Criticism in Translation

In the Spirit of the Wanderers

KARL AUGUST VARNHAGEN VON ENSE

INTRODUCTION
BY BENJAMIN KOHLMANN
TRANSLATION BY KALINA JANEVA AND KOHLMANN

BENJAMIN KOHLMANN, professor of English at the University of Regensburg, is the author of *Committed Styles: Modernism, Politics, and Left-Wing Literature in the 1930s* (Oxford UP, 2014) and *British Literature and the Life of Institutions: Speculative States* (Oxford UP, 2021). He is working on a global history of the radical bildungsroman from 1820 to 2020.

KALINA JANEVA is a PhD candidate in English and American studies at the Albert Ludwig University of Freiburg, as well as a research assistant at the University of Regensburg. Her research project examines female hunger, with a particular emphasis on voluntary food abstinence, as communicated in women's prose in English from the early modern to the mid-Victorian periods.

In Memory of Glyn Salton-Cox

Introduction

Literary critics often describe the bildungsroman as a fundamentally conservative genre. Emerging in reaction to the cataclysmic events of the French Revolution, so the story goes, the bildungsroman aimed to contain the disruptive social energies that threatened further revolution in the wake of 1789. "The classical *Bildungsroman*," Franco Moretti has influentially argued, "narrates how the French Revolution could have been avoided" (64). This reading emphasizes the link that exists between the bildungsroman's master plot of individual formation—a youthful protagonist breaks away from the community, experiences a process of *Bildung*, and eventually returns fully formed to the community—and the historical growth of the nation-state. On this account, the bildungsroman looks like the artistic equivalent of the nationalist policies that were enshrined at the 1815 Congress of Vienna and that sought to undo the geopolitical changes of the period 1789–1815. These reactionary policies also seem to find an echo in the bildungsroman's celebration of the everyday and the pleasures of domesticity. Individual freedom, Moretti explains, can only be fully realized within organically grown social structures: "as a 'free individual' . . . one perceives the social norms as *one's own*. One must *internalize* them and fuse external compulsion and internal impulses into a new unity" (16). On this view, the bildungsroman naturalizes social reality by offering readers the aestheticized image of an organic community in which the individual can find fulfilment (Jameson 145; see also Castle; Esty).[1]

Crucially, this account of the bildungsroman's political work has eclipsed a rich alternative genealogy of the genre.[2] This countertradition evolved alongside the bildungsroman's familiar hegemonic forms from the early nineteenth century onward, but it is allied firmly to political causes on the left: it does not aim to show "how revolution might be avoided" but rather seeks to imagine the conditions under which a socialist and internationalist dispensation might emerge. The German writer and public intellectual Karl August Varnhagen

© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of the Modern Language Association of America
PMLA 138.1 (2023), doi:10.1632/S0030812922000931

https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812922000931 Published online by Cambridge University Press

von Ense (1785–1858) deserves to be known as the principal originator of this alternative history of the bildungsroman. Varnhagen had served as Prussian envoy at the Congress of Vienna, yet after 1815 his democratic leanings and his Saint Simonism increasingly got him in trouble with Europe's resurgent autocratic elites. His opposition to the July Monarchy is well-documented ("I profoundly detested this crowned schemer [the French monarch Louis Philippe] and his miserable ministers" [Letter]),[3] and Varnhagen welcomed the revolutions that swept Europe in the late 1840s as harbingers of broader emancipatory struggles.

Varnhagen's "Im Sinne der Wanderer" (1832; "In the Spirit of the Wanderers"), a review essay about Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* (1821; rev. 1829; *Wilhelm Meister's Journeyman Years*) is *the* central critical text in the bildungsroman's early socialist history. Goethe died in 1832, and Varnhagen's article appeared the same year, in the final issue of Goethe's influential periodical *Über Kunst und Alterthum* (*On Art and Antiquity*). Varnhagen's focus on the *Wanderjahre* rather than on *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795–96; *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*) is significant. Indeed, the current blinkered view of the bildungsroman's political potential has been the result of the near-exclusive attention critics have given to the *Lehrjahre*.[4] As Varnhagen's essay reminds us, this narrow focus has given rise to an absurdly reductive understanding of the genre. Varnhagen points out that the *Wanderjahre*'s attention to social utopianism, global travel ("wandering"), and the space available for democratic organizing marked Goethe's break with narrowly nationalistic agendas and spoke to the budding socialist movements of his day.[5] Central to this shift is Goethe's decision to replace the *Lehrjahre*'s aristocratic secret society ("der Turm" ["the tower"]), which steers Wilhelm toward reintegration in the national community, with a democratic "Bund" ("League") that organizes utopian social experiments in North America. On Varnhagen's account, the *Wanderjahre* invites a radical rereading of the *Lehrjahre* itself: Goethe's later book highlights the earlier novel's attention to the monopolization of land by aristocratic and capitalistic elites as well as its focus on conditions of alienation and class struggle obtaining under the current socioeconomic order.

