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THE WOLLEN-SOLLEN EQUATION IN WEDEKIND'S *FRÜHLINGS ERWACHEN*

Gordon Birrell

I

Like other "open" or episodic dramas, *Frühlings Erwachen* tends toward diffusiveness of theme: each successive scene not only further defines the central theme, but in some important way *extends* it. The work gains in richness of detail and cross reference at the expense of dramatic continuity or coherence. As the stage history of *Frühlings Erwachen* demonstrates, a little selective emphasis is all that is needed to make the play reflect widely divergent viewpoints and moods.[1] Nevertheless, scholarly commentators have arrived at a virtual consensus with regard to the central idea of the play: essentially, we learn, *Frühlings Erwachen* concerns the "Kampf von Pennälern gegen die 'sittliche Weltordnung' ihrer Erzieher,"[2] "die Kampfstellung zwischen den lebens- und genußstarken Naturen einerseits und den durchschnittlich Engstirnigen der Bourgeoisie anderseits,"[3] "the clash between youthful interest in sex and the refusal or inability of the parental generation to see mention of it as anything other than immoral,"[4] or, in more general terms, the conflict between Eros and civilization[5] or even the allegorical struggle of good and evil as embodied in the innocent children and their corrupt elders.[6]

Whatever their respective merits, all of these formulations have a way of flattening the play. They identify what are undeniably central concerns of *Frühlings Erwachen*, but they leave too much unaccounted for. The insistent emphasis on conflict and struggle does not, for instance, do justice to the play's pervasive humor, its moments of lightheartedness and exultation, its intermittent "sunniness," to use Wedekind's word.[7] More important, interpretations that stress the themes of intergenerational strife and inhibited sexual expression tend strongly to sentimentalize the children, focusing on the obvious victims of parental abuse (Moritz, Wendla, and Melchior) to the exclusion of other youthful figures who, for one reason or another, have found the means to cope with their situations (Martha, Thea, Hänschen, Ernst, Ilse).[8] Moreover, despite occasional disapproving sideglances at stage productions that eliminate or reposition various scenes,[9] critics have been inclined to make certain omissions of their own, maintaining a delicate and pointed silence with regard to such scenes as Hänschen Rilow's masturbatory monologue in act 2, or the idyll of unrepentent and explicit homosexuality in act 3.

All interpretation is in some sense reductive, and one cannot reasonably expect that any single analysis of *Frühlings Erwachen*, however spacious, will be able to take into account all of the issues raised in this complex, sprawling drama. Nevertheless, it seems to me that it is precisely the aspect most frequently singled out for critical inspection—the clash between conventional morality and youthful sexual self-assertion—that is most in need of a closer, more subtle examination.

The characters of *Frühlings Erwachen* talk, analyze, and debate incessantly; they raise important questions, and they cast about for answers to the questions, but their voices invariably have the hollow ring of conjecture or self-delusion. It is only in the closing episode of the drama, the famous and often imitated graveyard scene, that Wedekind introduces a more authoritative perspective. In flight from reform school and near despair over his involvement in the death of Wendla Bergmann, Melchior Gabor pauses to rest in a local cemetery. There he is confronted on the one hand by the headless phantom of his friend Moritz Stiefel, who attempts to lure Melchior into suicide, and on the other hand by a cynical, urbane masked gentleman, who finally convinces Melchior to return to life, equipped only with the elemental will to live and the "enervierenden Zweifel an allem."[10] While the visionary setting of this scene promises rather more than it delivers in terms of clarification and overview, there are at least

several moments in which the issues of the drama are suddenly thrown into sharper relief. At one such point, in response to Melchior's question, "Was denken Sie über Moral?", the masked stranger remarks, "Unter Moral verstehe ich das reele Produkt zweier imaginärer Größen. Die imaginären Größen sind *Sollen* und *Wollen*. Das Produkt heißt Moral und läßt sich in seiner Realität nicht leugnen."[11] Often cited, seldom analyzed, and—it would appear—never really understood, this peculiar formulation has far greater bearing on the central concerns of the drama than its offhand cleverness would suggest.

There are three noteworthy aspects to the masked gentleman's definition of morality. First, *Sollen*, in contrast to its conventional meaning, is no longer coincident with "morality," but appears merely as a contributing factor alongside *Wollen*. Second, both *Sollen* and *Wollen* are termed "imaginary quantities": "imaginary," that is, in the mathematical sense of imaginary or irrational numbers such as the square root of minus one. Applying a metaphor that Robert Musil found equally serviceable a decade later in *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß*, Wedekind suggests that the controlling factors of morality are finally inaccessible to all conceptual interpretation. To put it paradoxically, *Sollen* and *Wollen* are "imaginary" in the sense that they are unimaginable: irrational, beyond logical comprehension. Nevertheless, and this is the third point, they are altogether tangible in combination. $\sqrt{-1} \times \sqrt{-1} = -1$, a real (albeit negative) number. From the interplay of the two irrational forces of *Sollen* and *Wollen* emerges morality, utterly real—and often utterly negative—in its implications and effects.

