Chapter 2

The Ideal Virgin and the Failed Mother

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, and *Faust I*

> Sey ihre Mutter! Ich gab ihr die Hand drauf . . . Habe es für deine Geschwister, und für deinen Vater: die Treue und den Gehorsam einer Frau.
>
> Be a mother to them . . . Show a mother's care to your brothers and sisters, and be as faithful and obedient to your father as a wife.
>
> —Goethe, *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*

"Der Hauptpunkt der ganzen weiblichen Existenz ist die Gebärmutter" ("The essence of the entire feminine existence is the womb").[1] With these words, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe locates the essence of femininity in the uterus and defines women through their capacity for reproduction.[2] As explored in the "Introduction," this belief was not uncommon in the eighteenth century, but it is significant when we examine the virginal mother and other representations of women in Goethe's works, specifically in *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (1774), *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795), and *Faust I* (1808). Where the virginal Lotte, Therese, and Natalie willingly serve as surrogate mothers, the cross-dressing Mariane and Mignon challenge the patriarchal order, and the infanticidal Gretchen emerges as the virginal mother's antithesis. Each representation reflects the belief that femininity is tied to nature and biology and specifically to the maternal body.

In Sophie von La Roche's *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*, the virginal mother functions to negotiate prescribed gender roles along with the pursuit of education. She performs domestic duties, but she also engages in intellectual activities. Her devotion to reading does not inspire sexual passions, as was feared with the reading of novels, but rather benefits the children in her care. As a positive example for young girls, the virginal mother thus serves as an appropriate character for women writers to enter the male-

dominated publishing world. Goethe, however, did not write under the same social constraints as his female contemporaries.[3] And although he maintained relationships with many educated women (including La Roche), he did not argue for advancements in female education like Christoph Martin Wieland or Johann Christoph Gottsched. In an early letter to his sister Cornelia, he even forbids her reading of novels without his approval.[4] Why, then, do we find virginal mothers in his work? And why, considering the connection that Goethe draws between femininity and the womb, does the virginal mother represent the ideal feminine in Goethe's work? And how is the love of the virginal mother—who is represented as ennobling and a precursor for domestic happiness in female-authored texts—linked to Werther's suicide?

In the following, I argue that maternity and motherhood play distinct and separate roles in Goethe's texts, so that the maternal body is ultimately divorced from the feminine ideal and the virginal mother is glorified over the biological mother. I draw on Kristevan psychoanalysis and Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the grotesque body to discuss the suppression of the mother in these works. In *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*, Werther projects maternal fantasies onto the virginal Lotte, but his inability to separate his romantic desire from his desire for maternal nurture proves to be fatal. In *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, promiscuous mothers complicate paternal identity, the Turmgesellschaft (Tower Society) circumvents maternal knowledge, and the pregnant body is deemed grotesque. In *Faust I*, the threat of maternal power is realized in Gretchen's infanticide, and the infanticidal mother challenges the essentialist notions of motherhood that are inherent to the virginal mother. All of these instances serve to separate maternity from motherhood and inscribe the feminine ideal on the nonbiological, virginal mother.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: The Father of German Literature

Born in Frankfurt am Main on August 28, 1749, to the imperial councilor Johann Kaspar Goethe and Katharina Elisabeth (née Textor), Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was the eldest of seven children, but only he and his sister Cornelia survived childhood. (See figure 2.1.) His father took an active interest in the children's education and employed tutors from a variety of international backgrounds to teach Latin, Italian, Yiddish, Hebrew, English, French, Greek, drawing, history, geography, and handwriting. Gifted with an exceptional memory and an aptitude for languages, the young Goethe proved himself to be an exceptionally bright child. At twelve, he was writing alexandrines, and he soon composed a romance in six languages in order to alleviate the burden of studying grammar. His childhood accomplishments also included a biblical epic on the life of Joseph and a collection of poems. In 1765, at the age of sixteen, Goethe left Frankfurt for Leipzig University to pursue the law degree his father desired, though he harbored the private aim

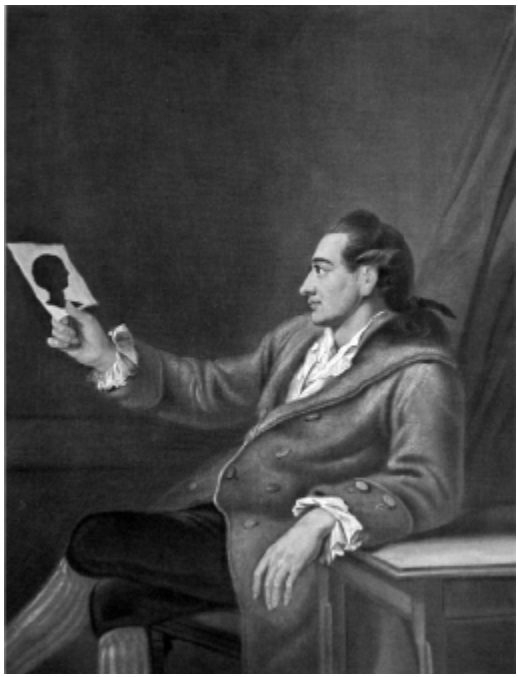

Figure 2.1. Georg Melchior Kraus, *Portrait of Johann Wolfgang Goethe*, ca. 1775–76.

of a university professorship. In Leipzig, Goethe began writing the pastoral drama *Die Laune des Verliebten* (published 1806; *The Lover's Caprice*) and the play *Die Mitschuldigen* (1787; *Partners in Guilt*). Due to an illness, he returned to Frankfurt in 1768 without obtaining his degree. He then pursued his doctorate in Strasbourg from 1770 to 1771, where he met Johann Gottfried Herder. In 1771, Goethe composed *Geschichte Gottfriedens von Berlichingen mit der eisernen Hand, dramatisirt* (*History of Gottfried von Berlichingen with the Iron Hand, dramatized*), later retitled *Götz von Berlichingen* (1773), and he began writing reviews for the *Frankfurter gelehrte Anzeigen* (*Frankfurt Scholarly Notices*). In 1772 he practiced law at the court in Wetzler, where he met Charlotte Buff, an encounter that inspired the first work analyzed in this chapter, *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (1774).

Goethe's writing career spanned six decades, and his work has come to define an era in history known as the *Goethezeit* or the "Age of Goethe." Yet as T. S. Eliot notes: "Goethe was of his age," but he "is about as unrepresentative of his Age as a man of genius can be."[5] With an immense and varied literary oeuvre comprising some 3,000 poems, prose and verse dramas, novels, novellas, fairy tales, fables, scientific texts, correspondences, and an autobiographical work in multiple volumes, Goethe presents us with a wide range of characters that resist any attempt to demarcate an age or era—sentimental young men, maternal and cross-dressing young women, witches,

a child murderess, and a devil, among others—and a wealth of atypical family constellations. It is among these diverse characters and within his unconventional families that we find the virginal mother.

The Caregiving Mother-Daughter: Lotte in *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*

Goethe wrote the journal entry that provides this chapter's introduction over two decades after *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (*The Sorrows of Young Werther*) was published, but the link between femininity and biology is evident in his portrayal of Lotte, and Werther's desire for her as a virginal mother. Published anonymously in 1774 by Weygand in Leipzig, the novel gained enormous fame and inspired poetry, drama, and controversy, resulting in its prohibition in Leipzig and Denmark.[6] By the time Goethe was identified as the author in an unauthorized volume by Christian Friedrich Himburg in 1775, "Wertherism" had spread throughout Europe and the Americas. Even Napoleon claimed to have read the novel seven times.[7] Its success led to numerous parodies, fan fiction, and even commercial products inspired by the novel, including "eau de Werther," porcelain figures, fans, and gloves.

The novel's success was a matter of timing, a fact Goethe himself observed in 1812,[8] but the immediate reception of *Werther* reflected a generational divide. Older critics protested the apparent justification of suicide, while the younger Sturm und Drang generation heralded the novel for its portrayal of Werther's inner life.[9] The poet Johann Jakob Heinse, for example, wrote that *Werther* was not a novel, but rather the expression of Werther's suffering drawn from the author's own heart.[10] Friedrich Nicolai provided a happy ending for Werther in *Freuden des jungen Werthers* (1775; *The Joys of Young Werther*) presenting readers with an alternative to suicide. However, many contemporaries and even Goethe himself viewed Nicolai's work as a malevolent parody, although that had not been its author's intention.[11] Lenz composed "Briefe über die Moralität der Leiden des jungen Werthers" ("Letters on the Morality of the Sorrows of Young Werther") in 1775, defending Goethe's work, but this essay was not published until a century and a half later.

Much of the novel's popularity has been attributed to the emotional response it elicited in bourgeois readers, who identified with its depiction of Werther's inner, subjective states.[12] Indeed, as an epistolary novel, "the trope of authenticity and intimacy" and "the notion of transparency" that Gilroy and Verhoeven note at the core of novels with female epistolary subjects, also hold true for Werther's letters.[13] For example, in November 1774, one anonymous reviewer of *Werther* for the *Frankfurter gelehrte Anzeigen* highlights the sympathy the reader feels for Goethe's characters:

> Glücklicher Mann! der du mit Werther sympathisieren—fühlen kannst . . . sey mir gegrüßet unter den wenigen Edeln!—Und du verehrungswürdige Schöne, die du mit Lotten den ganzen Werth unsers Werthers zu schätzen weist . . . mögest du doch in den Armen deines Gatten, jetzt oder in Zukunft, alle die Seligkeiten einathmen, die Dein und mein unglücklicher Freund nur in der Ferne schimmern sah.[14]
>
> Happy man! You who can sympathize—can feel—with Werther, I salute you among the few nobles!—And you venerable beauty, who, like Lotte, appreciates the total worth of our Werther . . . may you in the arms of your husband, now or in the future, inhale all the bliss, that our unhappy friend only saw shimmering in the distance.

What is particularly interesting about this review is that the reader is assumed not only to identify with the characters, but also to have a gendered response. The male reader receives praise for sympathizing with Werther, but the female reader must, like Lotte, see the value of the protagonist. Additionally, she must extend this feeling to her own romantic relationship. Although the novel is not overtly didactic, the female reader is instructed to learn from and emulate the heroine. This pedagogical expectation, as discussed in chapter 1, is intrinsic to the virginal mother motif.