Finally, Varnhagen's essay can prompt a reconsideration of the *Wanderjahre*'s difficult generic affiliations. Recent critics remind us that "the *Wanderjahre* has always posed classificatory challenges to literary scholars"—a situation partly explained by the fact that portions of Goethe's text had "appeared in different versions in various early-nineteenth-century print formats over the course of two decades during Goethe's lifetime, from the newspaper to the miscellany to the novel to the collected edition" (Piper 129). When the *Wanderjahre* is read in the light of its complex medial and print history, it can easily resemble "a formless grab bag" (Amrine 1)—a text marked by an "uneinheitlichen Charakter" ("disjointed design") that necessitates a "Neubeschreibung des Romans als 'Aggregat', 'Sammlung' oder 'Archiv'" ("redescription of the novel as an 'aggregate,' 'collection,' or 'archive'" [Spoerhase 546; my trans.]). The *Wanderjahre*'s uneven genesis notably led Goethe's early editors not to reprint the two collections of aphorisms ("Im Sinne der Wanderer" and "Aus Makariens Archiv" ["From Makarien's Papers"]) that had featured prominently in the book's first edition: the experimental nature of these aphorisms threatened to unsettle the narrative form codified by the *Lehrjahre* (Wundt 495–96). By borrowing the title of one of these collections for his review essay, Varnhagen pushes back against the tendency to dismiss the *Wanderjahre* as a generic "grab bag." The *Wanderjahre*'s formal openness, Varnhagen's title suggests, might well be its most significant feature: the book's inconclusive stops and starts, its fragmented plotlines, are not hallmarks of a Goethean *Spätstil* ("late style") but instead mirror the errant hopes and frustrations of the struggle for a better world.[6] Varnhagen concludes with the suggestion (veiled so as to escape censorship) that the bildungsroman's strictly artistic attention to egalitarian forms of life will need to translate into concrete real-life action, thereby linking the text of the *Wanderjahre* to the period's socialisms—those

https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812922000931 Published online by Cambridge University Press

"kindred thoughts" that "emerged from under the same night-sky of world-historical events."

Varnhagen's essay galvanized further socialist readings of Goethe's novel, including two studies by the 1848 revolutionaries Karl Grün (whose book provoked a response by Friedrich Engels) and Ferdinand Gregorovius. Varnhagen's influence extended well beyond Germany, and in the 1840s and 1850s he corresponded about Goethe with Thomas Carlyle (the first English translator of *Wilhelm Meister*) and with the Goethe enthusiasts George Eliot and George Henry Lewes. Most importantly, however, Varnhagen's essay can prompt a reassessment of the rich and long left-wing history of the bildungsroman. It restores to view a body of work that frequently echoes the openness of the *Wanderjahre* by constellating motifs of the bildungsroman into new narrative patterns: these works range from Nikolai Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?*, Martin Nexø's *Pelle the Conqueror*, Maxim Gorki's *Mother*, Doris Lessing's *Golden Notebook*, and Maryse Condé's *Hérémakhonon* to the novels of Peter Weiss, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, and Nanni Balestrini, as well as to Jean-Luc Godard's film *La Chinoise* (with its revolutionary protagonist, Guillaume Meister, played by Jean-Pierre Léaud). Whether they are youthful utopian dreamers or internationalists displaced into uncertain exile, the wandering protagonists of these bildung narratives embody the socialist vision that Varnhagen found anticipated in the *Wanderjahre* itself.

Notes

1. Boes's account of the bildungsroman resists Herderian organicism while also stressing the genre's national boundedness (Introduction and *Formative Fictions*).

2. For a partial reconstruction of this alternative tradition, see Kohlmann.

3. This letter to Rahel Varnhagen is among the unpublished autograph letters by Varnhagen von Ense that were discovered in 2019.