The masked gentleman does not stop to define the terms of his equation, but the larger context of *Frühlings Erwachen* makes them clear enough: *Wollen* may be understood as the broad range of self-assertive and sexual impulses, while *Sollen* represents the whole complex of social, ideological, and religious sanctions, perceived and enforced as absolute imperatives.[12] Unlike earlier dualistic formulations such as the Schillerian *Pflicht* vs. *Neigung*, Wedekind's *Sollen* and *Wollen* do not necessarily function as opposing and antagonistic forces. The principal point of the *Sollen-Wollen* equation, in fact, lies in its insistence that aggressive drives and ethical ideals operate in *conjunction* to create practical morality. Moreover, it is impossible to speak of *Sollen* and *Wollen* as isolated quantities; they are observable—and comprehensible—only in their interaction. The independent, objective existence of moral values and forces of aggression (as, for instance, Platonic Ideas or Schopenhauerian will) is a matter of metaphysical speculation with no useful bearing on empirical morality. Ethical norms can be defined only in the context of self-assertive drives; sexual norms—and here Wedekind outdistances even Freud—can be defined only in the context of social or ideological expectations.

Almost every scene in *Frühlings Erwachen* serves as an illustration of this secret (and usually acknowledged) reciprocity of conscience and desire. In the faculty meeting at the beginning of act 3, for instance, Rektor Sonnenstich rises to an almost evangelistic fervor in his denunciation of the treatise on reproduction that Melchior has written for Moritz. Sexual enlightenment, claims Sonnenstich, led Moritz to a moral depravity so deep and so final that suicide was the only possible response. Such pronouncements come easily, not to say automatically, to Sonnenstich. Intermeshed with his moral indignation, however, is the equally compelling thought of self-preservation. Unless the responsibility for Moritz's suicide is effectively shifted to Melchior, the school itself may be held accountable and closed by the authorities. "Wir sehen uns in die Notwendigkeit versetzt, den Schuldbeladenen zu richten, um nicht als die Schuldlosen gerichtet zu werden."[13] In a similar vein, Melchior's father, a lawyer, finds it convenient to send Melchior off to reform school as punishment for his role in Moritz's suicide. This solution not only satisfies Gabor's legalistic conviction that moral crimes deserve a swift, official retribution. It also relieves him of the uncomfortable task of reviewing his own responsibility in Melchior's upbringing. Moreover, it gives him an opportunity to reassert his masculine authority over Frau Gabor, whose lighthearted, permissive, altogether *feminine* influence has led to Melchior's moral disintegration. "Ich habe deine geistvolle Erziehungsmethode vierzehn Jahre schweigend mit angesehen. Sie widersprach meinen Begriffen. . . . Du erblickst vorwitzige Tändelei, wo es sich um Grundschäden des Charakters handelt. Ihr Frauen seid nicht berufen, über solche Dinge zu urteilen."[14] As with Sonnenstich, the moral stance is apparently honest and fervid, but it cannot be isolated from powerful underlying drives of self-assertion and self-justification.[15] In yet another example, Wendla's friend Martha describes her parents' reaction to the forbidden blue ribbon she has sewn into her nightgown: "Mama riß mich am Zopf zum Bett heraus. . . . Da habe man's, worauf ich ausgehe!—Da habe man's ja! . . . Ich lag auf der Erde und schrie und heulte. Da kommt Papa. Ritsch—das Hemd herunter. Ich zur Türe hinaus. Da habe man's. Ich wolle nun wohl so auf die Straße hinunter . . ."[16] Ripping the nightgown from the body of one's own pubescent daughter is at best a rather *curious* way of expressing anger at her awkward attempts to make herself attractive. In the reaction of Martha's father one senses an unpretty combination of moral outrage and sexual impulse. As before, explicit *Sollen* and implicit *Wollen* prove to be mutually supportive.

Up to this point, we have been speaking of adult figures in roles of authority, figures of whom it might be expected that moral starchiness is accompanied by self-serving interests. Wedekind goes to some lengths, however, to demonstrate that the *Sollen-Wollen* equation extends to the children as well. The reflective and precocious Melchior Gabor, for instance, has enough insight into human psychology to realize that the ideal of pure, selfless action is a fiction. From there it is only one step, albeit a very large step, to the conviction that all actions are selfish and nothing but selfish, and that moral systems are invented only to camouflage man's basic egotism. Armed with these ideas, Melchior feels free to vent his own selfish and sadistic impulses by sexually assaulting Wendla Bergmann. He rapes her literally in the name of his philosophy: in the middle of the very act, he exclaims, "O glaub mir, es gibt keine Liebe! — Alles Eigennutz, alles Egotismus! — Ich liebe dich so wenig, wie du mich liebst."[17] The fact that Melchior should find it necessary to blurt out these words in such an improbable context is evidence in itself of his continuing need to justify his actions by placing them in an ideological frame of reference. In other words, *Wollen* and *Sollen* are once again brought into alignment—in this case, quite forcibly and self-consciously.

