



THE MIRROR OF NARRATIVE:
ON THE TEXTUAL INTERPRETATION OF
GOETHE'S *DIE WAHLVERWANDTSCHAFTEN*

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*Alles gaben Götter, die unendlichen,
Ihren Lieblingen ganz,
Alle Freuden, die unendlichen,
Alle Schmerzen, die unendlichen, ganz.*

(Aus einem Brief an Gräfin Auguste zu Stolberg)

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ABSTRACT

This analysis of Goethe's novel *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* (1809) examines the way in which the construction of order in the text may be read as a critique of certain aspects of Enlightenment thought. A major section of this study focuses on a discussion of the nature of >real< and >fictional< order and the way in which these forms of order interact both on a thematic level within the text and in the implicit dialogue of the narrator with the reader. Central to this analysis is a detailed discussion of the myth of Narcissus. The variations on this myth, which are apparent not only in this novel, but also in many of Goethe's other works, provide the reader with an insight into the way in which individuals devise a means by which to impose order on their experience. A consideration of the permutations of this myth and their rôle in the characters' construction of order highlights a major schism in world-models prevalent at the end of the 18th century, namely the conflict between consensual and individual visions of utopia.

I have illustrated the method used by the characters to construct an image of >reality< by examining the theme of time in the novel. This indicates the way in which the characters attempt to construct and manipulate a particular form of order according to their own desires. In accordance with the Narcissus-myth, the characters mirror their own images in preferred models of the Real. Central to this process is the attempt of certain characters to manipulate language and the unwillingness of others to transform emotions into a linguistic object.

From this it becomes clear that the novel reflects the basic disillusionment with the potential of language to communicate complete and unambiguous meaning that was prevalent in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Goethe's novel indicates a loss of faith in the rhetorical tradition and represents language as being in a transitional phase. I have related this idea to the writings of other major thinkers of the Enlightenment.

The final two sections of this study focus on the effects that these various thematic developments have on the narrative structure itself. The contrasting rôles of the narrator and author have been closely examined, so as to analyse the principles underlying the act of reading a fictional text. An analysis of the complex structure of the work also reveals the impossibility of classifying it according to any single literary form. In order to illustrate this, various other approaches to the novel have been considered in the course of this study. It becomes evident that the attempt to impose a single structural model on the narrative from outside the text itself results in a fundamental distortion of various thematic complexes. In a similar sense, models created within the narrative display certain limitations when used as the basis for a single interpretation. Emphasis is placed on the various conflicting narrative techniques in the work, including elements of the >realist< tradition in fiction and an important consideration of the >self-reflective< aspects of the novel. It becomes evident that much of the novel's greatness lies in its resistance to classification according to any single category within European literary history.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any University. To the best of my knowledge and belief this study contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text. I consent to the thesis being made available for photocopying and loan if accepted for the award of the degree.

Kathryn Brown

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K. B.

INTRODUCTION

*Die Schrift ist unveränderlich, und die Meinungen
sind oft nur ein Ausdruck der Verzweiflung darüber.*

- Franz Kafka (Der Prozeß)

I The Task of Interpretation

Since the publication of Goethe's *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* in 1809 critics have attempted to define certain structural models in the text in order to interpret and unite a number of the novel's main thematic complexes. Many critical analyses place emphasis on one or more of Goethe's short and often obscure comments on this work in an effort to determine a predominant structural model. In this sense, various attempts have been made to ascertain the »durchgreifende Idee«, the »offenbare[re] Geheimnis« or the »roter Faden« supposedly present in the text.¹ This type of approach has often privileged one aspect of the novel at the expense of other major thematic complexes. An analysis of the novel as an »Eheroman« or »Adelsroman«, for example, endows the social aspects of the work with a primary importance and often results in a defence or condemnation of the characters according to their actions within the social hierarchy.² This type of approach to the text is seen clearly in early responses to the novel in which attempts are made to define a social critique in the work according to an accepted

code of morality or social ideology.³ Similar difficulties of interpretation in more recent criticism have also occurred when a structural model taken from within the novel is imposed on the development of the narrative. The most obvious instance of this is an analysis based solely on the »chemische Gleichnisrede«. In this case some critics have naïvely accepted the »Gleichnisrede« as representing the structural basis of the entire work, thereby ignoring instances in the plot which vary this model or question the »Kunstwörter« of which it is initially composed.⁴

While, on the one hand, it is the general consensus among critics that the novel is both a unified and thematically coherent work, there has been a common tendency, on the other, to opt for only one particular aspect of the text and to transform it into a structural paradigm. Whilst I would agree that *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* does display unity in the dynamic progression of the narrative, I do not, however, believe that it is possible to endow any one structural feature of the novel with absolute status. Instead, I would argue that, in order to do justice to the complexity of the work, it is necessary to take account of the tensions between various elements that vie for supremacy in the discourse of the characters and in the implicit dialogue between narrator and reader. For this reason, it is important to examine the incompatibilities of attitude among the characters which the novel presents, for example: Mittler's concept of marriage as opposed to Eduard's notion of Platonic union; a number of different images of Ottilie's personality; various contrasting notions of how to deal with the problem of temporality or of the best means by which to order

nature. In each of these areas the characters create particular models of human behaviour and attempt to realise these ideals in actual experience. Difficulties in interpretation occur, therefore, when the reader or critic takes up one of these models and attempts to impose it on the entire text. Several different notions of human relations are explored in the narrative, yet no single pattern is ultimately given dominant status by the narrative perspective. For this reason, it is impossible to make the entire novel conform to a single model.

The task of interpreting *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* is further complicated by the fact that conflicts not only occur between the characters, but may also arise solely within the world-view of an individual character. Throughout the novel it becomes increasingly evident that the characters often revise their own interpretations of events in order to accommodate a new set of circumstances or in an attempt to realise a new, preferred vision of present and future experience. Moreover, in addition to the numerous conflicts in the discourse of the characters, the reader must also reckon with modulations of the narrative perspective.

An analysis of the novel which takes into account the large number of conflicting elements in both the discourse of the characters and the dialogue of the narrator with the reader reveals that no single interpretation of events or phenomena in the work is static, but rather that each model of human experience is subjected to a process of variation by both the characters and the narrator. I believe, therefore, that it is necessary to view the novel in terms of a composition based

on a number of shifting paradigms. It becomes evident that the parameters of >reality<, as structured by individual consciousness, remain mutable because of the various different, often conflicting attitudes of the characters as to what is considered to be real or imaginary, >valid< or >invalid< experience. As the novel itself gives neither supremacy to any one structure of >reality< nor absolute validity to a particular model of individual experience or action, I believe that a critical analysis of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* which isolates one perspective of the narrative must ultimately oversimplify the depiction of human relations in the novel and distort the complex question of what is to be considered as >reality<.

In the following study I propose to undertake a close textual analysis of the novel with the aim of identifying the conflicts between various structural models in the text and their effects both on the narrative as a whole and on the position of the reader. I shall firstly consider the method used by the characters to construct their various world-views. Different permutations of the myth of Narcissus play a central rôle in this process, for throughout the narrative the characters >mirror< their own desires when constructing an ideal model of >reality<. In order to fully illustrate this tendency, I shall then consider the various attempts of the characters to construct a temporal order in accordance with their own preferred world-view. A substantial section of the following study centres on the depiction of language in the novel. As I shall illustrate in Chapter Three, the characters attempt to manipulate language in order to create ideal forms of order. It appears, however, that language cannot be viewed as a stable medium

from which to construct a permanent world-view, for meaning constantly lapses into ambiguity and the relationship of the speaker to the spoken becomes increasingly blurred. Finally, I shall consider the repercussions of the competing world-views on the structure of the text and on the position of the reader. It ultimately becomes evident that the theme of self-reflection, epitomised in the variations of the Narcissus-myth, is of central importance for an understanding of the characters' construction of >reality<, for a discussion of the position of the reader and for an interpretation of the self-reflective elements of the narrative itself. The following analysis will focus, therefore, on the development of various themes as they appear within the text, rather than considering the novel from a more hermeneutic view-point. As I shall indicate, however, a full understanding of the novel must include a consideration of Goethe's reactions to various aspects of the European Enlightenment.

By acknowledging the existence of numerous different world-views in the novel and thus resisting the temptation to privilege a single structural model developed in the text, the reader is forced to admit the possibility that multiple interpretations are, in fact, of equal validity. For example: the various manifestations of the Narcissus-myth in the work may be approached from a psychoanalytical view-point, as a study in myth or as a structural feature in the creation of order in the text. When re-reading the text, therefore, the reader cannot hope to achieve any single and definite model of interpretation, but rather is forced to admit the possibility of multiple, co-existing interpretations. In this respect, the act of reading and interpreting

the novel resembles the way in which the characters' various world-views compete with each other for supremacy within the text. Roland Barthes acknowledges precisely this aspect of the reader's approach to any text:

Il serait donc faux de dire que si nous acceptons de relire le texte, c'est pour un profit intellectuel: c'est en fait et toujours pour un profit ludique: c'est pour multiplier les signifiants, non pour atteindre quelque dernier signifié.⁵

Some texts obviously fit Barthes' description better than others, but the whole reception of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* suggests that its essential polyvalence is particularly well captured by a view of literature such as Barthes offers. The difficulty of attaining one final interpretation of the text is entirely in consonance with Goethe's own comments concerning the structure of his novel. In letters and conversations Goethe stated that a single reading of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* would be of little use in attempting to understand the intricacies of the work.⁶ By demanding several re-readings of the work, Goethe indicates the difficulty of arriving at the »dernier signifié« mentioned by Barthes and makes the task of the reader attempting to define a single structural basis impossible. In this respect, I would suggest that no single interpretation of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* can claim absolute validity because of the complex construction of the work itself.

The problem of the characters' relation to >reality< is a major issue with which to contend when approaching *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*. In many interpretations of the novel >reality< is understood in terms of a social order and the rôle of the characters therein. The ability or

failure of each character to recognise the workings of the social hierarchy would determine, therefore, his or her ability to accept and deal effectively with >real< situations. As I propose to show, this interpretation of >reality< in the novel cannot be sustained if one takes into account the varying attitudes towards human experience and perception put forward by the characters.

A number of writers on *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* have suggested that tensions in the novel arise for two main reasons: firstly, because the characters are chronically unable to perceive >reality< in an objective manner; secondly, because this withdrawal from >reality< leads them to endow their own desires and plans with false emphases or importance. In this sense Stuart Atkins suggests that the »failure to see and interpret reality objectively« is a fault common to the four main characters in the novel; Ilse Graham believes that »die Grenze zwischen Schein und Wirklichkeit verläuft nicht recht säuberlich...Es ist eine von Epigonen ahnungslos zitierte Natur, die hier *zusammengebaut* wird, und die wirkliche wird sich rächen«; H. Ehrke-Rotermund suggests that most of the characters display little or no consciousness of >reality< and that this is epitomized in the development of new elective affinities: »[das Motiv des Landschaftsgartens] spiegelt eine realitätslose Kunstwelt der Illusionen, wie sie mit der Ehe von Eduard und Charlotte auf der einen, mit der die Realität negierenden Wahlverwandtschaft auf der anderen Seite gegeben ist«; Seibt und Scholz stress the problematic relationship of the characters to >reality< in the following words: »Unermüdlich betont der Roman vor allem bei den beiden entscheidenden, die Tragödie bedingenden Ereignissen, der Zeugung und dem Tod des Kindes, die

Einkassierung von widerständiger Realität durch heftige, leidenschaftliche Affekte«.7

These views on the inability of the characters in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* to perceive and interpret >reality< all converge in the notion that there is, in fact, a perceptible, objective reality which offers itself to the characters for interpretation and which is finally rejected by them. I do not believe that this is the case. To label some dimension of the novel >reality< in the sense mentioned above and to contrast it with something else named >subjectivity< or >illusion< is to make a philosophical differentiation among aspects of a fictional universe, hence giving one perspective an extra-fictional status and authority. The characteristics of >reality< are, thus, defined arbitrarily by the reader of the text and often lead to distortions of various thematic complexes. In addition to this there are no consistent indications in the novel as to which of the many dimensions of the text is to be considered as objective reality and how it should be related to the characters' discourse and actions. Instead, the multiplicity of world-views in the text makes it increasingly difficult for both the characters and the reader to identify a single >objective< model of >valid< human experience. I believe it is a central characteristic of the novel to point out the difficulty involved in defining any particular world-view as an unquestioned and lasting model of the Real.

In the novel the characters often take up elements of traditional constructs of >reality< and then subject them to a process of variation according to their own wishes. In this sense they innovate freely in realms such as nature, time, interpersonal relations and aspects of the social code. The characters do not, therefore, express and believe unflinchingly in one single notion of >reality<, but rather make these creations the object of numerous instances of variation in order to accommodate changing circumstances. As a result of this, individual constructions of >reality< are not static models, but rather structurally mutable configurations that undergo constant dynamic modifications in the discourse of their creators. Moreover, the guarantees of what constitutes >reality< for each character are continually open to question or ultimately revealed to be entirely lacking.

This variation of pre-existing models involved in the characters' constructions of >reality< is balanced by the conscious use of the imagination. Whereas the characters tend to believe their own world-views to be durable constructions of the Real, there also occur situations where »Einbildung« is deliberately used by them to achieve a particular aim. As I shall show in the course of this study, it is important to distinguish between the belief in an individual construction of >reality< and the conscious use of »Einbildung« to deal momentarily with situations that cannot be integrated into these configurations.

Tensions arise in the novel when individual notions of >reality< come into conflict with each other, for each character assigns his or her own concept supremacy or, in some cases, universal validity. The attempt to label a particular world-view >objective reality< is finally depicted as sheer impossibility. Can Mittler's notion of the social code be described as >more real< than Eduard's vision of perfect wholeness in the sense of Platonic union? If nature is transformed into art by an act of human consciousness and is then pejoratively described as »illusion«, can the discourse of social relations, which is also a construction of human consciousness, remain immune to a similar classification? Is it possible to view Eduard's reading of signs in a disparaging light when compared with Charlotte's manipulation of language or the Hauptmann's aesthetic structuring of nature? Such are some of the questions that arise when the attempt is made to locate and give primacy to a single, objective >reality< within the narrative.

Throughout the novel the relative status of concepts of >reality< is continually thrown into question as characters undermine each others' world-views, vary their own idea of >reality< or begin to lose faith in their methods used to create order. A central element of the novel lies in the characters' desire to effect a fusion of certain structures of >reality< to form one whole. This is clearly evidenced by Eduard's wish to establish a single matrix of >real< experience for himself and Ottilie and to assign other characters certain programmed rôles in this configuration. The fusion of world-views to form one model of the Real, in terms of Platonic union, results in a new concept of unity that lies outside the socially accepted idea of intimacy and leads to a loss of

individual consciousness: »Dann waren es nicht zwei Menschen, es war nur Ein Mensch im bewußtlosen, vollkommenen Behagen, mit sich selbst zufrieden und mit der Welt«. In this sense, I believe that the process of union involved in the formation of new personal relations, namely the models of intimacy either as constructed within the social code or as outlined in the myth of Platonic union, may be seen in terms of attempts to fuse two or more world-views in order to form a single and satisfying structure of >reality< for the parties involved.

As I hope to show in the course of this study, however, there are certain irreconcilable differences between the notion of an ideal union and the asymmetry involved in Eduard's relationship with Ottilie. It becomes clear that Eduard imposes his model of >reality< on Ottilie and that she, for a certain amount of time, fulfils her rôle within this pattern. Charlotte, in turn, attempts to negate the potential of this union and to re-establish a fusion of her >reality< with that of her husband. This attempt to fuse models of >reality< is also at work on a larger scale in the novel when characters such as Mittler seek to establish a pattern of >valid< human experience for society in general. In the case of Mittler, we see the way in which aspects of the prevailing social and religious code of the time are taken up and are posited as essential and valid features of an efficiently functioning and >moral< society. Through violent rhetoric, Mittler attempts to fuse this view with the world-views of other characters, thus making his notion of moral righteousness a central and supposedly >valid< point of orientation for each individual in the novel.

In opposition to the attempted fusion of structures of >reality< stands the tendency towards dissolution which is apparent when the stable co-existence of certain world-views becomes impossible; for example, the tensions that develop between the »fast magische Anziehungskraft« (p.478) and Eduard's marriage to Charlotte or the various, and often conflicting, images of Otilie created by other characters. As the tensions between structures of >reality< or patterns of >valid< human experience mount, a process of disintegration becomes visible, with the result that no version of >reality< has supremacy and new world-views are created in order to vary or replace those which have been in some way discredited. In this respect, I believe that the antagonism between form and content which Adorno views as a central element of Goethe's *Iphigenie auf Tauris*,⁹ is exemplified in an extreme version in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*. Whilst the work itself appears to form a unified and coherent whole, the various world-views expounded in the novel are, in the end, unstable and remain locked in a process of mutual deconstruction. As a result of this, language can no longer be viewed as a stable means from which to construct either a >real< or a fictional order.

In his book *Fictional Worlds*, Thomas G. Pavel describes the way in which conflicting notions of >reality< compete for supremacy within society. Pavel labels these varying world-models »ontological landscapes« and correctly points out that a plurality of these »landscapes« may co-exist without stress in a functioning society.¹⁰ Indeed the diversity of these »landscapes« may be seen to offer a degree of freedom to members of the particular society in the sense that the

individual is at liberty to choose a preferred structure of >reality< as an existential point of orientation. In a society constructed of multiple »ontological landscapes« there remains, however, a problem concerning the ability of the individual consciousness to integrate these various structures with one another. Crossing the threshold from one »landscape« to another might lead to a disorientation of the subject and a discrediting of one or several of the structures determining human experience. Pavel points out that such a process can quickly dissolve into nihilism:

Nihilism assumes that the simultaneous presence of several world models cancels the credibility of each model. Their multiplicity stands to prove that all are fictitious, and the choice between these fictions is made according to purely utilitarian criteria. Any version is good, if it serves a certain purpose; marginal or obsolete landscapes have the same right to attention as central versions; yet the centrality of the latter is only a question of convenience, or convention.¹¹

As I propose to show in the course of this study, it is precisely this type of tension between »ontological landscapes« or world-models in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* that leads to the weakening of structures and to the characters' ultimate questioning of their own tenuous concepts of >reality<. In this sense, the novel may also be read in terms of a critique of the various social, philosophical and religious systems of thought competing for supremacy in the latter phase of the European Enlightenment. As has been pointed out by many historians, the intellectual trends of the 18th century were comprised of a great diversity of ideas in rivalry with one another. In addition to this, various philosophies often had to be modified in the light of radical social changes such as the French Revolution.¹² It is precisely this

rivalry amongst world-views and systems of ideas and the impossibility of executing any >Judgement of Paris< among them that is mirrored in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*.

Just as many authors of the Enlightenment opted for that particular construction of >reality< they decided was best suited to their own philosophical system, the characters in Goethe's novel find themselves in a similar position. As Thomas Pavel indicates, however, the multiplicity of and competition between various »ontological landscapes« can lead to an almost mathematical cancelling-out of each construction. In the novel this tendency may be seen in the way in which no single world-view attains absolute and lasting supremacy. I believe, therefore, that the dynamic form of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* involves a constant discrediting of concepts of >reality<, which forces what might, to the innocent observer, begin as a relatively conventional critique of the values of the Enlightenment or Weimar Classicism to such a point that Pavel's description of »nihilism« is the only one appropriate.

Nihilism in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* arises as a result of the sheer multiplicity of world-views and of the mutual discrediting of these models. This notion displays a marked difference from, say, Nietzsche's much later view of nihilism. For Nietzsche, it is not the plurality of systems of thought that leads to the eventual collapse of values. Instead, nihilism results from the primary absence of meaning within these patterns of thought: »Was bedeutet Nihilismus? - Daß die obersten Werte sich entwerten. Es fehlt das Ziel. Es fehlt die Antwort auf das >Wozu?< «.¹³ By nature of its narrative perspective, *Die*

Wahlverwandtschaften makes no such final selection among the prevailing philosophies as Nietzsche did, and the question of declining moral values is treated with the utmost diplomacy. In this sense, I believe it is important to identify the particular type of nihilism evident in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* rather than to apply to the narrative a concept of nihilism from the writings of other thinkers.

In *The Literature of Nihilism*, Charles Glicksberg points out that nihilistic tendencies involved in the recognition of human mortality are often counterbalanced by particular mythical configurations: »The most sublime and, historically, the most successful myth designed to counter the nihilistic dread induced by the prospect of dying is the myth of the Incarnation and the Resurrection«. ¹⁴ In *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* a variation on this tendency is also evident, namely: Otilie's elevation to the status of saint and, thus, her transcendent significance for the living after death. Whilst this may be seen, in part, to counteract the nihilistic cancellation of »ontological landscapes« in the novel, the processes involved in creating a vision of Otilie as a saint will be shown in this thesis to be the same sort of tenuous constructions of order as are evidenced again and again in more mundane contexts throughout the novel. In this sense, the traditional mythical solution to the crisis of nihilism remains ineffectual when viewed in the context of the entire narrative. Before considering the process of creating world-models in more detail, I shall give a brief overview of different notions of >reality<, as they are constructed in various philosophical and psychoanalytical theories, in order to facilitate a more precise discussion of >reality< in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*.

II Reality?

*With relief, with humiliation, with terror
he understood that he also was an illusion,
that someone else was dreaming him.*

- Jorge Luis Borges (*The Circular Ruins*)

General studies concerning the question of how to define >reality< often fall into one of two groups, depending on their concepts of the way in which human consciousness relates to and orders its surroundings. Theorists such as William James and Alfred Schutz support the notion that the subject actively constructs that which is real and that all >reality< must, therefore, remain a subjective product of human consciousness.¹⁵ In opposition to this view stands a Lacanian interpretation of >reality< in which the »Real« is that which cannot be named and which, in turn, remains ultimately inaccessible to the subject.¹⁶ The central difference between these two definitions of reality lies in the rôle assigned to individual consciousness, insofar as consciousness either determines >reality< or has limited power to structure and name that which confronts the categories of perception. D.W. Winnicott in his famous study *Playing and Reality* discusses aspects of the development from childhood to adolescence in terms of tensions between »inner psychic reality« and »external or shared reality«.¹⁷ Central to this development is the rôle assigned to yet another category of human experience, namely that of »play«. It is in precisely this area

»between the individual and the environment«, an area of creativity according to Winnicott, that the origin of cultural experience is located:

La place où se situe l'expérience culturelle est l'*espace potentiel* entre l'individu et son environnement (originellement l'objet). On peut en dire autant du jeu. L'expérience culturelle commence avec un mode de vie créatif qui se manifeste d'abord dans le jeu.¹⁸

Questions concerning distinctions between >reality< and >illusion< and the tensions between subjective perception and empirical experience have been a major point of contention in various different areas of psychoanalysis and philosophy. From the many theoretical standpoints, however, it becomes evident that a certain degree of blurring often occurs between the parameters ascribed to active consciousness and the degree to which external events can remain impervious to its interpretative capacity.

That a consideration of the question of >reality< is of importance in an evaluation of Enlightenment thought is clear not only from the ideological background of the era, but also from the philosophy of one of the most important thinkers of the 18th century, Immanuel Kant. Kant's discussions of the categories of perception and distinctions between *a priori* concepts and empirical experience led to a break with the Cartesian theory of ideas in which »objective reality« was often seen solely as the representation of an object in consciousness.¹⁹ Discussions on the rôles of »Verstand«, »Vernunft« and »Urteilkraft« in the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781) may be seen, in part, to reflect the general concern of Enlightenment thinkers to determine the position

of the individual in the cosmos and, thus, to define clearly the limits of >reality< and their relation to human consciousness.²⁰ This goal is also reflected in works such as Condillac's *Traité des Systèmes*, Newton's *Philosophiae Naturalia Principia Mathematica* and the *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and d'Alembert.²¹

Questions concerning the individual's understanding of >reality< also play a major rôle in Goethe's works. The reader of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, for example, becomes increasingly aware of the way in which the characters attempt to construct certain forms of order and to create a secure position for themselves within these various schemata. Although each character believes he or she might have attained a true and valid knowledge of objective >reality<, neither the narrative perspective nor events in the novel itself offer a consistent confirmation of the various conflicting world-views. Instead, we find that the construction of the Real is governed by the dual processes of perception and interpretation. Whilst the characters cannot escape the *a priori* categories of perception, they freely structure their own models of >reality< by interpreting various signs according to their own desires.

I indicated above that a consideration of the myth of Narcissus is of central relevance for an understanding of this complex. As I shall show, it is by reflecting their own images in various constructions of order that the characters attempt to realise their own preferred concepts of the Real. The active and creative process of structuring >reality< in this manner is made explicit in the *Lehrjahre*:

Das ganze Weltwesen liegt vor uns wie ein großer Steinbruch vor dem Baumeister...Alles außer uns ist nur Element, ja, ich darf wohl sagen, auch alles an uns; aber tief in uns liegt diese schöpferische Kraft, die das zu erschaffen vermag, was sein soll, und uns nicht ruhen und rasten läßt, bis wir es außer uns oder an uns auf eine oder die andere Weise dargestellt haben. (H.A. VII, p.405)

In the following analysis of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* I shall illustrate the way in which the characters employ this »schöpferische Kraft« in an attempt to transform the world into anthropocentric, and hence readily assimilable terms. A point of convergence between this process and the myth of Narcissus becomes apparent, for the characters mirror their own images in these various configurations. For this reason, a blurring of the distinction between subject and object is often seen. In one of his maxims Goethe expresses this idea in the following words:

Alles, was im Subjekt ist, ist im Objekt und noch etwas mehr.
Alles, was im Objekt ist, ist im Subjekt und noch etwas mehr.
Wir sind auf doppelte Weise verloren oder geborgen:
Gestehn wir dem Objekt sein Mehr zu,
pochen wir auf unser Subjekt. (H.A. XII, p.436)

Whilst this thesis will frequently adduce variants of the myth of Narcissus in order to explain structural and thematic aspects of the novel, it is not the case that »Narcissism« is offered as one adequate model for understanding the text. Rather, the intention of this analysis is to suggest that the Narcissus-motif, with all the themes and structural elements that accrue to it, is central to the novel and that this centrality has been neglected. Having done so, this thesis resigns before the ultimate task of providing one model of understanding. There is a tendency among the central themes and motifs of the novel to subsume one another or display themselves as variants of one another,

according to what initial perspective on the work is taken. This is true of the Narcissus-motif as well. But it is equally a distortion of critical perspective to exaggerate this phenomenon into one exclusive model for the work.

Throughout the novel both individuals and groups work in terms of preferred images of >reality<. The status of a particular world-view may, on the one hand, be determined by the number of characters that support and acknowledge its guarantees or else, on the other, by the nature of the authority invoked to validate the model. For this reason, Eduard experiences difficulty when he attempts to validate his esoteric ideal of intimacy, in the form of Platonic union, within the wider social code which is based on a well-established notion of legitimate union as marriage. The image of a consensual utopia as conceived of in the »Vernunftideal« of the Enlightenment is, however, constantly questioned in the novel, for ultimately forms of order constructed by the group are not seen to be in any way more stable than those constructed by small numbers of characters or by the individual. As I shall indicate, the novel reflects a major uncertainty in Enlightenment thought at the end of the 18th century which revolved around the ~~contrast~~ contrasting ideals of a wide-scale consensual utopia or the realisation of an individual world-model outside the confines of society.

Tensions exist not only between competing models of >reality<, but also between certain world-views and events which seem to defy integration into each individual's ordered system. Although the characters display the ability to assimilate and interpret occurrences

and phenomena which lie outside consciousness, the individual's belief in the validity of his or her >reality< often becomes weaker when the guarantees of a particular model are thrown into question by external forces; for example, Eduard's interpretation of signs as guarantees of his future happiness with Otilie eventually disintegrates when he recognises that the signs in which he has placed so much faith are nothing more than replaceable fetishes:

Denn eines Tages, als Eduard das geliebte Glas zum Munde brachte, entfernte er es mit Entsetzen wieder; es war dasselbe und nicht dasselbe; er vermißt ein kleines Kennzeichen. Man dringt in den Kammerdiener, und dieser muß gestehen, das echte Glas sei unlängst zerbrochen und ein gleiches, auch aus Eduards Jugendzeit, untergeschoben worden. Eduard kann nicht zürnen, sein Schicksal ist ausgesprochen durch die Tat; wie soll ihn das Gleichnis rühren?
(p.489)

Events in the novel that serve to weaken the individual's relationship to a preferred model of >reality< may be viewed in the same sense as the questioning of a philosophical system described by Voltaire after the earthquake in Lisbon of 1755. In his *Poème sur le désastre de Lisbonne*, the axiom »Tout est bien« expounded by Leibniz, Shaftesbury and Pope cannot be seen to retain its validity in the face of a natural disaster which defies the essence of its meaning:

O malheureux mortels! ô terre déplorable!
O de tous les mortels assemblage effroyable!
D'inutiles douleurs éternel entretien!
Philosophes trompés qui criez: »Tout est bien«;
Accourez, contemplez ces ruines affreuses,
Ces débris, ces lambeaux, ces cendres malheureuses,
Ces femmes, ces enfants l'un sur l'autre entassés,
Sous ces marbres rompus ces membres dispersés;
Cent mille infortunés que la terre dévore,
Qui, sanglants, déchirés, et palpitants encore,
Enterrés sous leurs toits, terminent sans secours
Dans l'horreur des tourments leurs lamentables jours!²²

One of the major areas in which the characters attempt to construct and regulate a particular order is that of time. The past, in the form of memory, acts as a foundation for the creation of personal relations. By reliving the past, characters often attempt to regain a former idealised state and to overcome dissonances in the present. This elevates the status of the past to the level of a guarantee for a certain world-view. In this sense, we find that Eduard's marriage to Charlotte was based on the attempt to regain a former intimacy: »So fanden wir uns wieder. Wir freuten uns der Erinnerung, wir liebten die Erinnerung, wir konnten ungestört zusammenleben« (p.246). In contrast to basing personal relations on the process of regaining of a former state stands the desire of certain characters to break with the past and to establish a new set of relationships. When the beginnings of the new »Anziehungen« become manifest, the emphasis on moving backwards in the temporal sequence becomes less important and time itself loses its value: »...und sie schienen, wo nicht zu empfinden, doch zu ahnen, daß die Zeit anfangs, ihnen gleichgültig zu werden« (p.290).

This apathy towards time does not, however, remain the characters' predominant attitude for a significant part of the novel. Instead, it is quickly replaced by Charlotte's desire to »return« to her former relationship with Eduard and also by Eduard's contrasting wish to »return« to Platonic wholeness with Ottilie. In this sense, tensions arise in the temporal order when the chronological progression of the narrative is set against the characters' desire to move backwards in time and to attain their vision of a former utopia. Throughout the novel, however, it is constantly emphasised that any attempt to make

time reversible is bound to end in failure. In this sense, the example of time serves to indicate the possibilities and limitations of the characters' power to structure and control a model of the Real. The ultimate failure of memory to effect positive changes in present circumstances and, thus, to realise the characters' notion of a utopian model, may be seen, in part, as a critique of the important rôle assigned to »memory« in the 18th century concept of time. In his book *études sur le temps humain*, Georges Poulet points out that in the 18th century the positive concept of »memory«, as a means by which to escape the nothingness perceived between moments of existence, played a predominant rôle in discussions on time during the Enlightenment.²³ In *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, however, the various attempts to use »memory« in an effort to attain past happiness or to base a future relationship on past experience constantly result in failure. »Memory« represents both the impossibility of return and the inescapable confines of experience in the present moment.

The attempts made to return to a past condition are matched by the characters' desire to construct a model of »eternity«. In the temporal order of the novel, the characters often try to endow certain aspects of their existence with an aura of permanence. This is seen in both private and social models of intimacy. Mittler, for example, depicts marriage not only as »der Anfang und der Gipfel aller Kultur« (p.306), but also as an eternal union of two people; Eduard also envisages his concept of Platonic union in terms of eternity; in direct opposition to this view stands the opinion of the Count, for whom a permanent bond between two people is seen as impossible in the flux of social

circumstances. Variations of the image of »eternity« may also be seen in Charlotte's plans to rearrange the monuments in the cemetery or during the ceremony marking the »Grundsteinlegung« on her birthday. Just as »memory« marks the attempt to endow the past with special status in the present, so too the concept of »eternity« re-shapes the present into the shadow of an »entfernte Nachwelt« (p.303). This leads to the characters' consideration of the »rights« of the present and to an evaluation of their own attitudes towards experience in the present moment.

Another major area in which the characters construct competing orders of >reality< is the replacement of human experience by images. This is evident when the characters attempt to structure a pattern of empiric events based on models such as the »chemische Gleichnisrede« or the »lebende Bilder«. In each of these instances the characters rely on the metaphoric or metonymic use of language which, in itself, stresses the absence of a particular object or experience. Once the initial substitution has been made, images are subjected to a process of variation according to the desires of each character. For this reason, patterns of interpersonal relations do not necessarily conform strictly to the model of the »Gleichnisrede«, but rather represent variations on this primary configuration. In a similar sense, characters also create images of each other which become permanent elements of individual world-views. In this respect the novel may be seen to anticipate the crisis of individualism depicted in late 19th and 20th century literature.

It becomes clear that Otilie, as a figure in a number of world-models created by others, is denied the opportunity of developing a concept of herself as an autonomous individual. This is due to the fact that her personality is constructed in different ways by almost every character in the novel, with the result that she fulfils a different rôle within a number of patterns of >reality<. For Eduard she is a »Schutzgeist« and »himmlisches Wesen«; for the architect an angel; in the eyes of the Gehülfe she is the perfect »Erzieherin«; finally, although she attempts to withdraw from these constructions of >reality< through silence and suicide, the narrative perspective presents her as a saint and Eduard insists that, after her death, she must be treated »als eine Lebende« (p.484). In this way, even her death may be made into a model of >reality< imposed on her by the other characters and by the narrative perspective.

A major problem in the construction of order in the novel arises from the failure of language to convey complete and unambiguous meaning. Certain notions of >reality<, such as those based on various temporal structures in the novel, rely on language to give them meaning and coherent form. As is constantly made clear in the novel, however, language is not a static mode of expression which enables characters to give a definitive name to particular experiences or actions. Instead, language in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* is depicted as an imperfect medium which throws into question the validity of the structures it seeks to create. This is of particular relevance in situations where metaphoric or metonymic substitutions are made by the characters. In the case of the »chemische Gleichnisrede«, for example, language is transformed into

»Kunstwörter« and then reduced to a »Zeichensprache« which, nonetheless, leads the characters further away from creating an accurate scientific model or a paradigm of human relations.

The failure of language to convey unambiguous meaning may be seen in terms of the gradual dissolution of the rhetorical tradition, still dominant in the German Enlightenment, which clearly defined the relationship of the speaker to the spoken. In the novel, this tradition is represented by the speeches of Mittler, in which language displays its inappositeness to social realities to the point of producing grotesque or disastrous effects. Although the mode of rhetoric is discredited in the novel it is not replaced by any more efficiently functioning form of language. For example, although Eduard attempts to realise a new form of intimacy, his discourse of love is never recognised within the dominant social world-view. Language appears to be in a state of transition in the novel. Outmoded rhetoric has lost its effectiveness, yet no new form of discourse has been created that may reasonably take its place. I shall examine this aspect of the novel in the light of various discussions on the nature of language that took place during the Enlightenment.

The polysemous aspect of language often leads to difficulties when characters attempt to communicate the structure of a particular order to each other. When Charlotte expresses her desire to establish greater intimacy with Eduard by »returning to a former state«, Eduard interprets this in a way that will correspond with his own idealised vision of events and understands »den alten Zustand« in terms of a return to »den

früheren Witwenstand« (p.341). In this case, Charlotte's manipulation of a temporal order is subverted by Eduard's ability to interpret language in ways which suit his own preferred notion of >reality<. That the meaning of words is neither unambiguous nor permanent in discourse is emphasised in Otilie's diary: »Jedes ausgesprochene Wort, erregt den Gegensinn« (p.384).

The inadequacy of language to convey meaning plays a major rôle in the development of Eduard's relationship with Otilie in the novel. In his book *Liebe als Passion*, Niklas Luhmann discusses 18th century attitudes towards language as an effective means of communication in intimate relations. Luhmann comes to the conclusion that in the 18th century a loss of faith in language is apparent, with the result that intimacy is characterised by an experience of »Inkommunikabilität«. ²⁴ In other words, there arose the question whether the sense of intimate relations would be destroyed when transformed into an object of discourse. This idea is in consonance with that aspect of the novel mentioned above that examines the outmoded rhetorical tradition and its lack of a meaningful successor. The hesitation to transform intimacy into an object of language is seen quite clearly in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* in Eduard's and Otilie's attitudes. At the end of the novel, when Otilie refuses to enter into any communication whatsoever, we find that their relationship is in no way weakened by the lack of spoken communication, but rather that they enjoy a form of union on a plane where language is seen as being irrelevant:

Nur die nächste Nähe konnte sie beruhigen, aber auch völlig beruhigen, und diese Nähe war genug; nicht eines Blickes, nicht

eines Wortes, keiner Gebärde, keine Berührung bedurfte es, nur des reinen Zusammenseins. (p.478)

In this and other, earlier scenes in the novel, Eduard and Otilie transcend language as a means of communication. When it becomes obvious that they will never enjoy a happy union except in death, Eduard assures the dying Otilie: »...da werden wir mit andern Sprachen reden« (p.484). This marks the final abandonment of the language of social relations and establishes the image of a utopian form of communication that appears unattainable in society. Such a striving for a new means of communication stands in direct contrast to the emptiness of Mittler's rhetoric. Although the major characters of the novel experience this failure of language to convey exact meaning, the opposite tendency is noted in the discourses of Mittler. It is precisely Mittler's violent rhetoric at the end of the novel that precipitates Otilie's death. Whilst Eduard and Otilie strive for a new means of extra-linguistic communication, Mittler remains locked in a pattern of rhetoric, characteristic of the discourse of social relations, that cannot convey the semantics of intimacy but only those of social convention.

III Narrator versus Author

It is evident that the narrator in the novel does not give supremacy in any consistent way to one particular notion of >reality<; nor is there any distinction to be made between the tendency of the characters to create structures by which to order existence and the final words spoken by the narrator. In the last paragraph of the novel the narrator evokes an image of the happy union of Eduard and Ottilie in death: »So ruhen die Liebenden nebeneinander...und Welch ein freundlicher Augenblick wird es sein, wenn sie dereinst wieder zusammen erwachen« (p.490). I believe it is possible to read the concluding paragraph of the narrative in two ways. In one sense the narrative voice becomes linked with the attempts of the characters to make credible an image of »eternity«. In another sense, however, the vision of Eduard's and Ottilie's union remains a construction of >reality< which is scarcely different from all other world-views previously encountered in the novel. The narrative perspective comments on the nature of the individual's relation to such idealised visions in the description of the townspeople's attitude to the now sacred corpse of Ottilie: »Jedes Bedürfnis, dessen wirkliche Befriedigung versagt ist, nötigt zum Glauben« (p.488). I believe, that in the elevation of Ottilie to the status of saint and the depiction of her eventual union with Eduard the narrative perspective may be seen to fall in with the central tendency of the fictional characters to create preferred orders by which to structure existence. The narrator causes the novel to fold back on

itself and the entire process of structuring patterns of experience begins again.

In another sense, however, the final paragraph is firmly lodged within the fictional parameters of the novel and must also be viewed in the light of earlier interjections and comments by the narrator. Throughout the novel the narrative perspective constantly changes position; it acknowledges various world-views, offers commentaries on certain aspects of the action, draws the reader's attention to the creation of a wider fictional framework and so on. In the final paragraph, however, the narrator may be seen to join the characters in the creation of an image of Eduard's union with Otilie in paradise. For this reason I believe it is important to draw a distinction between the narrative voice, as another character in the novel, and the author of the work, who manipulates the large number of discourses. In Chapter Five, I shall examine this distinction with reference to Foucault's comments on the nature of the authorial instance. I believe that the final paragraph of the novel indicates the final schism between author and narrator.

A number of critics have asserted that at the beginning of the novel the narrator vouches for the »truth« of the narrative and proposes to recount a »real« story.²⁵ In addition to these assertions that the narrative vouches for its own authenticity, critics have also concerned themselves with questions as to whether Otilie's canonisation at the end of the novel is taken seriously by the narrator and whether the reader should now consider her as a saint.²⁶ I believe that a discussion

of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* in terms of an example of >realist< fiction or a novel that asserts its own >truth< to be impossible for a number of reasons. The narrative itself is couched in experimental terms from the opening sentence and this mode also characterises various interventions by the narrator. This experimental tone of the narrative is further highlighted by the introduction of the »chemische Gleichnisrede«. In addition to this, throughout the novel the narrator often draws attention to the conscious creation of a fictional order. This may be seen in intrusive comments relating to the »Kunstgriff des Dichters«, the »roter Faden« in Otilie's diary and to other observations on the structure of the narrative itself. This is not to imply, however, that the narrative perspective offers a continual commentary on aspects of the novel or supports a particular construction of order. In contrast to novels such as Wieland's *Geschichte des Agathon*, in which the narrator often guides the reader through the various events of the narrative, intrusions by the narrator in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* are rare and offer few clues as to an >ideal< reading of the novel. For this reason, critics of the novel have been able to propose widely differing models of interpretation as being supposedly upheld by the narrative perspective.

Within the complex of the creation of various orders, it becomes apparent that there is, in fact, an authority superior to the narrator, namely, the dynamic form of the text itself. Instead of structured forms of order being controlled by the narrator at the end of the novel, we find that the narrative perspective takes its cues from the interplay of discourses that have been manipulated by the author throughout the text.

For this reason the reader must reckon with an ultimate division of the narrative perspective and authorial instance in the final paragraph of the novel as outlined above. I shall examine this aspect of the novel in the light of the genre of >metafiction< that gained importance throughout the 18th century. Whilst the narrative accomodates a critique of certain aspects of Enlightenment thought, a major feature of the text is the way in which it draws attention to the construction of fictional order, the rôle of language in this process and the position of the reader when interpreting the final product.

As I shall indicate in the course of this study, it is impossible to view Goethe as an unquestioning upholder of a small corpus of Enlightenment ideals, as has often been the case in much secondary literature on his works.²⁷ Instead, it becomes obvious that he constantly questioned numerous aspects of the Enlightenment and often reconsidered the ideals of Weimar Classicism. For this reason the questioning of methods used to construct models of >reality< depicted in the novel cannot be isolated from similar tendencies apparent in the creation of 18th century social, philosophical and religious systems. It is from this point of view, namely the mutable and impermanent nature of human constructions of order and their relevance for an understanding of certain aspects of Enlightenment thought, that I propose to examine thematic complexes in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*.

NOTES

1. See for example: Ilse Graham, »Wintermärchen: Goethes Roman *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*« in: Goethe Jahrbuch, Band 99, 1982, p. 43: »In diesen Worten...erkannte ich schlagartig jene *durchgreifende Idee*, nach welcher Goethe seinen Roman gearbeitet zu haben bekennt. Es ist dies die Idee der Selbsttranszendierung der Natur«; Rochlitz an Goethe am 5.11.1809 in: Erläuterungen und Dokumente, ed. Ursula Ritzenhoff, Reclam, Stuttgart 1986, p. 122: »Ueberhaupt findet man da den *rothen Faden* für Ottilien zwar leicht, für Charlotten wohl auch noch...«; see also Uwe Pörksen, »Goethes Kritik naturwissenschaftlicher Metaphorik und der Roman *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*« in: Jahrbuch der deutschen Schillergesellschaft, 1981, p.285f.
2. H. Reiss, Goethes Romane, Franke Verlag, Bern 1963, p. 165: »Die Ehe steht ohne Zweifel im Zentrum des Romans, der oft eine Ehetragödie genannt worden ist; eine Ansicht, die aber nicht selten bestritten wurde«; Stefan Blessin, Die Romane Goethes, Athenäum, Königstgein/Ts, 1979, p. 98: »Der Roman schildert, wie einem Kreis von Adligen trotz aller Anstrengungen, sich nach der Natur zu erneuern, die Annäherung an die neue bürgerliche Zeit mißlingen muß«; H.R. Vaget, »Ein reicher Baron: Zum sozialgeschichtlichen Gehalt der *Wahlverwandtschaften*« in: Jahrbuch der deutschen Schillergesellschaft, 1980, p. 131: »Ein Roman über Adlige und ihre >socialen Verhältnisse< mußte in den Jahren 1808/1809, also in der Zeitgenossenschaft zu der Krise und Reform des deutschen Adels, das Gepräge eines Adelsromans annehmen im Sinne einer kritischen Diagnose der mit neuen historischen Entwicklungen konfrontierten Adelsklasse.«
3. See for example: Das »Conversations-Lexicon« von Brockhaus, Erläuterungen und Dokumente, p.157: »Die den *Wahlverwandtschaften* so oft vorgerückte Unsittlichkeit wird, unsers Erachtens, dadurch

widerlegt, daß es kaum eine grössere und durchgreifendere Vertheidigung der *Ehe* geben kann, als gerade dies Buch und sein ganzer Inhalt. Denn die Heiligkeit der *Ehe* kann ja selbst die Bande der Natur überwältigen, und ihr werden alle Helden und Heldinnen des Stücks zum Opfer gebracht«.

4. For a discussion of this type of interpretation see: Ernst Loeb, »Liebe und *Ehe* in Goethes *Wahlverwandtschaften*« in: *Weimarer Beiträge*, no. 8 1970, pp. 163-80.
5. Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, Seuil, Paris 1964, p. 171.
6. Johann Peter Eckermann, *Gespräche mit Goethe*, ed. Paul Stapf, Tempel-Verlag, Berlin und Darmstadt 1958, p.320: »Es ist in den *Wahlverwandtschaften* überall keine Zeile, die ich nicht selber erlebt hätte, und es steckt darin mehr, als irgend jemand bei einmaligem Lesen aufzunehmen im Stande wäre«.
7. Stuart Atkins, »*Die Wahlverwandtschaften*: Novel of German Classicism« in: *German Quarterly*, January 1980, p.17; Graham, *op.cit.*, p.46; H. Ehrke-Rotermund, »Gesellschaft ohne Wirklichkeit: Eine Untersuchung von Goethes Roman *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*« in: *Jahrbuch des freien deutschen Hochstifts*, 1981, p. 162; G. Seibt and O. Scholz, »Zur Funktion des Mythos in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*« in: *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift*, 1985, Heft 4, Dezember, p. 620.
8. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Werke*, Hamburger Ausgabe in vierzehn Bänden, ed. Erich Trunz, München 1981, Band VI, p.478. All further references are to this edition unless otherwise indicated.
9. Theodor W. Adorno, *Noten zur Literatur*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt/M 1981, p. 501: »Mit der *Iphigenie* hebt eine Entwicklung der Sprache zum objektivierenden Moment an, die in Flaubert und Baudelaire kulminierte. Die Versöhnung des Subjekts mit dem ihm Entgleitenden freilich, die ihr aufgebürdet wird, die Substitution von Form für

einen ihr antagonistischen Inhalt, ist schon in der Iphigenie aufs äußerste exponiert.«

10. Thomas G. Pavel, *Fictional Worlds*, Harvard University Press, 1986, p. 139: »Hence, the world view of a given community may divide into several *ontological landscapes*. European society at the end of the eighteenth century was still keeping the Christian element as an essential component of its ontological territory. This territory was, however, much wider than the Christian world: even among those not primarily interested in the progress of science, the rumour would circulate that new and disturbing cosmological theories were being proposed...«
11. *Ibid.*, p. 142.
12. Cf. Norman Hampson, *The Enlightenment*, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1986, p. 97ff.
13. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Werke in drei Bänden*, ed. Karl Schlechta, Hanser, München 1966, Band III, p.557.
14. Charles Glicksberg, *The Literature of Nihilism*, Associated University Press, 1975. p.33.
15. William James, *Principles of Psychology*, Macmillan, London 1891, Volume II, p.295: »...*reality means simply relation to our emotional and active life*. This is the only sense which the word ever has in the mouths of practical men. *In this sense, whatever excites and stimulates our interest is real*; whenever an object so appeals to us that we turn to it, accept it, fill our mind with it, or practically take account of it, so far it is real for us, and we believe it«; Alfred Schutz, *The Phenomenology of the Social World*, trans. G. Walsh and F. Lehnert, Heinemann, London 1980, p.32: »There is only one external world, the public world, and it is given equally to all of us. Therefore, every act of mine through which I endow the world with meaning refers back to some meaning-

endowing act (*Sinngebung*) of yours with respect to the same world. Meaning is thus constituted as an intersubjective phenomenon.«

16. Malcom Bowie, Jacques Lacan, in: *Structuralism and Since*, ed. J. Sturrock, Oxford University Press 1979, p. 133: »First, the Real is that which is there, already there, and inaccessible to the subject, whether this be a physical object or a sexual trauma...Secondly, however, the Real is the primordial chaos upon which language operates...the Real is given its structure by the human power to name.«
17. D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, Tavistock Publications, London 1971, p. 131.
18. D.W. Winnicott, »La Localisation de l'expérience culturelle« in: *Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse*, Numéro 4, automne 1971, p.20.
19. René Descartes, *Meditations on the First Philosophy*, in: *A Discourse on Method*, trans. J. Veitch, Everyman, London 1984, p. 72: »...in the term *idea* there is here something equivocal; for it may be taken either materially for an act of the understanding, and in this sense it cannot be said to be more perfect than I, or objectively, for the thing represented by that act, which, although it be not supposed to exist out of my understanding, may, nevertheless, be more perfect than myself, by reason of its essence. But in the sequel of this treatise I will show more amply how, from my possessing the idea of a thing more perfect than myself, it follows that this thing really exists.«
20. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Werke Band IV, Riemer, Berlin 1903, p.75: »Wenn es also reine Begriffe a priori giebt, so können diese zwar freilich nichts empirisches enthalten: sie müssen aber gleichwohl lauter Bedingungen a priori zu einer möglichen Erfahrung sein, als worauf allein ihre objektive Realität beruhen kann.«

21. Diderot, Oeuvres complètes, ed. John Lough and Jacques Prouse, Hermann, Paris 1976, Vol. VII, p. 174: »En effet, le but d'une *encyclopédie* est de rassembler les connaissances éparses sur la terre; d'en exposer le système général aux hommes avec qui nous vivons, & de le transmettre aux hommes qui viendront après nous; afin que les travaux des siècles passés n'aient pas été des travaux inutiles pour les siècles qui succéderont; que nos neveux, devenant plus instruits, deviennent en même temps plus vertueux & plus heureux, & que nous ne mourions pas sans avoir bien mérité du genre humain.«
22. Voltaire, Mélanges, Pléiade, Paris 1961, p.304.
23. Georges Poulet, études sur le temps humain, Edinburgh University Press 1949, pp. 31-2: »La grande découverte du XVIIIe siècle, c'est donc celle du phénomène de la mémoire. Par le souvenir l'homme échappe au momentané; par le souvenir il échappe au néant qui se retrouve entre tous les moments de l'existence.«
24. Niklas Luhmann, Liebe als Passion: Zur Codierung von Intimität, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt/M 1982, p. 154: »Inkommunikabilität: damit ist nicht mehr nur gemeint, daß die Passion die Rhetorik ins Stottern bringt, die eloquente Rede verwirrt - und sich dadurch verrät...Nicht das Versagen der Geschichlichkeit, sondern die Unmöglichkeit der Aufrichtigkeit wird zum Problem. Dies gilt zunächst ganz allgemein. Die Erfahrung der Inkommunikabilität fällt an, wo immer Moral auf Begriffe gebracht wird, die in der Kommunikation kontrainentional wirken.«
25. See for example: Ignace Feuerlicht, »Der >Erzähler< und das >Tagebuch< in Goethes *Wahlverwandtschaften*« in: Goethe Jahrbuch, Band 103, 1986, p.326; Paul Stöcklein, Wege zum späten Goethe, Schröder, Hamburg, 1960, p.14f.
26. H.G. Barnes, »Bildhafte Darstellung in den *Wahlverwandtschaften*« in: Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift, 1956, p. 51.

27. This is particularly evident in critics' reactions to Goethe's play *Iphigenie auf Tauris*. See for example: Emil Staiger, *Goethe, Artemis*, Zürich 1981, p.379; Sigurd Burckhardt, » >Die Stimme der Wahrheit und der Menschlichkeit<: Goethes Iphigenie«, *Monatshefte*, February 1956, Nr.2., p.71.

CHAPTER ONE

»...ein wahrer Narziß«

*Mais moi, Narcisse aimé, je ne suis curieux
Que de ma seule essence;
Tout autre n'a pour moi qu'un coeur mystérieux
Tout autre n'est qu'absence.*

- Valéry (*Fragments du Narcisse*)

I >Reality< and the »Bezug auf sich selbst«.

»...der Mensch ist ein wahrer Narziß; er bespiegelt sich überall gern selbst, er legt sich als Folie der ganzen Welt unter« (p.270). This statement, uttered by Eduard during the discussion of the »chemische Gleichnisrede«, has been viewed by many critics as a key element in the development of personal relations in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*. Attempts to define instances in the novel which contain references to the myth of Narcissus have in many interpretations, however, led to a blurring of the distinction between the co-ordinates of the myth as it was known and cited from Antiquity to Goethe's own time and its later transformation into the basis of a psychoanalytical theory. Not only are these two configurations of the Narcissus story often confused, but critics who opt for a structural analysis of the novel according to elements of the mythical paradigm frequently overlook the many different versions of the

myth itself. In his essay on Plotinus' interpretation of the Narcissus-myth, Pierre Hadot has pointed out the wide range of differences between the numerous versions of the myth.¹ A crucial point of variation is the question as to whether or not Narcissus eventually recognises the reflection with which he falls in love to be his own image. Of the many reworkings of the myth, Ovid is the only author to have incorporated a fatal moment of self-recognition into the story.² The consequences of this important point of variation in the myth are nearly always overlooked by critics attempting to define the parameters and wider relevance of the Narcissus-myth for an understanding of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*.

There is much evidence to indicate that Goethe was greatly influenced by Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. This is clearly stated in letters describing his early literary experiences.³ In addition to this interest in Ovid, however, it is also evident that Goethe was aware of numerous other variations of the Narcissus-myth. In the encyclopedia of mythical figures, Hederich's *Gründliches Mythologisches Lexicon*, which was widely read in the 18th and 19th centuries, the author lists the many different versions and sources of Narcissus' history.⁴ I shall indicate the relevance of these differing narratives for an understanding of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* in the course of this chapter. It is known that Goethe possessed a copy of Hederich's *Lexicon* in his library, and references to various entries are also to be found in letters to Schiller.⁵ I think, therefore, it is reasonable to assume that Goethe was aware that the Narcissus-myth exists in the form of numerous variations, rather than as one definitive narrative. In this chapter, I

propose to analyse the relevance of these variations for an interpretation of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*. It becomes evident that the act of self-mirroring is not only an important feature of the characters' creation of world-models, but also plays an important rôle in the development of intimate relations and in the characters' concepts of selfhood. In a later chapter I shall examine the way in which the Narcissus-myth extends into the narrative structure itself. In all instances, the reader must acknowledge a number of variations on the theme of self-reflection, rather than attempt to force the narrative to accommodate a single pattern of >narcissistic< experience.

In addition to the virtual impossibility of isolating one version of the myth and using this as the basis of a structural analysis of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, there is the further problem that critics who choose a psychoanalytical approach to the novel often overlook the various differing, often contradictory, concepts of >narcissism< in psychoanalysis. Since Freud's first steps towards a theory of >narcissism< in 1905, there have been many subsequent variations within this theoretical field.⁶ In addition to the numerous minor variations of the theory, shaped not only by later psychoanalysts but also by Freud himself, there exists a major schism between the Freudian and Lacanian concepts of >narcissism< in the context of the individual's notion of the self and its relationship to the Other. In contrast to Freud's positive notion of a continuation of the pre-natal unity of experience in the stage he labelled »primary narcissism«,⁷ Lacan posits the possibility of aggressive competition between the subject and its reflection during that phase of self-experience designated »le stade du

miroir». ²⁸ Instead of representing a nostalgic and irretrievable stage of self-unity, Lacan's transformation of the Narcissus-myth centres on the thesis of a primal alienation of the subject from the image, in the course of which the subject at once recognises and mistakes the self-reflection:

L'agressivité est la tendance corrélative d'un mode d'identification que nous appelons narcissique et qui détermine la structure formelle du moi de l'homme et du registre d'entités caractéristique de son monde. [...] Ce rapport érotique où l'individu humain se fixe à une image qui l'aliène à lui-même, c'est là l'énergie et c'est là la forme d'où prend origine cette organisation passionnelle qu'il appellera son *moi*. ²⁹

When recent critics base an analysis of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* on a psychoanalytic model, they tend to construct a hybrid notion of >narcissism< which uses elements from both of these theories in order to describe certain elements of the text. As a result of this and of the equally common tendency to blur the distinctions between the various versions of the myth itself, sections of Goethe's novel have been read both in terms of a variation on a single mythical »Urtext« and as an anticipation of many different 20th century theories of >narcissism< in psychoanalysis. I believe that the theme of self-reflection that is developed throughout the novel cannot be forced into one single >mythical< or >psychoanalytic< schema. This is largely due to the way in which Goethe presents a structural model and then develops a set of variations on it in the course of the narrative. In the following examination of the Narcissus-theme in the text, I shall not, therefore, attempt to treat the topic in terms of a single version of the myth, nor as the basis of a restrictively psychoanalytic approach. Instead, I propose to examine the concept of narcissism as it is first created and

varied in the text itself. From this it will become evident that the tensions between subject, self-image and images created by other characters are of major relevance for the depiction of human relations in this novel and in several of Goethe's other works.