Like the female reader, Lotte reads in order to find her own world and an affirmation of her domestic role represented in literature:

> Und der Autor ist mir der liebste, in dem ich meine Welt wieder finde, bei dem es zugeht wie um mich, und dessen Geschichte mir doch so interessant und herzlich wird, als mein eigen häuslich Leben, das freylich kein Paradies, aber doch im Ganzen eine Quelle unsäglicher Glückseligkeit ist. (*GSW* 8:45)[15]
>
> And I like the author best who shows me my own world, conditions such as I live in myself, and a story that can engage my interest and heart as much as my own domestic life does, which is certainly no paradise but is still on the whole a source of inexpressible happiness.[16]

Not only does this distinguish male and female readership (Werther reads to expand his horizons), it also marks a difference between our second virginal mother and our first, Sophie Sternheim, who reads for intellectual and moral development. Additionally, whereas La Roche's virginal mother displays the maternal drive to educate young women through charitable work, Lotte embodies the maternal desire to nurture her siblings, which establishes her role firmly within the nuclear family. Therefore, in Goethe's epistolary novel there is even less reason to fear the *gebildete Frauenzimmer* (educated

woman). Reading does not challenge Lotte's domestic station but rather confirms it.

Much has already been written about Lotte. Where Goethe's contemporaries heralded her as "ein Kind der Natur" ("a child of nature"),[17] modern scholars debate her role in Werther's suicide.[18] But little attention has been paid to her unique position as a virginal mother in relation to her siblings and father and as the love object of Werther. Sexualized but not sexual, maternal but not a biological mother, Lotte's role as a surrogate mother affects a distinction between maternity and motherhood, which adds to our understanding of the virginal mother figure: although discourses surrounding maternity and motherhood assume a state of nature, the focus on gendered attributes of nurture and self-sacrifice in the figure of the virginal mother separates the ideal female body from both sex and the powerful maternal body.

Two years before the publication of *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*, Goethe provided an outline of ideal femininity in his review of Isachar Falkensohn Behr's *Gedichte eines polnischen Juden* (1772; *Poems of a Polish Jew*). In this review, Goethe imagines a young man who leaves society for a pilgrimage of solitude, but on his journey he discovers a maiden who is happy in the domestic love of her family:

> Wenn ihn heiligere Gefühle aus dem Geschwirre der Gesellschaft in die Einsamkeit leiten, laß ihn auf seiner Wallfahrt ein Mädchen entdecken, deren Seele, ganz Güte, zugleich mit einer Gestalt ganz Anmut, sich in stillem Familienkreis häuslicher tätiger Liebe glücklich entfaltet hat; die Liebling, Freundin, Beistand ihrer Mutter, die zweite Mutter ihres Hauses ist, deren stets liebwürkende Seele jedes Herz unwiderstehlich an sich reißt, zu der Dichter und Weise willig in die Schule gingen, mit Entzücken schauten eingeborne Tugend, mitgebornen Wohlstand und Grazie.—Ja, wenn sie in Stunden einsamer Ruhe fühlt, daß ihr bei all dem Liebeverbreiten noch etwas fehlt, ein Herz, das, jung und warm wie sie, mit ihr nach fernern verhülltern Seligkeiten dieser Welt ahndete, in dessen belebender Gesellschaft sie nach all den goldnen Aussichten von ewigem Beisammensein, daurender Vereinigung, unsterblich webender Liebe fest angeschlossen hinstrebte. Laß die beiden sich finden; beim ersten Nahen werden sie dunkel und mächtig ahnden, was jedes für einen Inbegriff von Glückseligkeit in dem andern ergreift, werden nimmer voneinander lassen. (*GSW* 18:51)

> When his holier feelings lead him apart from the busy whirl of society into solitude, let him, on his pilgrimage, discover a maiden who, with a soul all goodness, and a form, too, all charm, has grown up happily in the busy domestic love of the still family-circle; the darling, friend, support of her mother, the second mother of her home;

> whose soul, ever love-inspiring, attracts each heart to it irresistibly, to whom poets and wise men would gladly go to be taught, to look with entrancement upon innate virtue, and the propriety and grace which were ever hers. Yes, if in hours of lonely repose she feels that, with all her power of diffusing love, there is something wanting, a heart which, young and warm as her own, should dream with her of the remoter, more veiled delights of the world, in whose quickening company she, fast bound to him, should strive after all the golden vistas of eternal association, lasting union, and immortally intertwining love. Let them find each other, and at the first approach they will have a dim yet mighty presentiment of what a wealth of bliss each grasps in the other; they will never part. (trans. in Cornish, 168–69)

Perhaps influenced by contemporary demands for the exceptionalism and simultaneous exoticism of assimilated Jews,[19] Goethe writes that he expected something new but instead finds Behr's collection of poems to be mediocre. The episode of the traveling man is thus an interruption, which reflects Goethe's own preoccupations rather than a response to the poems, about which, as he himself admits, he has not much to say. After the verbose exclamation above, he asks, "Doch ob's solche Mädchen gibt? Ob's solche Jünglinge geben kann?" ("But is there such a maiden? Can there be such a youth?") and then reinforces the difference between his own writings and those of the "Polish Jew": "Es ist hier vom polnischen Juden die Rede, den wir fast verloren hätten, auch haben wir nichts von seinen Oden gesagt. Was ist da viel zu sagen! durchgehends die Göttern und Menschen verhaßte Mittelmäßigkeit" ("We are talking here about the Polish Jew, and have almost lost sight of him; and we have said nothing at all about his odes. What is there to be said? All through them there runs the mediocrity which gods and men alike hate"). Instead of a review, then, Goethe provides an independent episode and a precursor to the themes of *Werther*. The unnamed maiden and her benevolent motherhood have a positive effect on the traveling young man (who, of course, precedes Werther in his solitary journey to the country). Described as the "Liebling, Freundin, Beistand ihrer Mutter, die zweite Mutter ihres Hauses" ("the darling, friend, support of her mother, the second mother of her home"), the nameless maiden, who strongly resembles Lotte, is glorified and desired for her "eingeborne Tugend" ("innate virtue"). But in this instance, the traveling man is able to bind himself to the young woman, whereas Werther can only imagine a union beyond the physical world.

What then differentiates these two experiences? Both women are virtuous and content in their domestic circle, but the woman in Goethe's review is the *support* of the mother and is the *second* mother of her home, whereas Lotte is the *replacement* of the mother and the *only* mother of her home. The death of Lotte's mother is significant, then, because it complicates Lotte's subjectivity and Werther's desire for Lotte. Werther simultaneously imagines himself as

the lover, brother, and son to Lotte. In order to examine the ultimately fatal conflation of familial roles elicited by the biological mother's absence and Werther's desire for Lotte as the virginal mother, I draw on Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection and her study of the suppression of the mother in culture and subject formation. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva describes the abject as "something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object." What causes abjection is "what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite."[20] For Kristeva, the maternal body belongs to the Semiotic, the pre-symbolic, borderless, uncertain space which interacts with the Symbolic, the site of social and cultural order. As the subject moves toward the Symbolic acquisition of language, she or he experiences fear at the potential breakdown in meaning caused by the distinction between subject and object. The abject embodies this fear and represents whatever is deemed outside the self and is repressed in subject formation. Although in later examples of virginal mother literature, the creation of the virginal mother represents an attempt to separate daughter from mother, I argue that Werther's fascination with the mother-in-Lotte inhibits both characters' subject formation and proves fatal for Werther.[21]

Werther first encounters Lotte in her father's house surrounded by six children and handing out pieces of bread. Lotte's performance of this maternal duty has a significant effect on Werther: "Welch eine Wonne das für meine Seele ist, sie in dem Kreise der lieben muntern Kinder, ihrer acht Geschwister zu sehen!" (*GSW* 8:39; "What joy it is for my soul, to see her amidst those dear, cheerful children, her eight brothers and sisters!" 36). This first meeting defines Werther's perception of Lotte, and his romantic desire for her is linked to her as a mother figure. He describes their encounter in detail, remarking on the age of the children and their affection for Lotte:

> Ich ging durch den Hof nach dem wohlgebauten Hause, und da ich die vorliegende Treppe hinaufgestiegen war und in die Thür trat, fiel mir das reizendste Schauspiel in die Augen, das ich je gesehen habe. In dem Vorsaale wimmelten sechs Kinder von eilf zu zwei Jahren um ein Mädchen von schöner Gestalt, mittlerer Größe, die ein simples weißes Kleid, mit blaßrothen Schleifen an Arm und Brust, anhatte. Sie hielt ein schwarzes Brod und schnitt ihren Kleinen rings herum jedem sein Stück nach Proportion ihres Alters und Appetits ab, gab's jedem mit solcher Freundlichkeit und jedes rief so ungekünstelt sein: Danke! indem es mit den kleinen Händchen lange in die Höhe gereicht hatte, ehe es noch abgeschnitten war, und nun mit seinem Abendbrode vergnügt, entweder wegsprang, oder nach seinem stillern Charakter gelassen davonging nach dem Hofthore zu, um die Fremden und die Kutsche zu sehen, darinnen ihre Lotte wegfahren sollte.—Ich bitte um Vergebung, sagte sie, daß ich Sie herein

> bemühe und die Frauenzimmer warten lasse. Über dem Anziehen und allerley Bestellungen für's Haus in meiner Abwesenheit, habe ich vergessen meinen Kindern ihr Vesperbrod zu geben, und sie wollen von niemanden Brod geschnitten haben als von mir.—Ich machte ihr ein unbedeutendes Compliment, meine ganze Seele ruhte auf der Gestalt, dem Tone, dem Betragen. (*GSW* 8:41)

> I crossed the courtyard to a well-built house and, climbing the flight of steps in front, opened the door and beheld the most charming scene I have ever set eyes on. In the hallway, six children aged between eleven and two were milling about a girl with a wonderful figure and of medium height, wearing a simple white dress with pink ribbons at the sleeves and breast. She was holding a loaf of rye bread and cutting a piece for each of the little ones about her, according to their age and appetite; she handed out the slices with great kindliness, and the children reached up their little hands long before the bread was cut, cried out their artless thanks and then either bounded away contented with their supper or, in the case of the quieter ones, walked tranquilly out to the courtyard gate to look at the strangers and the carriage in which their Lotte was to drive away.—"Do forgive me for putting you to the trouble of coming in," she said, "and for keeping the ladies waiting. What with dressing and seeing that all will be well in the house in my absence, I forgot to give my children their supper, and they won't have their bread cut by anyone but me."—I paid her some unimportant compliment; my entire soul was transfixed by her figure, her tone, her manner. (38)

Goethe presents Lotte and her family through Werther's eyes as the "reizendste Schauspiel" ("most charming scene"), which he consumes with pleasure. As in Goethe's review of Behr's poems, the narrative focuses on the effect the young woman's actions have on the hero—his eyes, and more importantly, his soul. Werther observes that she cuts the bread according to each child's age and appetite. In this small but symbolic act, the text illustrates Lotte's aptitude for caregiving and economical household management. The children will only accept bread from her hands, denoting a recognition of their eldest sister in the sustenance-providing maternal role.