Wendla herself is unable to follow the logic of Melchior's attack on the ideal of selflessness, but she provides Melchior with a practical example that seems to confirm his theories. As early as the third scene of the first act, Wendla displays an inordinate interest in the beatings that Martha suffers at the hands of her father,[18] and it gradually becomes apparent that Wendla's compulsive need to perform acts of kindness and charity toward the poor is closely linked with masochistic motives. Not content merely to distribute food, clothing, and money to the poor, she dreams of becoming a starving street urchin herself, a beggar child subjected to storm and wind, heartless people, and—not least of all—the kind of satanic beatings that Martha is forced to endure. "O was die leiden muß! Siedendheiß wird es einem, wenn sie erzählt. . . . Seit Monaten denke ich darüber nach, wie man ihr helfen kann. — Ich wollte mit Freuden einmal acht Tage an ihrer Stelle sein."[19] And a few minutes later she virtually implores Melchior to whip her with a wooden switch. The moral impulse to help the oppressed is transformed into the sexual impulse to *be* the oppressed. It is tempting here, as it is with Sonnenstich and the other adult figures, to view the erotic drive as primary, the ethical stance as secondary and superficial. This is, in effect, Melchior's assessment of human motivation. A more subtle interpretation, however, would view both the sexual and the moral impulse as mutually *supportive* psychic forces, complementary and equally compelling factors in the generalized mental attitude that the masked gentleman terms "morality."

II

Critics have occasionally pointed out the curiously stilted and eccentric language of *Frühlings Erwachen*, but we are still missing a close analysis of the ways in which language functions in Wedekind's drama.[20] In the scope of this study, it can only be pointed out that such an analysis would be extremely pertinent to a more detailed understanding of the interaction of *Sollen* and *Wollen*. The language of *Frühlings Erwachen* has a markedly self-defensive quality; the cramped, high-flown style used by children and adults alike reflects their efforts to cloak their thoughts in terms of such refinement that the underlying currents of anxiety, confusion, or aggression are no longer apparent.[21] The cruelty of the schoolchildren, for instance, is scarcely masked by their constant allusions to history and classical myths, and Sonnenstich's monstrously involuted syntax demonstrates more than anything else the transformation of language from a means of communication to a form of weaponry. Moreover, when the boundaries of permissible speech are crossed, the characters immediately become tongue-tied or mute—or even paralyzed with anxiety, as is the case with Wendla's mother when Wendla demands of her some explanation of the facts of life. Faced with the necessity of finding words for the unspeakable, Frau Bergmann becomes virtually ecstatic with guilt: "Aber es geht ja nicht, Kind! Ich kann es ja nicht verantworten.—Ich verdiene ja, daß man mich ins Gefängnis setzt—daß man dich von mir nimmt . . ."[22]

All of the characters of Wedekind's play are mesmerized by the etiquette of language. The recasting of self-assertive drives into socially acceptable formulas makes language a direct expression of what the masked gentleman calls "morality." Nowhere is the congruence of *Sollen* and *Wollen* more perfectly expressed, however, than in *written* language. Whenever a situation becomes too complicated or too embarrassing for normal speech, the characters of *Frühlings Erwachen* reach for pencil and paper. Moritz calms himself after his first nocturnal emission by starting work on his memoirs; Melchior prepares a treatise on reproduction for Moritz, complete with life-size illustrations and marginal notes; Frau Gabor, in response to Moritz's request for money to flee to America, writes a letter of regret that is full of sonorous generalizations on the topic of moral self-reliance; Melchior sends Wendla a letter begging her forgiveness for the rape. Secondary literature has, to my knowledge, never taken note of the fact that these written materials are responsible for almost all of the complications in the plot of *Frühlings Erwachen*. The recourse to carefully phrased policy statements protects one from the uncertainty and vulnerability of direct confrontation. As Thomas Mann was to demonstrate in the figure of Gustav Aschenbach,

writing offers a means of maintaining a lofty posture of rectitude while one effectively withdraws from the true arena of morality.