Critics opting for a psychoanalytic approach to the Narcissus-theme in the novel have almost always found grounds to criticise Eduard's behaviour on the basis that his actions spring from a fundamental »self-love« reminiscent of Narcissus' love of his own image: Henkel describes Eduard as »der Virtuos einer narzißtischen Suche nach Bedeutsamkeiten«; this view is supported by Stephan Blessin: »Auf der Ebene symbolischer Interaktion wirkt es sich darin aus, daß Eduard zeitlebens einem Narzißmus verhaftet bleibt, der ihn zwingt, die Objektwelt in einen personalen Bezug zu sich zu setzen, sich gleichsam alles einverleibend, was ihm begegnet«; Horst Turk draws attention to Eduard's »narcissistic« relationship to society in even stronger terms: »Eduard ist nicht der Typ des abenteuerlichen Individualisten, der in den anderen nur *sich* bespiegelt, sondern der Typ des unbedingt liebenden Egoisten: in ihm bespiegelt sich die Gesellschaft«; Hans Reiss takes this point still further when he blames Eduard for the »Ehebruch im Ehebett«: »Auch sein [Eduards] Bild der Wirklichkeit ist beschränkt. Er ist narzißtisch und wird so zum Urheber des »Ehebruchs im Ehebett«, einer Sünde in der Phantasie...«¹⁰

These views of Eduard's »narcissism« converge in the implicit notion that Eduard is the only character to »project his whims and his desires on the outside world.«¹¹ I believe that the image of Eduard as an uncompromising egoist whose »narcissism« is the cause of his

»downfall«¹² unduly narrows the focus of the Narcissus-theme in the novel, thereby overlooking its wider relevance in the development of the entire narrative. Both Henkel's and Blessin's descriptions of Eduard's compulsion to read and interpret signs in a manner best suited to his own wishes, for example, overlook the way in which other characters in the novel display a similar tendency to interpret and structure their surroundings according to their own preferred models of >reality<. In a similar fashion, Hans Reiss totally distorts the scene of the »Ehebruch im Ehebett« in order to accommodate a model of >narcissism< into Eduard's character. By labelling Eduard the »Urheber« of the fantasy, Reiss totally ignores Charlotte's active and quite spontaneous imagining of the Hauptmann: »Wie sehnlich wünschte sie den Gatten weg; denn die Luftgestalt des Freundes schien ihr Vorwürfe zu machen. [...] Charlotte schwebte der Hauptmann näher oder ferner vor der Seele...« (p.321).

It is true that there are many references in the text to Eduard's »Selbstliebe« (p.289) and to his egocentric interpretation of events. Yet I believe that to present this aspect of Eduard's personality as the only manifestation of the Narcissus-theme in the narrative is to overlook an entire thematic complex in the work. In the light of the characters' central tendency to structure their surroundings according to their own desires and to mirror their images in these constructions, this concept of narcissism cannot possibly be seen as a trait characteristic of Eduard alone. Although Seibt and Scholz raise the point that evidence of a »narcissistic psyche« may, in fact, be perceived in the actions of other characters in the novel, they neither elaborate on the nature of this theme nor give any indication as to its

wider consequences in the whole novel. Moreover, in contrast to their assertion, they proceed to analyse the the workings of the Narcissus-myth solely in terms of Eduard's character and actions.¹³

When evaluating the theme of narcissism in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, it is necessary to examine the various elements of the reccurrent motif as they become manifest in the actions of all characters in the novel. As I have indicated, difficulties arise when a particular model of narcissism from outside the text itself is arbitrarily chosen as dominant and applied to the development of the narrative. For this reason, it is important to determine a concept of narcissism that is constructed from within the text itself and then to do justice to the various permutations of this idea throughout the novel.

As mentioned above, the first direct reference to »narcissism« is made by Eduard and occurs at the beginning of the discussion concerning chemical attractions. As it is Eduard who makes the statement, many critics have come to the conclusion that it is an ironic and inadvertent comment on his own personality. I believe, however, that this interpretation becomes questionable when Eduard's statement is viewed in the light of the entire text of the »Gleichnisrede«. For Eduard's words are in the form of a response to a comment by Charlotte and her interpretation of the chemical symbols. In this scene, Charlotte manipulates language in an attempt to excuse herself for looking in Eduard's book whilst he reads aloud. Despite this conscious manipulation of language, Charlotte's words illustrate the process of interpreting a situation from an egocentric point of view, thus positing the self as

the mechanism which determines a structure of the Real. This method of relating events to the self forms the basis of self-mirroring in the text:

»Ich hörte von Verwandtschaften lesen, und da dacht ich eben gleich an meine Verwandten, an ein paar Vettern, die mir gerade in diesem Augenblick zu schaffen machen. Meine Aufmerksamkeit kehrt zu deiner Vorlesung zurück; ich höre, daß von ganz leblosen Dingen die Rede ist, und blicke dir ins Buch, um mich wieder zurechtzufinden.«
»Es ist eine Gleichnisrede, die dich verführt und verwirrt hat,« sagte Eduard. »Hier wird freilich nur von Erden und Mineralien gehandelt, aber der Mensch ist ein wahrer Narziß; er bespiegelt sich überall gern selbst...« (p.270)

The motif of Narcissus, as introduced by Eduard, is part of a criticism that has the words of Charlotte as its target. The self-mirroring of the mythical character, Narcissus, is viewed here in terms of the way in which people adapt and interpret their surroundings in accordance with their own individual situation. Central to this process is the act of metaphoric or metonymic substitution. Charlotte substitutes the »Verwandtschaften« involved in the chemical reactions for a set of elements more appropriate to her own situation, namely her own relations (»Verwandte«). Through this act of substitution, Charlotte is able to interpret a particular configuration of language in terms of her own personal circumstances.

This process of interpreting and structuring events as they relate to the self forms, in fact, the basis of constructing world-models throughout the narrative. Self-mirroring may take the form of an externalisation of a characteristic already present in human consciousness. This process is clearly indicated by Goethe in a poem of 1805 in which he states: »Wär nicht das Auge sonnenhaft,/ Die Sonne

könnt' es nie erblicken;/ Läg' nicht in uns des Gottes eigne Kraft,/ Wie könnt' uns Göttliches entzücken?» (H.A. I, p.367). This poem is often seen as being indicative of Goethe's attraction to Plotinus' world-view.¹⁴ It is not possible here to discuss in detail Goethe's understanding of Plotinus, and therefore I shall limit my comments to the way in which this poem may be seen as an extension of the Narcissus-theme. Goethe points out that individuals project their own image of the self when interpreting external phenomena, because the construction of any world-model depends on the way in which events are dealt with by the categories of human perception. In other words: any model of >reality< may be seen, to some extent, as an externalisation of an individual's self-image. Thus, the sun can only be observed because the human eye is itself »sonnenhaft«, namely possesses the appropriate affinity to the external phenomenon which enables perception.

This process of interpreting phenomena is made clear in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* during the opening section of the discussion concerning the »chemische Gleichnisrede«. The Hauptmann suggests that the primary relationship of all forms of life takes the shape of an individual consciousness of the self. This is expressed in metaphoric terms as a >relationship< of the entity to itself: »An allen Naturwesen, die wir gewahr werden, bemerken wir zuerst, daß sie einen Bezug auf sich selbst haben« (p.271). It is for this precise reason that the characters are able to interpret the »Gleichnisrede« as a reflection of human relations, rather than the attractions of »ganz leblose Dinge«, thus constructing an anthropocentric model of >reality<. The love of the image that Narcissus sees reflected in the pool corresponds in *Die*

Wahlverwandtschaften to the tendency of the characters to adapt a set of circumstances in such a fashion as to facilitate a mirroring of their own desires. In this respect, self-mirroring in the novel does anticipate certain elements of Freud's notion of the narcissistic type of object-choice.¹⁵ In the novel, this >reflection< is brought about by the process of metaphoric or metonymic substitution. I shall examine this process in detail in Chapter Three. In the case of the »Gleichnisrede«, chemical attractions are displaced by human relations. I would agree, therefore, with J. Hillis Miller that in the context of the novel, the individual »has no images for himself but those generated by his reflecting of himself everywhere, and no terms for inanimate objects but those illicitly projected from the human realm«.¹⁶ This form of narcissism as the reflection of the individual self in external events and phenomena is further highlighted in the novel by the Hauptmann's response to Eduard's comment on the »wahrer Narziß«:

»Jawohl!« fuhr der Hauptmann fort; »so behandelt er [der Mensch] alles, was er außer sich findet; seine Weisheit wie seine Torheit, seinen Willen wie seine Willkür leiht er den Tieren, den Pflanzen, den Elementen und den Göttern.« (p.270)

This tendency is also commented on by Lenardo in the *Wanderjahre*. When discussing the nature of his own diary, Lenardo makes the following ironic comment: »Ich will nicht behaupten, daß es gerade angenehm zu lesen sei; mir schien es immer unterhaltend und gewissermaßen unterrichtend. Doch wir bespiegeln ja uns immer selbst in allem, was wir hervorbrachten« (H.A. VIII, p.338).

The idea of a fusion of individuals with their surroundings through the effects of self-mirroring is further illustrated by another of

Goethe's late poems. In *Ephirrhema*, published in 1820, the central element of human experience, namely a reflection of consciousness in the construction of >reality<, is described in a series of paradoxes:

Müset im Naturbetrachten
Immer eins wie alles achten;
Nichts ist drinnen, nichts ist draußen:
Denn was innen, das ist außen.
So ergreift ohne Säumnis
Heilig öffentlich Geheimnis.

*

Freuet euch des wahren Scheins,
Euch des ernstesten Spieles:
Kein Lebendiges ist ein Eins,
Immer ist's ein Vieles. (H.A. I, p.358)

Of particular relevance for an analysis of the Narcissus-theme as I have outlined it in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* is the notion: »Denn was innen, das ist außen«. It is the idea that individuals are able to perceive themselves in their surroundings through a mirroring of the self, thereby structuring a pattern of >reality<. It is interesting to note that Goethe does not seem concerned with distinguishing between perception and desire, in this way anticipating Freud, whereas the ancient myths are careful to give an explicit motivation of how and why perception is subsumed into desire. It is due to this >narcissistic< tendency that the characters in the novel are able to create a preferred »ontological landscape«, thus reflecting their own images in certain events, natural phenomena, experiences and other characters. In this respect, the reader of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* must come to terms with a dissolution of the notion of »objective reality« and its replacement by the »wahrer Schein«.

Just as a central point of variation in the myth itself revolves around whether or not Narcissus recognises the image in the pool to be his own reflection, so too the question arises in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* as to whether the characters' various acts of reflecting their own image in situations and objects outside the self («was er außer sich findet») is a conscious or unconscious substitution of one set of variables for another. In the case of the »chemische Gleichnisrede«, the characters are aware that they displace chemical reactions by interpersonal relations, with the result that a conscious mirroring of human experience must be explicitly allowed for. The characters and the reader continue, therefore, Charlotte's method of interpreting the chemical symbols and reflect images of their own situation using the »Zeichensprache« of the scientific discourse. Eduard continues this process in the following terms:

Du stellst das A vor, Charlotte, und ich dein B...Das C ist ganz deutlich der Kapitän, der mich für diesmal dir einigermaßen entzieht. Nun ist es billig, daß, wenn du nicht ins Unbestimmte entweichen sollst, dir für ein D gesorgt werde, und das ist ganz ohne Frage das lebenswürdige Dämchen Ottilie, gegen deren Annäherung du dich nicht länger verteidigen darfst. (p.276).

As is often the case in the novel, events in the narrative do not correspond to this structural model created by the characters. Contrary to Eduard's depiction of personal relations in the »Gleichnisrede«, a different series of attractions takes shape. This indicates that any set of structural co-ordinates is susceptible to the process of variation in the narrative. In addition to this, Jeremy Adler has pointed out at great length the ways in which the »Gleichnisrede« may be seen as the mixing of a plurality of chemical theories current in Goethe's era,

rather than as a reference to any single scientific model.¹⁷ The »Gleichnisrede« does not, therefore, represent a fixed construct in the narrative, but rather serves as a further illustration of the way in which the characters shape a particular set of co-ordinates according to their own will, thus mirroring themselves for a certain time only in an external configuration.

This may be seen quite clearly in the characters' attempts to create social and personal forms of order. Both Charlotte's and Mittler's acknowledgement of a social and moral code, Eduard's reading of signs and the Hauptmann's transformation of nature into an aesthetic object are manifestations of this tendency. It becomes clear that no single creation of order may be viewed as being superior to any other construction of >reality<, for all are based on the same act of self-mirroring. Conflicts arise in the novel *not* because one order is more >valid< than another, but rather because of the difficulty experienced by characters attempting to impose their own private world-view onto a wider social context. The success of this process depends on the characters' ability to find guarantees for their preferred model. In other words, they seek acknowledgement for their own experimental projection within the context of the dominant social view of >reality<.

For instance, Eduard attempts to validate his own ideal of Platonic union in more general social terms. This new model of union would have to be incorporated into the socially accepted concept of union which has up till now been viewed solely in terms of the marriage contract. In the course of the novel, the reader is made aware of the conflict between world-models constructed by groups, usually in the form of social or

religious codes, and the smaller shared world-view of Eduard and Ottilie, which cannot be integrated into the more widely accepted concepts of intimacy. This is not to imply, however, that the world-view shared by Eduard and Ottilie must be viewed as false or invalid, or indeed as perfectly unified. Instead it becomes clear that the creation of all forms of order is based on the same narcissistic tendency of individuals. The appearance of >validity< or >objective reality< can, on the one hand, be directly proportional to the number of people that believe in the guarantees of a certain model or, on the other, depend on the nature of the authority invoked to validate it. As I shall indicate at a later point, ultimately no form of order in the novel may be viewed as a stable and permanent structure. In contrast to *Werther*, in which the exceptional individual's world-view is depicted as being ultimately unreliable and subversive of order, in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* group ontologies are not seen to hold any greater intrinsic validity than those constructed by individuals or shared by a small number of people, although the narrative perspective frequently behaves as if they did. As I shall indicate in the course of this study, one of the central questions posed in the novel concerns whether or not it is possible for the individual, firstly, to propound an esoteric model of >reality< and, secondly, to validate it on a wider social scale.

The narcissistic »Bezug auf sich selbst« permits a degree of individual variation in the structuring of patterns of >reality<. By basing an interpretation of an event or object exclusively on a >relation to the self<, a number of characters may read the same sign in different ways. For this reason, when examining the self-mirroring of

the characters, it is necessary to consider a margin of deviation from a pre-existing model or the possibility of inconsistency in the characters' own interpretations of certain events. This is not only seen in the difference between the model of the »Gleichnisrede« and the actual development of interpersonal relations throughout the novel, but it is also evidenced by Eduard's constant interpretation of signs in accordance with his own wishes and their ultimate lack of correspondence with further developments in the narrative. Such a reading of signs is strongest in Eduard's speeches and actions. As a result of this narcissistic process, he is able to predict a happy future for himself and Ottilie, based on his positive interpretations of signs such as their interwoven initials on a glass or his survival in war. Nevertheless, this type of self-mirroring, is also characteristic of the other main characters when they actively construct world-models that embody not only their perceptions, but also their desires. In this context, Charlotte's attempts to manipulate language, the Hauptmann's transformations of nature and Mittler's use of rhetoric to enforce particular moral codes cannot be isolated from Eduard's tendency to read signs according to a reflection of his own desires.

The transformation of nature into a form of order that may be assimilated by human consciousness is most evident in the rôle assigned to the Hauptmann by the narrative voice. Not only does the Hauptmann attempt to impose a form of order on the arrangement of the neighbouring village, but he is also responsible for presenting Eduard with a plan of the surrounding parks and eventually undertakes to landscape the area. In this way he may be seen to reflect his own image, and implicitly

Eduard's as well, in a preferred configuration of nature. This process of transforming and assimilating an ordered form of nature is emphasised by the following depiction of the Hauptmann's plans:

Nach dieser Verabredung wurden die Bücher aufgeschlagen, worin man jedesmal den Grundriß der Gegend und ihre landschaftliche Ansicht in ihrem ersten, rohen Naturzustande gezeichnet sah, sodann auf andern Blättern die Veränderung vorgestellt fand, welche die Kunst daran vorgenommen, um alles das bestehende Gute zu nutzen und zu steigern. Hievon war der Übergang zur eigenen Besetzung, zur eignen Umgebung und zu dem, was man daran ausbilden könnte, sehr leicht. (p.288)

This form of self-mirroring in the creation of order in nature is seen by Goethe as a standard characteristic of humanity. In the *Wanderjahre* this idea receives further treatment. In an extract from »Makariens Archiv« we find the following description of the relationship of humankind to nature. Here, Goethe makes explicit the way in which humanity must modify and transform phenomena in a narcissistic manner in order to allow the possibility of their assimilation by consciousness:

Dafür steht ja aber der Mensch so hoch, daß sich das sonst Undarstellbare in ihm darstellt. Was ist denn eine Saite und alle mechanische Teilung derselben gegen das Ohr des Musikers? Ja man kann sagen: was sind die elementaren Erscheinungen der Natur selbst gegen den Menschen, der sie alle erst bändigen und modifizieren muß, um sie sich einigermaßen assimilieren zu können? (H.A. VIII, p.474)

The pattern of structuring >reality< according to the way in which individuals relate their surroundings to the self does not only form the starting point of the »Gleichnisrede«, but also receives treatment in Goethe's essay »Der Versuch als Vermittler von Objekt und Subjekt«, the earliest version of which is dated 1792. Here, Goethe describes the same tendency of people to relate external phenomena to the self in a

conscious manner and draws the reader's attention to the notion of a »Bezug auf sich selbst«:

Sobald der Mensch die Gegenstände um sich her gewahr wird, betrachtet er sie in Bezug auf sich selbst, und mit Recht. Denn es hängt sein ganzes Schicksal davon ab, ob sie ihm gefallen oder mißfallen, ob sie ihn anziehen oder abstoßen, ob sie ihm nutzen oder schaden. Diese ganz natürliche Art die Sachen anzusehen und zu beurteilen scheint so leicht zu sein als sie notwendig ist, und doch ist der Mensch dabei tausend Irrtümern ausgesetzt, die ihn oft beschämen und ihm das Leben verbittern. (H.A. XIII, p.10)

This form of perception »in Bezug auf sich selbst« is depicted as being at once a common and unremarkable feature of human perception, but paradoxically also one which may lead to »tausend Irrtümer«. The ease with which Goethe blends the elements of perception, self-preservation and desire into one is reminiscent of Rousseau's conjectures about the primal state of the human personality in his *Essai sur l'origine des langues*.¹⁸ I believe that the various aspects of this experience are depicted in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*. On the one hand, human experience must be regulated by the categories of perception and the »Bezug auf sich selbst«; on the other hand, however, when this process is taken to extremes, the narcissistic tendency of individuals can lead to the construction of tragically incompatible world-views. In this way, Goethe may also be seen to question the Enlightenment belief in »Vernunft« as a means by which to harmonise conflicting models of the Real.

Tensions between individual notions of >reality< and the actual outcome of events in the novel also serve to discredit the means by which world-models are created. That the construction of group and individual »ontological landscapes« according to the process of self-mirroring can lead neither to a unity of views nor to the creation of a

single objective reality is emphasised by the Hauptmann at an early point in the novel. When Eduard suggests that Charlotte be made aware of the errors in her plans to landscape the park, the Hauptmann's response draws attention to this problem:

»Tue das nicht!« versetzte der Hauptmann, der die Überzeugungen anderer nicht gern mit den seinigen durchkreuzte, den die Erfahrung gelehrt hatte, daß die Ansichten der Menschen viel zu mannigfaltig sind, als daß sie, selbst durch die vernünftigsten Vorstellungen, auf Einem Punkt versammelt werden könnten. (p.261)

As I mentioned in the Introduction, the depiction of a multiplicity of conflicting world-models may also be seen in terms of a critique of the many contradictory patterns of >valid< philosophical, religious and social world-views expounded during the Enlightenment. As the Hauptmann points out, despite the ideal of enlightened »Vernunft« (»die vernünftigsten Vorstellungen«), it remains impossible to draw these wide-ranging views together in order to form one complete and harmoniously functioning system of order. This type of antagonism between models of >reality< is also commented on by Charlotte. This time, however, the multiplicity of »ontological landscapes« is seen to be a characteristic of the supposedly stable world of scientific calculation: »Wie es wissenschaftlich damit zusammenhänge, wollen wir den Gelehrten überlassen, die übrigens, wie ich habe bemerken können, sich wohl schwerlich jemals vereinigen werden« (p.271). As I shall illustrate in detail in the following chapters, the construction of patterns of >reality< in the novel may be seen in the structuring of a temporal order, the transformation of Nature into images, the allocation of particular rôles to certain characters and in the construction of private and social codes of behaviour. In these instances the method of

constructing patterns of >reality< ranges between the innovative creation of a particular pattern and a series of variations on pre-existing models.

The construction of patterns of >valid experience< in the novel which are determined by the »Bezug auf sich selbst« take on two different forms in the course of the narrative. In the first instance, as I have outlined above, the characters reflect their own image in external phenomena and create a concept of the world and their own position in a configuration of human relations. They believe this narcissistic interpretation of events to be a valid and durable construction of >reality<. In the second instance, however, the »Bezug auf sich selbst« also leads to the characters' innovative use of »imagination« («Einbildung«), which provides another perspective on narcissistic experience. In contrast to world-views, which represent believable and often lasting patterns of >reality< for both individuals and groups, this form of self-mirroring through »Einbildung« is acknowledged by the characters to be purely transient and non-binding. This is in accordance with the description of the imagination in the *Wanderjahre* as a »vages, unstätes Vermögen« (H.A. VIII, p.249).

Undoubtedly the most famous instance of the workings of »Einbildungskraft« in the novel is the scene of the »Ehebruch im Ehebett«: »In der Lampendämmerung sogleich behauptete die innre Neigung, behauptete die Einbildungskraft ihre Rechte über das Wirkliche...« (p.321). This scene emphasizes the difference between the free use of the imagination and the construction of a world-view. Although Charlotte and Eduard are able to fantasize the presence of

their true lovers, the scene which unfolds in their imaginations does not represent a lasting construction of >reality< for either of them. Instead we find that after this innovative act of imagining, the characters are left with a heightened and painful awareness of the scene as it did, in fact, happen:

Aber als Eduard des andern Morgens an dem Busen seiner Frau erwachte, schien ihm der Tag ahnungsvoll hereinzublicken, die Sonne schien ihm ein Verbrechen zu beleuchten; er schlich sich leise von ihrer Seite, und sie fand sich, seltsam genug, allein, als sie erwachte. (p.321)

In this whole episode, the power of the imagination to transform experience successfully lasts only for moments. In contrast to the construction of a model of the Real, which, as in the case of social codes of behaviour, may remain durable for decades, this imaginary innovation is characterised by the failure of metaphoric substitution to be sustained by the desires of the characters for longer than a few instants. The narcissistic tendency, based on the »Bezug auf sich selbst«, may be seen either in terms of a lasting and believable construction of >reality<, such as the structuring of a temporal order or the transformation of nature into a particular image, or may also take the form of a momentary fantasy that dissolves when the characters put an end to the processes initiated by the active imagination, or else when some *force majeure* intervenes.

In their use of and attitudes towards »Einbildung«, the characters concede an element of unreality in particular constructions of order. This is also indicated in the scenes during which Luciane assumes a major rôle in the narrative. In the various references to the frivolity

of the aristocratic circle, the narrative perspective constantly stresses the sense of illusion effected by »Einbildung«:

...und wirklich verwirrte sie [Luciane] dadurch das Gegenwärtige und das Eingebildete dergestalt, daß man sich mit der Saalnixe verwandt und verschwägert zu sein glaubte. (p.379)

...da denn die Nachrichten und Erzählungen, wie man sich bei Hofe und in der Stadt vergnügte, der Einbildungskraft eine andere Wendung gaben und Lucianen mit ihrer sämtlichen Begleitung, indem die Tante schon vorausgegangen war, unaufhaltsam in einen andern Lebenskreis hineinzogen. (p.396)

Instead of forming a direct opposition to other methods of creating a believable world-model, the characters' use of the imagination indicates a slight change in perspective towards the construction of order. In this sense, the border between »ontological landscapes« as believed >reality< and a fictional order of the imagination becomes extremely tenuous. Although an imaginary order appears to last only for a few instants, the mere concession that such fictions can be created serves to discredit subtly the means used by the human mind to structure models of >reality<. Both processes are based on the act of self-mirroring, yet a slight change in perspective on the part of the characters determines whether these forms of order are to be viewed in terms of >reality< or >fiction<. In addition to acknowledging the conflicts between models of >reality<, the reader is also obliged to deal with the varying attitudes of the characters towards their own creations of order. As the narrative progresses, the characters' imposition of order on events is depicted in an increasingly relativistic manner.

II *The Self and the Other*

In the »chemische Gleichnisrede« the »Bezug auf sich selbst« is depicted as being only the first stage in a series of chemical reactions. In the further discussion of this set of reactions, the »Selbstbezug« is maintained, yet the primary relationship undergoes certain modifications. This becomes apparent if, like the main characters in the novel, we continue to interpret the chemical reactions in human terms. When the second phase of the process comes into effect, namely the addition of the »Fremdbezug«, the self-referential aspect of the primary relationship is not destroyed. Instead, the relationship to the Other is seen as being an essential element of the individual's consciousness of self: »Wie jedes gegen sich selbst einen Bezug hat, so muß es auch gegen andere ein Verhältnis haben« (p.272). A solipsistic world consisting of nothing but the »Bezug auf sich selbst« is not presented as a valid possibility. Instead, a relationship to something outside the self is seen as being an essential element in the formation of the individual's construction of >reality<. For this reason a shared »ontological landscape« is often considered by the characters to form a more >valid< construction of the Real than a world-model supported by the individual alone.

As I mentioned above, the *apparent* validity of a particular model of >reality< is determined by the number of people that support its >truth< or by the social or religious status of the authorities which

offer guarantees for such >truth<. It is important to keep in mind, however, the antinomy within the thought of the European Enlightenment which becomes acute at the close of the 18th century. This is the tension between the ideal of reasoned consensus, deriving ultimately from thinkers such as Hobbes, Hume and Locke, and the contrary ideal of individual authenticity which owes its vitality chiefly to Rousseau. The cult of »Vernunft« could bridge this gap precariously by insisting on the generality of reasonable conduct on the one hand, whilst making higher reason, on the other hand, intrinsic to each individual. *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* captures an historical moment in which the antinomy itself reveals its full destructiveness and the earlier synthesis survives only as the dead relics of its nomenclature.

The relationship of the self to the Other is also of vital relevance to the depiction of individual consciousness. The introduction of the »Fremdbezug« leads to the possibility of reading the individual's concept of the self in two ways. On the one hand, it is possible to interpret this aspect of the »Gleichnisrede« in terms of an idealised vision of metamorphosis which may produce a complete and whole self through union with another person; on the other, however, the question arises as to whether this transformation of the self corresponds to the union of equal factors or to the destruction of one member of the relationship:

Man muß diese tot scheinenden und doch zur Tätigkeit innerlich immer bereiten Wesen wirkend vor seinen Augen sehen, mit Teilnahme schauen, wie sie einander suchen, sich anziehen, ergreifen, zerstören, verschlingen, aufzehren und sodann aus der innigsten Verbindung wieder in erneuter, neuer, unerwarteter Gestalt hervortreten. (pp.275-6)

It is this dual nature of union and its effects on the self that leads to conflicting evaluations of Eduard's relationship with Otilie. When discussing the characteristics of this relationship there have been tendencies amongst critics either to emphasise Eduard's >narcissistic< preying upon Otilie's personality or to reject this approach in favour of an analysis according to the myth of Platonic union. Hillis Miller views Eduard's relationship with Otilie solely in terms of narcissistic self-reflection: »Eduard's relation to Otilie is the relation of an object to an image, like his own face to the mirror, or like a figure in a dream«. ¹⁹ This negative view of Eduard's rôle in the relationship is supported by Vaget, Reiss and Muenzer, for whom Eduard appears as a »Dilletant«, an uncompromising egoist and a character who attempts to manipulate Otilie according to his own »authorial hopes«. ²⁰ In contrast to these views stand interpretations such as that of W.J. Lillyman, in which Eduard's relationship with Otilie is seen as conforming to the depiction of Platonic union in *The Symposium*. ²¹ Both of these lines of interpretation run the risk of imposing an extraneous model on the text and distorting the narrative in order to make it comply with a pre-existing set of co-ordinates.

I believe that this is equally the case with Waltraud Wiethölter's examination of the Narcissus-theme in the novel. Wiethölter makes constant reference to manifestations of the Ovidian version of the myth in the novel, but does not take into account the numerous other versions of this myth of which Goethe was aware and which are also apparent in the work. Ignoring these other variations, she attempts to show how Eduard and Otilie correspond to Narcissus and Echo in the Ovidian

myth.²² I do not believe that this parallel is plausible when Ovid's text and Goethe's novel are closely compared. Although Wiethölter stresses the specificity of the Ovidian »Urtext«, she overlooks fundamental elements of the myth that clearly do not fit into an interpretation of Goethe's novel. For instance, she does not take into account Echo's initial attraction to Narcissus and his repulsion of her, nor does she consider the entire complex surrounding the question of Narcissus' self-recognition in the reflected image. Similarly the coordinates of the myth are blurred in Wiethölter's discussion of the relationship of Narcissus to his own image, to himself and to Echo. Although she admits that the novel can accommodate numerous different readings, she relates this notion to a formulation of mythopoesis based on the Ovidian depiction of metamorphosis.²³ In this way, even the essential element of variation within the text falls prey to the common tendency of distorting the novel to accommodate one exclusive model.

I believe that the two common depictions of Eduard's relationship with Ottilie, either as Eduard's narcissistic self-fulfilment or as an explicit allusion to the Platonic model, represent complementary features of the same configuration and must, therefore, be viewed as part of a whole. The notion of union expounded by Aristophanes in Plato's *Symposium* is that of an ideal form of selfhood which endows the parties involved with a heightened perception of the self and the world. This ideal union is described in the following words:

...the way to happiness for our race lies in fulfilling the behests of Love, and in each finding for himself the mate who properly belongs to him; in a word, in returning to our original condition. If that condition was the best, it follows that it is best for us to come as near to it as our present circumstances allow; and the

way to do that is to find a sympathetic and congenial object for our affections.²⁴

This transformation of the self through union and return to an original condition forms the positive mythical basis of Eduard's relationship with Ottilie and it is shared by both characters. In other words: the fusion of world-views involved in the relationship is based on this common notion of idealised union. As I shall indicate, however, Ottilie's >sharing< of this myth actually takes the form of her acceptance of a rôle assigned to her within Eduard's own preferred vision of the Real. In contrast to a model constructed by the imagination («Einbildung»), this ideal of Platonic union forms the basis of a world-view that is sustained for almost the entire novel. Heightening the contrast between these two forms of order is the fact that Eduard attempts to realise this union within a wider social context. As a result of their shared world-view, both characters undergo a change in outlook after discovering and confirming their mutual attraction:

Das Gefühl, etwas für den Freund getan zu haben, hatte ihr [Ottilies] ganzes Wesen über sich selbst gehoben. (p.323)

Von diesem Augenblick an war die Welt für Eduarden umgewendet, er nicht mehr, was er gewesen, die Welt nicht mehr, was sie gewesen. (p.324)

In accordance with this idealised vision of unity through the joining of the two Platonic spheres to form a single and harmonious whole, there are times in the novel when the narrative perspective also supports this vision of the relationship:

Nach wie vor übten sie eine unbeschreibliche, fast magische Anziehungskraft gegeneinander aus...Nur die nächste Nähe konnte sie

beruhigen, aber auch völlig beruhigen, und diese Nähe war genug...Dann waren es nicht zwei Menschen, es war nur Ein Mensch im bewußtlosen, vollkommenen Behagen, mit sich selbst zufrieden und mit der Welt. (p.478)

Some critics have accepted this description of the relationship by the narrator and, in accordance with the positive myth of Platonic union, have developed this idealised vision of the two lovers. In his interpretation of the novel, W.J. Lillyman analyses the relationship according to the possibility of Goethe's acquaintance with Plato's *Symposium*: »Goethe has thus portrayed the love between Eduard and Ottilie as an irresistible natural force. Like Aristophanes' halves, such lovers have no choice but to seek each other out and become one...«;²⁵ Ignace Feuerlicht goes still further in seeing Eduard's relationship with Ottilie as conforming to the central characteristics of the literary trope of two tragic lovers:

Das Ganze hat nichts mit dem Liebesverhältnis zwischen zwei Personen zu tun. Gewiß liegt Ottilies Grab später neben dem Eduards, aber das ist nicht einfach das Grab zweier Menschen, die einander verwandtschaftlich oder freundschaftlich nahegestanden sind, sondern das zweier außerordentlicher Liebender, wie das von Tristan und Isolde oder das von Romeo und Julia, die, wie Eduard und Ottilie, unter ihrer näheren Umgebung zu leiden hatten und die bald nach ihrem kurzen Liebesverhältnis und schnell nacheinander starben und nebeneinander begraben wurden.²⁶

As is the case with other models in the novel, I believe that an isolation of one aspect of this relationship, such as the narcissistic mirroring of Eduard or the myth of Platonic union, leads to a distortion of a central theme in the narrative. I would argue that these two aspects of the relationship are not mutually exclusive, but rather that they are depicted in the novel as being parallel and co-existing facets of the one relationship. In the novel, the utopian notion of self-unity

and heightened perception of the world according to the myth of Platonic union stands in direct contrast to the depiction of events leading to both Eduard's and Ottilie's apparent transcendence of their old, disunified selves.

It is clear that, instead of achieving perfect and equal union, an asymmetry exists in their relationship. This asymmetry may be seen in the way in which Ottilie's personality is taken over by Eduard's own self-image. As has been pointed out by those critics mentioned above, Eduard does reflect his own image in Ottilie. For instance, when Ottilie suggests the best position to build the new house, Eduard appears to take over the idea: »Er war so stolz darauf, als ob die Erfindung sein gewesen wäre« (p.295). In the same sense, Ottilie loses her own individuality by playing the piano in order to accommodate Eduard's interpretation of the music; she also gives up her own style of handwriting in favour of Eduard's. This loss of autonomy on Ottilie's part is epitomised in the scene where the two characters make known their feelings for each other:

»Um Gottes willen!« rief er aus, »was ist das? Das ist meine Hand!« Er sah Ottilien an und wieder auf die Blätter, besonders der Schluß war ganz, als wenn er ihn selbst geschrieben hätte. Ottilie schwieg, aber sie blickte ihm mit der größten Zufriedenheit in die Augen. Eduard hob seine Arme empor: »Du liebst mich!« rief er aus, »Ottilie du liebst mich!« und sie hielten einander umfaßt. (pp.323-24)

Ottilie acts as a mirror for Eduard in which he may reflect his own image and attempt to realise an ideal form of selfhood. I believe it is wrong, however, to assert that this is the dominant characteristic of their relationship. Instead, I would suggest that the mythical notion of

Platonic union with Ottilie may be seen as a positive re-coding of Eduard's attempt to achieve a unity of self by uniting with his own self-image. Thus, the narcissistic tendency is recast in terms of the myth of Platonic union. This form of positive re-coding as part of the Narcissus-configuration is also apparent in *Torquato Tasso*. Here, the narcissistic experience of the poet takes the form of an idealised self-reflection. In conversation with the Princess and Alfons, Tasso makes the following declaration:

So laßt mich denn beschämt von hinnen gehn!
Laßt mich mein Glück im tiefen Hain verbergen,
Wie ich sonst meine Schmerzen dort verbarg.
[...]

Und zeigt mir ungefähr ein klarer Brunnen
In seinem reinen Spiegel einen Mann,
Der wunderbar bekränzt im Widerschein
Des Himmels zwischen Bäumen, zwischen Felsen
Nachdenkend ruht: so scheint es mir, ich sehe
Elysium auf dieser Zauberfläche
Gebildet. [...]

O sah ich die Heroen, die Poeten
Der alten Zeit um diesen Quell versammelt!
O sah ich hier sie immer unzertrennlich,
Wie sie im Leben fest verbunden waren! (H.A. V, pp. 87-88. v.527-548)

Just as Tasso is able to see reflected in the water an idealised vision of Elysium in which poets and heroes are enshrined with glory, so too Eduard's vision of his relationship with Ottilie is viewed by him solely in terms of perfect and eternal unity. This indicates the way in which the process of self-reflection may take the form of an idealisation of events according to the desires of the subject. In this way, the more negative aspects of the act of self-mirroring and the subjugation of Ottilie's character by Eduard's own image are reshaped according to the more positive image of Platonic wholeness. For the greater part of the

novel, however, Eduard appears to be unaware that he reflects his own image in Otilie and, instead, remains secure in trying to achieve a utopian unity of self through enacting the Platonic myth. Interestingly, however, the link between self-awareness and recognition of or union with the mirror-image is placed in a sceptical light in one of the maxims from »Makariens Archiv« in the *Wanderjahre*. Here the mirror-image becomes a paradigm of self-deception:

Nichts wird leicht ganz unparteilich wieder dargestellt. Man könnte sagen: hievon mache der Spiegel eine Ausnahme, und doch sehen wir unser Angesicht niemals ganz richtig darin; ja der Spiegel kehrt unsre Gestalt um und macht unsre linke Hand zur rechten. Dies mag ein Bild sein für alle Betrachtungen über uns selbst. (H.A. VIII, p.486)

That Goethe was extremely interested in the notion of self-mirroring in the context of intimate relations is given further support if we examine an important novella in the *Lehrjahre* entitled *Bekenntnisse einer schönen Seele*. This novella takes the form of a first person narrative from a female perspective and forms a counter-image to the depiction of the male perspective on individual development in the wider context of the novel. In this novella the Narcissus-theme is particularly strong and forms an opposing schema to its depiction in Eduard's relationship with Otilie. The female narrator of the *Bekenntnisse* describes her growing attachment to a young man named Narcissus. As would be expected, this character displays those characteristics implied by his name: »...und seine schöne Gestalt hätte noch mehr Eindruck gemacht, wenn sein ganzes Wesen nicht eine Art von Selbstgefälligkeit gezeigt hätte« (H.A. VII, p.365).

As the novella progresses it appears that the relationship of the two characters will develop according to the pattern of Narcissus' self-mirroring in his lover. Indeed, he attempts to do this after their engagement by forcing his fiancée to act according to his wishes and adapt her personality to the image he has created of her. Instead of allowing the narrative to progress according to this pattern, however, Goethe introduces certain important changes to the Narcissus-theme that affect the development of the characters' relationship to each other. The first major change in the configuration occurs before the two main characters become engaged. After attending to the wounds of her future fiancé who has been the victim of a surprise attack, the female narrator undergoes a moment of new self-awareness in the context of narcissistic experience:

Nun führte mich die Hausfrau in ihr Schlafzimmer; sie mußte mich ganz auskleiden, und ich darf nicht verschweigen, daß ich, da man sein Blut von meinem Körper abwusch, zum erstenmal zufällig im Spiegel gewahr wurde, daß ich mich auch ohne Hülle für schön halten durfte. (H.A. VII, p.368)

In this scene, Goethe changes the tradition of the Narcissus-myth and allows the female character to perceive her own beauty in the mirror. It is this moment of self-perception through reflection in the mirror that affects the development of the narrator's relationship to her fiancé. In the moment of reflection, the narrator perceives an image of herself »ohne Hülle« and it is precisely the mask of conformity that she refuses to wear in order to keep alive her relationship with Narcissus. Narcissus expects to reflect his own image in his fiancée, but following upon the narrator's new awareness of her own individual self, she cannot

accept this rôle. As a result of this, she makes a demand for freedom and the right to act in accordance with her own will:

Ich zog die Maske ab und handelte jedesmal, wie mir's ums Herz war. [...] Ich erklärte mit männlichem Trotz, daß ich mich bisher genug aufgeopfert habe, daß ich bereit sei, noch ferner und bis ans Ende meines Lebens alle Widerwärtigkeiten mit ihm [Narziß] zu teilen; daß ich aber für meine Handlungen völlige Freiheit verlange, daß mein Tun und Lassen von meiner Überzeugung abhängen müsse; daß ich zwar niemals eigensinnig auf meiner Meinung beharren, vielmehr jede Gründe gerne anhören wolle, aber da es mein eignes Glück betreffe, müsse die Entscheidung von mir abhängen, und keine Art von Zwang würde ich dulden. (H.A. VII, p.379)

The narcissistic configuration in the *Bekenntnisse* forms a complete opposition to that element of Eduard's relationship with Otilie. Eduard reflects his own image in Otilie, with the result that Otilie is denied an autonomous existence and the right to develop as an individual. In contrast to this, the narrator of the *Bekenntnisse* does not conform to the narcissistic desire of her fiancé. Following upon her own moment of self-perception in a reversal of the traditional Narcissus-myth, she demands the right to autonomy. Thus, Goethe opposes two versions of the Narcissus-theme to one another and indicates their contrasting repercussions for the autonomy or subjugation of the characters involved in each relationship.

Another variant of the Narcissus-myth which is worth mentioning at this point is a version mentioned by Hederich in his *Mythologisches Lexicon* that tells of Narcissus' relationship to his sister. In this version, Narcissus is deeply attached to his twin sister and after her death attempts to restore his relationship with her by gazing at a reflection of his own image in a pool of water. Finding ultimately

little consolation in this, Narcissus drowns himself in the pond.²⁷ This variant is of extreme interest when considered first in the light of Goethe's own relationship to his sister, Cornelia. As K.R. Eissler has pointed out, Goethe had a strong attachment to his sister and often appeared to regard her as his »mirror image«.²⁸ This is confirmed by one of Goethe's comments in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*:

Und so wie in den ersten Jahren Spiel und Lernen, Wachstum und Bildung den Geschwistern völlig gemein war, so daß sie sich wohl für Zwillinge halten konnten, so blieb auch unter ihnen diese Gemeinschaft, dieses Vertrauen bei Entwicklung physischer und moralischer Kräfte. (H.A. IX, p.228)

That this relationship also displayed a secret and unrealised sexual dimension is also suggested by Eissler and intimated by Goethe himself.²⁹ In *Dichtung und Wahrheit* Goethe describes his relationship to Cornelia in terms of the Platonic myth. At one point he suggests that Cornelia had not found her true partner from amongst her eligible suitors: »...nur sie war ohne Hälfte geblieben« (H.A. IX, p.230). From this it follows that the true half may, in fact, have been Goethe himself. For this reason Goethe asserts that he and his sister were drawn closer together and that this closeness threatened to extend the boundary of brotherly affection:

...indem mein Verhältnis zu Gretchen zerriß, tröstete mich meine Schwester um desto ernstlicher, als sie heimlich die Zufriedenheit empfand, eine Nebenbuhlerin losgeworden zu sein; und so mußte auch ich mit einer stillen Halbschadenfreude empfinden, wenn sie mir Gerechtigkeit widerfahren ließ, daß ich der einzige sei, der sie wahrhaft liebe, sie kenne und sie verehere. (H.A. IX, p.230)

Goethe's feigned relief when Cornelia did find a partner is strongly disputed by Eissler, who produces evidence to show that Goethe was overcome by jealousy and anger when hearing of her decision to marry.³⁰

This theme of desire for the sister finds concrete expression in many of Goethe's works. In a play of 1776 *Die Geschwister*, the ideal relationship is depicted. Here, the two main characters are able to realise the sexual dimension of their relationship when it is revealed that they are not, in fact, brother and sister.³¹ Similarly in a poem of 1776 written for Charlotte von Stein, the two images of woman as lover and sister converge:

Sag', was will das Schicksal uns bereiten?
Sag', wie band es uns so rein genau?
Ach, du warst in abgelebten Zeiten
Meine Schwester oder meine Frau... (H.A. I, p.123)

As Eissler has pointed out, a further idealised image of the loving sister is evident in *Iphigenie* (1779).³²

Of particular interest in this entire schema is the image of the twins which Goethe uses to describe his relationship to his sister. In *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* a similar image may be seen in certain complementary actions of Eduard and Ottilie within the complex of the Platonic halves. Not only are they described as forming »nur Ein Mensch« (p.478) when in each others' presence, but this mirroring effect to form a complete whole is also evidenced during the act of reading aloud and further indicated by their complementary headaches. As Eduard points out:

»...ein wahrer Narziß«

Es ist doch recht zuvorkommend von der Nichte, ein wenig Kopfweh auf der linken Seite zu haben; ich habe es manchmal auf der rechten. Trifft es zusammen und wir sitzen gegeneinander, ich auf den rechten Ellbogen, sie auf den linken gestützt und die Köpfe nach verschiedenen Seiten in die Hand gelegt, so muß das ein Paar artige Gegenbilder geben. (pp.280-1)

In these scenes Eduard and Ottilie appear to form mirror-images of each other which unite in the form of Platonic wholeness. Similarly, after Ottilie's death, Eduard cannot survive without his mirror-image and, like Narcissus in this variant, soon follows his sister/lover in death. A positive re-coding of this version of the myth may be seen in a scene in *Hermann und Dorothea* (1797). When the two protagonists' love for each other first becomes apparent, the two characters appear to lose themselves in a reflection:

...und auf das Mäuerchen setzten
Beide sich nieder des Quells. Sie beugte sich über, zu schöpfen;
Und er faßte den anderen Krug und beugte sich über.
Und sie sahen gespiegelt ihr Bild in der Bläue des Himmels
Schwanken und nickten sich zu und grüßten sich freundlich im
Spiegel...

(H.A. II, pp.491-92)

I believe that an awareness of the different versions of the Narcissus-myth is of extreme relevance for a reading of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, for it serves to highlight the several different aspects of Eduard's relationship with Ottilie and provides a range of perspectives on the characters' attempts to create a unified image of the self. Central to this process is the way in which the characters displace negative aspects of one configuration by the more positive elements of another variant. In this way the Narcissus-theme may be seen to extend from being an element in the construction of order to a key feature of

intimate relations. In addition to this, the numerous variations of the myth may be seen in terms of an important theme that extends into the wider context of Goethe's works.

In order to bring about a state equivalent to the Platonic union Eduard must find a means of dealing with his already existing relationship with Charlotte. It is evident at the beginning of the novel that Eduard and Charlotte have different views of their own relationship. During the discussion concerning the possibility of inviting the Hauptmann to stay with them, Charlotte expresses a fear that the introduction of another person will disturb the unity of their existence together: »Nur daß wir nichts Hinderndes, Fremdes hereinbringen!« (p.247). For Charlotte, marriage to Eduard is conceived of in terms of unity and stability. In accordance with the terms of the marriage contract, Charlotte believes that the basis of permanent unity between them has been established. In contrast to the image of unity through marriage, Eduard attempts to convince his wife that their relationship will be enhanced by the presence of the Hauptmann:

...durch die Gegenwart des Hauptmanns würde nichts gestört, ja vielmehr alles beschleunigt und neu belebt. Auch er hat einen Teil meiner Wanderungen mitgemacht; auch er hat manches, und in verschiedenem Sinne, sich angemerkt: wir benutzten das zusammen, und alsdann würde es erst ein hübsches Ganze werden. (p.247)

It becomes evident that Eduard does not conceive of his marriage in terms of a perfect unity. In contrast to Charlotte, he is willing to introduce new factors into their situation that may have the potential to alter their perception of each other and the world. When the possibility of attaining a unity of self through a relationship with

Ottilie is glimpsed, Eduard transforms the Hauptmann into a »zweites Ich« in order both to fulfil his rôle in the marriage to Charlotte and to allow the chance of Platonic union with Ottilie. In the early stages of the novel we see the way in which this new rôle for the Hauptmann is prepared:

Das, was er [Eduard] mit andern abzutun hatte, was bloß von ihm selbst abhing, es war nicht geschieden, so wie er auch Geschäfte und Beschäftigung, Unterhaltung und Zerstreung nicht genügsam voneinander absonderte. Jetzt wurde es ihm leicht, da ein Freund diese Bemühung übernahm, ein zweites Ich die Sonderung bewirkte, in die das eine Ich nicht immer sich spalten mag. (pp.266-7)

Towards the end of the novel, the rôle of the Hauptmann as Eduard's »zweites Ich« becomes even more apparent as Eduard attempts to force the Hauptmann to take over his position in the marriage to Charlotte:

Ich weiß, du liebst Charlotten, und sie verdient es; ich weiß, du bist ihr nicht gleichgültig, und warum sollte sie deinen Wert nicht erkennen! Nimm sie von meiner Hand, führe mir Ottilien zu! und wir sind die glücklichsten Menschen auf der Erde. (p.449)

By creating a »zweites Ich« and, thus engineering a substitution of himself for another in the marriage to Charlotte, Eduard envisages liberty to enact the myth of Platonic union with Ottilie. In this way, he attempts to free himself from a situation in which the self must remain disunified and establishes instead the possibility of effecting a unity of self in his relationship with Ottilie. This action does, however, produce an ironic commentary on the process of attempting to achieve self-unity, for whilst trying to effect a union with his missing Platonic half, Eduard divides himself yet again in order to install the Hauptmann as a »zweites Ich«. This indicates two ways of dealing with the problem of incompleteness; in one sense, it seems possible to

imagine the Other out of the self; in another sense, it appears equally desirable to achieve a form of union with the Other. Thus, Eduard attempts to reconcile two contradictory programmes of action in the quest for completeness.

The »Bezug auf sich selbst«, as the starting-point for the creation of world-models, also plays an important rôle in Eduard's relationship with Ottilie. Throughout the novel Eduard constructs a pattern of >valid< experience by interpreting events, in this case Ottilie's personality and feelings, in ways that will best suit his own desires. In the early stages of the relationship, the substitution that occurs in the narcissistic model takes the form of a displacement of Ottilie's personality by Eduard's image. This is not to imply that Ottilie is deprived of her own notion of her relationship with Eduard, but rather that the two characters have differing concepts of the relationship, each of which involves a contrasting notion of how to achieve a unity of self through their relationship with a lover.

Eduard attempts to endow the instant of self-reflection in the Other with an aura of permanence. In his study of the various means of coding a discourse of love, Niklas Luhmann draws attention to this point in his general discussion of love and temporality: »...die Einheit der Liebe [wird] als Einheit von Moment und Dauer, als Paradoxie des Augenblicks mit Ewigkeitwert eingefordert«.³³ In the novel, this paradox lies in the attempt to transform the moment of self-reflection, or the mythicised moment of Platonic union, into a durable structure of self-unity. For this reason Eduard spends the larger part of the novel

attempting to make permanent his relationship with Ottilie and therefore looks for signs that will confirm the security of their union:

Mein Schicksal und Ottiliens ist nicht zu trennen, und wir werden nicht zugrunde gehen. Sehen Sie dieses Glas! Unsere Namenszüge sind dareingeschnitten...ich trinke nun täglich daraus, um mich täglich zu überzeugen, daß alle Verhältnisse unzerstörlich sind, die das Schicksal beschlossen hat. (p.356)

>So will ich mich denn selbst<, rief ich mir zu, als ich an diesem einsamen Orte soviel zweifelhafte Stunden verlebt hatte, >mich selbst will ich an die Stelle des Glases zum Zeichen machen, ob unsre Verbindung möglich sei oder nicht<. (p.447)

...dies Kind ist aus einem doppelten Ehbruch erzeugt! es trennt mich von meiner Gattin und meine Gattin von mir, wie es uns hätte verbinden sollen. Mag es denn gegen mich zeugen, mögen diese herrlichen Augen den deinigen sagen, daß ich in den Armen einer andern dir gehörte; mögest du fühlen, Ottilie, recht fühlen, daß ich jenen Fehler, jenes Verbrechen nur in deinen Armen abbüßen kann! (p.455)

Here we see the way in which two variants of the Narcissus-theme converge in Eduard's actions. On the one hand, the general narcissistic tendency of all the characters in the novel is evidenced by his ability to interpret and structure signs and events in terms of the »Bezug auf sich selbst«, thus making possible the creation of an individual world-view; on the other hand, however, the desire to form an eternal union with Ottilie indicates the attempt to realise a utopian mode of selfhood which reworks the negative aspects of the Narcissus-myth into a positive model. Whereas Ovid's version of the myth centres around Narcissus' instant of self-recognition in the image before him - »iste ego sum«³⁴ - and the following moment of death, for the greater part of the novel, Eduard remains unaware that he reflects his own image in Ottilie. If the negative mythemes of the Narcissus-myth can be substituted for the more positive aspects of the envisioned Platonic union, then - so one might

argue - there remains for Eduard the complementary possibility that a utopian mode of selfhood may be realised and endowed with eternal validity. The attempt to achieve unity of self in this manner would involve, therefore, the transformation of a single moment in the present into a structure of time as continuous duration. Early in the novel, Charlotte describes this form of thinking as being a specifically male character trait:

Die Männer denken mehr auf das Einzelne, auf das Gegenwärtige, und das mit Recht, weil sie zu tun, zu wirken berufen sind, die Weiber hingegen mehr auf das, was im Leben zusammenhängt, und das mit gleichem Rechte, weil ihr Schicksal, das Schicksal ihrer Familien an diesen Zusammenhang geknüpft ist und auch gerade dieses Zusammenhängende von ihnen gefordert wird. (p.245)

In direct contrast to this form of linear thinking which focuses on action in the present and, in Eduard's case, the transformation of a single instant into a permanent structure, Ottilie represents the opposite mode of thinking. This involves a notion of individual development as a slow process of »Werden«: »Alles Vollkommene in seiner Art muß über seine Art hinausgehen, es muß etwas anderes, Unvergleichbares werden.« (p.427). This notion of progression and transcendence of the self through individual development stands in direct opposition to Eduard's attempt to achieve an immediate unity of self through the union of the Platonic halves and the transformation of a single instant into a structure of eternity. In accordance with Ottilie's notion of individual development, the narrative perspective offers a different vision of her relationship with Eduard:

Ottilie fühlte dies alles so rein, daß sie sichs als entschieden wirklich dachte und sich selbst dabei gar nicht empfand. Unter diesem klaren Himmel, bei diesem hellen Sonnenschein ward es ihr auf einmal klar, daß ihre Liebe, um sich zu vollenden, völlig

uneigennützig werden müsse; ja in manchen Augenblicken glaubte sie diese Höhe schon erreicht zu haben. (p.425)

It is this notion of individual progression involved in the process of »Werden« that makes Ottilie the perfect »Erzieherin« in the eyes of the Gehülfe. The contrast between this notion of >becoming< and Eduard's concentration on the meaning of a single instant («das Gegenwärtige») is further heightened by Ottilie's mode of thinking which is characterised by a fixation on »das Zusammenhängende«. This is made explicit in a letter to Charlotte by the Gehülfe:

Wenn es bei einem Kinde nötig ist, vom Anfange anzufangen, so ist es gewiß bei ihr. Was nicht aus dem Vorhergehenden folgt, begreift sie nicht. Sie steht unfähig, ja stöckisch vor einer leicht faßlichen Sache, die für sie mit nichts zusammenhängt. Kann man aber die Mittelglieder finden und ihr deutlich machen, so ist ihr das Schwerste begreiflich. (pp.264-5)

The necessity to think in terms of »das Zusammenhängende«, together with the notion of individual development through the process of »Werden«, forms a complete contrast to the eternalisation of one single moment of self-reflection in the Ovidian version of the Narcissus-myth. In this respect, Ottilie's notion of her relationship with Eduard cannot be integrated into any of his preferred variants and in this discrepancy we perceive the asymmetry in their relationship I mentioned above. Ottilie's ideal of selfhood is based on the possibility of slow individual development, resulting in an eventual transcendence of the self, as opposed to the apotheosis of a single moment of self-reflection. These opposing tendencies are united by the narrative perspective, however, under the guise of Platonic union in the relationship of the two characters to each other. Although Ottilie

represents an opposing tendency to the narcissistic experience of self in the context of her relationship with Eduard she is, however, ultimately unable to realise the process of »Werden« in terms of her own individual development.

Whereas for the larger part of the novel Eduard is able to transform the narcissistic moment into a positive myth of self-unity, it is evident that, in differing circumstances, Ottilie also experiences moments of self-reflection within the framework of the Narcissus-theme, yet in totally negative terms. In one sense it is possible to view Ottilie's attempt to attain »Steigerung« in terms of a fixation on a narcissistic »Großen-Ich« or an ideal form of selfhood. Such a process is described by Kernberg and Kohut in their psychoanalytic theories as »healthy narcissism«. ³⁶ Throughout the novel, however, Ottilie experiences this >development< only in negative terms. On the one hand, this is due to the different rôles she is forced to play in the other characters' models of >reality<; on the other, the process of attaining a unified self through transcendence is depicted as being an unattainable ideal in the context of the entire narrative. I shall elaborate on this point in detail in the next section.

Although Eduard is able to uphold his belief in a transformation of the moment of narcissistic self-reflection into a utopian notion of unity for the greater part of the narrative, there comes a point in the novel where the substitution of one set of mythemes for another becomes impossible. After Ottilie's death, Eduard attempts to sustain his belief in the possibility of a union with her. As has been the case in the

past, he does this by means of interpreting signs. In this instance the guarantee of his future happiness takes the form of the glass with the interwoven initials: »Er betrachtet noch immer gern die verschlungenen Namenszüge, und sein ernstheiterer Blick dabei scheint anzudeuten, daß er auch jetzt noch auf eine Vereinigung hoffe« (p.489). The creation of a world-model based on the interpretation of signs cannot, however, be sustained indefinitely in this case, for Eduard learns that the original glass has been broken some time ago and has been replaced by an almost identical one. He has, therefore, been basing his future on the interpretation of a >>false< sign: »Eduard kann nicht zürnen, sein Schicksal ist ausgesprochen durch die Tat; wie soll ihn das Gleichnis rühren?« (p.489). This comment by the narrator suggests that Eduard cannot be satisfied with the interpretation of a mere metaphor of the original sign. There is, however, a great degree of irony in this statement, for throughout the entire novel Eduard has based his actions on the interpretation of metaphors according to his own preferred notion of >reality<. At this point in the novel, however, he is, in essence, forced to confront the actuality of interpreting the metaphor of a metaphor. As a result of this instant of recognition, Eduard loses faith in the entire process of structuring a world-view through the »Bezug auf sich selbst« and dies shortly afterwards.

This moment of realisation in the novel is, for Eduard, like the fatal moment of self-recognition for Narcissus, the ultimate »iste ego sum«. Eduard realises that he has attempted to structure a preferred model of the Real according to the process of metaphoric substitution and this process is now revealed to be totally unstable. In his book

Fragments d'un discours amoureux, Roland Barthes makes an interesting comment on the nature of the relationship between any individual and his or her world-view that also highlights this aspect of Goethe's novel:

Déplacement: ce n'est pas la vérité qui est vraie, c'est le rapport au leurre qui devient vrai. Pour être dans la vérité, il suffit de m'entêter: un »leurre« affirmé infiniment, envers et contre tout, devient une vérité.³⁶

Eduard ultimately recognises his life to be nothing more than the imitation of a set of mythical ideals based on the narcissistic process of metaphoric substitution and the construction of preferred models of the Real:

...was bin ich unglücklich, daß mein ganzes Bestreben nur immer eine Nachahmung, ein falsches Bemühen bleibt! Was ihr Seligkeit gewesen, wird mir Pein; und doch, um dieser Seligkeit willen bin ich genötigt, diese Pein zu übernehmen. Ich muß ihr nach, auf diesem Wege nach; aber meine Natur hält mich zurück und mein Versprechen. Es ist eine schreckliche Aufgabe, das Unnachahmliche nachzuahmen. (pp.489-90)

It becomes apparent at this point that Eduard's tragedy is also that of the failure of the Rousseauistic cult of individual authenticity that is so prominent in the German Enlightenment and of which Goethe had already produced one sympathetic, but equally devastating critique in his *Werther*. All of Eduard's wilfulness, passion, intransigence and his repeated attempts at innovation have as their ultimate end the realisation of a new and authentic self beyond the dictates of »Vernunft« in its aspect of social consensus. The narrative perspective has subtly indicated from the very start of the novel that Eduard, in all his >innovations<, does little more than take over the words and ideas of others and claim them for his own. That his »iste ego sum«

should take the form of the explicit recognition that in everything he has been not the author but the »Epigone« is a genuinely tragic irony. It re-states Goethe's early scepticism with regards to the cult of authenticity at a time when its transformation into Romantic individualism could not but appear to Goethe as a spectre both from his own past and from that of the German literary tradition.