In a letter dated September 10, 1771, Lotte confesses that she shares this sentiment and views her siblings as her children: "O! die Gestalt meiner Mutter schwebt immer um mich, wenn ich am stillen Abend unter ihren Kindern, unter meinen Kindern sitze, und sie um mich versammelt sind, wie sie um sie versammelt waren" (*GSW* 8:119; "Oh, the figure of my mother is always by me when I sit amidst her children in the silent evening hours, amidst my children, and they crowd about me as they used to crowd about her," 71). She internalizes the maternal role, and her mother's children become her own:

"meine . . . Kinder . . ." In this same letter, Lotte recalls the death of her mother and the heavy responsibility she is assigned in her absence:

> Sey ihre Mutter! Ich gab ihr die Hand drauf. Du versprichst viel, meine Tochter, sagte sie, das Herz einer Mutter und das Aug' einer Mutter. Ich habe oft an deinen dankbaren Thränen gesehen, daß du fühlst, was das sey. Habe es für deine Geschwister, und für deinen Vater: die Treue und den Gehorsam einer Frau. Du wirst ihn trösten. (*GSW* 8:121)

> "Be a mother to them."—I gave her my hand.—"Dear daughter," she said, "what you are promising is a great deal. It is the heart of a mother and the eye of a mother. I could often tell from your grateful tears that you felt what that means. Show a mother's care to your brothers and sisters, and be as faithful and obedient to your father as a wife. You will be a comfort to him." (72)

With these deathbed words, Lotte's mother simultaneously secures her replacement in the family and complicates the familial bonds that must be renegotiated in her absence. Lotte, in adopting her mother's caregiving role, becomes our second and most canonical example of the virginal mother.

While the death of the mother is necessary for Lotte to occupy her space, the daughter-father relationship is complicated by the mother's absence. In performing the maternal role, the daughter also serves as a surrogate wife. This is a common theme in literature that features a charitable and sacrificial heroine. In *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*, for example, Sophie not only is named after her mother and greatly resembles her, but she also wears her mother's clothes after her death at her father's request. On his deathbed, her father calls her "meine Sophie," and it is unclear whether he means his daughter or has mistaken her for his wife. The two become synonymous. A mother's deathbed scene plays a pivotal role in Goethe's *Die Geschwister* (written in 1776, published in 1787; *Brother and Sister*) as well, except that the daughter fills the sexual role in her betrothal to her mother's former love interest. And in the relationship between Lessing's Emilia Galotti and her father, Gail Hart observes that the literary absence of the mother "enhances the often erotically charged rapport between father and daughter: what had appeared to be a conventionally mediated relationship between child and parent of the opposite sex often becomes in the absence of the mother a barely concealed passion straining toward consummation."[22]

Although the mother's death blurs familial lines so that Lotte becomes both the wife and mother in the household, the abjected maternal body is removed from the text. Despite her mother's instruction to be as faithful and obedient to her father as a wife, the text gives no evidence that supports an incestuous reading of this promise. Lotte is not expected to perform the sexual

duties of a wife, only the domestic responsibilities. Additionally, the nurture she provides her siblings does not come from her body: she does not breast-feed; rather, she distributes bread. Within her familial relationships, Lotte is a virginal wife and a nonbiological mother. The mother's absence provides an opportunity for Lotte to practice the skills she will need in her own impending marriage, while simultaneously illustrating that maternal qualities are innate to women, regardless of biological motherhood. It is Werther, therefore, who projects the maternal body onto Lotte. His semiconscious fascination with Lotte as a mother figure is problematic because his desire blurs the boundaries inherent in the virginal mother figure: she is intended to regulate female sexuality. Therefore, in Goethe's epistolary novel, the mother-in-the-daughter does not threaten to take the daughter away from the father, as in contemporary bourgeois tragedies like Lessing's *Emilia Galotti* (1772);[23] rather, the abject mother-in-the-daughter becomes the love object.

Apart from a few editorial notes, Lotte's textual identity is reflected through the eyes of Werther and is thus crafted by a man so blinded by his fantasies that he cannot even draw a portrait of her likeness.[24] The epistolary excerpts of Lotte's life that Werther provides are distilled to examples that highlight her maternal caregiving. For example, at the dance that follows their introduction, Werther emulates the children in his wish for nourishment from her hands. The physical grief—a dagger in his heart—that he suffers when Lotte shares orange slices with another woman foreshadows the fatal consequences of his demand for exclusive access in the mother-child dyad.[25]

As the novel progresses, Werther becomes increasingly childlike in his pursuit of his desires. Before his initial encounter with Lotte, he writes: "Auch halte ich mein Herzchen wie ein krankes Kind; jeder Wille wird ihm gestattet" (*GSW* 8:17; "And I am treating my poor heart like an ailing child; every whim is granted," 28). Peter Fischer observes the significance of this statement as Werther's role in Lotte's family grows: Werther wants to be loved not only as one of the children, but also as a child—and more specifically, a sick child.[26] Werther becomes completely dependent on Lotte as a virginal mother, and Fischer observes that "Je weiter die Lotte-Liebesgeschichte fortschreite, umso mehr gerät er in eine kindliche Ohnmacht, aus der er sich nur durch Selbstzerstörung (Zerstörung des Selbst) 'lösen' kann" ("the further the Lotte love story develops, the more he finds himself in a childlike helplessness, which can be 'solved' only through self-destruction [destruction of the self]").[27] Werther is particularly susceptible to the confusion of familial roles because he resists the structures imposed by law and the social order; he insists on maintaining childish desires and thus allows himself to be governed by childish impulses. For Werther, love cannot be bound by rules, bourgeois society, or calculated gestures. He looks to the behavior of children as a model for true, unspoiled, and uninhibited nature; and he supports his claim that children should be man's models with the following biblical proclamation: "Wenn ihr nicht werdet wie eines von diesen [Kindern]!"[28] (*GSW* 8:61; "Except ye become as

little children," 45). It should therefore come as no surprise that less than a fortnight later, Werther proclaims thrice what a child he is.[29]

Lotte reinforces this role, scolding Werther for drinking too much wine and reprimanding him for his emotional outbursts.[30] And Werther writes to Wilhelm on September 3, 1772, that at times he cannot grasp that Lotte can love another man, that she could dare love another man, when he loves her and her alone with such passion and devotion.[31] This is the sentiment of both a lover, who desires no one else to possess his beloved, and a child, who does not understand how a mother's love could be directed toward anyone but himself. In her discussion of the abject, Kristeva describes the struggle of the child's "earliest attempts to release the hold of *maternal* entity" through the symbolic order of language as a "violent, clumsy breaking away" in which there is a perpetual desire to return to its stifling and securing power.[32] More childlike than adult, unsure of his motives, and governed by physical and emotional sensations,[33] Werther reflects the intermediate stage of human subject formation, where the maternal body is perceived as ambiguous and fluid. The struggle between the desires of the child-Werther and the man manifests itself physically the first and last time that Werther leaves Lotte.[34] He stretches his arms out to her, an action of both a lover and a child. The lover stretches his arms out to hold his beloved, the child to be held. It is unclear which role Werther would prefer, but he justifies his actions to Wilhelm in a letter dated October 30, 1772:

> Weiß der große Gott, wie einem das thut, so viele Liebeswürdigkeit vor einem herumkreuzen zu sehen und nicht zugreifen zu dürfen; und das Zugreifen ist doch der natürlichste Trieb der Menschheit; Greifen die Kinder nicht nach allem was ihnen in den Sinn fällt?—Und ich? (*GSW* 8:177)
>
> Dear God in heaven knows how it feels to behold so much loveliness before one and not be allowed to embrace it; and, after all, that embrace is the most natural of man's instincts. Do not children reach out for everything that attracts them?—Then why should not I? (97–98)

But to focus only on his relationship to Lotte as a mother would be to ignore the other role that Werther desires to play in her household: that of a husband to Lotte and a father to her "children." In a letter addressed to Lotte dated January 20, 1772, he envisions a scene of familial bliss in which he sits at her feet with the children playing around him.[35] Werther pretends that he shares the responsibility for the children's welfare with Lotte and that the children are their own. He even allows his imagination to wander, fantasizing that the children might be noisy and annoy Lotte, and he would reestablish family harmony with his stories. He is pleased to share in the

entertainment of the children as well as in Lotte's sustenance-providing function, and he tells Wilhelm that he cuts the bread for their supper, which they are now almost as glad to have from him as from Lotte.[36] On the one hand, Werther plays "daddy" to Lotte's "children" and establishes himself as her lover/husband. On the other, Werther desires to perform the maternal role of storytelling and providing nourishment in addition to the roles of a lover, brother, and son.[37] In this instance, maternal nature not only exists outside the maternal body, but manifests itself outside the female body, in Werther himself. Divorced from the maternal body, motherhood becomes a transferable trait. Will Hasty analyzes this fluidity of roles in terms of an imaginary family, which enables Werther to justify his relationship to Lotte within social-normative channels.[38] Although the family plays an integral role from the very beginning of their relationship—Lotte insists on a familial connection between her family and Werther, telling one of her brothers to greet his cousin (*GSW* 8:41)—Werther's multiplicity of roles in this "imaginary family" fails to provide an appropriate social context for his love of Lotte.

