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On the Role of Sublimation in the Works of Gabriele Reuter

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WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY IN ST. LOUIS
Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures

On the Role of Sublimation in the Works of Gabriele Reuter

by
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A thesis presented to the
Graduate School of Arts & Sciences
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Acknowledgments

My interest in the author Gabriele Reuter was sparked by attending a course on the German bourgeoisie in the 19th century; offered by Washington University in the fall 2011. Initially somewhat reluctant to take the course, considering my primary interests lie elsewhere, namely 20th and 21st century poetry and literature, I quickly changed my mind once the class began. It turned out to be a fun and exciting course characterized by many lively and intellectually stimulating conversations. Most memorable, however, was the course instructor, Professor Lynne Tatlock's, genuine enthusiasm for the material, which ultimately proved infectious. I owe a debt of gratitude to Professor Tatlock, not only for helping change my mind on the topic, but more importantly for her relentless support throughout this project. Her intellectual guidance and editorial prowess proved invaluable in finishing the thesis.

In the process of completing the final edits, my father passed away. His passing shook my world, but knowing how proud he was of my accomplishments I dedicate this thesis to him.

Maria Skene-Björkman

Washington University in St. Louis

August 2015

Till pappa

Romanska bågar

Inne i den väldiga romanska kyrkan trängdes turisterna
i halvmörket.
Valv gapande bakom valv och ingen överblick.
Några ljuslågor fladdrade.
En ängel utan ansikte omfamnade mig
och viskade genom hela kroppen:
”Skäms inte för att du är människa, var stolt!
Inne i dig öppnar sig valv bakom valv oändligt.
Du blir aldrig färdig, och det är som det skall.”
Jag var blind av tårar
och föstes ut på den solsjudande piazzan
tillsammans med Mr och Mrs Jones, Herr Tanaka och
Signora Sabatini
och inne i dem alla öppnade sig valv bakom valv oändligt.

- Thomas Tranströmer

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

On the Role of Sublimation in the Works of Gabriele Reuter

by

Maria Skene-Björkman

Master of Arts in Germanic Languages and Literatures

Washington University in St. Louis, 2015

Professor Lynne Tatlock, Chair

In my thesis I discuss the relationship between Nietzsche's concept of amor fati (love of fate) and Lacan's understanding of sublimation through the lens of selected works by Gabriele Reuter. I argue that Reuter deploys an understanding of will power that draws on the Nietzschean concept of amor fati, which ultimately serves the function of sublimation as discussed by Lacan. In their respective efforts at establishing their own identities, the female protagonists in Reuter's novels have to learn to overcome their sufferings, and in doing so they transform the process of identity formation into a life-affirming enterprise in the spirit of Nietzsche's Zarathustra. Language, or the symbolic order, serves as an instrumental tool for identity formation according to Lacan, whereby the father as the ultimate signifier serves as the law for symbolic order, or discourse. To become women on their own terms, all three female protagonists discussed in the thesis must break with the Name-of-the-Father – a Lacanian term discussed at length in the thesis – and enter into discourse as subjects with a sense of self separate from the physical and symbolic power represented by the father.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Gabriele Reuter (1859-1941) was a German author and convinced Nietzschean who became famous overnight with the publication of her novel, *Aus guter Familie* (1895). In her portrayal of the unassuming protagonist Agathe Heidling, Reuter tells the tragic story of a young bourgeois woman suffering from great mental anguish and pain over the consequences of oppressive and unjust gender relations. Agathe restlessly attempts to live up to the expectations of those in her social milieu, while simultaneously wishing to break with norms that she finds degrade women of their status as individuals, and ultimately, human beings. As suggested by Lisbeth Hock in “Shades of Melancholy in Gabriele Reuter’s ‘Aus guter Familie,’” “Agathe, too, is far more aware of the contradictions and hypocrisy of her society than her family and friends, and yet, as the reader realizes throughout the text, she is also excessively hard on herself” (457).

To resolve the conflicts evolving between the societal expectation that lead Agathe to model her behavior around virtues such as selflessness, modesty, and chastity and her own desire to find a language expressive of her intense emotional character, the protagonist of *Aus guter Familie* embarks on a path of conformity that gives rise to inner turmoil and conflict. In the words of the narrator of *Aus guter Familie* and in reference to Agathe: “Nicht in keuscher Unschuld – denn sie war kein Kind mehr – sie war erwacht, ein reifes, temperamentvolles Weib. Ihr Phantasie – und Gefühlsleben war nicht mehr unschuldig. Es war nur ein fortwährender Streit zwischen ihrer individuellen Natur und dem Wesen, zu dem sie sich in liebendem Eifer nach einem ehrwürdigen, jahrtausenden alten Ideal gemodelt hatte” (131).

The consequences of conformity lead to a series of nervous ailments, including agitation, exhaustion, and sleeplessness. As noted by Hock, the source of these ailments is not identified in

the novel. Instead, “By leaving illnesses unnamed, Reuter’s texts encourage an exploration of assumptions about the relationships among health, illness, society, and culture” (446). In other words, we may claim that the very nature of the relationship between psychological sickness, gender, and social standing is at the center of Reuter’s writing in *Aus guter Familie*. Listening to the advice of a medical professor who attends to Agathe after a period of illness, our protagonist accepts the doctor’s words that the cure to her condition lies in the exercise of will power: “Ihr Fräulein Tochter is sehr sensibel ... Ihre Gesundheit, liebes Fräulein, ist in Ihre Hand gelegt. Geben Sie sich heiteren Eindrücken hin, genießen Sie Ihre Jugend” (103).

The reader’s ability to understand Agathe’s failure to use her will power in order, in the words of Hock, to “transform her temperamental qualities into a productive force,” and her succumbing to madness instead relies on his/her grasp of Reuter’s depiction of the dangers of conformity (456). Reuter’s appreciation of the liberating potential of Nietzsche’s philosophy is evident in the recurrent use of will power as a literary trope and imaginative force or impetus in the portrayal of numerous female characters, including but not restricted to Agathe. To make it in the world, and stay true to themselves, these female characters have to fight and overcome old-fashioned gender norms. Agathe’s mistake is not that she is born a woman, or that she longs for the freedom to express her passionate nature, but that she fails to assert her will.

In her article, Hock makes a convincing argument for understanding Agathe’s condition, and ultimately her failure to assert her will power, as the result of melancholia:

if one follows the development of Agathe’s symptoms from her adolescent brooding and sadness to her later sleeplessness, anxiety, and violent aggression, and finally to the vacuousness with which she is to live out the second half of her life, and compares them to the medical literature of her day, it would appear that Reuter wrote a clinically-accurate description of a young woman suffering from melancholia. (252)

There are numerous accounts of sadness, anxiety, sleeplessness, and aggression on the part of the protagonist in *Aus guter Familie*; too many to list here, that serve as support for Hock's argument. Even if one does not agree with the assessment of Agathe's condition offered by Hock, the reference to melancholia and how it is treated by Freud provides a helpful framework for discussing the consequences of conformity. But, as cautioned by Hock, it is to misconstrue Agathe's efforts to break with the expectations of her social milieu to conceive of her biological predicament as the reason behind her (mental) illness. The pressure to conform is too strong, and Agathe's failure serves as a critique of societal norms that prevent women like our protagonist from finding a meaningful purpose in life outside of marriage.

To further understand the dangers associated with conformity for women in patriarchal societies as portrayed by Reuter and discussed by Hock, we are helped by looking beyond Freud's account of melancholia as a specifically female illness, to include discussions of Lacan's understanding of psychosis as a specific kind of "language entrapment."¹ The consideration of Agathe's condition as a case of psychosis allows for the inclusion of discussions concerned with the relationship between language, discourse, and identity. As a means to bridge the gap between self and Other, home and family, language according to Lacan is fundamental to subject-formation. Without language, outside of discourse, one is bereft of the unifying principle that situates human beings as subjects and individuals. Thus, without inclusion and access to an expressive language of some sort, human beings are prevented from knowing themselves and others.

¹ The term "language entrapment" is used by John Forrester in the opening remarks of Lacan's seminar on psychosis, and it refers to the psychotic's problematic relationship to language. This topic is discussed in detail in chapter 1, "Psychosis and sublimation in *Aus Guter Familie*".

The absence of an expressive language leads not only to the breakdown of communication, but, as in Agathe's case, a disintegration of self, which might be understood as the consequence of psychosis. By reading Agathe's fate through the lens of the Lacanian concept of psychosis we arrive at an understanding of why the Nietzschean concept of will (to) power is not enough to help her overcome the expectations of her social milieu. From the opening scene of *Aus guter Familie* -- describing Agathe and her family on the day of her Confirmation -- to the final pages depicting our protagonist as a numb, mindless woman living in the company of her father, we witness how -- time and again -- Agathe's will is broken. Succumbing to sickness at the end of the novel, Agathe is without any desire or passion to will or live.

Agathe's life story contrasts with the story of Ellen, another of Reuter's characters important to our discussion. Like Agathe, Ellen is of a passionate nature. However, Ellen, unlike Agathe, succeeds in breaking with some of society's expectations and living her life in accordance with her own convictions. She, and Cornelia, the protagonist of *Das Tränenhaus* -- the third of Reuter's novels to be discussed here -- share the same fate: pregnancy out of wedlock. As will become evident, Ellen and Cornelia experience rejection and a great deal of disapproval, and thus suffering, as a consequence of their pregnancies. It is only by exerting will power to an extreme extent that these two characters overcome the prejudices of their time, and survive in the world.

Characteristic for Ellen and Cornelia, setting them apart from Agathe, is their inclusion in the world of social order; defined as discourse by Lacan. They have access to the symbolic order, enabling them to share and discuss with other women the traumatic experience of childbirth out of wedlock. Consequently, these two female characters appear not only as strong willed, but as equipped with language as a mean to articulate the traumatic events following upon unwanted

pregnancy, preventing them from falling into an abyss of sorrow and madness. But, their inclusion into the social order, and thus language, does not preclude Ellen and Cornelia from experiencing feelings of despair, hopelessness, and depression. Their emotional reactions are similar to Agathe's in so far as all three female characters are overcome by sadness to such an extent that it threatens to ruin them. Ellen and Cornelia, however, find constructive ways to overcome their melancholy.

In order to understand the mechanism in place in the handling of trauma by Ellen and Cornelia, we will employ the Nietzschean concept of *amor fati*; understood by Reuter as the *ecstasy* of suffering the inequalities of gender norms by transforming the negative experiences into something willed, and ultimately positive. Agathe fails to make the transition or change of perspectives associated with *amor fati*. Instead, she regards the misfortunes of her life as the consequence of her own actions, i.e., as a failure to will what she desires. Consequently, she blames herself for her failure to break with the expectations of her social milieu, turning the creative forces of melancholy into self-destruction and, ultimately, psychosis.

Ellen and Cornelia suffer as well. However, unlike Agathe, they transform the negative circumstances of their respective lives into language, and thus, into a shared experience. Through great suffering they find the willpower to overcome the obstacles that prevent them from living as strong, independent women in the world. Thus, they become who they are not in spite of but because of the pain and rejection they face. As taught by Zarathustra and exemplified by Ellen and Cornelia, to break with the norms of society and become an *Übermensch*, one must test one's convictions and beliefs against norms or moral measuring sticks created by oneself.

Men, not God, judge each other, and society is nothing but a man-made institution created by and for human beings who cannot act as their own judge. The Übermensch, however, is a man with a strong will (to) power who reigns over his own actions and judgments - with or without the approval of society. Ultimately, we may consider the act of employing Nietzsche's concept of the Übermensch in relation to women an example of such overcoming, for it is not at all clear that Nietzsche ever intended it to apply to other subjects than male ones.

For the followers of the Übermensch, who embrace Nietzsche's teaching of the redemptive powers of willing in relation to great suffering, factors such as society's approval or rejection matter less than a truthful life. To be truthful to oneself, one must learn to love what one cannot initially endure, whereby amor fati, or love of one's fate, becomes a life-affirming practice situating each subject as his own commander. In situations in which one's experiences are not the results of one's own actions, or will, but due to circumstances, a special burden is laid upon the individual for forming the outlines of his/her life, and destiny. What to make out of this negative experience lies in the hand of the subject, no matter how extreme the apparent negative is. To overcome and break with conventions and thus act as one's own commander and judge, the subject aspiring to be an Übermensch must will the negative without changing it.

In conversation with Cornelia, one of the women at the establishment for unmarried pregnant women where she stays summarizes in a few sentences the significance of amor fati as a life affirming practice. Considering the pertinence of amor fati to the approach I suggest in understanding the outcome of Ellen and Cornelia's actions I include the words uttered in the exchange between the two women. Thereby, I hope to foreground the fatal nature ascribed to the pressure to conform facing all three characters discussed in this thesis, as well as their desire to be true to themselves:

Das wird nicht von dem individuellen Willen bestimmt, sondern durch Bedingungen, über die wir gar keine Gewalt haben. Darum tun wir wohl so oft Dinge, von denen wir fühlen, wir tun sie aus einem Zwang, der gegen unsere individuelle Natur ist. Das Schicksal hat manche unter uns ausersehen zu Symbolen der Zeit. Wir tragen ihr Brandmal oder ihre Flammenzunge an der Stirne – wissen nicht, ob das feurige Zeichen Schande oder Ehre bedeutet ... Wer einmal so gezeichnet wurde, der muss sein Los auf sich nehmen und seine letzten Bitterkeiten austrinken. Er wird ahnen, dass nur auf diesem Wege sein Leben reif werden kann, zu einer Frucht am Erntekranz der Zeit. (162)

The appeal to endure the pains of life associated with the Übermensch has clear affinities with the call to “take up one’s cross” in the Christian tradition. Unlike Christians, however, Cornelia, does not believe in “einen persönlichen Gott” (162). Cornelia’s rejection of God is not in and of itself a sign of her leaving her Christian tradition behind. To proclaim that there is no God does not prevent our protagonist from believing in some kind of Divine Providence, referred to as the Divine (in German “das Göttliche”): “Ahnen wir in seltenen Augenblicken das Gesetz unsres eignen Lebens, müssen wir uns ihm beugen, wenn es auch noch so erschreckend droht. Denn es ist doch das Göttliche ...” (163).

Notice here the word “beugen” or “bend.” A burden, in Biblical terms a cross, loaded onto one’s back will bend one down. Cornelia suggests we accept this burden, no matter how heavy or terrifying it is, as the workings of the Divine, and thus as our destiny. At first glance her approach to the Divine seems to suggest that there is little or no agency, or willpower, on the part of humankind. One must accept the yoke on one’s shoulders. The solution to this conflict, which shows how influenced Cornelia, and ultimately Reuter is by Nietzsche’s concept of amor fati, lies in the recognition that without personal interference from a divine God, one is empowered to change the circumstances of one’s life to the best of one’s capabilities without fear of facing Divine wrath or punishment.

On a personal, individual level, the insight into the mechanics of a divine principle that is impersonal, and thus unaffected by one's beliefs or actions, evokes a different sense of responsibility than if one is faced with an erratic, all-encompassing God who answers to no one but Himself. Cornelia, in coming to the recognition that she no longer believed in a personal God, felt nothing like remorse, emptiness or loss, but relief: "Und es war eine Erlösung, als ich diesen Glauben endlich von mir tun konnte" (162). Casting aside the shackles of the Christian tradition with its belief in the Holy Trinity, Cornelia is free to be her own person, and ultimately her own judge. She thereby accomplishes what Agathe did not achieve: to distance herself from a tradition that is inherently patriarchal and views women as followers, not leaders. In my thesis, I argue that Cornelia shares the desire to overcome the obstacles of narrow gender norms to live in the world as a free and independent woman with Ellen, and that Agathe, as a consequence of pressure, breaks down before she has the chance to live her life fully. However, Agathe is not to be read merely as an anti-hero or as radically different from Ellen and Cornelia, but as someone on the fringes of life, struggling to join the lines of women like Ellen and Cornelia.

Chapter 2: Psychosis and Sublimation in *Aus Guter Familie*

In the opening scene of *Aus guter Familie*, the main protagonist Agathe Heidling receives Communion in the company of her father, mother, and older brother. Conducting the Communion is Pastor Kandler, a friend of the family and the clergyman preparing Agathe for Confirmation. When Agathe returned from the boarding school just a few months earlier, her father was not pleased with his daughter's disposition and decided that a stay in the countryside under the supervision of a man of God would help restore Agathe's spirits and prepare her for life as a young woman:

Agathe war frisch und stark und rosig geworden in dem stillen Winter, bei den Schlittenfahrten über die beschneiten Felder, in der klaren, herben Landluft. Sein Kind hatte ihm nicht gefallen, als es aus der Pension kam. Etwas Zerfahrenes, Eitles, Schwatzhafte war damals an ihr aufgefallen. Nur das nicht! Er stellte ideale Forderungen an die Frau. (7)

Confirmation marks a transition or rite-de-passage from adolescence to adulthood. By accepting Communion, Agathe and her peers swear to accept and follow the word of God as his loyal, chaste servants. But, even as she is called upon to abstain from all earthly desires that are not in accordance with the teachings of the church and to refrain from sin, Agathe is preoccupied with thoughts about what she considers past immoral desires and fantasies. While producing a written confession, mandatory for all adolescents before partaking in Communion, Agathe decides to leave out these mental images from her statement. Unwilling to share the nature or magnitude of her wrongdoings, the protagonist cringes with fear and disgust at the mere thought of them: "Der Schweiß brach ihr aus, so peinigte sie die Scham. Das konnte sie doch nicht aufschreiben. Tausendmal lieber in die Hölle!" (2).

Agathe, who is fearful but determined to honor and obey the calling of God and the Christian community, is overcome by feelings of doubt as well as pressing urgency: “Alles war so geheimnißvoll schrecklich bei diesem christlichen Glaubensleben. Sie wollte es ja annehmen... Und sie hatte ja auch gelobt – nun mußte sie – da half ihr nichts mehr!” (2).

Unable to comprehend fully the significance of Confirmation, Agathe understands that, as a rite-of-passage, it implies a change in life that comes with new and challenging demands. However, on the day of Confirmation, while in church, Agathe experiences a moment of clarity that causes her to shiver with fear. In this moment of insight the protagonist is blinded by the sun shining through the windows of the church, brightening up the interior dim space to such an extent that Agathe’s vision is temporarily transfixed: “Das Licht der hohen Wachskerzen flackerte unruhig. Agathe schloß geblendet die Augen vor dem hellen Sonnenschein, der die Kerze durchströmte, und in dem Milliarden Staubatome wirbelten. War die Himmelssonne nur dazu da, alles Verborgene zu schrecklicher Klarheit zu bringen?” (2).