III The Autonomous Image: Ottilie

In contrast to Eduard's utopian vision of unity, Ottilie's experiences represent a more negative version of the Narcissus-myth and ultimately produce a fragmentation of the self and a wish for death. When examining this theme as it relates to Ottilie's character, it is important to note the variations in the pattern and also to distinguish between Ottilie's experiences and their further fictionalisation both by the other characters and by the narrative perspective. It becomes evident that the negative variations of the myth, represented by Ottilie's experiences, cannot ultimately be integrated into the other characters' idealised visions of selfhood.

The major narcissistic experience which Ottilie undergoes is in recognising her own image in Otto, the child of Eduard and Charlotte. This recognition is, however, prepared by an earlier instance in the novel in which Ottilie is faced with her own image in the recently decorated chapel. We are told that, because of the architect's love for Ottilie, the faces of the angels adorning the walls and ceiling of the chapel all come to resemble her:

Auch die Gesichter, welche dem Architekten zu malen allein überlassen war, zeigten nach und nach eine ganz besondere Eigenschaft; sie fingen sämtlich an, Ottilien zu gleichen...Genug, eins der letzten Gesichtchen glückte vollkommen, so daß es schien, als wenn Ottilie selbst aus den himmlischen Räumen heruntersähe. (p.372)

Although Ottilie senses a moment of self-alienation when faced with this mirror-image, she remains unaware that she is viewed in this rôle of angel or inhabitant of another world by the other characters. Rather, it is the *reader* who is led to believe that Ottilie belongs in an ideal region, such as the one painted by the architect, which separates her from the vulgar world of the other characters. This is clearly the aim of the narrative perspective. During the examination of the architect's collection of drawings and etchings the narrator suggests that when faced with such evidence of a past era most people lament the loss of a golden age or an irrevocably lost paradise. In contrast to this experience, however, stands the depiction of Ottilie's relationship to such an idealised past age: »Nur vielleicht Ottilie war in dem Fall, sich unter ihresgleichen zu fühlen« (p.368). This depiction has been taken up by many critics and is often viewed as a key to understanding Ottilie's character. In accordance with this view Jürgen Kolbe asserts: »Ottilie [...] ist die einzige unter diesen Menschen, die noch Zugang zum verlorenen Paradiese hat. Ottilie ist vor dem Sündenfall«; Judith Ryan expresses a similar view: »Ottilie, after all, is something of a visitor from that lost paradise; only her stay in this romantically degenerate world causes her to deviate from her circumscribed *Bahn*«. ³⁷

It is true that the *narrator* in this instance portrays Ottilie as the only character still able to inhabit this paradise lost. I believe, however, that this becomes questionable in the light of Ottilie's experiences when faced with her portrayal in this »lost era«. When Ottilie is left alone in the chapel and views her own image in the depiction of paradise, she responds in a way which does not accord in

the slightest with the various mythicisations of her rôle in the »verschwendenes goldenes Zeitalter«. Instead of experiencing a happy feeling of unity and a sympathetic recognition of her own image, Ottilie undergoes a moment of self-alienation:

...endlich setzte sie sich auf einen der Stühle, und es schien ihr, indem sie auf- und umherblickte, als wenn sie wäre und nicht wäre, als wenn sie sich empfände und nicht empfände, als wenn dies alles vor ihr, sie vor sich selbst verschwinden sollte... (p.374)

When faced with her own image, Ottilie does not exhibit the unity of character which critical tradition attributes to her, but rather undergoes an alienation from her own image and a fragmentation of the self. The lost Golden Age, as representative of a primary state of self-unity, is, therefore, also a lost ideal for Ottilie as well as for the other characters. Although the other characters and the narrator constantly depict Ottilie in idealised terms, she is, in fact, the only character in the novel who constantly undergoes experiences of self-alienation, isolation from her surroundings and a loss of faith in language as a means of self-expression. This alienation from both self and environment is clearly evidenced in the scenes where she is confronted with her own image. In addition to this, her plea at the end of the novel »mein Innres überläßt mir selbst!« (p.477) indicates precisely what the characters have not allowed her to do throughout the novel, namely develop an autonomous awareness of herself as an individual.

As is characteristic of the narcissistic experience represented in the Ovidian version of the myth, the reflection of Ottilie's image in

the scene in the chapel is confined to a single instant in which past and future dissolve into a single moment. The chapel is described as a »Denkmal voriger Zeiten« (p.366), yet paradoxically, the »Denkmal« itself is created as a monument that will last throughout future generations. The narcissistic experience occurs, therefore, at the intersection of these two opposing temporal orders. As is also typical of the negative side of the Narcissus-theme in the novel, Otilie's experience when faced with her own image is characterised by the introduction of the death-motif. As she hurries back towards the castle she notices some asters that have been bound together to form wreaths:

...diese A stern sahen noch immer still bescheiden vor sich hin, und was allenfalls davon zu Kränzen gebunden war, hatte zum Muster gedient, einen Ort auszuschnücken, der, wenn er nicht bloß eine Künstlergrille bleiben, wenn er zu irgend etwas genutzt werden sollte, nur zu einer gemeinsamen Grabstätte geeignet schien. (p.374)

In contrast to Eduard's mythical vision of unity, which forms a positive variation of the Narcissus-theme, Otilie's experience represents an opposing complex within the same schema. Her position in the »Golden Age«, or era of primary unity with the self, appears to be a fictionalisation of her character by the narrative perspective, for it is not consistent with the negative aspects of her thoughts and actions when faced with the visual depiction of this ideal. In the first experience of alienation, Otilie does not recognise the image she is faced with as her own. In the second variation of the model, however, recognition does occur and the dissolution of time into a single instant together with the theme of death are represented in much stronger terms.

The second experience within the framework of the Narcissus-theme occurs for Otilie during the baptism of Eduard's and Charlotte's child. On this occasion Otilie does recognise her own image in the face of the child:

Das Gebet war verrichtet, Otilien das Kind auf die Arme gelegt, und als sie mit Neigung auf dasselbe heruntersah, erschrak sie nicht wenig an seinen offenen Augen; denn sie glaubte in ihre eigenen zu sehen... (p.421)

In accordance with Otilie's earlier narcissistic experience, this moment of recognition is also marked by the dissolution of time into a single instant. The minister's rôle in the baptism ceremony is described by the narrator in the following words: »Der alte Geistliche... sollte durch seinen Segen das Vergangene mit dem Zukünftigen zusammenknüpfen« (p.420). For Otilie, the instant of self-recognition occurs, therefore, once again in an external situation whose parameters mark the intersection of past and future in a single moment of the present. The introduction of the motif of death in the first variant of the model is intensified in this scene. Not only does the minister collapse and die, but Otilie herself is overcome by the desire to join him in death:

So unmittelbar Geburt und Tod, Sarg und Wiege nebeneinander zu sehen und zu denken, nicht bloß mit der Einbildungskraft, sondern mit den Augen diese ungeheuern Gegensätze zusammenzufassen, war für die Umstehenden eine schwere Aufgabe, je überraschender sie vorgelegt wurde. Otilie allein betrachtete den Eingeschlummerten...mit einer Art von Neid. Das Leben ihrer Seele war getötet; warum sollte der Körper noch erhalten werden? (p.422)

Once again the myth of Otilie as a character essentially marked by self-unity is shattered in the light of such experiences. In this way, the narrator establishes conflicting images of Otilie, yet does not

privilege any one image above the other. Therefore the reader must either admit the centrality of the structural feature of contradictory presentations of the same figure in the text, or else choose arbitrarily one preferred model of Ottilie as »Kind«, »Engel«, »Mutter« or any of the other rôles she is forced to assume in the course of the narrative. Her negative experiences relating to the Narcissus-motif make impossible the ideal process of »Werden« or transcendence of the self, for the line of continuity in individual experience is broken upon the dissolution of past and future into the experience of a single instant in the present. Nevertheless, E. Dickson proposes that Ottilie is the only character to undergo a certain spiritual development during the course of the narrative: »The subtlety of Ottilie's character is something that can only be expressed in time, because she is capable of spiritual development, whereas the others are not«; in a similar sense Hans Reiss draws attention to »Die Tiefe ihres Gemüts, die unerhörte Kraft ihres Gefühls, die Reinheit ihrer Seele wie auch die Steigerung ihrer Persönlichkeit, die im zweiten Teil des Romans geschildert wird«; Stuart Atkins sees a similar development in Ottilie's character, but in terms of a spiritual awakening: »Ottilie's sensing of the discrepancy between her rôle as Madonna and the fundamentally non-aestheticizing Protestantism in which she has been raised marks a religious awakening that will henceforth determine her conduct«. ³⁸

In contrast to these views, I would suggest that Ottilie is the only character in the novel to be *aware of the possibility* of the process of individual development through »Werden« or »Steigerung«, but that events in the novel prevent a realisation of this experience. Not

only do the moments of alienation subvert this possibility, but the rôles which Ottilie is forced to assume within the world-views of other characters also lead to a disunifying effect on her personality. For Eduard she is a »Schutzgeist« (p.289) or a »himmlisches Wesen« (p.291); for the architect an »Engel« (p.372); in the eyes of the Gehülfe she is the perfect »Erzieherin« (p.265); in the aristocratic society she is a »Madonna« and an ideal mother (p.404); for the townspeople she fulfils the rôle of a saint (p.489). Thus, the different characters take one aspect of Ottilie's personality and make it the basis of their interpretation of her entire nature. This tendency is also seen after Ottilie's first appearance in the novel. Marked discrepancies arise between Eduard's and Charlotte's descriptions of her behaviour:

Den andern Morgen sagte Eduard zu Charlotten: »Es ist ein angenehmes, unterhaltendes Mädchen.«
»Unterhaltend?« versetzte Charlotte mit Lächeln; »sie hat ja den Mund noch nicht aufgetan.«
»So?« erwiderte Eduard, indem er sich zu besinnen schien, »das wäre doch wunderbar!« (p.281)

In contrast to those critics who believe that Ottilie undergoes a spiritual awakening which finally leads to her canonisation at the end of the novel, I believe it is important to realise that, without any active participation by Ottilie herself, it is purely the townspeople, with some collusion on the part of the narrative perspective, who elevate her to the status of saint. In other words, this is a further example of the way in which Ottilie is assigned an essentially passive rôle and is made to conform with a prescribed image in a particular pattern of >reality<.

I would suggest, therefore, that Ottilie is endowed with the potential to undergo a positive development or »Werden«, but that she is prevented from so doing both by the other characters in the novel and by the narrative perspective. Her transformation into a saint at the end of the novel may be seen in terms of a cruel parody of this idea of individual development. The subversion of Ottilie's notion of »Werden« may also be viewed as a parody on the same process as depicted in the *Bildungsroman*. In contrast to Wilhelm Meister, who is able to undergo a successful process of individual development as a result of his experiences in social, cultural and intimate realms, Ottilie's experiences in each of these areas have a disunifying effect on her personality, for she is forced to assume different rôles in each area which markedly do not form a dialectical synthesis or complement one another.

Whereas Wilhelm develops towards self-unity, Ottilie, despite her similar potential, is forced in the opposite direction. The depiction of individual development in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* may, therefore, be seen to subvert the goal of the *Bildungsroman*, thus forming an ironic commentary on the Enlightenment ideal of »Selbstverwirklichung«. There can be little doubt that Goethe's own sympathies lay more with this mode of self-realisation than with the Rousseauistic cult of authenticity he parodies in Eduard's chronic impulsiveness. The element of criticism he introduces to ensure that Ottilie's end is also tragic is, however, quite different. For in Ottilie's case the element of failure resides in the impossibility of pursuing one's entelechy without this process being disrupted by the stronger fictions imposed on her by others, an

impossibility which she herself ruefully acknowledges in her diary by the observation: »Man mag noch so eingezogen leben, so wird man, ehe man sichs versieht, ein Schuldner oder ein Gläubiger« (p.384).

In describing this critique of individualism in terms of >parody<, I refer to Margret Rose's discussion of this type of literary technique as »Gegengesang« or »countersong«, which is based on a balance of dependence and independence between the target and the new text and an establishment of the discrepancies between the two.³⁹ In this context, Goethe takes as his target two salient aspects of a literary and social tradition and presents opposing configurations. This serves at once to revive and question certain Enlightenment ideals and, as I shall indicate later, is an essential feature of Goethe's mature writings. I believe that those critics who assert that Otilie progresses towards and achieves her own apotheosis overlook the parodistic element of this portrayal.

It is evident, therefore, that Otilie does envisage an ultimate unity of self in terms of the process of »Werden«, both through transcendence of her love for Eduard and through transcendence of self in a moment of rebirth. After the death of the child, Otilie overhears a conversation between Charlotte and the Hauptmann; although present in the room, she can neither participate in the conversation, nor indicate that she understands what is happening; she remains in »einem halben Totenschlaf« (p.463). Otilie explains that she has also undergone a similar experience at an earlier stage in her life. On the two occasions, after awakening out of the trance-like state, she has been

able to envisage the shape that her life will take in the future. In the second instance Ottilie explains this to Charlotte in the following words: »...ich vernehme, wie es mit mir selbst aussieht; ich schaudere über mich selbst; aber wie damals habe ich auch diesmal in meinem halben Totenschlaf mir meine neue Bahn vorgezeichnet« (p.463).

The moment of rebirth is characterised by the vision of a new way of living which marks a transcendence of the old self. The »neue Bahn« that Ottilie has mapped out for herself may be seen as the attempt to achieve a process of »Werden«, thus forming a complete contrast to the moment of static alienation in the Ovidian depiction of narcissistic experience. That Ottilie conceives of progressing according to a particular »Bahn« indicates that a certain entelechy is intuitively glimpsed. In this case, the goal takes the form of »Steigerung« and the achieving of self-unity. Ottilie's elevation to sainthood must surely be read as a parody of this. In the context of the novel, even the »neue Bahn« itself is marked by negative characteristics, for it involves asceticism in the form of a withdrawal from spoken communication and a rejection of food. The attempt to realise the process of »Werden« or »Steigerung« by this means is ultimately revealed to be a false entelechy because it is so easily reduced to a mere reaction to the claims and interventions of others. This is transposed into a grotesque mode when Ottilie is elevated to the status of saint and assigned a quite adventitious rôle in the credulous imaginations of the townspeople at the end of the novel. Try as she might, at no point in the novel does Ottilie achieve a unity of self or realise her idealised notion of transcendence since the rôles continually assigned to her by others, the

narrator included, constitute a *force majeure* to which she is never equal. Not even in death is Ottilie able to achieve a unity of self, instead her image is annexed by others and must remain amongst the living.

Ottilie's failure to achieve the goal of »Steigerung« through the process of individual development may also be seen as a critique of the narcissistic tendency of the Enlightenment at large. In 1783 Kant described the Enlightenment in terms of a progression towards »Mündigkeit« through a programme of self-recognition.⁴⁰ Following a similar line, Pope expounds in Epistle Two of his »Essay on man«: »Know then thyself, presume not God to scan, / The proper study of mankind is man...«⁴¹. This form of »healthy narcissism« may also be seen in a radicalised form in Rousseau's *Confessions*, in which the attempt is made to break through the social code by transcending the socially bound self and achieving heightened self-awareness.⁴² A similar tendency is also evident in Goethe's works in his frequent championing of the notion of »Steigerung«. The idea of »Stirb und werde« (H.A. II, p.19) is equivalent to a new beginning in the sense of a rebirth or a series of individual progressions according to a process of self-recognition. This notion also appears to be parodied in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* in one of Ottilie's diary entries which states: »...das eigentliche Studium der Menschheit ist der Mensch« (p.417). This means of achieving a higher state through the process of self-recognition *should* be a product of Ottilie's decision to follow a particular »Bahn«. Forming an opposition to this ideal of the Enlightenment, however, Ottilie's »Bahn« is perceptible only by its negative characteristics because her behaviour

is continually obliged to be reactive rather than spontaneous. In this sense, her >development< in the novel forms not only an opposing image to that »Bildung« celebrated in the *Wilhelm Meister* novels, but also acts as a parody of the self-recognition of the Enlightenment itself.

Tensions between subject and image in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* do not always occur in the form of an immediate perception of the reflected self. Instead, a further variant of the Narcissus-motif revolves around the conscious creation of an image of the subject and the resultant competition for autonomy between subject and image. As is the case with the depiction of Eduard's relationship with Otilie, this complex displays both positive elements, when the characters attempt to construct a preferred model of >reality<, and a more negative side when these world-views begin to collapse in particular situations.

When Charlotte and the architect are discussing the rearrangement of the headstones in the cemetery, they come to the conclusion that the best monument to a person after death is a depiction of that person's own image: »...doch bleibt immer das schönste Denkmal des Menschen eigenes Bildnis« (p.364). The architect confirms this notion by asserting that it is possible to ascertain the subject's personality from a representation of their image. In this instance the location of the subject's identity is transferred to the image, thus making the presence of the subject irrelevant. Charlotte takes up this idea and develops the notion of a separation between subject and image, which results in the eventual autonomy of the image:

Das Bild eines Menschen ist doch wohl unabhängig; überall, wo es steht, steht es für sich...Selbst gegen die Bildnisse habe ich eine Art von Abneigung; denn sie scheinen mir immer einen stillen Vorwurf zu machen; sie deuten auf etwas Entferntes, Abgeschiedenes und erinnern mich, wie schwer es sei, die Gegenwart recht zu ehren. (pp.364-5)

In this variant of the Narcissus-motif the subject is alienated from the image with the result that the image itself is ultimately endowed with autonomy. This involves a process of metaphoric substitution which is emphasised by Charlotte's description of the image as something that suggests absence («etwas Entferntes, Abgeschiedenes»). In contrast to the single moment of alienation experienced by Otilie when faced with her own image, this alienation is deliberately contrived by the characters in the attempt to create a model of eternity.

It is in precisely this sense that the characters in the novel create images of Otilie and deny her the possibility of developing her own personality. This indicates the most negative tendency of the Narcissus-myth, for at this point the image becomes autonomous and exerts hegemony over the subject. This is indicated most clearly in the case of Otilie's relations to the other characters both during her lifetime and after her death. For in both cases she is subjugated by an image over which she has least control. This competition between image and subject also forms an integral part of Rilke's concept of the divided self. An extract from *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* may, indeed, give us added insight into the way this schema operates in Goethe's novel:

Während ich in maßlos zunehmender Beklemmung mich anstrengte, mich irgendwie aus meiner Vermummung hinauszuzwängen, nötigte er [der Spiegel] mich, ich weiß nicht womit, aufzusehen und diktierte mir

ein Bild, nein, eine Wirklichkeit, eine fremde, unbegreifliche monströse Wirklichkeit, mit der ich durchtränkt wurde gegen meinen Willen: denn jetzt war er der Stärkere, und ich war der Spiegel.⁴³

For Malte, as for Otilie, in the moment of narcissistic reflection the self is subjugated by the now autonomous image and forced to acknowledge the hegemony of a »monströse Wirklichkeit«.

Further indications as to the relationship between subject and image and the rôle of this image in various structures of >reality< are also given in Otilie's diary. Here Otilie discusses the possibility of relating to another person as though they were an image:

Man unterhält sich manchmal mit einem gegenwärtigen Menschen als mit einem Bilde. Er braucht nicht zu sprechen, uns nicht anzusehen, sich nicht mit uns zu beschäftigen; wir sehen ihn, wir fühlen unsere Verhältnisse zu ihm können wachsen, ohne daß er etwas dazu tut, ohne daß er etwas davon empfindet, daß er sich eben bloß zu uns wie ein Bild verhält. (p.369)

Once again we find a manifestation of the Ovidian myth, for the relationship between subject and image as described by Otilie is an exact replica of the way in which Narcissus reacts to his own image. The speech and actions of the image are dependent on the subject and can, therefore, be manipulated to a certain degree so that they may fit in with a particular model of >reality<. What Otilie does not mention is the essential point that, although a relationship to the image may develop, this relationship will always be characterised by unfulfilled desire, for the image is always unattainable. At a later point in the novel, however, she presents an opposing view of such a relationship and concedes that ultimately the image is not fulfilling in itself, and thus a demand for presence becomes dominant:

Ein Leben ohne Liebe, ohne die Nähe des Geliebten ist nur eine »Comédie à tiroir«, ein schlechtes Schubladenstück. Man schiebt eine nach der andern heraus und wieder hinein und eilt zur folgenden. Alles, was auch Gutes und Bedeutendes vorkommt, hängt nur kümmerlich zusammen. (p.427)

As a further variation of this model, situations arise in the novel where characters are transformed into the image of another figure. The active transformation of a character into the image of someone else also has negative consequences for the character involved. This is seen in Otilie's experience during the episode of the *tableaux vivants*. In this situation, Otilie is transformed by the other characters into an image of the Virgin Mary. This results in an experience of self-alienation and a subsequent tension between world-views:

»Und wie wenig wert bist du, unter dieser heiligen Gestalt vor ihm [dem Gehülfen] zu erscheinen, und wie seltsam muß es ihm vorkommen, dich, die er nur natürlich gesehen, als Maske zu erblicken.« [...] Sollte sie in diesem fremden Anzug und Schmuck ihm entgegengehn? Sollte sie sich umkleiden? Sie wählte nicht, sie tat das letzte und suchte sich in der Zwischenzeit zusammenzunehmen, sich zu beruhigen, und war nur erst wieder mit sich selbst in Einstimmung, als sie endlich im gewohnten Kleide den Angekommenen begrüßte. (pp.405-6)

Otilie's failure to realise the goal of her desired »Bahn« may thus be seen as an ironic commentary on a quite different ideal of autonomy in Enlightenment thought from that which Eduard fails to achieve by being the eternal >imitator<. Ironically - the novel seems to suggest - the lovers might have had more chance of happiness if there were more affinity between their respective failures. For this reason the opposition of Eduard's and Otilie's concepts of individualism and their contrasting failures also form an ironic comment on Charlotte's assertion during the early discussion of the »Gleichnisrede«: »Auf eben

diese Weise können unter Menschen wahrhaft bedeutende Freundschaften entstehen; denn entgegengesetzte Eigenschaften machen eine innigere Vereinigung möglich« (p.273).

As the only character in the novel to believe in and attempt to achieve a process of »Steigerung«, Ottilie is, paradoxically, the one most dragged down by the perceptions of others. When faced with her own image, Ottilie experiences a disunity of the self and the impossibility of re-attaining primary wholeness; when transformed into the image of someone else by other characters a similar alienation occurs, with the result that Ottilie's own personality remains hidden behind a mask; finally the narrative perspective steps in and transforms her into a saint, thus making complete the metaphoric displacement of subject by image. In this sense, Ottilie's involuntary sainthood at the end of the novel may be seen in terms of a self-parody of the Enlightenment.

* * *

In opposition to the frequent contention of critics that a single reading of the Narcissus-myth underlies the text, I have tried to show that a series of variations on the myth becomes evident in the course of the narrative. Although these variations allude to different elements of the several versions of the myth, the »narcissistic« experiences of the characters are ultimately created in the context of the narrative itself

and thus defy absolute categorisation. These variations of the Narcissus-motif in the text focus on the characters' attempts to overcome disunity of self and the repercussions of this in the realm of personal relations. In addition to having to deal with the multiplicity of these variations, the reader is faced with the further difficulty that no single model is endowed with constant or dominant status by the narrative perspective, or, indeed, the author.

To summarise the various permutations of the Narcissus-theme in the novel: the variations themselves may be seen to occur primarily in tensions between the subject and his or her image:

i) Owing to the primacy of the »Bezug auf sich selbst« the subject's own image, in the form of perception or desire, is reflected in a model of >reality< or in a fictional order of »Einbildung«. For this reason the definition of a single objective >reality< is impossible.

ii) In an attempt to attain a unity of self, the subject's image is reflected in another person. This moment of self-reflection may be mythicized into a positive vision of wholeness by a re-enactment of the myth of Platonic union, or else incorporate the fatal moment of recognition and ultimate destruction of the self in the tradition of Ovid's Narcissus.

iii) In the moment of self-reflection, an alienation and dissolution of the self may occur, with the result that



transcendence of the self as a process of »Werden« is made impossible.

iv) A fission may occur between subject and image when a character is forced to assume different rôles within the framework of certain world-models. The image assumes autonomy and the subject itself is reduced in status.

In almost all of these cases there exists a positive version of narcissistic experience, as is the case with Eduard's notion of Platonic union or of Charlotte's idea of a continuation of the personality after death, and a more negative aspect of the same complex. Moreover, it is usually Otilie who experiences the negative aspects of the theme and undergoes an alienation from the self, a break in the continuity of temporal experience and a wish for death. Paradoxically, Otilie is the only character who envisages for herself a meaningful process of individual development.

The notion of >self-reflection< in the myth of Narcissus is used, therefore, as the basis for a set of variations in the novel which revolve around the characters' experiences of a utopian mode of selfhood on the one hand, and the opposite perception of a dissolution of the self in esoteric models of >reality< on the other. In addition to this, a parody of two Enlightenment concepts of individual autonomy is also present in the depiction of Otilie's failure to attain her desired entelechy and in Eduard's failure to generate his own authenticity. The »Bezug auf sich selbst« plays a major rôle throughout the entire novel

in the construction of world-models. One of the most important constructions of order in the narrative, which illustrates both the characters' attempts to reflect their own images and desires in a model of >reality< and also the limitations of this process, is the temporal structure in the novel. It is to the characters' creation of this form of order that I shall now turn.

NOTES

1. Pierre Hadot, »Le mythe de Narcisse et son interprétation par Plotin« in: Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse, no. 13, 1976, p. 93: »Ovide est le seul auteur de l'Antiquité à imaginer que Narcisse finit par se reconnaître dans le reflet qu'il prenait pour un amant. Il est probable qu'Ovide a été conduit à cette modification du schéma général par son effort de formulation et d'expression de la démence de Narcisse...«.
2. Ovid, Metamorphoses, Loeb, 1984, Volume I, Book III, p.156:
iste ego sum: sensi, nec me mea fallit imago;
uror amore mei: flammam moveoque feroque.
quid faciam? rogem ane rogem? quid deinde rogem?
quod cupio mecum est: inopem me copia fecit.
o utinam a nostro secedere corpore possem! [463-67]
3. cf. Ernst Grumach, Goethe und die Antike, Erster Band, de Gruyter, Berlin, 1949, p. 377f. See also: Dichtung und Wahrheit, Erster Teil, Buch I (H.A. IX, p.35): »Man hatte zu der Zeit noch keine Bibliotheken für Kinder veranstaltet. Die Alten hatten selbst noch kindliche Gesinnungen, und fanden es bequem, ihre eigne Bildung der Nachkommenschaft mitzuteilen...und da ich gar bald die Ovidischen »Verwandlungen« gewahr wurde, und besonders die ersten Bücher fleißig studierte: so war mein junges Gehirn schnell genug mit einer Masse von Bildern und Begebenheiten, von bedeutenden und wunderbaren Gestalten und Ereignissen angefüllt...«
4. Benjamin Hederich, Gründliches Mythologisches Lexicon, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, 1986, pp. 1686-7.
5. Goethes Bibliothek, Katalog, Arion Verlag, Weimar, 1958, p.282.

6. cf. M. Bowie, »Jacques Lacan« in: Structuralism and Since, ed. J. Sturrock, Oxford University Press, 1979, p. 131f; J. Livesay, »Narcissism and Status« in: Telos, no. 64, Summer 1985, p. 75f; A. Stephens, »Nietzsche, Lacan und Narziß: Ein Experiment mit der Geburt der Tragödie« in: Freiburger Universitätsblätter, Heft 95, März 1987, p. 135f; J. Lacan, The Language of the Self, trans. and commentary, A. Wilden, Delta, p. 169f.

7. Sigmund Freud, Gesammelte Werke, Bd. X, London, 1943, p. 167: »...die Entwicklung es Ichs [besteht] in einer Entfernung vom primären Narzißmus und erzeugt ein intensives Streben, diesen wiederzugewinnen.«

8. Jacques Lacan, écrits, Seuil, Paris, 1966, p. 94: »Il y suffit de comprendre le stade du miroir *comme une identification* au sens plein que l'analyse donne à ce terme: à savoir la transformation produite chez le sujet, quand il assume une image, - dont la prédestination à cet effet de phase est suffisamment indiquée par l'usage, dans la théorie, du terme antique d'*imago*. L'assomption jubilatoire de son image spéculaire par l'être encore plongé dans l'impuissance motrice et la dépendance du nourrissage qu'est le petit d'homme à ce stade *infans*, nous paraîtra dès lors manifester en une situation exemplaire la matrice symbolique où le *je* se précipite en une forme primordiale, avant qu'il ne s'objective dans la dialectique de l'identification à l'autre et que le langage ne lui restitue dans l'universel sa fonction de sujet.«

9. Ibid., pp. 110 and 113.

10. Arthur Henkel, »Beim Wiederlesen von Goethes *Wahlverwandtschaften*« in: Jahrbuch des freien deutschen Hochstifts, 1985, p.7; Stefan Blessin, Die Romane Goethes, Athenäum, Königstein/Ts., 1979, p.84-5; Horst Turk, »Goethes *Wahlverwandtschaften*: >der doppelte Ehebruch durch Phantasie<«, in: Urszenen, ed. F. Kittler and H. Turk, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt/M, 1977, p.20; H. Reiss, Goethes Romane, Franke Verlag, Bern, 1963, p. 196.

11. F.J. Stopp, »Ein wahrer Narziß: Reflections on the Eduard-Ottillie Relationship in Goethe's *Wahlverwandtschaften*« in: Publications of the English Goethe Society, 1959, p. 63: »Beside the word "Narziß", the keyword here is "Willkür", one of the unstudied theme words of the book. Eduard projects his whims and his desires ("Willkür") into the outside world.«

12. G. Finney, »Type and Countertype: The Dialectics of Space in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*« in: The Germanic Review, Spring, 1983, p. 70: »This 'narcissistic' tendency, inspiring Eduard's analogy between human attractions and chemical affinities, plays no small role in his downfall.«

13. G. Seibt and O. Scholz, »Zur Funktion des Mythos in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*« in: Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift, 1985, Heft 4, December, p. 619.

14. For a study of Goethes attitudes towards Plotinus' world-view see: B. Buschendorf, Goethes mythische Denkform: Zur Ikonographie der *Wahlverwandtschaften*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt/M, 1986; E. Grumach, op.cit., Band II, p. 815f.

15. Heinz Henseler, »Die Theorie des Narzißmus« in: Die Psychologie des 20. Jahrhunderts, Band II: Freud und die Folgen (I), ed. Dieter Eike, Zürich 1976, p. 466: »Man schätzt ein solches Objekt nicht als das, was es ist, vielmehr schätzt man es, weil es etwas von einem hat oder ist. Letzlich schätzt man sich selbst in ihm. Kohut (1971) spricht daher von >Selbst-Objekten<. Diese Art der Objektliebe nennt Freud den narzißtischen Typus der Objektwahl.«

16. J. Hillis Miller, »A >buchstäbliches< Reading of the Elective Affinities« in: Glyph, no. 6. 1979, p. 15.

17. Adler, J., »Eine fast magische Anziehungskraft«: Goethe's >Wahlverwandtschaften< und die Chemie seiner Zeit, Beck, München 1987, p. 88.

18. Rousseau, *Essai sur l'origine des Langues*, Bibliothèque du Graphe, 1969, p. 505: »De cela seul il suit avec évidence que l'origine des langues n'est point due aux premiers besoins des hommes; il serait absurde que de la cause qui les écarte vint le moyen qui les unit. D'où peut donc venir cette origine? Des besoins moraux, des passions. Toutes les passions rapprochent les hommes que la nécessité de chercher à vivre force à se fuir. Ce n'est ni la faim, ni la soif, mais l'amour, la haine, la pitié, la colère, qui leur ont arraché les premières voix.«
19. Hillis Miller, *op.cit.*, p. 18.
20. H. Vaget, »Ein reicher Baron: Zum sozialgeschichtlichen Gehalt der *Wahlverwandtschaften*« in: *Jahrbuch der deutschen Schillergesellschaft*, 1980, p. 142; Reiss, *op.cit.*, p. 196; C.S. Muenzer, *Figures of Identity: Goethe's Novels and the Enigmatic Self*, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1984, p. 86.
21. W.J. Lillyman, »Analogies for Love: Goethe's *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* and Plato's *Symposium*«, in: *Goethe's Narrative Fiction: The Irvine Goethe Symposium*, ed. W.J. Lillyman, de Gruyter, 1983, Berlin/New York, p. 131.
22. Waltraud Wiethölter, »Legenden: Zur Mythologie von Goethes *Wahlverwandtschaften*« in: *Deutsches Vierteljahresschrift*, 56, 1982, p. 9f.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 19: »...was Goethe darüber hinaus erfaßt hat, ist die Genese nicht nur irgendeines, sondern *des Mythos überhaupt*, ist das Prinzip schlechthin der Mythopoesis und das Gesetz, die innere Organisation einer jeden Erzählung, die sich um eine projektive Mitte, ihren sagenhaften Urtext, gruppiert, um ihn in wiederholten, aber vergeblichen Anläufen zu rekonstruieren, 'alles und nichts, wie es war'.«

24. Plato, The Symposium, trans. Walter Hamilton, Penguin Classics, Harmondsworth 1985, p. 65.
25. Lillyman, op.cit., p. 141.
26. Ignace Feuerlicht, »Der >Erzähler< und das >Tagebuch< in Goethes *Wahlverwandtschaften*« in: Goethe Jahrbuch, Band 103, 1986, p. 338.
27. Hederich, op.cit., p. 1687.
28. K.R. Eissler, Goethe: A Psychoanalytic Study, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1963, Vol. 2, pp. 1347, 1359, 1453.
29. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 66f.
30. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 123f.
31. Die Geschwister, H.A. IV, p.353:
 WILHELM: O Marianne! wenn du wüßtest, daß der, den du für deinen Bruder hältst, daß der mit ganz anderm Herzen, ganz andern Hoffnungen für dich arbeitet! - Vielleicht! - Ach! - Es ist doch bitter - Sie liebt mich - - ja, als Bruder - Nein, pfui! das ist wieder Unglaube, und der hat nie was Gutes gestiftet. - Marianne! ich werde glücklich sein, du wirst's sein, Marianne!
32. Eissler, Vol. I, p. 237f.
33. Niklas Luhmann, Liebe als Passion, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt/M 1982, p. 116.
34. cf. Stephens, op.cit., p.136: »Bei Ovid fallen zunächst Illusion und Unterjochung durch den vermeintlich anderen zusammen. Die Verkennung wird dann durch die Erkenntnis zwar aufgehoben: »iste ego sum« - dies bin ich selbst - »uror amore mei« - ich brenne vor Liebe zu mir selbst -...«

35. Otto Kernberg, *Borderline-Störungen und pathologischer Narzißmus*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt/M 1983, p. 266: »Die normalerweise bestehende Spannung zwischen Real-Selbst einerseits, Ideal-Selbst und Ideal-Objekt andererseits wird aufgehoben, indem ein aufgeblähtes Selbstkonzept durch Verschmelzung von Realselbst-, Idealselbst- und Idealobjektrepräsentanzen erreicht wird, innerhalb dessen diese einzelnen Anteile nicht mehr voneinander zu unterscheiden sind; cf. also Heinz Kohut, *Narzißmus*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt/M 1976, p. 130f.
36. Roland Barthes, *Fragments d'un discours amoureux*, Seuil, Paris 1977, p. 272.
37. Jürgen Kolbe, »Goethes *Wahlverwandtschaften* und der Roman des 19. Jahrhunderts« in: E. Rösch (ed.), *Goethes Roman Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, 1975, p.396; Judith Ryan »Views from the Summerhouse: Goethe's *Wahlverwandtschaften* and its Literary Successors« in: Lillyman (ed) *op.cit.*, p. 148.
38. K. Dickson, »The Temporal Structure of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*« in: *The Germanic Review*, May 1966, no. 3, p. 183; H. Reiss, »Mehrdeutigkeit in Goethes *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*« in: *Jahrbuch der deutschen Schillergesellschaft*, 1970, p. 381; Stuart Atkins, »*Die Wahlverwandtschaften*: Novel of German Classicism« in: *German Quarterly*, January 1980, p. 14.
39. Margret Rose, *Parody/Metafiction*, Croom Helm, London 1979, p. 35.
40. Immanuel Kant, »Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung« in: *Schriften zur Anthropologie, Geschichtsphilosophie, Politik und Pädagogik*, ed. W. Weischedel, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt/M, p. 53.
41. Alexander Pope, *Collected Poems*, Everyman, New York, 1980, p. 189.
42. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Les Confessions, Oeuvres Complètes*, Tome I, Pléiade 1959, p. 5: »Je forme une entreprise qui n'eut jamais

d'exemple, et dont l'exécution n'aura point d'imitateur. Je veux montrer à mes semblables un homme dans toute la vérité de la nature; et cet homme, ce sera moi. [...] Je me suis montré tel que je fus, méprisable et vil quand le l'ai été, bon, généreux, sublime, quand je l'ai été: j'ai dévoilé mon intérieur tel que tu l'as vu toi-même.»

43. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Sämtliche Werke*, Insel, Frankfurt/M, 1966, Volume VI, p. 808. cf. also Anthony Stephens, *Rilkes Malte Laurids Brigge: Strukturanalyse des erzählerischen Bewußtseins*, Lang, Bern/Frankfurt 1974, p. 150.

CHAPTER TWO

THE RE-CREATION OF TIME

*Time past and time future
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present.*

- T.S. Eliot (*Burnt Norton*)

I Time Consciousness

A consideration of the characters' attitudes towards time in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* is important for any textual analysis of the novel. Not only does it provide a clear example of the way in which the characters mirror their own desires when structuring a particular form of order, but it also gives an indication of the type of conflicts that arise between world-models when various concepts of temporality are pitted against each other. In addition to this, the characters' attempts to structure temporal orders according to their own desires is of considerable relevance for an evaluation of the development of personal relationships and the characters' concepts of the disunified or ideal self. These notions of selfhood, in turn, affect the varying attitudes towards the coding of private and social models of behaviour. A comment made by Ottilie in her diary indicates precisely the narcissistic tendency of the characters when dealing with the problem of temporality:

»Wir blicken so gern in die Zukunft, weil wir das Ungefähre, was sich in ihr hin und her bewegt, durch stille Wünsche so gern zu unsern Gunsten heranleiten möchten« (p.384). As I propose to show in this chapter, the characters reflect their own images in the construction of various temporal orders and attempt to manipulate events within these realms in accordance with their own desires: »...das Ungefähre...zu unsern Gunsten heranleiten«.

It is beyond question that a number of different temporal orders play a rôle in the development of the narrative. Within the succession of events in the novel, the reader becomes increasingly aware of repetition, simultaneous action and images of the past that encroach on the characters' understanding of certain occurrences in the narrative. In the following analysis of time in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* I shall focus on the relevance of various temporal orders constructed by the characters themselves and then turn to a consideration of the larger time perspective as it relates to the narrative structure. An examination of the characters' own perceptions of time reveals their various attempts to validate certain programmes of action. This is achieved through the manipulation of temporality by >memory<, the substitution of future time for a re-animated past and the construction of >eternity<. In contrast to the perpetual flux of chemical reactions depicted in the »Gleichnisrede«, intimate relations in the novel are often governed by the characters' interpretation of memory and their various attempts to make permanent an ideal of valid experience in the future. It is evident, therefore, that the characters are aware of time

as an explicit complex of problems and that they consciously attempt to manipulate temporal structures in order to fulfil their own desires.

One of the major difficulties of approaching the question of time in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* is the fundamental problem of defining >time< and the criteria by which to assess its function. When critics construct a model of time on which to base an analysis of the novel, they often attempt to integrate events in the narrative into a single view of temporality. In many cases this has resulted in a distortion of certain thematic complexes. For example: Jürgen Kolbe sees the problem of time in the novel as being determined by the myth of the Fall; H. Ehrke-Rotermund equates the »present« with »reality« and claims that the characters' fixation on past and future events is equivalent to a negation of this »reality«; K. Dickson opts for a traditional dual perspective on time and opposes »purely impersonal objective measurement of time by the clock« to its »highly subjective, capricious evaluation by the individual consciousness«; Seibt und Scholz come to the conclusion that the characters' attitude towards time is one of the main elements leading to their collective downfall: »Das verkehrte Verhältnis zur Zeit ist ein Hauptaspekt der Schwäche der vier Protagonisten im selbst-bewußten, rationalen Handeln«.¹

Of all the attempts to deal with the problem of time in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, P. Leu is the only critic to have developed a complex interpretation by dividing the various attitudes of the characters towards temporality into different categories. Leu distinguishes three main aspects of time in the novel, namely: »the

regular mechanically measured time of everyday life (clock time)«; the »subjective time of personal experience (dramatic time)«; and a »'larger' time sense, a 'cosmic' flow beyond measurement and conflict (cosmic time)«.² Although Leu does draw attention to a number of different time-sequences in the novel, I believe that this categorisation of time also falls prey to the prevailing tendency in literature on the novel to adapt events in the plot to fit the framework of a pre-existing schema. In addition to this, Leu overlooks the irony that the supposedly >objective< clock time is, in fact, a narcissistic configuration of order. In other words: like »subjective time«, it is constructed by the characters' narcissistic tendency to mirror their own image in a particular form of order. As I explained in the previous chapter, the different forms of human order depicted in the novel may be viewed as a process of self-reflection that is common to all characters although productive of discrepant results in each case. In this respect, »clock time« and »subjective time« cannot be distinguished from each other on the grounds of qualitative structural differences. In suggesting that »cosmic« time lies »beyond conflict«, Leu also overlooks the point that Ottilie's elevation to sainthood, and thus her move into »cosmic time«, is one of the most important elements of conflict in the novel - as evidenced by the controversies in its reception - and effects a major dissonance in the narrative as I showed in the previous chapter.

Just as the various attempts by critics to define the parameters of >reality< in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* often result in the arbitrary imposition of an extraneous structural model on the text, so too these views on temporality imply that there is, in fact, a >correct< way in

which to perceive time. This would mean that the individual character should attempt to attain a correct and rational perception of time or, on a wider scale, that time itself is regulated by a particular occurrence or mythical sequence, such as the Fall. Temporal orders measured by clocks are equated with an >objective< perception of time, thus representing >reality<, as opposed to the more >subjective< and often esoteric measurement of time by human consciousness. I dispute this qualitative distinction between >objective< and >subjective< measurements of time in the context of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*. I believe that the novel shows quite clearly that any form of order used by the characters to regulate or interpret external phenomena cannot be viewed as anything other than a product of human consciousness. Time measured by a clock, just like any other model of order, is a device created by human consciousness in an attempt to impose shape on experience. Rather than try to define a hierarchy of orders based on a distinction between objective and subjective perception, I propose instead that certain forms of order in the novel only appear to have the quality of objectivity because they are guaranteed by the perceptions of a number of people, thus forming a unified consensus. In this way, a particular form of order is saved from the socially invalid and negative epithets >subjective< and >esoteric< and is endowed with the title of >objective reality<. Clock time, therefore, must be viewed not only as a traditional and universally accepted >objective< measurement of time, but also as a product of consciousness attempting to create a form of order from human experience.

When critics impose a hierarchical time sequence on the novel and draw qualitative distinctions between various concepts of time, certain details of the time-schema in the novel are often underrated and many different temporal structures are entirely overlooked. I propose, therefore, to examine the various concepts and manipulations of time in the text as they become apparent in the characters' >time consciousness<. By this term I refer to the characters' awareness of the impermanence of a particular state in the present and the resulting construction of ideal visions of existence in temporal dimensions referred to as >past< or >future<. In addition to this, I propose to view these various constructions of temporal order in the light of discussions concerning the question of time during the Enlightenment. It becomes apparent that no one concept of time in the novel has claim to absolute validity, nor can all events in the narrative be related to a single mythical sequence such as the Fall. Instead, I believe it is necessary to view the characters' constructions of temporal order as an extension of the narcissistic tendency to create models of the Real, thus structuring the world in anthropocentric, and hence assimilable terms.

A discussion of the nature of time in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* cannot be isolated from debates on the same issue common amongst thinkers in philosophical, religious and scientific circles of the Enlightenment. The depiction of temporal order in the novel is not only relevant for an understanding of developments within the text itself, but also indicates to what extent the novel may be viewed in terms of a commentary on certain aspects of Enlightenment thought. Although a

detailed and comprehensive analysis of the various concepts of time in the Enlightenment cannot be undertaken here, it is necessary to give a brief survey of some of the main ideas concerning temporality, in order to situate this thematic complex of the novel in its historical context and to isolate the degree of interplay between Enlightenment debates on this issue and its treatment in Goethe's novel.

In his book *études sur le temps humain*, Georges Poulet examines the way in which 18th century concepts of time mark a distinct break with earlier debates of the same question. This is largely due to the fact that, during the Enlightenment, thinkers finally rejected St. Augustine's notion that humankind is saved from a primal state of non-being by divine intervention.³ According to St. Augustine, the present, characterised by immediate and divinely legitimised experience, is bordered by states of non-being, namely the past and future; humankind is able to perceive and exist in the present only by the will of God: »No movement of time passes except by your will.«⁴ In the *Confessions* the concept of time resting on the opposition of states of Being and Non-being is explained in the following terms:

Of these three divisions of time [past/present/future], then, how can two, the past and the future, be, when the past no longer is and the future is not yet? As for the present, if it were always present and never moved on to become the past, it would not be time but eternity. If, therefore, the present is time only by reason of the fact that it moves on to become the past, how can we say that the present is, when the reason why it is is that it is not to be? In other words, we cannot rightly say that time is, except by reason of its impending state of not being.⁵

As Georges Poulet illustrates in his study, this notion of time as existence in a present moment bordered by states of non-being is still

in evidence in the 18th century.⁶ During the Enlightenment, however, the idea that divine intervention forms the regulating instance of the present is replaced by the more anthropocentric idea that human feelings and sensations are the forces which save humankind from the state of non-being. Just as Vauvenargues explains at great length the important rôle of the passions and sensations in the development of each individual existence, so too Montesquieu emphasises the necessity to free human sensibility not only from the constraints of an omnipotent divine agent but also from a philosophical system based solely on a concept of pure Reason.⁷

For Rousseau, the concept of experiencing a variety of sensations in the present moment is depicted as being a lost and permanently irretrievable ideal: »Plus on médite sur ce sujet, plus la distance des pures sensations aux plus simples connaissances s'agrandit à nos regards«.⁸ The active state of being and experiencing in the present is seen by Rousseau as one of the positive characteristics of existence in the »state of nature«. In contrast to this ideal stands experience in 18th century society, in which individuals construct a temporal hierarchy based on memory and comparisons of present, future and past experience. For Rousseau, therefore, the fall of humankind into time is not the result of expulsion from a divinely ordered paradise, but rather arises because of the primary and irrevocable alienation from the »state of nature«, when humans organised themselves into ordered groups and began communicating through language. Existence in the social relativity of time means that the moment of pure and immediate perception in the present becomes impossible:

Tout est dans un flux continuuel sur la terre. Rien n'y garde une forme constante et arrêtée, et nos affections qui s'attachent aux choses extérieures passent et changent nécessairement comme elles. Toujours en avant ou en arrière de nous, elles rappellent le passé qui n'est plus ou préviennent l'avenir qui souvent ne doit point être: il n'y a rien là de solide à quoi le coeur se puisse attacher.²⁹

In the context of this analysis of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, the structuring of a temporal order in the anthropocentric manner of the 18th century is seen quite clearly in the central tendency of the characters to mirror their own images in certain forms of order rather than to accept the notion of a pre-ordained >reality< according to divine will. The process of self-mirroring in a temporal order is evident in the characters' various attempts to overcome dissonances in the present by constructing an image of ideal experience in the past or future («...das Ungefähre...nach unsern Gunsten heranzuleiten«). Of extreme relevance to this process are the characters' attempts to realise an ideal form of selfhood. This may be seen in Eduard's attempt to achieve a unity of self through eternal union with his mirror-image, or missing Platonic half, Ottilie and also in Charlotte's and Mittler's praise of permanent union in terms of the marriage contract.

In order to explain this relation of time to the self as depicted in the novel, it is necessary to give some indication of the change in perspective when considering the position of the self in the various concepts of temporal order during the 17th and 18th centuries. The British empiricists, represented by Locke, Berkeley and Hume, thought of time in terms of the perception of a succession of ideas in the mind. This is clearly indicated in John Locke's *Essay concerning Human*

Understanding (1689). In this work, Locke suggests that an understanding of »duration« is necessary for any consideration of time. The central point of focus is on a concept of »duration« as individual awareness of the succession of ideas:

That we have our notion of succession and duration from this original, viz. from reflection on the train of ideas, which we find to appear one after the other in our own minds, seems plain to me, in that we have no perception of duration but by considering the train of ideas that take their turns in our understandings. When that succession of ideas ceases, our perception of duration ceases with it.¹⁰

Important in the consideration of time by the British empiricists is the exclusion of a notion of the self. A succession of ideas may be perceived by individual consciousness, but the self remains nothing other than a conglomeration of perceptions and cannot be represented in consciousness as >idea<. Time, therefore, may be perceived by humans without implying the necessity of an individual personality. Instead, the self remains a mechanism which records sensations, yet which does not develop a principle of individuality in the course of this process. Hume goes so far to suggest that the impressions which give rise to an idea of the self change constantly throughout the lifetime of the subject, with the result that no stable and lasting image of the self can be conceived of by human consciousness. Hence, »there is no such idea«.¹¹

The omission of the question of individuality from this context forms a marked contrast to the rôle of the self in 18th century concepts of time. Underlying these anthropocentric temporal orders is an individual »I« that perceives its surroundings according to lived

sensations in the intensity of the moment. In the 18th century attention is focused on a »sentiment de l'existence« which involves not only a consciousness of selfhood, but also the belief in a principle of unique individuality.¹² In this way, the 17th century notions of selfhood were gradually replaced by a concept of the individual that, in turn, affected the way in which a system of order was imposed on human experience.

Undoubtedly the most famous and most important discussion of the rôle of time and individual perception is that section of Kant's *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781) concerning the »transcendentale Ästhetik«. In this analysis, Kant suggests that time does not exist in and for itself, but rather that it is a necessary and a *priori* idea (»Vorstellung«) that forms the basis of all our perceptions.¹³ If time acts as the basis of the individual's perception of his or her surroundings, then it must also be a necessary category of self-perception. Kant links time and consciousness of the self in the following manner:

Die Zeit ist nichts anders, als die Form des innern Sinnes, d.i. des Anschauens unserer selbst und unsers innern Zustandes. Denn die Zeit kann keine Bestimmung äußerer Erscheinungen sein: sie gehört weder zu einer Gestalt oder Lage; dagegen bestimmt sie das Verhältniß der Vorstellungen in unserm innern Zustande.¹⁴

In Kant's terms, time cannot be determined by the object, for it does not have an objective reality: »Sie [die Zeit] ist also wirklich nicht als Object, sondern als die Vorstellungsart meiner selbst als Objects anzusehen«.¹⁵ In this context, a distinction between >objective< and

>subjective< perceptions of time becomes impossible, because, for Kant, time exists only as a category of human perception.

In the light of these discussions on the relationship of the self to time in the 18th century, I believe it is possible to discuss the structuring of a temporal order in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* in terms of the characters' tendency to mirror their own images in particular models of >reality<. Goethe would certainly have been aware of the various debates on time that were taking place during the Enlightenment. In addition to this, it is known that he possessed a copy of Kant's *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*.¹⁶ Although I do not propose to integrate the depiction of time in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* into any particular concept of temporality developed in the Enlightenment, I believe it is important to locate Goethe's depiction of time and the self in the context of these contemporary theories.

The various discussions concerning the nature of time in the Enlightenment do not form part of an obscure metaphysical debate, but, rather, concepts of time were of central relevance for developing an understanding of both an individual and social ontology. Not only was a concept of time important in determining the individual's attitude towards religious doctrine, but it was also of fundamental relevance in the growing scientific debates of the age. As Norman Hampson has pointed out, a major point of contention during the Enlightenment consisted in discussions concerning conflicts between scientific time, based on geological discovery and natural history, and concepts of historical time founded on Old Testament writings.¹⁷

As I shall indicate in the course of this chapter, a manifestation of this conflict may be seen in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* in the conflicting ideas of temporality represented by Mittler and the scientific discourse of the »Gleichnisrede«. Although a general trend towards a more anthropocentric view of time may be seen in the Enlightenment, it would be a distortion of the general debates on the question of time to depict these numerous theories of the 18th century as a unified whole. The various, often conflicting notions of time and differing attitudes of individuals towards temporality apparent in the Enlightenment are echoed in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* in all their complexity and contradictions and play a central rôle in the development of personal relations and the characters' notion of the self. I shall begin this analysis of time in the novel by examining the characters' construction of a category of past experience and the importance assigned to >memory< in this configuration.

II *The Return to Time Past: Memory*

As mentioned above, a major aspect of the characters' manipulation of time may be seen in their desire to regulate the development of intimate relations. This is evidenced quite clearly by certain characters' use of >memory<. Early in the novel, we learn that Charlotte's marriage to Eduard was based on the attempt to recreate their past affection for each other. Charlotte explains this in the following words:

Wir liebten einander als junge Leute recht herzlich; wir wurden getrennt...Wir wurden wieder frei; du früher, indem dich dein Mütterchen im Besitz eines großen Vermögens ließ; ich später, eben zu der Zeit, da du von Reisen zurückkamst. So fanden wir uns wieder. Wir freuten uns der Erinnerung, wir liebten die Erinnerung. (p.246)

By basing a relationship on memories of a former state, the characters attempt to overcome dissonances in their present condition. It is evident in the opening stages of the novel that Charlotte's and Eduard's marriage is not viewed by both characters in terms of a perfectly harmonious relationship. Each character perceives the relationship in a different way. Charlotte asserts the unity and fulfilment of their life together, whereas Eduard wishes to introduce the possibility of new experiences. In addition to this, Eduard is depicted as becoming increasingly discontented with their situation. Not only does he wish to invite the Hauptmann, but the new »Mooshütte« seems too small (p.243), and when Charlotte does not agree to invite the Hauptmann immediately: »...und nun fühlte er [Eduard] sich zum erstenmal widersprochen, zum

erstmal gehindert« (p.249). Even Charlotte draws attention to the difference between their personalities: »...da wir ungefähr von denselben Jahren sind, so bin ich als Frau wohl älter geworden, du nicht als Mann« (p.246). It becomes evident in the course of the novel that Charlotte's attempts to re-animate the past are made in the hope of resolving these dissonances. In contrast to this, Eduard prefers to break with such shared memories in an attempt to establish a new set of relationships.

Of particular importance in this context, however, is the knowledge that even Eduard's and Charlotte's marriage was based on an attempt to recreate a former state (»...wir freuten uns der Erinnerung«). This implies that, when the present relationship was formed, it was not regarded by each character in terms of pure culmination. Instead, both needed to revive the more positive image of past experience. Interestingly, a similar association between relations in the present and the rôle of memory is also made by Rousseau in *La nouvelle Héloïse*, a novel with which Goethe was well acquainted. Commenting on the relationship between Saint-Preux and Julie, Monsieur de Wolmar states: »Il l'aime dans le temps passé: voilà le vrai mot de l'énigme. Otez-lui la mémoire, il n'aura plus l'amour.«¹⁸ In Rousseau's novel, as also in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, certain love-relationships in the present are only able to exist through recollection of the past. Unfulfilled immediate experience is, therefore, replaced by the ideal of memory. In this respect, the present is subjugated by the image of an earlier condition and the attempt is made to endow this positive model of the past with permanence. From this reliance on memory at the beginning of

Die Wahlverwandtschaften, it appears that action in the present is scarcely experienced by the characters in terms of fulfilment. Instead, the attempt to re-instate a former set of circumstances in preference to focusing on the present moment is evident in the first depiction of a love-relationship in the novel.

Not only is memory used as the foundation of Eduard's marriage to Charlotte, but it may also be seen as a trait common to almost all relationships depicted in the novel. After the arrival of the Hauptmann, Charlotte's earlier indecision as to whether or not an invitation should be extended to him finally dissolves when the common past shared by the characters is re-animated. Once again, experience in the present is in need of sustenance or revivification by the past. Instead of the Hauptmann's being welcomed on the basis of his own qualities or actions, his arrival is finally justified by a re-animation of the characters' common past. This is illustrated by the narrator in the following words:

Hatten auf diese Weise die beiden Freunde am Gegenwärtigen manche Beschäftigung, so fehlte es nicht an lebhafter und vergnüglicher Erinnerung vergangener Tage, woran Charlotte wohl teilzunehmen pflegte. Auch setzte man sich vor, wenn nur die nächsten Arbeiten erst getan wären, an die Reisejournale zu gehen und auch auf diese Weise die Vergangenheit hervorzurufen. (p.262)

In both of these cases memory is consciously used by the characters in order to overcome dissonances in the present and to secure a more positive basis for a relationship by locating it in a positive model of former experience.

When the Count and Baroness join the four main characters we see exactly the same manipulation of intimacy by the use of memory. The characters deliberately evoke an image of the past on which to base their own preferred vision of circumstances in the present. No factual evidence is offered for this vision of the past. Instead, the image gains validity through its confirmation by the group. In this way, a fictionalised past, which is evoked by memory, may serve as a model for the structuring of a common pattern of >reality< in the present. During the evening shared by the four main characters with the Count and Baroness we see the way in which memory is used by them to transform the present according to an idealised and common model of the past:

Die Neueintretenden...machten gewissermaßen mit unsern Freunden, ihrem ländlichen und heimlich leidenschaftlichen Zustande eine Art von Gegensatz, der sich jedoch sehr bald verlor, indem alte Erinnerungen und gegenwärtige Teilnahme sich vermischten und ein schnelles, lebhaftes Gespräch alle geschwind zusammenverband.
(p.308)

As is usually the case when the characters structure a model of >reality< through self-mirroring in the framework of the Narcissus-theme, a process of substitution may be seen in this use of memory. In each case where memory is consciously activated by the characters, a substitution occurs in which certain dissonances in the present are replaced by the more positive features of a fictionalised past.