And his relationship to Lotte, already unstable and problematic, is complicated by the return of Lotte's fiancé, Albert.[39] Where Werther is clear in his desire to be loved like a son by Lotte's father and like a father by the children, the manner of his relation to Lotte and Albert remains undefined.[40] In an oedipal-like scenario, Werther reorganizes the imaginary family to become the child of Lotte and Albert. The child-lover role is inverted again when Werther revisits the route he first drove to meet Lotte and imagines himself as an old prince who returns to a destroyed castle he intended to leave to his son, whom we can only presume would be Albert: "Mir ist es, wie es einem Geiste seyn müßte, der in das ausgebrannte, zerstörte Schloß zurückkehre, das er als blühender Fürst einst gebaut, und mit allen Gaben der Herrlichkeit ausgestattet, sterbend seinem geliebten Sohne hoffnungsvoll hinterlassen hätte" (*GSW* 8:159–61; "I feel like a ghost returning to the burnt-out ruins of the castle he built in his prime as a prince, which he adorned with magnificent splendours and then, on his deathbed but full of hope, left to his beloved son," 89). Here, the family is reimagined with Werther as the patriarch, who wishes to benevolently bequeath the lost paradise he created to his son. Yet, in this same letter, Werther fantasizes about killing Albert in order to usurp his position as Lotte's potential husband. Given Werther's imagined role in the family, Will Hasty's argument that his "sexual desire for Lotte and the wish to do away with Albert are tantamount to incest and fratricide" could be expanded to include filicide and patricide and points to the impossibility of Werther finding an avenue for his love under paternal law.[41]

Unlike her relationship to Werther, Lotte's relationship with Albert is not marked by the abjected maternal body. And indeed, other examples of virginal mother literature include happy endings for the virginal mother and the male protagonist. Sophie Sternheim marries Lord Seymour. E. Marlitt's numerous pulp fiction heroines marry their matches. Thea von Harbou's Maria not

only is united with her beloved Freder, but also reconciles father and son. The performance of maternal care does not drive their potential husbands to madness or suicide. Similarly, Albert remains immune to Werther's affliction and marries the woman who has proven her maternal goodness and domestic abilities. Albert is the type of respectable gentleman Werther complains of in his May 26, 1771, letter, one who calculates his income, limits displays of romantic affection to birthdays, and whose every action is governed by social rules rather than true feeling (*GSW* 8:29). But another distinction marks Albert's relationship to Lotte that differentiates him from Werther: his love has existed under the regulating power of the biological mother. Not only did Albert know Lotte's mother, but his union with Lotte was blessed by her. At her deathbed, the mother commends the responsibility of her house and children to Lotte and the care of Lotte to Albert.[42] The deathbed scene is another common motif that functions both to convey the characters' grief at parting and to renegotiate and reformulate familial alliances. Reconciliations are fostered, succession and inheritance rights are secured with wills, and even marriages are facilitated by the death of a loved one. In this instance, the mother's final words are powerful and binding. The recollection of this scene and the maternal blessing given to the union of Lotte and Albert demonstrate the impossibility of Werther's desire in a way that even Albert's return did not, and they provide an impetus for Werther to leave Wallheim and Lotte for the first time since their introduction.

Lotte is not immune to these internal struggles. Although the epistolary form gives only limited evidence of her state of mind, the editor tells us that Lotte, in pain over Werther's departure, wishes she could transform him into a brother, thus connecting herself to him through the maternal body. However, Lotte's wish to turn Werther into a brother is complicated by the fact that her own relationship with her siblings is as a mother, not a sister. Therefore, she would fulfill the very function Werther has prescribed for her—the mother. This idea is further confused by Lotte's realization that, upon finding fault with all her friends as future romantic partners for Werther, she desires to keep Werther for herself.[43] And thus, like Werther, she alternates in her feelings for him as sister, mother, and lover.[44]

In *Goethe's Families of the Heart*, Susan Gustafson examines unconventional family structures in Goethe's works as communities drawn together by elective affinities and shaped by love. She argues that these families "transcend conventional notions of biology, body, and corporeal likeness as the fundamental determiners of family."[45] Love is fluid and shifting and is not necessarily determined by biological ties. Although Gustafson focuses on Goethe's later works (the *Stella* plays, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*, and *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*), *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* could also be read in terms of such an elective family. Werther is drawn to Lotte and her siblings as Wilhelm will later be drawn to Mignon, Natalie, and Felix. But where in the *Wahlverwandtschaften* and *Wilhelm*

Meisters Lehrjahre, these affinities are fluid and adaptable as additional members are brought into and out of the family unit, in *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*, Lotte's affinities shift between Werther and Albert, but Werther cannot shift his affinities away from Lotte.

In modern scholarship, Lotte's character and role in Werther's suicide have been the subject of a controversial debate. Benjamin Bennett calls her "a habitual breaker of hearts," while M. D. Faber and E. Kathleen Warrick hold Lotte responsible for Werther's death.[46] In his comparison of the original (1774) version of *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* and the second (1787) version, Thomas Saine observes that in the original, "Lotte might have been firmer in discouraging Werther," although he concedes that "she is dragged into the catastrophe more by virtue of being who she is, desirable and unattainable, than by anything she has done to encourage Werther's passion for her. She is his victim, forced by him into playing the role of his executioner."[47] In the revised version, however, Goethe includes a scene in which Lotte has trained a canary to eat bread crumbs off her lips, and she subjects Werther to watching this feeding process.[48] Thus, Saine claims that the new Lotte not only enjoys Werther's attentions, but also encourages them and therefore is an active participant in Werther's suicide.[49] I am in agreement with Saine's assessment of the original version of the story and with Walter Silz, who remarks that Lotte's role in Werther's suicide is only that which he projects onto her; and I would add that this projection of desire is fatal because of its connection to the maternal body.[50] Unable to distinguish the maternal abject from the love object, Werther cannot align his desire in accordance with paternal law. The canary scene further eroticizes Lotte in her role as a maternal sustenance-provider—rather than children taking bread from her hands, a canary pecks crumbs from her lips. But here, as Caroline Wellbery observes, "nurturing does not result in satiation but rather in the stimulation of desire, a desire that also necessarily structures the individual's relationship to the beloved." Werther projects the maternal image onto Lotte, and "its obsessive recurrence is a powerful motivating force."[51]

Werther's persistent conflation of familial roles reflects the tension between the virginal mother as an object of desire and the strengthening of maternal authority within the family. Reinhart Meyer-Kalkus observes that Werther's fixation on maternal figures corresponds to the recurrence of an identical constellation of minor characters in the novel: the older, deceased friend of his youth who was everything to Werther, the daughter of the schoolmaster with her two young children, and the farm boy in love with his widowed employer all comprise a mother-child dyad in which the father/husband is either absent or ineffectual, such as Lotte's father, whose grief removes him from the family.[52] This familial absence is complemented by the relegation of the father from the domestic sphere, where the child experiences his initial socialization, to the public sphere, where the man must commit himself to the Law. For Werther, this removal has fatal consequences. Meyer-Kalkus

argues that Werther's sensitive, feeling nature reflects a feminine coding of desire under the conditions of a paternalistic regime.[53] Fischer views the child-Werther as the hero of the narrative and sees his love for Lotte as a mother figure and his suicide as motivated by his desire to regress into the womb. Comprising narcissistic and infantile desires, Werther's love for Lotte grows in its insistence on the structure of a mother-child dyad. Strictly fraternal love, which would enable him to share Lotte with Albert under paternal law, becomes impossible. Unlike Wilhelm Meister, who, as we will see in the following section, transitions from his polymorphous desire of the gender-ambiguous Mignon to a heterosexual union with the cross-dressing but undeniably female Natalie, Werther does not realign his desire in accordance with the Law.[54] Rather, Werther's desire for Lotte exists in the Semiotic chora, the pre-symbolic, feminine space where mother and child have no separate identities, and where he can approach Lotte as son, brother, and lover outside paternal law.[55] As such, the manner of Werther's love reveals the fragility of the Symbolic order. His love cannot be confined to a world that imposes boundaries on love and desire.

Goethe imagines a hero who wants to be son, lover, and brother at the same time. All men can be these things, but this multiplicity of roles in relation to one woman is forbidden by the Law. Therefore, Werther can play out his romantic love for Lotte only in the in-between spaces of dreams, fantasies, and the ambiguous realms between "Himmel und Erde und ihre webenden Kräfte" (*GSW* 8:109; "heaven and earth and all their active forces," 66). Werther cannot locate Lotte in the patriarchal-Symbolic sphere. Rather than exist in a lover's purgatory of in-between, undefinable space, Werther chooses death. Here, Lotte and Werther will be united and received as children of their heavenly father. He proclaims:

> Sie ist mein! Du bist mein! ja, Lotte, auf ewig. Und was ist das, daß Albert Dein Mann ist? Mann!—Das wäre denn für diese Welt—und für diese Welt Sünde, daß ich dich liebe, daß ich dich aus seinen Armen in die meinigen reissen möchte? Sünde? Gut, und ich strafe mich dafür; ich habe sie in ihrer ganzen Himmelswonne geschmeckt diese Sünde, habe Lebensbalsam und Kraft in mein Herz gesaugt. Du bist von diesem Augenblicke mein! mein, o Lotte! Ich gehe voran! gehe zu meinem Vater, zu deinem Vater. Dem will ich's klagen, und er wird mich trösten bis du kommst, und ich fliege dir entgegen und fasse dich und bleibe bey dir vor dem Angesichte des Unendlichen in ewigen Umarmungen. (*GSW* 8:251)
>
> She is mine! You are mine! Yes, Lotte, for all eternity. Albert is your husband—well, what of it? Husband! In the eyes of the world—and in the eyes of the world is it sinful for me to love you, to want to tear

> you from his embrace into my own? Sin? Very well, and I am punishing myself; I have tasted the whole divine delight of that sin, and have taken balm and strength into my heart. From this moment you are mine! Mine, oh Lotte! I am going on ahead! going unto my Father, your Father. I shall tell Him my sorrows and He will comfort me until that time when you come and I fly to meet you, hold you and remain with you in a perpetual embrace in the sight of the Eternal. (128)

These proclamations do not stand alone, but rather are an answer to an early question posed by Lotte and recounted by Werther in his September 10, 1771, letter: "Wir werden seyn! . . . aber, Werther sollen wir uns wieder finden? wieder erkennen?" (*GSW* 8:119; "There will be a life for us after death, Werther! . . . but will we find each other again? and know each other?" 70). In the end, he answers her explicitly: "Wir werden seyn! wir werden uns wieder sehen! Deine Mutter sehen! ich werde sie sehen, werde sie finden, ach und vor ihr mein ganzes Herz ausschütten! Deine Mutter, dein Ebenbild" (*GSW* 8:251; "There will be a life for us! And we shall see each other again! We shall see your mother! I shall see her, I shall find her, and ah, I shall pour out all my heart to her! Your mother, the image of you," 128). Under the now-present mother, Werther and Lotte can have a life together. In heaven, they will form a new nuclear family: the lover-children under the now-present mother and the authoritative God-the-father.