A similar and complementary function is performed by pornography. Like the written material, pornography substitutes a debased kind of aesthetic detachment for intimacy: the erotic partner becomes the printed page. The motif of pornography is pervasive enough in *Frühlings Erwachen* that it amounts to a subtheme of the drama. Hänschen Rilow's onanistic reveries focus on a succession of pictures featuring such figures as Psyche, Io, Galathea, Amor, Leda, and finally Desdemona; Rektor Sonnenstich condemns Melchior's anatomical sketches as "the most shameless obscenities"; Hänschen's collection of erotica is enriched by a number of items stolen or inherited from other connoisseurs of pornography, including his father, his brother, and his governess; and even the free spirits of Ilse's Priapia circle are involved in a lively little cottage industry that produces a variety of erotic drawings and photographs for middle-class consumers. Wedekind's society can neither relinquish sexual activity nor accommodate it without furtiveness and distaste. The result is a pornographic mentality that insists on erotic arousal without erotic interaction.[23] Moreover, the terms of arousal are themselves subject to social sanctions. As the inventory of pictures in Hänschen's collection reveals, the "respectable" sexual daydream is directed toward idealized female figures drawn from mythology or literature. This appropriation of classical figures and motifs for erotic fantasy is only conceivable in a society whose devotion to the cultural canon is as obsessive as it is superficial. The schoolboys, with their compulsive talk of Scylla and Charibdis, dryads, and Etruscans, are only one step removed from the middle-class adults who purchase snapshots of Ilse posing as Ganymede or Ariadne. As Sonnenstich's reaction to Melchior's treatise makes clear, sexually explicit pictures that lack the classical touch are perceived as a threat to the "moral order of the universe." A *Sollen*-system that insistently idealizes feminine beauty while condemning the candid erotic appeal of the normal human body finds its counterpart in a *Wollen*-complex that prefers the titillation of high-brow pornography to the complications of sexual intimacy.

It is worth noting that the one scene of *Frühlings Erwachen* that has most regularly attracted the fury of the censors as a "pornographic" episode—the homoerotic scene in the vineyard (act 3, scene 6)—depicts in fact one of the few relationships in the drama that are not in some way perverted by the moral and sexual expectations of society. Despite the humorously self-conscious *Weltschmerz* and adolescent pathos of the scene, on the whole it affirms the possibility of straightforward communication even in a situation that would seem to call for the most elaborate defensiveness. Hänschen and Ernst are able to justify their relationship without having to cast about for clever verbal formulas or historical parallels; here, where one would most expect it, there is not a single allusion to ancient Greece. There is a further significance in the placement of the scene. It serves first of all as an instructive contrast to the preceding episode, in which Wendla's fate is committed to God in heaven and Mutter Schmidtin on earth.[24] Set against this demonstration of the deadly consequences of middle-class morality, the vineyard scene represents more than an idyllic interlude. However tentative or transitory the relationship between Hänschen and Ernst may be, it raises the possibility of a self-contained morality, a situational ethic that demands nothing more than the fulfillment of the present moment. Ernst: "Und wie macht sich jetzt alles so ganz von selbst!" Hänschen: "Warum also nicht!"[25] This naive, unremorseful celebration of sensual existence not only refutes the life-negating mentality of the previous scene; as a provisional example of moral autonomy, it also anticipates the appearance of the masked gentleman in the following scene.

III

Altogether, the arrangement of individual episodes in *Frühlings Erwachen* is carefully conceived. Each of the first two acts, for instance, builds steadily toward a violent climax, which is averted in the third act only by the sudden appearance of the masked gentleman. Moreover, each of the acts has a certain internal cohesiveness of theme and character. The first act explores the world of the children, oscillating from scene to scene between male and female perspectives and culminating in the final episode with the first forceful collision of perspectives (the flagellation scene between Melchior and Wendla). The third act is dominated by adult figures and institutions: Sonnenstich and the *Gymnasium*, Moritz's father, Herr and Frau Gabor, the reform school, the projected adulthood of Hänschen and Ernst, the masked gentleman.

The second act, on the other hand, reflects above all the introspective and elegiac world of Moritz Stiefel. While Moritz himself appears only in the opening and closing episodes, his spirit pervades the entire act, with its sensual, heavily atmospheric scenes, its moments of lyrical intensity and tenderness, its latent and occasionally overt violence. In addition, a significant thread of imagery runs through the second act, introduced by Moritz's narration of the fairy tale of the headless queen in the opening scene:

> Das war eine wunderschöne Königin, schön wie die Sonne, schöner als alle Mädchen im Land. Nur war sie leider ohne Kopf auf die Welt gekommen. Sie konnte nicht essen, nicht trinken, konnte nicht sehen, nicht lachen und auch nicht

küssen. Sie vermochte sich mit ihrem Hofstaat nur durch ihre kleine weiche Hand zu verständigen. Mit den zierlichen Füßen strampelte sie Kriegserklärungen und Todesurteile.[26]

If Moritz at this point feels nothing more than a vague sense of kinship with the headless queen ("[ich] erscheine mir . . . plötzlich selber als kopflose Königin"),[27] at the end of the act the identification becomes shockingly literal as Moritz shoots his own head off; and in the final graveyard scene the transformation of metaphor into reality is completed as Moritz appears on stage carrying his head under his arm. The imagery extends to other characters as well: in the second scene of the second act, Wendla momentarily "beheads" herself by hiding her head under her mother's apron, so that Frau Bergmann can summon the strength to speak of human reproduction. Frau Gabor's letter to Moritz contains at least two instances of unwitting decapitation imagery (". . . wollte ich mich . . . dazu bestimmen lassen, nun auch meinerseits den Kopf zu verlieren," "Und somit Kopf hoch, Herr Stiefel!").[28]