Penetrating the darkness of the candle-lit church, the beams of the sun have an almost disturbing effect, suggested by the restless flickering of the candles, forcing the female protagonist to close her eyes. When she opens her eyes again, her vision is blurred and as an effect thereof the sunrays appear atomized and broken down into millions of fragments of dust. The materiality of the candles is hereby juxtaposed to the breaking down of immaterial light into dead matter. In this process of deconstruction, Agathe is given another (inner) vision or perspective that causes her spirit to flicker like candlelight. Illuminated by the sun, she fears that God will find her unworthy of acceptance due to the hidden desires and untold secrets she harbors. Thus, she dreads the upcoming symbolic consumption of Christ’s blood and body that, in her opinion, can be followed only by the wrath of God and his community of dutiful followers

on account of perjury. However, feelings of shame and fear are soon overcome by a deep sense of gratitude and love:

Nun war es nicht der erhabene Gott-Vater, der das Opfer forderte, nicht mehr der heilige Geist, der unbegreiflich-furchtbare, der mit den Glutten des ewigen Feuers seinen Beleidigern droht, der nicht vergiebt – jetzt nahte der himmlische Bräutigam mit Trost und Liebe. . . . Ein schmachzendes Begehren nach der geheimnisvollen Vereinigung mit ihm durchzitterte die Nerven des jungen Weibes. Der starke Wein rann feurig durch ihren erschöpften Körper – ein sanftes, zärtliches und doch entsagungsvolles Glück durchbebte ihr Innerstes – sie war würdig befunden, seine Gegenwart zu fühlen. (3)

Here the metaphor of light is replaced by fire and the notion of lucidity with the consumption of self through fire. Agathe is relieved to have escaped the unnerving sensations associated with the fear of being found unworthy of God's love. Instead, she enjoys the more pleasurable glow of consumption as consummation and delivery, basking in the realization of her redemption in the eyes of the all-knowing and all-seeing God as Father. When she drinks the wine offered to her, the spirit of the Holy Father fills her with excitement, and in his presence she feels regenerated and purified. In this instance portrayed as a divine lover and bridegroom, God offers Agathe support and shelter. She falls on her knees and accepts Jesus Christ and the Holy God as her savior and commander.

With Communion simultaneously marking a continuation as well as a break with life as the female protagonist knows it, the implications of sunlight as a metaphor for insight or change of perspective, in my reading, not only foreshadow the tragic outcome of the novel but highlight one of its main conflicts and structuring principles: the struggle between father and daughter, man and woman. The problematic nature of gender and generational relations is resolved in the opening scene of *Aus guter Familie* by means of sublimation as a way of dealing with sexual awakening and burgeoning romantic desire: a strategy that eventually (in the second half of the novel) proves insufficient for the protagonist in dealing with the expectations of her social

milieu. Especially the role played by the father as authoritative figure represents an obstacle in Agathe's coming into herself as a young woman. The father's influence on how the protagonist views her role as daughter and woman is indicated in the opening quotation of this chapter, as well as in the scene on the day of Confirmation.

During the celebratory dinner for Agathe's family hosted by Pastor Kandler and his wife it is revealed to the reader that the shameful actions causing the protagonist to tremble with fear upon partaking in Communion are of a romantic nature. Actions, which to a twenty-first - century reader may seem trivial or the mere product of Agathe's imagination, lead to disagreement between Agathe and her father and Pastor Kandler. The source of the dispute is a book of poems sent to Agathe by her cousin Martin. The title of the book is *Herwegs Gedichte*, by Georg Herweg: a poet known for his involvement in the revolution of 1848 whose poems were banned in Prussia.

The two male authorities present at dinner are outraged at the sight of the book. Agathe, who is unable to make the connection between the political message of the poems and its critique of men in social positions represented by her father and the host, blushes out of gratitude and joy. The poems are a reminder of the summer she spent together with Martin, reading poetry and discussing politics, revolution and personal freedom. Too engrossed in the book, Agathe does not notice the silence spreading over the table. It is not until Pastor Kandler tears the book away from her that she recognizes that something is wrong. Agathe, who is unable to comprehend the reason behind the commotion, admits to having read the poems before and finding the language "wunderschön" (9). The pastor asks the protagonist whether she recognizes that the contents of the poems are in conflict with his instructions in preparation for Confirmation, whereupon Agathe replies, "Nein – ich dachte, man sollte für seine Überzeugung kämpfen und sterben!"

(10). As indicated by this reply, the protagonist lacks a deeper understanding of the political situation in the country and the ways in which Herweg's poems are critical of a system upheld by men such as her father and Pastor Kandler. To Agathe, the poems represent freedom as a romantic enterprise undertaken by human beings, like herself and Martin, who are connected in spirit by the same desire for justice and liberty. The political and social implications of revolution are thus replaced by romantic feelings and thoughts, whereby sexual desire is sublimated and represented in terms of spiritual liberation and freedom.

Agathe is discouraged by her father's and Pastor Kandler's reactions, and she represses her anger and internalizes it in favor of the opinion represented by the two men: "Es war doch zu schrecklich, daß sie heute, am Konfirmationstage, ihrem Pastor und ihrem Vater böse war! Hier fing gewiß die Selbstüberwindung und die Entsagung an. Sie war doch noch recht dumm! Ein so gefährliches Gift für schön zu halten... Aber so war es fortwährend: was einem gefiel, dem mußte man mißtrauen" (11). Under the assumption that obedience and self-sacrifice is expected by and of women and eventually rewarded, the young Agathe from this point on sets out on a path of self-denial that in the end will lead to self-destruction. As noted by Lynne Tatlock in her introduction to the English translation of *Aus guter Familie*, the tragic outcome of the novel is the consequence of what "good girls' might suffer as a result of their conforming" (xxiii). Calling the young protagonist "an ordinary young woman," Tatlock further emphasizes the importance of socialization, gender and class to the tragic outcome of Agathe's struggles (xxxii).

Although socialization and class are not the main focus of inquiry in this thesis, these aspects of the female protagonist's character should not go unnoticed. To understand better the importance of socialization in *Aus guter Familie* and the ways in which it affects the process of subject formation in Agathe, it is helpful to look more closely at the relationship between the role

of the father and language as discussed by Jacques Lacan in his *Seminar III: The Psychosis, 1955-1956*. In *A Compendium of Lacanian Terms*, Leonardo S. Rodriguez points to the central position of the father in Lacan's early work: "he [Lacan] linked contemporary forms of neurosis, and the social conditions that made possible the very emergence of psychoanalysis, to the problematic position of the father in our culture" (119). According to Rodriguez, in Lacan's conception of the paternal function, "the father operates as a signifier, that is, in the name of a symbolic ideal position; and he also represents the law and its prohibition" (120). This "in the name of a symbolic ideal position" primarily inhabited by the father is referred to by Lacan as the-Name-of-the-Father. Russell Grigg, author of *Lacan, Language and Philosophy* and translator of Lacan's seminar XII on psychosis, refers to the father's symbolic ideal position as a "pure signifier [which] situates the the Name-of-the-Father in 'prehistory'" (30). The term "pure" refers to the fact that there is no representation correlative to the signifier, positioning the Name-of-the-Father at the very beginning of the symbolic order, and thus language, as one of its fundamental and structuring principals.

The primary function of the father in matters concerned with socialization does not preclude the mother from playing an important role in the child's early childhood as well as adult life. As noted by Grigg, "One needs to consider the place that the mother, as the first object of the child's desire, gives to the authority of the father" (18). By charging other people with the responsibility for preparing her daughter for life as a bourgeois woman, Mrs. Heidling has no or very little control over Agathe's coming into her own as a woman. The mother distances herself from her daughter, and individuals outside of the family, mainly some of the girls at the boarding school Agathe attends, assume the role of the mother, thus causing emotional detachment between mother and daughter, and ultimately transference and homoerotic desire on Agathe's

part. The detachment in turn makes Agathe vulnerable not only to the influence of girls her own age but especially to the authority of her father.

In his seminar on psychosis, Lacan introduces the concept of the Name-of-the-Father as a strategic move in his opposition to what he considers to be over-emphasis of the exclusive relationship of the individual and his/her mother in the Oedipus complex. Lacan emphasizes instead the importance of the third party in the Oedipus complex – what he calls “the place that she [the mother] reserves for the Name-of-the-Father in the promulgation of the law” (*Ecrits* 218). Lacan sees the internalization of the Name-of-the-Father as a vital element for helping each new member of the human race to move from an exclusive, primary relation to the mother to a wider engagement with the outside, material and cultural world, also referred to as the symbolic order.

Traditionally, and especially at the time in which Reuter was writing, the father is the family member primarily responsible for the transition from home to society. As head of the household and the main guardian, the father has responsibilities including all affairs and contact with the domain outside the home, while the mother is primarily responsible for the domestic order, of which caring for the children when they are young numbers among the main responsibilities. While instructing boys and girls respectively in what is considered good behavior and social conduct is part of the mother’s responsibility, teaching and training the young to prepare them for conventional life as adults is ultimately the duty of the father. His law overrides the authority of the mother. As the head of the household and the family, the father--both as authority and symbolic figure--inhabits a subject-position of power and influence, both over the woman as wife and mother and the children as inheritors of the law laid down by him.

In other words, the father is the ultimate referent or signifier, demanding symbolic recognition as the representative and upholder of the social order.

To develop and inhabit one's own subject position, the child needs to transition from the sphere of the home and the parents to the social order of the world. For Lacan, this bigger context could be seen as "the chain of discourse . . . in which an entire family, an entire coterie, an entire camp, an entire nation or half the world will be caught" (*Ecrit* 89-90). The internalization of the Name-of-the-Father with the passing of the Oedipus complex ensures, for Lacan, participation in that wider chain of discourse. The power or influence of the actual father is thus replaced by the symbolic father. The symbolic father is not an actual subject but a position in the symbolic order, allowing for the substitution of the mother's desire. He imposes the law that regulates desire in the Oedipus complex, intervening in the imaginary dual relationship between mother and child to introduce a necessary symbolic distance between them. In the words of Rodriguez, "[A]s a result of this operation the subject ceases to be the phallus of the mother, while for the mother it is no longer possible to have the child as her phallus" (120).

Psychosis for Lacan is the exact opposite of the Name-of-the-Father--the absence of the identification with the symbolic order that ensures our place in the world. In Lacan's understanding, psychotics have not been properly separated from their mother by the fixed Name-of-the-Father, hence they relate differently to speech and language from mere neurotics. In the opening remarks to Lacan's seminar on psychosis, John Forrester refers to the psychotic's relationship to language as "a specific but emblematic case of language entrapment". Entrapment here refers to the subject who "is ignorant of the language he speaks" (*Seminar III* 12). Unlike cases of neurosis, in which the return of the repressed is structured like a language of symptoms

that are cured through talking, psychosis appears when “whatever is refused in the symbolic order, in the sense of *Verwerfung*, reappears in the real” (*Seminar III* 13).

Verwerfung is the very mechanism that distinguishes psychosis from neurosis. The concept stems from Freud, and it was developed by Lacan, who exchanged *Verwerfung* for the term foreclosure. Dominique Hecq offers the following definition of the Lacanian term foreclosure:

While repression can be conceived as a bracketing of an experience that is structured, and which is likely to return to consciousness, foreclosure radically crosses out what it rejects because the psychotic has neither access to symbolization, nor to the judgment required for this experience to be inscribed in the symbolic. Thus, foreclosure designates a process of ‘symbolic abolition’ which precedes any possibility of repression. This, of course, has disastrous consequences for the subject’s relations with language and with his or her own body. (71)

In the case of psychosis we are dealing with individuals where the Name-of-the-Father has been excluded from the symbolic; however, the absence of the signifier does not prevent the symbolic from functioning altogether. In his seminar on psychosis Lacan frequently refers to the writings of Daniel Schreber. Schreber was diagnosed with psychosis and throughout his life treated in various clinics, yet there are few written reports on the development of his illness by the numerous doctors who attended to him. Instead, there is a volume of about 500 pages produced by the patient himself, in which he talks about the different stages of his illness.

As evidenced by Schreber’s productivity, he was very much situated within the symbolic. But, as pointed out by Grigg, “the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father is accompanied by the corresponding absence, foreclosure, of the phallic meaning that is necessary for libidinal relations. Without this phallic meaning the subject is left prey to ... the mother’s unregulated

desire, confronted by an obscure enigma at the level of the Other's jouissance that the subject lacks the means to comprehend" (9-10).

The inability to comprehend the Other's jouissance causes serious problems for subject formation, especially since the Other's jouissance does not vanish with foreclosure. It returns, but unlike the return of the repressed, it returns from outside the object, "as emanating from the real," which is not the same as reality (Grigg 10). That which has been foreclosed does not exist in the symbolic order, leading the psychotic subject to believe that the return of the real emanates from his environment and not from within himself--thus the use of the term real. At the center of human subjectivity, the ego defends and wards off overpowering or life-threatening impulses from the unconscious by means of signification, whereby the connection between self and the outer world remains intact. In the psychotic subject, however, the ego is not strong enough to "establish points of attachment in the external milieu in order to exercise its defense against the drives in the id" (*Seminar III* 105). The result is disintegration of the self and a sense of disembodiment, giving rise to delusion, and ultimately, hallucinations and verbal assaults.

In dealing with psychotic patients, where what has been foreclosed finds no ways of expression through repression, the treatment advised by Lacan is the analysis of verbal hallucinations: "It's the register of speech that creates all the richness of the phenomenology of psychosis, it's here that we see all its aspects, decompositions, refractions. Verbal hallucination, which is fundamental to it, is precisely one of speech's most problematic phenomenon" (*Seminar III* 36). In his analysis of the function of hallucinations and verbal assaults in psychosis, Lacan makes use of Schreber's memoirs, *Denkwürdigkeiten eines Nervenkranken*. Schreber had been read and discussed by Freud before him, and Lacan, in his reading of Schreiber, assigns the same significance to the patient's written statements as if he had been physically present to give an

account of his illness. Thus, Lacan, in reading Schreber, does not restrict himself to speech; rather he understands verbal hallucinations as both speech and writing.

In analyzing Schreber's writing, Lacan makes a point about the frequency of coarse language, especially in the patient's relationship to God. Schreber states as a matter of fact that God is speaking to him through the rays of sunlight, and he is convinced that he can feel the presence of souls bringing life to him. To Schreber, the presence of the souls encapsulated in the light is more real than any of the nurses or doctors attending to him. However, his relationship to God is ambivalent. As the guarantor of the order of the hallucinatory world that Schreber has created for himself, God is the ultimate signifier. To write him (down), i.e., to try to capture his essence in words, thereby turning representation into the very object it represents, could potentially, in the words of Lacan, reduce "this fantasmagoria . . . to a unity which doesn't annihilate his existence, but God's, which is essentially language" (*Seminar III* 100). Fear of annihilation, which would cause the psychotic to be lost in his hallucinatory fantasies forever, is in turn the reason behind the coarse language in the written projections of God: "Insults are very frequent in the divine partner's relations with Schreber, as in an erotic relationship that one initially refuses to take part in and resists. This is the other face, the counterpart, of the imaginary world. The annihilating insult is a culminating point, it is one of the peaks of the speech act" (*Seminar III* 100).

In the many verbal exchanges between Schreber and God "the ego-ideal has taken the place of the Other' – resulting in a partial delusion" (Sarah Murphy 166). In this delusional state, Schreber is no longer speaking from the position occupied by the ego, but by the Name-of-the-

Father. As illustrated by Lacan in his Schema L², in exchanges between a subject and his others, the subject never speaks from the position of Es, or S, which Murphy refers to as the “subject in its opening up” (162). Rather, the subject sees himself speaking from the position of the ego, which is an imaginary construct. The ego holds an essential place in the life of the subject in the constitution of objects, including the specular other, “that ‘fellow being’ who has a very close relation to the ego and can be superimposed on it” (Murphy 162). The specular other is an imaginary construct and thus not the same as the Other, who is a “true” subject and as such unattainable to the one speaking: “It is these . . . I seek to address every time I speak, but ‘the subject is separated from the Others, the true ones, by the wall of language’” (Murphy 162).

In psychosis, the ego shifts its position as the other of the specular relationship to hold the place of the Name-of-the-Father. Consequently, the subject speaks from two positions; sometimes as the Father and sometimes as the subject. The use of coarse language serves to help the subject escape annihilation through consumption by the Father. As an act that could potentially unite or bring together subject and object, self and Other, the psychotic subject has to evade and resist being drawn in or consumed by the Other. To uphold the distinction between self and the imaginary Other the psychotic subject has to maintain a disbelief or rejection of that which he does not have the means to comprehend or talk about due to the lack of the Name-of-the-Father. Verbal hallucinations and insults serve in this sense as a form of defense mechanism, warding off threats posed by the real.

² Schema L allows for many possible readings; however, the main point of the schema is to illustrate that the symbolic relation between the subject and the Other is always blocked to a certain extent by the imaginary axis between the ego and the specular image. The discourse of the Other has to pass through the imaginary wall of language, and in effect it reaches the subject in an interrupted and inverted form. Thus, the schema demonstrates the opposition between the imaginary and the symbolic which is fundamental to Lacan’s conception of psychoanalysis.

In the same manner, but in reversed order, language as a threat imposes itself on the subject in that it must be articulated by him. When the Other is presented as the ultimate sign or referent with its own essence or nature in the world of the psychotic, the act of speaking or writing can potentially put an end to the Other and thereby to language itself. Lacan addresses the significance of withholding or “leaving the sense in suspense” noticeable in Schreber’s writing, particularly in sentences left unfinished and interrupted in the middle, leaving the subject and the Other in suspension: “It is at all times necessary to produce diversionary phenomena so that God is not absorbed back into the central existence of the subject. This isn’t self-evident but well illustrates the creator’s relationship to what he creates. The withdrawal of his function and his essence effectively allows the corresponding nothing that is his lining to appear” (*Seminar III* 100-101). By means of non-articulation and a refusal on the part of the psychotic subject to deliver the Other in words, through language, the Other’s threatening and all-encompassing existence is nullified and exposed as nothing, as emptiness. The threat posed by the Other is thereby not only evaded by the subject, but the subject takes control over the creation, establishing a form or sense of ownership by means of censorship, thus annihilating, if only temporarily, the existence of the Other.

In Agathe’s case, the threat posed by the real, which the protagonist finds no way of integrating into the symbolic order, involves physical and erotic intimacy. The anguish associated with sex is partly the result of a number of traumatic incidents in the life of the protagonist but also due to the overbearing presence of her father. In Grigg’s account, to understand the importance of the father for the onset of psychosis “one needs to consider the father’s relation to the law in itself. This leads him [Lacan] to remark that psychosis occurs with

‘particular frequency’ when the father ‘functions as a legislator,’ whether as one who actually makes the laws or as one who poses as the incarnation of high ideals” (18).

As the head of the household, Agathe’s father has the final say in all decisions concerning his daughter, and he exerts his will to such an extent that he – not the mother or Agathe - decides what books she is allowed to read, what clothes she will wear, what people she will see and with whom she will be seen. He sets high ideals in all that concerns his daughter, and in the father’s eyes humility and modesty are especially womanly virtues. Eager to please her father and not cause any turmoil or inconvenience, Agathe makes it her duty to fulfill all of his wishes.

The initial incident that may be viewed as *the* traumatic event that causes foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father, leaving the protagonist without the signifier necessary to symbolize or talk about certain experiences, takes place at an early age. It concerns sexual reproduction and the question “Where do babies come from?” Agathe learns from her friend and future sister-in-law, Eugenie Wutrow, that babies are the result of sexual intercourse between man and woman. In order to verify the information, Agathe turns to her mother, who informs her daughter that babies are brought by God’s angels. Agathe shares these new facts with Eugenie, who responds: “Ach, Deine Mama .. Mütter lügen einem immer was vor!” (15). Agathe is devastated at the idea that her mother would lie to her, and with horror she listens to Eugenie’s account of human reproduction: “Was Eugenie ihr sonst noch erzählte hatte – nein, das war ganz abscheulich. Pfui – pfui – ganz greulich. Nein, das konnte gar nicht wahr sein. Aber – wenn es doch wahr wäre? Und ihre Mama und ihr Papa ... Sie schämte sich tot” (15). That same night, when her mother comes to her bed to kiss her goodnight, Agathe turns away from her: “Nein – sie konnte ihre Mama niemals – niemals wieder nach so etwas fragen” (15).