Werther's fetishization of Lotte as a virginal mother and his desire for her as love object/love abject proves to be fatal. Ultimately, however, Lotte does not sacrifice herself to this ideal of femininity. Unlike Goethe's later sacrificial female figures, Lotte does not transgress paternal law; instead she remains chaste, provides maternal care for her siblings, and marries Albert. If "Goethe's eternal feminine draws heavily on figures such as the uncanny Mothers, Helen of Troy, the Virgin Mary, and Margarete,"[56] then the virginal mother does not represent the eternal feminine in *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*. Lotte is, after all, not a biological mother. Separated from the powerful and dangerous maternal body, she represents the ideal feminine.

Shaking Children from Trees: Cross-Dressing Virgins and Grotesque Mothers in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*

In *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*, Lotte embodies the roles of sister, mother, and lover. These relations are governed by assumptions of embodied femininity and the projections of Werther's many role conflations. Cross-dressing women, androgynous girls, and incestuous unions further complicate the essence of femininity in Goethe's second novel, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795/96; *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*). The cast of characters and

the narrative reveal a break in sexual, social, and gender norms. The family, commonly assumed to be a site of stability, is fragmented and presents new and unusual relationship structures. Nevertheless, the *Lehrjahre* continues to represent "the image of enlightened patriarchy as the *natural* order" and to portray the virginal mother as the ideal woman.[57]

A revision of an earlier work, *Wilhelm Meisters Theatralische Sendung* (*Wilhelm Meister's Theatrical Calling*), from the period 1777–86, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* details a young man's journey from his bourgeois parental home to his adventures with traveling performers and his tutelage under the patriarchal Turmgesellschaft (Tower Society). Like *Werther*, the *Lehrjahre* both reflects and is reflective of the time in which it was written. Friedrich Schlegel even lists Goethe's bildungsroman alongside the French Revolution and Johann Gottlieb Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* (science of knowledge) as significant in defining the era.[58] And in a letter to Schiller, which Schiller published in his magazine *Die Horen* (*The Horae* or *Hours*), Christian Gottfried Körner offered an early analysis of Wilhelm's development as a result of the harmony of his inner being with his external circumstances:

> Die Einheit des Ganzen denke ich mir als die Darstellung einer schönen menschlichen Natur, die sich durch die Zusammenwirkung ihrer inneren Anlagen und äussern Verhältnisse allmählich ausbildet. Das Ziel dieser Ausbildung ist ein vollendetes Gleichgewicht, Harmonie mit Freiheit.[59]
>
> I think of the unity of the work as its representation of a beautiful human nature, which is formed through the interaction of inner facilities and external circumstances. The goal of this development is a perfect equilibrium: harmony with freedom.

But many of Körner's contemporaries disagreed with this reading, including Wilhelm von Humboldt and Schiller, with whom Goethe discussed the *Lehrjahre* and its reception at length. In a letter to Goethe dated November 28, 1796, Schiller responds to Körner's interpretation:

> Körner hat diesen Charakter zu sehr als den eigentlichen Held des Romans betrachtet; der Titel und das alte Herkommen, in jedem Roman pp. einen Helden haben zu müssen, hat ihn verführt. Wilhelm Meister ist zwar die notwendigste, aber nicht die wichtigste Person; eben das gehört zu den Eigentümlichkeiten Ihres Romans, dass er keine solche wichtigste Person hat und braucht. *An* ihm und *um* ihn geschieht alles aber nicht eigentlich *seinetwegen*; eben weil die Dinge um ihn her die Energien, er aber die Bildsamkeit darstellt und ausdrückt, so muß er ein ganz ander Verhältnis zu den Mitcharakteren haben, als der Held in anderen Romanen hat.[60]

> Körner exaggerated the importance of this character as the actual hero of the novel; the title and the old custom that every novel has to have a hero mislead him. Wilhelm Meister is certainly the most necessary, but not the most important character; it is just that this is peculiar about your novel, namely that it has no such most important character, nor does it need one. Everything happens *to* him and *around* him but not really *for his sake*; precisely because the things around him represent and express energies [*Energien*], and he the capacity for improvement, he has a completely different relationship to his fellow characters than the hero has in other novels.[61]

Many events happen to and around Wilhelm rather than at his initiative, yet the narrative centers on his journey. Female characters are represented in relationship to Wilhelm and come into his life in stages like the acts in his beloved theater, with one appearing when another disappears and in turn vanishing when another emerges: first Mariane, then Philine, Mignon, the Amazone, the Countess, Aurelie, Therese, and Natalie (the Amazone). Schiller describes this phenomenon as "ein schönes Planetensystem" ("a beautiful planetary system").[62] The *Lehrjahre* features a variety of women—single and married, upper and lower class, chaste and promiscuous—who possess a diversity of talents and personalities. Yet, as Goethe's bildungsroman charts the male protagonist's development, these women are only obstacles or supporting acts in Wilhelm's journey to maturity. And although many female characters in the *Lehrjahre* illustrate the innate maternal qualities of self-sacrifice and charity, only Therese and Natalie fulfill the character requirements for the virginal mother. Thus, they are the characters who complete the development of the heroes, Lothario and Wilhelm.

Before I analyze the virginal mother figures in Wilhelm's "planetary system," I would like to briefly examine how the experiences of the non-virginal female characters in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* reinforce the virginal mother as the feminine ideal. In his book on subversive currents in the *Lehrjahre*, John Blair asserts that "the dialectic between authority (order, hierarchy, asceticism) and transgression (disorder, subversion, sexuality, pleasure) clearly impacts the roles of the female figures in the *Lehrjahre*. This dichotomy reflects general social images of women in the eighteenth century."[63] While I agree that there are dichotomized representations of women and that "Natalie and Philine are cast in these respective roles, functioning as symbolic, almost mythical figures," I disagree that "the other women of the novel illustrate more 'realistic' incarnations of positions between Natalie and Philine."[64] Goethe's female characters offer a panoply of diverse roles and character traits, yet they are all equally unrealistic. The actress Mariane, the androgynous Mignon, and the elusive *schöne Seele* (beautiful soul) are arguably more symbolic and mythic than Natalie and Philine. However, as characters who undermine patriarchal authority, they perish by the end of the novel.

Given the importance of biology and paternal knowledge for heritage and social hierarchies, Mariane and Mignon illustrate the consequences for women who threaten this order. Both characters are first introduced wearing male clothing—Mariane in her red officer's uniform, and Mignon in a boy's tightrope costume. The theater allows for this cross-dressing, and both are allowed a fluidity of gender on the stage. But Mariane and Mignon show a preference for this dress offstage as well. This social transgression by itself is not damning—indeed, Sophie Sternheim and her maid wear men's clothes in their escape from court, and the virginal Natalie and Therese exhibit a preference for male dress[65]—but when combined with behaviors that call into question paternal authority, this cross-dressing reinforces their threat to social stability. Mariane brings an illegitimate child into the world, whose paternity is unknown and assigned to three different men over the course of the novel. Because of this promiscuity, Mariane is an unworthy partner for Wilhelm and does not survive in Goethe's bildungsroman. A fever removes her from Wilhelm's journey, and only the Turmgesellschaft possesses the authority to grant her son Felix legitimacy as Wilhelm's heir. Mignon is an illegitimate child herself who cross-dresses and, to borrow Marjorie Garber's term, embodies a "thirdness," which challenges binary thinking and thus finds no place under the Law.[66] Initially, Wilhelm is unsure whether the child Mignon is a boy or a girl, and even with the discovery of her sex, he continues to use gender-neutral terms to refer to the child or he alternates between masculine and feminine pronouns. Mignon dresses the part of a boy for much of the novel and exchanges her tightrope uniform for a boy's sailor suit. Part of this child's allure for Wilhelm, as with Mariane, seems to be this androgyny, her insistence on dressing like a boy and her refusal to play the part of a girl. A hybrid being, indeed the product of an incestuous union, she occupies an uncertain position in Wilhelm's world. The ideological confusion that Werther felt in relation to Lotte as his mother-sister-lover is realized in the union between Mignon's father Augustin and her mother Sperata. Although Augustin defends his love for his sister as natural, this love contradicts the social rules that govern family relations. Mignon, therefore, "is the fruit of this transgressive and monstrous love between brother and sister, an androgyne thrown up as the mark of society's ultimate taboo."[67] Not unlike Werther's unstable connection with Lotte and her family, Wilhelm's relationship with the child alternates between a father's protection and a lover's embraces. In a world of gender binaries tied to biological sex, Mignon, like Mariane, must perish for the patriarchal order to be reestablished.

Among the variety of women in the *Lehrjahre*, the "schöne Seele" is unique and of particular interest to this study of "others" who cannot be categorized as virginal mothers. The novel's sixth book, "Bekenntnisse einer schönen Seele" ("Confessions of a Beautiful Soul"), interrupts the narrative. Some critics have argued that this section is so out of place, its tone so unusual, that Goethe may not have been its author and rather inserted part of a manuscript

by his relative and friend Susanna Katharina von Klettenberg.[68] Regardless of authorship, its inclusion in the bildungsroman is striking, and the *schöne Seele*'s refusal to abide by social expectations and the strictures of paternal law merit a brief discussion here.