The motif of headlessness has several important aspects. First, as is evident in the description of the unhappy queen, headlessness signifies sensual deprivation of the most drastic sort. The queen is incapable of sight, taste, and touch ("kissing"). For Moritz, too, sensual gratification is impossible, largely (but not exclusively, as we shall see) because of the crushing burden of his schoolwork. The yearly ordeal of promotion to the next grade engulfs Moritz's emotional life. His intellectual concentration must be defended at all costs against distraction, and there is no distraction more insidious than thoughts of sex. "Sag mir heute noch nichts [von der Fortpflanzung], Melchior. Ich habe noch Mittelamerika und Ludwig den Fünfzehnten vor mir. . . . Um mit Erfolg büffeln zu können, muß ich stumpfsinnig wie ein Ochse sein."[29] In an analogous passage, Martha's parents punish her for her naughty experiments with fashion by cinching her into a sack, so that only her head remains in the open air ("Der Kopf bleibt frei. Unter dem Kinn wird zugebunden.")[30] The forcible separation of body and head ostensibly insures that mind and spirit remain aloof from all impure impulses emanating from below.

The throttling of instinctive responses in the name of spiritual control is of course familiar from Freud's *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*. From a Freudian standpoint it is predictable, too, that the deprivation of sensual experience is accompanied by powerful aggressive impulses. The figure of the headless queen combines dainty refinement with murderous aggression: "Mit den zierlichen Füßen strampelte sie Kriegserklärungen und Todesurteile." Moritz's sexual fantasies, momentarily revitalized by the appearance of Ilse, reflect the same combination of delicacy and violent assault: ". . . ich werde sagen, ich . . . hätte mir ein unbändiges Füllen gezogen—hätte es in langen schwarzseidenen Strümpfen und schwarzen Lackstiefeln und schwarzen, langen Glacé-Handschuhen, schwarzen Samt um den Hals, über den Teppich an mir vorbeistolzieren lassen—hätte es in einem Wahnsinnsanfall in meinen Kissen erwürgt."[31] Perhaps the most impressive example of this sort of thing is Rektor Sonnenstich, in whom a selfish, sadistic temperament is united with a linguistic finesse so extravagantly refined as to border on the unintelligible.

Headlessness also implies isolation, lack of "touch" in the sense of communication or sharing. It is no coincidence that four of the seven scenes of the second act are essentially monologues.[32] Entrapped in the lonely, conjectural world of their own thoughts and emotions, the characters of *Frühlings Erwachen*—children and adults alike—are capable only of fitful communication, and their interaction, uninformed by understanding or compassion, often enough has deadly consequences. Above all, headlessness signifies false awareness, the inevitable outgrowth of isolation and impoverished experience.[33] Momentarily "beheaded" beneath her mother's apron, Wendla receives the fatal information that babies are the result of a spiritual state ("Um ein Kind zu bekommen—muß man den Mann—mit dem man verheiratet ist . . . *lieben—lieben* sag' ich dir—wie man nur einen Mann lieben kann!")[34] Frau Gabor, who otherwise has a fairly reasonable and sympathetic head on her shoulders, loses it altogether when she hears of Melchior's sexual involvement with Wendla. The fury of Frau Gabor's reaction ("In die Korrektionsanstalt!")[35] derives from her sense of betrayal; Melchior has shattered her loving but utterly misguided image of his "edle Denkungsweise," "seine kindliche Unberührtheit," "[sein] frühlingsfrohe[s] Herz," "seine kindliche Entschlossenheit, mutig zu kämpfen für Gut und Recht."[36] This clash between perception and reality accounts for much of the play's biting humor: the more earnestly and emphatically a character speaks, the more likely his words are to be undermined by ignorance or self-delusion.

In the most general terms, headlessness implies *inadequacy*, and it is here that the parallel between Moritz and the headless queen is most poignantly evident. In Moritz, the feeling of inadequacy hardens into a profound, obsessive sense of guilt. He finds himself condemned on all counts. He cannot satisfy his parents' ethic of academic success, nor can he look forward to any sort of heavenly retribution for his martyrdom on earth. On the contrary: in the long monologue before his suicide at the end of act 2, Moritz envisions a transcendent tribunal that takes him to task for, of all things, failing to fulfill his human *sexual* potential. "Ich werde es niemandem sagen, daß ich unverrichteter Sache wiederkehre. Ich werde so tun, als hätte ich alles das mitgemacht. . . . Es hat etwas Beschämendes,

Mensch gewesen zu sein, ohne das Menschlichste kennengelernt zu haben.—Sie kommen aus Ägypten, verehrter Herr, und haben die Pyramiden nicht gesehen?!''[37] Moritz's belief in the inevitability of guilt also finds its way, unsurprisingly, into his sexual fantasies. In an earlier scene, he explains to Melchior that women alone can experience the highest erotic bliss, since their very *passivity* in the sexual act makes it possible for them to enjoy sex without guilt. ''Glaub mir, Melchior, Unrecht leiden zu müssen ist süßer denn Unrecht tun! Unverschuldet ein so süßes Unrecht über sich ergehen lassen zu müssen, scheint mir der Inbegriff aller irdischen Seligkeit. . . . Das Mädchen, Melchior, genießt wie die seligen Götter.''[38] This ideal of utter passivity, of being raped, corresponds exactly to the frame of mind that permits Moritz to be so completely dominated by the morality of school and parents. As before, sexual *Wollen* and societal *Sollen* are exposed as mutually supportive.