At the heart of the conversation between Agathe and Eugenie is an impossibility that is constitutive of the real according to Lacan: the impossibility of any sexual relationship between man and woman. The entrance into language represents a break from any sense of materiality in and of itself, situating the Other behind “the wall of language.” Thus the body cannot appear in language; it can only be represented by it. This impossibility stems from the fact that the signifier stands in for the body of the Other, making it impossible for any kind of unmediated relationship or dialogue to take place between the subject and the Other. Or, as Ellie Ragland-Sullivan in referencing Jacques-Alain Miller puts it, “the referent of all language, or creation itself, is the vacuousness of language, the void” (50).

Despite the futility of language ever being the thing it represents, and thus truly capturing or embodying the objects it refers to, language serves to create surplus value, or *jouissance*. The *jouissance* stems from the desire associated with attempting to express or capture the unspeakable, i.e., that which is at the very heart of the void of language. Ragland-Sullivan refers to the emptiness around which language is structured as “the impossible kernel that cannot be spoken, but which, nonetheless, evokes desire around which fantasies are elaborated” (48). In Lacanian terminology, “the impossible kernel that cannot be spoken” is object *a*.

In *Televison*, Lacan offers the following definition of *object a*: “The object *petit a* is what falls from the subject in anxiety. It is precisely the same object that I delineated as the cause of desire” (82). He lists a number of forms that the object *petit a* may assume: the oral object, the anal object, the specular image - *i (a)* -, and the voice. As the fallen object of the Other, object *petit a* represents separation, and its function in fantasy is to fill in or compensate for the void caused by loss: “There [in fantasy] it [object *petit a*] takes on its influence as support of desire, in so far as desire is the most intense of what the subject can attain in his realization as subject at

the level of consciousness. It is by way of that chain that, once again, the dependencies of desire in relation to the desire of the Other are affirmed” (82-83).

Lacan cautions his listeners not to confuse the Other with the subject “who speaks from the place of the Other, even if through its voice” (88). What comes before the Other, and ultimately before desire, is the mythical father understood as an animal. He precedes the law and its prohibition, kinship and marriage. He is the leader of a hoard, whose satisfaction “knows no bounds” (88). According to Lacan, this primordial father’s desire is the structuring principle of the subject’s desire, and ultimately language, but not in terms of “erotic bliss” demanding satisfaction but as a signifier standing in for his desire: “in a strictly literal interpretation of the letter” (89). The gap between God’s erotic bliss and its fulfillment is ultimately the objet petit *a*, or the thing fallen from the Other.

Slavoj Žižek refers to the objet petit *a* as the sublime object: “the impassive, imaginary objectification of the real” (185). As formulated by Žižek, the sublime object is situated at the intersection between the real and the imaginary, and it carries certain meanings invested in it by the subject. Take as an example a breast, which is a body part and as such a part of the real, but also an imaginary construct associated with nurturing, feeding, care, sex etc. Further, it is an object of desire that is represented or signified in and through language, and in effect, always unattainable. The unattainability of the object serves to draw the subject in, and it creates a surplus of pleasure, or *jouissance*. This pleasure is both negative and positive in nature, thereby adding suffering to pleasure, and pain to joy. Why that is the case is discussed in more detail in chapter 2. For our discussion on the impossibility of sexual relations between man and woman according to Lacan, it suffices to know that as a result of its position between the real and the

imaginary, the sublime object is situated on the threshold of language, close to the very center of the void.

At the center of the void is that which cannot be truly captured or represented by language. In their exchange concerning human reproduction, Agathe and Eugenie move to the very heart of this complexity according to Lacan. Unlike Eugenie, who shows a fascination for the topic of sex and a desire to talk about it, Agathe rejects the story told by her friend. She refuses to accept the fact that children are born as the result of sexual relations between man and woman. The mere thought of it upsets Agathe to such an extent that she cannot bring herself to talk about these matters with her mother. Consequently, sexual intimacy remains a contradiction and mystery to Agathe.

At this point in her young life, the role played by the actual father in matters concerned with sexual reproduction is beyond Agathe's comprehension. However, even though a child, Agathe recognizes that as the upholder of the law and its prohibition, the father is in a position of power and influence over the mother. Thus, any desire or jouissance originating from the Other must be regulated by him. As a result of her disbelief in the disclosure offered by Eugenie concerning sexual reproduction, Agathe remains disapproving in any matters concerned with physical and erotic intimacy. She simply refuses to accept the fact that eroticism is a part of gender relations. Eventually, Agathe's deep-seated disbelief that often turns into disgust at the mere thought of physical contact, causes foreclosure on the part of the protagonist. In Lacanian terms, what follows upon the exchange between Eugenie and Agathe is a rejection of the fundamental signifier – the Name-of-the-Father – that regulates jouissance and attaches the phallic image to the symbolic father. As an effect of foreclosure the main protagonist manages to maintain her disregard for any matters involving physical intimacy and thus to keep threats posed

by the real at a distance. Consequently, she fails to incorporate the body, and ultimately the real, into the symbolic order, and the older she grows, the more difficult Agathe finds it to talk about or express any thoughts, ideas, or desires concerned with erotic matters.

In regard to gender relations, the sexual double standard of Wilhelminian Germany is perceived by the protagonist as especially incomprehensible and abhorrent, and thus she rejects it. In a society, in which more sexual freedom is given to men than to women, marriage serves to maintain this double standard. The sexual double standard represents chastity as a specifically female virtue, reserving explorations of female sexuality to the confinements of the home and in the service of childbirth. In her search for a suitable husband, Agathe is not merely concerned with finding a match appropriate to her social standing, but mutual love and respect as well. Due to her more idealistic understanding of marriage, she finds it difficult to reconcile with a view of marital relations as a mere business transaction concerned with maintaining the status quo of certain privileged classes and groups of people.

Eventually, the sexual double standard and her inability to comprehend the Other's jouissance, cause Agathe to withdraw into an imaginary world of sublimation. Although sublimation in itself does not pose a threat to subject formation, in Agathe's case the double threat of sublimation in combination with foreclosure causes regression, encapsulating her in an imaginary world of her own making. Eventually, due to her weakly developed ego, the idea of physical intimacy elicits so much fear in Agathe that she is unable to overcome herself and establish any references in the actual, physical world.

The fear resulting from the inability to understand the Other's jouissance, and ultimately appear as the object of someone else's libido, is not only the consequence of foreclosure. A

review of the protagonist's childhood and young adulthood reveals a number of incidents in which male sexuality is represented as aggressive and oppressive of women. One such incident occurs when Agathe witnesses her brother Walter's treatment of a servant named Wiesing. Wiesing is sexually molested by Walter. She approaches Agathe for help. Agathe is outraged, but concerned to keep her parents from finding out, she orders new bolts for the maid's door in order to keep her brother out. When installing the bolts Agathe catches a glimpse of the servant's room:

Wiesing hatte das Fenster in dem engen Raum seit dem Morgen noch nicht geöffnet, es war eine abscheuliche dumpfe Luft darin. Schmutziges Wasser stand in der Schüssel, ausgekämmtes Haar und allerlei armseliger Plunder lag auf dem Boden herum. Und Walter – ihr peinlich sauberer, eleganter Bruder, in seiner glänzenden Uniform war hier gewesen . . . wie war es nur möglich? Es schüttelte sie ein Grauen, ein Ekel. (52)

Agathe finds the atmosphere of the servant's room with its bad smell, filth, and disorder disgusting, and she cannot envisage physical contact of any kind taking place in a room of this kind. Especially the notion of filth seems to upset the protagonist. To think that her brother, an orderly member of the bourgeoisie, would consort with a woman of a lower class -- and thereby use force and violence -- represents a breach of conduct so abhorrent that it sickens the protagonist. Through his contact with the maid and due to the nature of their interaction, in Agathe's eyes the brother now appears contaminated by the maid and the filth symbolized by her disorderly room. Agathe confronts the brother and is further appalled and discouraged by his reactions. The brother, who exhibits nothing but anger and resentment, orders his sister to stay out of his business. When she challenges him on the matter of his impending marriage and the "ehrlos" nature of his behavior, Walter threatens to strike Agathe (53). She bursts into tears, and the discussion is thereby curtailed. Traumatized by the incident, Agathe distances herself from

the female servant from this day on: “Es war für sie etwas Gemeinsames an dem Mädchen haften geblieben” (53).

After the confrontation with Walter, Agathe does not bring up the incident again. The issue is, however, not resolved for the protagonist by avoiding the topic. The revelation of the incident in the maid’s room causes estrangement between brother and sister: “Auch wenn sie Wiesing ansah, empfand sie eine heftige Abneigung gegen das Mädchen, durch welches sie ihren Bruder verloren hatte” (52). Interesting in the protagonist’s reaction in the moment of disclosure is her need to protect her brother by projecting all of her aversion and repulsion onto Wiesing. One could read Agathe’s attitude as a defense mechanism. As a family member, Agathe interacts with Walter regularly and consequently she has to find strategies in order to socialize with the brother.

In order to maintain the relationship between the parents’ household, of which she is a part, and Walter and his family, the protagonist takes it upon herself to keep her parents from finding out. In order to hide a secret of this magnitude, Agathe retreats to the imaginary. By turning the maid into an abject object associated with filth and pollution, she avoids the threat posed by Wiesing. Hence, Wiesing becomes the Other in negative terms. Not only does Agathe fail to identify with her; the maid also represents the real in that she embodies all that Agathe finds repulsive about physical intimacy.

Attempting to restore order by integrating the incident into the symbolic order, the protagonist turns to her brother. As a man and family father, he inhabits the position of the symbolic father, and thus of social order. To Agathe’s amazement, however, Walter’s reaction does not reflect her understanding of socially accepted behavior. Further, he shuts down the

conversation in a manner so violent that the protagonist is forced to repress the incident. In effect, there is a break of communication, forcing the fearful event out of the realm of the symbolic, thereby rendering it incomprehensible and without meaning. The efforts to forget about the sexual assault are further supported by the mother's decision to fire Wiesing as a consequence of her becoming pregnant with another man's baby. Agathe is relieved. Now the threat posed by Wiesing as a symbolic return of the real is eradicated and order -- represented by the symbolic father as a guarantor of stability and orderly conduct -- is restored.

It is not until several years later that Agathe reconsiders the implications of Walter's treatment of Wiesing. An old woman comes to the house with a letter addressed to Agathe. It is from Wiesing. She has recently lost her baby and due to complications related to labor she is dying. In the letter Wiesing asks Agathe to provide her with the money to pay for the baby's coffin. Agathe rushes to aid the dying woman, but unable to save the former maid she is devastated by the other's death: "Und sie und ihre Mutter waren schuldig. Ja – ja – ja – sie waren schuldig" (142).

Upon returning to the house, Agathe informs the mother of Wiesing's death. The old woman reacts in a cold and distanced manner: "Ja – diese Frauenzimmer – sie taugen alle nichts – sie sind zu unserer Qual erschaffen" (142). Agathe cannot understand how her mother, who is otherwise such a compassionate woman, can be so cold. Puzzled by her mother's reaction, Agathe remembers a comment once uttered by her cousin: "Ein hartes Urteil fiel ihr ein, das Martin Greffinger einmal über die Frauen der Bourgeoisie gefällt hatte – über ihre verknöcherte Engherzigkeit. Aber der war doch Sozialdemokrat oder irgend so etwas Ähnliches. Er durfte nicht Recht behalten! Er durfte nicht!" (143). Agathe is unwilling to consider the plausibility of class difference as the reason behind the old woman's dismissal of Wiesing's misfortunes.

Instead, she dismisses Martin's opinion as the result of political confusion. As a social democrat, he has left his social milieu and upbringing behind; an act that at this point in the story is unimaginable to Agathe.

The protagonist's inability to confront her mother is an indication of, in my reading, the lack of emotional attachment between mother and daughter, caused by their separation at a point of sexual awakening in Agathe's childhood. A woman who has borne many children, the majority of which died as infants, the mother is weakened by sorrow. Overwhelmed by her responsibility for her daughter's education in domestic duties, she decides to send Agathe to a boarding school as a young woman. The mother sets for herself ideals of femininity modeled on notions of "Bescheidenheit," which Agathe's father very much favors, and she finds the burning intensity of her young daughter to be an assault on her very being, causing her nerves to suffer (19). When she asked her acquaintances for advice, they all recommended that she send Agathe to "die Pension": "Überall riet man ihr 'die Pension'. Sie sah also, daß das Übel, welches sie quälte, ein weitverbreitetes war, und das beruhigte sie vollständig" (19).

As a consequence of her decision to charge others with the responsibility for her daughter's education, the mother has little or no influence on what happens at the boarding school. With formal classroom training only constituting one part of Agathe's socialization, the other young women at the boarding school serve as a major source of support and personal growth in all matters concerned with the life of a bourgeois woman. Old friendships are renewed again, and new ones forged, but none is as influential for Agathe as her reconnection with her former childhood friend, Eugenie Wutrow.

Eugenie is sexually precocious, and she has been sent to the boarding school by her parents after an incident with one of her father's employees. Agathe, who is attracted yet intimidated by the "sexual" nature of her friend, shares moments of physical and emotional intimacy with Eugenie. In one of these moments, Eugenie confides in Agathe about the reason behind her residence at the boarding school, and overcome by passion she kisses Agathe. That same night Agathe awakes from her sleep suffused with an intense and sudden feeling of desire: "Plötzlich, nach kurzer Zeit, kam sie wieder zur Besinnung, geweckt von einem großen brennenden Sehnsuchtsgefühl, welches ihr ganz fremd, ganz neu und schreckenerregend und doch entzückend wonnig war, so daß sie sich ihm einen Augenblick völlig hingab" (23). In this instance Agathe utters the name "Mani", her cousin, with whom she had been spent a few weeks in the summer at the home of mutual relatives (23). Agathe is overwhelmed and confused by her feelings, and she immediately folds her hands in prayer in order to forget all about the incident.

During her stay at the boarding school, Agathe develops an attachment to Eugenie with clear homoerotic tendencies. But, rather than constituting the object of Agathe's desire, Eugenie may also function as a stand-in or substitute for what is missing in the symbolic order, in which case the homoerotic desire experienced by Agathe may be read as a precursor of psychosis. Lacan, as explained by Russell Grigg in *A Compendium of Lacanian Terms*, uses the analogy of a three-legged stool to clarify the function of a stand-in, or substitute, in psychosis. With the help of the stand-in, the psychotic subject avoids having to confront the lack constitutive of the missing signifier, in Lacan's analogy represented by the missing leg. Rather, the subject remains stable until the day of the return of the real, which marks the onset of psychosis. In effect, the psychotic subject can go undiagnosed for a long time; in some cases an entire lifetime. Schreber,

for instance, held a position as a judge for many years, until the outbreak of psychosis in his early fifties.

By transferring her desire onto Eugenie, Agathe avoids having to confront the absence of the Name-of-the-Father. It allows her to remain dismissive of sharing any thoughts or desires concerned with romantic and/or sexual desire with the other girls. Soon Agathe is accused by her fellow boarding school friends of being a prude who sticks her nose in the air as soon as the subject of sex comes up, and she is kept from reading the books that the girls circulate among themselves. Sent by a family member to one of the girls, these books are of kind considered by most adults inappropriate for young women to read. Agathe, who suspects they deal with notions of romance, is both happy and disappointed not to be part of the other girls' discussions.

Bourgeoning sexuality and Christian morals were not explicitly addressed as conflicting with each other in the education of young women from better families. Agathe, however, recognizes that her belief in the one and only love, supported by her Christian background, prevents her from sharing the other girls' excitement over sexual and romantic explorations. Even though encouraged by Dr. Engelbert, instructor of religious studies at the boarding school, to consider the possibility of Jesus as a man of flesh and blood and the legitimate son of Mary and Joseph, Agathe cannot and will not give up her faith in the divine nature of Jesus. By staying a virgin both in body and spirit and thereby honoring her faith in the Christian Trinity, she hopes to remain worthy of the love of her future husband: "Sie wollte auch immer streng und abwesend bleiben – bis – ja bis Er kommen würde, der Herrlichste von allen! Visionen weißer Schleierwolken und brennender Altarkerzen schwebten durch ihre Phantasie" (28).

Notice here the reference to the one and only love as “Er” spelled with upper case “e.” It is in fact not unusual to capitalize the first letter of the third person singular when referring to an unknown, imaginary man who is the object of romantic ideals and desires, yet if we replace “Er” with “Gott,” the significance of Agathe’s statement changes drastically.

Given the reference Agathe makes in the opening scene of the novel, in which she compares God to a father figure as well as a divine bridegroom, one could assume that Agathe envisions marriage a relationship based on devotion as well as obedience according to strict rules formulated by the husband. In this sense, Agathe does not seem to differ significantly from the other young women at the boarding school. Yet, while the significance of purity and virginity in spiritual as well as erotic matters concerning women’s sexuality does not prevent some young women from exploring, or at least fantasizing about, the implications of their awakening romantic and sexual desires, Agathe remains disapproving. She makes repeated attempts throughout her stay at the boarding school, and later when introduced to men, to sublimate the notion of sexual desire. Unable to overcome her fear of physical intimacy, she retreats to an imaginary world inhabited first by the poet Lord Byron and later by an artist named Herr von Lutz.

In Lord Byron Agathe identifies an object of her desire. While at an art exhibit with her father, Agathe stops in front of a painting of the famous poet. Mesmerized by his beauty, Agathe returns to the exhibition again the following day to catch a glimpse of the poet: “Das Mädchen schlich zu ihm, wie zu einem verbotenen Genuß, sie berauschte sich an der Sehnsucht, die nun ein Ziel gefunden hatte, bei dem sie doch immer Sehnsucht bleiben konnte” (46). Telling in Agathe’s fascination with Lord Byron with respect to her problematic relationship to sexual intimacy is that her desire is described in terms of “forbidden pleasure” that remains imaginary.

When faced with an object upon which she can project her desire safely, Agathe retreats into a world of fantasies and imagination in which “die natürliche Beziehung der Geschlechter zu einander erschien in einer wilden Gewitterstimmung, durch die ihr dann doch alles wieder den Eindruck eines phantastischen Märchens machte” (46).

Initially, as a young woman, Agathe finds support for her romantic and sexual desire in fantasy by means of sublimation. In order to make sexual intercourse less threatening, Agathe creates an imaginary Other, out of reach. The more intense her desire and passion for Lord Byron grows, the more she distances herself from the people and events around her, showing nothing but vague interest in what is going on in the world outside her imagination. In her infatuation with her imaginary lover, her feelings remain of a platonic nature, that is, her attachment is of such kind that it excludes the idea of physical intimacy. In Agathe’s imagination, the sublimation of sexual desire into romantic notions of renunciation functions as a form of atonement, and it serves to impassion and animate the beloved one: “Durch unerhörte Entsagung entsühnte sie den Geliebten – und der weinte zu ihren Füßen und seine Augen waren wie lodernde Flammen.....” (47).

Unlike men such as her brother, Lord Byron, as imagined by Agathe, is in control of his desire. To pay respect to the sacrifice made by Agathe, he restrains his passions so as not to violate the terms of decency and honor so important to bourgeois notions of female sexuality. More importantly, Lord Byron is a man who appreciates and honors the female subject as an individual in her own right. By not forcing himself upon her (as did her brother with the maid), he shows not only restraint but also respect for the will of the other. Ultimately, foregoing sex seems to stir up greater passion in Agathe’s imaginary lover, whereby physical intimacy as an act imagined and controlled by the protagonist is eluded, yet permitted.