"The beautiful soul," according to Schiller, "has no other merit, than that it is."[69] Thus, a *schöne Seele* is not a character trait, but a state of being. If we apply Schiller's definition here, Natalie's aunt is indeed a *schöne Seele*. However, while she appears at peace with her external circumstances, external life and society are not at peace with her. The *schöne Seele* is intelligent and virtuous. She breaks off an engagement to a man she loves because she feels she must be true to herself and responsible for her actions. Although Wilhelm marvels at her inner harmony with her place in the world, her actions come under criticism within the text. Her decision to alienate herself and not participate in a marital union threatens the patriarchal order in which women submit to the authority of their male relatives and husbands. By refusing to fulfill her "natural" role as wife and mother, she defies the ideology of maternal nature and is thus deemed selfish. Natalie criticizes her aunt's self-absorption; and, in a particularly condemnatory gesture, the *schöne Seele*'s uncle refuses to let her visit her nieces and nephews lest they develop a similar subversive mentality. While the *schöne Seele* is virtuous, her commitment to perpetual virginity and the development of her inner life remove her from society. She is neither charitable nor self-sacrificial, nor will she transition to biological motherhood, and therefore she does not illustrate the virginal mother ideal.

Unlike Mariane, Mignon, and the *schöne Seele*, Philine and Frau Melina are represented unambiguously as feminine. Philine possesses female charms, but she can be flighty and self-serving. Within the text, she is described by her fellow actor Laertes as the true Eve, "die Stammmutter des weiblichen Geschlechts" (*GSW* 9:452–53; "the great mother of all womankind").[70] Referencing the biblical Eve, Laertes paints Philine not only as a temptress—the woman responsible for man's fall from grace—but also as a mother. She is "Eve," the biological mother, and not "Mary," the virgin mother. Frau Melina, on the other hand, is characterized as defective in soul and spirit. Both of these women lack female virtue despite their feminine charms and both, incidentally, are also described in unbecoming states of pregnancy.

With the essence of femininity situated in the womb, pregnancy should be woman's crowning accomplishment, but in the *Lehrjahre*, it is described as ugly and something to be concealed. Observing the pregnant Frau Melina, Philine remarks that "Es wäre doch immer hübscher . . . wenn man die Kinder von den Bäumen schüttelte" (*GSW* 9:565; "It would be prettier, however . . . if we could shake children from the trees," 153). This sentiment holds true for Philine even when she finds herself in a similar state. Instead of embodying femininity, pregnancy distorts the ideal female body. The womb, then, is synonymous with femininity only because it differentiates women from men and is perceived to bestow the maternal qualities of nurture and self-sacrifice,

not because of the reproductive act itself. And rather than feminine, the mother's connection to the womb represents grotesque nature. Indeed, for Mikhail Bakhtin, the grotesque is synonymous with pregnancy.[71] Like the pregnant body, the grotesque body "is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body. More-over, the body swallows the world and is itself swallowed by the world."[72] Similarly, Mary Russo sees the grotesque body "as opposed to the classical body which is monumental, static, closed and sleek, corresponding to the aspirations of bourgeois individualism; the grotesque body is connected to the rest of the world."[73] Kristeva observes that the pregnant female body possesses radical power: "Pregnancy seems to be experienced as the radical ordeal of the splitting of the subject: redoubling up of the body, separation and co-existence of the self and an other, of nature and consciousness, of physiology and self."[74] And just as with blood, vomit, and other bodily excretions, the birth process in which the body expels another body reveals the abject. This body without borders disturbs identity, system, and order; it undermines the "fictions of the biological body and the Law."[75] It is therefore not surprising that the pregnant Frau Melina is shunned and Philine must concede a kind of defeat when she too finds herself pregnant. In Kristeva's reading, the abjected and grotesque maternal body is dangerous and a threat to patriarchal powers. The threat of giving life is matched by the threat of taking life away and, as we will see in the next section, Goethe's addition of the Gretchen motif to the Faustian legend reflects the eighteenth-century preoccupation with this fear.

Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre offers a variety of female characters; however, the two women represented as the most appropriate marriage partners for the members of the Turmgesellschaft, Therese and Natalie, share qualities of charity and virtue with Lotte and Sophie Sternheim. An only child who was abandoned by her unfaithful mother, Therese cares for her father and his household until he dies. She is virtuous, has proven to be a productive and reasonable household manager, and matches Lothario's description of his ideal wife. Natalie also grew up without maternal guidance. Along with her four siblings, Natalie was orphaned and brought up by her uncle. Her charitable nature is evident at a young age: her aunt recalls her going through her wardrobe to give clothes to the poor. And she continues to devote herself to others, cultivating the minds and hearts of the young girls in her care. In addition, Therese and Natalie take care of Felix and Mignon, respectively. Neither woman loses herself in sexual passions, nor do they find themselves in unbecoming states of pregnancy. Unlike the flirtatiousness of Philine and the promiscuity of Mariane, their chaste behavior suggests marital faithfulness and the legitimacy of any future offspring.

Wilhelm first meets the "Amazone" Natalie in the fourth book when he and his traveling companions are attacked by robbers. She appears suddenly, bringing warmth in the form of her cloak and aid through her surgeon, who

removes a bullet from Wilhelm's shoulder. Like Werther's first impression of Lotte in the maternal act of distributing bread to her siblings, Wilhelm's first sight of Natalie has a significant effect on him. In his dreams, the "Amazone" saves not only his life, but Felix's as well. And when contrasted with Natalie, Philine becomes unattractive to Wilhelm:

> Philine war indessen aufgestanden, um der gnädigen Dame die Hand zu küssen. Als sie nebeneinander standen, glaubte unser Freund nie einen solchen Abstand gesehn zu haben. Philine war ihm noch nie in einem so ungünstigen Lichte erschienen. Sie sollte, wie es ihm vorkam, sich jener edlen Natur nicht nahen, noch weniger berühren. (*GSW* 9:590)

> Philina, in the meantime, had risen up to kiss the hand of this kind young lady. While they stood beside each other, Wilhelm thought he had never seen such a contrast. Philina had never till now appeared in so unfavourable a light. She had no right, as it seemed to him, to come near that noble creature, still less to touch her. (171)

Natalie's "edle[n] Natur" (noble nature) sets her apart from Philine. She is "edel" both in terms of class and in terms of virtue. According to John Blair, Philine and Natalie occupy "opposite poles of the moral spectrum of the eighteenth century," where Philine ranks low in terms of class, morality, and social approval, and Natalie ranks high.[76] Like Mariane, Philine conceives a child out of wedlock, but she quickly marries and remedies the social problem that her illegitimate child creates. Her willingness to submit to the social code of marriage complicates Blair's "opposite poles." Philine leads a life at odds with middle-class morality, but she conforms to marital expectations in the end. Natalie, however, as the chaste caregiver, is the preferred wife of Wilhelm and the caretaker for Felix.

Although in the *Wanderjahre* (1821) Natalie and Wilhelm live apart, Natalie can be considered a virginal mother within the *Lehrjahre* because of her virtue, charity, and her impending marriage to Wilhelm. Like Sophie Sternheim, Natalie is educated, the keeper of her uncle's library, and both she and Therese educate young women in their domestic duties. Natalie's chaste and maternal nature unites her with Wilhelm through Felix. The motivation to form a nuclear family is stressed in the episode in which Felix is believed to be poisoned. As they watch over his recovery, Natalie and Wilhelm sit together with Felix lying across both their laps, and it is within this scene of domestic harmony that they agree to marry.

Much as in *Werther*, familial relations also play a pivotal role in Wilhelm's development and direction in life. In her recent book *Novel Affinities: Composing the Family in the German Novel, 1795–1830*, Sarah Eldridge argues that the family in the turn-of-the-century novel "can be seen as the contested,

evolving ground from which the form of the individual emerges—subject development takes place in the crucial context of affective familial relationships."[77] Similarly, in her evaluation of family dynamics in the *Wilhelm Meister* novels, Ingrid Broszeit-Rieger suggests that the novels "contain sequences of different family constructs that carry a critique of the impact of family on the individual as a major subtext throughout their plots" and that "the novel seems to suggest a hybrid form of the old and the new, merging the flexibility of the pre-nuclear family with the affection and compassion of the modern nuclear family for the benefit of both communal welfare and authentic individuality. Simultaneously the work also seems to reject or at least resist the concept of family altogether."[78] Gail Hart also sees Goethe's work as resisting the depiction of conventional families; and Heidi Schlipphacke argues that the bourgeois family is "consistently and repeatedly deconstructed" in the novel.[79] These fractured families, as Gustafson notes, are the ones defined by paternal plans "with attempts to preserve heritage, to produce progeny, to maintain social class, to strengthen economic success, and/or to maintain or expand family property."[80] Instead, as Schlipphacke argues, "happy communities . . . generally consist not of biologically related figures but of friends, lovers, and displaced relations."[81] Although fractured and broken, the family, as Eldridge argues, "often serves as both a starting and ending point: the origin and education of protagonists is always included, and frequently a sign of the protagonist's maturity is that she or he begins a family of his or her own."[82] The *Lehrjahre* ends with Wilhelm's recognition of his son Felix and his union with Natalie. Although the breadth of the novel is dedicated to life outside the nuclear family, the law of the Turmgesellschaft maintains authority throughout the text, and the formation of a patriarchal family unit is the result of Wilhelm's journey.