A further example of this process may be seen when, upon her arrival, Otilie attempts to re-establish her relationship with Charlotte according to her preferred image of the past: »Ich mag mich nur so gern jener Zeit erinnern, da ich noch nicht höher reichte als bis

an Ihre Kniee und Ihrer Liebe schon so gewiß war« (p.281). In all of the above cases, there are no guarantees as to the validity of any one model of the past as evoked by memory. For this reason, an individual vision of past experience may achieve dominant status in the present once it becomes the common view of two or more characters. Thus, the depiction of memory in the novel reflects certain aspects of the way in which larger »ontological landscapes« assume importance in the structuring of a social order. Their general status seems directly proportional to the number of their supporters or the nature of the authority to which they appeal. This process conforms to the principle of >enlightened< consensus. As I shall indicate in the course of this study, difficulties arise in the novel when the characters attempt to make valid the vision of an individual utopia that appears to contradict models accepted by the consensus.

The constant attempts of the characters in the novel to manipulate a temporal structure through the use of memory may also be seen as an extreme version of the importance accorded to memory by certain thinkers of the 18th century. As Georges Poulet indicates, the concept of memory had not played a major rôle in discussions of time in earlier centuries. Its appearance in the 18th century as a central feature in debates on the nature of temporality arose from the general development of a more anthropocentric world-view and from a concept of individuality. In this sense Georges Poulet suggests:

En chaque moment nouveau de conscience se distinguent, non seulement la sensation nouvelle, qui est le noyau de ce moment, mais un ensemble de sensations déjà vécues dont les résonances s'y prolongent et l'entourent de leur nébuleuse. La grande découverte du XVIIIe siècle, c'est donc celle du phénomène de la mémoire. Par

le souvenir l'homme échappe au momentané; par le souvenir il échappe au néant qui se retrouve entre tous les moments de l'existence.¹⁹

During the 18th century a conflict may be seen, therefore, between two different attempts to break from the Lockean notion of the self as a conglomeration of sense-perceptions. On the one hand, thinkers such as Voltaire and Buffon emphasised the importance of memory in the structuring of individual personality.²⁰ In an entry of his *Dictionnaire Philosophique* entitled »Identité«, Voltaire makes the following link between memory and a principle of individual development:

Vous n'êtes le même que par le sentiment continu de ce que vous avez été et de ce que vous êtes; vous n'avez le sentiment de votre être passé que par la mémoire: ce n'est donc que la mémoire qui établit l'identité, la même de votre personne.²¹

In opposition to this view, stands the »sentiment de l'existence« expounded by Rousseau which praises an immediate awareness of selfhood in the present moment.²² This is precisely the point I made in the last chapter concerning the contrasting modes of failure to realise an ideal self represented by Otilie and Eduard. Otilie's lost entelechy, her failure to incarnate a process of »Steigerung«, is a clear derivation from the ideal of »Mündigkeit« as a steady individual progression. This, in turn, depends on the primacy of the Voltairean notion of memory as a unifying process. Eduard's attempts to transform a momentary plenitude of experience into an eternal guarantee of the authenticity of the self represent equally clearly the most extreme implications of Rousseau's charismatic »sentiment de l'existence«.

Whereas for many thinkers of the Enlightenment, memory was seen in terms of a function enabling people to oppose not only the states of »non-being« between each moment, but also the negativity of a temporal hierarchy in society and anti-individualistic notions of the self, Goethe's concept of the potential of memory to effect definite and positive changes in the present may be described as, at best, displaying marked scepticism. In *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, Goethe discusses the rôle of memory and the interweaving of past and present in the following terms:

Das, was man gedacht, die Bilder, die man gesehn, lassen sich in dem Verstand und in der Einbildungskraft wieder hervorrufen; aber das Herz ist nicht so gefällig, es wiederholt uns nicht die schönen Gefühle, und am wenigsten sind wir vermögend, uns enthusiastische Momente wieder zu vergegenwärtigen. [...] Ein Gefühl aber, das bei mir gewaltig überhand nahm, und sich nicht wundersam genug äußern konnte, war die Empfindung der Vergangenheit und Gegenwart in Eins: eine Anschauung, die etwas Gespenstermäßiges in die Gegenwart brachte. Sie ist in vielen meiner größern und kleinern Arbeiten ausgedrückt... (H.A. X, p. 32)

Both in this extract and in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, memory is ultimately unable to effect definite changes in a present situation and therefore produces only a form of fictional order. Although the status of memory in the novel is often elevated to that of a foundation for intimate relations, thus functioning as a common ground for the creation of >reality<, both the characters' manipulations of time and their attempts to overcome dissonances in the present through the use of memory ultimately result in failure. This is made evident when the conscious use of memory is transformed into the desire and active attempt to return to a former state.

In the instances mentioned above, the characters seek to control the development of relationships in the present through memory. It becomes evident, however, that this process of creating a common past must undergo certain modifications when the characters decide to form new sets of relations which have no foundation in past experience. Instead of basing actions in the present on a model of the past, the characters must create an entirely new set of co-ordinates and thus break with an intersubjective memory of former circumstances. This is shown quite clearly in the novel when the new sets of relationships between the four main characters emerge. Instead of attempting to control the development of relations through memory, the characters begin to >forget< both time and memories of the past:

Da zeigte sich denn, daß der Hauptmann vergessen hatte, seine chronometrische Sekundenuhr aufzuziehen, das erstmal seit vielen Jahren; und sie schienen, wo nicht zu empfinden, doch zu ahnen, daß die Zeit anfangs, ihnen gleichgültig zu werden. (p.290)

In this instance, the development of new constellations in the novel implies the dissolution of memory through the forgetting of time. When a new set of relationships begins to take shape, the bond between present and past becomes increasingly irrelevant. An escape to the security of the past is no longer required by the characters, because the guarantees for a more positive model of experience are now located in an as yet unrealised future dimension. The dissonances in the characters' present condition may, therefore, be overcome by a different attempt to restructure their situation. This involves turning away from an ideal model of the past and positing an entirely new set of possible relationships in the future.

After the new relationships between the four main characters are established and certain models of past experience, such as the marriage contract, appear to be of less relevance, it becomes clear that not all of the characters are in agreement with this apparent fission of past and present. This dissatisfaction is most evident in the speeches and actions of Charlotte. Charlotte ultimately rejects the possibility of developing a new relationship with the Hauptmann, which would entail severing all ties to her common past with Eduard. Instead, she attempts to use memory in a literal sense by trying to re-establish a former set of circumstances in the present. In other words: she decides to renounce the Hauptmann and attempts to return to her earlier relationship with Eduard. From its first manifestation in the text, however, Charlotte's desire to »return« is depicted as being an impossible ideal:

Ihr eigenes Verhältnis hoffte Charlotte zu Eduard bald wiederherzustellen, und sie legte das alles so verständig bei sich zurecht, daß sie sich nur immer mehr in dem Wahn bestärkte: in einen frühern, beschränktern Zustand könne man zurückkehren, ein gewaltsam Entbundenenes lasse sich wieder ins Enge bringen. (p.329)

The impossibility of return is emphasised by the narrator's implication that fulfilment of Charlotte's desire would be nothing short of utterly fantastic («...daß sie sich...in dem Wahn bestärkte»). The inevitability of unconstrained progression away from a former ideal state is portrayed here in a manner reminiscent of Rousseau's thesis concerning the permanent loss of the »state of nature«.²³

Just as for Rousseau humankind could never hope to reattain the positive ideal of immediate sensation in nature, so too the desire to return to a past set of relationships in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* is

depicted as impossible in the development of the narrative. Both individuals and humankind in general cannot escape the inevitability of historical progression after having lost contact with a primary state. In *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, however, this type of progression is depicted in a far more radical manner. For Rousseau, re-establishment of the »state of nature« is seen as being impossible after the primary alienation from it has occurred, but the need to reform society so as to approximate to some of the lost values remains a prime imperative. In *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, Goethe depicts the »gewaltsam Entbundenes« as a force that becomes increasingly uncontrollable. In this sense, an elapse of time means not only a further alienation from the original condition, but also implies a heightening of that force which initiated the primary alienation. In the context of the narrative, therefore, not only is return itself impossible, but it seems that the consequences of Eduard's attraction to Otilie will continue their dynamic progression in even stronger and more uncompromising terms. Despite the apparent impossibility of return, Charlotte spends most of the second part of the novel attempting to base both present and future on a re-establishment of the past.

In addition to taking Enlightenment views on the rôle of memory to an extreme point, the impossibility of re-establishing an ideal state may also be seen as an ironic commentary by Goethe on the image of a mythical past favoured by the early Romantics. In Novalis' *Hymnen an die Nacht* the image of an idyllic past, coupled with a vision of »return« is particularly strong:

Was sollen wir auf dieser Welt
Mit unsrer Lieb und Treue.
Das Alte wird hintangestellt,
Was soll uns dann das Neue.
O! einsam steht und tiefbetrbt,
Wer hei und fromm die Vorzeit liebt.²⁴

This nostalgic view of a mythical »Vorzeit« finds a corollary in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* in the characters' attempts to overcome dissonances in the present by invoking an idyllic image of the past. As is clearly indicated throughout the novel, however, not only is this image of the past depicted in terms of a construction that mirrors the characters' own desires, but any attempt to reinstate a former set of circumstances or to return to this past age results in failure. In this sense, the Romantic notion of an ideal »Vorzeit« is also seen in terms of an illusion that cannot produce any positive effects on empiric human experience. Thus, the characters in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* are left with a heightened awareness of their unfulfilled desires, as is clearly indicated by their »hopeless« condition at the end of the novel:

Was sollen wir bei diesem hoffnungslosen Zustande der ehgattlichen, freundschaftlichen, rztlichen Bemhungen gedenken, in welchen sich Eduards Angehrige eine Zeitlang hin und her wogten? (p.490)

In addition to the scepticism surrounding the desire to »return«, the goal of the return itself is often presented as being ambiguous. The plan of returning to a former state implies the choice of an arbitrary point in the past and its transformation into the condition which is to be re-established in the present/future. In this case, we also see the way in which time is often considered in terms of spatial metaphors.²⁵ The past which is >behind< the characters takes the place of the future

which still stands >before< them. In the development of the theme of return in the novel, it is the characters' ideal to reverse the conventional order of these two categories, thus presenting an ironic vision of linear development as the attempt to >progress< towards the >past<. It is evident that the characters' desire to return to a former state is extremely difficult to control on an intersubjective level. In contrast to the way in which a single memory may be shared by a group of characters and used as the basis for a model of >reality< in the present, the goal of return to a former state often remains ambiguous when viewed in the context of intimate relations. When Charlotte puts the question of return in direct terms to Eduard - »...ob wir wieder völlig in den alten Zustand zurückkehren wollten« (p.340) - the ambiguous nature of the point of return becomes evident:

Eduard, der nichts vernahm, als was seiner Leidenschaft schmeichelte, glaubte, daß Charlotte durch diese Worte den früheren Witwenstand bezeichnen und, obgleich auf unbestimmte Weise, zu einer Scheidung Hoffnung machen wolle. Er antwortete deshalb mit Lächeln: »Warum nicht? Es käme nur darauf an, daß man sich verständigte.« (p.341)

There remains the further irony in this situation that Eduard is also attempting to return to a former state, but the goal which he seeks to attain is markedly different from the one suggested by Charlotte. This indicates the way in which the same signifier may be read by the characters in different terms because of the narcissistic tendency underlying each individual interpretation of language and events. It is apparent that Charlotte desires a return to the former stable relationship between her and Eduard as she perceived it before the arrival of the Hauptmann and Ottilie. Eduard, however, interprets the

return to »den alten Zustand« as being synonymous with the freedom of their individual situations after the dissolution of their first marriages. For Eduard, however, a return to this state of individual freedom marks only the first stage of a larger programme of return. The myth of Platonic union on which Eduard bases his relationship with Ottilie is also depicted in Plato's *Symposium* as the union of two halves and their attainment of an ideal past condition. In Aristophanes' speech this is made quite clear when it is suggested that the happiness of humankind depends on each individual's finding his or her proper partner and thus »returning to our original condition«. ²⁶ In this respect, Eduard bases his relationship with Ottilie on an ideal form of return to a mythical past, just as Charlotte attempts to re-establish her marriage to Eduard on the basis of a return to a different stage of their own shared past.

At this point in the novel a convergence of the depiction of time with the characters' concept of an ideal self becomes apparent. Eduard's attempt to achieve union with Ottilie by »returning« to the original condition as outlined in Plato has as its ultimate goal the ideal of attaining unity of self. This unity can, however, only be realised according to a re-enactment of the pattern of return. In this case, the construction of a temporal order offers two perspectives on the theme of self-mirroring. On the one hand, the narcissistic tendency of Eduard may be seen in his attempt to structure a preferred model of >reality< according to the co-ordinates of Platonic union; on the other hand, the theme of return is now linked with the desire to attain unity of self by achieving wholeness with the subject's mirror-image. Once again, this

process is not peculiar to Eduard alone. Charlotte's desire to return is also based on the attempt to attain a unity of self. In contrast to the foundation of Eduard's concept of self-unity in the Platonic myth, however, Charlotte's ideal is to be attained by re-establishing the union described in the social contract of marriage. Once again the present is discredited in the temporal order and actual experience is characterised by depictions of the disunified self attempting to overcome primary alienation by conforming to a particular model of »return«.

Both Charlotte and Eduard, therefore, attempt to base progression on the re-instatement of a past condition. In Charlotte's case, this process relies on transforming memory into a literal configuration that can then be manipulated and located as an attainable state in the future. Eduard's notion of return remains a mythical ideal which can have no firm external guarantees, but depends instead on the efficacy of an apotheosis of personal authenticity. For this reason it must rely on Eduard's interpretation of signs to retain its status as a condition that may still be achieved.

Towards the end of the novel Eduard finally realises the impossibility of manipulating time in accordance with individual will and comments on the futility of attempting to attain an ideal state in either the future or the past:

Wer in einem gewissen Alter frühere Jugendwünsche und Hoffnungen realisieren will, betriegt sich immer; denn jedes Jahrzehnt des Menschen hat sein eigenes Glück, seine eigenen Hoffnungen und Aussichten. Wehe dem Menschen, der vorwärts oder rückwärts zu greifen durch Umstände oder durch Wahn veranlaßt wird! (p.448)

Here, as in the narrator's comment on Charlotte's desire to return to a past state, the attempt to manipulate time in accordance with individual desire is described in terms of »Wahn«. The characters are at liberty to mirror their own desires in particular constructions of time, yet these models ultimately resist transformation into empiric human experience. This aspect of the novel may also be seen in terms of a parody of the ideal of rebirth which is treated by Goethe in other contexts with the utmost seriousness. *Auf dem See*, the opening scene of *Faust II* and the notion of »Stirb und werde« represent the opposing side of this complex and depict the innovative »new beginning« as a positive and desirable goal. Essentially, the tensions between these two versions of rebirth take the form of a conflict between repetition and innovation. In *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, the characters constantly find themselves in situations where the idea of a new beginning appears to be an ideal means by which to overcome dissonances in the present. Throughout the novel, the narrative perspective appears to support the characters' attempts to attain this, yet ultimately prevents them from achieving their ideal. Instead of allowing the characters to create successfully a new set of circumstances for themselves, the narrator subverts this form of progress by introducing motifs of »Schicksal« and »Naturnotwendigkeit«. In this way, Goethe places his own ideal of rebirth in a new and critical light. Just as Ottilie's failure to develop an autonomous image of herself may be read in terms of a parody of one variant of the Enlightenment ideal of »Selbstverwirklichung«, so too this aspect of the temporal structure of the novel may be viewed as a critical reflection on the quite popular motif of a metaphorical rebirth.

The attempt to regulate interpersonal relations through the manipulation of memory and the ideal of return form only the first part of the characters' various attempts to structure a temporal order. Before examining the characters' attitude to the present it is first necessary to deal with the escape from experience in the lived moment into a future perspective characterised by a model of eternity.

III Constructing >Eternity<

*...le Temps a reparu; le Temps règne en souverain
maintenant; et avec le hideux vieillard est
revenu tout son démoniaque cortège de Souvenirs,
de Regrets, de Spasmes, de Peurs, d'Angoisses,
de Cauchemars et de Névroses...le Temps règne...*

— Charles Baudelaire (*La chambre double*)

An examination of the characters' conscious use of memory has revealed that a fictionalisation of the past often serves as a means by which to overcome dissonances in the present. The development of this thematic complex does not come to an end once the characters have established new relationships or believe that they have found the means to attain self-unity. Instead, they attempt to make permanent these new relationships and thus project their own image into a future dimension. In this section, I propose to examine the way in which the characters strive to make credible images of >eternity< and the various effects this has on personal relations and on the different notions of selfhood throughout the novel. Closely linked to this theme is the coding of social and private models of behaviour and the delineation of tensions implicit in controlling a linear temporal order.

The attempts made to project a relationship into the future reveal a schism between two models of human relations within the temporal order of the novel. On the one hand, relationships are depicted in terms of a succession of different attractions and repulsions, as exemplified by

the »chemische Gleichnisrede«. This model, embodying the discourse of science, depicts attractions as being in permanent flux. That is to say, the subjects under observation continue to form different bonds and no final and permanent union can be achieved:

Man muß diese tot scheinenden und doch zur Tätigkeit innerlich immer bereiten Wesen wirkend vor seinen Augen sehen, mit Teilnahme schauen, wie sie einander suchen, sich anziehen, ergreifen, zerstören, verschlingen, aufzehren und sodann aus der innigsten Verbindung wieder in erneuter, neuer, unerwarteter Gestalt hervortreten: dann traut man ihnen erst ein ewiges Leben, ja wohl gar Sinn und Verstand zu, weil wir unsere Sinne kaum genügend fühlen, sie recht zu beobachten, und unsre Vernunft kaum hinlänglich, sie zu fassen. (pp.275-6)

The Hauptmann points out that the notion of continual flux, embodied in the chemical reactions, taxes human reason (»...und unsre Vernunft kaum hinlänglich, sie zu fassen«). The »ewiges Leben« with which these substances seem to be endowed is not a form of eternal union, but rather an endless continuum of changing attractions and repulsions. It is precisely this concept of unceasing change in the pattern of attractions that lies beyond the limitations of human understanding. For this reason the »Gleichnisrede« cannot serve as a stable model for the depiction of human relations in the novel. In contrast to the eternal flux of attractions represented by the scientific discourse, the characters spend most of their time attempting to secure an eternal union in the context of their preferred relationships. Eduard attempts to make permanent his relationship with Ottilie in the same way that Charlotte tries to re-establish the permanence of her marriage. This desire to achieve a lasting union is depicted in the novel as being a characteristic of all human relations. That this goal is often arbitrary and fictional in character is stressed by the Count. Using the literary

convention of the *Lustspiel* as an example, he points out the illusory nature of >permanent< union:

In der Komödie sehen wir eine Heirat als das letzte Ziel eines durch die Hindernisse mehrerer Akte verschobenen Wunsches, und im Augenblick, da es erreicht ist, fällt der Vorhang, und die momentane Befriedigung klingt bei uns nach. In der Welt ist es anders; da wird hinten immer fortgespielt, und wenn der Vorhang wieder aufgeht, mag man gern nichts weiter davon sehen noch hören.
(p.309)

In an attempt to realise a preferred model of eternal union, the characters design means by which to distinguish their relationships from the eternal flux of the »Gleichnisrede«. This is achieved through adherence to the myth of Platonic union or to the social contract of marriage. As the Count points out, however, such models may represent little other than a conventional aestheticisation of human experience. It would seem, at this point, that the only certain counter-model to the flux of the »Gleichnisrede« is human finitude itself.

Despite the apparent impossibility of realising a state of permanent union, Eduard spends the greater part of the novel trying to achieve precisely this. In point of fact, Eduard's view of his relationship with Ottilie may be seen to take structural elements from both the »Gleichnisrede« and the conventional notion of the permanent union of two individuals. Once again, this indicates the impossibility of integrating a set of events in the narrative into a single structural model. Eduard's initial attraction to Ottilie is represented in terms of the elective affinities of the chemical model, thus satisfying the scientific description of an unending series of attractions and repulsions. Although they do not correspond to Eduard's interpretation

of the »Gleichnisrede«, the new attractions do necessarily imply the possibility of constant flux in the dimension of human relations. A major discrepancy between the developing relationship and the »Gleichnisrede« is revealed, however, when Eduard attempts to make permanent his relationship with Otilie. The chronic transience of the scientific model, which can - it seems - generate unlimited new combinations, is thus replaced by a vision of eternal union in the name of the Platonic myth:

Mein Schicksal und Otiliens ist nicht zu trennen, und wir werden nicht zugrunde gehen. Sehen Sie dieses Glas! Unsere Namenszüge sind dareingeschnitten. Ein fröhlich Jubelnder warf es in die Luft; niemand sollte mehr daraus trinken, auf dem felsigen Boden sollte es zerschellen; aber es ward aufgefangen. Um hohen Preis habe ich es wieder eingehandelt, und ich trinke nun täglich daraus, um mich täglich zu überzeugen, daß alle Verhältnisse unzerstörlich sind, die das Schicksal beschlossen hat. (p.356)

By endowing this relationship with an aura of permanence, Eduard attempts to impose an arbitrary end on the flux implicit in the »chemische Gleichnisrede« and determine the nature of his new relationship by the co-ordinates of a desirable mythical model. His action also illustrates the way in which the characters try to evade the full implications of a model that overstrains Enlightenment »Vernunft«. Goethe illustrates quite clearly that in order to deal with a set of circumstances that lie beyond reason, individuals mirror their own images in a counter-model which they can then integrate into a preferred world-view.

This mythical vision of »eternity« is entirely in consonance with the final tableau of the novel. At the end of the novel, the narrative

perspective presents an idealised image of the two lovers' union in death:

So ruhen die Liebenden nebeneinander. Friede schwebt über ihrer Stätte, heitere, verwandte Engelsbilder schauen vom Gewölbe auf sie herab, und welch ein freundlicher Augenblick wird es sein, wenn sie dereinst wieder zusammen erwachen. (p.490)

This image of smiling angels, peace and the bliss of eternal union in death stands in complete opposition to the furthest import of the >scientific< discourse and »Zeichensprache« of the »chemische Gleichnisrede«.

It is evident that tensions exist between these two models throughout the novel. In contrast to Eduard, Charlotte aims to reinstate the scientific discourse for a certain part of the novel in order to reach her own particular goal. The only way that Charlotte can >return< to a former state, namely the apparent stability of her earlier relationship with Eduard, is to effect further modifications in the structure of interpersonal relations, thus conforming to the principle of flux in the chemical reactions depicted in the »Gleichnisrede«. On the one hand, Eduard attempts to realise his desires in a single moment of individual apotheosis and then endows this moment with an aura of permanence; on the other hand, Charlotte, when faced with the same possibility, places the moment of fulfilled experience in the perspective of her own personal history which makes her encounter with the Hauptmann relative to her past and future. This is in consonance with the idea of »das Zusammenhängende«, that Charlotte sees as being characteristic of the female mode of thinking. As a result of this

relativistic view of her own experiences, Charlotte desires a return to her former relationship with her husband and establishes an ideal of »Entsagung« in order to achieve this:

Der Kuß, den der Freund gewagt, den sie ihm beinahe zurückgegeben, brachte Charlotten wieder zu sich selbst...Doch indem sie sich zu ihm hinunterneigte und eine Hand auf seine Schultern legte, rief sie aus: »Daß dieser Augenblick in unserm Leben Epoche mache, können wir nicht verhindern; aber daß sie unser wert sei, hängt von uns ab. Sie müssen scheiden lieber Freund, und Sie werden scheiden...« (p.326)

Through the act of »Entsagung« Charlotte believes that she can reinstate the stability of her former relationship with Eduard. The first set of new attractions have, therefore, already been formed, and Charlotte wishes to effect a further variation which will replace this undesirable constellation with a previous one. Instead of attempting to realise an eternal union with the Hauptmann, she accepts the idea of separation. Not only does she prescribe this course of action for herself alone, but she also tries to impose it on Eduard and Otilie:

Sie [Charlottel] empfand eine ewige Trennung und ergab sich darein...so hielt sie doch die Sache schon für gewiß und entsagte ihm [dem Hauptmann] rein und völlig. Dagegen glaubte sie nun auch die Gewalt, die sie über sich selbst ausgeübt, von andern fördern zu können. Ihr war es nicht unmöglich gewesen, andern sollte das gleiche möglich sein. (p.340)

In the course of the narrative, however, Charlotte cannot impose this demand of renunciation on Eduard and Otilie. Thus it becomes increasingly clear that the flux of interpersonal relations as depicted in the »Gleichnisrede« is not a model that can be imposed on the whole plot. Although Charlotte attempts to recommence the process of variation in personal relations, it is not, however, her goal to enact a pattern

of continual change. In this case, a repetition of the dual processes of separation and union should lead to a renewal of her relationship with Eduard: »...sie wiederholte den Schwur, den sie Eduarden vor dem Altar getan. Freundschaft, Neigung, Entsagen gingen vor ihr in heitern Bildern vorüber« (p.326). For Charlotte changes within the complex of relationships are not ends in themselves, but rather serve to secure her marriage to Eduard. Her idea of permanent union is based on a socially coded marriage contract and in this way she too ultimately places an ideal of stasis in opposition to the *perpetuum mobile* of the chemical analogy. Throughout the novel, both Charlotte and Mittler depict this contract as being permanent and binding. In Mittler's diatribe on marriage this is illustrated in the following words:

Die Ehe ist der Anfang und der Gipfel aller Kultur...Unauflöslich muß sie sein; denn sie bringt so vieles Glück, daß alles einzelne Unglück dagegen gar nicht zu rechnen ist. [...] Lasse man den Augenblick vorübergehen, und man wird sich glücklich preisen, daß ein so lange Bestandenes noch besteht. Sich zu trennen gibts gar keinen hinlänglichen Grund. Der menschliche Zustand ist so hoch in Leiden und Freuden gesetzt, daß gar nicht berechnet werden kann, was ein Paar Gatten einander schuldig werden. Es ist eine unendliche Schuld, die nur durch die Ewigkeit abgetragen werden kann. (pp.306-7)

Just as the concept of eternal wholeness in the form of Platonic union is envisaged as one way of ending the constant flux of interpersonal relations, so too the social contract of marriage aims at a similar goal. There remains the problem, however, that certain critics of the novel have placed value judgements on these two different forms of union and have viewed the marriage contract as being >valid< and the notion of union under the heading of Platonic wholeness as being >invalid<. Whilst this notion is implicit in some recent criticism, it

is often overtly stated in early reactions to the novel. In an entry in Brockhaus' *Conversations-Lexicon* (1817) the following distinction is made between the two forms of union:

Die den Wahlverwandtschaften so oft vorgerückte Unsittlichkeit wird, unsers Erachtens, dadurch widerlegt, daß es kaum eine größere und durchgreifendere Vertheidigung der *Ehe* geben kann, als gerade dies Buch und sein ganzer Inhalt. Denn die Heiligkeit der *Ehe* kann ja selbst die Bande der Natur überwältigen, und ihr werden alle Helden und Heldinnen des Stücks zum Opfer gebracht.²⁷

I believe that no such conclusion can be drawn from events in the narrative. Both the notion of Platonic union and the social contract of marriage are presented by their various advocates in the novel as forming the basis of a >permanent< union of two individuals. In this sense, relationships falling within either of these categories show a marked similarity, for they both stand in opposition to the seemingly endless series of elective affinities as depicted in the »chemische Gleichnisrede«.

I would suggest that there is no evidence in the novel to indicate that the social contract of marriage is conceived of in terms less mythical than those of the Platonic union. In other words: Platonic union and marriage display much the same structural features for they are both based on the process of self-mirroring and on the imposition of an arbitrary term on the flux of the chemical analogy. Eduard mirrors his own desires in an ideal model of >reality<, just as society reflects its own image in a preferred code of behaviour. In addition to this, both forms of union are designed to allow the characters the possibility of attaining self-unity on a seemingly permanent basis. I would suggest, therefore, that Goethe indicates in the course of the novel that the

apparently secure and stable concept of social union, epitomised by the marriage contract, is as equally mythical in character as the notion of Platonic union, for both forms of union are characterised by a fictionalised concept of >eternity<.

The only character in the novel to admit that the idea of eternal union between two individuals is nothing but a fictional construct is the Count, who stresses the irrational basis of this version of >eternity<:

Wir mögen uns die irdischen Dinge und besonders auch die ehlichen Verbindungen gern so recht dauerhaft vorstellen, und was den letzten Punkt betrifft, so verführen uns die Lustspiele, die wir immer wiederholen sehen, zu solchen Einbildungen, die mit dem Gange der Welt nicht zusammentreffen. [...] Eine neue Rolle mag man gern wieder übernehmen, und wenn man die Welt kennt, so sieht man wohl: auch bei dem Ehestande ist es nur diese entschiedene, ewige Dauer zwischen soviel Beweglichem in der Welt, die etwas Ungeschicktes an sich trägt. (p.309)

In accordance with this notion of change, the Count supports the idea that marriages should no longer be thought of in terms of permanent union, but rather that the marriage contract should last for a period of only five years. In this way, he takes the scientific discourse to its logical conclusion to the extent that this is compatible with the finitude of human life. Instead of conforming to the prevailing tendency of the main characters in their growing preference for mythical notions of union, he suggests a means by which the flux of personal relations may continue indefinitely within the framework of the already existing social code.

Whilst still advocating a certain concept of marriage, the Count modifies the social coding of legitimate relationships and, through his image of constant transition, effects a deft modification of the notion of a permanent bond in terms of the marriage contract. Using the example of the »Lustspielschluß« that brings events on stage to a happy close and posits marriage as the solution to all outstanding problems, the Count transposes the ethical realm of human interaction into an aesthetic mode. By discussing the nature of union in these two areas, the Count raises the possibility that the dogmatic stance of Mittler on marriage may have no greater validity than the aesthetic convention of comedy endings. For this reason the Count's idea cannot find support from Charlotte:

Sie [Charlotte] wußte recht gut, daß nichts gefährlicher sei als ein allzufreies Gespräch, das einen strafbaren oder halbstrafbaren Zustand als einen gewöhnlichen, gemeinen, ja löblichen behandelt; und dahin gehört doch gewiß alles, was die eheliche Verbindung antastet. (p.310)

Attempts to make plausible a concept of eternity are not only fraught with tension in the realm of intimacy, but difficulties also surround the problem of linear continuity in the social realm. This is exemplified in the novel by the various father-son relationships. There are several of these relationships that are important for a full analysis of the novel. The first relationship that is presented to the reader within this thematic complex is the relationship of Eduard to his now deceased father. Early in the novel, certain signs indicate a degree of antagonism within this relationship. Eduard points out the flourishing plane and poplar trees to the Hauptmann and recalls the circumstances of their planting:

»Diese habe ich«, rief er aus, »in meiner Jugend selbst gepflanzt. Es waren junge Stämmchen, die ich rettete, als mein Vater, bei der Anlage zu einem neuen Teil des großen Schloßgartens, sie mitten im Sommer ausroden ließ.« (p.260)

That Eduard's ideas continue to run contrary to those of his father is further indicated in the opening stages of the novel when we learn that he and Charlotte have been building away from the castle itself. Instead of using the castle as both a confirmation and continuation of family tradition, they decide to build other quarters in the surrounding parks, thus moving further away from the main focus of tradition and emblem of continuity in the family history. There are two major stages in this process of breaking with the traditional past. The first attempt takes the form of building the »Mooshütte«. From this summer house a view is offered of the town, church, the castle and surrounding gardens. Although the building is one step removed from the centre of tradition, the view itself still offers a link with the past and the signs of social life.

In the second stage of this process, however, a more radical change is apparent. Eduard and the Hauptmann reach the highest point of the park and find themselves isolated from the central focus of family tradition and social life: »Dorf und Schloß hinterwärts waren nicht mehr zu sehen. In der Tiefe erblickte man ausgebreitete Teiche, drüben bewachsene Hügel...« (p.259). It is at this particular location that the four main characters decide to build new quarters. When Ottilie first suggests this, the break with the image of a supposedly stable past is made clear:

Ich würde...das Haus hieher bauen. Man sähe zwar das Schloß nicht, denn es wird von dem Wäldchen bedeckt; aber man befände sich auch dafür wie in einer andern und neuen Welt, indem zugleich das Dorf und alle Wohnungen verborgen wären. (pp.294-5)

At this point the son's desire to break with the father's centre of power and regulation of the social order develops into a view supported by all of the main characters. By building away from the traditional past the characters attempt to define their own mode of living and establish the beginnings of a new and different tradition. This desire to break with the apparent stability of the old order is emphasised by the Hauptmann:

Wir verlangen Abwechselung und fremde Gegenstände. Das Schloß haben die Alten mit Vernunft hieher gebaut, denn es liegt geschützt vor den Winden und nah an allen täglichen Bedürfnissen; ein Gebäude hingegen, mehr zum geselligen Aufenthalt als zur Wohnung, wird sich dorthin recht wohl schicken und in der guten Jahreszeit die angenehmsten Stunden gewähren. (p.295)

This break in linear continuity within the temporal order occurs by means of spatial displacement. In other words: by building further away from the seat of family tradition embodied in the castle, the characters attempt to cause a shift in historical continuity. It appears that the old social tradition is broken and that the characters believe themselves at liberty to begin their own traditions. A similar situation is described by the English Lord. In this case, father and son have become estranged from each other and the break in the temporal order is once again described in terms of a spatial metaphor. In this sense the Lord explains to Charlotte:

Nach meinen eigenen Besitzungen sehne ich mich nicht zurück, teils aus politischen Ursachen, vorzüglich aber, weil mein Sohn, für den ich alles eigentlich getan und eingerichtet, dem ich es zu übergeben, mit dem ich es noch zu genießen hoffte, an allem keinen

Teil nimmt, sondern nach Indien gegangen ist, um sein Leben dort, wie mancher andere, höher zu nutzen oder gar zu vergeuden. (p.431)

The antagonism between father and son, together with the new generation's desire to break with the traditions of the past, are also expounded by the Gehülfe as being a characteristic conflict between the generations. Of particular interest in the speech of the Gehülfe, however, is the notion that the desire of the new generation to effect changes in the present tradition is not always entirely innovative. Instead, the Gehülfe envisages the possibility of recurrence within the pattern of historical development. For this reason, he prophesies that Charlotte's child may reject paternal authority by re-instating the traditions established by his grandfather:

Glauben Sie mir: es ist möglich, daß Ihr Sohn die sämtlichen Parkanlagen vernachlässigt und sich wieder hinter die ernstesten Mauern und unter die hohen Linden seines Großvaters zurückzieht. (pp.418-19)

This idea further develops the parody of rebirth I mentioned in the last section, for the attempt to innovate is seen here to lapse into an even more negative pattern of repetition and the ideal of a >new beginning< ends in failure. This stresses once again the double bind in which the characters often find themselves. The comments by the Gehülfe concerning tensions within family tradition place the problem in a wider social context. This idea is once again repeated by the narrative perspective as forming the main thoughts of the Gehülfe:

Es gibt wenig Menschen, die sich mit dem Nächstvergangenen zu beschäftigen wissen. Entweder das Gegenwärtige hält uns mit Gewalt an sich, oder wir verlieren uns in die Vergangenheit und suchen das völlig Verlorene, wie es nur möglich sein will, wieder hervorzurufen und herzustellen. Selbst in großen und reichen

Familien, die ihren Vorfahren vieles schuldig sind, pflegt es so zu gehen, daß man des Großvaters mehr als des Vaters gedenkt. (p.417)

In his essay on *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, David Wellbery suggests that throughout the novel a gradual dissolution of paternal authority is apparent («die Annullierung der väterlichen Autorität»).²⁸ He bases this assertion on the fact that Eduard is not present at the baptism of his own son and does not choose the child's name. In addition to this Wellbery draws attention to the point that Ottilie chooses the site for the building: »Eduard hatte nämlich sein Vorrecht und seine Pflicht als Gutsherr an Ottilie delegiert; sie war es, die die Stelle des Baus bestimmt hatte«.²⁹ It is true that a number of conflicts between father and son are evident in the course of the novel, but I do not believe that this indicates the *dissolution* of a particular model.

Rather, I would suggest that from the opening scenes of the novel, the model of paternal authority is not intact. As I mentioned above, the characters may be seen to subvert whatever power may still belong to an image of the father from the opening scenes of the novel. The reader is brought into a situation in which the characters are re-landscaping the old gardens, building away from the seat of family tradition and concentrating their energies on their own »neue Schöpfung« (p.242). I would suggest, therefore, that a model of paternal authority does not dominate the action at the beginning of the narrative. Instead, the reader is made aware that this authority exists only as remnants and that the characters are unselfconscious enough about this to see nothing impious in their kinds of innovation.

Perhaps nowhere is the tension between the son and the last vestiges of paternal authority more evident than in Eduard's desire to free Ottilie from the image of her father in order to secure his own relationship with her. As many critics have pointed out, Eduard attempts to obviate the paternal authority he perceives to be barring the growth of his relationship with Ottilie by asking her to remove from her neck the locket containing a picture of her father.³⁰ When Ottilie removes the necklace, Eduard experiences a sudden change in their relationship: »Ihm war, als wenn ihm ein Stein vom Herzen gefallen wäre, als wenn sich eine Scheidewand zwischen ihm und Ottilie niedergelegt hätte« (p.293). It is not until much later in the text that we discover the illusory nature of Eduard's reaction to the removal of the father's image. Towards the end of the novel, Ottilie unpacks the chest filled with gifts that Eduard had given her on her birthday. On repacking the chest a paradoxical mixing of the father's image with mementoes of Ottilie's love for Eduard is apparent:

Zuletzt gelang es Ottilien, alles sorgfältig wieder einzuschichten; sie öffnete hierauf ein verborgenes Fach, das im Deckel angebracht war. Dort hatte sie kleine Zettelchen und Briefe Eduards, mancherlei aufgetrocknete Blumenerinnerungen früherer Spaziergänge, eine Locke ihres Geliebten und was sonst noch verborgen. Noch eins fügte sie hinzu - es war das Porträt ihres Vaters - und verschloß das Ganze... (p.480)

At this point Ottilie appears to re-instate the paternal authority that barred the development of her relationship with Eduard. Shortly after this she hears another manifestation of the voice of the father, embodied in Mittler's diatribe on the Ten Commandments, which hastens the approach of her death. Eduard's attempt to obviate paternal authority in his relationship with Ottilie appears to end in failure.

Critics have tended to interpret this association of the »Kästchen« with the image of the father in terms of a fusion of two models. For example, K. Dickson asserts that by placing the image of her father amongst mementoes of her love for Eduard, Otilie reconciles »the conflicting forces that besieged her« and that she is finally endowed with »spiritual sight« which allows her to »overcome the temporal«. ³¹ I cannot agree with this interpretation of the closing scenes of the novel. As I indicated in the previous chapter, Otilie remains locked within the conflicting temporal orders like all the other characters and only appears to transcend these boundaries through her transformations into a series of fictionalised images by the narrative perspective and by the other characters. In addition to this, a reconciliation between paternal authority and the new generation's desire for freedom does not seem plausible within the context of the continual antagonism between the two generations throughout the text. The question also arises: if Otilie successfully reconciles the two »conflicting forces« why can she not realise her love for Eduard and why must both she and Eduard die at the end of the novel?

It is important to keep in mind that, if one discounts the idealised fictionalisation of paradise at the end of the novel, the reader is still left to interpret the death of the two main characters. I do not believe that the end of the novel supports the ascendancy of any single model. It would be a contradiction of the entire development of the narrative to suggest that Otilie's death is brought about solely by the re-assertion of paternal authority. I believe it is equally incorrect to suggest that this authority and the model of Platonic union

are reconciled, for ultimately Eduard and Ottilie cannot realise their love for each other in the social realm. I would suggest, therefore, that the death of Eduard and Ottilie should be read as a result of the conflict between competing world-models, exemplified, as I have shown above, by the antithetical ways in which they fail to realise their quite different ideals of selfhood.

The competition between the various world-models in the narrative may lead, on the one hand, to an apparent tendency for them to blend into or subsume one another, or else, on the other hand to a mutual deconstruction of each form of order. The unstable nature of patterns of >reality< at the opening of the novel may be seen to increase in the course of the narrative. In the closing scenes no single model of >reality< may fairly be seen to dominate the action. The model of paternal authority cannot reassert an absolute validity it never had to start with, Eduard and Ottilie cannot realise their ideal of Platonic union and the social contract of marriage is left discredited by the tragic course of events.

The death of Eduard and Ottilie does not, therefore, result from the triumph or dissolution of any one structure of order, but rather indicates the way in which the two characters fall victim to the tensions imposed on the individual by world-models competing with each other for dominance. These tensions are increased by the impossibility of completing a programme of action within any one model. The constant dissolution of these models leads to the arbitrary imposition of order on the final scene, when the narrator steps in and hints at a final

union of Eduard and Ottilie in paradise. This ending, which is similar, in structural terms, to the arbitrary imposition of finality on the plot of the *Lustspiel*, indicates that the most common method used to overcome this mutual deconstruction of orders is to canonise a preferred fiction. But this exalted status may seem quite forced or spurious if the whole complexity of the narrative is reviewed from the beginning.

The unstable nature of the father-son model in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* and its failure to effect positive changes in the development of events form a marked opposition to the evocations of a similar relationship in the *Wanderjahre*. In contrast to Wilhelm, whose >Selbstbildung< and social integration are determined to a large extent by his rôle as husband and father, Eduard cannot legitimately assume either of these rôles at the end of the novel. Not only has he attempted to provide a substitute, namely the Hauptmann, to take his place as husband, but his position as father is questioned in the first instance by the lack of similarity between him and his son. Instead of reinforcing Eduard's position in the family, the child is seen by him as a sign that further absolves him of any social responsibility: »...dies Kind ist aus einem doppelten Ehbruch erzeugt! es trennt mich von meiner Gattin und meine Gattin von mir, wie es uns hätte verbinden sollen« (p.455). Eduard's chronic uneasiness in the rôles of father and husband is further emphasised at the end of the novel. The drowning of the child also stands in opposition to one of the final scenes of the *Wanderjahre* in which Wilhelm rescues his son from the same fate:

Wilhelm griff sogleich nach der Lanzette, die Ader des Arms zu öffnen; das Blut sprang reichlich hervor, und mit der schlängelnd

anspielenden Welle vermischt, folgte es gekreiseltem Strome nach. Das Leben kehrte wieder; kaum hatte der liebevolle Wundarzt nur Zeit, die Binde zu befestigen, als der Jüngling sich schon mutvoll auf seine Füße stellte, Wilhelmen scharf ansah und rief: »Wenn ich leben soll, so sei es mit dir!« Mit diesen Worten fiel er dem erkennenden und erkannten Retter um den Hals und weinte bitterlich. So standen sie fest umschlungen, wie Kastor und Pollux, Brüder, die sich auf dem Wechselwege vom Orkus zum Licht begegnen.
(H. A. VIII, p. 459)

In this scene, the act of rescuing the son secures not only the identity of both characters within the social realm, but also creates a new bond between them in terms of »Bruderschaft«. As Gerhard Neumann has correctly pointed out, in the *Wanderjahre* one of the major features of of the main character's self-legitimation lies in the rôle he fulfils within the father-son relationship:

Der zweite für die Entstehung des modernen Subjekts wesentliche Problembereich steht in Goethes Roman im Zeichen der Vaterschaft, wie sie die Familie als Gefühlszentrum bürgerlicher Identität prägt: unter dem Doppelaspekt von Zeugung und Adoption. [...] Der den Konflikt heilende Grundgedanke ist derjenige der Verwandlung von blutbestimmten Zeugungs-Beziehungen in solche der durch Vernunft und Entsagung geregelten Adoption; der Verwandlung von Trieb in Vernunft, von Blut in Schrift, von Vaterschaft in soziale Instanzen, wie sie durch den >Turm< und die >pädagogische Provinz< vertreten werden.³²

In direct opposition to the relationship between Wilhelm and Felix stands that of Eduard and Otto. This is highlighted by the scene of Otto's death in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*. The son is faced with the same fate of death by drowning, but in contrast to the father's act of rescue in the *Wanderjahre*, Eduard has left the scene and is not present to save his child. Instead, the rescue attempt is left to Ottilie and results in failure. In this way, Eduard is denied a socially legitimised rôle as father in the context of the existing relationships. Despite this, both Eduard and the Hauptmann are able to integrate the child's death into

their own preferred models of the future. This is due to the way in which they have viewed the child as a >>false< sign of Eduard's proper rôle in events. That this rôle is seen from the outset in terms of falsity and error further supports the idea that the model of paternal authority is not intact at any early stage of the narrative. For this reason the Hauptmann is able to envisage a future in which both he and Eduard may assume legitimate rôles within a different father-son configuration:

Er [der Hauptmann] dachte sich Ottilien mit einem eignen Kind auf dem Arm, als den vollkommensten Ersatz für das, was sie Eduarden geraubt; er dachte sich einen Sohn auf dem Schoße, der mit mehrerem Recht sein Ebenbild trüge als der abgeschiedene. (p.461)

Eduard also interprets the death of the child in terms best suited to his own future happiness: »...auch er [Eduard], anstatt das arme Geschöpf zu bedauern, sah diesen Fall...als eine Fügung an, wodurch jedes Hindernis an seinem Glück auf einmal beseitigt wäre« (p.461). In this way, even the main father-son relationship in the novel cannot be seen in terms of a stable model that guarantees a certain rôle for the characters involved. Instead, the relationship is discredited from the outset by the child's lack of resemblance to its physical parents and by the complete absence of paternal affection; the failure of Eduard to rescue his son forms an opposition to the same scene in the *Wanderjahre* and shows clearly that this model of paternal authority or benevolence has been a chimera from the beginning of the book.

Eventually, however, the characters lose faith in their own ability to structure a model of events in the future. This is evidenced by the

transition of their active attempts to sketch an image of the future to the more passive faith in the power of »hope«. This transition occurs after the death of Eduard's child. After Otto's death, the characters do not sketch out a definite image of their preferred future experience, but rather »hope« that events will be positive in character:

Charlotte sah Ottiliens Zustand, sie empfand ihn; aber sie hoffte durch Zeit und Vorstellungen etwas über sie zu gewinnen. (p.463)

Sie [Ottilie] unterhielt, sie zerstreute Charlotten, die noch immer die stille Hoffnung nährte, ein ihr so werttes Paar verbunden zu sehen. (p.464)

Die Hoffnung, ein altes Glück wiederherzustellen, flammt immer einmal wieder in dem Menschen auf, und Charlotte war zu solchen Hoffnungen abermals berechtigt, ja genötigt. (p.470)

Charlotte macht ihm [Eduard] Hoffnung, verspricht ihm, in die Scheidung zu willigen. Er traut nicht; er ist so krank, daß ihn Hoffnung und Glaube abwechselnd verlassen. (p.476)

Nun durch Ottiliens Blatt aufs neue angeregt, durch ihre trostvollen, hoffnunggebenden Worte wieder ermutigt und zu standhaftem Ausharren berechtigt, erklärte er auf einmal, er werde sich nicht entfernen. (p.477)

Walter Benjamin's comment on the theme of hope at the end of the novel - »Nur um der Hoffnungslosen willen ist uns die Hoffnung gegeben«²³ - is most apt to describe the transition of the characters from the active structuring of a temporal order to the passive faith in an external salvatory power. The characters' reliance on hope opens a third perspective onto the themes and motifs that surround the figure of Narcissus. I have already illustrated the ways in which the characters

construct models of order by mirroring their own desires in a durable construction of >reality< or through the use of »Einbildung«.

The transition from this active self-mirroring to the belief in hope indicates that the characters still aim to fulfil their desires, but that they have lost faith in the means used to reach such ends. For this reason, in the penultimate paragraph of the novel, the narrator points out that even hope itself eventually dissolves into its negative opposite, namely the »hoffnungsloser Zustand« of the characters. With the death of Otto the characters' construction of a future dimension is destroyed in two ways: not only does the possibility of founding a new tradition outside the boundaries of the past come to an end, but the child's death also seals the impossibility of a union between Eduard and Ottilie, Charlotte and the Hauptmann. The Hauptmann's »hope« that Otto may be replaced in the future by one of Ottilie's children remains futile. Eduard's attempt to envisage a new life for himself outside the boundaries of his present relationship to Charlotte is made impossible when Ottilie withdraws from communication and dies.

As I have indicated, the various attempts to validate a model of >eternity< or even an image of future experience are the source of much tension throughout the novel. The characters attempt to secure models of valid experience in the past through memory and, in the future, by trying to realise a notion of ideal selfhood. When these attempts to structure orders in the past and future fail, however, the characters find themselves forced to deal with a seemingly inadequate present characterised by the individual's perception of unfulfilled experience.

In order to complete this discussion of time in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, let us now turn to the various attitudes towards the present evident in the discourse of the characters.

IV *Boundaries of the Present*

An examination of the characters' attitudes to the past and future and of their various attempts to situate images of valid experience in these imaginary temporal realms has revealed that immediate actions often serve only as a means to posit valid experience outside the limitations of the present moment. In this respect the present often comes to be seen by the characters as representing >invalid< experience. I would suggest that the characters' criterion for >valid< experience is the extent to which a particular set of co-ordinates can accommodate a reflection of their own desires at a given moment. The devaluation of the present during the process of structuring an ideal past or future is indicated clearly in the mason's speech made during the festivities for Charlotte's birthday. When the foundation stone of the new building is laid, the tensions between the present and a model of >eternity< become apparent:

Wir gründen diesen Stein für ewig, zur Sicherung des längsten Genusses der gegenwärtigen und künftigen Besitzer dieses Hauses. Allein indem wir hier gleichsam einen Schatz vergraben, so denken wir zugleich, bei dem gründlichsten aller Geschäfte, an die Vergänglichkeit der menschlichen Dinge; wir denken uns eine Möglichkeit, daß dieser festversiegelte Deckel wieder aufgehoben werden könne, welches nicht anders geschehen dürfte, als wenn das alles wieder zerstört wäre, was wir noch nicht einmal aufgeführt haben. (p.302)

As the mason suggests, the »Grundsteinlegung« points to a double future perspective; not only does it look towards that time in the future when the new house will be completed, but this vision also encompasses an

image of the era when the work of the present age will be destroyed and the time capsule filled with relics of a former age will be opened. By constructing an image of the future in this way, the characters develop an image of the present as a past age, the present is transformed into the shadow of an »entfernte Nachwelt« (p.301). In addition to this, the »Grundsteinlegung« also illustrates the way in which the characters construct a temporal dimension through the enactment of a ritual. In this scene, the formal creation of a future dimension is achieved by the ritual language of the mason. In this way, the ritual itself acts as a guarantee for the construction of a particular temporal order. A similar instance of this ritual shaping of time is evident at a later stage of the novel during the scene of Otto's baptism. As S. Brandon has indicated in his essay »Time and the Destiny of Man«, in baptism the subject is ritually assimilated into Christ's death and resurrection, namely events that happened at a definite point in the past.³⁴ This past is thus re-animated and made operative in the present. In the context of the novel, the characters' attachment to ritual tends consistently to devalue the present in favour of either a past or a future.

The transformation of the present into the shadow of a future perspective is not only seen in a social context, but also plays a rôle in the characters' perceptions of each other. In the earlier discussion on narcissism, I pointed out the tendency of all the main characters to give preference to the *image* of a person rather than to the individual as such. The image of the self asserts hegemony over the actual existence of the individual and assumes dominance in both the present and future. The devaluation of the present in the temporal order may be

seen to occur, therefore, both in the realm of the individual development of the characters and on a wider social scale.

Although the characters incessantly attempt to locate >valid< experience in the past or future, there is still an occasional recognition of the value that should be given to action in the present. One may see this ambivalence in terms of the »double bind« in which the narrative perspective places the fictional characters: again and again in the novel one or more of them enter situations which suggest that it is good and timely to innovate, that the emancipation of individual desire is a permissible goal; with equal frequency, however, attempts at innovation result in failure and the narrative perspective emphasises the contrary motifs of determinism, »Schicksal« and »Naturnotwendigkeit«. Once more, one may see this double bind as a parodistic allusion to somewhat facile ideals of progress within the European Enlightenment, for it means, essentially, no antithesis is ever resolved into an effective synthesis.

Hence even the devaluing of the present cannot always be taken at face value, for there are exceptions. In these cases the present seems to exhibit an intrinsic authority which the characters either respect or ignore at different stages of the novel. When discussing the possibility of retaining the personality of individuals after death through a depiction of their image, Charlotte draws attention to the general neglect of the present in individual experience:

Selbst gegen die Bildnisse habe ich eine Art von Abneigung; denn sie scheinen mir immer einen stillen Vorwurf zu machen; sie deuten auf etwas Entferntes, Abgeschiedenes und erinnern mich, wie schwer

es sei, die Gegenwart recht zu ehren. Gedenkt man, wieviel Menschen man gesehen, gekannt, und gesteht sich, wie wenig wir ihnen, wie wenig sie uns gewesen, wie wird uns da zumute! (p.365)

Just as Rousseau and other thinkers of the Enlightenment proposed individual self-awareness in the present moment («le sentiment de l'existence») as a positive ideal,³⁵ so too Charlotte recognises the importance of experience in the present. Social existence in the novel, however, is characterised by a relativity of time in which the conflicting effects of memory, images of eternity and attempts to return make »honouring« the present seem almost impossible. The idea that time in general demands some form of respect is also found in the *Lehrjahre*. In a conversation between Laertes and Philine this image of time is given expression:

»Lache nur nicht«, versetzte er, »es ist abscheulich, wie die Zeit vergeht, wie alles sich verändert und ein Ende nimmt!...Nur kurze Zeit werden das zertretene Stroh und die eingegrabenen Kochlöcher noch eine Spur zeigen; dann wird alles bald umgepflügt sein, und die Gegenwart so vieler tausend rüstiger Menschen in dieser Gegend wird nur noch in den Köpfen einiger alten Leute spucken.«
Philine fing an zu singen und zog ihren Freund zu einem Tanze in den Saal. »Laß uns«, rief sie, »da wir der Zeit nicht nachlaufen können, wenn sie vorüber ist, sie wenigstens als eine schöne Göttin, indem sie bei uns vorbeizieht, fröhlich und zierlich verehren.« (H.A. VII, p.203)

In this extract, as in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, the resistance which time offers to complete conformity with the narcissistic tendencies of the individual makes it an area that demands a certain respect. Paradoxically, however, this image of temporal categories that exercise their own »rights« must also be viewed in terms of an anthropocentric construction of temporality. In *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* the attribution of these qualities to the present serves as another

example of the characters' tendency to interpret their surroundings in purely personal terms. In other words: as a result of the process of self-mirroring, the present is personified and appears to make certain >demands< of the characters. Thus, the narcissistic tendency rebounds on the characters in a negative form. The belief that the present does have certain »rights« may also be seen in terms of a metaphoric realisation on the part of the characters that the visions of ideal forms of valid experience in the past and future are in fact fictional constructions. Nonetheless, the image of the present as a living entity plays a major rôle in the characters' attitudes towards the relationship between the individual and time. As a further variation on this theme, Charlotte conforms to the traditional view of history as the division of time into epochs and describes individual development as being subject to a form of historical determinism. In a conversation with the Gehülfe she puts this in the following words:

Indem uns das Leben fortzieht...glauben wir aus uns selbst zu handeln, unsre Tätigkeit, unsre Vergnügungen zu wählen, aber freilich, wenn wir es genau ansehen, so sind es nur die Pläne, die Neigungen der Zeit, die wir mit auszuführen genötigt sind. (p.417)

Charlotte's attitude to the »rights« of the present and the inferior position of individuals in the schema of historical determinism affirms a dual perspective on time in the novel. On the one hand, the characters attempt to manipulate a temporal order in accordance with their own desires; on the other hand, however, moments occur when the characters perceive their inability to escape the present and achieve an ideal of valid experience in the past or future. It appears, perhaps, that the only character in the novel to escape the constraints of the

present and attain a firm place in an extra-temporal dimension is Otilie. Paradoxically, however, she does not attain this state through her own actions, nor can she be seen to undergo any form of development towards a transcendence of her old, disunified self. Instead, she is elevated to the status of saint by the other characters in the novel, the narrator included, and the leap out of time present is performed for her by the mythical thinking of those characters who invent for her an image of eternity.

The tensions between the desire to escape the present and the confines of actual experience are further highlighted in the novel in the scene of the »Ehebruch im Ehebett«. In this episode Eduard and Charlotte attempt to use the powers of the imagination to escape the present. This use of imagination as an attempt to manipulate the temporal order results in failure. It becomes apparent that the imagination has no power to alter actual events, nor can it effect any permanent alterations to the temporal order:

In der Lampendämmerung sogleich behauptete die innre Neigung, behauptete die Einbildungskraft ihre Rechte über das Wirkliche. [...] Und doch läßt sich die Gegenwart ihr ungeheures Recht nicht rauben. (p.321)

The present exerts its »rights« over the characters with the result that Eduard leaves Charlotte's room like a criminal: »...die Sonne schien ihm ein Verbrechen zu beleuchten« (p.321). In this scene, the characters cannot help but appear as victims of the double bind created by the narrator's declaration of mutually incompatible »rights«. For their

synonymic quality exists more in the dialogue between narrator and reader than in the fictional situation itself.

The »rights« of time over individuals and the impossibility of structuring a temporal order according to the individual will is not a notion confined to the narrative perspective, but is also espoused at one point by Ottilie. In response to Charlotte's idea that the personality may be kept alive after death by retention of a person's image, Ottilie writes in her diary: »Wie über die Menschen, so auch über die Denkmäler läßt sich die Zeit ihr Recht nicht nehmen« (p.370). The characters reflect their own images in temporal orders for a larger part of the novel, yet there comes a point at which time cannot be integrated into individual or collective patterns of >reality<. The manipulation of a temporal order is depicted in the novel as the characters' attempt to impose a reflection of their own self-image on the »rights« of the present. Within this schema tensions arise between the various categories of perception and experience vying for dominance: »Denn so ist die Liebe beschaffen, daß sie allein recht zu haben glaubt und alle anderen Rechte vor ihr verschwinden« (p.322). We have already seen the difficulties involved in making dominant a model of the past through memory or in structuring a future perspective such as >eternity< through the inauguration of a mythical discourse. When the characters seek to escape the present moment and realise a model of experience in another temporal dimension, it is also evident that the past and future are human constructions of order that ultimately cannot be experienced by individuals as categories in their own right.

In a comment recorded in her diary, Otilie notes the element of transitoriness inherent in any temporal sequence. By noting the example of change in nature she inadvertently points out the difficulties involved in the structuring of any temporal order:

Warum nur das Jahr manchmal so kurz, manchmal so lang ist, warum es so kurz scheint und so lang in der Erinnerung! Mir ist es mit dem vergangenen so, und nirgends auffallender als im Garten, wie Vergängliches und Dauerndes ineinandergreift. Und doch ist nichts so flüchtig, das nicht eine Spur, das nicht seinesgleichen zurücklasse. (p.426)

Otilie's diary entry points out that, when dealing with individual perspectives on time, it is important to take note of the rôle of human perception, the element of distortion encountered in the use of »memory« and the way in which any model of >eternity< is subverted by the transitory nature of all existence. As a result of this, individuals appear to be trapped in a series of successive moments and can only escape the confines of this mode of existence for an instant through the use of imagination. On an individual level, the dissolution of the larger temporal order may also be seen in the model of narcissistic experience, when the moment of self-recognition involves the collapse of past and future into an instant in the present. The characters' acknowledgement of the »rights« of the present indicates, therefore, a certain concession on their part that dimensions termed >past< and >future< cannot be considered as categories of actual experience, but rather must be viewed in terms of ideal forms of order that cannot be attained in any finite manner.