4. This restricted focus stems from Georg Lukács's selective readings of Goethe's bildungsromane (*Theory* 132–43 and *Goethe* 50–67).

5. "I have been rereading the *Wanderjahre*," Varnhagen notes in his last letter to Goethe: "The novel can be easily compared to St Simonism . . . , which will soon make political inroads into Germany" ("Brief an Goethe" 597).

6. On the *Wanderjahre*'s "late style," see Kindt.

Works Cited

Amrine, Frederick. *Goethe and the Myth of the Bildungsroman: Rethinking the* Wilhelm Meister *Novels*. Cambridge UP, 2020.

Boes, Tobias. *Formative Fictions: Nationalism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Bildungsroman*. Cornell UP, 2012.

———. Introduction to "On the Nature of the *Bildungsroman*," by Karl Morgenstern. *PMLA*, vol. 124, no. 2, Mar. 2009, pp. 647–49.

Castle, Gregory. *Reading the Modernist Bildungsroman*. UP of Florida, 2015.

Engels, Friedrich. Review of *Über Goethe vom menschlichen Standpunkte*, by Karl Grün. *Marx-Engels Werke*, vol. 4, Dietz, 1971, pp. 222–47.

Esty, Jed. *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development*. Oxford UP, 2013.

Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von. *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*. Edited by Erich Trunz, dtv, 1998. Vol. 7 of *Werke: Hamburger Ausgabe*.

———. *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre, oder die Entsagenden*. Edited by Erich Trunz, dtv, 1998. Vol. 8 of *Werke: Hamburger Ausgabe*.

Gregorovius, Ferdinand. *Göthe's* Wilhelm Meister *in seinen socialistischen Elementen entwickelt*. Bornträger, 1849.

Grün, Karl. *Über Goethe vom menschlichen Standpunkte*. C. W. Leske, 1846.

Jameson, Fredric. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Cornell UP, 1981.

Kindt, Tom. "Goethes Spätwerk. Zur Wissenschafts- und Begriffsgeschichte einer 'Entdeckung.'" *Goethes Spätwerk / On Late Goethe*, edited by Kai Sina and David E. Wellbery, De Gruyter, 2020, pp. 253–67.

Kohlmann, Benjamin. "Toward a History and Theory of the Socialist Bildungsroman." *Novel*, vol. 48, no. 2, 2015, pp. 167–89.

Lukács, Georg. *Goethe and His Age*. Merlin, 1979.

———. *The Theory of the Novel*. MIT Press, 1971.

Moretti, Franco. *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*. Verso, 2000.

Piper, Andrew. "Rethinking the Print Object: Goethe and the Book of Everything." *PMLA*, vol. 121, no. 1, Jan. 2006, pp. 124–39.

Spoerhase, Carlos. *Das Format der Literatur: Praktiken materieller Textualität zwischen 1740 und 1830*. Wallstein, 2018.

Varnhagen von Ense, Karl August. "Brief an Goethe, 28. Dezember 1831." *Briefe an Goethe*, vol. 2, edited by Karl Robert Mandelkow, Wagner Verlag, 1968, pp. 597–98.

———. "Im Sinne der Wanderer." *Ueber Kunst und Alterthum*, vol. 6, 1832, pp. 533–51.

———. Letter to Rahel Varnhagen. 20 Mar. 1848. *Bonhams*, www.bonhams.com. Accessed 20 Sept. 2020.

Wundt, Max. *Goethes Wilhelm Meister und die Entwicklung des modernen Lebensideals*. De Gruyter, 1932.

https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812922000931 Published online by Cambridge University Press

In the Spirit of the Wanderers

Some thirty years ago, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* offered inexhaustible material for critical judgments, observations, studies, and interpretations. It was at this time that the following pronouncement was first heard—namely, that the whole of the *Lehrjahre* resembles a fruit, richly and beautifully grown around a kernel that consists of two textual passages in particular. The first of these passages notes that all habitable land in the Old World has long been seized and turned into private property; and the second passage expresses regret that many things that are necessary for human flourishing are in fact rendered unattainable to humans. When this pronouncement was first voiced, it seemed disconcerting to many. The reasons for this are easily explained: it is true that the aesthetic pleasure that most readers derive from the stylistic particulars of a given text tends to be disturbed by references to the structure of the whole; indeed, even the most sophisticated and profound types of aesthetic enjoyment are unsettled by thoughts that appear unfamiliar or by interpretative paths that are untrodden. Most critics—including many who have been celebrated for their perceptiveness and clear-sightedness—felt astonishment and confusion at the pronouncement: they were either inclined to treat it as a strange and incomprehensible paradox, or they dismissed it, with a shake of the head, as ungrounded and unjustifiable.