Nevertheless, the case of Moritz Stiefel adds a new dimension to the *Wollen-Sollen* relationship. It is easy enough to attribute all of the aspects of ''headlessness''—sensual deprivation, rechanneled aggression, isolation, false awareness—to the crushing influence of Victorian morality. With Moritz, however, Wedekind raises the possibility that headlessness may be in fact an *innate* condition. The queen of the fairy tale, we hear, ''came into the world without a head.'' Moritz's sense of sexual embarrassment goes back to his earliest memories (''Ich erinnere mich auch, als fünfjähriges Kind schon befangen worden zu sein, wenn einer die dekolletierte Coeurdame aufschlug''),[39] and Melchior concludes that sexual shame is ''tief eingewurzelt in der menschlichen Natur.''[40] The most telling passage of all, however, is the confrontation between Moritz and the masked gentleman in the final scene of the drama. If the masked gentleman appears as an advocate of life in the broadest, most undifferentiated sense, Moritz in his spectral form represents some anti-vital force, a *Wollen* whose deepest desire is to deny the satisfaction of existence.[41]

The allegorical framework of this closing scene, in which Moritz and the masked gentleman compete for Melchior's soul, invites the audience (or the reader) to rethink the entire play as a struggle between life-affirming and life-negating forces.[42] In particular, Wedekind implies that Moritz has *all along* represented the allure of death—and represented it intrinsically, not merely as the result of a repressive moral code. Nowhere is the ''irrational'' quality of *Wollen* more evident than in this tormented soul, whose fervent, unquestioning acceptance of societal pressures is tantamount to a suicidal death wish. The essential conflict in *Frühlings Erwachen* is not between *Sollen*-dominated adults and *Wollen*-dominated children, or between restrictive morality and healthy, life-enhancing eroticism. The deepest concern of the play is rather the conflict between two radically opposed forms of *Wollen* along with their concomitant (and likewise opposed) *Sollen*-systems. The morbid instincts of Moritz Stiefel, furthered by and supportive of middle-class morality, confront the vigorous instincts of Ilse and the masked gentleman, which reflect a Nietzschean ethic of scepticism and exuberant self-expression.[43] Moritz cannot be redeemed from his situation merely by placing him in a more permissive environment such as Ilse's flamboyantly lusty Priapia circle. If he were to follow Ilse, his surrender to Eros would doubtless lead him as surely to death as Lulu is drawn to Jack the Ripper. Ilse's account of her adventures with the sadistic, suicidal Heinrich makes it clear enough that life in the Priapia is anything but an idyll of uninterrupted sexual euphoria. The relaxing of social restrictions liberates the dark, destructive instincts as well as the robust, life-supportive instincts.[44]

The morose headlessness of Moritz Stiefel and the exultant ''Besinnungslosigkeit'' of Ilse represent two psychic extremes, two *Wollen* roles of such elemental force that neither of these figures can survive in conventional society. The other characters of the drama—Melchior, Wendla, Hänschen, Frau Gabor, Frau Bergmann—are less radically, less fatalistically perceived; they exhibit a complex blend of destructive and life-affirming drives, and it is in them that Wedekind's critique of middle-class society is most apposite. As long as human beings are in a state of emotional flux, as long as they are bewildered and disabled by contradictory impulses, they can be shaped, regulated, ''educated,'' by systematically rewarding certain impulses and repressing others. The puritanical society of *Frühlings Erwachen* consistently rewards the morbid, malignant instincts; it permits a power structure in which idealistic sadists like Sonnenstich (and, on a more discreet and elegant level, Herr Gabor) maintain their supremacy by arousing and capitalizing on feelings of self-loathing in the young or the weak. Wedekind's middle-class morality represents a *Wollen-Sollen* equation in which life-negating instinctive drives work in collusion with strait-laced ethical values to produce a state of enforced headlessness.