Hence, Agathe experiences a sort of pleasure in abstinence that stems from controlling while charging the object of her desire with all of her want and longing. However, the portrayal of Lord Byron as a man of honor and passion is the result of his status as a figment of Agathe's imagination. We recall that Agathe encounters him as a painting hanging in the museum. In other words, he is a dead subject that cannot look back at Agathe, thus allowing her to gaze and roam freely in her imagination.

How then is the notion of love as imaginary related to language and the Name-of-the-Father? As mentioned before, Agathe's behavior is characterized by conformity. When told on the day of her Communion that the book she receives from her cousin Martin needs to be exchanged for another book, Agathe submits to the will of her father. A few years later, finding her way into her father's library and there discovering books that her father disapproves of her reading, Agathe quietly resigns herself to being kept from the books she desires. And when informed that her dowry is gone, and the first – and the last – of her suitors – a man named Raikendorf – leaves, Agathe crumbles inside, but still there is no rebellion on her part. In all that happens to her she remains sensible and pleasing in her resolve to remain self-sacrificing and obedient and thus to fulfill the ideal imposed upon her at her Confirmation.

But, in order to deal with the expectations of her social milieu, Agathe retreats into an imaginary world of her own creation. Again, I want to emphasize that this imaginary world is not initially a delusional one, but offers the female protagonist respite and comfort. And it is in this context that imagination as a creative act grants the protagonist a certain level of agency. While some readers may not consider her imaginings enough of a break with the expectations set by her family, the power or will to be her own person is nevertheless a driving force in Agathe's efforts to formulate ideas and visions of her liking. Unfortunately, for the female character, her

imaginative powers are not supported by an equal transition or translation into symbolic power. Without a language to express her ideas and desires and with no financial means to support herself, she remains dependent on her family, and ultimately her father. More importantly, however, the respite offered by the imaginary vanishes.

After Agathe's family fails to provide the necessary dowry for her to marry Raikendorf, Agathe is given the responsibility of caring for her sick mother. When the old woman dies, the protagonist officially takes over the household duties she had performed during her mother's illness. Fatigued and on the verge of nervous exhaustion, Agathe accompanies her father on a trip to Switzerland, where she meets Martin again. In the subsequent encounter between her and Martin, the relationship between foreclosure, language, and psychosis is made explicit.

During their stay in Switzerland, Martin and Agathe are engaged in many long discussions about the future. Martin encourages Agathe to move to Zürich, where she could get her own room and a suitable occupation, working either for Martin or, if she would rather, for another employer. No obligations, bonds, or attachments; just Agathe leading her own life, supported in spirit by Martin. Agathe realizes that the fears she previously harbored regarding her cousin were unjustified. In Martin, once a rebellious and passionate soul with non-bourgeois ideas of freedom and justice, she now sees a man of conviction and success:

Nur ein freier Mensch war er geworden. Weiter nichts. Und was das heißen wollte – ein freier Mensch. Welche Kluft zwischen einer ganz auf sich gestellten Persönlichkeit, die nach eigenem Gesetz und eigener Wahl das eigene Leben führt, und den Kreisen ihrer Gesellschaft! An solchem Maß gemessen – besaß jede That, jeder Gedanke ihres Daseins überhaupt noch Wert? Das ahnte sie nun erst. Es war ein schauerndes Aufwachen mit ungeduldigem Flügelschlagen ihrer Seele. (168)

Despite her desire to break free and live life according to her own liking, the suggestion to abandon her father horrifies Agathe. She looks in vain for emotional support from Martin, who

remains unresponsive and detached. Terrified people will consider her a “fallen woman” if she follows her desire, a part of her still wishes Martin would show some level or degree of tenderness, not excluding the possibility of a future marital arrangement more in accordance with the expectations of the bourgeoisie. A few days later, however, the crushing of her secret wish causes Agathe to suffer a nervous breakdown. The incident leading up to the onset of psychosis centers on Agathe’s deep-seated fear of physical intimacy.

Martin is flirting with a young waitress. Minutes before another male customer had flirted with the same waitress, and Agathe had found his actions repugnant. Now she sees the same behavior in the man she respects so highly: “Die halbgeschlossenen, blinzelnden Lider, aus denen ein grünliches Licht nach dem Mädchen drüben züngelte. . . . Das Lächeln um die Lippen – sie sprachen kein Wort – sie lockten und baten doch” (175). Without uttering a word, she stands up and walks away.

Later that night, Martin takes Agathe for a walk to discuss the incident. He makes it clear to her what the nature of their friendship is and that in the future he will not accept any jealousy or childish behavior on her part: “Für so klein und sentimental und weiblich eitel, wie sie sich heut gezeigt, habe er sie nicht gehalten. Er wollte sie für die Freiheit gewinnen. Aber er werde sich nicht unter die Tyrannei eines prüden und thörichten Frauenzimmers beugen” (178). He asks for an explanation and the first words that come to Agathe’s mind are “Weil ich Dich liebe!” schrie sie ihn gellend an. Sie wußte ihm in dem Augenblick keine größere Beleidigung entgegenzuschleudern” (179). Agathe exhibits the first sign of psychosis immediately thereafter. Running off in tears, she gets lost temporarily, when all of a sudden she hears loud laughter. It takes her some time to realize that the laughter stems from her, and shocked to hear such sounds

coming out of her mouth, Agathe summons her remaining strength and walks back to the hotel, where she locks herself in her room.

As Grigg points out in *Lacan, Language, and Philosophy*, Lacan argues that the onset of psychosis is triggered by a certain kind of encounter, in which “the Name-of-the-Father is ‘summoned to that place [the Other] in symbolic opposition to the subject’” (14). The symbolic opposition is the result of what Lacan calls “‘l’appel,’ ‘the call,’ ‘the calling,’ ‘the appeal,’ or even ‘the interpellation’ (Grigg 14). Interpellation occurs in situations in which one subject calls upon another subject to make a decision in order to pursue a certain course of action. The one calling thereby acts in the-Name-of-the-Father, i.e., as someone who demands action and symbolic recognition, and ultimately to be acknowledged as the representative of the law and its prohibition.

Agathe is called upon by Martin. As she watches him flirt with the young waitress, Martin shares his desire for the other woman with his cousin: “Reizendes Mädel – findest Du nicht?” (176). By uttering these words, Martin lays down the law that is to govern the relationship between him and Agathe. Further, he asks for recognition and for her to follow his lead, that is, to set herself above her bourgeois sentiments regarding gender relations. Due to foreclosure that took place at an early stage in her life, when she was still a child, Agathe cannot comprehend or make sense of the Other’s *jouissance*, here expressed by Martin’s flirtation with the waitress. When called upon by her cousin she is confronted with the absence of the Name-of-the-Father, and thereby the return of the real.

Against Agathe’s will, her father asks Eugenie to assist him in the care of his daughter. Following the doctor’s order, Eugenie and Agathe are sent on a six-week long stay at a

sanatorium. Without money and too weak to make her voice heard, Agathe finds herself confined in a place inhabited by numerous neurotic women, a doctor she despises, and a sister-in-law she cannot stand. Before the psychosis takes its full toll on her, Agathe once again wishes she could escape and go to Zürich. Realizing, however, how utterly hopeless her situation is, she succumbs to her despair. Sleep deprived due to the relentless activity of her mind, Agathe can no longer muster the strength to contain the inner turmoil.

One afternoon as Eugenie walks in after an excursion in the countryside, Agathe attacks her sister-in-law and tries to strangle her. What follows is a series of verbal hallucinations or insults. What exactly she says in this hallucinatory, delirious moment is not stated, but the text hints that the confessions made by the psychotic Agathe are of an explicitly sexual nature: “die arme Agathe beschuldigte sich, Dinge getan zu haben – vor dem Doktor und den Krankenwärterinnen – es war ja ganz unsinnig – kein Wort davon wahr! Sie hatte ja nicht die kleinste Backfischliebschaft gehabt . . . Und sie nannte sich mit Namen – brauchte Ausdrücke, als ob ein böser Geist aus ihr redete” (188).

The insult so characteristic of verbal hallucinations is the climax of the interaction between the psychotic subject and the Other. By insulting the imaginary Other, who is always a creation of the psychotic subject and thus lacks a stable referent in the actual world, the psychotic subject tries to make sense of the incomprehensible, i.e., the Other’s *jouissance*. Wanting or desiring to become a part of the Other, that is, to be one with the Other, yet dreading the consequences that consummation has on identity, the psychotic subject oscillates between using language to call forth and to annihilate the Other. In other words, the Other is not only represented by the language used by the psychotic subject to summon and/or annul his existence in imaginary terms, but the Other becomes the very language itself. Beyond the speech act, of

which verbal hallucinations and insults are the culmination, there exists nothing or nobody in the world of the psychotic. Thus, language is employed by the psychotic in order both to command and control, to create and destroy.

Why then does Agathe try to strangle Eugenie? And what is the importance of the verbal hallucinations uttered by Agathe? As mentioned before, in the childhood and adolescence of the protagonist, Eugenie has a significant impact on the more innocent Agathe in matters concerned with sex and romance. Agathe identifies in her friend her opposite in terms of sexual liberation and exploration, and she is fascinated by the implications of sexual intimacy embodied and expressed by Eugenie. She is also terrified, for reasons having to do with the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father.

When introduced to the scene of socially accepted forms of contact between young men and women, Agathe fails to establish meaningful connections or bond with people of the opposite sex. Eugenie, on the other hand, is successful in the game or play of young bourgeois women in the search for a suitable husband. She is able to choose from a number of suitors and eventually she settles for Agathe's brother. An attractive and flirtatious woman also after marrying, Eugenie not only bears several children but also remains the center of male attention at parties and other social gatherings.

Agathe, depicted as a young, attractive woman who lacks the confidence and self-assurance of her sister-in-law, grows increasingly disillusioned in her search for a man to love and respect. Seeing how Eugenie continues to use her impressive physical appearance and beauty even after being married to exert control and power over men, Agathe becomes rigid and dismissive in her interactions with members of the opposite sex. At the same time, she continues

to harbor dreams of finding love and somebody who will treat her as an equal. With Martin leaving, and herself going to the sanatorium, her dreams are forever crushed.

In Lacanian terms, the subject position occupied by Eugenie at the end of the novel is the one of the specular other in the psychotic's imaginary world. As the subject passes the mirror stage, s/he learns to identify with his/her own image, and thus to view his/her own body as it is perceived from another point of view, a process that is necessary for socialization. This relationship to the specular other is characterized by an imaginary relationship based on erotic attachment as well as aggressive rivalry. The erotic attachment stems from identification with the specular other, and the aggression from the fact that both subject and (other) object fight for recognition from the Other, ultimately, the pre-oedipal mother/father. In cases of psychosis, the subject is locked into this relationship to the (specular) other, leading to narcissism and failure to identify with other subjects. Instead, the other becomes an erotic object as well as the agent of persecution.

Agathe is attracted to Eugenie. Simultaneously, she experiences a sense of rivalry and aggression towards her sister-in-law. Agathe both wants and does not want what her sister-in-law has. Torn between the pressure to conform and the desire to break free from convention, Agathe fails to transition from a position of dependence and submission vis-à-vis her sister-in-law. Without the support from the Name-of-the-Father, she cannot make sense of the Other's jouissance -- in the last scene embodied by Martin, -- and Eugenie functions both as a stand-in, or substitute, for the lack of the signifier, as well as the rival for the Other's desire.

Numb and without ambition or desire to escape the confines of convention, not even in imaginary terms, at the end of the novel Agathe leads a quiet life next to her father. "So leben sie

still nebeneinander her – voller Rücksichten und innerlich sich fremd” (188). The irony of the statement is impossible to miss. Here, Reuter employs the hyphen as a strategic stylistic element to state the obvious without naming it. On either side of it – the hyphen – father and daughter are situated, separated in time and space by their differences. He – a man, a father, of old age and (once high) social power – and she – a (unmarried) woman, a dependent without any social and/or symbolic influence. There is nothing in their relationship that suggests equality or mutual understanding or respect; yet father and daughter are civil to each other.

Residing peacefully with her father, Agathe -- a woman not yet forty -- has no concerns or worries regarding the future. She lives one day at a time, her health being her main concern. Another distraction to her liking is the collection of crochet patterns:

Agathes Gedächtnis hat gelitten – in ihrer Vergangenheit sind Abschnitte, auf welche sie sich nicht mehr besinnen kann. Einem längeren Gespräch zu folgen, ist ihr nicht mehr möglich. Sie hat sich eine Sammlung von Häkelmustern angelegt, und freut sich, wenn sie ein neues hinzufügen kann. Die Zukunft macht ihr keine Sorge mehr. Sie begreift auch nicht, daß so vieles sie früher aufregen konnte – jetzt läßt alles, was nicht ihre Gesundheit betrifft, sie ganz gleichgültig. Sie seufzt oft und ist traurig – zumal wenn die Sonne hell scheint und die Blumen blühen, wenn sie Musik hört oder Kinder spielen sieht. Aber sie wüßte kaum noch zu sagen, warum ... (188)

“Warum” Once again Reuter makes use of irony in implying but not naming or writing out the obvious. Why, one may think, would Agathe ever have any reason to be unhappy or sad? With nothing to worry about but herself, and possibly, as stated by the author in the very last sentence of the novel, a long life ahead of her, Agathe is free. With no more obligations, or duties, or concerns regarding convention and/or appropriate behavior, the female protagonist is finally her own person. Yet, as implied by the ellipsis Agathe is still, at times, sad. Why is that?

To answer the question we need to return to the importance ascribed by Lacan to the Name-of-the-Father and the implications of foreclosure for psychosis. As pointed out by Lacan,

language constitutes both a threat and a defense mechanism in the psychotic's imaginary world. The subject re-appropriates language as a metaphor or tool to bridge or piece together the fragments of the psychotic subject, and thereby close off the threats posed by the real. In effect, s/he becomes a creator of his/her own making. The power or significance of language in the psychotic's world follows as an effect of leaving meaning in suspension by piecing together words and sentences in an unconventional fashion, or, as in Schreber's case, by leaving sentences unfinished, and open-ended. As a consequence hereof, meaning beyond meaning is created, whereby the very text itself becomes the imaginary universe constituting the fragmented subject. S/he is his/her own creation, understood in relation to the Other, who evokes both fear and attraction in the psychotic subject.

As an attempt in order to break free from or open up this universe or text of identity-making in disguise, the psychotic subject has to find a way to integrate the traumatic experience into the symbolic order, as suggested by Agathe's interest in crochet patterns. The arbitrary relationship between signifier, signified and referent that comprises the sign according to Saussure allows Agathe to re-appropriate the notion of pattern making as a form of signification to establish order in a disorganized or fragmented symbolic system. One could argue that Agathe's interest in collecting and stacking crochet patterns is an expression of a psychotic state of mind and a desire on the part of the protagonist to employ the symbolic representation enabled by patterns as a form of language.

By establishing a system of signification with importance solely to the imaginative workings of the protagonist, and thus preventing interaction and/or communication with the world of common sense, pattern making beyond the obvious serves to ward off and protect the protagonist from the threats posed by the real. In effect, the separation between the real and the

symbolic essential for structuring and maintaining the psychotic's world or imaginary creation remains intact. Agathe thus appears as a creator of a mindless space and time that is beyond meaning, and therefore exclusively her own. Closed off from the world of symbolic signification, she is safe from any threat posed by failure to conform as well as (aggressive) physical intimacy.

Another plausible explanation for Agathe's fascination with crochet patterns emerges if one considers the importance of language, and signification to overcoming the fragmentation of self, characteristic of psychotic subjects. By creating a collection, and adding one pattern to another in an orderly fashion, the subject without a clear sense of self composes a language or system of signification that allows for re-integration. Viewed as a first step or attempt on the part of the protagonist to piece herself together, the notion of collecting crochet patterns may be understood as an act of willing, and becoming. Not yet forty and possibly with a long life ahead of her, Agathe may yet succeed in overcoming her fear of the real, and thus reappear in life as a woman with a voice of her own.

In concluding this chapter on Agathe, I would like to mention a few things about Reuter's writing style as it relates to matters of psychosis and language entrapment discussed in *Aus Guter Familie*. Through the repeated use of stylistic elements such as the hyphen and ellipsis, Reuter explicitly reflects on Agathe's disposition in regard to the symbolic order, thereby creating an excess of meaning. By no means do I wish to suggest that Reuter's writing is psychotic or beyond meaning, but that she employs certain stylistic elements, mainly the hyphen and elipses, to avoid symbolization of the unspoken traumas and sufferings of her female protagonist. One could read this both as an invitation to the reader to make her own assumptions regarding the nature of the unstated, as well as a strategy on the part of the author to avoid naming the unnamable in symbolic terms.

My assumption of the nature of Agathe's disposition in relation to the symbolic would support the latter. As a stylistic element, the void opened up by the repeated use of the hyphen and ellipsis reflects in linguistic terms the inability of the protagonist to enter into discourse and formulate in her own words the desire to be her own person. Metaphorically speaking, Agathe is the subject who cannot be one because she lacks her own language. By leaving meaning in suspension by means of, for instance, the hyphen, the text expresses the state of mind of the protagonist in a powerful manner. Hence, the significance of Agathe's destiny lies not in her success but her failure.

Given the protagonist's inability to transition or change discourse from the imaginary to the symbolic due to the real threats posed by the sexual double standard, her story offers a critical perspective on a period of history in which men are depicted and understood as incarnations of the law, and in some cases even of God, whereas women are seen as their inferiors. In addition, the significance of language to social power is made explicit by a protagonist who, despite numerous attempts, fails to enter into discourse. Bereft of language, and thus a position within society, Agathe lacks agency in any real and/or symbolic terms.

Chapter 3: On the Apparently Negative and the Life-Affirming Principal of the Übermensch

In chapter one I offer a reading of *Aus guter Familie* according to which the female protagonist Agathe is granted some level of agency in relation to her appropriation of crochet patterns as a strategy to structure and overcome the fragmentation of self resulting from psychosis, and ultimately electric shock treatment. However, as noted, this agency does not extend beyond the imaginary, and in effect Agathe remains enclosed in a symbolic realm of her own making that lacks referents in the world of common sense. Thus, the main protagonist of Reuter's best-selling novel does not emancipate herself from the influence exercised by the father to enter into discourse. Throughout the novel, her being depends on male symbolic power and authorization, and the efforts to establish an identity that could potentially conflict with or question the paradigm of her father and, ultimately, bourgeois society are never realized or acted upon.

In the other two novels by Reuter still to be discussed in this thesis – *Ellen von der Weiden* and *Das Tränenhaus* – the female protagonists are more successful in the internalization of the Name-of-the-Father, this success granting them some level of agency as subjects in their own right. Initially unable to reconcile themselves with their respective fates as unmarried pregnant women, eventually both Ellen and Cornelia find strategies for overcoming some of the restrictions caused by rigid gender norms. In this chapter I explore notions of unwanted pregnancy and motherhood in relation to self-overcoming, a concept crucial to discussions of the *Übermensch* in *Also sprach Zarathustra* by Friedrich Nietzsche and foundational for my analysis of *Ellen von der Weiden* and *Das Tränenhaus*. In agreement with Walter Kaufmann -- a

translator and author of several works on Nietzsche -- I understand the concept of the Übermensch as a process and state of mind expressive of the term sublimation.