Finally, the question arises: how do these various temporal orders affect the structure of the narrative itself? As I have already pointed

out, a central paradox inherent in the narrative development is apparent when the characters express their desire to >return< to a former state. This engenders the contradiction that the progression of the narrative itself is effected by the characters' contradictory desire to move *backwards* through time. In this respect, the narrative progression and the characters' plans appear to move in opposite directions. In addition to this, a reading of the novel itself is equivalent to an elapse of time which implies a constant dominance of the present during the act of reading. In the novel, the narrator continually draws attention to this illusion of immediate experience on the part of the reader by switching suddenly into the present tense. This use of the present tense at certain dramatic points of the text serves a dual purpose; on the one hand it draws the reader further into the illusion of immediate experience by unfolding the scene as if it were occurring in the present; on the other hand, a rupture in the narrative sequence occurs because of the change of tense, so that the reader is temporarily alienated from the narrative and becomes aware of a degree of artificiality in the narrative mode.

A further comment on the nature of time as a structural feature of an aesthetic mode of narration may be seen in the Count's comments on the *Lustspiel* and in the final image of the novel itself. As I mentioned above, the example of the »Lustspielschluß« illustrates the way in which a model of eternal union is constructed in a fictional realm in accordance with the desires and expectations of the public. In the final paragraph of the novel the reader is faced with a similar model, constructed both by the characters and by the narrative perspective.

Once again, the reader is left with a dual perspective on this scene. The image of Eduard's and Ottilie's union in paradise may be read at first in terms of an ultimate >reality< believed by the characters and supported by the narrative perspective. This interpretation becomes questionable, however, when perceived as a structural parallel to the arbitrary »happy end« of the *Lustspiel*.

Just as the comedy works towards a happy resolution, so too the final image of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* falls into the same pattern of satisfying the reader's demand for a solution to the unhappy events of the previous scenes. In the strongly emphasised example of the *Lustspiel* the novel contains, therefore, a parodistic anticipation of its own ending. Thus, the tableau of eternal union in the final scene is coloured by the fictional model of union already outlined at an earlier point of the text. It becomes evident that the construction of various temporal orders and the contradictions they engender are not confined to the actions of the characters themselves, but also form an integral element of the narrative structure. It is precisely this interplay between thematic complexes and the construction of the narrative itself that makes *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* one of the most intricately designed and complex works of Western Literature. In order to discuss the construction of the text and the rôle of the narrator in greater detail, I shall treat the matter more fully in the final chapter of this study.

An analysis of the various temporal orders in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* constructed both by the characters and by the narrative perspective has provided an example of the way in which

characters reflect their own images in a preferred model of >reality<. The numerous constructions of order in the schemata of time may be shared by two or more characters or may be the property of only one individual. It is evident that the characters are free to construct models of >valid< experience in the past and future, but escape from the experience of failure in the present appears to be impossible. The example of time indicates, therefore, the the way in which the novel subverts one of its own intricate themes, namely the variant patterns of narcissistic experience. Time is a perfect realm in which to test the narcissistic tendency of the characters, for it illustrates both the success and limitation of the characters' ability to shape and control a pattern of >reality< according to reflections of their own image. On the one hand they are able to construct a particular form of order by mirroring their own desires in a structure of temporality; on the other hand, however, the various attempts to transform these models into actual experience result in failure.

NOTES

1. Jürgen Kolbe, »Goethes *Wahlverwandtschaften* und der Roman des 19. Jahrhunderts« in: Rösch (ed), op. cit., p. 395; Dickson, op. cit., p. 174; H. Ehrke-Rotermund, »Gesellschaft ohne Wirklichkeit: Eine Untersuchung von Goethes Roman *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*« in: Jahrbuch des freien deutschen Hochstifts, 1981, p. 156; Seibt und Scholz, op. cit., p. 621.
2. P. Leu., »Time and Transcendence in Goethe's *Wahlverwandtschaften*« in: Monatshefte, no. 4, Winter, 1968, p. 369.
3. Georges Poulet, études sur le temps humain, Edinburgh University Press, 1949, p. 26: »Mais de l'instant actuel le Dieu créateur et conservateur est absent. L'acteur principal n'est plus sur la scène. Au rôle suréminent de la cause première se trouve substitué le jeu des causes secondes. A la place de Dieu, il y a des sentiments, des sensations, tout ce qui cause ces sensations.«
4. Saint Augustine, Confessions, trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin, Penguin Classics, Harmondsworth 1986, p. 254.
5. Ibid., p. 264.
6. Poulet, op.cit., p. 26.
7. Vauvenargues, Introduction à la connaissance de l'esprit humain, Oeuvres Complètes, Librairie Hachette, 1986, Tome I, p. 226: »De ces deux sentiments [le plaisir et la douleur] unis, c'est-à-dire celui de nos forces et celui de notre misère, naissent les plus grandes passions, parce que le sentiment de nos misères nous pousse à sortir de nous-mêmes, et que le sentiment de nos ressources nous

y encourage et nous porte par l'espérance»; Montesquieu, »Essai sur le gout«, Oeuvres Complètes, Pléiade, Tome I, 1956, p. 1018-19: »Le système chrétien..., en nous donnant des idées plus saines de la Divinité, semble nous donner un plus grand agent. Mais, comme cet agent ne permet ni n'éprouve aucune passion, il faut nécessairement que le sublime y tombe...Mais ce qui achève de perdre le sublime parmi nous et nous empêche de frapper et d'être frappés, c'est cette nouvelle philosophie qui ne nous parle que de lois générales et nous ôte de l'esprit toutes les pensées particulières de la Divinité. Réduisant tout à la communication des mouvements, elle ne parle que d'entendement pur, d'idées claires, de raison, de principes de conséquences.«

8. Rousseau, Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité, Oeuvres complètes, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1964, Tome III, p.144.
9. Rousseau, Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire, Oeuvres Complètes, Tome I, p. 1046.
10. John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Collins, 1984, p. 145.
11. David Hume, A Treatise on Human Nature, Vol. I, Longmans, Green and co., London 1874, p. 533: »If any impression gives rise to the idea of the self, that impression must continue invariably the same, thro' the whole course of our lives; since self is suppos'd to exist after that manner. But there is no impression constant and invariable. Pain and pleasure, grief and joy, passions and sensations succeed each other, and never all exist at the same time. It cannot, therefore, be from any of these impressions, or from any other, that the idea of self is deriv'd; and consequently there is no such idea«; cf. also The Works of George Berkeley, Volume II, A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge, Nelson and Sons, London 1949, p.105: »...all the unthinking objects of the mind agree, in that they are entirely passive, and their

existence consists only in being perceived: whereas a soul or spirit is an active being, whose existence consists not in being perceived, but in perceiving ideas and thinking.«

12. cf. John McManners, *Death and the Enlightenment*, Oxford University Press, 1981, p. 154f.
13. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Gesammelte Schriften Band IV, Reimer, Berlin 1903, p. 36: »Die Zeit ist kein empirischer Begriff, der irgend von einer Erfahrung abgezogen worden. Denn das Zugleichsein oder Aufeinanderfolgen würde selbst nicht in die Wahrnehmung kommen, wenn die Vorstellung der Zeit nicht *a priori* zum Grunde läge.«
14. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
16. *Goethes Bibliothek: Katalog*, *op.cit.*, p. 450f.
17. Norman Hampson, *The Enlightenment*, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1986, p. 218ff; see also: J.L. Russell, »Time in Christian Thought« in: *The Voices of Time*, ed. J.T. Fraser, Allen Lane The Penguin Press, London 1968, p. 71ff.
18. Rousseau, *La nouvelle Héloïse*, *Oeuvres Complètes*, Tome II, p. 509.
19. Poulet, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-2.
20. Voltaire, *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, *Oeuvres Complètes*, Tome 19, Garnier, 1879, p. 400f; Buffon, *De l'homme*, François Maspero, Paris, 1971, p. 40f.
21. Voltaire, *Oeuvres Complètes*, Tome 19, p. 400.

22. Rousseau, Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire, Oeuvres Complètes, Tome II, p. 1047: »Le sentiment de l'existence depouillé de toute autre affection est par lui-même un sentiment précieux de contentement et de paix qui suffiroit seul pour rendre cette existence chère et douce...Mais la plupart des hommes agités de passions continuelles connoissent peu cet état et ne l'ayant goûté qu'imparfaitement durant d'instans et n'en conservent qu'une idée obscure et confuse qui ne leur en fait pas sentir le charme.«

23. For Rousseau the primary and irrevocable alienation from the »state of nature« occurs with the creation of language, see: Sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité, p. 148ff.

24. Novalis, Werke und Briefe, Winkler, München 1962, p. 82.

25. For a discussion of this »spatial« view of time see: Arnaud Lévy, »Devant et derrière soi« in: Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse, Numéro 15, Printemps 1977, pp. 93-103.

26. Plato, The Symposium, p. 65.

27. Erläuterungen und Dokumenten, op.cit., p. 157; see also: Hans Reiss, »Goethes Romane, Franke Verlag, Bern 1963, p.170; Stöcklein, op.cit., p.36.

28. Wellbery, op.cit., p. 294.

29. Ibid.

30. Stöcklein, op. cit., pp. 32-33; Muenzer, op. cit. p. 87; Wellbery, op.cit., p.305.

31. Dickson, op. cit., pp. 179-80.

32. Gerhard Neumann, »Der Wanderer und der Verschollene: Zum Problem der Identität in Goethes Wilhelm Meister und in Kafkas Amerika-

Roman« in: Paths and Labyrinths, University of London, Institute of Germanic Studies 1985, pp. 50-51; for a further consideration of father-son relationships in Goethe's works see: Gerhard Kaiser and Friedrich Kittler, Dichtung als Sozialisationsspiel, Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, Göttingen 1978, p.14f; cf. also: Peter Horst Neumann, Der Preis der Mündigkeit, Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart 1977, passim.

33. Walter Benjamin, »Goethes Wahlverwandtschaften« in: Gesammelte Schriften, ed. R. Tiedemann and H. Schweppenhäuser, Band I.1., Suhrkamp, 1974, p. 201.
34. S.G.F. Brandon, »Time and the Destiny of Man« in: The Voices of Time, ed J.T. Fraser, pp. 150-1.
35. Rousseau, Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire, Oeuvres Complètes, Tome II, p. 1047f.

CHAPTER THREE

WORD AND IMAGE: PARADIGMS OF THE REAL

Selbst das einzige, das wir besitzen, die Sprache taugt nicht dazu, sie kann die Seele nicht malen, und was sie uns gibt sind nur zerrissene Bruchstücke.

- Heinrich von Kleist (Brief an Ulrike, 1801)

I Interpretation: In Search of Meaning.

Throughout the novel, language functions as a medium in which the characters reflect their own images and construct particular models of >reality<. A central element of this process is the characters' method of interpreting both the spoken and written word. It becomes increasingly apparent that a single signifier may be interpreted in various ways by a number of characters. As a result of these different, often conflicting interpretations, one signifier may become a focal point of several world-views. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the example of Eduard's and Charlotte's different interpretations of »return« illustrate precisely this process. This has both positive and negative consequences for the characters. On the one hand, the ambiguous nature of language allows them some freedom of interpretation and thus provides them with the opportunity to choose and give preference to

salient features of a preferred world-model; on the other hand, however, the impossibility of imposing unified and non-ambiguous meaning on words engenders a scepticism as to the potential of language to serve as that reliable means of communication which it was held to be by the main stream of Enlightenment thought. As I shall indicate in the course of this chapter, this double perspective on language may, indeed, be seen in terms of the growing scepticism concerning the ›rational‹ basis of language that was apparent amongst certain critical thinkers of the 18th century. In this context, a major conflict in the novel centres on the general discrediting of rhetoric and the various attempts of the characters to find effective substitutes for it, or else to abandon language altogether in favour of non-verbal communication.

In the course of the narrative, the characters' many different uses of and reactions to language become increasingly distinct. These various modes of communication include, for example, reading aloud, the creation of a »Zeichensprache« and communication through the written word. In opposition to this schema, certain characters reject these forms of communication in favour of body language, images and silence. The different language-structures are closely linked to the changes in intimate relations. The discourse of science in the »Gleichnisrede«, for example, represents a mode of interpersonal relations based on the notion of eternal flux. In opposition to this model, which is created from a scientific »Zeichensprache«, stands the model of Platonic union which is characterised by the non-verbal communication between Eduard and Otilie. A third model of interpersonal relations is seen in the social contract of marriage and is exemplified by the flights of

rhetoric in Mittler's speeches. These three models of sexuality are distinguished by three different uses of language, or to be more precise, by three conflicting interpretations of »union«.

Tensions arise in the novel as the characters attempt to endow their preferred interpretation of »union« with supremacy. From this it appears that a consensus concerning the meaning of a particular word or group of words is of central importance when attempting to endow a world-view with dominant status. The ruling social model of human relations, for example, is based on the general interpretation of »union« in terms of the marriage contract. I believe, however, that throughout *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* Goethe indicates that both this >enlightened< form of order through consensus and a belief in the non-ambiguous nature of language do not render actual the ideal of »Vernunft«. Instead, he points out that language is more often used according to the situation in which the speakers find themselves at a certain moment. In this respect, the multiplicity of world-views evident in the novel may be seen, in part, to result from the polysemous nature of language. In one of his maxims, Goethe draws attention to the tenuous link between language and »Vernunft« in the following words:

Der Sprache liegt zwar die Verstandes- und Vernunftsfähigkeit des Menschen zugrunde, aber sie setzt bei dem, der sich ihrer bedient, nicht eben reinen Verstand, ausgebildete Vernunft, redlichen Willen voraus. Sie ist ein Werkzeug, zweckmäßig und willkürlich zu gebrauchen, man kann sie ebensogut zu einer spitzfindig-verwirrenden Dialektik wie zu einer verworren-verdusternden Mystik verwenden... (H.A. XII; p. 456)

On the one hand, the construction of order through the use of language implies the individual's ability to organise a set of events or

phenomena in a rational manner. In this respect, the speaker appears to be firmly in control of language and words themselves are viewed as »Werkzeuge« that may be manipulated according to the will of the individual. This implies that the relationship of the speaker to language is clearly defined and stable. On the other hand, however, Goethe also points out that the process of interpretation may lead to the creation of world-models that stand in complete opposition to each other. Despite the apparent control of enlightened »Vernunft«, language may be seen as the basis not only of concepts that are »spitzfindig«, but also of ideas that are »verworren« and »verdüsternd«, namely world-views that appear to contradict Enlightenment rationality.

By questioning the link between language and Reason, Goethe points to one of the major debates concerning the nature of language that was conducted during the Enlightenment. This controversy was polarised between those thinkers who propounded the intrinsic relationship of language to rational thought and those who believed there was a link between human communication and that of animals. In contrast to Süßmilch's notion that language is a divine gift, which displays the highest form of order and perfect rationality, stand the opinions of Condillac, Herder and Rousseau, each of whom stressed the highly irrational beginnings of linguistic communication between humans.¹ In his *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache* (1772) Herder, for example, stresses in the opening sentence the origins of human language in the communication of animals:

Schon als Thier hat der Mensch Sprache. Alle heftigen, und die heftigsten unter den heftigen, die schmerzhaften Empfindungen seines Körpers, alle starke Leidenschaften seiner Seele äußern sich

unmittelbar in Geschrei, in Töne, in wilde, unartikulierte Laute. [...] Diese Seufzer, diese Töne sind Sprache: es gibt also eine Sprache der Empfindung, die unmittelbares Naturgesetz ist.²

The irrational origins of human language in the communication of animals had already been depicted in similar terms by Rousseau in his *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* (1755). Once again the notion of a pre-ordained, rational, linguistic order is refuted: »Le premier langage de l'homme, le langage le plus universel, le plus énergique, et le seul dont il eut besoin, avant qu'il fallut persuader des hommes assemblés, est le cri de la Nature«.³

It is in the light of these various debates on the structure and development of linguistic communication that the reader must approach the characters' use of language in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*. In the novel, language does not appear to serve the speaker as a perfectly functioning divine gift, nor is the relationship of speaker to spoken always clearly defined. On the one hand, the characters attempt to use words as »Werkzeuge« by shaping their own preferred world-view in a certain form of language. This implies that language may be used as a stable basis for the construction of >reality< and thus stresses its supposedly rational nature. On the other hand, however, the characters nearly always fail in their attempts to manipulate language according to their own desires. For example, Mittler uses language powerfully, yet precipitates a number of disasters throughout the novel. Equally so, Charlotte cannot use language to bring the development of new attractions under control, nor is she able to effect a return to »den alten Zustand«. Characters such as Eduard and Ottilie attempt to

supplant the outmoded rhetoric of social relations with a new discourse of intimacy, yet cannot make this alternative to conventional language prevail in the social dimension. For this reason, their model of intimate relations is situated beyond language. From this, it appears that a form of language has not yet been created which can supplant the failing social rhetoric. The characters find themselves in situations where no single form of language appears to function effectively. The impossibility of establishing a non-ambiguous form of language and the frequent dissolution of various discourses make the link between language and »Reason« appear increasingly tenuous. In order to illustrate this situation in greater detail, it is necessary to turn to a close examination of its expression in the text.

A short look at Eduard's final meeting with Otilie will give an indication of certain characters' scepticism concerning the potential of language to communicate intimacy in a complete and non-ambiguous manner. As Otilie lies dying, Eduard kneels at her side and announces his intention to follow her in death so that they might finally enjoy union:

Soll ich deine Stimme nicht wieder hören? Wirst du nicht mit einem Wort für mich ins Leben zurückkehren? Gut, gut! ich folge dir hinüber; da werden wir mit andern Sprachen reden! (p.484)

Eduard presents an image of his final union with Otilie in terms of a bond through language. In contrast to the restrictive interpretation of »union« within the social code that depicts marriage as the only valid basis for sexual intimacy, the realm of death seems to offer the possibility of creating a discourse of love. Throughout the novel, the two lovers have attempted to realise their ideal of intimacy by

allegiance to their own model of »eternity« within the framework of Platonic union although, as we have seen, the same ideal has different meanings for each of them. This ideal is supported by Eduard's own esoteric interpretation of signs which seem to indicate the possibility of achieving this eternal union.

The attempt to realise a new form of union may be seen as one of the central questions posed by the novel, namely: to what extent is it possible to create a private discourse and validate it in a wider social context? This is precisely what Eduard seeks to achieve throughout the narrative. This central question of the novel may also be seen to intersect with a major theme in the *Wanderjahre*. Gerhard Neumann has indicated that in this novel Goethe asks whether it is possible to create sign-systems that will permit a realisation of individual identity:

Zum einen geht es um das Problem der >Erzählbarkeit vom Leben< als selbstbewußter Geschichte eines Subjekts. Diese Frage hat ihrerseits drei Aspekte. Sie ist aus einer kritischen sozialen Situation geboren...[...]; sie gestaltet sich zugleich als eine kritische kulturgeschichtliche Situation... [...]; sie offenbart sich letztlich als eine kritische psychische Erfahrung... Alle drei Aspekte dieser Krise verdichten sich in der in allen Disziplinen der Lebenserfahrung - der Naturwissenschaft, der Kunst, der Ökonomie - aufbrechenden Frage, ob es möglich ist, Zeichenordnungen zu begründen, die Realisationsfelder von Identität in diesem neuen, bisher unerfahrenen sozialen Spannungsbereich eröffnen.⁴

Whereas Wilhelm ultimately realises the ideal of »Selbstbildung«, in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* the author clearly decides to depict a dystopian version of a very similar theme. I have indicated how this is evident in both the >>false< development of Otilie's character and in Eduard's negative experiences within the father-son model. Ultimately, the idea

of creating a desired sign-system that will confirm the identity of the individual in a model of sexuality can only be envisaged by Eduard in the realm of death. The utopian ideal of creating a new discourse of love implies that the word »union« will become non-ambiguous, thus signifying complete and unequivocal meaning in the Platonic sense. Only in this illusory way is the coding of Eduard's love of Ottilie and their eternal union possible in the language-oriented realm of interpersonal relations.

In the development of their relationship, Eduard and Ottilie avoid communication with each other through socially coded discourse. In the early stages of their relationship, emphasis is placed on their experiences of communion when reading, playing music, writing or simply being in the presence of the other. The two characters may be drawn together whilst sitting in a room without having to rely on spoken or written language as a means of communicating their love. Not only is language treated with a certain degree of scepticism on the part of the two lovers, but it often appears unnecessary for them to transform their feelings for one another into an object of language. It becomes apparent, therefore, that Eduard and Ottilie often share images of their intimacy in an extra-linguistic realm. As a result of this, parallel reactions to certain events are apparent. When Ottilie's handwriting becomes identical to that of Eduard each character interprets the occurrence as an expression of their mutual love and both enter into a new relationship to the self and to each other:

Endlich trat sie [Ottilie] herein, glänzend von Liebenswürdigkeit. Das Gefühl, etwas für den Freund getan zu haben, hatte ihr ganzes Wesen über sich selbst gehoben. (p.323)

Similarly for Eduard:

Von diesem Augenblick an war die Welt für Eduarden umgewendet, er nicht mehr, was er gewesen, die Welt nicht mehr, was sie gewesen.
(p. 324)

It appears that a major feature of the world-view shared by Eduard and Ottilie lies in their common interpretation of certain signs.⁶ It is for this reason that they are both able to read the term »union« in a manner that is contrary to the social code of marriage. This schema of shared interpretation, however, presents both positive and negative aspects. Just as the entire relationship may be read either in terms of Platonic union or as Eduard's attempt to unite with his mirror-image, so too the shared process of interpretation must be viewed in terms of this duality. The negative aspect of this unity may be seen in Eduard's imposition of his own interpretations on Ottilie. In the scene mentioned above, as in other crucial points in the development of their relationship, Eduard suggests his own reading of certain signs to Ottilie. As a result of this, Ottilie is deprived of the opportunity to develop her own individual method of interpretation. In this sense, the ideal, non-ambiguous nature of the signifier is given an illusory quality, for this unity of interpretation is, in fact, based on the fundamental asymmetry which is a central feature of Eduard's relationship with Ottilie throughout the novel.

Ottilie, however, accepts the rôle that Eduard ascribes her in his version of Platonic union and, for the greater part of the novel, does nothing to disrupt their private code. Instead she confirms their shared discourse in her responses to Eduard's actions; she acquiesces to his

request regarding the portrait of her father; she plays her rôle in the scenes of mystical union by accompanying Eduard on the piano, writing letters and watching the words on the page as he reads aloud. These and other sets of actions and reactions fall within the realm of a private coding of events and behaviour. Difficulties arise, however, when the attempt is made to validate this »fast magische Anziehungskraft« within the social code. In order to make their relationship socially acceptable, Eduard and Ottilie are forced to search for universally acknowledged guarantees for their union within the realm of social discourse. At this point a fundamental opposition between the attempt to code a discourse of love and the rhetoric of social relations becomes apparent.

In his book *Liebe als Passion*, Niklas Luhmann draws attention to the rôle of language in the depiction of intimate relations in 18th century literature. In contrast to the literature of earlier centuries, in which love was made the celebrated subject of rhetoric, there appeared a growing scepticism in the 18th century as to whether language was, in fact, a suitable vehicle for the communication of intimacy. As Luhmann points out, this scepticism developed to the point where it was feared that the transformation of love into an object of language would deprive it of all sense.⁶ Concerning this general attitude towards the possibilities and boundaries of language, Luhmann comes to the following conclusion: »Das 18. Jahrhundert erlebt das Ende der Rhetorik, das heißt, das Ende des technischen Vertrauens in Kommunikation«.⁷

This is indicated quite clearly in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* when the characters attempt to locate guarantees for a particular relationship in the interpretation of signs other than language and in Eduard's desire to create a new discourse of love after death. I mentioned above a number of examples which illustrate the way in which Eduard and Ottilie often communicate their love for each other in a non-linguistic mode. That this unwillingness to transform intimacy into an object of language was not confined to Goethe's works alone is indicated by a passage in Rousseau's *La nouvelle Héloïse* in which language appears to disrupt direct and meaningful communication: »Que de choses sont dites sans ouvrir la bouche! Que d'ardens sentimens se sont communiqués sans la froide entremise de la parole!«.²⁸ In a similar sense, Voltaire also draws attention to the limitations of language in an entry entitled »Langues« in the *Dictionnaire Philosophique*. Here, he describes language as an inadequate means by which to express human emotions and perceptions:

Il n'est aucune langue complète, aucune qui puisse exprimer toutes nos idées et toutes nos sensations; leurs nuances sont trop imperceptibles et trop nombreuses. Personne ne peut faire connaître précisément le degré du sentiment qu'il éprouve. On est obligé, par exemple, de désigner sous le nom général d'*amour* et de *haine* mille amours et mille haines toutes différentes; il en est de même de nos douleurs et de nos plaisirs. Ainsi toutes les langues sont imparfaites comme nous.²⁹

It is important to recognise that in the case of Voltaire we see a master of conventional rhetoric acknowledging the imperfections of his finite means, whilst not in any way condemning their relative adequacy. Both Kleist, in all his literary production, and Goethe, more radically in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* than elsewhere, allow the cliché of the

imperfection of communication through language to assume the proportions of a genuine crisis of human relations. In a letter to Ulrike written in 1801, Kleist gives expression to this crisis in the following words:

...sie [die Sprache] kann die Seele nicht malen, uns was sie uns gibt sind nur zerrissene Bruchstücke. Daher habe ich jedesmal eine Empfindung, wie ein Grauen, wenn ich jemandem mein Innerstes aufdecken soll; nicht eben weil es sich vor der Blöße scheut, aber weil ich ihm nicht *alles* zeigen kann, nicht *kann*, und daher fürchten muß, aus den Bruchstücken falsch verstanden zu werden.¹⁰

An important parallel is evident between Goethe and Kleist in this scepticism concerning the capacity of language to communicate complete and non-ambiguous meaning. In *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* a sharp contrast is apparent between the two lovers' attempts to escape the confines of language and the rhetorical violence of Mittler, in whose speeches we find manifestations of social and religious codes of behaviour. In his diatribes on marriage and the Ten Commandments, Mittler announces a socially accepted model of interpersonal relations which admits of no deviation from the prescribed course. Within this world-view we find an interpretation of »union« that forms a complete contrast to that conceived of by Eduard. In order to make valid his own ideal form of union, Eduard must attempt to disrupt this seemingly non-ambiguous idea of marriage. In his attempts to persuade the Hauptmann to take over his rôle in the marriage to Charlotte, he points out the way in which a certain set of accepted social models must be dissolved and replaced by a new concept of union, in order that he might achieve his ideal:

Ich sehe wohl...nicht allein von Feinden, sondern auch von Freunden muß, was man wünscht, erstürmt werden. Das, was ich will, was mir unentbehrlich ist, halte ich fest im Auge... Dergleichen Verhältnisse, weiß ich wohl, heben sich nicht auf und bilden sich nicht, ohne daß manches falle, was steht, ohne daß manches weiche, was zu beharren Lust hat. Durch Überlegung wird so etwas nicht

geendet; vor dem Verstande sind alle Rechte gleich, und auf die steigende Waagschale läßt sich immer wieder ein Gegengewicht legen. (p. 450)

In order to vary successfully the existing social code in their own favour, Eduard and Otilie would have to venture into the realm of social discourse and transform their intimacy into an object of language. As I indicated above, throughout the novel they have displayed an unwillingness to do precisely this. For this reason, the possibility of disrupting the prevailing social basis of sanctioned intimacy is never actually realised by them. Before examining the final conflict between the language of social relations and the model of intimacy constructed by Eduard, it is first necessary to discuss the rôle of language in the social realm as it is outlined in the novel.

In the social code, interpersonal relations are governed by the laws of language in the form of the marriage contract and as outlined in the model of the Ten Commandments. Throughout the novel, these forms of socially acknowledged human relations are both epitomised and discredited in the speeches of Mittler. At the baptism of Charlotte's child the minister collapses and dies during Mittler's speech and his diatribe on the Ten Commandments at the end of the novel immediately precedes Otilie's death. In contrast to Eduard and Otilie, who appear to mistrust the potential of language to communicate intimacy in a successful manner, Mittler relies on language to expound his ideals of social interaction.

I would agree with David Wellbery that Mittler's use of language during the baptism ceremony of Charlotte's child marks »die völlige Pervertierung der rituellen Sprache.«¹¹ I believe, however, that this idea is taken still further by Goethe. Just as there are no totally stable models in the opening scenes of the novel, I believe that language itself is not perceived as a stable and reliable means from which to construct a world-view. In other words: from the opening of the narrative, the »rituelle Sprache«, the language of social relations and even the discourse of science are not shown as stable and non-ambiguous. Instead, the entire social structure is constructed from languages that are no longer perfectly, or even reliably functioning »Werkzeuge« controlled by the speaker. It is for precisely this reason that Eduard and Ottilie attempt to move beyond language when communicating their love for each other. Similarly, the possibility of controlling language through »Vernunft« appears as equally improbable, as indicated in the maxim quoted at the opening of this chapter. In another maxim, Goethe also suggests that the apparently stable world of scientific calculation does not remain immune from the dissolution of the rhetorical tradition:

Abbildungen, Wortbeschreibung, Maß, Zahl und Zeichen stellen noch immer kein Phänomen dar. Darum bloß konnte sich die Newtonsche Lehre so lange halten, daß der Irrtum in dem Quartbande der lateinischen Übersetzung für ein paar Jahrhunderte einbalsamiert war. (H.A. XII, p.434)

I believe that this discrediting of the use of language as »Werkzeug« depicted in Goethe's novel lends support to Luhmann's suggestion that at the end of the 18th century a loss of faith in the effectiveness of rhetorical language was apparent. Despite this scepticism, however, characters such as Mittler still attempt to make

language function for them as a »Werkzeug«. This gives the illusion that there is still a major distinction between language and the speaker. I believe, however, that this model is also brought into question in the course of the novel. Not only does Mittler produce only social dissonances by his flights of rhetoric, but the characters often find it impossible to control certain models constructed from language once they have been set in motion. The written marriage contract, for example, prevents Eduard from realising his ideal; despite her apparent ability to control certain discourses, Charlotte cannot tame »ein gewaltsam Entbundenen«; language fails as a »Werkzeug« when attempts are made to create and control temporal orders. There appears a central paradox in the novel, namely that the characters are able to construct world-views from language, but then often find it impossible to control their further development. I would suggest that this occurs because language is depicted as a dangerously imperfect instrument *throughout* the narrative and does not decline from any initial stability. For this reason there exists the possibility of rôle-reversal between language and speaker. In other words: the characters becomes the »victims« of their own use of language.

This idea of rôle-reversal between speaker and spoken is also in evidence in other works of the late 18th century. In the fragment *Monolog*, Novalis depicts a positive mythical ideal of autonomous language which is in total opposition to the image of the »Werkzeug«. Novalis sees language as being totally independent, and the speaker is denied the rôle of a >manipulator< of discourses:

Es ist eigentlich um das Sprechen und Schreiben eine närrische Sache; das rechte Gespräch ist ein bloßes Wortspiel. Der lächerliche Irrtum ist nur zu bewundern, daß die Leute meinen - sie sprächen um der Dinge willen. Gerade das Eigentümliche der Sprache, daß sie sich bloß um sich selbst bekümmert, weiß keiner. Darum ist sie ein so wunderbares und fruchtbares Geheimnis...¹²

Towards the end of the 18th century a number of different perspectives may be seen in the general discussions on language. On the one hand, the rhetorical use of language still played a major rôle in the construction of certain world-models based on religious and social traditions; on the other hand, the use of language as a »Werkzeug« was being gradually discredited as a means by which to communicate intimacy. In addition to this there arises the positive myth of an autonomous language evident in the works of the early Romantics. These various conflicts are depicted clearly in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* and form a central axis around which much of the action in the novel revolves.

I have stated that from the very beginning of the novel, language cannot be viewed in terms of a stable instrument manipulated by the speaker. This is experienced by all characters in the novel. Mittler, however, appears to represent the most negative and destructive use of language. In attempting to use language as a functional »Werkzeug«, he also expounds new interpretations of certain social and religious models. In his discussion of the Ten Commandments, he suggests that the Commandments themselves be re-worded in order to advocate a course of positive individual action rather than to admonish sin:

>Du sollst nicht ehebrechen<...Wie grob, wie unanständig! Klänge es nicht ganz anders, wenn es hieße: >Du sollst Ehrfurcht haben vor der ehelichen Verbindung; wo du Gatten siehst, die sich lieben, sollst du dich darüber freuen und teil daran nehmen wie an dem Glück eines heitern Tages. Sollte sich irgend in ihrem Verhältnis

etwas trüben, so sollst du suchen, es aufzuklären; du sollst suchen, sie zu begütigen, sie zu besänftigen...< (pp.482-3)

Not only does Mittler reduce the already unstable ritual language to a point of absurdity, but he also attempts to rephrase that which he has at one time acknowledged to be the word of God. Such attempts to use language as a »Werkzeug« without consideration of the repercussions of such manipulations characterise Mittler's behaviour throughout the entire novel. His skill in re-uniting married couples is essentially a demonstration of his ability to use language in a certain way and his three major speeches in the novel reveal his preoccupation with the rules of the social code in the corresponding ritualised discourse. In addition to these skills Mittler also believes himself at liberty to improvise on the religious basis of the social and moral code. Just as Mittler is depicted in increasingly critical terms in the course of the novel, so too the language-based orders he attempts to control are subtly undermined.

There remains the question as to why language proves to be an area of conflict when Eduard and Ottilie try to validate their love for each other on a social scale. I believe that this is explored in the novel in two ways. In the first instance, the characters are forced to deal with the problem of interpreting the signifier »union«. As I mentioned earlier, »union« is read by Eduard in terms of the Platonic myth, whereas for society at large it is seen to conform to the marriage contract. These conflicting models of >valid< interpersonal relations rest on opposing attitudes to language, namely a rejection of language as a means to communicate intimacy and a contrasting celebration of

language as the basis of social modes of behaviour. Secondly, the problem of the general discrediting of language must be considered. Both Eduard and Ottilie desire to code a discourse of love in a social context, but never actually leave their own private field of extra-linguistic communication when they have the choice. For this reason I would suggest that the novel reflects a view of language in an intermediary phase, in which the model of words as »Werkzeuge« is breaking apart, but has not yet been replaced by a functional substitute. This idea is in accordance with Goethe's scepticism concerning the link between language and »Vernunft« and may be seen as an extension of the various debates on the nature of language in evidence during the Enlightenment.

If Eduard and Ottilie do not create a successful discourse of intimacy and never realise their love in a social context, why then does the novel allow the image of their union in death to dominate the final scene? Until the point of Ottilie's death, the development of her relationship with Eduard has been dealt with in the novel in terms of a conflict between two major models of >reality< namely, the social code and the image of Platonic union. After Ottilie's death, however, a third model is added to this schema. By elevating Ottilie to the status of saint, both the narrator and the other characters find a means to envisage an acceptable union between her and Eduard. The concept of eternal union, which has dominated the image of Platonic wholeness, is extended into the religious sphere, so that the two characters may be seen to enjoy final union in an image of paradise:

So ruhen die Liebenden nebeneinander. Friede schwebt über ihrer Stätte, heitere, verwandte Engelsbilder schauen vom Gewölbe auf sie herab, und welch ein freundlicher Augenblick wird es sein, wenn sie dereinst wieder zusammen erwachen. (p.490)

In this way, another model of >valid< experience is created after Eduard's and Ottilie's respective deaths which takes elements of both models and creates yet another pattern of >reality<. In order to make possible this vision of union, the narrator removes both characters from the social realm and transforms them into saint-like figures. Not only is Ottilie elevated to the status of saint, but Eduard is also allowed to acquire something of her aura: »...und wie er in Gedanken an die Heilige eingeschlafen war, so konnte man wohl ihn selig nennen« (p.490). As I mentioned in the previous chapter, however, this »happy ending« closely resembles the arbitrary mark of finality imposed on human relations by the *Lustspiel*. In this respect, this final vision of union may be read either in terms of another creation of >reality< by the characters and the narrative perspective, or as a parody of the literary trope in which the impossible earthly union of two lovers is realised in a vision of paradise.

Charlotte's uses of and reactions to language are also important for a consideration of this aspect of the novel. It is precisely her talent for regulating the direction of a discussion that leads to the interpretation of the »Gleichnisrede«. Before Charlotte excuses herself for looking in Eduard's book during the reading the narrator gives an indication of her particular understanding of the rules of social communication:

Charlotte, deren Gewandtheit sich in größeren und kleineren Zirkeln besonders dadurch bewies, daß sie jede angenehme, jede heftige, ja selbst nur lebhaftige Äußerung zu beseitigen, ein sich verlängerndes Gespräch zu unterbrechen, ein stockendes anzuregen wußte, war auch diesmal von ihrer guten Gabe nicht verlassen... (pp.269-70)

It is this concern with the rules of social communication that characterises Charlotte's use of language throughout the novel. During the discussion of the »Gleichnisrede«, for example, she is not overly concerned with the wider implications of the chemical attractions, but instead tries to elicit the exact meaning of the words used in the discourse: »...denn es macht in der Gesellschaft nichts lächerlicher, als wenn man ein fremdes, ein Kunstwort falsch anwendet« (p.271). In contrast to Mittler's violent rhetoric and Eduard's innovative attempts to create a discourse of love, Charlotte's concern with language centres on a desire to adhere to the prescribed rules of social discourse. For this reason her attitudes towards existing models of union are totally different from those of her husband. Charlotte also attempts to steer the course of discussion during dinner with the Count and Baroness. In this scene she acknowledges the danger of an »allzufreies Gespräch« (p.310) and thus the way in which language may influence the world-view of an individual, in this case Otilie. For Charlotte, the stability of social >reality< consists in enforcing certain prescribed rules when using language.

Although Charlotte may be seen to exercise a degree of power when she dictates the direction of a particular discourse, her skill in the realm of social communication encounters a barrier when faced with Eduard's methods of interpretation. I indicated this conflict in an

earlier section by the example of Charlotte's proposal to Eduard that they both return to »den alten Zustand«. At this point the narrator tells us that in the process of interpretation Eduard selects and acknowledges only that which is in accordance with his own preferred model of >reality< («Eduard, der nichts vernahm, als was seiner Leidenschaft schmeichelte...« p.341). This process is in evidence again when Eduard interprets various non-linguistic signs in an attempt to determine guarantees for his relationship with Ottilie. By interpreting signifiers solely according to his own desires, Eduard subverts Charlotte's undoubted powers within the context of social norms of language. On the one hand, Charlotte reflects her own desires in a form of language which characterises the laws of social behaviour; on the other hand, Eduard rejects this model of language and uses his powers of interpretation in an attempt to form an everlasting bond with Ottilie. A reflection of the speaker's own image may be seen, therefore, in the dual processes of construction and interpretation of language-orders.

In their conversations, Charlotte and Eduard avail themselves of opposing strategies. Although bound to Charlotte by that social discourse, which is epitomised in the marriage contract, Eduard no longer recognises the validity of this bond. Thus, he perceives a rupture in their relationship that is reflected in the realm of language. These dissonances in their relationship are indicated in their use of language in the early part of the narrative. In the opening scene of the novel Eduard demands of Charlotte that their discussions concerning the Hauptmann and Ottilie be open and unrestrained: »...jetzt sprich aber auch recht frei und umständlich und sage mir alles, was du

zu sagen hast; ich will dich nicht unterbrechen« (p.245). This apparent frankness is, however, revealed as quite illusory. Not only does Eduard attempt to disguise his true feelings of impatience and annoyance by apparently open and disingenuous discourse, but Charlotte also uses language to disguise her true feelings:

Charlotte, so aufrichtig sie zu sprechen schien, verhehlte doch etwas. Sie hatte nämlich damals dem von Reisen zurückkehrenden Eduard Ottilien absichtlich vorgeführt, um dieser geliebten Pflgetochter eine so große Partie zuzuwenden... (p.253)

The dissonances in Eduard's and Charlotte's relationship are evident at the beginning of the novel, yet are masked to a certain degree by their strategic uses of language. At a later stage of the novel, however, the dissolution of their relationship can no longer be hidden. At this point, language is precisely the area which indicates the impoverished nature of their relationship:

Eduard schauderte, er hielt sich für verraten und die liebevolle Sprache seiner Frau für ausgedacht, künstlich und planmäßig, um ihn auf ewig von seinem Glücke zu trennen. Er schien ihr die Sache ganz zu überlassen; allein schon war innerlich sein Entschluß gefaßt. (p.343)

It is Ottilie's method of interpreting language at the end of the novel that leads to a paradoxical development in her relationship with Eduard. In her letter to the other main characters she mentions the promise she made both to herself and to Charlotte concerning her future relations with Eduard: »Mein Versprechen, mich mit ihm in keine Unterredung einzulassen, habe ich vielleicht zu buchstäblich genommen und gedeutet« (p.477). By interpreting her own words in a literal sense, Ottilie implements a method of interpretation that is different from

other attitudes towards language in the novel and, as Hillis Miller suggests, this focus on the literal »plays a crucial rôle in determining the circumstances of Otilie's death«.¹³ By interpreting words in a strictly literal sense, Otilie attempts to counter the ambiguous nature of the signifier which characterises the construction of opposing models of >reality< throughout the novel. She does this by imposing non-ambiguity on language. Paradoxically, however, this leads to the complete dissolution of her bond to language, for in her case the imposition of non-ambiguity leads to total silence.

Throughout the novel every assumption by a fictional character that language is non-ambiguous reveals the whole precarious basis of linguistic communication. Thus Otilie renounces the possibility of structuring her own preferred >reality< through language, for she submits herself to the principle of an autonomous and unequivocal meaning of words. This stands in opposition to the way in which the other characters have attempted to manipulate language throughout the novel. I have suggested that the characters often attempt to move beyond language when constructing preferred models of >reality<. This is often due to the failure of language to communicate single and unified meaning, or is the result of a loss of faith in language as a stable structural principle. It is to a more detailed discussion of this escape from the boundaries of language that I shall now turn.

II *Beyond Language: »Wort und Bild«.*

We have already seen that the ambiguous nature of certain statements can lead to difficulties in some characters' attempts to realise their own preferred visions of >reality<. In one of her diary entries, Ottilie indicates the difficulty of communicating unified and complete meaning in social discourse:

Niemand würde viel in Gesellschaften sprechen, wenn er sich bewußt wäre, wie oft er die andern mißversteht.

[...]

Wer vor andern lange allein spricht, ohne den Zuhörern zu schmeicheln, erregt Widerwillen.

Jedes ausgesprochene Wort erregt den Gegensinn. (p.384)

As I shall indicate in the course of this section, the discourse of social relations is given the illusion of stability by its preservation in writing. Within the realm of oral communication, however, the characters become increasingly aware of the difficulty of holding an »unverfängliche Unterhaltung« (p.434). This is constantly illustrated in the conversations between the English Lord, his companion, Charlotte and Ottilie. After accidentally drawing attention to Eduard's absence from the household, the English Lord points out the inevitability of making such inadvertent and tactless comments in social communication:

Dem Lord tat es leid, ohne daß er darüber verlegen gewesen wäre. Man müßte ganz in Gesellschaft schweigen, wenn man nicht manchmal in den Fall kommen sollte; denn nicht allein bedeutende Bemerkungen, sondern die trivialsten Äußerungen können auf eine so mißklingende Weise mit dem Interesse der Gegenwärtigen zusammentreffen. [...] Allein auch mit dem besten Vorsatze gelang es den Fremden nicht, die Freunde diesmal mit einer unverfänglichen Unterhaltung zu erfreuen. Denn nachdem der Begleiter durch manche

sonderbare, bedeutende, heitere, rührende, furchtbare Geschichten die Aufmerksamkeit erregt und die Teilnehmende aufs höchste gespannt hatte, so dachte er mit einer zwar sonderbaren, aber sanfteren Begebenheit zu schließen und ahnte nicht, wie nahe diese seinen Zuhörern verwandt war. (pp.433-4)

This passage anticipates Charlotte's negative reaction to the story of »Die wunderlichen Nachbarskinder«, the narrating of which epitomises the difficulty of steering a social discourse along innocuous lines. In addition to this, the above quote ^{preparation} also leads the reader to believe that the novella will correspond to events experienced by some of the main characters. This preparation of the reader by the narrative perspective has often led critics to propose direct parallels between events in the novella and those in the lives of the Hauptmann and Charlotte.¹⁴ These analyses, however, often overlook the self-subverting tendency of the narrative perspective itself. After having prepared the reader for a certain interpretation of the novella, the narrator intrudes once more at the end of the story and puts his own earlier instruction to the reader in a more doubtful light. At the end of the novella the narrator addresses the reader in the following terms:

Diese Begebenheit hatte sich mit dem Hauptmann und einer Nachbarin wirklich zugetragen, zwar nicht ganz wie sie der Engländer erzählte, doch war sie in den Hauptzügen nicht entstellt, nur im einzelnen mehr ausgebildet und ausgeschmückt, wie es dergleichen Geschichten zu gehen pflegt, wenn sie erst durch den Mund der Menge und sodann durch die Phantasie eines geist- und geschmackreichen Erzählers durchgehen. Es bleibt zuletzt meist alles und nichts, wie es war. (p.442)

This provides a clear example of the way in which the narrative perspective shifts constantly throughout the text. Not only is the reader unable to define the limits of an >objective reality< in the novel, but it also becomes increasingly difficult to rely on a single

and consistent narrative perspective. As a result of this tendency to undermine its own narrative stance, the voice of the narrator also indicates the difficulty of constructing a stable language-based narrative. This not only affects the supposed >validity< of the novella as it relates to the main characters, but also casts a doubtful light on the stability of the wider fictional order. I shall return to a more detailed discussion of the narrator's rôle and manipulation of language in the novel in a later chapter.

When Charlotte attempts to pacify Ottilie after Eduard's departure the reader also finds the following scepticism as to the power of language to produce any consolation:

...und ob sie [Charlottel] gleich wohl wußte, daß man mit Worten nicht viel gegen eine entschiedene Leidenschaft zu wirken vermag, so kannte sie doch die Macht der Besonnenheit, des Bewußtseins, und sie brachte daher manches zwischen sich und Ottilien zur Sprache. (p.347)

It appears that language itself can do little to change Ottilie's emotional state. In this passage, however, an important link is made between language and consciousness, namely »die Macht der Besonnenheit, des Bewußtseins«. In this context, Charlotte's ability to avail herself of language is associated with a clarity of selfhood and rationality. Interestingly, a similar reference to Charlotte's ability to overcome inner conflict through a consciousness of self is made at an earlier point in the text. After deciding to renounce the Hauptmann, Charlotte attempts to achieve an inner balance:

Ihr kam bei diesen Widersprüchen ihr tüchtiger und durchs Leben mannigfaltig geübter Charakter zu Hülfe. Immer gewohnt, sich ihrer selbst bewußt zu sein, sich selbst zu gebieten, ward es ihr auch

jetzt nicht schwer, durch ernste Betrachtung sich dem erwünschten Gleichgewichte zu nähern... (p.326)

It is important to keep in mind that Charlotte achieves a state of supposed inner balance not only through awareness of her own self and personality, but also because of her supposed ability to manipulate language according to her own will. In this instance, a clear definition of the rôle of the speaker and the ability to >manipulate< words is seen as a central feature of self-awareness.

Certain characters, such as Charlotte, become conscious of their own self through language. This gives a further indication of the change in attitude from 17th to 18th century ideas concerning the nature of the self. In contrast to the Lockean concept of the self as a conglomeration of sense-patterns, we find here an image of individual selfhood in terms of the conscious use and interpretation of language. As is the case with virtually all relations in this text, however, the link between language and the self in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* is presented to the reader from a double perspective. In the first instance, the relationship of the self to language further indicates the way in which language functions as a mirror in which the characters may display and explore their narcissistic tendencies. The experience of self-awareness through language is not restricted to Charlotte alone. Instead, we also find that the Hauptmann is described by the narrator as possessing a similar clarity of view concerning his own life and position. In his written communication to Charlotte, his language betrays the following characteristics: »Soviel Deutlichkeit über sich selbst, soviel Klarheit über seinen eigenen Zustand, über den Zustand seiner Freunde gab eine

heitere und fröhliche Aussicht« (p.258). Eduard also believes that he gains a certain insight into his own personality through language. Although it often seems impossible to alter the actual structure of events by effecting changes in discourse, Eduard is convinced he achieves a new sense of self-awareness. In one of his discussions with Mittler he expresses this in the following words:

Freilich...hilft das Hin- und Widerdenken, das Hin- und Widerreden zu nichts; doch unter diesem Reden bin ich mich selbst erst gewahr worden, habe ich erst entschieden gefühlt, wozu ich mich entschließen sollte, wozu ich entschlossen bin. Ich sehe mein gegenwärtiges, mein zukünftiges Leben vor mir; nur zwischen Elend und Genuß habe ich zu wählen. (p.356)

In the second instance, however, a contradictory element in these supposed moments of self-awareness through language becomes visible as a result of the questionable nature of language itself. For there remains the irony that Eduard does not actually arrive at any accurate evaluation of his behaviour in the course of the action until the final stage of the narrative when he sees his whole existence as »imitation«. A further problem is apparent in this complex, namely: if language has constantly proved to be an unstable area in which to construct any form of order, how then can it be used as an accurate and stable medium from which to construct or gain insight into the self? In an early part of the novel, Charlotte draws attention to the dangers inherent in presupposing a clarity and consciousness of self. In a discussion with Eduard concerning whether or not an invitation should be extended to the Hauptmann, she explains this in the following terms:

Das Bewußtsein, mein Liebster...ist keine hinlängliche Waffe, ja manchmal eine gefährliche für den, der sie führt; und aus diesem allen tritt wenigstens soviel hervor, daß wir uns ja nicht

übereilen sollen. Gönnen mir noch einige Tage, entscheide nicht! (p.248)

Ironically, however, Charlotte does not take notice of her own warning and instead imagines that she enjoys self-awareness through language, as does Eduard at a later stage of the novel. The main reason this irony persists and has to be accepted is that the novel ultimately demands of fictional characters a degree of insight into the fictionality of their own world that realistic narrative simply does not permit. For such insight undermines the conventions of fiction itself in a way that traditionally produces the absurdity and game-playing of the metafictional genre from *Tristram Shandy* to the prose of Samuel Beckett. This single work of Goethe's is akin to virtually all of Kleist's narratives in insisting that the irony of a text that is metafictional to such an extreme be tragic rather than comic.

Within this ironic framework, the ambiguous referential field of language and the plurality of world-views engender a fundamental inability to define the nature of the self for success in this world mean, in effect, a fictional figure's transcending the bounds of fiction. Perhaps nowhere is this more clearly indicated than in the case of Otilie. Not only is she the only character to experience moments of alienation and dissolution of the self, but she also finds difficulty in defining her own relationship to language and eventually withdraws from spoken communication completely. As I have indicated in an earlier section, Otilie is also the focal point of a number of different models of the Real, so that any attempt on her part to create a mature, individual self in the sense of the Enlightenment ideal of »Mündigkeit«

is made even more difficult. I shall discuss Otilie's position in this complex of language and the self in the next section of this chapter.

Throughout the novel, a number of different courses are open to the characters faced with the difficulty of dealing with the unstable order of language. There is the possibility of tenaciously expounding the validity of a particular discourse, as does Mittler; there exists the alternative of silence, eventually chosen by Otilie; the Gehülfe attempts to create an ideal fusion of selfhood and language through education; or it is even possible to go beyond the boundaries of language and attempt to define ideal models of experience in images. Before dealing with the construction of patterns of >reality< through images let us take a short look at the rôle language plays in the programme of education advocated by the Gehülfe.

It is the aim of the Gehülfe to train boys to become »Diener« and girls to assume multiple functions »als Liebende, als Braut, als Frau, Hausfrau und Mutter« (p.409). As Friedrich Kittler has pointed out, these two rôles characterise the cultural and social system which developed in Germany in the early 1800's: »In ihrem Doppelsinn als Darstellung und Deckbild, als Offenbarung und Geheimnis des Geschlechterunterschieds begründet die Zweiheit von Beamten- und Mutterschaft das Machtsystem der Goethezeit«¹⁵ Central to the Gehülfe's pedagogy is the rôle of discussion between teacher and pupil. The Gehülfe explains the nature of this »Hin- und Widerreden« in the following terms:

Die Antworten auf Ihre Fragen mögen noch so ungehörig sein, mögen noch so sehr ins Weite gehen, wenn nur sodann Ihre Gegenfrage Geist und Sinn wieder hereinwärts zieht, wenn Sie sich nicht von Ihrem Standpunkte verrücken lassen, so müssen die Kinder zuletzt denken, begreifen, sich überzeugen, nur von dem, was und wie es der Lehrende will. (p.408)

Although the Gehülfe appears to advocate free discussion, he stresses the importance of guiding the pupils through language into a position from which they will accept the point of view of the teacher. In this sense, education functions as an initiation into social discourse. The pupils are allocated rôles within the social structure through language, either as »Diener« or »Mütter«, and are considered to have reached the height of their education when they have accepted a self constructed form from this particular model of language, or as Kittler puts it: »Der Diskurs nach den Regeln von 1800 ist ihr Element«. ¹⁶ The Gehülfe accepts this ideal form of social discourse as the model on which to base the construction of society. In *L'ordre du discours* Foucault clearly indicates the way in which language functions in such a programme of education:

Qu'est-ce, après tout, qu'un système d'enseignement, sinon une ritualisation de la parole; sinon une qualification et une fixation des rôles pour les sujets parlants; sinon la constitution d'un groupe doctrinal au moins diffus; sinon une distribution et une appropriation du discours avec ses pouvoirs et ses savoirs? [...] Est-ce que le système judiciaire, est-ce que le système institutionnel de la médecine eux aussi, sous certains de leurs aspects au moins, ne constituent de pareils systèmes d'assujettissements du discours? ¹⁷

Following this model outlined by Foucault, I would suggest that the function of language in the programme of education outlined by the Gehülfe consists in initiating children into a ritualised social discourse and thus allocating them rôles as speakers in the framework of

society. Like Mittler, the Gehülfe is able to retain this model as an ideal and does not succumb to the scepticism concerning language which affects the other characters. In this respect, both Mittler and the Gehülfe make an arbitrary, if quite conventional, choice concerning a suitable model on which to base social relations.

This rôle of language in a programme of social education was also a point of contention in many discussions on language during the Enlightenment. Once again the relationship between language and »Vernunft« appears to be a central element of these debates. Lichtenberg, for example, suggests: »Je mehr man in einer Sprache durch Vernunft unterscheiden lernt, desto schwerer wird einem das Sprechen derselben. Im Fertigsprechen ist viel Instinktmäßiges, durch Vernunft läßt es sich nicht erreichen.«¹⁸ The central rôle of language in human development is questioned in even stronger terms by Montesquieu when he suggests the following experiment:

Un prince pourroit faire une belle expérience. Nourrir trois ou quatre enfants comme des bêtes, avec des chèvres ou des nourrices sourdes et muettes. Ils se feroient une langue. Examiner cette langue. Voir la nature en elle-même, et dégagée des préjugés de l'éducation; savoir d'eux, après leur instruction, ce qu'ils auroient pensé; exercer leur esprit, en leur donnant toutes les choses nécessaires pour inventer; enfin, en faire l'histoire.¹⁹

These two discussions of language and individual development question the traditional rôle of language as a means by which to integrate the individual into a particular social model. Instead, both Lichtenberg and Montesquieu consider the possibility of a new relationship of the speaker towards language which is free of social convention. These views may be seen to echo the writings of Rousseau, Condillac and Herder which

focus on the >irrational< aspect of language and its primary basis in the communication of animals.

In *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, the function of language in the pedagogy of the Gehülfe forms a complete opposition to this notion, for in it language is precisely the area in which social conventions and the ideals of Reason are imparted to the individual. In the light of the general instability of language throughout the novel, however, this would seem to be an uncertain basis for the allocation of social rôles and for the creation of world-views. As I mentioned above, this means of social education through language implies the arbitrary choice of a world-model by the Gehülfe. Events in the novel indicate that this is the only way in which to endow a particular model of experience with the title >objective reality<. It is precisely this step, however, that is constantly put into question by the competition of world-models created by other characters.

One of Goethe's comments in the *Maximen und Reflexionen*, »Wort und Bild sind Korrelate, die sich immerfort suchen...« (H.A. XII, p.493), points out one of the central characteristics of the characters' use of language in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*. At various stages in the novel, attempts are made to fuse a word with a corresponding visual image. This may be seen in terms of an effort to create a stable field of non-ambiguous meaning by removing signs from the instability of a purely linguistic realm. In this context, the image acts as a guarantee for the chosen referential point of a particular word. As I shall show, however,

this arbitrary fusion of word and image often achieves little towards defining stable and non-ambiguous meaning.

The characters often attempt to affirm and give permanence to particular actions or discourses by formulating them in terms of images. I would agree with David Wellbery, therefore, that: »Die bloße Sprache beläßt nämlich die Elemente in ihrem Totsein; erst im Bild nehmen sie >ein ewiges Leben< an«. ²⁰ This tendency is evident from the opening pages of the novel. When Eduard meets Charlotte in the »Mooshütte«, we see the way in which nature is transformed into a series of images by the characters:

An der Türe empfing Charlotte ihren Gemahl und ließ ihn dergestalt niedersitzen, daß er durch Tür und Fenster die verschiedenen Bilder, welche die Landschaft gleichsam im Rahmen zeigten, auf einen Blick übersehen konnte. (p.243)

In a similar sense, Eduard believes he comes to know his own property only when it is presented to him in the form of images on paper: »Er glaubte sie [seine Besitzungen] jetzt erst kennenzulernen, sie schienen ihm jetzt erst recht zu gehören« (p.261). Passages such as these indicate a fundamental inner uncertainty on the part of the main characters as to the nature and validity of their own experience. Language is, conventionally, the most immediate means of attaining certainty or clarity through articulation of feelings. But, whereas language is an imperfect instrument and recognised as such from the beginning of the novel, the fixed, visual image seems to hold out a final hope of verifying what is most elusive in one's own experience.

There is the possibility of »possessing« it in this form as one would any other piece of property.