For Wendla Bergmann, this morality proves to be nothing short of murderous; for Moritz Stiefel, it reinforces an innate longing for self-destruction. On the other hand, there is no evidence whatsoever that Wendla's and Melchior's sado-masochistic tendencies, or Hänschen's homosexual leanings, are the result of their parents' warped values. Wedekind is careful to show that sexual responses may be relatively independent of social or parental influence. His indictment of society is deeper and more subtle: the fundamental problem of *Frühlings Erwachen* is that society has completely failed to provide these young people with a value

system that would help them to cope with their unpredictable and often violent emotional drives. The available *Sollen*-models provided by society serve only to compound and reinforce their sexual confusion. By the same token, Wedekind refuses to assign negative or positive values to the seemingly aberrant sexual attitudes in the children. Taken out of context, Melchior's assault on Wendla may seem deplorable, but Wendla herself apparently has no real objection to the "rape," beyond her confusion as to whether it represents the kind of love that can result in a baby. Wedekind suggests on the contrary that sexual responses cannot be classified as normal or abnormal, acceptable or unacceptable, outside of the system of social norms. The drastic scenes of rape, masturbation, and suicide serve to demonstrate above all, and with great poignancy, the lengths to which the children will go in order to justify or condemn their sexual drives in terms of the values available to them. The final tragedy of *Frühlings Erwachen* lies in its implicit—and accurate—prediction that these fumbling, ad-hoc combinations of *Wollen* and *Sollen* will only lead to another generation of repressive adults and bewildered, unhappy adolescents.

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NOTES

1. Günther Seehaus, *Frank Wedekind und das Theater*, Die neue Schaubühne: Forschungen zur Theatergeschichte, ed. Carl Niessen and Hans Günther Auch, no. 2 (Munich: Laokoon, 1964), pp. 307-321.

2. Klaus Volker, *Wedekind*, Friedrichs Dramatiker des Welttheaters, no. 7 (Velber bei Hamburg: Friedrich, 1965), p. 26.

3. Peter Michelsen, "Frank Wedekind," in *Deutsche Dichter der Moderne: Ihr Leben und Werk*, ed. Benno von Wiese, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1963), p. 53. Michelsen, to be sure, considers this "programmatic idea" less important dramatically than the play's evocation of the emotional pathos of adolescence.

4. Keith Bullivant, "The Notion of Morality in Wedekind's *Frühlings Erwachen*," *New German Studies* 1 (1973): 42.

5. Wolfdietrich Rasch, "Sozialkritische Aspekte in Wedekinds dramatischer Dichtung: Sexualität, Kunst und Gesellschaft," in *Gestaltungsgeschichte und Gesellschaftsgeschichte: Literatur-, Kunst- und Musikwissenschaftliche Studien*, ed. Helmut Kreuzer and Käte Hamburger (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1969), pp. 414-15.

6. Sol Gittleman, *Frank Wedekind* (New York: Twayne, 1969), p. 51.

7. "Nimmt mich Wunder, ob ich es noch erleben werde, daß man das Buch endlich für das nimmt, als was ich es vor zwanzig Jahren geschrieben habe, für ein sonniges Abbild des Lebens . . ." Frank Wedekind, *Prosa, Dramen, Verse*, 2nd ed. (Munich: Langen Müller, 1960), p. 964. See also the letter to Fritz Basil (3 January 1907): "Ich glaube, daß das Stück um so ergreifender wirkt, je harmloser, je sonniger, je lachender es gespielt wird." Frank Wedekind, *Gesammelte Briefe*, ed. Fritz Strich, 2 vols. (Munich: Georg Müller, 1924), 2: 170.

8. For the only extended discussion of these minor figures, see Friedrich Gundolf, *Frank Wedekind* (Munich: Langen Müller, 1954), pp. 50-58. Gundolf's sympathetic but selective interpretation stresses the atmospheric qualities of the drama rather than its ethical concerns; thus he concentrates on the world of the children, to the neglect of complicated adult figures such as Frau Bergmann and Frau Gabor.

9. See, for example, Günther Seehaus, *Frank Wedekind in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1974), pp. 52-53, and Artur Kutscher, *Frank Wedekind: Sein Leben und seine Werke*, 2 vols. (Munich: Müller, 1922), 1: 258-59.

10. Wedekind, *Prosa, Dramen, Verse*, p. 311.

11. Ibid., p. 310.

12. Bullivant, "The Notion of Morality in Wedekind's *Frühlings Erwachen*," p. 45, sees the masked gentleman's remarks at first as an appeal to a "personal ethical code" and is then dismayed to discover that they do not necessarily mean any such thing: " 'Sollen,' as one of the pair of ideal values which produce the synthesis 'morality,' fundamentally contradicts the whole idea of a personal code of moral behaviour, since it implies the existence of constraints exercised by an external ethic, realised as a system within a social context." The translation of "imaginäre Größen" with "ideal values" undermines, of course, the sense of the mathematical metaphor, and it is difficult in any case to conceive of the *Wollen* factor as an "ideal value."

13. Wedekind, *Prosa, Dramen, Verse*, p. 285.

14. Ibid., pp. 292-93.

15. For a discussion of the more sympathetic aspects of Herr Gabor's character, see Seehaus, *Frank Wedekind und das Theater*, pp. 331-32.