In the context of sublimation as understood by Nietzsche repression serves little to help the subject deal with society's expectations. Instead, Nietzsche urges his readers to break with society's norms and embrace the Dionysian elements of life that are less concerned with reason and more with the instrumental function of willing and wanting in relation to self-mastery. Self-overcoming as a form of sublimation is therefore different from Freud's as well as Lacan's understanding of sublimation. But, despite their apparent differences, there are aspects of Lacan's concept of sublimation that are useful to our discussion of self-overcoming and the Übermensch, aspects that will be discussed in more detail below.

Before I address the relationship between Lacan and Nietzsche in terms of sublimation, I shall introduce another of Nietzsche's concepts with particular relevance for self-overcoming: *amor fati*. Indicative of *amor fati*, or love of fate, as understood by Nietzsche is its uncompromising acceptance of life, or reality, per se without recourse to metaphysical categories. Being is not viewed by Nietzsche as an essential matter but as constructed in a continuous effort to overcome the negative aspects of convention and thereby to situate oneself as a creator of one's fate, especially in regard to the apparently negative or unfavorable.

In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche writes of *amor fati* as a state of mind in which the individual has learned not only to endure what is necessary but more importantly to embrace it as something good and positive:

Meine Formel für die Größe am Menschen ist amor fati: dass man Nichts anders haben will, vorwärts nicht, rückwärts nicht, in alle Ewigkeit nicht. Das Nothwendige nicht bloß

ertragen, noch weniger verhehlen – aller Idealismus ist Verlogenheit vor dem Nothwendigen –, sondern es lieben. . . . (35)

As an act of sublimation, *amor fati* continuously repeats itself. To break with conventions of any kind and be one's own commander requires that the human subject aspire to behold truth beyond truth, i.e., the will to power so essential for notions of self-overcoming. Hence, to be an Übermensch and thus act as one's own commander, one must not will or want to change one's fate yet also never be or become complacent. Contradictory or convoluted as this idea may seem, any life worth living in Nietzschean terms constitutes a struggle to overcome oneself and the very conditions that govern life *without* having to alter life's necessity. Rather, one must want to change oneself out of the will to power. Driven by the life-affirming will to power that originates in the dialectics inherent in cancelling yet preserving the object of one's desire through sublimation, the human subject willing and wanting to be an Übermensch becomes a creator. As a result, no circumstances of life are left to the will of others and/or blind powers as defined by religion and/or science. Instead, each man is his own god.

Unlike Agathe, the female protagonists Ellen and Cornelia break with some of the constraints and limitations imposed on them by gender by learning how to live according to some of the guiding principals of the Übermensch and the notion of love of fate (or *amor fati*). Ellen as well as Cornelia is compelled to redefine notions of womanhood by outer circumstances but also by inner drive and necessity, and eventually they break with previous "idols," in the novels embodied by, for instance, their respective fathers, Ellen's husband, and Cornelia's lover. The centrality of the destruction of the connection to God and Christian morals central to *Also sprach Zarathustra* consists in *Ellen von der Weiden* and *Das Tränenhaus* of a break with tradition, in particular, the idea of motherhood as an essential feature of women's life; a notion that even some female reformers in the historical period of the novels still supported.

The protagonists' struggle to create a space for themselves in society as single mothers ultimately causes them to break with the expectations of their social milieu and situate themselves as outsiders living on the fringes of society. But, as I will show, Ellen and Cornelia are empowered by their own suffering, thereby gaining a certain degree of independence. Reuter's autobiography suggests that in writing *Ellen von der Weiden* and *Das Tränenhaus* the author borrowed from her own experience as a bourgeois woman trying to create an identity for herself as a writer, and eventually, as a single mother³:

Wir genossen alle das Gefühl, das Bürgerliche hinter uns gelassen zu haben und in dem Lande Jenseits von Gut und Böse gelandet zu sein. Aber das Einrichten dort war gar nicht so leicht, als es aussah, wir Frauen kamen doch zuweilen in arge Konflikte ... Ich war stiller und bei mir spielte sich der Kampf mehr im Innern und den anderen unsichtbar ab. Er war vielleicht desto intensiver. Dabei konnte ein jeder vorläufig seine Souveränität im Gebiet der Freiheit nur geistig genießen, denn das Leben spannte uns alle in harte Schranken. (451)

As Reuter points out, establishing a life and an identity in accordance with the new challenges that follow upon the break with bourgeois conventions poses specific problems having to do with gender. What exactly these problems or concerns may be, Reuter does not say, but they prevent the female members of the reading group from experiencing freedom other than in the imagination. A closer look at some of Reuter's work, however, provides substantial material for discussion of the situation of bourgeois women in the late nineteenth century and the ways they may have suffered as a consequence of rigid gender norms, especially in relation to unwanted pregnancy, which is the main topic of *Ellen von der Weiden* as well as *Das Tränenhaus*.

In order better to understand the implications of amor fati for Ellen and Cornelia in relation to pregnancy out of wedlock, I will elaborate on the relationship between self-

³ In 1897 Reuter gave birth to her illegitimate daughter Lili. The author does not discuss any of the circumstances of the birth of her daughter in her autobiography, but one may assume that the circumstances of Reuter's pregnancy and childbirth informed *Das Tränenhaus*.

overcoming, sublimation, and the concept of the *Übermensch* in a number of texts by Nietzsche, followed by a comparison between Nietzsche's thoughts on the *Übermensch* and Lacan's account of sublimation. I will attempt, thereby, to contextualize the suffering associated with unwanted pregnancy as a human but primarily gendered experience. As I will demonstrate, gender plays an important role in how Ellen and Cornelia reconfigure notions of agency to arrive at an understanding of self that coincides with their own beliefs and convictions of what it means to be a woman and, ultimately, a human being. For Ellen and Cornelia simply to endure their respective pregnancies does not suffice; they have to embrace their fates in positive terms in order to overcome them.

1.1 The *Übermensch*

In the introduction to *Also sprach Zarathustra*, the fictive character Zarathustra—a hermit and prophet—proclaims the death of God. Descending like the sun from his cave in the mountains, Zarathustra starts his wanderings to teach the people about the *Übermensch*. Upon entering the first town, he encounters a crowd of people in the square. Men, women, and children, people of all ages, are gathered to watch an artist walk high up in the air on a rope tied between two buildings. Zarathustra is able to capture the crowd's attention for a few moments but as soon as the tightrope walker appears in the air the crowd turns away from him to watch the artist in action.

Balancing a long stick in his hands, the tightrope walker slowly approaches the middle of the rope, suspended over the market place and the people, when suddenly another man appears. Entering through the same door that the tightrope walker had just come out of, the man—"einem Possenreißer gleich"—starts following the artist, urging him to move on (22). When he comes to the place where the tightrope walker stands, the jester jumps over him and hurries over to the

safety of the other tower. The act of jumping unsettling him, the tightrope walker loses his balance and falls. The people rush to avoid being hit by the falling body, and Zarathustra alone tries to console the dying man in his last moments. When the artist expresses his fear that he will burn in Hell for failing to accomplish more in life, Zarathustra pays him a last honor by offering to dispose of his body after his death, reminding the tightrope walker about the mortal nature of both the body and the soul: “es gibt keinen Teufel und keine Hölle. Deine Seele wird noch schneller tot sein als dein Leib: fürchte nun nichts mehr! ... du hast aus der Gefahr deinen Beruf gemacht, daran ist nichts zu verachten. Nun gehst du an deinem Beruf zugrunde: dafür will ich dich mit meinen Händen begraben” (22-23).

As an allegory or metaphor for the Übermensch, the tightrope walker is fearless in regard to the potentially lethal consequence of walking the rope. In the context of self-overcoming as a form of sublimation the notion of walking the rope marks a transition or change of mind that takes not only courage but may cost the one who attempts to cross his life. In the eyes of Zarathustra, by repeatedly risking his life the tightrope walker is a higher being than the people in the audience and a man deserving of recognition for his bravery. Further, as a potential Übermensch, in falling down, the tightrope walker symbolizes the fall of humankind and the rise of the Übermensch, here embodied by Zarathustra, who identifies in the tightrope walker a potential follower and superior human being. More importantly, however, the fall of the tightrope walker may serve as a warning to those who watch his fall.

The lesson to be learned here pertains to the importance of sublimation as a form of self-overcoming. As formulated by Zarathustra, “nur ein Possenreißer denkt: ‘der Mensch kann auch übersprungen werden’” (291). To change from one state of being to another – in *Also sprach Zarathustra* symbolized by the attempt on the part of the tightrope walker to cross from one

tower to the other – requires courage and dedication. Further, one must face the difficulties and challenges that arise along the way, and not, like the jester, try to avoid them. It is an error to think one can reach the state of mind and personal integrity embodied by the Übermensch by avoiding the conditions of human life that pose restrictions and difficulties.

Walter Kaufmann understands Nietzsche's concept of self-overcoming as discussed in relation to the tightrope walker as a form of sublimation that depends on "the ultimate recognition and affirmation of the value of the apparently negative" (253). In order to arrive at a better understanding of the value of the "apparently negative" to self-overcoming it helps to view the dialectic suggested by Nietzsche in relation to his critique of body/mind dualism. Rather than seeing body and mind as representing two opposing or conflicting principles, Nietzsche understands them as manifestations of the same basic life force: the will to power.

A subject in favor of the apparently unfavorable, the Übermensch represents the ultimate life-affirming principle for human beings willing and wanting to overcome the distinction between body/mind. Supported in his actions by passion as well as reason, the Übermensch makes no distinction between willing or wanting, body or mind. All human nature is spirit and passion. In the words of Kaufmann, "First he [man] must, as it were, burn a No into his own soul; he must brand his own impulses with contempt and become aware of the contradiction of good and evil" (253).

How is the human subject to "burn a No into" his soul? The answer is through great suffering. Only what causes pain and anguish will not be forgotten. In the course of suffering, man will understand that Christian morality based on the dichotomy between good and evil has no bearing in life, since none of these concepts exists in absolute terms. Rather, morality functions in relation to self-overcoming as an obstacle prescribing conformity and conventional

behavior, and it prevents the subject from making decisions informed by independent and critical thinking. To Nietzsche, the subject who strives to create his own ideals is more truthful than individuals who conform to the norms and expectations of their time.

In the attempt of setting up his own guiding principles in life, the subject striving to become an Übermensch must break with old idols. In the closing chapter of Book One of *Also sprach Zarathustra*, before returning to the solitude on the mountain top, Zarathustra asks his fellow companions to turn away from him in order to return to and re-create themselves:

Ihr sagt, ihr glaubt an Zarathustra? Aber was liegt an Zarathustra? Ihr seid meine Glaubigen: aber was liegt an allen Glaubigen? Ihr hattet euch noch nicht gesucht: da fandet ihr mich. So tun alle Glaubigen; darum ist es so wenig mit allem Glauben. Nun heiÙe ich euch, mich zu verlieren und euch finden; und erst, wenn ihr mich alle verleugnet habt, will ich euch wiederkehren. (115)

The denial of their master on the part of the disciples has a clear biblical reference, especially in the context of Peter's denial of Jesus as depicted in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. However, denying one's master and god is imbued with different connotations in Nietzsche's writings.

Rather than constituting an act of betrayal or retribution, dismissal and rejection of one's spiritual leader in a Zarathustrian sense of the word honor the concept of self-overcoming so central to the Übermensch. By acknowledging the metaphysical nature of the quest for guidance and instruction, based in many religious systems on the notion of absolute truth, human beings thirsting for direction in life become agents in their own right: "Das eben ist Göttlichkeit, daß es Götter, aber keinen Gott gibt!" (*Also sprach Zarathustra* 296). In the context of self-overcoming, Nietzsche's redefinition of truth as a form of self-command serves to inform an understanding of sublimation as a creative act whereby the individual subject, as stated by Kaufmann, "gives form" to himself (239). Consequently, self-overcoming, and thus sublimation according to Nietzsche, constitutes not only the ultimate goal or mission in life but also grants the subject

creative power to act independently (or in spite) of social, cultural and religious norms and conventions.

In *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* Nietzsche contests the possibility that any concept, god, or deity is higher than the Übermensch. He deems Christianity the number one enemy of free spirits who, like “guten Europäer und freien, sehr freien Geister” (6), fight “der Kampf gegen den christlich-kirchlichen Druck von Jahrtausenden (5). Nietzsche encourages these very same spirits, displaying all the signs of “die ganze Noth des Geistes und die ganze Spannung seines Bogens,” to redefine their notion of morality in a fashion that points beyond accepted dichotomies of good and evil, truth and falsehood (*Jenseits von Gut und Böse* 6).

In order to question and challenge already established conventions and norms the subject must accept “Die Unwahrheit als Lebensbedingung” (*Jenseits von Gut und Böse* 6). Here, untruth is not to be understood as the opposite of truth but more as an attitude toward knowledge that questions the primacy of truth as the guiding principle of science as well as religion. Referred to by Nietzsche as “der geistigste Wille zur Macht,” philosophy as presented by “real philosophers” constitutes an attitude toward science that is critical of the supposedly objective nature of knowledge (*Jenseits von Gut und Böse* 11).

In *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* Nietzsche states that, contrary to assumption, science – like religious doctrines – is constituted by a system of beliefs, convictions, and pre-existing assumptions, without which there would be no science: “nämlich dass es immer ein metaphysischer Glaube ist, auf dem unser Glaube an die Wissenschaft ruht” (170). Further, he claims that the faith upon which science rests lies in the importance ascribed to truth as the guiding principle of all scientific endeavors: “es thut nichts mehr noth als Wahrheit, und im Verhältnis zu ihr hat alles Übrige nur einen Werth zweiten Ranges” (169). Consequently, truth as

a scientific concept sets itself apart as the highest of known human values or virtues, whereby the very pursuit or search for truth becomes an abiding and overbearing attitude, which Nietzsche calls “unbedingte[r] Wille zur Wahrheit” and “Wahrheit um jeden Preis” (169).

What exactly, Nietzsche asks, constitutes this very need of or will to truth at any price? The answer is a “destructive principle” or will to death. As pointed out above, in order to overcome and sublimate one’s impulses and passions one must learn the importance of the painful and negative in life. To insist on the positive value of all negative experience and to view it as a source of will power, the subject must be willing to sacrifice everything in life, including assumptions and facts held to be true, for the sake of truth itself: “nur bleibt übrig zu fragen, ob nicht, damit diese Zucht anfangen könne, schon eine Überzeugung da sein müsse, und zwar eine so gebieterische und bedingungslose, dass sie alle anderen Überzeugungen sich zum Opfer bringt” (*Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* 169). Thus, to claim to know or behold the truth is a continuous self-destructive endeavor.

In view of the value or importance ascribed to self-destruction in relation to self-overcoming, Agathe is seemingly one of the most - if not *the* most - truthful of Reuter’s protagonists. Unlike Ellen and Cornelie, Agathe suffers self-destruction to the point that she permanently loses a stable referent in the world of orderly conduct, thus deteriorating into a state of mind similar to that of psychotics. The question remains, however, to what extent Agathe willingly suffers this self destruction, or if her sufferings are the result of trying to avoid certain problems or issues that arise from standing up against, or willingly, breaking with gender conventions and norms.

Recalling the significance of *amor fati*, or willing what one does not initially want, as well as the importance of the affirmation of the “apparently negative” to the Übermensch, one

may ask if Ellen and Cornelia are not more strongly willed than Agathe. As will be discussed in more detail in chapter three, neither Ellen nor Cornelia are free from thoughts of self-destruction. Both protagonists struggle to make sense of their respective experiences as pregnant unmarried women and in moments of deepest despair they contemplate suicide. However, they overcome their own initial aversion toward their pregnancies in order to institute motherhood as a creative practice of life-affirmation through suffering. Ellen and Cornelia thereby set themselves apart from Agathe in that they are able to effect change in their lives.

Nietzsche's re-evaluation of the concept of truth has an instrumental function in teaching the subject who strives to overcome himself the purpose and value of self-destruction and suffering. In Kaufmann's account, the Nietzschean self-destructive quest for truth is the result of internal psychological processes borne by a subject in conflict with himself. Ridden with bad conscience, "man says to himself: my inclinations are damnable, and I am evil. At this point, man is divided against himself. There are two selves, as it were, one rational and the other irrational. The one self then tries to give form to the other; man tries to remake himself . . . and to organize the chaos of his passions" (253).

To maintain a certain level of internal chaos and conflict is one of the main concerns of the subject striving to become an *Übermensch*. Only through the re-insertion of uncertainty, antagonism, and tension into the human soul can he arrive at assumptions that hold until they are proven false or inadequate. These assumptions can never be true or good in and of themselves. Instead, initially bad conscience or rather internal conflicts have an instrumental function. Their ultimate goal is to make the subject aware of the futility of Christian morality, and teach him the importance of self-command through sublimation.

Kaufmann offers some insight into the relationship between the concept of self-overcoming in Nietzsche's philosophy and how it relates to sublimation by comparing it to Hegel's use of the word *aufheben*. *Aufheben* is the German equivalent of the Latin word for sublimation – *sublimatio*. It is used by Hegel synonymously with the words preserve, cancel and lift up. Simply put, *aufheben* represents a process by which the immediate object is cancelled while simultaneously transformed into another object, whereby the initial substance or substrate is preserved. Lifting up consists in attaining greater value through the process of change and modification. However, according to Kaufmann, while Hegel uses the word *aufheben* to describe and discuss (paradigmatic) shifts and changes in social and economic systems, Nietzsche's understanding of sublimation refers to the individual subject in conflict with himself, resulting in a re-evaluation of behavioral norms (236).

To Kaufmann, the focus on the individual and psychological in Nietzsche's understanding of self-overcoming is connected to the latter's critique of consciousness viewed as a separate "thing" or an "entity" apart from the body: "Happiness is envisaged less as a state of consciousness than as a state of being: as power" (266). Unlike many scholars who assert that Nietzsche privileges the body over the spirit, thus arguing for a kind of instinctual determinism, Kaufmann points to the fact that the Nietzschean subject is embedded in nature. This very nature is spiritual in character, i.e., informed by an understanding of body and mind as expressions of the will to power and ultimately self-overcoming: "All of nature is imbued with a striving to overcome and transcend itself, and man cannot be extricated from this total picture" (Kaufmann 211). Consequently, man is both spirit and nature. More importantly: spirit is nature, and nature is spirit.

In the subject's striving to arrive at a state of mind characteristic of self-command, human instincts, impulses, and drives are not to be viewed as bad or negative, or as something that must be fought against or repressed. Rather, in Nietzsche's understanding of self-overcoming, ultimate self-mastery and (will) power consist in controlling, sublimating and employing one's instincts: "ebenso wenig ist 'Bewusst-sein' in irgend einem entscheidenden Sinne dem Instinktiven entgegengesetzt – das meiste bewusste Denken eines Philosophen ist durch seine Instinkte heimlich geführt und in bestimmte Bahnen gezwungen" (*Jenseits von Gut und Böse* 5-6).

In order for human passions to support the subject's desire for self-mastery, they need to be controlled or channeled. However, instincts, drives, and other bodily functions should not be considered primarily instrumental in nature. Body and mind, spirit and reason are equally natural, and the subject striving to become an Übermensch must break with or overcome conventions based on the concept of "Plato's Erfindung vom reinen Geiste und vom Guten an sich" (*Jenseits von Gut und Böse* IV-V) as the only means for man to reach his full potential.

Nietzsche uses the term "vom reinen Geiste" in order to critique the privileging of the soul or spirit over the body represented in the majority of contemporary religious and philosophical doctrines. The ultimate force or power informing human life and all of nature is the will to power, and to employ and make use of the will to power, the subject must be what it is, i.e., nature. Thus, self-overcoming understood as sublimation is not concerned with transcendence in any metaphysical sense defined by Christian morality. Instead, it is concerned with the human subject viewed as a unified subject after the division in the body/mind-dichotomy has been overcome or sublimated.