It is often implied within the text that the emphasis placed on various images can lead to a devaluation of actual events or phenomena. I illustrated this in an earlier chapter when dealing with Otilie's notion of achieving intimacy with the image of a person («mit einem geliebten Bilde»). This is evidenced in another part of the novel when both Charlotte and Otilie describe the pleasures of travelling through the world as image. When the English Lord comments on the pictures from his numerous voyages, both Charlotte and Otilie experience his travels vicariously through these images:

Sie freuten sich, hier in ihrer Einsamkeit die Welt so bequem zu durchreisen, Ufer und Häfen, Berge, Seen und Flüsse, Städte, Kastelle und manches andre Lokal, das in der Geschichte einen Namen hat, vor sich vorbeiziehen zu sehen. (p.430)

Once again, the status of both object and actual human experience is reduced in favour of a particular image. In this respect, the transformation of certain phenomena into images corresponds to the process of myth-making in society, which is described by Roland Barthes in terms of a transformation of culture into nature. Paradoxically, Barthes' description of 20th century bourgeois ideology illustrates the way in which the characters in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* fuse nature and culture:

...il est l'idéologie bourgeoise même, le mouvement par lequel la bourgeoisie transforme la réalité du monde en image du monde, l'Histoire en Nature...le passage du réel à l'idéologique se définit comme le passage d'une *anti-physis* à une *pseudo-physis*. Et c'est ici qu'on trouve le mythe.²¹

It is precisely this attempt to transform culture into a natural order that characterises various actions in the opening scenes of the novel. The characters regulate nature according to their own desires, yet attempt to endow their creation with an aura of a natural appearance. This is not only seen in the tendency to transform nature into various images, but is also illustrated both in Charlotte's rearrangement of the headstones in the cemetery and in a later description of the »Mooshütte«:

Als sie die Mooshütte erreichten, fanden sie solche auf das lustigste ausgeschmückt, zwar nur mit künstlichen Blumen und Wintergrün, doch darunter so schöne Büschel natürlichen Weizens und anderer Feld- und Baumfrüchte angebracht, daß sie dem Kunstsinn der Anordnenden zur Ehre gereichten. (p.258)

That this confusion of nature and artificiality remained an important question in Goethe's writing is indicated in the *Novelle*, which was completed in 1828. The above extract from *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* is echoed in the description of the countryside: »...hierauf nun steht gemauert ein Turm, doch niemand wüßte zu sagen, wo die Natur aufhört, Kunst und Handwerk aber anfangen« (H.A. VI, p.493).

By creating a model of >reality< through the construction of a series of images, the characters seek to avoid the apparently unstable medium of language and believe they have found a means by which to construct a more stable world-view. Hence, it is also important for them to remove images which appear to threaten certain discourses. This is seen quite clearly in Eduard's request of Ottilie that she remove from her neck the locket containing a portrait of her father. The characters' belief that models of >reality< may be stabilised through a series of

images is, however, constantly thrown into question by other events in the novel. As was evident in the construction of world-views through language, the interpretation of images in the same process is not immune to the problem of ambiguity. That the construction of world-models through images follows the same pattern as outlined earlier in the realm of language is illustrated in the last scene of the »lebende Bilder«. In the representation of Madonna and Child, the architect elevates Otilie to the rôle of the ideal mother: »Der junge Mann hatte sie in seinem Sinne zur Mutter Gottes erhoben, und wenn sie es abschlug, so war bei ihm keine Frage, daß das Unternehmen fallen müsse« (p.403). As the scene unfolds, it becomes evident that not only the architect, but also the audience and the narrative voice share this vision of Otilie:

Das Bild, das sich ihr [Charlotten] vorstellte, war so oft in der Welt wiederholt, daß man kaum einen neuen Eindruck davon erwarten sollte. Aber hier hatte die Wirklichkeit als Bild ihre besonderen Vorzüge. [...] Physisch geblendet, geistig überrascht, schien das umgebende Volk sich eben bewegt zu haben, um die getroffenen Augen wegzuwenden, neugierig erfreut wieder hinzublinsen und mehr Verwunderung und Lust als Bewunderung und Verehrung anzuzeigen... [...] Und wer beschreibt auch die Miene der neugeschaffenen Himmelskönigin. Die reinste Demut, das liebenswürdigste Gefühl von Bescheidenheit bei einer großen, unverdient erhaltenen Ehre, einem unbegreiflich unermeßlichen Glück bildete sich in ihren Zügen... (pp.403-4)

In the instant of perceiving Otilie as an image of the ideal mother, both the audience and the narrative perspective unite in their interpretation of her. In this respect, Otilie is transformed into a seemingly non-ambiguous >sign< and is read accordingly by the other characters. This confirmation of a particular image by the group leads to the construction of a shared model of >reality<. As David Wellbery correctly points out: »Nicht als empirisch gegebene Kombination von

körperlichen und symbolischen Werten ist die Frau begehrenswert, sondern nur als Bild - und zwar als Bild der idealen Mutter«. ²²

Although this union of perspectives may appear to construct a particular image of >reality<, the model itself does not last throughout the entire narrative. The apparent cohesion of the various perspectives is first of all disrupted by Otilie herself. Immediately following this description of the »ideal mother«, Otilie undergoes a moment of self-alienation. Confronted by the Gehülfe, she perceives an image of herself in a totally different model of experience represented by her earlier life at the Pension. Thus, her former self-image conflicts with the rôle she has just been forced to assume and the apparently unified referential field of the signifier is disrupted. As is the case with language, a non-ambiguous referential power of the image is seen in terms of a utopian, if not impossible feature of a construction of >reality<.

This model of the ideal mother represented by Otilie is gradually discredited in the text. This process may be seen to culminate in the scene during which Otto is drowned. As has been pointed out by other critics, Otilie's actual experience totally contradicts the model of the ideal mother when she presses the dead child to her breast²³: »...zum erstenmal drückt sie ein Lebendiges an ihre reine nackte Brust, ach! und kein Lebendiges. Die kalten Glieder des unglücklichen Geschöpfs verkälten ihren Busen bis ins innerste Herz« (p.457). Following this episode the Hauptmann expresses the hope that the future union of Eduard and Otilie may lead to the birth of another child, thus allowing

Ottillie the opportunity to replace the child of which she has now deprived Eduard. Her withdrawal from communication and her ultimate death, however, mark the final collapse of this particular image.

Throughout the text, neither language nor images offer a completely stable basis from which to construct a model of >reality<. This is due in both cases to the way in which the referential field of the signifier is characterised by a high degree of ambiguity. After one image of >valid< experience dissolves, it is replaced by another different model and so on. For this reason at the end of the novel, Ottillie is transformed from the »ideal mother« into the image of a saint. This constant evolution of different models of >reality< proceeds by means of various metaphoric and metonymic substitutions made by both the characters and the narrative voice. I propose to examine the rôle of such substitutions in this process in the following section and then to view the way in which Ottillie assumes a central position in the succession of world-views throughout the novel.

III *Metaphor and Metonymy: Naming >Reality<.*

Both the creation of models of >reality< and visions of >valid< experience occur through acts of metaphoric or metonymic substitution. In the context of the Narcissus-theme, these processes revolve around the displacement of a certain structure by a reflection of the characters' own image. In other words: the characters substitute empiric occurrences for their own preferred vision of >reality<. In the creation of order based on metaphor, the characters may be seen to effect a direct substitution of one object for another. This is evident, for example, in Eduard's transformation of certain signs into guarantees of his relationship with Otilie or in his attempt to have himself replaced by the Hauptmann in the marriage to Charlotte. The contrasting use of metonymy may be seen in terms of a chain of substitutions in which an object or character is made to fulfil a number of rôles. In contrast to metaphor, this form of substitution may be reversed or modified by the subject. This process is illustrated by the way in which Otilie's personality is displaced by a number of different images in other characters' models of the Real. Lacan indicates the distinction between these two forms of substitution when he describes metonymy as »la connexion du signifiant au signifiant« and metaphor as »la substitution du signifiant au signifiant«.²⁴ The >development< of Otilie's character in the novel illustrates the intersection of these two forms of substitution. In the first instance, she must assume a series of different rôles allocated to her by the other characters; finally,

however, an irrevocable metaphoric substitution of her personality for the image of a saint is enforced by the narrative perspective in the final scene of the novel. In this section I propose to examine the effects that these two processes have on the characters' attitude towards language and how this relates to the consciousness of self.

In a preliminary sketch of the *Farbenlehre* Goethe raises the point that language itself cannot be viewed as a totally stable medium which gives us a direct insight into the nature of all phenomena.²⁵ Instead, language can only give a rough approximation of the self and that which exists outside consciousness. In its final version, this idea is expressed in the following words:

Man bedenkt niemals genug, daß eine Sprache eigentlich nur symbolisch, nur bildlich sei und die Gegenstände niemals unmittelbar, sondern nur im Widerscheine ausdrücke. (H.A. XIII, p.491)

Interesting in this extract is the notion that in attempting to define the nature of certain things, language functions through images and is ultimately unable to provide the speaker with a direct perception of phenomena. Language itself can only provide the speaker with a type of reflection («Widerschein») of the object under observation. In this respect, human consciousness cannot stand in direct relation to that which it perceives, for the individual becomes alienated from the observed when the latter is transformed into an object of language. This idea is also found in certain extracts from *Makariens Archiv* in the *Wanderjahre*. Here, the individual is faced with the task of uniting empiric experience with the corresponding language structure:

Wir haben das unabweichliche, täglich zu erneuernde, grundernstliche Bestreben: das Wort mit dem Empfundenen, Geschauten, Gedachten, Erfahrenen, Imaginierten, Vernünftigen möglichst unmittelbar zusammentreffend zu erfassen.

Jeder prüfe sich, und er wird finden, daß dies viel schwerer sei, als man denken möchte; denn leider sind dem Menschen die Worte gewöhnlich Surrogate; er denkt und weiß es meistens besser, als er sich ausspricht. (H.A. VIII, p.469)

Words, therefore, are viewed as »surrogates« for empiric experience and are thus considered to be metaphoric or metonymic representations of actual sensations or experiences. Interestingly, this idea that the speaker can never come into direct contact with an object through language is also expressed by Voltaire in his *Dictionnaire Philosophique*. In his discussion of language, Voltaire expresses a view almost identical to the notion expounded by Goethe in the extract from the *Farbenlehre* quoted above. Once again, the idea that words are images of sensations which exclude the possibility of direct perception, forms a central element of the argument:

Tous les mots, dans toutes les langues possibles, sont nécessairement l'image des sensations. Les hommes n'ont pu jamais exprimer que ce qu'ils sentaient. Ainsi tout est devenu métaphore; partout on éclaire l'âme, le cœur brûle, l'esprit voit, il compose, il unit, il divise, il s'égaré, il se recueille, il se dissipe.²⁶

Despite this apparent alienation from phenomena, the characters in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* attempt to establish a direct relation between the self and that which exists outside consciousness by manipulating language in certain ways. In so doing, they frequently overlook the central rôle of metaphor and metonymy in their constructions of >reality<. In the discussion of the »Gleichnisrede«, for example, the characters use »Kunstwörter« and a »Zeichensprache« in an attempt to

describe the chemical reactions. This provides a good example of the way in which language is confined to a realm of metaphor in the manner outlined by Voltaire. Through the use of various forms of language, Eduard and the Hauptmann attempt to explain in exact terms the sequence of chemical reactions. It becomes evident, however, that even the reduction of language to mere letters does not provide an escape from the confinement of language in symbolic images. The letters themselves describe the chemical reactions and are then used to describe the relationships of the four main characters.

Instead of providing a direct insight into the chemical processes, the various forms of language take the characters further away from the original topic and make the subject of the discussion language itself. In this way, the »Gleichnisrede« proceeds by way of a series of images in which one set of variables is substituted for another. In this respect the analogies in the »Gleichnisrede« are created by means of metonymic substitutions - chemical reactions → Charlotte's relatives → interpersonal relations → language - in which finally the »Zeichensprache« proposes a commentary concerning the use of its own »Kunstwörter«. Ultimately, the reader of the text is uncertain as to the primary object of the »Gleichnisrede«. In addition to this, the extent to which language models can be viewed as stable configurations becomes unclear. For example, are the chemical reactions representative of interpersonal relations or vice versa? To what extent do the relationships in the novel form parallels with these chemical reactions? and so on. The novel offers three different perspectives on the construction of order through metaphoric or metonymic substitution:

i) The inadequacy of language to place the speaker in direct relation to the object of reference and the resulting definition of the primary object in terms of symbols (ie. »Gleichnisrede«).

ii) The attempt on the part of the characters to validate a discourse by displacing words by images, thus locating its guarantees in certain visual signs (writing, »lebende Bilder« etc.)

iii) The rejection of language in preference of silence (Ottillie's ultimate course of action).

In all of these cases, the characters do not show any indication of being able to overcome the primary alienation from external phenomena engendered by perception through language.

The »Gleichnisrede« has provided a good example of the way in which the interpretation of phenomena is often achieved by a series of substitutions based on the characters' self-reflection. In the *Wanderjahre* this use of metaphoric or metonymic substitutions is seen as being allied with the attempt to overcome difficulties of interpretation. In this sense, Angela states: »Lassen Sie mich nun zuvörderst gleichnisweise reden! Bei schwer begreiflichen Dingen tut man wohl, sich auf diese Weise zu helfen« (H.A. VIII, p.126). A similar process may be seen in the use of metaphor in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, for here the characters displace certain objects by a reflection of their own images in an attempt to construct world-models in assimilable, anthropocentric terms.

The second perspective on the process of substitution indicates the way in which the characters attempt to validate a particular discourse by transforming it into a corresponding visual image. This is evidenced by Eduard's confirmation of his love for Ottilie in the written word (writing/reading) and the interpretation of certain non-linguistic signs. The desire to create a discourse of love based on Platonic union is first considered in definite terms by Eduard when the similarity between his and Ottilie's handwriting becomes apparent. As usual, Eduard overlooks the way in which Ottilie renounces her own individuality by assuming his writing style. In contrast to the spoken word, the visual representation of language appears to display the property of duration. For this reason it accommodates the model of eternity inherent in the Platonic ideal and is particularly suited to act as a confirmation of Eduard's relationship with Ottilie. We find further evidence of this in those scenes when Eduard reads aloud from a book or when the two characters exchange letters. In many cases in the novel, the transformation of language into its written form is held by the characters to have greater stability and more permanence than verbal communication. After leaving the castle, Eduard comments in a discussion with Mittler that he intends to confirm his relationship with Ottilie through an act of writing: »Bald unterschreiben wir einen Kontrakt; da ist ihre Hand und die meinige, ihr Name und der meinige; beide löschen einander aus, beide verschlingen sich« (p.354).

As has been pointed out in many studies, a metaphor, owing to the process of substitution it involves, implies in itself the absence of a particular object.²⁷ For this reason, we find in the novel that certain

characters perceive a sense of loss in models of supposed >valid< experience that are constructed from metaphors. In some instances, for example, the voice of the speaker is usurped by a particular image. This is the case when we first see Eduard reading aloud from a book. Here, the identity of the speaker is ultimately considered to be subordinate to the written word. Eduard explains this as follows:

Wenn ich jemand vorlese, ist es denn nicht, als wenn ich ihm mündlich etwas vortrüge? Das Geschriebene, das Gedruckte tritt an die Stelle meines eigenen Sinnes, meines eigenen Herzens... (p.269)

In giving preference to a written model of language the speaker's voice is temporarily displaced by the written word. Eduard's comment quoted above serves as an introduction to the effects that metaphoric substitution have on the subject at later points in the text. The usurpation of a character's voice and identity is indicated quite clearly during the scene when Eduard recognises that Otilie's handwriting has become identical to his own. During this scene Otilie does not speak; rather, a visual image of language in the form of writing takes the place of her voice and acts as a guarantee of her affection for Eduard. Furthermore, it is Eduard who makes Otilie's declaration of love for her in spoken form.

I have indicated that Otilie plays a different rôle in a number of characters' world-views. This means that she is the point of convergence of several different and often conflicting discourses. Her entry into the narrative is prepared by letters from the Gehülfe and the Vorsteherin, in which her character and behaviour at the Pension are described; similarly, before her appearance she is drawn into the

scientific discourse of the »Gleichnisrede« and is used by Eduard and the Hauptmann to form the missing element in the description of interpersonal relations; both Charlotte and Mittler attempt to initiate her into social and religious discourses by teaching her the rules of the social code; Eduard allocates her a central rôle in the model of Platonic union; within the wider social dimension of the novel, she is given the various roles of »ideal mother«, »Erzieherin« and finally that of a saint. Throughout the novel, the characters' views of Ottilie appear to be stronger than the view she has of herself. For this reason, a type of negative competition takes place between the metonymic displacement of images that other characters have of her and the personality that she attempts to develop as an individual. The tensions between these two narcissistic tendencies form the >development< of Ottilie's character in the course of the text.

In his essay on >der doppelte Ehebruch durch Phantasie<, Horst Turk points out the way in which Ottilie is forced to assume a number of different rôles throughout the novel and suggests: »...Ottilie existiert nur in der Imagination anderer«. ²⁸ Turk then asserts that this form of existence as image is destroyed during the scene in which Otto is drowned. At this point, Ottilie is said to break with the various images that other characters have of her and instead acts for the first time as an individual:

Die Erweckung Ottilies zur >Tat< der Kindestötung bedeutet die Abnabelung des Geschöpfs vom Wort des Dichters. Durch die Tat widerlegt Ottilie wirklich und wesentlich das Bild, das sie vorstellt, und das die Sprache, wenn sie es sagt, *nur* bedeutet. Erst nach ihrer Tat kann Ottilie als Bild der Anschauung, das durch sich selbst, nicht durch die Sprache ist, an die Stelle der überlieferten Sprachsymbole treten. ²⁹

Although Turk's interpretation does illustrate the way in which Otilie is made to conform to certain images, I cannot agree with his interpretation in full. In the first instance, I would dispute the notion that Otilie undergoes an »Erweckung zur Tat« when the child drowns. If the death of Otto were the result of a pre-meditated murder plan, the idea of an »Erweckung« might perhaps be more convincing. Instead, Otto's death is the result of an accident in which Otilie cannot be said to assume an active rôle. Moreover, in the development of the narrative, this supposed »awakening« does not lead to the birth of Otilie's autonomy as suggested by Turk. By asserting that an emancipation from the language of the narrator and the images of her created by the other characters occurs after this scene, Turk totally overlooks Otilie's involuntary transformation into a saint in the final scene of the novel. Otilie's elevation to sainthood is a transformation of her character through language as are all the other images of her that have been created in the course of the novel. As I mentioned above, this final image of Otilie marks the ultimate metaphoric displacement of her person by an image preferred by other characters. In opposition to Turk, I would suggest, therefore, that although Otilie attempts to withdraw from the realm of language by lapsing into total silence in the final stages of the novel, ultimately she remains locked within the orders of >reality< created by the use of language on the part of both the characters and the narrator.

Unfortunately for Otilie, the various images imposed on her come into conflict with each other in the course of the novel. The social code imparted to her by Charlotte stands in opposition to the model of

Platonic union expounded by Eduard. Equally so, her rôle as »ideal mother« is opposed by her inability either to save Otto or to replace him by a child of her own. Throughout the text, Ottilie's personality is made the object of various metonymic substitutions. As I illustrated in Chapter One, this may be seen as a cruel parody of the Enlightenment ideal of »Selbstverwirklichung«, for each metonymic substitution takes her one step further away from realising any fully autonomous individuality. Charlotte's early attempt to present Ottilie as a prospective wife for Eduard and her final elevation to the status of saint mark the two illusory extremes of this process. This metonymic progression is finally broken off when the narrative perspective initiates a final metaphoric substitution of Ottilie's personality for the image of a saint. It is precisely the pressure of the various competing discourses that leads to Ottilie's death at the end of the novel. In the letter she writes to her »friends« explaining her withdrawal from their company and society in general, she gives an indication of her position:

Ich bin aus meiner Bahn geschritten, und ich soll nicht wieder hinein. Ein feindseliger Dämon, der Macht über mich gewonnen, scheint mich von außen zu hindern, hätte ich mich auch mit mir selbst wieder zur Einigkeit gefunden. [...] Duldet mich in eurer Gegenwart, erfreut mich durch eure Liebe, belehrt mich durch eure Unterhaltung; aber mein Innres überläßt mir selbst! (pp.476-77)

The nature of the »feindseliger Dämon« has been a point of contention amongst critics since the novel's first appearance.³⁰ Often this demon has been interpreted in conjunction with Ottilie's relationship to Eduard. Hillis Miller, for example, suggests: »That ›malignant spirit‹ is, the reader knows, Ottilie's metaphysical

personification of her projection of herself into Eduard, reflex of his Narcissistic love for her». ³¹ In other cases Ottilie's and Eduard's love for one another has been termed »demonic« or Eduard himself has sometimes been described in these terms. ³² In contrast to these approaches to the problem, I would suggest that it is the successive convergence of the various discourses on Ottilie that assumes for her the function of a »feindseliger Dämon«. It is precisely this superimposition of others' world-views upon her that prevents her from perceiving and following her own desired »Bahn«, and thus makes it impossible for her to achieve self-unity. Important in Ottilie's comment is the idea that the power of this demon is imposed on her »from outside« (»...scheint mich von außen zu hindern«). This forms another parallel to the imposition of various external discourses on her, for the pressure to take on a number of different rôles within conflicting models of >reality< is not generated by Ottilie herself, but rather results from the discourses of other characters. Her final plea - »mein Innres überläßt mir selbst!« -, is precisely the opportunity that has been denied her by the other characters throughout the entire novel, just as they have installed her external image in the *tableaux* of their own devising.

In his analysis of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* Hillis Miller interprets Ottilie's rôle in the novel in the following manner:

Ottilie is neither the literal nor the figurative, or rather she is an impossible embodiment of both. She is an incarnation of the figure called catachresis...As the incarnation of the literal, Ottilie cannot enter into relations, not even relations with herself. She is the literal in the paradoxical sense of being the letters, the senseless matter, marks or sticks, of which written language is made, and at the same time she is the absence of any

ground in matter or beneath it for the meaning which is spread over matter by a process of substitution and sideways superficial transfer.³³

I cannot agree with this interpretation of Otilie as the »incarnation of the literal«. This view presupposes that her tendency towards silence, even at the beginning of the novel, makes her not »properly« nameable and also denies her the possibility of entering into a >relationship< to her own self. I believe that this view overlooks the active rôles assumed by the other characters who attempt to integrate an image of Otilie into their own models of >reality<. In opposition to Hillis Miller, I would suggest that the greatest difficulties arise for Otilie because she is ascribed too many »names«. As I illustrated above, it is the pressure placed on her by other characters to assume a rôle in different paradigms of >reality< that forces her out of her own desired »Bahn«. In this sense it is not Otilie herself that dissolves the equation of the four main characters, as Hillis Miller suggests in his interpretation. Instead, the plurality of various conflicting models of >valid< experience lessens the credibility of each construction, with the result that no single image of >reality<, or of Otilie, has the chance to stand alone as >objective reality<. As the point of convergence of the various discourses, Otilie falls victim to the multiple world-models in which she is forced to play a part.

In an attempt to remove herself from the world-views of the other characters and to achieve unity with herself, Otilie rejects communication through language and refuses nourishment. Although she ceases to communicate orally, she does not withdraw completely from

communication. As indicated above, her preference for transforming language into a visual image is still firmly intact in the latter stages of the novel and is indicated by the letter to her friends. Ottilie still communicates with other characters through the written word and the »fast magische Anziehungskraft« between her and Eduard is still apparent. Not only are they automatically drawn together when in each other's presence, but the act of reading still functions as a representation of the Platonic model that has bound them together throughout the novel:

Es war, als wenn er [Eduard], so gut durch Fröhlichkeit als durch Gefühl, Ottiliens Erstarren wieder beleben, ihr Schweigen wieder auflösen wollte. Er setzte sich wie vormals, daß sie ihm ins Buch sehen konnte, ja er ward unruhig, zerstreut, wenn sie nicht hineinsah, wenn er nicht gewiß war, daß sie seinen Worten mit ihren Augen folgte. (p.479)

Despite her attempt to withdraw from the configuration of discourses that have exerted power over her own personal development, at the end of the novel Ottilie remains trapped in certain models of >reality< constructed by the characters and reinforced by the narrative perspective. It becomes evident that she is even denied the right to an individual death. Eduard is the first character who continues to ascribe Ottilie a rôle in his own preferred view of >reality<, for he refuses to admit that she is no longer amongst the living:

Wie er [Eduard] sich aus seiner Verzweiflung nur hervorheben und einigermaßen besinnen konnte, bestand er darauf, Ottilie sollte nicht aus dem Schlosse gebracht, sie sollte gewartet, gepflegt, als eine Lebende behandelt werden; denn sie sei nicht tot, sie könne nicht tot sein. (p.484)

When the characters finally stop treating Ottilie as a function in discourse, the narrative perspective takes over and continues this process itself. The image of Ottilie as a saint is then taken up by the other characters in the novel, and by most readers, with the result that, even after death, she remains purely a signifier in an ambiguous discourse. The »development« of Ottilie's character throughout the novel consists, therefore, in her integration into a sequence of world-models, with the result that the development of an individual self in the tradition of enlightened >Selbstbildung< is never achieved.

It is evident that both literal and symbolic manifestations of language form central elements in the characters' construction of >reality< in the novel. The processes of metaphoric and metonymic substitution inherent in these configurations, however, may be seen to result in a usurpation of the speaker's voice or in the disintegration of an individual personality. I have indicated the central rôle that Ottilie assumes in this process. It is now necessary to examine the effects that the construction of patterns of >reality< have on the behaviour of other characters in the novel and how this relates to the structure of the narrative as a whole.

NOTES

1. cf. Herder, »Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache«, Sämtliche Werke, Fünfter Band, ed. Bernhard Suphan, Berlin 1891, p.38 and p.40: »Nichts wird diesen Ursprung deutlicher entwickeln, als die Einwürfe der Gegner. Der gründlichste, der ausführlichste Vertheidiger des Göttlichen Ursprungs der Sprache [Süßmilch] wird eben weil er durch die Oberfläche drang, die nur die andern berühren, fast ein Vertheidiger des wahren Menschlichen Ursprungs. Er ist unmittelbar am Rande des Beweises stehen geblieben; und sein Haupteinwurf, blos etwas richtiger erklärt, wird Einwurf gegen ihn selbst, und Beweis von seinem Gegentheile, der Menschenmöglichkeit der Sprache. [...] Ich habe Süßmilchs Schlußart einen ewigen Kreisel genannt: denn ich kann ihn ja eben so wohl gegen ihn, als er gegen mich drehen: und das Ding kreiselt immer fort...«
2. Ibid., pp. 5-6.
3. Rousseau, Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité, Oeuvres complètes III, p.148; cf also: Condillac, »Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humains«, Oeuvres Complètes, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1947, p. 64: »...dans l'origine des langues, les hommes trouvant trop d'obstacles à imaginer de nouveaux mots, n'eurent, pendant long-temps, pour exprimer les sentimens de l'ame, que les signes naturels auxquels ils donnèrent le caractère des signes d'institution. Or, les cris naturels introduisent nécessairement l'usage des inflexions violentes, puisque différens sentimens ont pour signe le même son varié sur différens tons.«
4. Neumann, op.cit., p.44.

5. Other examples of these parallel reactions occur, for example, during the scene of the »Grundsteinlegung«: »Eduard und Ottilie wagten nicht, bei diesen Worten einander anzusehen, ob sie gleich nahe gegen einander über standen« (p.300); as their intimacy develops both Eduard and Ottilie believe they stand in a new relationship to their surroundings (p.320 and p.332); during the period of separation both characters employ »Einbildung« in an attempt to achieve closeness to each other (p.353 and p.423); in the closing scenes of the novel they both experience the tranquillity of union p.478: »Nur die nächste Nähe konnte sie beruhigen, aber auch völlig beruhigen, und diese Nähe war genug; nicht eines Blickes, nicht eines Wortes, keiner Gebärde, keiner Berührung bedurfte es, nur des reinen Zusammenseins.«

6. Niklas Luhmann, op.cit., p.163: »Wenn die Erfahrung der Inkommunikabilität dasjenige Moment ist, was für uns den Einsichtsgewinn des 18. Jahrhunderts zusammenfassen kann, ist sie jedenfalls nicht als Errungenschaft gefeiert und nicht in den Code passionierter Liebe aufgenommen worden. Bei allen Fortschritten in der Miterfassung der Sexualität, bei aller Favorisierung des Gefühls, bei allem Enthusiasmus der Innigkeit stagniert die Entwicklung eines Mediums für Intimbeziehungen im 18. Jahrhundert; oder sie nimmt zumindest wichtige anlaufende Veränderungen zunächst nicht auf.«

7. Ibid., p.157.

8. Rousseau, La nouvelle Héloïse, Oeuvres Complètes II, p. 560.

9. Voltaire, Dictionnaire Philosophique, Oeuvres Complètes, vol. 19, pp. 562-3.

10. Kleist, Sämtliche Werke und Briefe, ed. Helmut Sembdner, Hanser, München 1982, Band IV, p.626. cf. also: Anthony Stephens, » >Eine Träne auf den Brief<: Zum Status der Ausdrucksformen in Kleists

Erzählungen« in: Jahrbuch der deutschen Schillergesellschaft, 1984, pp.315-48.

11. Wellbery, op.cit., p. 296.
12. Novalis, Werke und Briefe, p. 323.
13. Hillis Miller, op.cit., p.13; cf. also p. 19: »There is, as the novel everywhere indicates, no such thing as a literal or *buchstäbliches* reading of signs. All reading is *bildlich* or figurative, a reading of signs made into *Kunstwörter*. Or rather, the only true literal reading is no reading, the blank silence and death-like sleep of Otilie.«
14. cf. J. Milfull, »The function of the Novelle >Die wunderlichen Nachbarskinder< in Goethe's *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*« in: German Life and Letters, October 1971, p.3: »The time of the novel is not the time of everyday life; the symbolic concentration of the action removes it from ordinary experience. It is in this sense only that I wish to suggest that the Novelle in fact represents an idealized past meeting between the Hauptmann and Charlotte, the possibility of an ideal union between them which did not come to pass«; A. Henkel, »Beim Wiederlesen von Goethes *Wahlverwandtschaften*« in: Jahrbuch des freien deutschen Hochstifts, 1985, p. 9: »Charlotte kennt offenbar das wirkliche Ende der Geschichte. Sie verläßt höchst bewegt den Raum. Der Erzähler suggeriert uns somit eine Prägung des Hauptmanns durch ein frühes Trauma.«
15. Friedrich Kittler, »Otilie Hauptmann« in: Goethes *Wahlverwandtschaften*, ed. N. Bolz, Hildesheim 1981, p. 262.
16. Ibid., p.263.
17. Michel Foucault, *L'ordre du discours*, Gallimard 1971, pp. 46-7.

18. Lichtenberg, Werke in einem Band, Aufbau-Verlag, Berlin/Weimar 1985, p. 51.
19. Montesquieu, Oeuvres Complètes I, p. 1213.
20. Wellbery, op. cit., p.304.
21. Roland Barthes, Mythologies, Seuil, Paris 1957, p. 228.
22. Wellbery, op.cit., p.247.
23. See for example: Kittler, op.cit., p.266; H. Turk, »Goethes Wahlverwandtschaften: >der doppelte Ehebruch durch Phantasie< « in: Urszenen, ed. F. Kittler and H. Turk, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt/M 1977, p. 221.
24. Lacan, op.cit., p. 515; cf. also: Maria Ruegg, »Metaphor and Metonymy: The Logic of Structuralist Rhetoric« in Glyph 6, 1979, pp.141-57.
25. See: Goethe, Werke, Weimar 1898, Band II, 5, »Paralipomena zur Farbenlehre«, LXXXIV, p.298: »Alle Erscheinungen sind unaussprechlich, denn die Sprache ist auch eine Erscheinung für sich, die nur ein Verhältnis zu den übrigen hat, aber sie nicht herstellen (identisch ausdrücken) kann.«
26. Voltaire, Dictionnaire Philosophique, Oeuvres Complètes, Vol. 19, p. 563.
27. For a general discussion on the nature and rôle of metaphor see: Theorie der Metapher, ed. Anselm Haverkamp, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1983; Metaphor: Robert Rogers, Metaphor: A Psychoanalytic View, University of California Press 1978; On Metaphor, ed. Sheldon Sacks, University of Chicago Press, 1981.

28. Turk, op.cit., p.221.
29. Ibid.
30. See for example: H. Reiss, *Goethes Romane*, Franke Verlag, Bern 1963, p. 174: »Eduard und Ottilie, die der Natur nahe stehen, sind von ihren dämonischen Kräften mehr gefährdet als Charlotte und der Hauptmann, bei denen Sitte und Verstand schließlich doch den Trieben immer wieder Einhalt bieten können«; Peter Ammann, *Schicksal und Liebe in Goethes Wahlverwandtschaften*, Franke Verlag, Bern 1962, p. 77f.
31. Hillis Miller, op.cit., p. 22.
32. See for example: Stöcklein, op.cit., p.32f: »In Eduard erhebt sich immer bestimmender ein zweites Wesen, aus dunklem Stoff gebildet, von dessen Sein, Tun, Planen er nichts weiß. Dieses zweite Wesen, nach Ottilie greifend, ist unglaublich geschickt und zäh in der Verfolgung seiner Pläne.«
33. Hillis Miller, op.cit., pp.19-20.

CHAPTER FOUR

INNOVATION AND REPETITION

A model is by definition that in which nothing has to be changed, that which works perfectly; whereas reality, as we see clearly, does not work and constantly falls to pieces; so we must force it, more or less roughly, to assume the form of the model.

- Italo Calvino (*Mr Palomar*)

I Incomplete action and models of >reality<.

I have examined the way in which pressure to assume a rôle in a number of different models of >reality< prevents Otilie from developing towards and realising the Enlightenment ideals of »Selbstbildung« or »Mündigkeit«. It is now necessary to consider the wider implications of this process for the portrayal of the other characters in the novel and for the structure of the work itself. I have indicated that the characters present and attempt to validate various opposing models of >reality< throughout the text. This process is based on establishing new world-views by disrupting the seemingly unified referential field of certain signs within the former discourse and then by interpreting them in a new manner. In this way, models of >reality< compete with and succeed each other throughout the narrative. As a result of this, human experience appears to be characterised by a flux of conflicting

patterns, each of which purports to structure the Real. The question arises: if no single paradigm of >reality< is endowed with absolute or even consistently dominant status in the text, how then can the characters successfully bring to a conclusion a preferred course of action that is based on one of these models? It is this question that I propose to address in the course of this section.

I believe that the last comment in Otilie's diary gives an insight into the position of the individual when attempting to contend with models of >reality< that are in rivalry with one another: »Man muß überall von vorn anfangen und möchte überall enden« (p.427). I would suggest that this comment is of central importance for an understanding of the characters' final condition in the novel. Not only does it give an insight into the way in which models of >reality< succeed each other throughout the narrative, but it also indicates the difficulty of bringing to a close a programme of action that is in accordance with a particular world-view. When a model loses its validity in the eyes of the speaker, and when the attempt is made to establish the supremacy of a new set of circumstances, the former model becomes virtually irrelevant to the character concerned. In other words: the multiplicity of world-views leads to the proposal of numerous different courses of action on the part of the characters; owing to the frequent replacement of these models, however, the characters' projects are never fully realised. This is indicated clearly by the number of actions undertaken by the characters that remain incomplete in the course of the novel. For example: Eduard's marriage to Charlotte, which is firmly based on the social model of sanctioned union, is interrupted by the development of

new sets of relationships and by Eduard's notion of the Platonic ideal; Eduard and Ottilie are ultimately unable to realise their love for each other in the social realm because their concept of »union« cannot prevail over the social model on which intimate relations are based; Charlotte's attempt to return to »den alten Zustand« remains abortive; Ottilie is unable to die the death she has chosen for herself because of her integration into a new model of >reality< and so on.

Although the characters are unable to bring their projects to a definite end, this should not imply that they do not envisage a goal when undertaking a particular action. On the contrary, future plans are constantly revised in an attempt to establish new sets of personal circumstances. Just as the attempt to »return« to a particular state implies projecting back to an arbitrary point of time in the past, so too any new course of action undertaken by the characters implies a fictionalised goal and the image of attaining an ideal condition in the future. Innovative alterations made to a particular model suggest, therefore, the placement of a goal in a subjectively chosen point of time. The text presents both a positive and negative perspective on this tendency to embark on new courses of action. Hence, the negative aspect of the tendency to >begin again< (»von vorn anfangen«) may be seen in the constant re-structuring of >reality< and the inability of the characters to bring any action to a conclusion. This does not become apparent to them until the end of the novel. In opposition to such negative insights stand the characters' positive attitudes towards new beginnings, which form the basis of their desire to effect changes in certain patterns of circumstances. It becomes evident that the

characters consciously attempt to begin new courses of action according to their own desires. Paradoxically, however, within the framework of the narrative this process is taken to the point where the completion of any action is made impossible. In order to illustrate fully this tendency in the novel, I shall firstly consider the positive aspect of this duality.

Goethe often pointed out in his works and letters that the desire to embark on new courses of action is a general characteristic of Enlightenment thought. One aspect of this complex is depicted in the *Lehrjahre*: »Mit welchem Interesse betrachtete er [Wilhelm] die Baumschulen und die Gebäude! Wie lebhaft sann er darauf, das Vernachlässigte wiederherzustellen und das Verfallene zu erneuern!« (H.A. VII, p.502). This desire is illustrated once again and mentioned in a more general context in the *Wanderjahre* as Lenardo comments, »...daß es die Eigenheit des Menschen sei, von vorn anfangen zu wollen« (H.A. VIII, p.142). This may be seen as a reflection of the general predilection of the Enlightenment for the ideal of regeneration and the desire to create new world-models by re-structuring pre-existing social, philosophical and religious views. As Cassirer has pointed out in his study *Die Philosophie der Aufklärung*: »Hier herrscht überall ein echt schöpferisches Grundgefühl; ein unbedingtes Vertrauen zur Weltgestaltung und Welterneuerung«. This view is also supported by Friedrich Sengle in his study on *Biedermeierzeit*. Referring to the Enlightenment ideal of regeneration he suggests the following:

Durch den Aufstieg einer neuen Schicht und durch das neue Vertrauen zur Vernunft ist das 18. Jahrhundert...heiter, tätig, progressiv.

Der Entwurf einer neuen Welt wird durch die Aufklärung mit Energie gefördert bis hin zur französischen Revolution.²

In an entry in the *Encyclopédie*, Diderot formulates the idea of »beginning again« in terms of a re-orientation of the individual's world-view. Instead of accepting a traditional outlook on existence, Diderot suggests that the philosopher should develop a new method of viewing ideas and phenomena:

Un vrai philosophe ne voit point par les yeux d'autrui, il ne se rend qu'à la conviction qui naît de l'évidence... Il y a sans doute infiniment plus de plaisir et plus d'honneur à se conduire par ses propres yeux que par ceux des autres...³

This Enlightenment ideal of the »new beginning« may be seen in a parodistic form in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* on both a social and individual level. In the first instance, the characters' desire to re-structure an old order is indicated by their attempts to build away from the castle, re-arrange the headstones in the cemetery or to impose a new design on the neighbouring village. In the realm of intimate relations the desire to »begin again« also acts as a means by which to overcome dissonances in the present and to re-structure relationships according to a preferred vision of intimacy. In this context, characters attempt to instigate a process of regeneration in an effort to dissolve the structure of the present and attain their ideal vision of >valid< experience in the future. As I have outlined in earlier chapters, this is seen quite clearly in their various attempts to manipulate time and language. It may be seen on a social level, when Mittler recasts the wording of the Ten Commandments, and, in a more intimate mode, in Eduard's attempt to create an individual discourse of love. As no single

model of >reality< retains absolute validity, however, the characters find themselves forced into a pattern of seemingly endless repetition. The rivalry or succession of world-views and the impossibility of endowing a single model of >reality< with absolute supremacy means that no new beginning can lead to the goal set by the characters. Thus, the desire to »begin again« subverts its own end and innovation decays into a series of repetitions.

Often the attempt of the individual to undertake a new programme of action is characterised by variations on an earlier experience or occurrence. One aspect of the development of relations between the four main characters, for example, is depicted in terms of variations on the experience of playing music together. In this sequence, the differing degrees of intimacy in the various relationships are indicated as the characters change partners to play duets; at the beginning of the novel Eduard and Charlotte form a pair (p. 257); Charlotte is then replaced by Ottilie (p.297); finally the reader is told of the duets played by Charlotte and the Hauptmann (p.298). The same scene is varied, and this illustrates the possible combinations of relationships. Further variations, which anticipate the characters' desire to redefine certain relations, are also evident in the scenes where Eduard reads aloud:

Wenn ich jemand vorlese, ist es denn nicht, als wenn ich ihm mündlich etwas vortrüge?...Wenn mir jemand ins Buch sieht, so ist mir immer, als wenn ich in zwei Stücke gerissen würde. (p.269)

Alsdann rückte sich Ottilie wohl näher, um ins Buch zu sehen, denn auch sie traute ihren eigenen Augen mehr als fremden Lippen; und Eduard gleichfalls rückte zu, um es ihr auf alle Weise bequem zu machen, ja er hielt oft längere Pausen als nötig, damit er nur nicht eher umwendete, bis auch sie zu Ende der Seite gekommen. (pp.296-7)

The same tendency is also evident in the episodes of Charlotte's and Ottilie's birthday celebrations (299ff, 335ff) and in Eduard's various chance meetings with the beggar:

Indem sie [Eduard/Hauptmann] standen und sprachen, bettelte sie ein Mensch an, der mehr frech als bedürftig aussah. Eduard, ungern unterbrochen und beunruhigt, schalt ihn, nachdem er ihn einigemal vergebens gelassener abgewiesen hatte. (p.286)

Eine Figur, den Hut in der Hand, vertrat ihnen [Eduard/Ottilie] den Weg und sprach sie um ein Almosen an...Eduard erkannte die Züge jenes zudringlichen Bettlers. Aber so glücklich wie er war, konnte er nicht ungehalten sein, konnte es ihm nicht einfallen, daß besonders für heute das Betteln höchlich verpönt worden. Er forschte nicht lange in der Tasche und gab ein Goldstück hin. Er hätte jeden gern glücklich gemacht, da sein Glück ohne Grenzen schien. (p.339)

Als er [Eduard] beim Wirtshause vorbeiritt, sah er den Bettler in der Laube sitzen, den er gestern nacht so reichlich beschenkt hatte...nochmals blickte er nach dem Bettler: »O du Beneidenswerter!« rief er aus; »du kannst noch am gestrigen Almosen zehren und ich nicht mehr am gestrigen Glücke!«. (p.345)

These various meetings with the beggar indicate transitions in Eduard's emotional state, for the beggar progresses from being a petty annoyance to a »Beneidenswerter«. In other words: the character of the beggar is determined solely by Eduard's perspective on existence at a given moment and the meetings themselves provide the reader with an insight into these different emotional conditions. This set of repetitions also serves to highlight several different stages of Eduard's relationship with Ottilie and confirms the impossibility of securing a preferred model of >reality< as a stable and lasting condition. Although the characters envisage new sets of personal and collective circumstances, it becomes increasingly evident that individual action in the novel often assumes the form of a series of variations on models of previous experience. This is in accordance with the way in which the Narcissus-

theme is treated in the work. I indicated in the first chapter that Goethe includes almost every known variant of the Narcissus-myth when experimenting with the ways in which individuals structure a model of >reality<. The patterns of repetition mentioned above indicate that this notion of variation is continued into the individual's experiences of the different models of existence. The reader's attention is once again drawn to the impossibility of assigning absolute validity to any one paradigm of the Real.

The different sets of variations have a marked effect on the structure of the work itself. Other critics have pointed out the retarding effects that repetition has on the latter stages of the work, but few have considered the rôle that variations and repetitions play throughout the entire narrative.⁴ I believe that the sets of variations in the novel serve to indicate a fundamental paradox inherent in any model used to form the basis of a particular world-view. On the one hand, the repetitions imply the existence of a certain model used to construct a version of >reality<. On the other hand, however, the discrepancies between these variations eventually undermine the primary structure of the model itself. This is due to the fact that no two repetitions are identical. In this way, the variations serve the paradoxical but dual purpose of confirming *and* dissolving their own structural bases in the course of the novel. This has been one cause of the difficulties in interpreting *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* throughout the history of its reception. I indicated in the Introduction that many critics have attempted to interpret the novel by imposing a particular model on the narrative, either from external sources or from within the

text, and then, by using this model, to fix events in the work in an unambiguous meaning. In this way, the reader falls into exactly the same trap as the characters in the novel itself, for, as I have shown, they too attempt to interpret phenomena by classifying them according to the structure of a particular model. This points to another interesting affinity between *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* and Kleist. In his essay on »Kleist and Tragedy«, Anthony Stephens indicates the way in which readers of Kleist's works often take up the perspective of the characters when attempting to analyse the text. The »overstructuring« of much of Kleist's prose, which engenders this tendency amongst critics, is also a major structural feature of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*:

The >naive< reader experiences the plot as it elapses, the distanced critic can see the structure as a simultaneity, and so on. Part of the effect of the over-structuring of perspectives in Kleist's works is that aspects of the structure tend, within the work itself, to take over the function of protagonists and that the apparently distanced critical position remains much closer to that of the naive reader, namely enmeshed in the puzzles presented by the plot, than with most other writers. Hence, a great deal of Kleist criticism is pronouncedly >problem solving< in the sense of trying to find correct answers to the questions which the characters have got wrong, thus tending to merge participation in a fiction with critical abstraction from it in a way that is deceptive.⁵

Because *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* is based on a series of shifting paradigms and the narrative perspective does not endow any single model with dominant status, a single reading of the work must remain inadequate. When Goethe suggested that several readings of this novel were necessary for an understanding of its intricacies, he gave some indication of the difficulties involved in making credible a single interpretation:

...es steckt darin mehr, als irgend jemand bei einmaligem Lesen aufzunehmen im Stande wäre« (H.A. VI, p.644)

Es ist manches hineingelegt, das, wie ich hoffe, den Leser zu wiederholter Betrachtung auffordern wird. (H.A. VI, p.639)

Wie ich mich denn auf die Wirkung freue, welche dieser Roman in ein paar Jahre auf manchen bei'm Wiederlesen machen wird. (H.A. VI, p.640)

Continuing this notion of multiple readings, it follows that a number of these readings may complement each other without distorting the text. For example, it is possible to approach the Narcissus-theme from the point of view of a study in myth, a psychoanalytic exercise or as a feature of structuring >reality<. Ultimately, however, the reader is forced either to assume an arbitrary decisiveness in interpreting events in the novel or to admit the impossibility of a single and definite interpretation in the light of the multiplicity of models which form the structural bases of the narrative. The impossibility of achieving the goal of a particular course of action experienced by the characters is, therefore, doubled and mirrored on the level of textual interpretation, for the act of re-reading does not necessarily lead to the attainment of single meaning. This is precisely what Barthes suggests in his analysis of the act of reading:

Il serait donc faux de dire que si nous acceptons de relire le texte, c'est pour un profit intellectuel...c'est en fait et toujours pour un profit ludique: c'est pour multiplier les signifiants, non pour atteindre quelque dernier signifié.⁶

In this respect, the act of re-reading the novel resembles the consistent ambiguity of language that is demonstrated on a thematic level in the text. The primary ambiguity of the signifier, and the

resulting plurality of interpretations, allow not only the possibility of creating numerous different world-models within the text, but also afford multiple readings of the entire narrative. Rather than progressing towards a definite end, both the differing models of >reality< and the act of re-reading the text expose and depend on the ambiguity of the signifier, thus making impossible the attainment of a single and unified interpretation of any group of verbal or non-verbal signs. I shall return to a fuller discussion of the difficulties of interpretation and the rôle of the reader in the final chapter.

The failure of individuals to achieve their various goals is commented upon by the narrator towards the end of the novel. At this point in the text each of the main characters has failed to realise the goal of his or her >new beginning< and instead, we find that the reunion of the foursome is almost an exact copy of scenes depicted earlier in the novel. The narrator comments on the rôle of repetition in individual experience in the following terms:

Was einem jeden Menschen gewöhnlich begegnet, wiederholt sich mehr, als man glaubt, weil seine Natur hiezu die nächste Bestimmung gibt. Charakter, Individualität, Neigung, Richtung, örtlichkeit, Umgebungen und Gewohnheiten bilden zusammen ein Ganzes, in welchem jeder Mensch wie in einem Elemente, in einer Atmosphäre schwimmt, worin es ihm allein bequem und behaglich ist. Und so finden wir die Menschen, über deren Veränderlichkeit so viele Klage geführt wird, nach vielen Jahren zu unserm Erstaunen unverändert und nach äußern und innern unendlichen Anregungen unveränderlich. (p.478)

In this extract the narrator presents the duality of innovation and repetition as one of the central axes around which events in the novel have revolved. Interesting in the above comment is the notion that various repetitions occur because it is the individual that determines

the structuring of events («...weil seine Natur hierzu die nächste Bestimmung gibt»). If, as outlined in Chapter 1, a central trait of all individual ordering of >reality< lies in the narcissistic tendency of humankind to reflect its own image in phenomena, then it would appear that it is precisely this tendency that entraps the characters in patterns of repetition and, ultimately, produces Eduard's insight that his life has been essentially a process of imitation. In other words: repetitions revolve around the continual self-mirroring of the characters attempting to structure preferred models of >valid< experience. The comment by the narrator quoted above serves to indicate the characters' desire to devise new world-views, yet also stresses the fundamental impossibility of bringing these innovations to a successful conclusion.

This is not to imply, however, that action in the novel is static or that the characters themselves remain unchanged throughout the sequence of events. Rather, the different sets of variations allow the possibility of some marginal character development, whilst at the same time not permitting the characters to bring their attempts at innovation to a successful conclusion. This may be seen in the latter stages of the novel when the four main characters find themselves re-united and living in a situation similar to that in the opening stages of the narrative. Their reunion must be seen in terms of a variation on their previous circumstances rather than an exact copy of them. The narrator continues this description of the characters' situation in the following words:

So bewegte sich auch in dem täglichen Zusammenleben unserer Freunde fast alles wieder in dem alten Gleise. Noch immer äußerte Ottilie stillschweigend durch manche Gefälligkeit ihr zuvorkommendes Wesen,

und so jedes nach seiner Art. Auf diese Weise zeigte sich der häusliche Zirkel als ein Scheinbild des vorigen Lebens, und der Wahn, als ob noch alles beim alten sei, war verzeihlich. (p.479)

This extract presents a double perspective on the nature of repetition as illustrated in the text. On the one hand, the characters have failed to realise their preferred models of >reality< and thus their new beginnings have not led to the desired end; on the other hand, however, this scene cannot be viewed as an exact replica of their previous experiences together. The narrator describes the reunion in terms of illusion, a »Scheinbild«, and stresses that the desire to view it in terms of an exact re-animation of the past is sheer fantasy (»Wahn«). As was evident in the characters' desire to attain a former state, a link is made between the attempt to overcome dissonances in the present by re-living past models and the futile nature of »Wahn«.

Repetition itself must be viewed, therefore, in a double perspective. On the one hand, the characters appear to be locked in a series of recurrent actions that prevents them from attaining their various goals. On the other hand, however, certain characters also believe that the repetition of events serves to increase the importance or validity of a particular scene. This idea is expressed by Otilie when she awakens from her trance-like state after the death of the Otto. In her conversation with Charlotte she mentions this notion of repetition:

...zum zweitenmal widerfährt mir dasselbige. Du sagtest mir einst, es begegne den Menschen in ihrem Leben oft Ähnliches auf ähnliche Weise und immer in bedeutenden Augenblicken. Ich finde nun die Bemerkung wahr und bin gedrungen, dir ein Bekenntnis zu machen. (p.462)

Here, it seems possible that repetition may reinforce a particular mode of action proposed by the characters. This is also evidenced by Eduard's attempts to repeat the birthday celebrations in Ottilie's name, or in the scene during which Charlotte's recites her marriage vows once again. But the element of failure is present here as well.

In the light of the narrator's comment linking the repetition of events and »Wahn«, it seems that repetition cannot always be viewed as an act that confirms a pre-existing model. Contrary to the characters' own views on repetition, it becomes evident throughout the novel that the sets of variations serve to emphasise the *differences* between each repeated event rather than their similarity. I illustrated this above in the examples of the four main characters playing duets, reading and in Eduard's various meetings with the beggar. Two notions of repetition which highlight this discrepancy are discussed in detail by Hillis Miller in his study of *Fiction and Repetition*.⁷ I would agree with him that Gilles Deleuze's argument concerning repetition is of central importance in any consideration of this issue. In Deleuze's *Logique du sens* two forms of repetition are opposed to each other and discussed in terms of the contrasting elements of the philosophy of Plato and Nietzsche:

Il s'agit de deux lectures du monde dans la mesure où l'une nous convie à penser la différence à partir d'une similitude ou d'une identité préalables, tandis que l'autre nous invite au contraire à penser la similitude et même l'identité comme le produit d'une disparité de fond. La première définit exactement le monde des copies ou des représentations; elle pose le monde comme icône. La seconde, contre la première, définit le monde des simulacres. Elle pose le monde lui-même comme phantasme. Or, du point de vue de cette seconde formule, il importe peu que la disparité originelle,

sur laquelle le simulacre est construit, soit grande ou petite; il arrive que les séries de base n'aient qu'une petite différence.⁶

These two opposing forms of repetition provide us with an insight into a fundamental conflict in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, namely the discrepancy between the characters' desired image of the world and the actual outcome of events. Throughout the narrative the characters attempt to use repetition as a means by which to stress the similarity of certain events, thus confirming the characteristics of a particular world-model. This would entail transforming their own world-view into an »icon«. As indicated above, however, it becomes increasingly apparent that the various repetitions serve to weaken the primary model rather than to confirm it and usually do little to further the projects of the characters. Otilie's birthday celebrations end in disaster, Charlotte's repetition of her marriage vows does not restore her former relationship to Eduard and the final security of reunion at the end of the novel is quickly seen by the reader to be illusory.

It seems that the novel as a whole must both affirm and deny the notion of progress in human affairs, whether this be seen as the growth and maturation of the individual or the advancement through time of a pair or group towards a more desirable state of existence. Essentially it is a novel of the Napoleonic era, when the dissonances between the Enlightenment's ideals of progress and the outcome of the French Revolution had no chance of being resolved, either in Goethe's own consciousness or in that of most of his contemporaries.

Action in the novel may be seen to progress not according to the principle of a linear succession of completed actions, but rather in terms of the dual processes of construction and dissolution of models of >reality<. These models may compete with each other for dominant status or succeed each other in a process of repetition and variation, but the notion of progression towards a single end remains illusory. This is indicated quite clearly by the Count in his comments on the literary convention of the *Lustspiel*. As I indicated in an earlier chapter, the Count's comments on the *Lustspiel* act as a mediate term between the constant flux, which is the final implication of the »Gleichnisrede«, and any model of eternity constructed by the characters in the realm of intimate relations. Throughout the novel, the characters attempt to endow their preferred world-models with permanence, yet the action in the narrative constantly illustrates that which is »...hinten immer fortgespielt«. Although the finitude of human life must logically put an end to the apparently endless flux of the »Gleichnisrede«, the Count draws attention to the illusory nature of a desired single and permanent end in any chain of cause and effect, or any sequence of human experience which is ordered aesthetically rather than by chance or »Naturnotwendigkeit«. As I indicated above, even the impermanence of human existence may be integrated into a world-view, with the result that death itself is ultimately disqualified as a proof of finality. I shall return to this point shortly in a discussion of the final scenes of the novel.

If the attempts made by the characters to structure new models of >reality< lapse into a pattern of indefinite repetition, thus negating

the possibility of realising the goal of a programme of action on a permanent basis, how then does this affect the models of »eternity« that play such an important rôle throughout the novel? I have indicated that the concept of »eternity« is a major element both of the ideal of Platonic union and of social relations, represented by the marriage contract. The fundamental problem arises, however, that in order to realise a particular model of »eternity«, the corresponding discourse must assume a certain status. In the context of the novel this process is subverted by a number of different factors. In the first instance, the competition between the contrasting images of union weakens the credibility of each model. Eduard constantly attempts to replace the model of union within the social discourse by his own version of the Platonic ideal. The notion of permanent union remains intact, therefore, but is redefined according to the new world-view. In contrast to this attempt by Eduard to discredit the social coding of human relations, both Charlotte and Mittler constantly expound the notion of union as outlined in the social contract of marriage. Moreover, Charlotte is shocked when this idea of a permanent bond within the social code is questioned by the Count and viewed as a parallel to the fictional ending of the *Lustspiel*. In contrast to these models, there remains the constant flux of possible relations in the »Gleichnisrede«.

The characters may also be seen to lose faith in their own models of permanent union. In the case of Charlotte this is indicated by her agreement to accept divorce after the death of the child. In her

conversation with the Hauptmann her disillusionment is expressed in the following words:

Sagen Sie Eduarden, daß ich in die Scheidung willige, das ich ihm, Ihnen, Mittelern die ganze Sache einzuleiten überlasse, daß ich um meine künftige Lage unbekümmert bin und es in jedem Sinne sein kann. Ich will jedes Papier unterschreiben, das man mir bringt; aber man verlange nur nicht von mir, daß ich mitwirke, daß ich bedenke, daß ich berate. (p.461)

In this scene Charlotte appears to disclaim any rôle as a >manipulator< of social discourse and instead attempts to assume a passive position. In view of the following events of the narrative, however, it seems that this is a >>false< clue given to the reader. In the latter stages of the novel, Charlotte does not allow the other characters to manage events for her. This is clearly indicated by her attempts to prescribe a course of action for Ottilie by suggesting her return to the *Pension*. In the last scenes of the novel, we see the way in which Charlotte makes a final attempt to erase previous events and to achieve the earlier stability which she believed characterised her life with Eduard. Once again she attempts to tame »ein gewaltsam Entbundenenes«. When her plan to keep Eduard and Ottilie apart fails and the two characters arrive back at the castle unexpectedly, the contrast between Eduard's and Ottilie's bedrooms epitomises their different positions in Charlotte's ordered world:

Charlotte eilt auf Ottiliens Zimmer, und ihr schaudert, da sie hineintritt; es war schon ganz ausgeräumt, nur die leeren Wände standen da...Man hatte alles weggetragen, nur das Köfferchen, unschlüssig, wo man es hinstellen sollte, in der Mitte des Zimmers stehengelassen. [...] Ottiliens Zimmer ist aufs baldigste wieder eingerichtet. Eduard hat die seinigen angetroffen, bis auf das letzte Papier, wie er sie verlassen. (p.475)

Once again, however, the attempt to bring circumstances into a controllable pattern results in failure. Not only is it impossible for Charlotte to ignore the events which have led up to Otilie's vow of silence, but she cannot completely efface the model of »eternity« created in the Platonic model of intimacy. This is clearly indicated by the presence of the »Kästchen« in Otilie's otherwise empty room. Although Charlotte is able to integrate the evidence of Otilie's former presence into the larger structure of her household, there remains the further problem of halting the progression of a series of events that have already been set in motion. Just as Charlotte cannot find a place for the »Kästchen« in her ordered world, so too she is unable to efface the idea of union shared by Eduard and Otilie, which stands in the way of any possibility of »Entsagung«. In this sense, the »Kästchen«, symbolising the model of Platonic union, emphasises the impossibility of integrating the two discourses into a unified and stable whole. Charlotte's attempt to clear out Otilie's room and eliminate all traces of the Platonic model indicates that she has, in fact, not assumed a passive rôle as her earlier comment to the Hauptmann may have led us to believe. Instead, her eventual assumption of a passive rôle lies in the wider change in mode to a general emphasis on »Hoffnung« during the latter stages of the novel. This characteristic of the end of the novel is not confined to Charlotte alone, but is also apparent in the speeches of Eduard and the Hauptmann.