However, a better understanding of these arguments might have been reached even then, if only some critic had given attention to the work's content rather than merely to the novel's form and source material. After all, Goethe's book itself offers sufficient textual elements, and relationships between those elements, to support such arguments—and the two passages mentioned above resonate with the rest of the novel in manifold ways. Anyone striving to grasp the *Lehrjahre*'s inner coherence and deeper meaning as an artwork must have vaguely felt that the strange confessions and outbursts that are put in the mouth of the character of the old woman—outbursts that are uttered in response to Mariane's death and in which the living conditions of proletarians, slum-dwellers, and the oppressed are exposed with shocking candor—serve a different purpose than simply heightening the literary effect by introducing a dark and grotesque element of shock and horror.

It must have come as a genuine surprise when it became more widely known that the two text passages, which we highlighted above, had already been singled out for special emphasis by Goethe himself. Indeed, Goethe had articulated similar ideas elsewhere, submitting them for critical consideration: first, in *Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten* [*Conversations of German Refugees*], and then again in the appendix to [Benvenuto] Cellini's autobiography. Moreover, in addition to these texts, there are numerous related allusions and oblique echoes that can be found elsewhere in Goethe's writings.

It would make for a hefty collection were one to try to bring together in a single volume everything that has been written about *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* since the novel's initial publication, whether insightful and instructive appreciation or half-cooked critical concoctions. The author [of the *Lehrjahre*] himself gave no heed to any of this—he did not pay attention either to the censure or the praise, either to well-intentioned remarks or to hurtful ones—and he never explained whether or not he was in agreement with any of these critical assessments. Instead, he decided to aid the interpretation and better understanding of his work in the surest and most effective manner possible—namely, by giving us a sequel that finally saw the light of day—after a twenty-year interval—under the title *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*.

Unexpectedly, and to the astonishment of those who were mindful of the passages cited above, the *Wanderjahre* reaffirmed the first of the two

https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812922000931 Published online by Cambridge University Press

pronouncements—to wit, the observation regarding the private seizure of land. This reaffirmation of the passage's importance carried all the more weight since Goethe was not unaware of how highly it had been valued by some of his readers. When, after an additional number of years, the *Wanderjahre* was republished in an emended and fuller edition, the abovementioned passage was even repeated twice.

What is more, in addition to these literal repetitions, the centrality of [Goethe's] deep and penetrating insight—distilled from the contemporary world and insistently referring its readers back to that world—was indicated by the work's entire development and content. This insight, now finally and undeniably visible to everyone, had become fundamental to the *Wanderjahre*'s manifest content as well as to the ideas underpinning it.

And the *Lehrjahre* too now appeared in a new light; a set of concerns that had hitherto been less apparent, and that had at times been entirely overlooked, began to shine forth amid [the *Lehrjahre*'s attention to] the tender affairs of the heart and mind, thereby emphasizing the close relationship between the *Lehrjahre* and the more clearly developed version of these ideas offered in the *Wanderjahre*. Indeed, as we had occasion to note some time ago, the final two books of the *Lehrjahre* had already stood out notably against the earlier ones, as if in anticipation of the *Wanderjahre*.

Before we proceed in our argument, it will be useful to add a few general observations that will help to prepare us for our conclusions.

What has been said of Shakespeare—that he stands at the transition or crossroads between two ages—is fundamentally true of every figure who deserves to be called by the high title of "poet." Indeed, this transitional position is an enabling condition that makes possible the historical appearance of a poet in the first place: it provides the material for his education [*Ausbildung*] and poetic activity by situating him between a fully realized but hostile present, and a newly emerging and as-yet unformed world.