Given the patrilineal logic of the *Lehrjahre*, the father-son relationship is a driving force from the outset of the novel. Wilhelm's father expresses the wish to pass down not only his physical possessions, but also his values to his son: "Nichts wünschte aber der alte Meister so sehr, als seinem Sohne Eigenschaften zu geben, die ihm selbst fehlten, und seinen Kindern Güter zu hinterlassen, auf deren Besitz er den größten Wert legte" (*GSW* 9:392; "But nothing was so much desired by Meister as to confer upon his son those qualities of which he himself was destitute, and to leave his children advantages which he reckoned it of the highest importance to possess," 36–37). The performance of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, "the most significant mirror for the *Lehrjahre*,"[83] reflects the lasting influence of the father and the importance of succession, even as Wilhelm avoids Hamlet's fate. Friedrich Strack suggests that in the *Lehrjahre*, Goethe binds "das Bewusstsein des Bürgers zurück an die Pflichten der Vaterschaft. Bürger sein heißt jetzt Vater sein, und damit ist gemeint: das eigene Haus sachgerecht bestellen" ("the consciousness of the citizen back to the duties of fatherhood. To be a citizen means to be a father, and that means: to order your own house properly").[84] Wilhelm's journey from his paternal

home leads him to pursue his own domestic situation with Natalie and Felix. And his apprenticeship is not complete until he takes paternal responsibility for his own son:

> Die Lüsternheit des Kindes nach den Kirschen und Beeren, die bald reif werden sollten, erinnerten ihn an die Zeit seiner Jugend und an die vielfache Pflicht des Vaters, den Seinigen den Genuß vorzubereiten, zu verschaffen und zu erhalten. . . . Er sah die Welt nicht mehr wie ein Zugvogel an . . . Alles, was er anzulegen gedachte, sollte dem Knaben entgegen wachsen, und alles, was er herstellte, sollte eine Dauer auf einige Geschlechter haben. In diesem Sinne waren seine Lehrjahre geendigt, und mit dem Gefühl des Vaters hatte er auch alle Tugenden eines Bürgers erworben. (*GSW* 9:881)

> The longing of the child for cherries and berries, the season for which was at hand, brought to his mind the days of his own youth, and the manifold duties of a father, to prepare, to procure, and to maintain for his family a constant series of enjoyments. . . . He no longer looked upon the world with the eyes of a bird of passage . . . Everything that he proposed commencing was to be completed for his boy; everything that he erected was to last for several generations. In this sense, his apprenticeship was ended: with the feeling of a father, he had acquired all the virtues of a citizen. (366)

It is significant that Wilhelm's fatherly role is established with a male child. Felix reminds him of his boyhood in his paternal home, and he will carry on Wilhelm's name as Wilhelm has carried on his father's. The reunion of Mignon with her biological father cannot and does not result in such a reestablishment of order. And while the chaste Natalie supplants Mariane's maternal role, it is not until Felix is reconnected with Wilhelm that the patriarchal order has been restored. Therefore, Barbara Becker-Cantarino argues that "enlightened patriarchy" is the driving force of the novel:

> The novel depicts a (mostly) conciliatory, orderly, at times repressive, yet productive, in short a benign, image of enlightened patriarchy as the *natural* order. The father/son dyad with the absent mother represents the symbolic order, while in realistic terms the Wilhelm-Felix duo moves to the center of the novel's plot and remains there throughout the sequel, *Wilhelm Meister's Travels* (*Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*). The hero's trials and tribulations all happen and are resolved within this symbolic order; confrontational situations and subversive characters that threaten or question this benign, seemingly natural, patriarchal order have been relegated mostly to the past (as was the "Beautiful Soul" in her confessions) and repressed; they

> surface only in such tales of mystery as Mignon's and the Harper's, both of whom die in somewhat inexplicable, irrational ways. After their deaths the patriarchal order as such is never seriously disturbed (nor is it problematized); patriarchy then appears as the natural order.[85]

Although Mariane, Mignon, and the *schöne Seele* are repressed and perish under the *Lehrjahre*'s enlightened patriarchy, Natalie and Therese find places as the potential wives of Wilhelm and Lothario. And where the father-daughter dyad in *Sternheim* and *Werther* grants the daughter the autonomy necessary to develop her maternal nature in the mother's absence, the father-son dyad in the *Lehrjahre* simultaneously excludes the biological mother and creates space for another female caregiver: the virginal mother. Lacking the grotesquely pregnant and powerful maternal body, she can fill this void without threatening the patriarchal order.

The Failed Virginal Mother: Unwed Motherhood and Its Consequences in *Faust I*

In the discussion of Goethe's texts thus far, there is a striking absence of nuclear families. Without paternal authority and influence, Werther struggles to find his place in Lotte's life, and the absence of biological mothers complicates his desire for Lotte as her lover, brother, and son. In *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, absent fathers and promiscuous mothers not only lead to nontraditional family structures, but also give rise to questions of legitimacy. Bastard children, like Mignon and Felix, occupy an uncertain place in the social order. Both men and women are cuckolded, but in the *Lehrjahre* there are virginal mothers, not virginal fathers. Where Aurelie is tricked into caring for Felix and Therese, and while Natalie cares for Felix and Mignon, Wilhelm is hesitant to assume parental responsibility for his child. Ultimately, the Turmgesellschaft establishes order without the biological mother, thus circumventing the illegitimacy dilemma.[86] In *Faust I*, the consequence of absent fathers and female promiscuity proves to be fatal. Additionally, the abjected and grotesque maternal body becomes a dangerous force that must be controlled.

The first part of Goethe's tragedy *Faust* was published in 1808.[87] But the earliest version of the *Urfaust* was composed between 1772 and 1775, the same time that Goethe was writing *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*. Like the figure of Lotte, the Gretchen episode in *Faust* provides further insight into the conflation of femininity with the maternal body. However, as a child-murderess, Gretchen is the virginal mother's antithesis. Here the feminine ideal, with its bourgeois emphasis on pliability, submissiveness, and innocence, falls apart. To the modern reader, the social conventions that kept women ignorant of the world are revealed as the source of their downfall:

Gretchen's naivete leads to seduction, an unwanted pregnancy, and infanticide. Yet, in this dichotomized image of motherhood, both Lotte and Gretchen serve to reinforce eighteenth-century ideals of femininity and to control women's sexuality.

The Gretchen episode is significant as Goethe's addition to the Faust tradition. Goethe's conception of the Gretchen scenes has been attributed to his familiarity with the execution of Susanna Margarethe Brandt, a 25-year-old inn servant who was convicted and beheaded for infanticide in Frankfurt in 1772. Although it is unknown whether Goethe was an eyewitness to the execution, he had returned to Frankfurt in August 1771, and Brandt's trial occurred in October of that same year. Ernst Beutler observes many similarities between Gretchen's experience and the testimony of Brandt.[88] Brandt accused her seducer of putting something into her wine, like the sleeping potion that Gretchen prepares for her mother. Brandt blamed her seduction and infanticidal act on the devil, and Mephistopheles plays a large role in Gretchen's downfall. Brandt's friend reportedly comforted her with the words: "Sie wäre die erste nicht" ("She would not be the first"). And Mephistopheles tells Faust: "Sie ist die erste nicht" (*GSW* 7.1:188; "She's not the first," 183).[89] Yet despite the similarities between the historical Brandt and the fictional Gretchen and Goethe's sympathetic representation of the infanticidal mother's plight in *Faust I*, as a privy councilor, Goethe voted to maintain the death penalty for infanticide, ultimately resulting in the November 28, 1783, execution of Johanna Höhn.[90]

In the eighteenth century, public executions for infanticide were not uncommon. The trials were often inadequate and unjust. The judges relied on the expert male testimony of childbirth, a subject on which they were still largely ignorant. Torture was used to obtain confessions. Moreover, women were almost always convicted of infanticide if an infant had been born out of wedlock and then died, regardless of whether it had been injured at birth or was stillborn. Tellingly, infanticide was a common theme of the Sturm und Drang movement, and Isabel Hull views this fascination as "coded interest in the sexuality of unmarried women."[91] Lyndal Roper notes that Gretchen's character was intended for an eighteenth-century audience: "[A sixteenth-century audience] would have spared no tears for Gretchen, but would have regarded her as a child-killer whose dreadful crime merited death. It was not until the eighteenth century that pamphlets began to sympathize with the plight of the seduced and abandoned infanticidal mother."[92] Similar themes are found in other contemporary works, such as Heinrich Leopold Wagner's *Kindermörderin* (1776; *The Child Murderess*) and Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz's *Zerbin oder die neuere Philosophie* (1776; *Zerbin or Modern Philosophy*) and *Die Soldaten* (1776; *The Soldiers*).[93]

In view of the rise of the novel, pedagogical women's journals, and cameralist thinkers who hoped to use literature to educate women, it is tempting to argue that these texts sought to instruct women lest they experience

similar fates. But, as Helga Madland observes, the fictional depiction of infanticide and its fatal consequences could not have affected those most at risk.[94] Women convicted of infanticide came primarily from the lower classes and therefore did not have the education to read or gain access to child-murderess literature.[95] Nevertheless, the seduction plot is written so that the female reader identifies with the infanticidal mother.[96] Madland proposes that "the spectacle of the child murderess and her eventual execution—is the ideal vehicle to domesticate and control subconsciously the middle-class woman reader, into whose hands such literature found its way."[97] For readers like the fictional Lotte, who read to find her own domestic situation confirmed by literature, Gretchen's fate would have been terrifying. Infanticide fiction was thus a means for eighteenth-century thinkers to intimidate women into chaste behavior. While witch burnings and public executions for infanticides were increasingly viewed as unenlightened,[98] infanticide fiction reflects a transition from physical violence to psychological violence in the efforts to control the sexuality of women.[99] Therefore, where the maternal nature of the virginal mother places her within the family and domestic sphere and her chastity serves to police female sexuality, the infanticidal mother illustrates the consequences for women who abandon their domestic roles and allow themselves to be seduced.

In the beginning of the *Faust* drama, Gretchen resembles other eighteenth-century heroines. Kenneth Burke notes her similarity to the virginal mother figure prior to her Faust encounter, and he views her as an intentionally sympathetic figure: "this child who later drowns her own illegitimate child is seen to have been a virgin-mother to her sister. This girl who dies in disgrace is seen to be intrinsically endowed with such spiritual inheritance as goes ideally with middle-class respectability, and extrinsically endowed with the ideal property requirements of such a status."[100] Gretchen is nurturing and self-sacrificial—two of the key components in virginal mother figures.