1.2 The Will to Power

Nietzsche's critique of the denunciation of the body in much of Christianity is not to be understood as an expression of his high regard for human instincts and passions at the expense of rationality. According to Kaufmann, the primacy ascribed to impulses, instincts, and passions is a consequence of "metaphysical monism" (239). Nietzsche's metaphysical monism gives rise to an attitude of scientific inquiry that seeks to explain any duality in terms of "a single force" (239). As pointed out above, Nietzsche dubs this single force the will to power. The will to power is an instinct or force informed by reason as well as passion, and it is representative of the sum of nature: "so hätte man damit sich das Recht verschafft, alle wirkende Kraft eindeutig zu bestimmen als: Wille zur Macht. Die Welt von innen gesehen, die Welt auf ihren 'intelligiblen Charakter' hin bestimmt und bezeichnet – sie wäre eben 'Wille zur Macht' und nichts ausserdem. – " (*Jenseits von Gut und Böse* 52).

As an intrinsic part of nature, humans are constituted by the will to power. What distinguishes "real philosophers" and "cynics" from the rest of humankind – including other philosophers, priests and scientists – is the extent to which they are in command of will to power. As Nietzsche notes in *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, "im wirklichen Leben handelt es sich nur um starken und schwachen Willen" (27). Due to the nature of the will to power and its status as an essential life force that exists beyond all dualities and dichotomies, Nietzsche concludes that humans are neither free nor un-free. Instead, some individuals exercise a stronger will than others: "Das, was 'Freiheit des Willens' genannt wird, ist wesentlich der Überlegenheits-Affekt in Hinsicht auf Den, der gehorchen muss" (*Jenseits von Gut und Böse* 23). Resounding in the background is the master-slave relationship informing Nietzsche's philosophy.

Of importance to the discussion concerning the relationship among self-overcoming, free will, and the will to power is the understanding that Nietzsche sees mainly two kinds or types of people: slaves and masters, old philosophers and all-too-humans, on the one hand, and the *Übermensch* on the other. The *Übermensch* is the master of future generations of all-too-humans, who – like slaves – follow the command of a new order of philosophers, referred to as “Philosophen des gefährlichen Vielleicht” (*Jenseits von Gut und Böse* 5). These philosophers are: “Befehlende und Gesetzgeber: . . . Ihr ‘Erkennen’ ist Schaffen, ihr Schaffen ist eine Gesetzgebung, ihr Wille zur Wahrheit ist – Wille zur Macht” (*Jenseits von Gut und Böse* 154). Thus, the *Übermensch* is a creator of new virtues and values, of which the will to power remains the highest.

In Nietzsche’s account, as a creator of new values the person commanding himself obeys himself only: “Ein Mensch, der Will --, befiehlt einem Etwas in sich, das gehorcht oder von dem er glaubt, dass es gehorcht” (*Jenseits von Gut und Böse* 23). Far from suggestive of an anarchic state of affairs or mind, the freedom to act as creator or instigator of one’s own values and virtues is accompanied by responsibilities on the part of the subject. The potential to and of self-mastery resides in Nietzsche’s philosophy with a strong will or power to command and master one’s passions. Termed the “intelligiblen Charackter” of all (human) life and the guiding principle of the world, the will to power is a precursor to gaining power, not primarily over others as their commander and leader but over oneself (*Jenseits von Gut und Böse* 52). While many people claim to possess this will, few know how to command and be their own master of mind and inhibition: “Wer sich nicht befehlen kann, der soll gehorchen. Und mancher kann sich befehlen, aber da fehlt noch viel, daß er sich auch gehorche!” (*Also sprach Zarathustra* 291).

Notice in the quotation the use of the words should, can, and obey. Not only does Nietzsche suggest that individuals who are not in command of themselves ought to follow the lead of others, but that they must. The error on the part of the many all-too-humans in believing they can be their own masters can only be avoided if the ones chosen to command rise to the challenge. More importantly, the *Übermensch* is not only required to construct a law or set of beliefs that he can live by, but he also has to act as his own judge: “Kannst du dir selber dein Böses und dein Gutes geben und deinen Willen über dich aufhängen wie ein Gesetz? Kannst du dir selber Richter sein und Rächer deines Gesetzes? Furchtbar ist das Alleinsein mit dem Richter und Rächer des eignen Gesetzes” (92).

The difficulties presented by acting as one’s own master make commanding more difficult than obeying, and the human subject who does not know how to overcome himself cannot lead others: “Dem wird befohlen, der sich nicht selber gehorchen kann . . . daß Befehlen schwerer ist, als Gehorchen . . . und noch im Willen des Dienenden fand ich den Willen, Herr zu sein. . . .ich bin das, was sich immer selber überwinden muß” (166-67). In few passages of Nietzsche’s writing is the connection between self-overcoming and sublimation as clear. Constituting both that which overcomes and that which is overcome, I or the subject is the central point of struggle: “Geist is das Leben, das selber ins Leben schneidet” (151). Thus, the human subject is the object that is cancelled yet preserved by means of uplifting, or self-overcoming. Further, the result of self-overcoming, or sublimation, is not judged in terms of good or bad but assessed in terms of more or less (will) power.

To understand better the significance and implication of the will to power to discussions of self-overcoming and sublimation and how it relates to notions of free will, one should not ask, in Nietzsche’s words, “frei wovon?” but “frei wozu?” (92). The first question poses a

relationship between subject and object that focuses primarily on the process or act of a liberation or movement separating subject from object; the second question asks what follows afterwards, once the subject has removed himself from the object. As a sequence of actions, i.e., what happens *after* the subject has freed himself from something or someone, the relationship among free will, will to power, and agency in Nietzsche's philosophy is more easily discernible if one thinks of it less in terms of cause and effect, and more in terms of a reversal thereof. The reversal of cause and effect noticeable in Nietzsche's writing may be understood both as a stylistic element and the result of dialectical monism.

Ultimately, the effect of Nietzsche's dialectical monism is the canceling of the human subject in favor of the *Übermensch*: he who is both human and god. The will to power thereby remains unchanged while the physical manifestation thereof, i.e., the human subject is transformed into a higher state of being. As a result, some individuals possess more will to power than others and thus act as commanders. However, those who obey the command of others are not un-free, but in charge of less will power than their commanders. To believe in the equality of all human beings is according to Nietzsche the result of sentimental weakness and misdirected humanity. If allowed to guide human conduct, the will to truth, and ultimately the will to power, enables some human beings to rise above and overcome themselves. To acknowledge that one is not (yet) an *Übermensch* (like the tightrope walker) makes not for an un-free human but for one less strongly willed. The commander's role is to help the one striving to overcome himself to find the way back to himself. Eventually, he will break with his master and follow his own command.

By replacing the dichotomy of true and false, good and evil, constituting much of religion and science, with a continuum of self-overcoming as a creative act of willing, Nietzsche teaches

his readers the destructive powers of all creation. In order to appear as a creator, one must learn to despise what one loves and love what one despises, i.e., one must practice *amor fati*, which is ultimately the consequence of Nietzsche's dialectical monism: "Was ich auch schaffe und wie ich's auch liebe, – bald muß ich Gegner ihm sein und meiner Liebe: so will es mein Wille. . . . Nur, wo Leben ist, da ist auch Wille: aber nicht Wille zum Leben, sondern – so lehre ich's dich – Wille zur Macht" (168). Thus, not to live, but to overcome is the strongest of all forces in life, equaled only by willing-as-such: "tut immerhin was ihr wollt, - aber seid erst solche, die wollen können!" (251).

1.3 Women – Slaves *and* Masters?

On his wanderings to teach man about the Übermensch, Zarathustra encounters an old woman. At her request, Zarathustra talks about woman, or "Weib" (96). Due to the limited scope of the reference in respect to Nietzsche's overall corpus, it is impossible to make any conclusive remarks regarding Nietzsche's thoughts on gender. However, if one attempts to determine the significance that gender holds for the Übermensch based on the frequency with which the topic is treated in *Also sprach Zarathustra*, the lack of engagement with the issue is telling. For Nietzsche, women do not exist in other than negative terms as enigmas: "Alles am Weibe ist ein Rätsel, und alles am Weibe hat eine Lösung: sie heißt Schwangerschaft" (96).

In Zarathustra's view, pregnancy and motherhood are the *raison d'être* for women. Here he assigns men a merely instrumental function as enablers or supporters in women's achievement of their goal. For men, on the other hand, women appear as shining toys, or "Spielzeuge," and their role is to entertain men returning from warfare and battle by engaging with men's inner child (96). Although women are human beings capable of loving, this love is better spent on young children than on men: "Der Strahl eines Sternes glänze in eurer Liebe!

Eure Hoffnung heie: mge ich den bermenschengebren!“ (96). Thus, as Nietzsche discusses in *Also sprach Zarathustra*, women’s function in society is clear. They are mothers and wives/lovers. However, if by “bermenschengebren” we not only understand the newborn baby, but the man born again, as an bermensch, woman is crucial to the coming of the new age under the reign of bermensch. Zarathustra does not convey how she is to support this development further, other than in her function as a toy; however, the old woman gives the reader some clues. At the end of their conversation, she gives Zarathustra a piece of advice: “Du gehst zu Frauen? Vergi die Peitsche nicht!” (98).

With respect to the exchange between Zarathustra and the old woman, one must assume that women are not willingly going to submit themselves to the supremacy of men, and ultimately, the bermensch. Men, so it seems, are encouraged to use force and violence in order to subdue women. What kind of relationship this creates between man and woman is difficult to say. It is not based on trust or mutual understanding, but on personal interest. Men and women are dependent on each other, and by no means will either of them allow the other to interfere with their respective ambitions. Ultimately, in *Also sprach Zarathustra*, Nietzsche encourages us not to trust women, but to view them as the other subject or sex that must be overcome by the one aspiring to be an bermensch.

In contrast to his account of women as primarily instrumental to the bermensch in *Also sprach Zarathustra*, in *Die frhliche Wissenschaft* Nietzsche offers a more nuanced representation of women. Once again, he invokes old women as a feature and topic in relation to gender. In the 64th aphorism Nietzsche writes,

Skeptiker. — Ich frchte, dass altgewordene Frauen im geheimsten Verstecke ihres Herzens skeptischer sind, als alle Mnner: sie glauben an die Oberflchlichkeit des Daseins als an sein Wesen, und alle Tugend und Tiefe ist ihnen nur Verhllung dieser

„Wahrheit“, die sehr wünschenswerthe Verhüllung eines pudendum —, also eine Sache des Anstandes und der Scham, und nicht mehr! (81)

In “Gender in The Gay Science,” Kathleen Higgins argues that the description of the old women “as taking a superficial stance toward experience as a matter of etiquette” is not to be confused with a negative representation of women (238). Rather, in the introduction to the second edition of *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft*, Nietzsche portrays himself as a man who, in the words of Higgins, “has become superficial out of profundity, thanks to the wear of his experiences” (38). Thus, in line with Higgins’ argument, Nietzsche’s point is not to make a fool out of old women but to credit them with insights that many men lack. Nietzsche thus questions assumptions by male skeptics who fail to recognize that profundity and old age are virtues also found in women

Further, in *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft* Nietzsche criticizes what he considers a paradoxical feature in the education of noble women. The title of the chapter is “Von der weiblichen Keuschheit,” and it concerns the problems women face in regard to chastity as a specifically female virtue. Given social expectations that they remain uninformed about sexual matters until the day of marriage, how are women not, Nietzsche asks, to be confused? More importantly, how are they to deal with the complexities of marriage? The consequences are fatal, and, as it seems, pregnancy is the only solution to a paradoxical situation: “Die Frauen empfinden leicht ihre Männer als ein Fragezeichen ihrer Ehre und ihre Kinder als eine Apologie oder Busse, — sie bedürfen der Kinder und wünschen sie sich, in einem ganz anderen Sinne als ein Mann sich Kinder wünscht” (83)

In regard to pregnancy, in *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft* Nietzsche reiterates the opinion voiced in *Also sprach Zarathustra* that motherhood is central to women’s existence. However, as Nietzsche points out, motherhood serves multiple functions, one of which concerns the idea brought forward in the passage quoted above regarding women’s need for children in order to

build both a buffer against man in marriage and a bridge to understand him. Nietzsche's attempt to understand motherhood not merely as an expression of female nature but as a consequence of marriage, which is a paradoxical situation, expresses, in my opinion, a consideration for women as human beings. This concern may not extend to include woman in the concept of *Übermensch*; however, it indicates an effort to question stereotypical presentations of women

In her discussion of gender in Nietzsche's *The Gay Science*, Higgings not only dismisses feminist criticism describing Nietzsche as a sexist and misogynist, but emphasizes his importance as a "forebear of feminist philosophy" (242). One of the hallmarks of Nietzsche's philosophy that he shares with feminist philosophers according to Higgings is perspectivism: "the view that philosophy can only do justice to human experience by taking perspectival differences into account" (242). Thus, what to some readers may appear to be sexist jokes or misogynists utterings in Nietzsche's writings are rhetorical devices intended to represent and critique different stereotypical perspectives on gender. Ultimately, Higgings argues, "Nietzsche also seems interested, at least in *The Gay Science*, in inducing transformations of consciousness regarding gender in his readers. While his ultimate goal is presumably neither limited to nor focused on gender, he takes gender to be a noteworthy case in point" (242).

One argument in favor of Higgings' reading of Nietzsche can be made if one considers the fact that Nietzsche addressed a primarily male audience. By using commonly accepted terms and expressions to talk about women, Nietzsche could lead his readers to believe that he agreed with them, thereby proving the point made in the first part of *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft*, namely, that realists among men are hypocrites for assuming that they draw conclusions free of prejudice. Rather, in Nietzsche's account, these men and informed readers are naïve to think that they may ever represent or understand their object of inquiry from an objective or truthful

standpoint. The consequence of narrow-minded universalism and misogyny is to exclude the plurality of perspectives that constitute the real world.

Whether or not one agrees with Higgings, given the role Nietzsche assigns to women as mothers and wives both in *Also sprach Zarathustra* and *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft*, it is not surprising that Reuter's protagonists use the domestic domain to redefine their positions as women. By affirming their roles as mothers and wives, however, these protagonists do not support the limitations imposed on women by their time; rather they critique the consequences of traditional gender roles for personal freedom and agency. Women are capable, much like the *Übermensch*, to summon their will to power to position themselves as conscious agents knowingly commanding their souls and spirits to overcome life's obstacles, especially the "apparently negative" ones. Of importance here is the fact that Reuter employs the clearly stereotypical application of gender in Nietzsche's work in order to explore and appraise the implications and effects of both conformity to and transgression of conventional norms. She thereby actively adds a gendered aspect to discussions of the *Übermensch* that Nietzsche himself may or may not have had in mind when addressing his readers.

Whether or not a rhetorical device intended to challenge stereotypical presentations of gender, Zarathustra's regard of men as the only subjects with the potential to become *Übermenschen* resonates with the androcentism of the historic period in which Reuter wrote. The ideals most favored in society are represented by church, state and family as patriarchal systems: structures that are reflected in the novels discussed in this thesis. In each novel, the conventions of gender and class appropriate behavior are discussed in relation to one or several male figures that function as normative and disciplining authorities against which the protagonists measure their behavior. Failure to live up to the expectations formulated by male authorities causes

internal conflict and emotional distress, conditions that Ellen and Cornelia deal with in similar ways. Due to her failure to comply as well as break with the expectations of her social milieu, Agathe functions as an antihero to inform and warn the reader of the consequences of conformity. However, in all three cases the female subjects are portrayed as women who are restricted by and at odds with a gender-specific discourse that assigns them roles as daughters, wives and mothers but rarely as individuals with the same status and power as men.

The view of women as inherently emotional beings incapable of higher reasoning and self-command was widespread in the late nineteenth century. In the context of self-overcoming as a woman's fight for self-mastery, Nietzsche's critique of body/mind dualism serves as an impetus for change. Based on the assumption that women are inherently emotional, one may conclude that they are human beings capable of much willing and wanting. To be overly emotional, or even hysterical, does not make for an *Übermensch*; however, those women who do not want to follow the lead of men may deploy the will power attributed to *Übermenschen* by Nietzsche in combination with self-sacrifice – a virtue especially assigned to women – to practice the art of self-overcoming. To clarify my point concerning the relationship between women's struggle to break with conventions in Reuter's work and the function of body/mind dualism in Nietzsche's writing, I turn to parts of Reuter's own biography as a prime example.

At the age of thirteen Reuter's father passed away, and as the oldest child, she assumed the responsibility for her younger brothers and her increasingly depressive mother. A few years later the family lost its entire fortune, and in order to support her family financially, Reuter used her writing talent as a source of income. The money she earned from these publications inspired Reuter to establish herself as a writer, and in 1890 she moved with her mother to Bohemian Munich to live among fellow writers. A year later, in 1891, her mother fell severely ill, and

Reuter was forced to return with her to Weimar. Although mostly generous and loving in her descriptions of her mother's lengthy sickbed, Reuter also displays dark moments of resentment and bitterness: "Oft musste ich das stille weiße Gesicht meiner Mutter betrachten und denken: Sie hat gesiegt ... sie besitzt mich nun ganz allein" (442).

One of few distractions offered to Reuter came from a small local literary scene that included famous writers such as Rudolf Steiner, founding father of anthroposophy. In the early 1890s this small circle of friends met regularly to read and discuss works by contemporary writers, such as Nietzsche, whose writings left an everlasting impression on Reuter. In *Vom Kinde zum Menschen*, she writes, "Nun war Friedrich Nietzsche unser Gott geworden, um den sich wie Planeten um die Sonne, unsre Geister drehten" (448). All the members of the reading group viewed themselves as individuals who had left their bourgeois upbringing, or habitus, behind them, and collectively and individually, they sought to formulate new and radical identities as human beings, an endeavor that posed problems for Reuter, who had to care for her sick, elderly mother.

Other than the distraction and entertainment offered by her small circle of friends, Reuter's only creative and artistic outlet came from her writing. At this point, in the early 1890s, she wrote *Aus guter Familie*. It took her six years to finish the novel, a period in her life concerned mainly with the wellbeing of her mother: "Wie man sich eine Belohnung gibt, arbeitete ich zwischendurch an der Lebensgeschichte der Agathe Heidling. Die dunkle Hoffnungslosigkeit dieser Jahre gab ihr die Stimmung" (444).

My reason for including a part of Reuter's biography here is not to discuss potential parallels between the author and fictional characters, in this case Agathe, but to highlight the perseverance and commitment of a woman who is determined to establish herself as a writer. She

is forced by outer circumstances to abstain from living among other writers; however, writing gives her the opportunity temporarily to escape a distressing life situation. It is this same imaginative power that informs Reuter's portrayal of women who, like herself, try to navigate the domains of nature and culture in order to critique society's construction of gender and its limiting effects on women.

Further, Reuter, much like some of her female protagonists, is a woman capable of great suffering. The obstacles presented to Agathe, Ellen and Cornelia are at least partially the consequence of gender. It is precisely because they are viewed first and foremost as women, and thus as inferior to and dependent on men, that they must fight for their right to formulate a meaningful life project. In order to attain the agency sought after they must practice *amor fati*: a continuous process of self-overcoming and sublimation that ascribes the apparently negative the highest value in life.