Towards the end of the narrative, Eduard also develops a passive reliance on »hope« as a solution to the problems experienced by the group at the end of the novel. Eventually, however, his faith in the

possibility of realising a form of union according to the Platonic model begins to dissolve in the light of events in the narrative. Throughout the novel Eduard is able to assimilate potentially disruptive occurrences into his ideal of intimacy because of his own method of interpreting various signifiers. At the end of the novel, he even attempts to reconcile himself to Ottilie's death by asserting that they will create a discourse of love »mit andern Sprachen«. His notion of »eternity« finally dissolves, however, when he doubts the validity of his method of interpreting the signs on which he has based a vision of union with Ottilie. The possibility of an eternal union between Eduard and Ottilie proposed in the final scene of the narrative presents an ironic commentary on this ideal of eternity, for their union is a construct of language which is created by the narrator for essentially aesthetic reasons - like the ending of a comedy - and which is never realised in the characters' actual experience. At the end of the novel, the primacy of human action has been completely usurped by language. A final metaphoric substitution has, therefore, taken place and individual action is replaced by a purely linguistic act. In the following section I propose to examine the way in which the mutual deconstruction of these language-orders results in a final nihilism and how this may be seen in terms of a parody of various aspects of Enlightenment thought.

II *Order and Nihilism*

Throughout the previous chapters I have indicated that the characters in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* construct various models in an attempt to order events and phenomena. I have also suggested that the multiplicity of these orders and the competition between various world-views leads to a general discrediting of each individual or collective method of imposing a system of meaning on the world. In this way, *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* may be seen to take up and develop a main theme of *Werther*. In *Werther* we find that the solipsistic world-view of the main character serves not only to alienate him from society, but also acts as a prelude to his unhappy end. In Goethe's earliest novel, it appears that individual world-views are not seen by the author in terms of valid constructions of order. In another sense, the outlook shared by Werther, Albert and Charlotte for a few moments at the end of the first part of the novel, forms a contrast to the dominant social world-view, yet it does not disrupt the social order, nor is it dismissed as an individual solipsistic model:

Sie [Lotte] machte uns aufmerksam auf die schöne Wirkung des Mondenlichtes, das am Ende der Buchenwände die ganze Terrasse vor uns erleuchtete: ein herrlicher Anblick, der um so viel frappanter war, weil uns rings eine tiefe Dämmerung einschloß. Wir waren still, und sie fing nach einer Weile an: »Niemals gehe ich im Mondenlichte spazieren, niemals, daß mir nicht der Gedanke an meine Verstorbenen begegnete, daß nicht das Gefühl von Tod, von Zukunft über mich käme. Wir werden sein!« fuhr sie mit der Stimme des herrlichsten Gefühls fort; »aber, Werther, sollen wir uns wieder finden? Wieder erkennen? Was ahnen Sie? Was sagen Sie?« (H.A. VI, p.57.)

In the context of the novel, the discussion on death and reunion in the future held by the three characters may be seen to offer a means of creating a view of existence that offers an alternative, rather than a simple opposition, to the code of enlightened »Vernunft«. At the same time, however, these attitudes towards mortality and life after death shared momentarily by these characters achieve a higher status than an individual view of existence because they are supported by a number of people rather than by the individual alone.

The important step taken by Goethe in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* consists in the discrediting not only of individual world-models, but also of those created by groups. In this way, he questions the method used to structure any human concept of >reality<. This may be seen in terms of a critique of the two dominant world-models apparent in the latter stages of the Enlightenment. In *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* the status of a particular world-view often appears to depend on a consensus of enlightened rationality. Based on the ideal of »Vernunft«, the traditional utopia of the Enlightenment was seen in terms of a consensual model of opinions on a wide social scale.⁵ By illustrating in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* that this model of an ideal society is often built on an illusory view of rationality, Goethe shows that this >utopian< model is not necessarily a stable, or even possible structure. For this reason, I suggest he also experiments with the opposing world-model prevalent in the late Enlightenment, namely the image of an individual utopia. As I mentioned in the Introduction, this rejection of the consensual model in favour of an individual utopia is seen quite

clearly in Rousseau's *La nouvelle Héloïse* in the household of Monsieur de Wolmar:

Il regnoit dans cette petite assemblée un certain air d'antique simplicité qui me touchoit le coeur; je voyois sur tous les visages la même gaité et plus de franchise, peut-être, que si'il s'y fut trouvé des hommes. Fondée sur la confiance et l'attachement, la familiarité qui regnoit entre les servantes et la maîtresse ne faisoit qu'affirmer le respect et l'autorité, et les services rendus et reçus ne sembloient être que des témoignages d'amitié réciproque.¹⁰

In *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* Eduard attempts to realise such an individual utopia for himself and Ottilie and tries to make valid a new idea of »union«. This engenders a major conflict between the images of consensual and individual models of utopia. I believe that this opposition forms one of the major dualities in the novel and may be seen to anticipate the more drastic attempt of the Romantics to seek a utopia outside the confines of society. This may be seen quite clearly, for example, in Novalis' attempt to realise an ideal existence, implying the exclusion of the outside world, in the *Hymnen an die Nacht*.¹¹

Throughout *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* the model of a consensual utopia based on the Enlightenment ideal of »Vernunft« is constantly called into question. As the novel progresses it becomes apparent that the basis of the social concept of »reality« cannot be seen as displaying greater validity than any other model constructed in the text. Mittler is depicted in increasingly critical terms as the novel progresses and his ideas on social relations are discredited by the irony of events and by his disastrous use of language. As I indicated in the previous section, the general orientation of the characters towards

»hope« also serves to indicate their attempt to relinquish an active rôle in structuring events as a group. The world-view supported by a large number of people is revealed as being no more than a construction of >reality< that is created in precisely the same way as an individual model of >valid< experience. Ultimately, however, neither the individual nor the group is able to impose a coherent and lasting order of >reality< on phenomena.

The general discrediting of world-models constructed by the collective may also be seen in the light of Goethe's negative reaction to the French Revolution. The ultimate barbarism of the masses during the Reign of Terror and the failure of the French people to realise the ideal of individual freedom as envisaged by many >enlightened< thinkers led to a general loss of faith amongst writers and philosophers when considering the rôle of the majority in social decision-making.¹² Goethe's negative conviction as to the outcome of the French Revolution is not only evident in *Hermann und Dorothea* (1796-7). In an essay published in 1823, *Bedeutende Fördernis durch ein einziges Geistreiches Wort*, indication is given as to the impact of the Revolution on Goethe's artistic life:

An ebendiese Betrachtung schließt sich die vieljährige Richtung meines Geistes gegen die Französische Revolution unmittelbar an, und es erklärt sich die grenzenlose Bemühung dieses schrecklichste aller Ereignisse in seinen Ursachen und Folgen dichterisch zu gewältigen. Schau' ich in die vielen Jahre zurück, so seh' ich klar, wie die Anhänglichkeit an diesen unübersehblichen Gegenstand so lange Zeit her mein poetisches Vermögen fast unnützerweise aufgezehrt... (H.A. XIII, p.39)

This negative reaction to the French Revolution had far reaching consequences for Goethe's attitude towards world-views constructed and upheld resolutely by large numbers of people. His mistrust of group decisions is apparent in both *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* and the *Wanderjahre*.¹³ This scepticism concerning the voice of the majority is also explicit in certain maxims:

Nichts ist widerwärtiger als die Majorität; denn sie besteht aus wenigen kräftigen Vorgängern, aus Schelmen, die sich akkomodieren, aus Schwachen, die sich assimilieren, und der Masse, die nachtrollt, ohne nur im mindesten zu wissen, was sie will.
(H.A.XII, p.382)

This scepticism as to majority judgements automatically calls into question the validity of world-models created and supported by large groups.

I suggest that the rivalry between the various concepts of the Real which are apparent throughout *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, engenders a final nihilism that pervades the latter stages of the narrative. In applying this term to the novel in this context, I would agree with Thomas Pavel's definition of >nihilism< as follows:

Nihilism assumes that the simultaneous presence of several world models cancels the credibility of each model. Their multiplicity stands to prove that all are fictitious, and the choice between these fictions is made according to purely utilitarian criteria. Any version is good, if it serves a certain purpose; marginal or obsolete landscapes have the same right to attention as central versions, yet the centrality of the latter is only a question of convenience, or convention. In turn, by rejecting ontological multiplicity, nostalgics in their own way consider the surrounding ontologies as mere fictions, at least in comparison with the overthrown dogma.¹⁴

The choice of world-model, based on the convenient definition of >reality< for a group of people, may also be seen in terms of Goethe's scepticism of value-judgements made by the majority. This is illustrated quite clearly in the *Wanderjahre* in one of the maxims from »Makariens Archiv«:

Die Geschichte der Philosophie, der Wissenschaften, der Religion, alles zeigt, daß die Meinungen massenweis sich verbreiten, immer aber diejenige den Vorrang gewinnt, welche faßlicher, d.h. dem menschlichen Geiste in seinem gemeinen Zustande gemäß und bequem ist. Ja derjenige, der sich in höherem Sinne ausgebildet, kann immer voraussetzen, daß er die Majorität gegen sich habe. (H.A. VIII, p.473)

The notion that only those world-views gain validity and general acceptance that are convenient for the largest group of people is most interesting here. This arbitrary choice of a widely accepted structure named >reality< is evidenced quite clearly in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* in the concept of »union« as marriage and other clearly defined social and moral codes of behaviour outlined by Mittler, but also implicit in most statements made either by the characters or by the narrator. The cumulative effect of the narrator's attitudes is to render innovation something marginal at best. Eduard and Otilie cannot locate any guarantees for their own individual utopia in this realm of social discourse. In contrast to *Werther*, however, the model of >reality< created by the minority is no longer held in a disparaging light because it is supported by only a small number of people. I would agree, therefore, with Michael Beddow's conclusion concerning the number of »un-ended« plots in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* that:

All attempts, whether by the characters or narrator, to provide the events with an ending which might organize them into a pattern of

meaning whilst remaining adequate to their substance and complexities meet with failure.'⁶

It is important to realise that this nihilistic tendency apparent in Goethe's novel does not conform exclusively to any single concept of nihilism in philosophy. It forms, for example, a complete contrast to the Nietzschean concept of nihilism. In his writings, Nietzsche does not place any emphasis on the number of world-views present at a particular moment, but rather takes as his central point the notion of a qualitative decline of values and the resultant absence of meaning in human constructions of order; »Was bedeutet Nihilismus? - Daß die obersten Werte sich entwerten. Es fehlt das Ziel. Es fehlt die Antwort auf das *Wozu*«.⁶ The collapse of world-models into nihilism which is evident in Goethe's novel may be seen in terms of a commentary on the various conflicts between philosophical, religious and social ideologies which seemed to contradict the construction of order based on enlightened consensus. This stands in opposition to Nietzsche's much later concept of nihilism which focuses on a decline of »die obersten Werte«. Before discussing the way in which the nihilistic trend of Goethe's novel may be seen in terms of a commentary on the values of the Enlightenment, I would first like to consider the way in which the dissolution of the various world-models affects the final scene of the narrative.

In his study on nihilism in literature, Charles Glicksberg discusses the various means which have been used throughout literary history as a counter to nihilistic tendencies and concludes with the following statement:

The most substantial and, historically, the most successful myth designed to counter the nihilistic dread induced by the prospect of dying is the myth of the Incarnation and the Resurrection.¹⁷

The last scene of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, namely the canonisation of Ottilie and the vision of her final union with Eduard in paradise, may be read in terms of a variation on this model. The collapse of world-models into a nihilistic chaos is, in a sense, countered by the opposing positive vision of paradise and the resurrection of Ottilie and Eduard. The concluding scenes of the novel that are concerned with Ottilie's transformation into a saint certainly depict the reaction of the townspeople to >Saint Ottilie< in terms of a »counter to nihilistic dread«. In the description of the townspeople it is interesting to note the emphasis placed on »Glauben« as the central feature in the construction of this and any other model of >reality< or >valid< experience:

Jedes Bedürfnis, dessen wirkliche Befriedigung versagt ist, nötigt zum Glauben. Die vor den Augen aller Welt zerschmetterte Nanny war durch Berührung des frommen Körpers wieder gesund geworden; warum sollte nicht auch ein ähnliches Glück hier andern bereitet sein? Zärtliche Mütter brachten zuerst heimlich ihre Kinder, die von irgendeinem Übel behaftet waren, und sie glaubten eine plötzliche Besserung zu spüren. Das Zutrauen vermehrte sich, und zuletzt war niemand so alt und so schwach, der sich nicht an dieser Stelle eine Erquickung und Erleichterung gesucht hätte. (pp.488-89)

Both this vision of Ottilie's magic healing powers and the image of her union with Eduard in paradise might perhaps serve as a counter to the discrediting of world-models throughout the text. It would, however, be both an over-simplification and, indeed, a distortion of the narrative if the final scenes were to be viewed solely in these terms. As is often the case in Goethe's works, a double perspective is offered

on the plot at this point. On the one hand, it is possible to read the concluding scenes in terms of a counter to the nihilism inherent in the constantly dissolving models of >reality<. In this case, Otilie's imagined union with Eduard in the afterlife may be viewed as a final and complete union of the two Platonic halves, thus bringing to a conclusion the programme of action prescribed by the Platonic model. This version of the last scene is given preference by the characters, the narrative perspective and also by some critics.¹⁹ On the other hand, however, these two images may also be seen as a further exercise of the capacity of both the characters and the narrative perspective to create world-models. In this light, the process of structuring orders may be seen to continue indefinitely. The conclusion of the novel may be read, therefore, either as a >finite end< to the plot or as another example of >endless repetition< in the succession of world-models.

The choice depends on whether the reader accepts the position of the narrative perspective or assumes a critical stance towards the method of constructing models of >reality< throughout the novel. Many critics have accepted the final image created by the narrator in terms of a positive end to the more negative aspects of the narrative. This acceptance of the narrative perspective is illustrated by P. Böckmann's evaluation of the novel's ending:

Aber wie sollen wir dieses Ende verstehen? Ist es die Katastrophe, die auf einen psychologisch interessanten Fall hindeutet oder indirekt die moralische Forderung rechtfertigt? Offenbar meint Goethe es anders. Von der toten Otilie geht eine heilende, überwindende Kraft aus, die neuen Glauben weckt. In ihrem Tod bezeugt sich also der eigentliche Sinn ihres Verhaltens. Es führt zur uneigennütigen Liebe als dem Heiligen und weckt zugleich den Glauben an dieses Heilige.¹⁹

I cannot, however, accept this more positive view of the end of the narrative. One of the major difficulties in approaching any of Goethe's works is the double perspective offered on certain elements of the text from within the work itself. This is not only evident in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, but is also manifest in the dramas, most notably *Iphigenie*, and certain shorter prose works, such as the *Novelle*.²⁰ Much of this doubling of perspective arises from the way in which the author creates works which are in themselves self-reflective. I shall examine this aspect of Goethe's narrative technique as it relates to *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* in the next chapter. I have already indicated that the novel contains a parody of its own »happy ending« in the form of the Count's comments on the »Lustspielschluß«. When evaluating the closing scenes of the novel and their relevance for an understanding of the entire narrative, however, it is also important to keep in mind the way in which Goethe often presents an image in his works, yet then subtly questions its validity from another perspective. I believe that this is reflected in Goethe's own critical attitude towards certain trends of Enlightenment thought. A consideration of the more critical aspect of Goethe's thinking is of extreme relevance for an analysis of the means used to construct world-models throughout *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* and indicates the way in which a doubling of perspective also arises in other narrative contexts.

It is, of course, impossible to view the European Enlightenment in terms of a homogeneous and stable system of ideas. It would be equally difficult to attempt to define a single and unchanging reaction to the Enlightenment in all of Goethe's works. When reading *Die*

Wahlverwandtschaften in terms of a commentary on Enlightenment thought, however, it is important to remember that the final version of the novel was completed in 1809. At this time Goethe would have been aware that the various ideologies of the age had passed through a number of different stages, beginning with reactions to the ideal of »Vernunft« in the name of »Empfindsamkeit« or »Sturm und Drang« to the »Humanitätsideal« of Weimar Classicism. In addition to this, the upheaval of the French Revolution must be considered as a disruption of the ideal of consensus in the name of »enlightened« rationality. At the time when *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* was written in its final form, the author not only had the opportunity of hindsight and re-evaluation of Enlightenment thought, but would also have been aware of the growing scepticism concerning the »Vernunftideal«. In addition to this, the various ideals of the Enlightenment had shifted in the early decades of the 19th century to being a vulgarisation rather than the property of writers, intellectuals and »philosophers«. Friedrich Sengle comments on this development in his study *Biedermeierzeit* in the following terms:

Mehr noch als bei der Betrachtung der Aufklärung, der Klassik und der Frühromantik ist im beginnenden 19. Jahrhundert der traditionellen Vorstellung, die Philosophie bilde das Fundament einer Geschichtsperiode, zu mißtrauen; denn es zeigt sich damals bereits eine grundsätzliche Philosophiemüdigkeit. Die Lehre vom ideologischen Überbau ist nicht zufällig in dieser Zeit vorbereitet worden. Man wird behaupten dürfen, daß von dem um 1800 geborenen Restaurationsgeschlecht, das der Hegel-Schelling-Generation folgt, sich fast nur noch Geister zweiten Ranges der Philosophie widmen.²¹

Goethe's late works have been viewed by many critics as upholding the ideals of »Vernunft« and »Humanität«, thus forming a break from the the earlier »Sturm und Drang« phase. Although Goethe's works do develop through various stages, there has been a tendency amongst critics to

view the later writings of Weimar Classicism in terms of a panegyric on a highly selective corpus of Enlightenment thought. This is most clearly evidenced by reactions to the play *Iphigenie*, which throughout its history has been treated as a celebration of Enlightenment values and the >Humanitätsideal< in the form of »die Stimme der Wahrheit und der Menschlichkeit«. ²² As I have indicated elsewhere, the depiction of the main character in Goethe's *Iphigenie* does incorporate this ideal, yet also strategically prevents a reading along this single line, because of the way in which the discourse of the individual is subverted by the wider mythical framework of the drama. ²³ In contrast to the usual views on this play, I would suggest that the work does not present a straightforward emancipation of the main character from the consensuality of myth. Instead, it becomes increasingly obvious that there is no ideal realm of pure, individualistic freedom into which *Iphigenie* may be released at the end of the play. In this respect *Iphigenie* provides an example of the way in which Goethe's works often present and uphold a series of values, yet strategically call these ideas into question or undermine their foundation in the course of the work itself.

In *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, the characters take elements of scientific thought, religious doctrine, literary models etc. in order to find guarantees for a particular world-view. This gives an indication of the syncretistic tendency apparent in the Enlightenment, namely the attempt to fuse together elements from a number of different areas in order to construct a preferred model of >reality<. In addition to this, Goethe also illustrates the way in which a model may be seen to gain

validity, even though arbitrary and impermanent, through the support of a large number of people and through the type of authority invoked to guarantee its authenticity. In the manner of *Werther*, he once again draws attention to the hierarchy of world-views apparent in society which range from widely accepted models, to those shared by small groups of people in the manner of »Empfindsamkeit« and finally the purely individual world-view which cannot be validated in the wider social order. As I indicated above, however, in contrast to *Werther* the characters' construction of wider world-models in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* is also discredited in the course of the narrative.

General studies on the 18th century often diverge on the question as to whether the Enlightenment should be viewed in terms of a unified system of ideas or as a group of heterogeneous world-views. Certain critics, such as Ernst Cassirer, have attempted to prove a general unity of 18th century thought by emphasising the ideal of »Vernunft« that pervaded many philosophical and scientific investigations.²⁴ Although many 18th century thinkers did make what Wieland termed »die gesunde Vernunft«²⁵ the central focus of their world-view, it is, I believe, impossible to posit the »Vernunftideal« as the unifying factor of the various ideas of the time. Not only was the rôle of »Vernunft« in social and philosophical systems viewed in different ways by various thinkers, but as Detlef Kremer has pointed out, towards the end of the 18th century a growing scepticism as to the positive potential of rationality is in evidence in the works of many writers, amongst them, Klinger, »Bonaventura«, Lichtenberg and Jean Paul.²⁶ I incline to the view that the various streams of ideas that characterised the 18th and early 19th

centuries were marked by a general heterogeneity. As has been pointed out by many historians, not only were there fundamental oppositions between the emerging scientific theories and philosophical and religious ideas, but these individual realms were themselves made up of disparate, often conflicting elements.²⁷ I would agree, therefore, with Uwe Japp's summary of the disparate nature of the Enlightenment in the following terms:

An diesen Bewegungen im Denken der Aufklärung, [...] wo sich geschichtsphilosophischer Pessimismus und Optimismus ständig vermischen, läßt sich eines lernen: Weder der Anspruch noch die Wirklichkeit der Aufklärung lassen sich in der Zentrierung auf ein Zentrum erkennen...Die Bewegtheit des aufklärerischen Prozesses ist gerade aus dem Versuch zu erklären, die Faszination substanzialisierender Zentralisierungen zu überwinden, um dafür das ungleich schwierigere Wagnis auf sich zu nehmen, Identitäten in Relationen zu transformieren und dort die Differenz zu suchen, wo man früher einen König, einen Glauben und ein Gesetz sah.²⁸

In *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* Goethe not only illustrates the way in which the creation of various models of >reality< form the basis of many opposing, yet apparently >enlightened< world-views, but he also depicts the central tendency of individuals and groups to systematise these various models in the attempt to form a plausible social and intellectual order. It is, therefore, not only the process of creating the models themselves that engenders tensions between the various ontologies in the novel, but also the characters' perception of the qualitative differences between these models that leads to nihilism and the general discrediting of all forms of order throughout the text. The scepticism concerning the imposition of a particular model on events in an attempt to define order may also be seen in terms of a parody on the many philosophical systems of the Enlightenment. The 18th century

witnessed the flourishing of many different >systems< which purported an explanation of natural history and the position of humankind in the cosmos. The emphasis placed on certain models claiming to structure an order of >reality< is quite clearly apparent in works such as Condillac's *Traité des systèmes*, Newton's *System of the World* in book III of the *Principia* or d'Alembert's Introduction to the *Encyclopédie*.²⁹ In an entry of the *Encyclopédie* entitled »Philosophie«, Diderot draws a distinction between positive and negative forms of systematising the world and comes to the following conclusion:

L'esprit systématique ne nuit pas moins au progrès de la vérité: par esprit systématique, je n'entends pas celui qui lie des vérités entre elles pour former des démonstrations, ce qui n'est autre chose que le véritable esprit philosophique; mais je désigne celui qui bâtit des plans et forme des systèmes de l'univers, auxquels il veut ensuite ajuster, de gré ou de force, les phénomènes... Rien n'est plus louable que le parti qu'a pris l'Académie des sciences, de voir, d'observer, de coucher dans ses registres les observations et les expériences, et de laisser à la postérité le soin de faire un système complet lorsqu'il y aura assez de matériaux pour cela...³⁰

The multiplicity of different systems prevalent in the Enlightenment, whilst attempting to bring order from chaos, also created a chaos of its own, as a result of the philosophical multiplicity which it engendered. In this respect, the quest for >Reason< was subverted by the means used to attain it in the systematic principles of various philosophical, religious and social circles. Goethe sums up this central tendency of the Enlightenment in the entry in »Makariens Archiv« in the *Wanderjahre*:

Man rühmt das achtzehnte Jahrhundert, daß es sich hauptsächlich mit Analyse abgegeben; dem neunzehnten bleibt nun die Aufgabe: die falschen obwaltenden Synthesen zu entdecken und deren Inhalt aufs neue zu analysieren. (H. A. VIII, p.468)

It is certain that Goethe was aware of the various trends of thought that made up the different phases of the Enlightenment. This is evidenced not only by his readings of Rousseau and the *Encyclopédistes*, but also by various references to other contemporary philosophical, scientific and religious questions in many of his works. These references include a commentary on the self-reflective nature of Enlightenment thought. As Ernst Cassirer has pointed out, Enlightenment thinking was also characterised by the attempt to define its own nature: »...diese geistige Selbstbestimmung und diese geistige Vorschau, erscheint ihr [der Epoche] als der eigentlichen Sinn des Denkens überhaupt und als die wesentliche Aufgabe, die ihm gestellt ist«³¹. In contrast to the thinking of earlier periods, the Enlightenment marked an emancipation from belief in a divinely ordered system of >reality< and instead attempted to define its own world-model and an explanation of its own thought processes. This attempt at self-definition is most clearly indicated in Kant's essay of 1785 *Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?* In this essay Kant emphasises the emancipatory characteristic of individual development in this epoch and states: »Aufklärung ist der Ausgang des Menschen aus seiner selbst verschuldeten Unmündigkeit. Unmündigkeit ist das Unvermögen, sich seines Verstandes ohne Leitung eines anderen zu bedienen«.³²

Such attempts at self-definition are also in evidence in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*. This is not only clear in the self-reflective tendency of the narrative itself, but also appears as a parody of this general tendency of the Enlightenment. This parodistic element of self-analysis may be seen, for example, in the ironic use of a quote from ^{fiction}

Pope's *Essay on Man* in Ottilie's diary: »...das eigentliche Studium der Menschheit ist der Mensch« (p.417). The development of the Narcissus-theme in the narrative may be seen as a parody of this statement. Throughout the novel, the characters constantly attempt to define and evaluate both their own world-models and a concept of the self according to the act of self-mirroring. This process, however, is constantly subverted by innovation's lapsing into repetition. Instead of gaining an insight into the self, the metaphoric and metonymic processes involved in the structuring of various orders prevent the characters from achieving their desired goal. In this respect, the means used to achieve a particular end form a key element in the prevention of its realisation. In 1823 Goethe criticises the general attempts at self definition and analysis in even stronger terms:

Hiebei bekenn' ich, daß mir von jeher die große und so bedeutend klingende Aufgabe: erkenne dich selbst, immer verdächtig vorkam, als eine List geheim verbündeter Priester, die den Menschen durch unerreichbare Forderungen verwirren und von der Tätigkeit gegen die Außenwelt zu einer innern falschen Beschaulichkeit verleiten wollten. (H.A. XIII, p.38)

In a similar sense, the use of >Reason< in the Enlightenment to dispel various superstitions and to form a rational image of the self may be seen to produce myths of its own. As Horkheimer and Adorno suggest:

Wie die Mythen schon Aufklärung vollziehen, so verstrickt sich Aufklärung mit jedem ihrer Schritte tiefer sich in Mythologie. Allen Stoff empfängt sie von den Mythen, um sie zu zerstören, und als Richtende gerät sie in den mythischen Bann.³³

In addition to the more direct references to various elements of Enlightenment thought, an important comment in one of Goethe's *Maximen*

also points to the dialectical process of philosophical or historical development:

Der Kampf des Alten, Bestehenden, Beharrenden mit Entwicklung, Aus- und Umbildung ist immer derselbe. Aus aller Ordnung entsteht zuletzt Pedanterie; um diese los zu werden, zerstört man jene, und es geht eine Zeit hin, bis man gewahr wird, daß man wieder Ordnung machen müsse. Klassizismus und Romantizismus, Innungszwang und Gewerbsfreiheit, Festhalten und Zersplittern des Grundbodens: es ist immer derselbe Konflikt, der zuletzt wieder einen neuen erzeugt. (H.A. XII, p. 383)

The notion of historical progression as a process in which established dogmas are constantly put into question and replaced also forms the basis of Roland Barthes' concept of conflicts between a prevailing world-view and the development of contradictory models. In Barthes' terms the prevailing order or »doxa« is ultimately contradicted by an opposing model, or »paradox«. It is the rôle of the »paradox« to demolish the preceding »doxa«. Having accomplished this, however, the »paradox« itself finally achieves the status of a new acknowledged order which then must be demolished by another »paradox« and so on.³⁴

This process is depicted in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* as world-models succeed each other or compete for supremacy at a given moment. From the maxim quoted above, it also appears, however, that Goethe viewed this type of process as being a central feature of development during the Enlightenment. As I indicated earlier, this process of establishing models that contradict the existing world-view must be seen as a central characteristic of the construction of »ontological landscapes«. In this way, the novel may also be seen to reflect a concept of wider historical development, or rather the popular belief in

such concepts but, more importantly the scepticism surrounding them in the midst of the Napoleonic era when the work was written.

I believe that any consideration of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* must view the novel in relation to Goethe's rôle as a critical thinker in matters concerning social and intellectual developments during the Enlightenment. Having examined various links between the novel and certain aspects of 18th century thought, it is now necessary to analyse the consequences that the author's critique has on the form of the novel itself and what position the narrator assumes in the conflicts between discourses throughout the text.

NOTES

1. Ernst Cassirer, *Die Philosophie der Aufklärung*, Mohr, Tübingen 1932, p. 181.
2. Sengle, *op.cit.*, p. 26.
3. *Textes choisis de l'Encyclopédie*, ed. A. Soboul, éditions Sociales, Paris 1962, p.191.
4. cf. Dickson, *op.cit.* p. 174f; H.G. Barnes, »Bildhafte Darstellung in den *Wahlverwandtschaften*« in: *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift*, 1956, Band XXX, p.45f.
5. Anthony Stephens, »The Illusion of a Shaped World: Kleist and Tragedy« in: *Journal of the Australian Universities Language and Literature Association*, November 1983, p.205.
6. Barthes, *S/Z*, p. 171.
7. J. Hillis Miller, *Fiction and Repetition*, Blackwell, Oxford 1982, p.5: »The history of Western ideas of repetition begins, like our culture generally, with the Bible on the one hand and with Homer, the Pre-Socratics, and Plato on the other. The long centuries of Biblical hermeneutics whereby the New Testament was seen in one way or another as repeating the Old are still presupposed in the use of Biblical types in *Henry Esmond* or *Adam Bede*. The modern history of ideas about repetition goes by way of Vico to Hegel..., to Nietzsche's concept of the eternal return, to Freud's notion of the compulsion to repeat, to the Joyce of *Finnegan's Wake*, on down to such diverse present-day theorists of repetition as Jacques Lacan or Gilles Deleuze, Mircea Eliade or Jacques Derrida.«

8. Gilles Deleuze, *Logique du Sens*, éditions de Minuit, Paris 1969, p.302.
9. See for example: Schiller, *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*, Werke, Nationalausgabe, Zwanzigster Band, Weimar 1962, p.410: »Wenn in dem *dynamischen* Staat der Rechte der Mensch dem Menschen als Kraft begegnet und sein Wirken beschränkt - wenn er sich ihm in dem *ethischen* Staat der Pflichten mit der Majestät des Gesetzes entgegenstellt und sein Wollen fesselt, so darf er ihm im Kreise des schönen Umgangs, in dem *ästhetischen* Staat, nur als Gestalt erscheinen, nur als Objekt des freyen Spiels gegenüberstehen. *Freyheit zu geben durch Freyheit*, ist das Grundgesetz dieses Reiches«; Wieland, *Geschichte des Agathon*, Werke, ed. Fritz Martini and H.W. Seiffert, Hanser, München 1964, p.754: »Denn Agathon hatte nicht die Tyrannei, sondern die Regierung eines Vaters angepriesen, der seine Kinder wohl erzieht und glücklich zu machen sucht«; For an overview of utopian thinking see: Anthony Stephens, »The Sun State and its Shadow: On the Condition of Utopian Writing« in: *Utopias*, ed. Eugene Kamenka, Oxford University Press 1987, pp. 1-19.
10. Rousseau, *La nouvelle Héloïse*, *Oeuvres Complètes* II, p.452.
11. Novalis, *Werke und Briefe*, p. 60:
 Zu bewohnen deine Welt
 Und zu heiligen sie
 Mit Liebe.
 Zu geben
 Menschlichen Sinn
 Deinen Schöpfungen.
 [...]

 Einst zeigt deine Uhr
 Das Ende der Zeit
 Wenn du wirst,
 Wie unser Einer
 Und voll Sehnsucht
 Auslöschest und stirbst.
 In mir fühl ich
 Der Geschäftigkeit Ende
 Himmlische Freyheit,
 Selige Rückkehr.

12. For a comprehensive survey of German reactions to the French Revolution see: *Die französische Revolution im Spiegel der deutschen Literatur*, ed. Claus Träger, Röderberg-Verlag, Frankfurt/M 1979. Particularly negative reactions to the Revolution may be seen in Schiller's Brief an den Herzog Friedrich Christian von Augustenburg (13. July, 1793) p.260f. and Friedrich Schlegel's *Ideen* (1799) p.402f.

13. »Wegen der Majorität haben wir ganz eigne Gedanken; wir lassen sie freilich gelten im notwendigen Weltlauf, im höhern Sinne haben wir aber nicht viel Zutraun auf sie. Doch darüber darf ich mich nicht weiter auslassen« (H.A. VIII, p.407).

14. Pavel, op. cit., p.142.

15. Michael Beddow, » >Da wird hinten immer fortgespielt<: Unended plots in Goethe's *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*« in: Publications of the English Goethe Society, 1982-3, p.19.

16. Nietzsche, op.cit., Band III, p.557.

17. Glicksberg, op.cit., p. 33.

18. J. Jacobs, Glück und Entsagung: Zur Bedeutung der Novelle von den >Wunderlichen Nachbarskinder< in Goethes *Wahlverwandtschaften* in: Jahrbuch des freien deutschen Hochstifts, 1979, p.168: »Das legendenhafte Ende des Romans...demonstriert, daß der Entsagungsentschluß die wahlverwandtschaftliche Bestimmung nicht einfach auslöschen kann, sondern daß der aufgebrochene Konflikt sich allenfalls im Bezug auf eine transzendente Instanz als überwindbar denken läßt«; See also: F.J. Stopp >Ein wahrer Narziß<: Reflections of the Eduard-Ottillie Relationship in Goethe's *Wahlverwandtschaften* in: Publications of the English Goethe Society, 1980, p.75; A. Henkel, Beim Wiederlesen von Goethes *Wahlverwandtschaften* in: Jahrbuch der deutschen Schillergesellschaft, 1979, p.12.

19. P. Böckmann, Naturgesetz und Symbolik in Goethes *Wahlverwandtschaften* in: Jahrbuch des freien deutschen Hochstifts, 1968, p. 183.

20. This is epitomised in the *Novelle* by the variations in visual perspective that are commented upon by the narrator: H.A. VI, pp. 491, 492, 498, 499, 501. For an overview of considerations of the *Novelle* see: Erika Klüsener, »Novelle« in: Goethes Erzählwerk, ed. P.M. Lützel and J.A. McLeod, Reclam, Stuttgart 1985, pp. 429-52.

21. Sengle, op.cit., p.1.

22. See: Emil Staiger, Goethe, Artemis, Zürich 1981, S.397; Sigurd Burckhardt, »Die Stimme der Wahrheit und der Menschlichkeit«: Goethes *Iphigenie* in: Monatshefte, February 1956, no. 2, p.71; Humphrey Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks, Cambridge University Press, 1981, p.100f; Woldietrich Rasch, Goethes *Iphigenie* als Drama der Autonomie, Beck, München 1979.

23. K. Brown and A. Stephens, » >...Hinübergehn und unser Haus entschöhnen«: Die Ökonomie des Mythischen in Goethes *Iphigenie*«, Jahrbuch der deutschen Schiller Gesellschaft, 1988.

24. Cassirer, op.cit. p. 5: »Wenn das achtzehnte Jahrhundert diese Kraft bezeichnen, wenn es ihr Wesen in einem Wort einfangen will: so greift es hierfür nach dem Namen der >Vernunft«. Die >Vernunft« wird ihm zum Einheitspunkt und Mittelpunkt: zum Ausdruck all dessen, was von ihm ersehnt und erstrebt, gewollt und geleistet wird. [...] Das achtzehnte Jahrhundert ist durchdrungen von dem Glauben an die Einheit und die Unwandelbarkeit der Vernunft. Sie ist dieselbe für alle denkenden Subjekte, für alle Nationen, alle Epochen, alle Kulturen«.

25. Wieland, Die Geschichte des Agathon, op.cit., p. 434.

26. Detlef Kremer, Wezel: Über die Nachtseite der Aufklärung, Wilhelm Fink Verlag, München, p.25.
27. Hampson, op.cit., p.97f.
28. Uwe Japp, Aufgeklärtes Europa und natürliches Südsee, Georg Forsters Reise um die Welt, in: Reise und Utopie: Zur Literatur der Spätaufklärung, ed. H.J. Piechotta, Frankfurt/M 1976, p.20f.
29. Condillac, Oeuvres Philosophiques Vol.1, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1947, p.121f; Isaac Newton, Opera Quae Extant Omnia, Vol 3, Friedrich Frommann Verlag, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt 1964, p.3f; d'Alembert, Discours Préliminaire, Textes choisis de l'Encyclopédie, p. 41f.
30. Textes 'choisis de l'Encyclopédie, p. 191-2.
31. Cassirer, op.cit., p.3.
32. Kant, Schriften zur Anthropologie, p. 53.
33. Max Horkheimer und Theodor W. Adorno, Dialektik der Aufklärung, Fischer, Frankfurt/M 1984, p.14.
34. Roland Barthes, Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes, Seuil, Paris 1975, p. 75: »Formations réactives: une *doxa* (une opinion courante) est posée, insupportable; pour m'en dégager, je postule un paradoxe; puis ce paradoxe s'empoisse, devient lui-même concrétion nouvelle, nouvelle *doxa*, et il me faut aller plus loin vers un nouveau paradoxe.«

CHAPTER FIVE

THE >TRUTH< OF FICTION

All language is an alphabet of symbols whose use presupposes a past shared by all other interlocutors. How, then, transmit to others the infinite Aleph, which my fearful mind scarcely encompasses?

- Jorge Luis Borges (*The Aleph*)

I The Question of >Truth<

The impossibility of identifying an >objective reality< in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* that may function as the basis of a certain line of interpretation has serious repercussions both for the development of the narrative and for the rôle of the reader. A major problem concerning the relationship of the reader to the narrative arises because the multiple world-views constructed by the characters often occlude the position of the narrator. A further and equally problematic consequence of this is that the reader tends to seize on the values expressed or implicit in the narrator's infrequent interjections as offering a more simple access to the >truth< of the whole work than can be gained from disentangling the attitudes of the fictional characters. This, in turn, obscures the fact that the narrator's pronouncements are, over the whole text, marked by the same shifts of position as those of the characters themselves and

that the narrator's treatment of the characters can, at times, be distinctly manipulative.

I have asserted in previous chapters that the characters view models of >valid< experience constructed within their preferred discourses as structures of >reality< and that each character attempts to assign his or her desired model a dominant status. Although the characters may lose faith in these constructions, the models themselves are always replaced by what seem to be more acceptable images of >reality< at a given time. The question arises: if these various structures of the Real exist within the text, how then do they affect the structure of the entire work?

A fundamental problem of approaching the text lies in identifying the relationship of the reader to these images of >reality< constructed within the text. Does the text set out to convince the reader that it is a report of >>true< events, or does the narrative perspective maintain a critical distance between the text and the reader? Central to this problem is the question as to the rôle and position of the elusive narrator who appears at certain points in the text and comments on various aspects of the action. The numerous questions concerning reality and fiction as they relate to *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* have posed difficulties for critics during the history of the work's reception and I would like to consider these problems in the course of this chapter. In order to gain some perspective on the apparent conflict between >>true< and fictional order, I shall survey the various interpretations

of the novel which support the thesis that the narrative attempts to convince the reader of its own authenticity.

Many critics have asserted that at the beginning of the novel the narrator vouches for the »truth« of the narrative and proposes to recount a »real« story.¹ This view is based on an interpretation of the opening sentence of the novel: »Eduard - so nennen wir einen reichen Baron im besten Mannesalter -...« (p.242). A number of critics have suggested that this gesture by the narrator in the first sentence indicates an attempt to conceal the real identity of the characters in the novel, thus indicating that the narrative establishes itself as a record of factual occurrences. Ignace Feuerlicht suggests that throughout the novel an attempt is made to keep intact this illusion of >truth< and that the style of narration is a central factor of this process:

Ein Erzähler stützt sich auf angebliche Quellen, um seiner Erzählung den Anschein oder wenigstens den Tonfall einer wahren Geschichte zu geben. Der Erzähler der *Wahlverwandtschaften* will, daß der Leser den Roman als einen wahren Bericht erleben soll...Dieser Anschein einer wahren Geschichte wird verstärkt durch Ausdrücke, die die gefühlsmäßige Teilnahme des Erzählers an den Ereignissen zeigen...Weil sich die Geschichte als wahr ausgibt, werden die Namen der von Luciane verspotteten Personen nicht oder nur mit dem Anfangsbuchstaben angegeben.²

Paul Stöcklein takes the idea of »truth« in the novel to even further extremes: »Er [der Erzähler] erzählt übrigens wahre Geschichten. Auch der ganze Roman gibt sich als eine solche. Dies ist der Sinn seiner Eingangsworte >Eduard - so nennen wir...< Den wahren Namen verschweigt die Diskretion des Erzählers«.³ In addition to these assertions that the novel attempts to convince the reader of its own authenticity, critics

have also concerned themselves with questions as to whether Ottilie's canonisation at the end of the novel is taken seriously by the narrator and whether the reader should now consider her as a saint. H.G. Barnes addresses precisely this question: »Für Goethe ist Ottilie eine Heilige, sonst hätte er sie nicht nach Sankt Odilia getauft und sie dann nach dem Vorbild der elsässischen Wunder wirken lassen«.4

I believe it is an oversimplification of Goethe's sophisticated narrative technique to suggest that the novel attempts to convince the reader of its own authenticity. A reading of the novel in terms of a true story not only necessitates a passive and uncritical acceptance of the narrative perspective at the beginning and end of the work, but also implies the arbitrary espousal of a certain view of >reality< propounded by the text as a basis for interpretation. For this reason, readers have been able to interpret the work solely in terms of an »Eheroman«, a commentary on social developments in the 18th century and so on. In addition to this, critics who stress the apparent >truthfulness< of the narrative immediately place the work within the confines of a European literary convention prevalent in the 18th and 19th centuries in which works of fiction were endowed with the aura of an actual occurrence.⁵ Attempts to locate >reality< in the fictional framework of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* also overlook the way in which the narrator provides the reader with information as to the characters' emotional states and intimate relations, yet does not indicate by what means he came to have such information. This is not in consonance with the notion that the opening sentence of the novel is structured in such a fashion as to conceal the true identity of the characters. I suggest that

elements of the literary convention of >authenticity< are used by Goethe in the course of the novel, but are then consistently ^{called} cast into question by means of the various interjections by the narrator. Throughout the novel, tensions arise between the traditional convention of authenticity and elements of the text which draw the reader's attention to the deliberate construction of a fictional world. As a result of the conflicts between these and other features of the narrative, the novel resists integration into any single literary category. I shall elaborate on this point in the following section.

Since the novel's first appearance, there has been a tendency amongst its readers to consider the narrative as an example of >realist< fiction. In a letter to Goethe dated 5. October 1809, Rochlitz expressed his astonishment at the realism of the characters in the following terms:

Im Einzelnen, die Charaktere - sie sind keine wesenlosen Ideen, sondern wahre Personen, ohne jedoch an Hinz oder Kunz zu erinnern; sind wahre Individuen, ohne dass viel auf das gezählt wäre, was man im gemeinen Leben Eigenheiten nennt.⁶

For Rochlitz, as for other contemporary readers of the work, the actions and mannerisms of the characters appeared to remove them from the purely fictional realm and to locate them as actual members of society. I believe that H.G. Blocker provides an interesting perspective on why fictional characters are often viewed by the reader in such extra-fictional terms. In his essay on »fictional entities«, Blocker suggests that the aura of >truth< which appears to surround characters in a fictional framework is an extension of both the reader's and the author's referential use of language:

Descriptive expressions refer not by asserting or implying real existence but by our understanding them to be partial and generalized accounts of full-bodied, complete, concrete situations. In that sense every description is the description of a whole world. As a fact about our descriptive use of language, you can't describe less than a whole world. [...] Through our referential use of language, the character in a work of fiction is treated as a partially disclosed entity about whom more can be learned, who therefore contains more than our description of him, and in *that* sense, transcends the actual descriptive sentences about him. In short, because of our referring use of language, we treat him as a whole person over and above the sum of properties actually attributed to him in the novel.⁷

I believe it has often been the case in secondary literature on *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* that ^{critics} authors have attempted to impose value judgements on the actions of the characters by viewing them in an extra-fictional context or by imposing a model on the text from outside the novel itself. This is most evident in many critics' negative judgements of Eduard's actions and their contrasting praise of Ottilie's personality.⁸

The structure of the narrative itself makes it difficult for the reader to establish a position from which to evaluate events depicted in the text. On the one hand, the referential use of language leads the reader to enhance the depiction of the partially disclosed characters and to view them in an extra-fictional framework. This tendency is given further support by the illusion of authenticity which recurs at intervals throughout the text. On the other hand, however, various interjections by the narrator, which I shall examine in detail shortly, threaten the stability of this >realist< framework. In one of his conversations Goethe pointed out the difficulty of attempting to impose value-judgements from outside the text on events that occur within the fictional world:

...das Gesetz in dem Buche ist wahr, das Buch ist nicht unmoralisch, Sie müssen es nur vom grösseren Gesichtspuncte betrachten, der gewöhnliche moralische Maßstab kann bei solchem Verhältnisse sehr unmoralisch auftreten.⁹

This comment by Goethe emphasises the difficulty of attempting to make the novel conform to models derived from outside the text itself. I mentioned this tendency in the Introduction and indicated the way in which some writers have attempted to define not only a model of >reality< but also the author's intentions in the novel by basing their interpretations on a pre-existing view of social relations, the Platonic myth and so on.

I believe that the various discussions of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* which attempt to prove that the novel convinces the reader of its own >truthfulness< are erroneous because of the modulations of the narrative perspective throughout the text. In the first chapter of the novel, I would suggest, the narrative itself is couched in experimental terms («Eduard, - so nennen wir einen reichen Baron...») and that this tone forms the basis of various other interventions by the narrator throughout the text. This experimental tone of the narrative is in accordance with the questioning nature of the »Gleichnisrede« and the attempt to establish, by means of this model, a pattern of human relations. I conclude, therefore, that the introductory sentence establishes an experimental tone that develops in various guises throughout the text. In this sense, I agree with those critics who assert that the opening of the novel draws the reader's attention to the creation of a fictional rather than a >realistic< framework for the novel.¹⁰ The opening sentence may be seen to offer the reader a choice

when approaching the text. On the one hand there is the possibility of observing the development of a standard literary trope, namely the unfolding of a type of >realistic< novel or of a »Schlüsselroman«; on the other hand, the novel may be seen in terms of a self-conscious commentary on the creation of fictional order. In the course of this chapter I shall indicate how the novel takes elements from both of these literary traditions, yet ultimately defies categorisation into either of these two modes.

I mentioned above that there is a paucity of evidence in the novel to support the view that the narrator attempts to disguise the true identity of the characters. Nor does the narrative perspective explicitly signify at any point that the novel should be read in terms of an account of actual occurrences. On the contrary, throughout the work the narrator constantly draws the reader's attention to the conscious creation of a fictional order in the novel by commenting on aspects of the work's structure or on certain actions of the characters. Part Two of the novel opens in a fashion similar to Part One, for once again the narrator comments on the construction of the next scene in the narrative sequence:

Im gemeinen Leben begegnet uns oft, was wir in der Epopöe als Kunstgriff des Dichters zu rühmen pflegen, daß nämlich, wenn die Hauptfiguren sich entfernen, verbergen, sich der Untätigkeit hingeben, gleich sodann schon ein Zweiter, Dritter, bisher kaum Bemerkter den Platz füllt und, indem er seine ganze Tätigkeit äußert, uns gleichfalls der Aufmerksamkeit, der Teilnahme, ja des Lobes und Preises würdig erscheint. (p.360)

Not only does this deliberate replacing of characters occur after Eduard leaves the household, but eventually the architect is replaced by the

Gehülfe, the Gehülfe by Charlotte's child, and the child's death is compensated for by Eduard's return. In this respect, the narrator's comment that opens Part Two draws attention to a structural feature of the novel that determines the succession of events in the second half of the work. By indicating that the development of the plot progresses according to a conventional structural principle, the structure of the following events may also be viewed in terms of an ironic comment on the traditional »Kunstgriff des Dichters« mentioned by the narrator. In other words: a traditional narrative device is employed and exploited by the author, with the result that its functional use in the European literary tradition is unmasked.''

This comment also serves to heighten the reader's awareness of the element of fictionality apparent in the work. In other words: the narrator stresses the creation of an artificial universe in which the narrative comments on or mirrors the process of its own creation. In this sense, certain parts of the novel are directly concerned with the process of constructing a fictional order through language, rather than with advancing the plot itself. Several other interjections by the narrator also indicate this self-reflective tendency in the work. Throughout the novel, the narrator draws the reader's attention to certain aspects of the narrative or expresses concern as to the way in which events are described:

Dadurch ward sie [Ottillie] den Männern, wie von Anfang so immer mehr, daß wir es nur mit dem rechten Namen nennen, ein wahrer Augentrost. (p.283)

Fast hätte er [Eduard] gewünscht, sie [Ottillie] möchte straucheln, gleiten, daß er sie in seine Arme auffangen, sie an sein Herz drücken könnte. Doch dies hätte er unter keiner Bedingung getan,

aus mehr als einer Ursache: er fürchtete sie zu beleidigen, sie zu beschädigen. Wie dies gemeint sei, erfahren wir zugleich. (p.292)

Wir müssen dieses Vorfalls gedenken, weil er verschiedenen Dingen einen Anstoß gab, die sonst vielleicht lange geruht hätten. (pp.360-61)

Ebenso zieht sich durch Ottiliens Tagebuch ein Faden der Neigung und Anhänglichkeit, der alles verbindet und das Ganze bezeichnet. Dadurch werden diese Bemerkungen, Betrachtungen, ausgezogenen Sinnsprüche und was sonst vorkommen mag, der Schreibenden ganz besonders eigen und für sie von Bedeutung. Selbst jede einzelne von uns ausgewählte und mitgeteilte Stelle gibt davon das entschiedenste Zeugnis. (p.368)

Manches Eigene von innigerem Bezug wird an dem roten Faden wohl zu erkennen sein. (p.383)

So bewegte sich auch in dem täglichen Zusammenleben unserer Freunde fast alles wieder in dem alten Gleise. (p.479)

Was sollen wir bei diesem hoffnungslosen Zustande der ehedem ehegattlichen, freundschaftlichen, ärztlichen Bemühungen gedenken, in welchen sich Eduards Angehörige eine Zeitlang hin und her wogten? (p.490)

In this way, the text offers at once the narration of a series of events and a commentary on various aspects of its own construction. Moreover, in the reference to the »roter Faden... , der alles verbindet und das Ganze bezeichnet«, the narrative purports to hold the key to its own interpretation. As I mentioned in the Introduction, however, the various critics who have attempted to determine the exact nature of this »roter Faden« have nearly all located one structural model in Ottilie's diary and imposed it on the narrative development regardless of its general applicability. This resembles the central tendency of the characters in the text to take one aspect of Ottilie's personality and then to elevate it to the status of a characteristic paradigm which may be used as the basis of various models of >reality<. In both cases, a single aspect of the text or character is exploited at the expense of other important

features presented to the reader. I believe that the reference to the »roter Faden« must be approached with great caution, for it becomes increasingly evident that the reader cannot wholly trust the interjections by the narrator because of the fluctuations within the narrative perspective throughout the text. The reader's relationship to the narrator becomes clearer if we examine the distinction between the narrator and author of the novel. I shall return to this point later.

The self-reflective aspect of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* indicates Goethe's awareness of the tradition of >metafiction< that developed in 18th century European literature. The metafictional novel reflects the narrative process as the text itself unfolds. In this way the narrative technique turns back on itself and transforms itself into the object of its own discourse, thus placing its own structure and composition as one of the central issues in the developing narrative.¹² Novels such as Diderot's *Jacques le fataliste* (1771) or Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759-66) incorporate into the body of the text commentaries on the nature of writing, the relationship of the reader to the text, parodies of various literary genres and, most importantly, discussions concerning the rôle of truth and reality in the fictional work. The metafictional tradition of the 18th century, of which the greatest forerunner is undoubtedly Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1604), may be seen to have exercised a great influence on Goethe's attitude towards various aspects of literary production. A series of maxims in »Makariens Archiv« in the *Wanderjahre*¹³ and the essay »Lorenz Sterne« of 1798 give some indication of the importance that Goethe attached to the influence of this writer:

In diesem Sinne mach' ich aufmerksam auf einen Mann, der die große Epoche reinerer Menschenkenntnis, edler Duldung, zarter Liebe in der zweiten Hälfte des vorigen Jahrhunderts zuerst angeregt und verbreitet hat. An diesen Mann, dem ich so viel verdanke, werd' ich oft erinnert. (H.A. XII, pp.345-46)

Given the overwhelming self-reflective nature of Sterne's most important work *Tristram Shandy*, which forms the central point of Goethe's discussions of this writer, it is unlikely that Goethe would not have been aware of the self-consciousness of literary production evident in certain novels of the 17th and 18th centuries.

The most important aspect of this self-reflective tendency in 18th century literature for the present context is the debate on the position of reality in the fictional world. In *Jacques le fataliste*, Diderot provides the reader with a constant commentary on the irrelevance of factual detail in the novel. This leads to an imaginary dialogue between the narrator and reader, during the course of which the narrator may be seen to become increasingly exasperated by the reader's demand for factual precision. When describing the onset of a sudden storm that causes great difficulties for the two main characters, the narrator addresses the reader in the following terms:

...ils furent accueillis par un orage qui les contraignit de s'acheminer...-Où? - Où? Lecteur, vous êtes d'une curiosité bien incommode! Et que diable cela vous fait-il? Quand je vous aurai dit que c'est à Pontoise ou à Saint-Germain, à Notre-Dame-de-Lorette ou à Saint-Jacques-de-Compostelle, en serez-vous plus avancé? Si vous insistez, je vous dirai qu'ils s'acheminèrent vers...Oui, pourquoi pas?...vers un château immense au frontispice duquel on lisait: »Je n'appartiens à personne et j'appartiens à tout le monde...«¹⁴

Diderot points out the absurdity of incorporating factual detail into his fictional world in this dialogue with the reader and then, stressing

the fictionality of his following description, proceeds to describe in detail the Château and the actions of the two protagonists. By drawing attention to the rôle of the narrator and stressing the imaginative construction of the fictional world, Diderot renders absurd questions concerning the truth of the narrative. Ultimately the narrator absolves himself from the responsibility of providing the reader with any indications as to how this aspect of the work should be approached:

Je vous le répète donc pour ce moment et pour la suite, soyez circonspect si vous ne voulez pas prendre dans cet entretien de Jacques et de son maître le vrai pour le faux, le faux pour le vrai. Vous voilà bien averti, et je m'en lave les mains.¹⁵

There is much evidence to show that Goethe was also concerned with the question of reality and its relation to a work of fiction. In one of his conversations at the time of the publication of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* Goethe comments on the futility of attempting to locate a purely factual basis for the work. In a remark similar in tone to the narrator's comments in *Jacques le fataliste*, Goethe states the following:

Ob die >Wahlverwandtschaften< wahr sind, ob sie auf Thatsächlichem beruhen? Jede Dichtung, die nicht übertreibt, ist wahr, und alles, was einen dauernden tiefen Eindruck macht, ist nicht übertrieben. Uebrigens soll es den Menschen gleichgültig sein; der blossen Neugierde muss man nicht die Rede stehen.¹⁶

Questions concerning >truth< and fiction were also treated by Goethe from an earlier point and form the central issue of certain theoretical writings. In an essay of 1798, >über Wahrheit und Wahrscheinlichkeit der Kunstwerke<, which takes the form of a dialogue between the »Anwalt des Künstlers« and a member of the public, Goethe illustrates the difficulty

of attempting to discuss works of art in terms of truth and illusion. The problem of applying this duality to art arises because the work of art is seen essentially as an autonomous world that is governed by its own rules, and is thus totally separated from the social order:

ANWALT: Wir sprachen vorher der Oper eine Art Wahrheit ab; wir behaupteten, daß sie keineswegs das, was sie nachahmt, wahrscheinlich darstelle; können wir ihr aber eine innere Wahrheit, die aus der Konsequenz eines Kunstwerkes entspringt, ableugnen? (H.A. XII, p.70)

There is a strong tendency in Goethe's theoretical writings to emphasise the notion that the work of art is characterised by its own form of order or »Kunstwahrheit«. In this sense, guarantees for the >truth< of a construction of >reality< are located within the order of the work itself rather than in any empirical reality experienced by the author or the public. In a definition of the novel in one of his *Maximen* Goethe asserts the following link between a fictional order and reality: »Roman: der uns unmögliche Begebenheiten unter unmöglichen oder beinahe unmöglichen Bedingungen als wirklich darstellt« (H.A. XII, p.498). Here the notion of »Kunstwahrheit« removes the construction of fictional order from the position of an >imitation< of nature to the more elevated status of an order governed by its own laws. This notion may be seen to extend into *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* when Ottilie discusses the relationship of the work of art to the artist. In one of the comments in her diary she suggests that the work of art is to be viewed in terms of an autonomous order that eventually becomes independent not only of empirical reality, but also of its creator:

Muß sich nicht allgemach auf diese Weise die Kunst von dem Künstler entfernen, wenn das Werk wie ein ausgestattetes Kind nicht mehr auf den Vater zurückwirkt? Und wie sehr mußte die Kunst sich selbst

befördern, als sie fast allein mit dem öffentlichen, mit dem, was allen und also auch dem Künstler gehörte, sich zu beschäftigen bestimmt war! (p.375)

As Käte Hamburger has indicated quite clearly in her book *Wahrheit und ästhetische Wahrheit*, however, the creation of an >aesthetic< form of truth or reality is a fiction in itself and undermines the semantic basis of >truth<:

In dem Begriffsgefüge »ästhetische Wahrheit« geht der Begriff der Wahrheit seines Bedeutungsgehalts verlustig: identisch zu sein mit dem, was der Fall ist. Hier liegt, wie man sagen kann, der semantische Grund, daß Wahrheit niemals als ästhetische aufgewiesen werden kann.¹⁷

This whole concept of truth does, of course, depend on an acceptance of Aristotle's notion that truth is located in the correspondance between judgment and object, namely the idea of >adaequatio< that has dominated Western metaphysics and logic throughout the history of philosophy.¹⁸ As Margret Rose has pointed out, the metafictional novel undermines the notion of truth in fiction as mimesis by exposing and questioning the process of artistic production itself.¹⁹ Although certain 20th century thinkers have attempted to overturn the concept of truth as mimesis in the work of art by developing entirely new theories of truth,²⁰ the fact remains that the relationship of art to empiric reality was seen by many artists of the Enlightenment to revolve around polemics concerning the >imitation< of reality and the creation of a hermetic order in terms of »Kunstwahrheit«. Moreover, it is precisely this concept of >truth< in the fictional construction as the correspondance of the narrative with reality as experienced by the author and reader that has dominated in secondary literature on *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* since its first

appearance in 1809. As I shall show, Goethe manages to undermine both this idea of >reality< in fiction and the concept of »Kunstwahrheit« in the course of the novel. Before entering into this discussion, however, it is first necessary to determine the various positions open to the reader when attempting to develop an interpretation of the work.