Like Lotte feeding her siblings and managing her father's house, Gretchen cares for her younger sister and maintains her mother's small abode. And like Werther, who admires Lotte's domesticity and fantasizes about her role in the household, Faust is overcome by the idea of Gretchen in her domestic world:

> In dieser Armut welche Fülle!
> In diesem Kerker welche Seligkeit!
> . . . . . .
> Ich fühl', o Mädchen, deinen Geist
> Der Füll' und Ordnung um mich säuseln,
> Der mütterlich dich täglich unterweis't,
> Den Teppich auf den Tisch dich reinlich breiten heißt,
> Sogar den Sand zu deinen Füßen kräuseln.
> O liebe Hand! so göttergleich!
> Die Hütte wird durch dich ein Himmelreich. (*GSW* 7.1:115–16)

What fullness I sense in this poverty!
What blessedness in this narrow prison!
. . . . . .
Dear girl,
I feel your spirit of order and abundance
Murmuring around me in the air,
The spirit that, like a mother, instructs you daily
To spread the clean cloth on the table and
Strew the sand in patterns on the floor.
Dear hand, dear heavenly hand!
You've turned this lowly cottage into a paradise. (115)

Faust feels more in touch with Gretchen's spirit in her small bedroom, from which she is absent, than he does in her presence. He idealizes her impoverished situation. Like Werther with Lotte, Faust loses sight of the real Gretchen, and she becomes a projection of his desires. Neither woman can live up to the ideals these protagonists set for them, but for Gretchen, Faust's preoccupation with her proves fatal.

Gretchen serves as a surrogate mother to her sister when her mother is ailing, and in the course of feeding and caring for the girl, she comes to see the child as her own:

Ich zog es auf, und herzlich liebt' es mich.
. . . . . .
Da konnte [meine Mutter] nun nicht d'ran denken
Das arme Würmchen selbst zu tränken,
Und so erzog ich's ganz allein,
Mit Milch und Wasser; so ward's mein.
Auf meinem Arm, in meinem Schoß
War's freundlich, zappelte, ward groß. (*GSW* 7.1:134)

I brought her up myself.
Oh, she loved me so!
. . . . . .
Still, of course, [my mother] couldn't dream of
nursing the poor thing, she was so weak,
so I made do feeding it with milk and water,
And that's how she came to be mine.
And so she grew big,
In my arms, on my lap
Squirming, kicking, smiling. (136)

This is where the similarities between Gretchen and Lotte end. Lotte is virtuous, charitable, and tends her father's house with pleasure. However, when

Faust assumes that fulfilling this maternal role is Gretchen's greatest happiness, Gretchen quickly draws attention to her many difficult hours and details the mundane aspects of tending to an infant: waking to soothe the crying child in the night; then early morning washing, going to the market, and cooking. Where Lotte desires to emulate her mother, and her behavior with her siblings reinforces Werther's maternal fantasies, Gretchen distances herself from her mother and attempts to dispel Faust's romanticization of this role.

Although Gretchen is portrayed sympathetically—as a naive virgin who is seduced by Faust, abandoned, and then commits infanticide out of desperation—Becker-Cantarino observes that "the text actually represses rather than reveals Gretchen's inner motivation: the moral conflicts and social circumstances leading to infanticide must be inferred by the reader, as they do not surface in the text's language."[101] Like the one-sided image of the virginal mother found in Werther's letters and the constellation of female characters in Wilhelm's apprenticeship, her antithesis—the child murderess—is offered little opportunity to voice her motives or state of mind.

The infanticidal act itself is eclipsed in the play. Indeed, Goethe goes to great lengths—almost to hell and back—to remove Faust from the entire duration of Gretchen's pregnancy, her delivery of her child, and her infanticidal act. If the abjected and grotesque maternal body is a source of radical power and a threat to patriarchal authority as Kristeva argues, then the audience never witnesses Gretchen as a powerful being.[102] In her discussion of the French novelist Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Kristeva observes that "Céline locates the ultimate of abjection—and thus the supreme and sole interest of literature—in the birth-giving scene [where] he makes amply clear which fantasy is involved: something *horrible to see* at the impossible doors of the invisible—the mother's body."[103] In the life-threatening birth process, the mother is both agent and victim: giving birth but also being delivered of a child.[104] Drawing on Kristeva's discussion, Brandy Andrews Harvey argues that maternal infanticide can be read as the mother's attempt to once more establish agency over her body and its creation.[105] Here, the drowning of the child represents a return to the abjected amniotic fluid of the maternal body. However, by the time Faust discovers what has happened, the once-open, abjected, and fearful boundaries of Gretchen's body have literally been imprisoned so that her pregnancy, birth, and infanticide can only be discussed in symbolic language. During Walpurgisnacht, Faust encounters a beautiful child who resembles Gretchen and through whom he infers Gretchen's fate. Therefore, Goethe represents only the seduction of Gretchen and the consequence of the infanticide: her loss of virtue and subsequent imprisonment. The thing that is "horrible to see" has already happened. The allusion to the act itself surfaces in only a few lines. In prison, Gretchen cries out: "Mein Kind hab ich ertränkt" (*GSW* 7.1:195; "I've drowned my child") and describes the infant's struggle: "Es will sich heben, / Es zappelt noch, / Rette! rette! (*GSW* 7.1:197;

"It's trying to rise! / Kicking! / Save it! Save it!" 195–96). The emphasis on Gretchen's seduction and its consequences reinforces Madland's argument: "Infanticide fiction is really not about morality, the reform of the criminal law, sexual emancipation, or an expression of the heightened social consciousness of the Stürmer und Dränger. It is about the intimidation of women."[106]

When Georg Lukács observes that "die Gretchen-Tragödie hört auf, Mittelpunkt zu sein, sie wird zu einer entscheidenden tragischen Etappe auf dem Lebensweg Fausts, auf dem Entwicklungsweg der Menschheit" ("the Gretchen tragedy stops being at the center and becomes a crucial tragic stage in the course of Faust's life, in the course of the development of mankind"), he inadvertently draws attention to a pivotal problematic in Goethe's works.[107] Like each female figure examined in this chapter, Gretchen occupies only a stage in the male protagonist's life. She forms part of mankind's development but is not given the opportunity to develop herself. Highlighting the similarities between Gretchen and Shakespeare's Ophelia—"madness, drowning, a melancholy lover associated with the university at Wittenberg, the murder of both parent and brother by the lover"—Jane K. Brown summarizes the Gretchen tragedy as "*Hamlet* rewritten from Ophelia's point of view."[108] In contrast, Robert Anchor views Gretchen as a more active and tragic character than Ophelia: "The very willfulness of her death confirms her as more than a merely helpless victim, either of her erstwhile lover or her hidebound society. And her self-destruction for the sake of a love both had denied her—a love for which her mother, brother and child had perished—is a form of self-development no less authentic or radical or tragic than Faust's own."[109] Gretchen is undoubtedly more active and more developed than Ophelia, but she is a victim of both Faust and paternal law. Faust no longer loves her. His offer of rescue is half-hearted and is scorned by Mephistopheles. It is difficult to imagine a scenario in which Gretchen could be saved. Even more than Mignon and Mariane, Gretchen's action merits death in the human realm. Mephistopheles pronounces: "Sie ist gerichtet" (*GSW* 7.1:199; "She is doomed!" 198). It is only the heavens that can declare: "Ist gerettet!" (*GSW* 7.1:199; "She is saved!" 198). God may save her soul, but man holds the patriarchal authority to damn her body.

In many ways, Gretchen is Lotte's antithesis. Where Lotte represents the virginal mother and the feminine ideal, Gretchen represents the unwed mother and the failure of this ideal. If Goethe had created one-dimensional characters, Lotte and Gretchen would represent opposite sides of the womb-tomb dichotomy. But the eternal feminine contains aspects of both, and so do these two female characters. Lotte sustains life, but ultimately provides the tool and motivation for Werther's death, while Gretchen both brings forth and ends life. In addition to her premarital loss of virginity, by killing her child, Gretchen challenges the social order on two levels: if the essence of femininity is located in the womb, then infanticide—killing what the womb creates—

represents the ultimate destruction of femininity. It rejects the traits of charity and self-sacrifice that were viewed as inherent to maternal nature in the eighteenth century. And if a child can be viewed as the mother's phallus, as Freud claims in "Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes," then infanticide represents a form of castration and a threat to male authority.[110] Clearly, the act of infanticide upsets the social order. Like Mignon and Mariane, Gretchen has no place in the patriarchal order and must be eliminated. Although Gretchen cares for her sister, looks after her mother's house, and is a virgin before her encounter with Faust, she is abandoned after giving in to his sexual advances. It is only the virginal mother who nurtures the children of others and polices her own sexuality, who is rewarded with marriage, its protection, and its social advantages.

Conclusion

The virginal mother is a present non-mother. Her boundaries are stable. Her borders are closed. She is nurturing, but not lactating. She is a virgin: impenetrable and unknowable. She is the love object rather than the maternal abject. She should not disturb identity, system, or order. Rather, the isolation of maternal nurture from the maternal body serves to alleviate fears of female creative power. And female authors are successful in portraying the virginal mother as a heroine who does not threaten patriarchal authority. But Goethe locates feminine existence in the womb rather than in maternal nature; and in his texts, the male protagonists struggle to reconcile the feminine ideal with the female body. Werther positions Lotte as the abjected-mother/love-object; and the destabilizing nature of the maternal body in Lotte makes the distinction between Lotte as subject, love object, and maternal abject impossible. His desire forces her to become the "in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" associated with the abject and the disturbance of order;[111] and his love cannot survive under paternal law. Wilhelm Meister abandons the unchaste mother of his child and cycles through cross-dressing women, flirtatious actresses, and androgynous figures until he finds a virgin who does not threaten the social order. Conforming to the feminine ideal of maternal self-sacrifice and lacking the powerful maternal body, Natalie is the wife approved by the patriarchal Turmgesellschaft. Faust's infatuation with Gretchen brings forth the loss of virginity and the culmination of female creative power: both the giving of life in an unwanted pregnancy and the taking of life in infanticide. In these works, the ever-present maternal abject gives rise to otherworldly love, confused desire, and romantic passion, which result in abandoned mothers and uncertain fathers. Thus, Goethe's texts deviate from female-authored representations of virginal motherhood. Written largely from the perspective of the virginal mother herself, La Roche's *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* and, as we will see in the next chapter, E. Marlitt's *Das Geheimnis*

der alten Mamsell and *Die zweite Frau*, represent maternal nature as separate from the maternal body. Instead of the all-consuming and often fatal passion inspired by uncertain boundaries and pregnable borders, love is both rational and sentimental, and the reward for the love of the virginal mother is the nuclear family and the secured legitimacy of future offspring. Goethe's works show the virginal mother from a different perspective: that of the male lover.