1.4 Sublimation according to Lacan

As discussed at length in other sections of this thesis, the process of self-overcoming is initially a self-destructive endeavor that requires the will or desire to sacrifice everything in life for the sake of overcoming per se. The outcome or result of overcoming may be more or less pain or more or less pleasure, but viewed separately from the will to power, the subject's feelings are insignificant. The will to power is not measured by pain or pleasure but by, in Lacanian terms, the *jouissance* associated with sublimation as an act of self-destruction.

Jouissance is Lacan's term for the kind of pleasure that derives from the transgression of the incest taboo. Unlike Freud, who believes in complete satisfaction of the drives by breaking with the incest taboo, Lacan rejects the notion of complete satisfaction. In Lacan's understanding, the symbolic prohibition of enjoyment in the Oedipus complex (the incest taboo)

is, paradoxically, the prohibition of something that is already impossible. The impossibility of full satisfaction, or *jouissance*, is an effect of language and thus a principle defining the human condition. In the words of Carmela Levy-Stokes: “The speaking being has to use the signifier, which comes from the Other. This has an effect of cutting any notion of a complete *jouissance* of the Other. Complete *jouissance* is thus forbidden to the one who speaks, that is, to all speaking beings. This refers to a loss of *jouissance* which is a necessity for those who use language and are a product of language” (103). The ultimate function of the incest taboo is therefore not to prevent incest and thus complete satisfaction from taking place, but to sustain the neurotic illusion that enjoyment would be attainable if it were not forbidden. Further, the very prohibition itself creates the desire to transgress it, and *jouissance* is therefore fundamentally transgressive.

The signifier of the Name-of-the-Father serves to limit *jouissance*. It represents the “no” of the incest-taboo, which redirects desire, and ultimately libido, toward another object. In psychotic subjects the Name-of-the-Father has been excluded from the symbolic altogether, and as a result they lack referents or objects in the actual world toward which they can direct their libido. Instead, they turn the libido toward the ego. The ego takes the position of the Other, that is, the Name-of-the-Father, which causes delusions and hallucinations in the psychotic subject. S/he is concerned with attempting to achieve full *jouissance*, which in the absence of the signifier causes the subject to suffer the pleasures of self-destruction: “In this sense, *jouissance* is a type of satisfaction that includes its contrary, exquisite pain. The drive’s satisfaction is a mode of what is beyond the pleasure principle, a determination by the subject to suffer” (Levy-Stokes 102).

To discuss in more detail the relationship between *jouissance* and its relationship to Nietzsche’s concept of self-overcoming, it is useful to compare Lacan’s account of sublimation with Freud’s view of it. My account is by no means intended to be exhaustive or to provide a

new perspective. Instead, it serves as a starting point to discuss an aspect of Lacanian psychoanalytical theory that is complex and not easily understandable to lay readers, among which I count myself.

In *Civilization and Its Discontents* Sigmund Freud defines sublimation as the process of deflecting sexual instincts toward acts of higher social value. It is “an especially conspicuous feature of cultural development; it is what makes it possible for higher psychological activities, scientific, artistic or ideological, to play such an important part in civilized life” (79-80). Accordingly, sublimation is a type of defense mechanism that allows individuals to function in culturally acceptable ways, possibly resulting in long-term conversion of the initial impulses and drives.

Jacques Lacan takes up the concept of sublimation in his seminar of 1959-60, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*. He follows Freud in emphasizing the fact that social approval is central to the concept. In Lacan’s view, it is only insofar as the drives are diverted toward this dimension of shared social values that they can be said to be sublimated. However, his account of sublimation also differs from Freud’s on a number of points. In *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* Freud argues for a relationship between perverse sexuality and sublimation that assumes that a form of direct satisfaction of the drives is possible in theory and that sublimation is only necessary because this direct form is prohibited by society. In *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, however, Lacan rejects the concept of total or complete satisfaction, arguing that perversion is not simply a brute natural means of discharging the libido and experiencing forbidden sexual pleasures. Instead, Lacan maintains, sexual perversion represents a highly structured relation to the drives, which are already, in themselves, linguistic rather than biological forces. Thus, according to Lacan, sexual drives are not natural or unmediated bodily forces but linguistic representations of desire termed

signifiers. The signifier represents or expresses the subject's desire for the Other. However, the Other's desire is represented in terms of a signifier as well, and both subjects are unattainable to each other as subjects. Instead, they appear as objects, blind to each other's needs and desires.

Freud's and Lacan's respective accounts of perverse sexuality in relation to sublimation posit different object-positions, i.e., understandings of the subject's relation to the object of sublimation. In Freud's account, sublimation involves the redirection of the drive to a different non-sexual object. In Lacan's view, what changes is not the object but its position in the structure of fantasy. In other words, sublimation does not involve directing the drive to a different object, but rather changing the nature of the object to which the drive was already directed, a "change of object in itself," a transformation possible because the drive is "already deeply marked by the articulation of the signifier" (*The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* 293). The sublime quality of an object is thus not due to any intrinsic property of the object itself, but simply an effect of the object's position in the symbolic structure of fantasy.

Over the course of sublimation the signifier changes while remaining the same, that is, unattainable. Due to its nature as a signifier an object can be more or less desirable but it remains unattainable. It constitutes an emptiness or void ultimately pointing to another signifier, or emptiness. This chain of signification constitutes language and intersubjectivity according to Lacan and explains why sublimation is another form of linguistic representation. Consequently, whereas Freud believes that complete sublimation might be possible for some particularly refined or cultured people, Lacan argues that "complete sublimation is not possible for the individual" (*The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* 91). His/her entrance into the symbolic order is marked by a desire set in motion by the signifier: a desire that can never be fully spoken or represented, thus excluding the possibility of complete sublimation.

Lacan follows Freud in linking sublimation with creativity and art. According to Lacan, all human expression and interaction consists of a play of signifiers but sublimation is different in that it is connected with the death drive. How it comes about that sublimation is connected with the death drive is more easily discernible if one considers the nature of the signifier and the position of the sublime object in the subject's fantasy. By being elevated to the dignity of the Thing – which is the term used by Lacan in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* for object petit *a* – the sublime object exerts such a power of fascination that it becomes irresistible to the subject. Simultaneously, it causes anxiety due to the subject's fear of castration and annihilation. Hence, the subject circles around the object of desire. By giving in to desire and attempting the impossible of attaining the sublime object, the subject dies in a metaphorical sense. Confronted with the void of the signifier, the subject views himself as the Other views him, i.e., as an object. To return to and recreate himself as a subject he must fill or substitute the void of the signifier with the creative powers of signification. Thus, the death drive associated with sublimation is not only a “destruction drive,” but also “a will to create from zero, a will to begin again” (*The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* 212- 213). In other words, sublimation is a creative process of signification informed by the death drive in order to overcome self-destruction and annihilation.

The subject that is confronted with the void of the signifier and manages to employ the creative forces of the death drive has much in common with the Übermensch. Both subjects are creators who depend on will and the will to power to overcome themselves, and the Other. While the Other is constituted by the desire for truth in Nietzsche's philosophy, the Lacanian object of sublimation is the imaginary object of desire that we seek in the Other. Both objects are subjects whose desire is represented by the signifier and thus attainable only in symbolic and imaginary terms. Further, both Nietzsche and Lacan claim that humankind cannot exist without the Other.

The Other, i.e., objet petit *a*, is any object that sets desire in motion. It is the surplus of desire or irreducible reserve of libido that defines human subjectivity. Thus, objet petit *a* is not only the object of the subject's desire, but constitutive of his subjectivity.

As established above, the irreducible character of the Lacanian objet petit *a* is not the same as the Übermensch. The Übermensch strives to break with convention to set up his own ideals, thereby creating a plurality of truths and gods. In one of five possible incarnations, the objet *petit a*, on the other hand, is the object that fills or covers up the gap between the erotic bliss of the mythical primordial Father and its fulfillment. Thus, the objet petit *a* is not another subject but an object invested with meaning. This object evokes desire in the subject, and, in effect, a surplus of meaning. The excess of meaning associated with the objet petit *a* is connected to the pleasure that stems from trying to represent and talk about the void at the center of language:

We meet the object *a* in language all the time, Miller says, as a function of the symbolic trying to master the real ... But paradoxically, the continual and palpable emptying out of the void positivizes itself as jouissance (negative) effects that appear as an excess in an otherwise smooth glow of symbolization. The excess paralyzes the spontaneous movement of language and appears as an object *a*. There one finds a question, an enigma, or a paradox (Ragland-Sullivan 49-50).

The excess of meaning created by jouissance is both creative and destructive in nature. While it adds to the pleasure of the Other's desire, it represents contingency as a permanent condition. In the case of psychosis, in which the unifying signifier intended to incorporate the real into the symbolic is missing, the subject lacks the means to cover up the void. Confronted by the lack and the emptiness of the signifier, the psychotic risks being pulled in and swallowed by the real.

In the case of regular, uninterrupted socialization, however, the symbolic serves as a vehicle for integration as well as desire, thus urging the subject to engage with other subjects and

objects in the world. Consequently, as a result of the inexhaustible nature of the void, the subject is engaged in a continuous process of signification that situates him/her as a creator not of language but of meaning. This approach to signification as meaning-making has certain affinities with Nietzsche's understanding of self-overcoming as an uninterrupted quest for truth. On his/her path to truth, the subject recognizes that truth in itself does not exist in absolute terms but represents an attitude to knowledge that is characterized by a destructive principle, "or truth at any price." What is being destroyed in relation to truth is not necessarily another subject or an object but the assumption that truth in itself exists, resulting in a new approach for being in the world.

In conclusion, Lacan as well as Nietzsche conceive of the subject as both that which overcomes and that which is overcome. Termed *jouissance* by Lacan and the will to power by Nietzsche, human desire is driven or powered by the will or want to create from zero, or start again, thereby informing subjectivity with the creative aspects of self-destruction. To create is to confront the void of the signifier. To confront the void of the signifier is to overcome the object and the Other to become an *Übermensch*. To be an *Übermensch* is to create. The chain or process of signification and meaning making is never-ending, and it is based on self-destruction as well as the will, and desire, to create new beginnings.

Chapter 4: Ellen and Cornelia – Two Übermenschen

Ellen von der Weiden tells the story of a young woman of untamed spirit, who marries an older doctor and psychiatrist and moves from the countryside to start a new life with him in the city. Progressively dispirited by the efforts made by her husband to tie her to her wifely duties, Ellen resists by insisting on continuing to live her life as a free individual even as a married woman. She entertains a large circle of friends and is often seen as a guest at different social events. As someone known for her frankness and somewhat unconventional nature, Ellen is often the center of attention to the amusement of hosts and friends. Her husband, who is not equally amused by the wild nature and behavior of his wife, dedicates all of his time and energy to his work as a doctor at a clinic for hysterical women. An expert in the field of hysteria (i.e., female illness) he expects that Ellen's wild nature will be tamed once she becomes a mother.

Ellen also nurtures fantasies of becoming a mother. Like her husband, she sees parenthood as a part of married life that grants meaning and purpose to the institutionalized relations between man and woman. More significantly, she considers maternity an experience defining womanhood: "O, ich weiß was mich stillen würde. Nichts Unerhörtes – nein. Etwas so Natürliches. Ein so alltägliches Glück, wie es arme Waschfrauen, Tagelöhnerinnen, Pastorenfrauen im Übermaß besitzen. Die Gesegneten! Nur ich allein – ich unter Tausenden nicht? Kein Anzeichen – keine Hoffnung" (70). With married life not sufficient to nourish a passionate, wild nature like hers, the female protagonist longs for a baby to give purpose to her life. She is in despair at the prospect of not being able to conceive (of) a new life, here in a double sense, both as a pregnant woman giving birth to another human being and as an individual subject in her own right.

Ellen continues to struggle throughout her marriage to Fritz. Despite repeated attempts to build a harmonious relationship based on trust and intimacy, wife and husband drift further and further apart. At this point in the story, Ellen finds consolation in her newly discovered admiration for the art of a painter named Uglandy. Visiting an exhibition of his paintings for the first time in the company of her good friend Jakobus, Ellen is struck speechless. In the following weeks, she visits the exhibition regularly, and on his first visit to the city, Ellen takes her father to see the paintings. Once a renowned writer, the elderly man now lives a life in seclusion, unimpressed by the whims and trends of modern times. The old man does not appreciate or approve of Uglandy's art, but in the discussions that follow between father and daughter, Ellen remains a firm defender of the artist: "Nie habe ich mich so selbst gefunden. Nie war ich so ich selbst, als in meinem Urteil über Uglandy. Darum hätte ich schweigen sollen" (61).

Ellen, who is aware of her father's as well as her husband's views of Uglandy's art, knows that by defending her opinion she will antagonize and repel both men. But Ellen guards the impression of Uglandy's paintings as an expression and extension of her own self; careful not to cause animosity or resentment, Ellen oscillates between excitement and despair. In one of her more heated discussions with her father about art Ellen defends the right of contemporary artists to find new means and ways of expression, and she labels those who fail to break with convention imitators and conformists: "Doch einfach abgeschrieben, der edle Stil. Seit Jahrhunderten abgeschrieben. In der Schule ist Abschreiben verboten, und in der hohen Kunst soll es erlaubt sein?" (55)

In Ellen's opinion, the role of art does not lie in mere reproduction as an attempt to maintain the status quo but in breaking with old traditions. She identifies in Uglandy a man of new ideals more in agreement with her own ideas, and Ellen rapidly develops romantic feelings

for the artist. In Uglydy she believes to have found her equal in love and life, and in a moment of passion Ellen puts together an elaborate bouquet of flowers and leaves it at the door of the painter's studio. Much as Agathe's idealization of the dead poet Byron causes her to tremble with desire and fear, Ellen's identification with Uglydy touches on her innermost being.

But, in Ellen's case, the notion of sublimation is presented as an act of passion and will that situates the protagonist within discourse and thus the commonly ordered world. Unlike Agathe, Ellen does not try to break out of or away from language but she strives to find ways to redefine the realm of representation in order to express her love for another man. Unlike Agathe, who is willing to confine her desires to the realm of the imaginary, Ellen struggles to achieve real change in life as an agent of her own making. She is determined to obtain and possess the object of her desire, and in order to achieve satisfaction Ellen disobeys the law laid down by her husband, thereby forever estranging him.

When Ellen encounters Uglydy in person for the first time she is taken aback by his unattractive appearance. Disappointed to the extent that she cannot hide her tears, she leaves the company without talking to him. A few weeks later during a solitary walk in the dark, Ellen meets the painter a second time: "Es war Uglydy. Etwas Bedrücktes, Müdes, Trostloses lag in seinem Gesichte und in seiner Haltung. Nicht der berühmte Künstler, der Zauberer blühender Farben. Nicht der Siegreiche. Der Mensch, der unter einem schweren, ernsten Schicksal steht. Es war Ehrfurcht und Zurückhaltung in meiner Seele" (98). Uglydy, who is stripped of his appearance as a great painter and performer of artistic wonders, now appears as a human being in need and despair, evoking feelings of compassion and identification in the protagonist. When they meet again at the wedding of Ellen's friend Röschen some time later, a spark of passion is ignited between the protagonist and Uglydy.

The following evening Ellen forcefully disobeys her husband's command to stay home. She climbs out their bedroom window to watch the moon in the company of her friend Jakobus and Uglandy. While climbing the hill to get a better view, Ellen lures Uglandy deeper and deeper into the forest until they are finally alone: "Und das weiß ich – weiß es noch heut'! Nehme es nicht zurück – bereue es nicht! Was geschah in jener Nacht, und was nicht geschah zwischen mir und ihm, das ist sein Geheimnis und das meine, und niemand sonst wird davon erfahren" (124).

When Ellen returns to her room that night she finds her husband, Fritz, waiting for her. He informs her that his concern for her is not mainly as her husband but as a doctor, knowing as he does that she is pregnant. Ellen is struck speechless before passing out. When she recovers consciousness, she is confronted by her husband, who accuses her of carelessness and selfishness, whereupon Ellen throws at him the fact that she is in love with another man. Fritz dismisses her behavior as the result of hysteria and refuses to discuss the topic further. However, Ellen's words plant a seed of distrust between the married couple, and shortly after their return to Berlin, Fritz announces that he wants to divorce Ellen: "Du hast ja vielleicht die Wahrheit gesprochen.... Ich weiß es ja nicht, und das ist das Schlimmste, daß ich nicht mehr weiß, was ich Dir glauben soll, und was nicht ... Ich würde dieses Kind hassen Hörst Du – hassen würde ich es!" (145).

Ellen too struggles to attach emotionally to the unborn child, but for other reasons than hatred of her husband: "Und ich hasse das Kind in meinem Leibe, weil es nicht sein Kind ist" (129). Uglandy, in the meantime, has left the country to get away from Ellen and to dedicate himself to his art. Abandoned by both husband and lover, Ellen stays temporarily in a hostel until the divorce is settled.

In retrospect, after her divorce from Fritz, Ellen recognizes that her main motivation for entering marriage was in fact to become a mother: “Aus welchem Grund habe ich Fritz geheiratet als aus dem einer wilden Sehnsucht, Mutter zu werden. Und nun...” (159). Thus, despite her opposition to the expectations set up by married life in a bourgeois setting it turns out that Ellen, much to her surprise, wanted a baby just as much as her husband did. But, over the course of her life with Fritz the longing for a baby turned into despair and at times even hatred and rage. Unable to connect emotionally to the unborn child, Ellen considers whether ending her life would not save her and the child from a life of anguish and pain:

Warum nicht ein Ende machen mit dir und mit mir? Wer nicht mehr Zutrauen zum Leben hat, der sollte von hinnen gehen. Oft und oft denke ich's. Und sehe nur Barmherzigkeit gegen mein Kind darin. [...] Eine geheime Hoffnung kauert in einem Winkel meines Verlangens. Es wird eine Stunde kommen, die mich erlöst. Bald – vielleicht sehr bald ... Das ist tröstlich. Nicht mehr sein – nicht mehr fühlen – immer nur schlafen – schlafen – schlafen(134)

Ellen is prevented from attempting to kill herself and the unborn baby out of a deep-seated conviction that suicide, especially when one is pregnant, is utterly immoral: “Wäre selbstmord nicht so gemein Und der Selbstmord einer schwangeren Frau ist über alle Begriffe schamlos” (134). Plagued by feelings of guilt and shame, Ellen is left with no other option than to view the pregnancy as a test of her endurance, and she suffers the torments of having her body inhabited and taken over by another living being against her will. Once the baby is born, Ellen dedicates all of her time to the newborn, which due to his disability needs constant care and attention.

A devoted caretaker, Ellen experiences none of the maternal feelings for her son that she once harbored with respect to the prospect of having a baby: “Es ist so schauerlich, sein eigenes Kind nicht zu lieben. Ich glaubte von Stunde zu Stunde, das Muttergefühl müsse wie eine Erlösung über mich kommen... Nun weiß ich, auch das kommt nicht” (162). Jakobus is

concerned that Ellen will waste her life in isolation and solitude in the company of her disabled son and elderly father, and he urges her to break free and go some other place where there are more opportunities for her to live her life fully. Ellen becomes defensive and upset, and an exchange follows in which she offers a perspective on the relationship between suffering and happiness that seems influenced by Nietzsche's concept of *amor fati*:

Ich dachte nur, es wäre mehr Roheit in Ihnen. So: Etwa das sich ausleben muss, wie die Leute so schön sagen.

Jacobus – ausleben heißt doch nicht nur sich ausfreuen. Leben ist doch auch, dem Schmerz bis in seine tiefsten Gründe nachgehen und ihn ertragen, wo er am dunkelsten und verborgensten haust.