II Approaching a Fictional Order.

It would seem that we now have three major alternatives to deal with when considering possible textual interpretations of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*. Should the novel be viewed in terms of imitation or mimesis, thus making the >truth< of fiction directly proportional to its correspondance with the empirical experiences of reader and author? Are we to accept the notion of »Kunstwahrheit« and suppose that the novel is a separate >reality< governed by its own laws and thus independent of the reader's presuppositions? Is the fictional order remote from any form of empirical reality and thus the product of an imaginary impulse of the author? I have already indicated why I believe that the first proposition cannot be applied to the novel. As against the notion that the fictional world is a hermetic construction of reality, I believe that *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* must be viewed both in the light of Goethe's concept of »Kunstwahrheit« and as part of the growing tradition of self-reflective fiction in the 18th century. Before considering the metafictional aspects of the novel, I shall first deal with the notion of a hermetic universe of the art work as it applies to the novel.

Treating *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* as a fictional construct that displays its own »Kunstwahrheit« creates the possibility of establishing one single model of >truth< and applying it to the development of the narrative. This is essentially what Walter Benjamin does in his critique

of Goethe's novel. At the beginning of his essay on *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, Benjamin draws a distinction between the »Sachgehalt« and the »Wahrheitsgehalt« of the work. The former he defines as the object of a commentary, the latter forms the goal of criticism.²¹ Without giving any further indications as to the meaning of these two concepts, Benjamin asserts that the tensions between the »Sachgehalt« and the »Wahrheitsgehalt« form both the basis of literary production («Grundgesetz des Schrifttums») and of the crucial question concerning any critical approach to the work of art. According to Benjamin the »Sachgehalt« of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* appears in the form of »das Mythische«, namely the primary chaos that has been given an ordered structure in the discourse of the characters. In an evaluation of the depiction of marriage in the novel, Benjamin gives the following explanation of the nature of »das Mythische« as that which remains after the socially created discourses dissolve in the development of the narrative:

Kein sittliches Problem ist hier die Ehe und auch kein soziales. Sie ist keine bürgerliche Lebensform. In ihrer Auflösung wird alles Humane zur Erscheinung und das Mythische verbleibt allein als Wesen.²²

Having identified what he believes to be the »Sachgehalt« of the novel, Benjamin then proceeds to indicate the complement of this frame of reference, namely the »Wahrheitsgehalt«. He defines this structure as the rôle played in the work by Goethe's concept of »das Symbolische«. According to Benjamin: »Das Symbolische aber ist das, worin die unauflöslliche und notwendige Bindung eines Wahrheitsgehaltes an einen Sachgehalt erscheint«.²³ The process of endowing signs with meaning is

depicted by Benjamin as being the central means by which both aesthetic and social forms of order are created. The reading of symbols imposes a structure on the chaos of »das Mythische«, whereby the characters, the author and the reader are able to construct a frame of reference by which to order events. In this way, »das Symbolische« becomes an essential part of »das Mythische«, for without the process of imposing meaning on phenomena, the various structures of order dissolve into chaos. In this way, »das Symbolische« and »das Mythische« stand in a dynamic relationship that forms the basis of the narrative development.

Although the notion of this dynamic opposition may provide an interesting perspective on the central issues of the novel, I cannot agree with Benjamin's categorisation of »das Mythische«. It is true that underlying the various constructions of order in the text lie the many signs that the characters have vainly attempted to bring under control. I suggest, however, that to label this disorder of signs »das Mythische« is itself the imposition of a further fictional order on the text. Moreover, there is no indication in the novel that the chaos from which order is drawn is in any way >mythical< in essence. Whatever definition of »myth« one may espouse, myths tend to present themselves as narratives or structures which are intelligible and which can be reduced to relatively simple components, hence the opposite of the chaos which Benjamin implies. Benjamin also avoids a discussion of the exact nature of the term »myth«. As I have indicated in the course of this study, the various discourses competing for supremacy in the novel may be seen to form a disorder in themselves. I suggest that this multiplicity of orders in the text makes the plain duality of »das Mythische« and »das

Symbolische« into yet another simplification. In addition to this, I think that the definition of a »Wahrheitsgehalt« in the text necessitates the imposition of one particular order on the work and implies an arbitrary conceptualisation of >truth< that forces the text to conform to a single set pattern.

In another sense, »Kunstwahrheit« in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* may be taken to represent the various forms of order constructed within the text and believed in by the different characters. The principles governing the actions of the characters are validated by certain discourses within the text. It may be precisely the interplay of these various discourses that forms the basis of the »Kunstwahrheit« in the novel, namely the shifting frame of reference that acts for the characters as the parameters of human experience. The notion that the work of art expounds its own version of >truth< implies that the imposition of certain models from outside the text itself may be an inappropriate basis on which to erect an interpretation of the novel. As a result of this, the guarantees for a particular order within the text need not necessarily be located in an empirical social or moral code experienced by the author or the reader, but instead may be located in the fictional discourses within the text itself. Finally, therefore, the code shared by the narrator, characters and reader is localised within the text itself. As Maurice Blanchot states in his examination of the rôle of the reader:

Mais la fiction n'est pas comprise, elle est vécue sur les mots à partir desquels elle se réalise, et elle est plus réelle, pour moi qui la lis ou l'écris, que bien des événements réels, car elle s'imprègne toute la réalité du langage et elle se substitue à ma vie, à force d'exister.²⁴

A common code of experience, shared by the narrator, the characters and the reader and created from the language of the novel itself, is established at the end of the novel when the narrator presents the final image of a union between Eduard and Otilie. As I indicated in an earlier chapter, this final image is based on a fusion of two discourses that recur throughout the narrative. The creation of a link between a form of social discourse and the theme of Platonic union establishes a nexus of experience between the reader and the work that has developed out of the narrative itself. In this respect, the structural basis of the final image is located in the inter-relation of discourses in the text rather than in the experience of author or reader outside the fictional world. As a result of this, the reader is drawn into the final model of >reality< constructed in the text in the same way that fictional characters make pilgrimages to Otilie's tomb in the belief that they will be healed. The reader and the narrator join the characters, therefore, in the creation and validation of this final model of >reality<. This adherence of the reader to the linguistic structure of the Real in the text is most clearly evidenced by the interpretations of those critics mentioned above who attempt to decide an answer to the question as to whether or not Otilie should be considered as a >>true< saint at the end of the novel.

Although the guarantees of various models of >reality< may be seen to be located in different discourses within the text itself, thus forming a »Kunstwahrheit«, this entire process is put into question by the interventions of the narrator. By providing the reader with a spasmodic commentary on aspects of the novel, the narrator draws

attention to the fictional nature of this form of >reality<. In this respect the narrator simultaneously creates and discredits the notion of truth in the work of art, thus transforming the >realistic< novel into a metafiction. Interestingly, in her study of the metafictional narrative, Linda Hutcheon terms this type of art that comments on its own fictional nature, »narcissistic narrative«:

Overt forms of narcissism are present in texts in which the self-consciousness and self-reflection are clearly evident, usually explicitly thematized or even allegorized within the >fiction<. In its covert form, however, this process would be structuralized, internalized, actualized. Such a text would, in fact, be self-reflective, but not necessarily self-conscious.²⁵

In accordance with Hutcheon's definition of the metafictional narrative, I believe that the self-reflective tendency of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* may be seen in terms of an extension of the Narcissus-theme that underlies much of the action in the novel. Just as the characters reflect their own images in various constructions of order, so too the novel reflects its own narrative technique during the development of the plot. In this respect, the structure of the work itself further develops the narcissistic configuration and completes this series of variations.

Forming an interesting opposition to various critics' discussions of the way in which fiction and truth relate to art, Roland Barthes suggests that the novel which admits its own fictionality is, in fact, the most »truthful« form of literary production:

...la littérature, c'est l'irréel même; ou plus exactement, bien loin d'être une copie analogique du réel, *la littérature est au contraire la conscience même de l'irréel du langage*: la littérature la plus »vraie«, c'est celle qui se sait la plus irréelle, dans la mesure où elle se sait essentiellement langage...²⁶

When approaching the question of >truth< as it relates to *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* critics have tended to distort elements of the novel in an attempt to draw a distinction or bridge the gap between truth (reality experienced by the author and reader) and fiction (imaginary world inhabited by the characters). In these terms, the more >truthful< the narrative, the more it should correspond to the lived reality of author and reader. As Barthes points out, however, this process, usually attributed to the realist novel, does, in fact, represent a greater form of deception on the part of the author. According to Barthes, the >truth< of the work is to be found in the narrative's admission of its own fictionality. In this sense, critics searching for >truth< and >reality< in Goethe's novel have overlooked one of the most important aspects of this entire complex, namely the self-reflective elements of the narrative that tell the >truth< about fictional constructions in the realm of language. In addition to this, the constant references in the novel to the use of language in creating models of order serve as a further indication of the narrative's central preoccupation with the material of its own creation, or in Barthes' terms, »elle [la littérature] se sait essentiellement langage«.

As a further extension of this line of argument, I suggest that the reader may also approach the work as a meta-critique of the Enlightenment. In other words: just as the narrative contains a commentary on its own structure, the work itself may be seen as an example of the Enlightenment turning back on itself and reflecting its own image in a new and critical light. As I mentioned earlier, Goethe is often seen by critics as an upholder of a small corpus of Enlightenment

values that were also evident in Weimar Classicism. It is true that ideals such as »Vernunft«, »Humanität« and »Selbstbildung« are often praised in his works, yet it would be an underestimation of Goethe's critical thinking to assume that the various ideals of the Enlightenment received nothing other than unquestioning praise. Instead, Goethe is capable of depicting and supporting certain >enlightened< values in his works, whilst at the same time subtly questioning their validity as the basis of a world-model. I indicated this in the last chapter in a discussion concerning the critique of certain models of Enlightenment thought that are evident in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*. In this respect, Goethe's narrative may be seen as an example of the way in which the more critical thinkers of the Enlightenment were able to provide their readers with a double perspective on the social, philosophical and literary ideas of the 18th century. This involves the formulation of an >enlightened< thesis and a critical, rather than naïve, reflection of this postulate as antithesis.

As is always the case with *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, it is impossible to view the work as an example of only one literary genre. For it is not an example of the solely >realistic< or of the purely >self-reflective< novel. Rather, the various modulations of the narrative perspective make it impossible for the reader to view the novel as representative of one particular form. The earlier interjections by the narrator, on the one hand, and the world-view implicit in the last paragraph of the novel, on the other, mark the two extremes of the narrative perspective in the text, namely the self-

reflective mode of narration and the contrasting naïve construction of a preferred model of >reality<.

The interjections by the narrator may be seen to provide a commentary not only on certain events in the novel, but also on the way in which a fictional world is constructed. In this respect, the rôle of the narrator differs markedly from the comments made by the narrator in another important fictional work of the Enlightenment, namely Wieland's *Agathon*. The narrator plays an prominent rôle in this novel and becomes involved in a dialogue with the reader that serves to emphasise certain points in the narrative. In contrast to the narrator of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, the narrative voice of Wieland's novel guides the reader through the plot and gives consistent indications as to how the work should be understood. Although the interpolations of the narrative perspective draw attention to the fictional nature of the work, emphasis is placed on the didactic aspect of the narrative. This ultimately diverts the reader's attention from the construction of fictional order. The rôle of the narrator in *Agathon* may be seen quite clearly in one of the commentaries concerning the way in which the reader should interpret certain actions of the hero:

Der Himmel verhüte, daß unsre Absicht jemals sei, in schönen Seelen diese liebenswürdige Schwärmerei für die Tugend abzuschrecken, welche ihnen so natürlich und öfters die Quelle der lobenswürdigsten Handlungen ist. Alles was wir mit diesen Bemerkungen abzielen ist allein,...daß also der Held unsrer Geschichte, durch die Veränderungen und Schwachheiten, denen wir ihn unterworfen sehen, zwar allerdings, wir gestehen es, weniger ein Held, aber destomehr ein Mensch, und also desto geschickter sei, uns durch seine Erfahrungen, und selbst durch seine Fehler zu belehren.²⁷

The rôle of the narrator in 18th century fiction cannot be seen to fulfil only a single function, since the metafictional novel, the more didactic examples of narration and many other different narrative techniques may be seen to exist alongside each other. This stylistic multiplicity is mirrored in the course of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, for the reader is also forced to deal with a great variety of narrative techniques including letters, diary entries, maxims, interventions by the narrator, third person narration and the larger construction of a >realistic< framework. In this respect, the novel incorporates almost every form of narrative technique current at the time. As a result of this, the reader may ultimately be led to assume a critical distance from the various contemporary literary techniques and to question the nature of fiction. The various appearances and disguises assumed by the narrator form a marked contrast to the narrative techniques in Goethe's earlier prose works, for the personality of the narrator in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* is much more enigmatic than^w the first person narrative voice in *Werther* or the narrations of the Abbé in the *Unterhaltungen*.

There has been a tendency amongst writers on *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, however, to impose a standard narrative form on the novel and to view Goethe's narrator in terms similar to the narrator's rôle in Wieland's *Agathon*, namely as a discourse that provides the reader with a guide to the interpretation of events in the narrative. Victor Lange, for example, views the position of the narrator as being stable and consistent throughout the entire narrative:

The pressure upon the aristocratic world of this book from forces which are comprehended only in so far as they seem scientifically - or pseudo-scientifically - intelligible, is exercised, gauged, and controlled for us, the readers, by a narrator who is absolutely impartial. He alone makes that seemingly normal, all too formalized world transparent, he illuminates it by an astonishing number of concealed and at first sight barely relevant lights.²⁸

This view overlooks the subtlety of the narrative perspective in the work, for it not only fails to take into account the synthesis of different styles of narration which prevent the reader from placing the work in a single category, but also fails to acknowledge the metafictional commentary incorporated into the narrative. Moreover, it is precisely the instability of the narrative perspective throughout the work and its failure to take control of the various world-views in the text that leads to the mutual deconstruction of models of >reality< in the novel.

When discussing the function of the narrative perspective in the novel, many critics have attempted to define the personality of the narrator. This has led to a large number of conflicting perspectives on the work. On the basis of Goethe's acknowledgement of the importance of »Bildung« and »Erziehung« in the creation of socially acceptable individuals, R. Finney associates the the narrative voice with the character of the Gehülfe: »The reader's response is to view the assistant as a spokesman for the narrator, who is traditionally seen as very close to the author himself«.²⁹ Finney develops his argument by asserting that the Gehülfe recognises Otilie's individual capabilities and does not create an image of her in a narcissistic manner, as does Eduard. I believe that this association of the narrative perspective

with the character of the Gehülfe does not give an exact account of the rôle of the narrator, for it necessitates accepting a single model of interpreting of the novel. By endowing the speeches of the Gehülfe with special status, a form of social discourse is elevated to the position of >objective< reality.

This overlooks the constant questioning of group constructions of order that is in evidence throughout the work. Moreover, it also implies that the Gehülfe has the privilege of standing outside the narcissistic complications in which the characters remain enmeshed. As I have indicated in previous chapters, I believe that there is ample evidence in the text to suggest that the Gehülfe creates an image of Otilie as »ideal mother« that is in accordance with his own preferred structure of >reality< in the same way that other characters in the novel integrate different images of her into their own world-views. This is heightened by Otilie's own negative reaction, in terms of self-alienation, to the rôle she is forced to assume during the scene of the »lebende Bilder«. In addition to this, Finney's view does not take account of the interjections by the narrator that directly concern the creation of the fictional world.

Perhaps the best example of the way in which critics have tended to endow the narrator with a personality that determines the tenor and construction of the novel is Paul Stöcklein's commentary on the narrative perspective:

Hinter diesem einfachen, klaren Tonfall, der niemals schwankt...hinter dieser lakonischen Erzählweise, die gelassen Tatsache an Tatsache scharfäugig und vieldeutig knüpft, hinter

dieser Hörsprache des 18. Jahrhunderts, zu der kein lebenswarmer Hauch aus den Gründen der Volkssprache oder aus Werthers Sprache gedrungen zu sein scheint, hinter alledem taucht allmählich und immer deutlicher ein faszinierendes Gesicht auf, das Gesicht des Erzählers: ein grauhaariges, gepflegtes, vornehmes, faltengeprägtes Gesicht, fraglos noch aus dem echten 18. Jahrhundert, dem eleganten und rationalen, vergleichbar dem Abbé aus den *Unterhaltungen*, doch wehläufiger, härter und geheimnisvoller.³⁰

This fanciful description of the narrator as an archetype of aristocratic, enlightened rationality overlooks the entire dimension of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* that questions the philosophical, religious and social heterogeneity of the Enlightenment. Moreover, Stöcklein's view also suggests that the narrative perspective is a stable and unchanging feature of the novel. As I have already indicated, it is precisely the various fluctuations of the narrative voice that cause difficulties for any reader approaching the work. I believe, therefore, that the notion of a narrative perspective »der niemals schwankt« is a distortion of the position of the narrator throughout the novel. In this sense, any single characterisation of the narrator implies the arbitrary endowment of the narrative perspective with a personality according to the preference of the reader.

In the light of these various conflicting depictions of the narrator, the question arises: what feature of the narrative perspective makes it susceptible to so many different interpretations? I have already pointed to the effects of the various fluctuations of the narrative voice on the reader's approach to the text, but there is another aspect of the narrative technique that has led to this great variety of approaches. This is the way in which the narrative encourages the illusion of denying its own power to structure an order through

language. Throughout the novel the reader is increasingly aware of the rôle of »Schicksal« that seems to guide events, or the impossibility of the task »ein gewaltsam Entbundenenes wieder ins Enge [zu] bringen«. In other words: once a succession of events has been put into motion, there is no possibility of altering their ultimate course. The narrator comments on the rôle of destiny as it relates to events in the novel in the following terms:

Wenn gewöhnliche Menschen, durch gemeine Verlegenheiten des Tags zu einem leidenschaftlichen ängstlichen Betragen aufgeregt, uns ein mitleidiges Lächeln abnötigen, so betrachten wir dagegen mit Ehrfurcht ein Gemüt, in welchem die Saat eines großen Schicksals ausgesät worden, das die Entwicklung dieser Empfängnis abwarten muß und weder das Gute noch das Böse, weder das Glückliche noch das Unglückliche, was daraus entspringen soll, beschleunigen darf und kann. (p.371)

Auch auf dem festen Lande gibt es wohl Schiffbruch; sich davon auf das schnellste zu erholen und herzustellen, ist schön und preiswürdig. Ist doch das Leben nur auf Gewinn und Verlust berechnet! Wer macht nicht irgendeine Anlage und wird darin gestört!...Der Reisende bricht unterwegs zu seinem höchsten Verdruß ein Rad und gelangt durch diesen unangenehmen Zufall zu den erfreulichsten Bekanntschaften und Verbindungen, die auf sein ganzes Leben Einfluß haben. Das Schicksal gewährt uns unsre Wünsche, aber auf seine Weise, um uns etwas über unsere Wünsche geben zu können. (p.428)

After the development of the new relationships in the novel, many references occur to the characters' inability to alter the inevitable succession of events. As the narrative progresses, the characters appear to be bound to a course of action that is prescribed within their own preferred models of >reality<. I indicated this in the last chapter when pointing out that the characters appear to be at once creators and victims of their own discourses. As the narrative develops, this tendency increases to the point where »destiny« appears to take control of the action. For example: because of his great passion for Ottilie and

his faith in the power of the Platonic myth, Eduard cannot renounce his love even after Ottilie withdraws from all communication: »Er [Eduard] mußte sie sehn, sie sprechen. Wozu, warum, was daraus entstehen sollte, davon konnte die Rede nicht sein. Er widerstand nicht, er mußte« (p.471). If the actions of the characters in the latter stages of the novel are controlled by »destiny«, then ultimately the course of the narrative itself must be governed by the same guiding principle. By allowing the characters to acknowledge the power of »destiny«, the narrative perspective itself gives the illusion of subscribing to a higher authority. In this way, the relationship of the speaker to the spoken is mirrored in the relationship of the narrator to the narrative. The apparent dominance of »Schicksal« has been seized upon by many readers since the novel's first appearance. In 1810 Rudolf Abeken suggested the following explanation of destiny as it relates to Ottilie's character:

Nicht von bewusster Leidenschaft, sie wird vom Schicksal hingerissen, und findet sich von seinem Strome gefasst, ehe sie weiss, dass sie hineingerathen ist. [...] Die Würde der menschlichen Natur, die in dem furchtbaren Drange der Noth und des Leids erst recht hervortritt, siegreich, anbetungswürdig. - Siehe Ottilien an. Sie ist der Naturnothwendigkeit unterworfen; ihr Geschick reisst sie blind dahin...³¹

As creator of a fictional world, the narrator has, in principle, the power to manipulate events in any way. With the introduction and acknowledgement of »destiny«, however, the narrative perspective appears to dispense with the problem of having to control the further course of events. This technique heightens the illusion that the work of art represents a hermetic world that is governed by its own laws. The apparent abdication of power by the narrative perspective stands in

complete opposition to the experimental tone of the opening of the novel and the various intrusions by the narrator which develop the image of a literary experiment. I would agree, therefore, with Martin Swales that a »supernatural area of motivation« cannot be viewed as the sole driving force behind the narrative development.³² In order to conduct the experiment in the first place, the narrator must be in control of all variables. As the novel progresses, however, this experimental line is blurred not only by the change of perspective to the focus on >destiny<, but also by the way in which the narrator does not attempt to keep control of the various world-views. This constant shifting of perspective in the novel may be seen to anticipate the more radical stance of the narrator in the works of Kleist. In Kleist's prose the narrative perspective often relinquishes its absolute control in favour of an emotional involvement in the events narrated, yet it is ultimately not replaced by any stable regulating feature in the narrative context. In *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* the narrative perspective may be seen to assume various guises in the course of the novel that increase the complexity of the work's structure and create further difficulties for the reader when attempting to define a stable basis for interpretation.

A further problem concerning the rôle and identity of the narrator arises if the attempt is made to view the author and narrator as one person. Ignace Feuerlicht recognises the importance of this problem and discusses the position of the narrator at length, yet, as I have indicated in the course of this analysis, I would disagree with his conclusion that the narrative ultimately vouches for its own authenticity.³³ R. Finney's interpretation of the rôle of the narrator

in the novel equates the narrative perspective with the personality of the Gehülfe on the basis that the pedagogical ideals of the Gehülfe are close to Goethe's own concept of »Bildung«.³⁴ This notion presupposes that the narrative voice is a self-portrayal of the author. For the greater part of the novel there is apparently little cause to doubt this proposition. The experimental nature of certain parts of the narrative, self-reflective aspects of the novel and even the illusory denial of authorial control in the motif of >destiny< may be integrated into such a fusion of narrator and author.

I suggest, however, that this notion cannot be sustained throughout the entire novel. Once again the final paragraph is of enormous importance in attempting to decide this issue. If narrator and author are to be seen as one and the same person then the final image of Eduard's union with Ottilie in Paradise must be taken seriously as the novel's conclusion, for the narrator neither questions the final vision nor offers it unequivocally as a parody of a literary trope. I suggest that a naïve ending to the novel in this manner is uncharacteristic of the sophisticated narrative technique that has been developed throughout the work. I have already indicated that in the last paragraph a final model of >reality< is created and upheld both by the characters in the novel and the narrative perspective. In this way, the final image fulfils the demands of the characters, the reader and the narrator for a reconciliation of the mutually destructive orders that have dominated the narrative. By conforming to the narcissistic process of creating convenient »ontological landscapes« the narrator becomes essentially another character in the novel. The narrator joins the characters in

their desire for a pleasing image of eternal union and thus conives at the arbitrary imposition of finality in the narrative sequence. I believe, however, that a final division between the narrator and the author occurs at this point in the text.

Whereas the narrator and characters construct a naïve image of Paradise, the authorial instance remains separate from the vision and allows the reader to view the ending in more critical terms both as a parody of a standard literary trope and as a further variation of the process of self-mirroring that has characterised the constructions of order throughout the text. I believe that to accept an authorial endorsement of the final image would not only weaken the structural technique of the entire narrative, but would also tend to shift the ultimate sense of the novel from a subtle critique of Enlightenment thought and literary conventions towards an uncritical celebration of myths of the era. In the light of the questioning of Enlightenment values in Goethe's other works, it seems that this view would be most uncharacteristic of his writing. I believe that the distinction between the author and the narrator of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* becomes clearer in the light of Foucault's concept of the authorial identity. In his essay *L'ordre du discours*, Foucault discusses the authorial instance in the following terms:

Je crois qu'il existe un autre principe de raréfaction d'un discours...Il s'agit de l'auteur. L'auteur, non pas entendu, bien sûr, comme l'individu parlant qui a prononcé ou écrit un texte, mais l'auteur comme principe de groupement du discours, comme unité et origine de leurs significations, comme foyer de leur cohérence.³⁶

In *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, the author has the function of controlling and manipulating the various discourses in the work, including the oscillations of the narrative perspective itself. In this sense, the narrator need not be the voice of the author, but is also able to assume an uncritical stance towards events in the novel or to provide the reader with a biased perspective on the action of any character. In contrast to this, the authorial instance remains distanced from occurrences in the novel and controls the narrative voice in the same sense as it manipulates the various discourses and speeches of the characters. I would, therefore, disagree with those critics who seek to prove that the author and narrator are invariably one and the same, for I believe that this view reduces the rôle of the author to an immanent function of the narrative discourse. Furthermore, it not only obscures the possibility that the author is the final instance that controls the various discourses, but also fails to take account of the more complex and critical authorial perspective on the work itself.

It would seem that the construction of the narrative itself plays a major rôle in preventing the reader from interpreting *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* from a single perspective. There does, however, remain the further difficulty in the novel that the authorial instance provides the reader with many clues to possible interpretations. In this sense we must reckon with the deliberate manipulation of the reader during the course of the narrative and a questioning of the traditional expectations of the reader when approaching a fictional work. I mentioned above that, as the narrative develops, meaning is created increasingly by internal textual references rather than by references to

the matrix of experience shared by author and reader outside the text. Although this process may be seen in the development of the novel, it does not exclude the reader from approaching the work with certain expectations or imply that there is no extra-textual ground of experience between author and reader. On the contrary, the traditional expectations of the reader are constantly aroused, but then disappointed by the structural technique of the work itself. This tendency may be seen in the way in which the narrator provides the reader with certain apparently familiar keys to interpretation. This is not only evident in the obvious construction of possible models of interpretation such as the »Gleichnisrede« or references to the »roter Faden«, but is also indicated by smaller components of the narrative framework such as the depiction of father-son relationships or the various attempts to use language as a »Werkzeug«.

When approaching these two aspects of the text, it is tempting to assert that certain models which are offered as coherent sets of values at the beginning are demolished in the course of the narrative. As I have indicated throughout this study, however, it becomes increasingly obvious that the various structural models in the novel are not stable and wholly intact principles in the first instance. This is evidenced by the example of language. The reader does not witness the gradual disintegration of language as functional rhetoric and its ultimate descent into a chaos of discourses that are mutually discredited. Rather, language is depicted as being an unstable medium from the opening pages of the novel. This is seen clearly in the ambiguous nature of language in the opening section or in the impoverished rhetoric of

Mittler during his first appearance. In this sense, I would agree with Benjamin's statement concerning the depiction of marriage in the opening scenes of the novel. Instead of viewing the marriage contract as a model that is discredited in the course of the text, Benjamin indicates that this structure is in a precarious state from the opening pages: »Der Gegenstand der Wahlverwandtschaften ist nicht die Ehe. Nirgends wären ihre sittlichen Gewalten darin zu suchen. Von Anfang an sind sie im Verschwinden, wie der Stand unter Wassern zur Flutzeit«. ³⁶ I suggest, therefore, that the narrative does not present the reader with a set of models that are demolished in the course of events, but instead brings the reader directly into an unstable fictional universe in which conflicting world-models constantly cast doubt on each others' validity.

Paradoxically, the only stable set of variables apparent in the opening stages of the novel are the expectations of the reader. It is the literate and socially educated reader who *expects* to find a stable model of paternal authority or a coherent functioning of language in the opening stages of the novel. In other words: the reader has been conditioned to expect certain things of the novel from both a structural and a thematic point of view and thus also expects to classify the work according to particular categories. The greatness of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* lies in the way in which it appears to fit certain models created by the reader, yet ultimately eludes such classifications because of the complex relativism of its structure. As I have indicated above, it is precisely the intricate narrative structure of the work that prevents the reader from fulfilling his or her expectations according to pre-conditioned literary models. It is for this reason that

the narrator makes parodistic references to the literary techniques of the *Lustspiel* or to the »Kunstgriff des Dichters«. The traditional attitude of the reader to the text is further emphasised by the »Notiz« announcing the publication of the work in 1809 (H.A. VI, p.639). This announcement informs the prospective reader of the work's classification and structure:

Die Wahlverwandtschaften, ein Roman
von Goethe
in zwei Teilen.

By drawing the reader's attention to the genre and structure of his forthcoming work and mentioning the model of the »Gleichnisrede« in the commentary that follows, Goethe awakens the expectation that the novel is to be received by the reader in a certain manner:

Es scheint, daß den Verfasser seine fortgesetzten physikalischen Arbeiten zu diesem seltsamen Titel veranlaßten. Er mochte bemerkt haben, daß man in der Naturlehre sich sehr oft ethischer Gleichnisse bedient, um etwas von dem Kreise menschlichen Wissens weit Entferntes näher heranzubringen, und so hat er auch wohl in einem sittlichen Falle eine chemische Gleichnisrede zu ihrem geistigen Ursprunge zurückführen mögen, um so mehr, als doch überall nur eine Natur ist und auch durch das Reich der heitern Vernunftfreiheit die Spuren trüber, leidenschaftlicher Notwendigkeit sich unaufhaltsam hindurchziehen, die nur durch eine höhere Hand und vielleicht auch nicht in diesem Leben völlig auszulöschen sind. (H.A. VI, p.639)

In this sense, the reader approaches the text with a concept of how the work should be understood and is prepared to acknowledge the work as representative of the literary tradition of the >Roman<.

It appears, in fact, that there are ultimately two options open to readers of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* when faced with the problem of

actualising the text: either to construct from preferred elements of the work a fictional model that suits their own expectations, but which demands the exclusion of important areas of the whole text, or to admit the permanent subversion of the accepted game-rules of fiction and the traditional relationship of the reader to the text, thus allowing the possibility of multiple readings. In this respect I believe that Goethe's novel anticipates not only elements of 20th century metafiction, but also acts as a forerunner of structuralist theories concerning the rôle of the reader. In *S/Z*, for example, Roland Barthes suggests that a single interpretation of a literary text is by nature inadequate and stresses the necessity of multiple interpretations: »...le sens d'un texte n'est pas dans telle ou telle des ses >interprétations<, mais dans l'ensemble diagrammatique de ses lectures, dans leur système pluriel«. ³⁷ In accordance with this demand, I believe that critics of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* should be open to reconsidering the nature of their rôle and admit the possibility that a definitive analysis lies more in the complex of multiple interpretations than in a single reading reinforced again and again by the critical discourse.

The dissolution of various orders in the novel may not only be seen in terms of a discrediting of the creation of world-models, but also questions the potential of language to impose order on phenomena. The impossibility of creating a stable fictional order also indicates the 18th century scepticism concerning the use of language as a »Werkzeug« that may be manipulated according to the will of the speaker. In opposition to the image of language as an instrument that obeys the will of the speaker and whose production of effects may be clearly delineated

and categorised, language no longer appears to function in this instrumental mode of the rhetorical tradition. Instead, both speaker and listener become increasingly aware that language has lost its previously axiomatic potential to create or reflect a unified order and that intended meanings constantly lapse into ambiguity. At the beginning of the novel, therefore, the reader cannot realistically expect to confront a perfectly functioning system of language out of which one stable and hierarchical order of meaning may be constructed. In this way, the novel implicitly questions the rhetorical tradition.

Hillis Miller also views the instability of various models in the novel as being closely linked to the discrediting of language itself. Although I would dispute many of Hillis Miller's conclusions concerning the novel, as I have indicated in earlier sections of this study, I do agree with his comment on the rôle of language and the self-reflective nature of the work. With reference to the possibility of various interpretations of the novel Hillis Miller states the following:

They make *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* another demonstration of the self-subverting heterogeneity of each great work of Western literature. This heterogeneity of our great literary texts is one important manifestation of the equivocity of the Western tradition generally. This equivocity is present in the languages we have used to express ourselves in that tradition, and in the lives we have led in terms of those languages.³⁸

In Barthes' terms the act of reading is equivalent to the act of naming: »lire, c'est lutter pour nommer«.³⁹ As I have indicated in the above discussion, the instant the reader attempts to name an action, set of events or frame of reference in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, the act of naming is immediately subverted by the other structural models that

compete for supremacy. In this sense, the reader is ultimately left to consider the various imperfect means used by individuals and groups to impose a system of order on phenomena.

Throughout the novel Goethe makes the narrator behave in such a fashion as to show that a fictional world can pretend to be a stable structure. I believe that a close textual analysis of the work indicates, however, that the author constantly displays scepticism as to the stability of this order and therefore unmasks the whole pretence in the final stages of the narrative. Instead of progressing to a definite end, therefore, *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* leaves the reader with a commentary on the tenuous nature of the various processes involved in creating fictional orders. Thus, the notion of self-reflection that takes shape around the Narcissus-theme must be viewed as a driving force of the narrative and serves a threefold function in the novel: it characterises the creation of order on a thematic level within the text, forms a commentary on the process of fiction-making and provides an insight into the creative act of reading.

NOTES

1. G. Marahrens, »Narrator and Narrative in Goethe's *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*« in: Essays on German Literature in Honour of J.J.Hallymore, ed. M.S. Batts and M.G. Stankiewicz, Toronto 1968; Paul Stöcklein, op.cit., p.14f.
2. Feuerlicht, op.cit., p. 326.
3. Stöcklein, op.cit, p. 14.
4. Barnes, op.cit., p. 51.
5. This tendency is most evident in the genre of the »Schlüsselroman« in which the names of real people and actual events were disguised in the fictional mode. See: Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturgeschichte, Dritter Band, de Gruyter, Berlin 1929, p.189ff.
6. Erläuterungen und Dokumente, p. 121.
7. H.G. Blocker, »The truth about fictional entities«., in: The Philosophical Quarterly, January 1974, pp.28 and 32.
8. This tendency is most evident in critics' reactions to the character and actions of Eduard. See for example: H. Reiss, »Mehrdeutigkeit in Goethes *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*« in: Jahrbuch der deutschen Schillergesellschaft, 1970, p. 379; Stöcklein, op.cit., p. 32-3; H.J. Geerds, »Goethes Roman *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*: Die Hauptgestalten und die Nebenfiguren in ihrer Grundkonzeption« in: Goethes Roman *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, ed. E. Rösch, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, 1975,

p. 277. For praise of Otilie's personality that transcends her description in the novel see: S. Atkins, »Die Wahlverwandtschaften: Novel of German Classicism« in: German Quarterly, January 1980, p. 15; Stöcklein, op.cit. p. 21.

9. Erläuterungen und Dokumente, p.150-1.
10. See for example: Buschendorf, op. cit. p.68: »Die anfangs explizite Präsenz des Erzählers...unterstützt dessen implizite Anwesenheit im folgenden Erzählertext so nachhaltig, daß im Bewußtsein des Lesers während des ganzen Romans beständig ein Wissen um Fiktionalität und Künstlichkeit der dargestellten Gegenstände mitgegeben ist«; Martin Swales, »Consciousness and Sexuality: Reflections on *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*« in: Publications of the English Goethe Society, 1980, p.88: »...there is a hint that what is being put before us is a test case, one in which the interaction between the characters is more important and binding than is their selfhood as discrete individuals.«
11. See Rose, op.cit. p.34: »Parody, unlike some other forms of satire which do not make their target a part of their text, is not only ambivalently dependent on the object of its criticism, but may satirically unmask and deflate other writers by using their works ironically as a temporary >word mask< for the parodist.«
12. For general discussions of »Metafiction« see: Michael Boyd, *The Reflexive Novel*, Associated University Press 1983; Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*, Methuen, New York 1984; Rose, op.cit.; Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, Methuen, London 1984.
13. H.A. VIII, p. 484: »Bei leichter Berührbarkeit entwickelte sich alles von innen bei ihm heraus; durch beständigen Konflikt unterschied er das Wahre vom Falschen, hielt am ersten fest und verhielt sich gegen das andere rücksichtslos...«

14. Diderot, Jacques le fataliste, Oeuvres Complètes, Vol. XXIII, pp.42-3.
15. Ibid., p.81.
16. Erläuterungen und Dokumente, p. 133.
17. Käte Hamburger, Wahrheit und ästhetische Wahrheit, Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart 1979, p.143.
18. See: Aristotle, The Nicomachean Ethics, trans. J.A.K. Thomson, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1983, p. 205: »Pursuit and avoidance in the sphere of appetition correspond exactly to affirmation and negation in the sphere of intellect; so that, since moral virtue is a state involving choice, and choice is deliberate appetition, it follows that if the choice is to be a good one, both the reasoning must be true and the desire right; and the desire must pursue the same things that the reasoning asserts. We are here speaking of intellect and truth in a practical sense: in the case of contemplative (as distinct from practical and productive) intellect, right and wrong are truth and falsehood. To arrive at the truth is indeed the function of intellect in any aspect, but the function of practical intellect is to arrive at the truth that corresponds to right appetition.«
19. Rose, op.cit., p. 35.
20. See for example Martin Heidegger's notion of »truth« in the work of art: Holzwege, Klostermann, Frankfurt/M 1980, p.24: »Das Kunstwerk eröffnet auf seine Weise das Sein des Seienden. Im Werk geschieht diese Eröffnung, d.h. das Entbergen, d.h. die Wahrheit des Seienden. Im Kunstwerk hat sich die Wahrheit des Seienden ins Werk gesetzt. Die Kunst ist das Sich-ins-Werk-Setzen der Wahrheit...«
21. Benjamin, op.cit., p.125: »Die Kritik sucht den Wahrheitsgehalt eines Kunstwerks, der Kommentar seinen Sachgehalt. Das Verhältnis

der beiden bestimmt jenes Grundgesetz des Schrifttums, demzufolge der Wahrheitsgehalt eines Werkes, je bedeutender es ist, desto unscheinbarer und inniger an seinen Sachgehalt gebunden ist.«

22. Ibid., p.131.
23. Ibid., p.152.
24. Maurice Blanchot, »La Littérature et le droit à la mort« in: *La Part du feu*, Gallimard, Paris 1949, p.341.
25. Hutcheon, op.cit., p.23.
26. Roland Barthes, *Essais critiques*, Seuil, Paris 1964, p.164.
27. Wieland, Agathon, *Werke I*, p.513; see also: Martin Swales, *The German Bildungsroman from Wieland to Hesse*, Princeton University Press 1978, p.39: »We have an abundance of narrative commentary and discursive reflections on moral and epistemological problems that threatens to swamp the slender and not exactly gripping plot. Moreover, this wealth of narrative rumination is not only bulky, it is also curiously paradoxical and inconsistent.«
28. V. Lange, »Goethe's Craft of Fiction« in: *Publications of the English Goethe Society*, 1952-3, p. 54.
29. G. Finney, »Type and Countertype: The Dialectics of Space in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*« in: *The Germanic Review*, Spring 1983, p.70.
30. Stöcklein, op.cit., p.11.
31. *Erläuterungen und Dokumente*, pp.139 and 143-4; see also K.W.F. Solger (1809), *Erläuterungen und Dokumente*, p.162: »Aber das Grösste und Heiligste darin ist wahrlich die so tief innerliche Ottilie, die ihr keusches Inneres herausgeben muss an den Tag des

Schicksals, der dieser Sturm ihre Knospe aufweht und ihren heiligen Blütenstaub verstreut.«

32. Swales, »Consciousness and Sexuality: Reflections on *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*« op.cit., p. 84.
33. Feuerlicht, op.cit., p. 317: »Der Erzähler wird manchmal als der Verfasser des Romans behandelt, so daß es eigentlich nicht ganz berechtigt wäre, zu sagen, Goethe habe den Roman verfaßt. Die richtige Formulierung wäre, Goethe habe eine Figur erfunden, die den Roman verfaßt hat.«
34. Finney, op.cit., p. 7f.
35. Foucault, op.cit., p.28.
36. Benjamin, op.cit. p.131.
37. Barthes, S/Z, p. 126.
38. Hillis Miller, op.cit., p. 11.
39. Barthes, S/Z, p. 98.

CONCLUSION

»All right,« said the Cat; and this time it vanished quite slowly, beginning with the end of the tail, and ending with the grin, which remained some time after the rest of it had gone.

»Well! I've often seen a cat without a grin,« thought Alice; »but a grin without a cat! It's the most curious thing I ever saw in all my life!«

- Lewis Carroll (Alice's Adventures in Wonderland)

In this study I have tried to demonstrate the way in which the theme of self-mirroring infiltrates the construction of order on all levels of the narrative. A close analysis of various aspects of the Narcissus-myth illustrates how the characters reflect their own desires in particular models of >reality<. In the opening sections of this analysis, I mentioned that the construction of the Real, in terms of mirroring images of individuals or groups, is a theme which is explored throughout Goethe's entire literary development. Another quote from the *Wanderjahre* confirms precisely this suggestion and also indicates several different reactions to this process of creating world-models:

Ein jeder Mensch sieht die fertige und geregelte, gebildete, vollkommene Welt doch nur als ein Element an, woraus er sich eine besondere ihm angemessene Welt zu erschaffen bemüht ist. Tüchtige Menschen ergreifen sie ohne Bedenken und suchen damit, wie es gehen will, zu gebaren; andere zaudern an ihr herum; einige zweifeln sogar an ihrem Dasein.

Wer sich von dieser Grundwahrheit recht durchdrungen fühlte, würde mit niemanden streiten, sondern nur die Vorstellungsart eines ändern wie seine eigene als ein Phänomen betrachten. Denn wir erfahren fast täglich, daß der eine mit Bequemlichkeit denken mag,

was dem andern zu denken unmöglich ist, und zwar nicht etwa in Dingen, die auf Wohl und Wehe nur irgendeinen Einfluß hätten, sondern in Dingen, die für uns völlig gleichgültig sind. (H.A. VIII, p.306)

It has been my contention throughout this study that the various world-models in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* compete for supremacy in the discourse of the characters and in the implicit dialogue of the narrator with the reader. As a result of this competition, no single model retains absolute validity and the credibility of the various world-views is constantly put into question. The attempt to impose order on phenomena leads inevitably, therefore, to the disorder of multiple models of what constitutes the Real. This crisis may be seen not only in the construction of order through language, but also in the construction and interpretation of non-linguistic sign-systems.

I have indicated that the disorder of multiple world-views in the novel may, in turn, be seen as an ironic commentary on the various social and philosophical systems of the Enlightenment that sought and achieved acknowledgement throughout the 18th century. Although a similar questioning attitude towards various aspects of Enlightenment ideologies may be found in several of Goethe's other works, I believe that this may be seen in its most pointed form in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*. As I have tried to indicate, in this novel the various philosophies and ideals which made up the intellectual background of 18th century society may be seen to form a disorder in themselves as a result both of their multiplicity and of their competition for relative status. This sceptical attitude towards aspects of the Enlightenment is also in consonance with several of Goethe's comments and letters from the latter

years of his life. In a letter to Zelter of 1829, Goethe sums up certain paradoxes of the Enlightenment and its aftermath, Romanticism, in the following terms:

Die Gegenwart hat wirklich etwas Absurdes; man meint zwar das wär' es nun, man sehe, man fühle sich, darauf ruht man; was aber aus solchen Augenblicken zu gewinnen sei, darüber kommt man nicht zur Besinnung...Es ist ein närrisch Ding, daß durchs Reale das Ideelle gleichsam aufgehoben wird, daher mag denn wohl kommen daß den Modernen ihr Ideelles nur als Sehnsucht erscheint. Hierüber wollen wir nicht weiter nachgrübeln, sondern es bei diesem ziemlichen und unziemlichen Vorwort beenden lassen; ob ich gleich noch eine lange Litanei zu Aufklärung der allgemeinen neuern Lebensweise hienach wohl ausspinnen könnte...'

The theme of self-mirroring in the novel and its relation to various ideologies of the Enlightenment and the transformations they undergo in the first decade of the 19th century may be examined from two perspectives. In the first instance, the characters' constructions of order within the framework of the Narcissus-theme resembles the way in which thinkers of the 18th century reflected their own desires in the creation of a preferred and >rational< system of the world; secondly, the entire novel may be read in terms of a literary product of the >death< of the Enlightenment and thus as an example of the way in which certain writers of the period mirrored various well-known ideals in a new and critical light within a fictional framework. I have pointed out that many parallels may be found between *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* and the sceptical tone prevalent in much of Kleist's writing. Other writers, such as Jean Paul and Bonaventura, carried this critical attitude towards 18th century social and philosophical ideals still further.²

This questioning of certain aspects of the Enlightenment is entirely in accordance with other of Goethe's works, such as *Iphigenie*, in which elements of 18th century thought are subtly undermined within the larger framework of the text. I have indicated that this more critical aspect of Goethe's works is often overlooked by his readers. Instead of taking into account the double, or indeed multiple, perspective in many of his writings, critics have often tended to view Goethe's later works in terms of a panegyric on a small corpus of Enlightenment ideals which they see as characterising »Weimar Classicism«. In 1908, for example, Hugo von Hofmannsthal draws on this more popular view of Goethe in his essay »Balzac«:

Dann freilich ist es beinahe gleichgiltig, welches von Goethes Werken er [der Leser] aufschlägt: überall umfängt ihn die gleiche gesteigerte und verklärte Wirklichkeit. Ihn umgibt in Wahrheit eine Welt, ein Geist, der eine Welt ist. Die Sentenzen und die Gestalten, eine Idee oder die Beschreibung einer Naturerscheinung, ein Vers oder Mignon oder Ottilie, alles ist die gleiche göttliche, strahlende Materie. Hinter jeder Zeile fühlt er den Bezug auf ein Ganzes, auf eine erhabene Ordnung.³

It is certainly true that Goethe depicts various forms of order in his works, but I would dispute Hofmannsthal's postulate of »eine erhabene Ordnung« which appears to act as a stable background for his novels. This view of Goethe overlooks the negative repercussions that the wider construction of order has on events in the fictional framework of his works and does not take into account the subtle questioning of 18th century social, religious and philosophical ideologies which also forms an integral part of his writing. In the context of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, Hofmannsthal overlooks the important point that the numerous conflicting world-models make it impossible for »eine

erhabene Ordnung« to function consistently or unambiguously as a means of orientation for the reader at any stage of the narrative. Moreover, it is precisely Ottilie's integration into these different world-views that precipitates her unhappy end.

I also wish to emphasise that the theme of self-reflection in the creation of order may be seen to develop out of ideas which are present from Goethe's earliest writings onwards. I indicated that *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* takes up and develops a major theme in *Werther*. In this later novel the discrediting of exclusively individual world-models, which is first enacted in *Werther*, extends to the general questioning of the creation of >reality< by groups. This may be seen in terms of Goethe's increasing awareness of the unstable nature of various scientific or philosophical faiths competing for supremacy throughout the 18th century and also as a lasting scepticism concerning decisions made by the majority in the light of the chaos produced by the French Revolution. *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* may also be read in terms of a dystopian antithesis to certain ideals present in the *Wilhelm Meister* novels. This is most clearly evidenced by the negative versions of the father-son relationship in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* and also in the failure of Ottilie's »Selbstverwirklichung«. I believe, therefore, that this novel assumes a central position in Goethe's literary career, for the treatment of certain thematic complexes may be seen to develop major preoccupations of his early writings and also to offer an alternative perspective on certain salient aspects of his later work.

That the theme of self-reflection still played a major rôle in Goethe's later discussions of individual identity and the relationship of the individual to various world-models present in society is not only indicated by various references in the *Wanderjahre*, but also finds expression in an essay published in 1823, *Bedeutende Fördernis durch ein einziges geistreiches Wort*:

Am allerfördersamsten aber sind unsere Nebenmenschen, welche den Vorteil haben, uns mit der Welt aus ihrem Standpunkt zu vergleichen und daher nähere Kenntnis von uns zu erlangen, als wir selbst gewinnen mögen. Ich habe daher in reiferen Jahren große Aufmerksamkeit gehegt, inwiefern andere mich wohl erkennen möchten, damit ich in und an ihnen, wie an so viel Spiegeln, über mich selbst und über mein Innres deutlicher werden könnte. (H.A. XIII, p.38)

As I have indicated in the course of this analysis, throughout his writings Goethe depicts both the positive and negative aspects of this complex. In this respect he takes into account the possibility of mistaking one's own identity in the mirror-image, experiencing a disunification of the personality and falling victim to the hegemony of the reflection.

Die Wahlverwandtschaften may also be seen to take up major issues of 18th century philosophy and to anticipate certain developments in 19th century literature. I have indicated at length that the treatment of language in the novel illustrates the decline of the rhetorical tradition and the inability of the speaker to use words as »Werkzeuge«. In contrast to Voltaire, who acknowledges the imperfections of rhetoric, yet remains nonetheless a master of this form, Goethe transforms the notion of an imperfectly functioning system of language into a crisis in

human relations. In this, he may be seen to uphold the similar scepticism towards the rôle of language in human relations evident in almost all of Kleist's works. This depiction of language in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* may also be read as a prelude to the more radical Romantic depiction of the autonomy of language which culminates much later in the myths of »absolute Dichtung« or »poésie pure«. Whereas Goethe depicts language as being in a transitional phase, in which outmoded rhetoric is not yet superseded by a suitable alternative, writers such as Novalis were able to find a solution to this crisis by developing a mythical image of language that would eventually be elaborated within the aesthetics of Symbolism. For Novalis, the relationship of the speaker to the spoken is reversed and language itself is endowed with an almost supernatural autonomy.⁴ In *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, however, the confusion concerning the relationship of the speaker to the spoken produces only negative effects in the realm of human relations and also inclines the endemic ambiguity of language towards the >nihilism< I have earlier described. I have illustrated this in reference to the speeches of Mittler which may be seen to have catastrophic effects throughout the entire novel and in which the emptiness of rhetoric is unmasked.

The integration of characters into various world-views may also be seen to anticipate questions concerning the nature of individualism posed in the 19th and 20th centuries. This is clearly indicated by the depiction of Otilie in the novel. I have stressed throughout this study that the various rôles allocated to her in a number of different, often conflicting world-views make it impossible for her to achieve the ideal

of »Selbstbildung«. She is, therefore, deprived the opportunity to develop an effective and coherent image of herself as an individual and is even denied the chance to die an individual death. The questions concerning the development of individual identity, which are depicted in their negative aspect in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* and usually from a more positive view-point in the *Wilhelm Meister* novels, may be seen, in part, as a prelude to the *Künstlerroman*. Interestingly, in Rilke's *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* motifs present in Goethe's writings occur in a new context. Not only does the notion of the mirror-image assuming hegemony over the subject recur in a more pointed form, but the image of the disunified self and the difficulty of progressing towards an ideal of self-unity also play a major rôle in the depiction of the individual as artist.⁵ I believe that *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* assumes not only a central position in Goethe's own literary development, but that it also stands as a focal point in the European literary tradition.

I would suggest this not only on the grounds that certain major questions posed in the novel are re-stated in later literary works, but also because of the way in which the novel incorporates into its structure a number of different literary techniques. I indicated in the final chapter of this study that the multiplicity of narrative techniques present in the text makes it extremely difficult for the critic to place the novel within the confines of any single category. I have also stressed that the attempt to apply a particular structural model to the text will end in failure precisely because of the complex structure of the work itself. For this reason no single and absolute

interpretation of the novel can be achieved. In many ways the novel both invites and resists interpretation. This is because the narrative perspective oscillates throughout the text, appears to uphold certain world-views, yet ultimately refrains from giving supremacy to any one model. A further complication in this complex arises because of the division between the narrator and the authorial instance. Often these two distinct aspects of the text have been confused in criticism, and this has resulted in blurring of perspectives on certain themes in the work.

I believe that a consideration of these two different voices reveals a dual aspect of the construction of order through language. On the one hand, the narrator virtually becomes one of the characters in the novel by overtly helping to adumbrate the illusion of a final model of >reality< in the form of Eduard's union with Otilie in paradise; on the other hand, the author uses language to construct a fictional framework in which to locate the sequence of events. In both cases language is used to construct a particular form of order, yet each order is revealed to have no lasting stability. On a thematic level within the text, the multiplicity of orders discredit each other's potential to create a harmoniously functioning society in miniature. A fictional construct may pretend to be a stable and >real< configuration, but the history of the work's reception shows abundantly that the text does not contain sufficiently arresting signals to ensure that the majority of readers recognise such pretence for what it is.

The multiple world-views within the text may be seen to mirror the many different interpretations of the novel. The question arises: if the large number of world-models in the text discredit each other in the course of the narrative, do the numerous conflicting interpretations of the work also nullify the potential of the reader to arrive at a definitive understanding of the text? I have already argued that a large number of interpretations of the work may co-exist without distorting thematic complexes in the novel. This is, of course, provided that the critic does not attempt to adapt configurations in the narrative to correspond with some pre-existing and exclusive structural model. I would suggest that the novel opens a dual perspective onto the task of criticism. On the one hand, there exists the possibility of imposing a single model on the entire narrative, thus forcing events in the novel to conform with a pre-conceived configuration; on the other hand, the reader may choose to acknowledge the possibility of multiple interpretations, thus admitting that the referential field of the signifier is multiplied rather than diminished as a result of each re-reading of the work. I suggest that the novel is constructed in such a fashion as to force the reader to admit the latter possibility. This is also in consonance with Goethe's critique of majority opinions and their effects on individual creativity.

For this reason it must be stressed that the Narcissus-theme cannot be viewed in terms of a stable structural model. As I have emphasised throughout this interpretation of the novel, the motif of narcissistic experience is subjected to numerous variations in the course of the work and often fails to meet the demands of the characters. In the course of

the narrative, therefore, the theme of self-mirroring may often be seen to subvert its own end or to provide the characters with >>false< insights into the self and each other. I believe that a consideration of the novel from this aspect is important because it serves to highlight a number of major thematic complexes in the work and has itself received limited attention from other critics. This analysis of the novel is not, therefore, presented as a definitive reading of the text. Instead, it should be viewed as a possible reading that highlights certain aspects of structural and thematic complexes in the narrative.

Not only does the novel raise questions concerning the traditional relationship of the reader to the text, but it also engenders a reconsideration of traditional reader-expectations. In Chapter Five I examined the way in which the novel constantly arouses the traditional expectations of the reader, yet then disappoints them in the course of the narrative. Just as no form of order is revealed to be totally stable within the framework of the narrative, so too the relationship of the reader to the fiction is constantly put into question. In this respect, the novel must be considered in terms of a homologous set of commentaries on the ways in which order is created in society, within individual consciousness, in the fictional world of narrative and in the relationship of the reader to a fictional construct.

I believe that a pluralistic reading of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* is of fundamental importance not only for an understanding of antithetical currents of thought within the Enlightenment, but also for a consideration of the European literary tradition as it developed during

the 18th and 19th centuries. Both the content and structure of this novel make it one of Goethe's most ingeniously crafted works. It is for this reason that such a wide diversity may be seen in interpretations which have been put forward for consideration since the work's first appearance. Moreover, from the often cryptic comments in letters and conversations it is apparent that Goethe was well aware of the difficulties with which he had presented his readers.

In this interpretation of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* I have not attempted to locate the »durchgreifende Idee«, nor have I made any suggestions as to the nature of the »roter Faden« or the »offenbares Geheimnis«. This is because I believe that the structure of the work itself makes such categorisations into pitfalls for the unwary. The text offers the reader many clues as to the nature of these configurations, yet then subverts the project of any single view's laying claim to absolute validity. By basing *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* on a series of constantly shifting structural paradigms Goethe has created one of the most demanding works of fiction in the European literary tradition. Most importantly, he has not only raised fundamental questions concerning the position and rôle of the reader, but has also revealed »meaning« to be a much sought after, yet elusive principle in the construction and interpretation of any form of >real< or >fictional< order.

NOTES

1. Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Briefe, Hanser, München 1958, pp. 1089-90; see also Letter to Zelter, 6. Juni 1825, p. 981: »Junge Leute werden viel zu früh aufgeregt und dann im Zeitstrudel fortgerissen; Reichtum und Schnelligkeit ist was die Welt bewundert und wonach jeder strebt; Eisenbahnen, Schnellposten, Dampfschiffe und alle mögliche Fazilitäten der Kommunikation sind es worauf die gebildete Welt ausgeht, sich zu überbieten, zu überbilden und dadurch in der Mittelmäßigkeit zu verharren. Und das ist ja auch das Resultat der Allgemeinheit, daß eine mittlere Kultur gemein werde, dahin streben die Bibelgesellschaften, die Lancasterische Lehrmethode und was nicht alles.«
2. See: Detlef Kremer, Wezel: über die Nachtseite der Aufklärung, Wilhelm Fink Verlag, München 1987, p. 25f.
3. Hugo von Hofmannsthal, »Balzac«, Gesammelte Werke, Prosa II, ed. Herbert Steiner, Fischer, Frankfurt/M 1951, p. 381.
4. Novalis, Monolog, op. cit., p. 323.
5. Cf. Stephens, Rilkes Malte Laurids Brigge, op. cit., p. 100f and p. 182f.

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