Goethe's life and works certainly belong to one of the historical periods that, instead of signifying a moment of construction and synthesis, are more rightly described as a period of decay and disintegration: the second half of the eighteenth century, as much as the beginning of the nineteenth, is undoubtedly to be regarded as a prime example of an emerging era that helps to lay the ground for the advent of the new. It used to be argued that the sixteenth-century Reformation had long run its course, that its fallout had been contained, even while the effects of this momentous historical event continued to spread with giant strides. It was simply the case that the Reformation had begun to transcend the narrow sphere of the ecclesiastical, which had been the movement's historical point of origin, and that it had begun to spread into secular areas and to unsettle the established order there as well. The Reformation's initial impetus started a series of shockwaves that seized, in strict and clearly traceable succession, the center of European life and that pushed it, toward the end of the previous century, into a general struggle—indeed, far from being subdued, this struggle has since extended its influence to other spheres and principles. We must be clear about the fact that the contradiction between two epochs, one receding and one emerging, has in turn given rise to a higher form of *Bildung*, as the spirit of literature and science has tried to come to terms with these historical tensions and to push past them—and all the while, real life has been subjected to the most profound and painful transformations, as it was buffeted about by historical storms and variously shattered.

The image that literature has given us of these transformations was bound to become richer as poetry worked—with the greatest frankness and brilliance—to fulfill the task of capturing this life by giving it noble and lasting form.

When viewed in its entirety, Goethe's work gives us an image of the ruptures of a world in conflict with itself; and while Goethe mitigates the shape of this conflict through the magic and flair of his artistic genius—reconciling and harmonizing conflicts by showing all that is true and just in the arrangement of the world—he is nonetheless compelled, by that very same artistic commitment to truth, to cast a sharp and glaring light on hitherto

https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812922000931 Published online by Cambridge University Press

hidden and dormant contradictions. Goethe's historical position and his particular conception of the work of the poet help to explain the preposterous accusations that narrow critical temperaments—constantly upset by what they fail to grasp—have brought against him with regard to his social sense. In truth, however, this social sense is very much present in his writings, even when blind critics fail to perceive it.

For it is precisely the shattering and vanishing of the old forms of life that the literature of this era must incorporate and process unless it is to renounce life itself. Literature must engage forms of social life that are corrupt and damaged and that condemn to death all newly emerging life, but it also needs to come to terms with the still unsanctioned emergence of the new: it must shed light on the knotty processes whereby the self-authorizing innovations of the new are usurped or repressed by the intransigence of the old. The majority of contemporaries may well admire an author without fully understanding him; or they will censure his writings as well as his intentions. Later periods will inevitably come to a fairer judgment, by recognizing how the artist has remained innocent and pure in all adventures of the heart and all depravities of the spirit—chaste and unsullied in all sensuality, like the spiritual teacher who unhesitatingly examines every error and transgression, cites their names and qualities, and even plunges into the depths of night in order to reemerge into the light enriched with the life he has wrested from them. This is the task of the poet, insofar as he is truly a poet, and he will no longer be true to himself as soon as he ceases to be a poet.

Early on in his career, Goethe became aware of the depredations of a world that was at odds with itself, and it was in the midst of these depredations that his own life was awakened and grew. The first of his works—*Werther*, *Götz*, *Faust*, *Stella*—show the inner urge for a different life, one that chafes against the conditions of life available at present and fails to be contained by them, and that at the same time lacks the forms that would allow it to unfold freely. This struggle constitutes a constant and recurring theme that runs through several of Goethe's subsequent works and is given variegated form: in *Egmont*, *Tasso*, *Hermann und Dorothea*, *Die natürliche Tochter* [*The Natural Daughter*], even in *Iphigenia*—insofar as this beautiful evocation of the ancient world is animated by the living spirit of the present—in *Die Wahlverwandschaften* [*Elective Affinities*], and especially in *Wilhelm Meister*, all of which offer interlinked variations on a single theme.

As early as *Werther*, Goethe saw clearly that those who are born today are not born into lives of natural freedom. Instead, the world—such as it confronts us today—is an artificial and man-made one: it is everywhere intersected and partitioned by boundaries; it has long since been appropriated and cramped by the accumulation of dead matter; and it is deaf, or even hostile, to the demands of personal growth. As a result, new life that enters this world is bound to lack any material ground on which it might flourish—instead it floats and becomes entangled in webs that are not of its own making, and in which its best part all too often perishes or sadly wastes away. The only way out of such despair offered in *Werther* is the rash act of suicide. By contrast, later works [by Goethe] begin to hold out antidotes to such despair, and they also offer moments of spiritual comfort and reprieve. This tendency is most fully developed in *Faust* and *Wilhelm Meister*: here, we are shown how those aspects of social life that appeared irredeemably broken or lost are salvaged in the name of a higher spiritual principle: these texts begin to suggest new ways in which earthly existence might finally meet with material and ideal satisfaction.