16. Wedekind, *Prosa, Dramen, Verse*, pp. 253-54.

17. Ibid., p. 274.

18. Her repeated question—"Womit schlägt er dich?"—is so much out of context that Martha either ignores it altogether or dismisses it with an indifferent "Ach was—mit allerhand." Ibid., pp. 253-54.

19. Ibid., p. 261.

20. See Kutscher, *Frank Wedekind*, pp. 252-53; Walter H. Sokel, *The Writer in Extremis: Expressionism in Twentieth-Century German Literature* (1959; reprint ed., New York: McGraw Hill, 1964), pp. 62-67; Friedrich Rothe, *Frank Wedekinds Dramen: Jugendstil und Lebensphilosophie* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1968), p. 19.

21. This is not to suggest that Wedekind's language is consistently open to psychological interpretation. As a transitional work, *Frühlings Erwachen* retains elements of naturalistic verisimilitude while anticipating the abstract (and non-psychological) techniques of expressionism. In general, the language of *Frühlings Erwachen* tends most strongly toward expressionist heightening in those characters who assume quasi-allegorical roles, e.g., Sonnenstich and Moritz.

22. Wedekind, *Prosa, Dramen, Verse*, p. 271.

23. See Rasch, "Sozialkritische Aspekte in Wedekinds dramatischer Dichtung," p. 411: "Eine Gesellschaftsmoral, die die sexuelle Aktivität zugleich erstrebt und verdammt, genießt und verachtet, heimlich praktiziert und öffentlich diffamiert, ist nach Wedekinds Ansicht nicht nur lebensfeindlich, sondern sie kann auch der gesellschaftlichen Aufgabe einer wahren Integration der Sexualität nicht gerecht werden."

24. "O laß uns auf den lieben Gott vertrauen, Wendla; laß uns auf Barmherzigkeit hoffen und das Unsrige tun! . . . Sie kommen eben recht, Mutter Schmidtin." Wedekind, *Prosa, Dramen, Verse*, p. 301.

25. Ibid., p. 303.

26. Ibid., p. 264.

27. Ibid., p. 265.

28. Ibid., pp. 275-76.

29. Ibid., p. 251.

30. Ibid., p. 254.

31. Ibid., p. 282.

32. Hänschen Rilow's farewell address to "Desdemona" (act 2, scene 3); Frau Gabor's letter to Moritz (act 2, scene 5); Wendla in the garden (act 2, scene 6); Moritz's meditations before his suicide (act 2, scene 7). In addition, Wendla encourages her mother to think of her explanation of the facts of life as nothing more than a harmless monologue: "Du deckst mir deine Schürze über den Kopf und erzählst und erzählst, als wärst du mutterseelenallein im Zimmer" (Wedekind, p. 270). For a discussion of the role of monologue in *Frühlings Erwachen* and other "open" dramas, see Volker Klotz, *Geschlossene und offene Form im Drama*, 2nd ed. (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1962), pp. 187-97.

33. In folklore, too, headless spirits are associated with a lack of reason or with self-delusion. See Hanns Bächtold-Stäubli, ed., *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, 12 vols. (Berlin and Leipzig: Walter de Gruyter, 1927-42), 5: 216 and 226.

34. Wedekind, *Prosa, Dramen, Verse*, p. 271.

35. Ibid., p. 296.

36. Ibid., pp. 293-95.

37. Ibid., p. 278.
38. Ibid., p. 267.
39. Ibid., p. 251.
40. Ibid., p. 247.
41. Wedekind's own commentary on the scene is misleading: "Als Modell für den aus dem Grab gestiegenen Moritz Stiefel, die Verkörperung des Todes, wählte ich die Philosophie Nietzsches." (From the "Vorrede zu Oahu," *Prosa, Dramen, Verse*, p. 943.) I would suggest, on the contrary, that Nietzsche's way of thinking is more accurately represented by the masked gentleman, while Moritz voices the sentiments of Arthur Schopenhauer.
42. For a discussion of the role of allegory in *Frühlings Erwachen*, see Friedrich Rothe, *Frank Wedekinds Dramen: Jugendstil und Lebensphilosophie* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1968), pp. 25-29.
43. Here again Wedekind anticipates Freudian theory, in this case the opposition of the pleasure principle and the death instinct.
44. Walter H. Sokel's otherwise excellent article, "The Changing Role of Eros in Wedekind's Drama," *German Quarterly* 39 (1966): 201-207, overlooks the elements of violence and brutality in the Priapia: "Cultivated for itself, untouched by the pressures of hostile society, eros is not tragic, but idyllic" (p. 202). For a similar view, see Claude Quiguer, "L'Érotisme de Frank Wedekind," *Études Germaniques* 17 (1962): 14-33; here, p. 24: [Dans *L'Esprit de la Terre*] le mal ne réside plus—comme dans *L'Eveil du Printemps*—dans les obstacles que la société dresse à l'instinct, mais dans l'instinct lui-même. Le tragique s'intériorise."