The French Revolution falls exactly into the middle of Goethe's life. This tremendous event responded to the same problems identified in Goethe's works, but the revolution had recourse to the most terrifying and destructive instruments imaginable. By contrast, Goethe engages the social problems of his day by turning to *Bildung*, insight, and goodwill: he resists the physical violence of the revolution itself, which threatens to destroy the world that it would seek to make new. Even so, the vision of organic and lively development—the creation of a better and more harmonious world—

https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812922000931 Published online by Cambridge University Press

animates his writing throughout: his eye set on a richer and nobler future, Goethe notably parts ways with those delusional dreamers who would have us return to the antiquated forms of a world that is in the process of disappearing. The *Lehrjahre* had begun to scrutinize class differences, economic relations of land ownership, as well as the relationship between an individual's innate abilities and the vocational choices open to them—yet these topical concerns have seldom received proper critical attention and they have often been misunderstood. For, instead of clinging to what is outdated, and instead of rejecting the pressure that emerging social aspirations exert on the present, Goethe hopes to seize on the new that becomes visible in the cracks of contemporary society, and direct both—the emerging and the already existing—toward their joint goal. Goethe shows appreciation of that which has stood the test of time, but he also recognizes the need for transformation—because he knows that the whole cosmos is founded on the unalterable principle of revolution and change, and that this movement is a defining property of the human itself.

The *Wanderjahre* expresses these ideas with all desirable clarity, and the book also holds out a fully realized image of new ways of life, drawn with the confidence and inventiveness of the accomplished poet. Here lie scattered many fertile seeds: if these are to blossom, they will make it possible for future audiences to claim Goethe as their own, just as he belongs to us thanks to those seeds that have already begun to bloom so beautifully today. The instructive and incisive overview of the *Wanderjahre*'s form and content that has been provided by [Heinrich Gustav] Hotho in the *Berliner Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik* [*Berlin Yearbooks for Academic Criticism*][1] saves us the work of having to provide another comprehensive summary of Goethe's book, since we can refer the reader back to this very successful and sufficient account.

At this point, we only wish to remind our readers that the *Wanderjahre* must be regarded no longer as mere literary play designed to please the imagination but rather as a work that deals in full seriousness and gravity with reality itself, and has therefore become a didactic work in the highest sense. In this work, the necessities of earthly life stand alongside the loftiest spirituality; Christianity has been returned to a state of pious purity; educational institutions are shown to comprise all of society; the process of *Bildung* in and through art, richly imagined in much detail, is presented as a common good; industriousness, finally cleansed of the destructive taint of competition, approaches the status of an art, secure in the knowledge of its legitimacy and the respect that it is due; vocation and ability ennoble and give meaning to every endeavor; in marriage, including marriages across different classes, the demeaning subjection of women is undone. Finally, the *Wanderjahre* imagines a vast and freely expandable association of solidary individuals [i.e., the *Bund* society] that stretches across the globe. This association extends its activities in all directions, giving attention to the highest and the lowest objects alike, and it labors to obliterate hardship and wickedness everywhere: it helps to bring about a renewed appreciation of all things and activities, an undoing of life's present inequities, as well as a new sense of the beautiful and the good. What Goethe gives us here is the rich vision of a humanity collectively advancing in work and *Bildung*. This vision, however, comprises the two principles that had formed the thematic kernel of the *Lehrjahre*: first, on the material side of things, the association grants each of its members their rightful share and enjoyment of the available earthly goods; and second, as far as the sphere of intellectual and spiritual life is concerned, the association enables individuals to break the brittle shackles that currently make it impossible for them to realize their true potential for self-growth.

Finally, we also wish to recall the remarkable phenomenon that—simultaneously with these images, yet independently of them and unbeknownst to [Goethe]—there arose a series of kindred thoughts, resulting from entirely different forces and emerging on a different terrain, yet from under the same night sky of world-historical events: these thoughts

https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812922000931 Published online by Cambridge University Press

took the form of teachings, and even dared to become active in the real world.

But here we must stop. The space that these comments open up for all kinds of further observations is vast and will only keep expanding. However, the judgments and insights that are to be won from such an inquiry will only be truly fruitful to those who are prepared laboriously to traverse this space on their own.

Note

1. Year 1829, nos. 108–12.

https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812922000931 Published online by Cambridge University Press