So viel Christentum steckt noch in Ihnen? O Ellen – Ellen!

In Ihnen etwa nicht? Wenn Sie nichts wüssten von der Wollust des Leidens möcht' ich Sie bedauern. – Nur aus tiefstem Herzen sagen können: "Ich will" nicht "ich muß" – darin liegt alles. (169)

Ellen does not say "I want pain," but "I want," and therein lies the explanation as to why the concept of the "Wollust des Leidens" or *amor fati* proves to be so successful or satisfying in the protagonist's case. Counter to expectation, by claiming to trade pain for joy, the protagonist turns the failure of misdirected desire into the experience of happiness and love as a process of unmasking or overcoming the self in order to perform or stage another self that is free from the burdens of past or future projections or expectations. As she arises from the ashes of burning agony and self-destruction concerned with the loss of her husband and lover, Ellen creates another object of desire: the newborn baby.

In order to replace the other of her desire with the creative, life-affirming act of self-overcoming, Ellen must find her place in life here-and-now by creating ex nihilo. In the words of Pippin, "In what way, goes the implied question or experiment, can a human being now tied to the 'earth' still aspire to be ultimately 'overman,' *Übermensch*?" (161). The answer to Pippin's

question is ultimately amor fati. As Pippin explains, in Nietzschean terms to learn to love what one hates or cannot endure is a “heroic form of affirmation of life ... to re-introduce this ‘tension’ of spirit so necessary for self-overcoming” (162). In Pippin’s statement we see an understanding of time that points neither backward nor forward but is associated with or locked into the here and now as the moment of life-affirming decision-making. As a sovereign subject the individual is situated as a creator or instigator of a time and space in which pain equals happiness and negation is described in positive terms as an act of heroism.

The moment of recognition causing the protagonist to experience the kind of life-affirming tension of spirit necessary for self-overcoming occurs when she watches her son’s reactions to sun beams playing on his bed:

[...] und da wendet mein Bübchen, das am sonnigen Fenster gesessen, das Köpfchen – und es lächelt mit den Augen, lächelt mit dem blassen Mündchen und zeigt mit den Fingerchen auf die goldenen Lichter, die durch die Efeuranken auf sein Deckchen fallen, und greift mit den Händchen – und will sie haschen und fangen!... [...] Mein Kind – mein Schmerzenskind, mein Sohn! Mein Einziges! [...] Ein Laut – der Hauch eines Ausdruckes – und wieder Glaube, wieder Hoffnung, wieder Spannung und atemloses Lauschen auf das Glück.” (174)

In *Aus guter Familie* the metaphor of the sun – in the opening scene described as penetrating the dark space of the church on the day of Communion – is used as an expression of foreboding and future change of perspective that causes the female protagonist to tremble. In the closing scene of *Ellen von der Weiden*, the symbol of the sun has changed from posing a potential threat to include notions of self-overcoming. In the reflections of light on her son’s face, Ellen finds the first signs of joy after months of anguish and pain. Here, the sun as a metaphor for overcoming, and ultimately amor fati, serves to foreground the role of the son as a source of great hardships *as well* as happiness. By accepting her destiny as a mother against her will, Ellen discovers in and through her son a will to power by means of destruction or self-sacrifice. In those first

moments of excitement Ellen no longer sees herself primarily as a caretaker but as a mother, i.e., as somebody who finds a meaning in life that is beyond herself, yet pointing to the here and now characteristic of the life-affirming force or tension of self-overcoming.

Ellen's life having come full circle, the irony of the situation inheres in the fact that the boy, who is severely disabled, is the main source of happiness in his mother's life. Before his birth a cause of pain and self-doubt, the infant is now the past event that helped the mother and female protagonist understand the limitations of her bourgeois self. While watching him play, and in anticipation of what is yet to come, Ellen experiences a spark or tension that gives her cause for joy. One may even claim that it is not despite the son's disability but because of it that the female protagonist manages to turn suffering into happiness. Returning to *Also sprach Zarathustra* can shed some light on why the notion of disability is crucial in the re-awakening of Ellen as a subject in her own right with the will to over-come herself and live again.

In part 3 ("Von alten und neuen Tafeln") Zarathustra announces, "O meine Brüder, wer ein Erstling ist, der wird immer geopfert. ... wir brennen und braten alle zu Ehren alter Götzenbilder. Unser Bestes ist noch jung" (292). Read in relation to *Ellen von der Weiden*, the concept of firstling can be understood in multiple ways. First, one could claim that Ellen herself is a firstling, not in that she is the first woman ever to be disappointed in love or be abandoned at the moment of childbirth, but that she is the first among the characters in the text to suffer from and overcome obstacles related to matters of gender. While there is evidence in the text showing that other characters, Ellen's husband and Uglandy included, undergo painful experiences in the love triangle played out in the novel, none of them goes through such a radical change as Ellen. Both men continue their respective careers, and as the reader later learns, at the end of the novel Uglandy marries another woman. The text does not reveal whether Ellen's husband remarries or

not, but considering the nature of his position as the supervisor of a clinic for hysterical women and a doctor with a great reputation, one may assume that he will eventually conform to conventions that prescribe that men of a certain class and social standing be married. In Ellen's case, on the other hand, there is nothing suggesting that she will follow the lead of a man in a second marriage. Especially the reference to the son as her one and only love or "Einziges" in the passage quoted above proposes that Ellen has decided to honor her decision to dedicate her life to her son.

If one considers the anguish and suffering associated with breaking with previous "idols" or conventions, a second reading becomes possible. Born to parents from the middle class, the baby is the first (and only one) to be conceived of within the legal framework of institutionalized marriage between Ellen and Fritz and the first to be born outside of the very same structure. Further, the son is marked by birth defects never specified but making him unfit for the expectations of bourgeois gender roles. A weakling in poor health and with limited mental capacity, the boy will likely never rise to a position of influence, fame, or money, and chances are he will never reproduce and be a father in his own right. With no career or family to justify his existence as a man and main provider he lacks the attributes typical of middle-class men like his father and grandfather. Instead, he will remain in a blissful state of childish innocence, which in the eyes of his mother grants him eternal life as the chosen one. He, who is unaware of his surroundings, is lost to the world and free to be his own self, guarded and protected by his mother. Hence, the boy is a firstling, sacrificed by his father and saved by his mother for future generations as a symbol of redemption, and ultimately, self-overcoming. As Nietzsche states, "Eurer Kinder Land sollt ihr lieben: diese Liebe sei euer neuer Adel ...An euren Kindern sollt ihr

gut machen, daß ihr eurer Vater Kinder seid: alles Vergangene sollt ihr so erlösen. Diese neue Tafel stelle ich über euch!” (297).

In Nietzschean terms, one could argue that the boy is a flawed Messianic figure, born of a single mother to bring salvation and hope. He is the king of future nations gone wrong and a sign of his own time. Unable to become the man middle-class society wants him to be, the boy is an embodiment of a place and time in history that points to a here and now unmarked by past or future events or expectations. Be it divine bliss or childish innocence, what matters is that the boy is a man yet unborn and the birthright of a woman born again. Re-birth being the issue here, both boy and woman, son and mother, enter into a relationship of life-affirming interdependence by which the birth of the one marks the re-birth of the other.

2.1 Das Tränenhaus

On discovering that she is pregnant Cornelia, much like Ellen, decides to retreat from public life. But rather than awaiting the delivery of the baby in the company and care of close family, Cornelia, a well-known author, determines to keep the pregnancy a secret. Cornelia, who discovers she is pregnant only after she breaks off the relationship with her lover and the father of her child, quite impulsively and without telling anyone sets off on a journey to a countryside inn in South Tirol. When she learns that an acquaintance who happens to be in the area plans to visit, Cornelia – desperate to keep the pregnancy a secret– takes up residence with Frau Ursula Uffenbacher. Uffenbacher is the owner and manager of an establishment for pregnant unmarried women, referred to as “das Tränenhaus” by its young residents. Cornelia is eager to remain anonymous and to find enough time to finish a second manuscript. She asks to have all of her meals brought to her room, and on leaving the house, she goes on solitary walks far away from the prying eyes of Frau Uffenbacher and the other women staying at the Tränenhaus. Due to the

low standard of lodging and food Cornelia is determined to leave the establishment as soon as an opportunity presents itself. But, informed by the other residents that Frau Uffenbacher is known for sending incriminating letters to family and friends of her residents out of revenge for lost income, Cornelia finds herself forced to stay. She wants to protect her mother from the disgrace that would follow upon a public revelation of her daughter's condition, and she makes a conscious effort to endure her stay and focus all of her attention and energy on her writing. With the revenues from a second book Cornelia hopes to attract good and dedicated foster parents for her unborn child: "Ihr neues Werk sollte ihr die Mittel geben, um dem unaussprechlich verlassenen Wesen Freunde zu erwerben, die sich, wenn auch nicht aus Liebe, so doch um des Verdienstes willen seiner annahmen, es pflegten und groß zogen" (14-15). At this point in the story, writing as a creative act is viewed as instrumental in that it will help support another life, i.e., a baby, unwanted by its mother. Thus, initially writing is presented as a means not to overcome oneself but that other being who threatens to take over the body and life of the female protagonist.

As is clearly stated throughout the first half of the novel, the prospect of bearing and delivering the child fills Cornelia with a despair so deep that she at times considers ending her own and the baby's life: "Mit dem Kind im Arm an der Kirchhofsecke auf dem öden windumwehten Hügel zu schlafen schien ihr so süß und friedlich" (103). Increasingly consumed by the new life growing inside her, Cornelia sinks deeper and deeper into depression, thus finding it more and more difficult to focus on her work. Eventually she lacks the will to write, and ultimately to live: "Sie vermochte schon längst nicht mehr zu arbeiten, der Degout auch vor diesem Werk war zu übermächtig geworden. Sie hielt sich viel auf ihrem Zimmer, lag auf dem Kanapee und grübelte – sie konnte gar nicht wieder los von den Gedanken und Phantasien, die

ihr zuflüsterten, wie alles am besten auszuführen sein würde” (107). The importance of willing to the will to power and the lack thereof and what it means in terms of self-overcoming resonate in this passage. Recalling Zarathustra’s saying “Do whatever you will, but first be such as are *able to will*,” the question here is less whether Cornelia wants to live or die – or maybe both – and more the notion of willing per se. As the death wish or self-destructive force is instrumental to the concept of the will to power, one must ask what exactly it is that the female protagonist wills and whether her will is strong enough to render her successful.

In order to figure out what the nature of her death wish is, Cornelia calls death – in German “der Tod” or “er” – upon herself: “Er wußte ja, daß sie die Sehnsucht verzehrte, von ihm geküsst – von ihm in den Arm genommen zu werden. Er wußte ja, daß es damit enden mußte, daß sie von selbst zu ihm kam” (107). Threatening to steal her breath, and thus to take her life, death seems to have his own character. Male in nature he asserts such a strong appeal that Cornelia considers giving in to her desire for him. She longs for his embrace and the kiss that will seal her destiny. As a body out of reach, he confronts the protagonist with her own desire: a longing so intense that it consumes her.

The seductive nature of the Other makes for a dangerous play of games between Cornelia and the object of her desire. Circling around it she cannot decide what to do. Can she give in without submitting herself to total annihilation or will she succumb to the deathly attraction of the Other? Ultimately, it is a matter of will power. In view of the emptiness of the signifier, i.e., the Other, Cornelia must decide if she wants to live for herself and the unborn, or die. It is only by overcoming her desire for him and the burning sensation of loss that she can create a new object of desire and thereby live again. In the spirit of Zarathustra, what matters is not pain or

self-destruction but the will to power, and in order to overcome herself, Cornelia must not fear anything, not even death.

On the brink of what could be considered a nervous breakdown, Cornelia shows no signs of psychosis. However, her fascination with death in the first half of the novel exhibits some similarities with sublimation in the psychotic's handling of trauma. While Cornelia is not a psychotic subject she is unwilling and unable to integrate the trauma related to unwanted pregnancy into the symbolic order. In view of the social stigma of childbirth out of wedlock in the historical period in which Reuter wrote, it is not surprising that the experience would have devastating effects on the protagonist. To overcome or deal with her fear and anguish, Cornelia sublimates her love for the lost lover, and he returns as the imaginary Other, represented as a lover and redeemer, holding the promise of saving Cornelia and the unborn child from disgrace.

But, as taught by Lacan, in psychosis hallucinations act as a form of sublimation "with serious drawbacks" (105). These drawbacks include the loss of language and a stable sense of self. The result is a form of language entrapment isolating the psychotic subject in a world of his own making. The psychotic's world as depicted by Lacan has little in common with the notion of creation in Nietzsche's philosophy of the *Übermensch*. To be a creator in the sense of the *Übermensch* is an imaginative and liberating act that situates the subject within discourse; however, the psychotic's lack of access to the world of communication makes him a creator of a language that only he speaks. The exclusion from the symbolic is the result of the loss of an ultimate, absolute referent in the world. In his study of Schreber's writing, Lacan refers to this loss of "the guarantor of my being" as a loss of the ultimate sense of self as belonging to the world: "What characterizes Schreber's world is that *he* is lost, and only the *you* remains. . . . This *he* is the guarantor of my being, without this *he* my being could not even be an *I*" (101).

The he referred to by Lacan is ultimately the subject position made possible by the Name-of-the-Father. As part of socialization the subject must learn to separate himself from the mother, and eventually the father and to represent their absence in language. The result is a creation of self that is always understood in relation to the absence of the Other in the presence of its replacement, i.e., the signifier. A dispersed, disembodied psychotic subject, however, lacks access to discourse, and consequently, the means to interact in all but one way: he can determine when to achieve the un-imaginary by imbuing himself with his self, thereby escaping the threat posed by the real. The fact that this process or act implicates or brings about the death of the subject is not of concern to the psychotic. At this point he is lost and only you exist, i.e., the Other. But what about the I?

The I goes missing as well. As soon as the process of integration into the symbolic order breaks down or fails, the ego of the psychotic subject initiates a series of defense mechanisms to ward off the threat posed by the real. Since language constitutes the main tool and effect of integration, by refusing to talk in any manner comprehensible to other members of the discursive order, the psychotic subject closes himself off from the world. As a consequence thereof, the imaginary relationship between you and me, him and God remains intact, protecting the psychotic subject from facing himself in the Other. With the refusal to recognize the Other as a product of the I, the psychotic subject remains in a world of hallucinatory signs and subjects imaginable and comprehensible only to him. To try to make sense of this world is pointless. Why? Because the psychotic subject lacks access to the symbolic order and does not desire to communicate with anyone but the Other. To avoid discovering the mechanisms behind the tricks played by the psychotic mind to cause fragmentation, the subject cannot and will not make sense.

To ask the psychotic subject to step outside the self-imposed language trap that constitutes him would cause God or the Other to come back.

By calling death upon herself, Cornélie allows for the kind of disintegration of self visible in the first stages of psychosis to take place. Rather than as disintegration, one may view the act of sublimation performed by Cornélie as an attempt at unsettling the stable sense of self represented by the ego, whereby impulses from the id are given space to roam freely. As a consequence hereof, Cornélie is free to succumb to her desire, thereby creating a surplus of pleasure, or *jouissance*. The surplus is the result of the temporary loss of a stable referent in the symbolic order, which in turn causes a separation between the imaginary and the real. Due to the lack of the unifying principle of the signifier, Cornélie is unable to make sense of or understand the *jouissance* of the Other.

It should be noted that, unlike a psychotic subject such as Agathe, who is excluded from the symbolic and enclosed in an imaginary realm of her own making, Cornélie suffers a temporary fragmentation of self. In Cornélie's case, the internalization of the Name-of-the-Father has been successful in a process of socialization and subject-formation supported by her professional career as a writer. Thus, Cornélie faces a different kind of language entrapment and fragmentation from Agathe, yet it is similar to psychosis insofar as she temporarily loses a stable referent in the world of common sense.

A split, fragmented subject plagued by hallucinations, Cornélie experiences the return of the real as erratic, dark forces spreading a smell of brandy. Brandy is strongly associated with bourgeois men and the custom of drinking brandy and smoking cigars after dinner. The brandy

on the breath of the invisible, hallucinatory Other marks him as a man intoxicated by alcohol and lust, and his attempts at seizing Cornelia as an act of aggression:

Jeden Augenblick konnte sie gewärtig sein, daß die Hölle, die unten an der gebrechlichen Türe rüttelte, die rostigen Bänder sprengen und zu ihr eindringen werde – daß das Fürchterliche, Grauensvolle sie wehrlos preisgeben finden würde. . . . Cornelia fühlte den Wirbel der finstern, tierhaften Urmächte des Lebens um sich kreisen – er griff nach ihr empor, riß sie in seinen Schlund – sie sah rote Fäuste durch die Dunkelheit nach ihr langen, brantweindunstiger Atem umfing sie. (112)

In this passage, the Other shares none of the characteristics of the sublime object, represented as a lover and redeemer. Nor does he evoke any sensations of lust or desire. Unfathomable and dark as the void itself, the Other is a force of destruction and animalistic power, and ultimately death:

Und so wurde ihr der Mann schlechthin zu einem Bilde des Todes: Leben zeugend, um doppelt Leben zu vernichten, nur von einem blinden Drang getrieben, den er selbst nicht zu deuten gewußt hätte. War das ruhelose Sehnen und Gieren nach Liebe, das sie verzehrt hatte, all die Jahre ihrer Jugend hindurch, im Grunde nicht auch nur ein Verlangen nach Vernichtung, als nach der Erfüllung alles Seins? (108)

At the point in the return of the real, the Other is represented as the primordial father who is also the leader of the hoard. As a result of the temporary lack of symbolic and imaginary power due to trauma, the Other's *jouissance* appears crude and aggressive. Without the means to signify or understand this *jouissance*, Cornelia becomes prey to his demands. However, the surplus of pleasure created by the Other is also a surplus of meaning. This richness of meaning arises out of the gap between the primordial father's sexual drive and its fulfillment. It is represented by the objet *petit a*, or the sublimated object. Thus, in order to fight or overcome the lethal attraction of the Other and not to be consumed by the void, Cornelia must create another object of desire.

Sublimation is one way to approach the void without being consumed by it, however signification in itself, and thus language, is the very mechanism that situates the subject at a

safe distance from the void, and ultimately from insanity. With the help of signifiers, the unspeakable is approached in order to handle what, in itself, lacks meaning. Thus, the signifier is both that which could potentially confront the subject with the void, as well as the structuring principle to cover it up by creating an excess of meaning.

To maintain a certain balance between the destructive and creative forces of the void, and thus allow for socialization to proceed normally, the Name-of-the-Father serves to limit jouissance. Without it, there is an excess of pleasure, as well as destruction. Is this excess of pleasure and suffering what is meant by the expression “doppelt Leben zu vernichten” in the passage quoted above? In the encounter between man and woman another life is produced. When the man later abandons his lover, the hope of a good life for the unborn child is crushed as well as the woman’s desire for the lover. Thus the Other as representative of the void appears both as creator and destroyer.

How then is the relationship between willing and wanting to die related to jouissance in *Das Tränenhaus*? Is Cornelia willing or wanting to die, or both? Further, what is the nature of her death wish in relation to the concept of the Übermensch? Ultimately, longing for the ultimate and irrevocable consumption of self through identification with the Other, Cornelia seeks to escape her deepest fear: the pain of (child) birth. Here, childbirth may be interpreted as an allegory for the relationship between creation and self-destruction so central to the Übermensch. By Nietzsche termed a desire to “be the child who is newly born,” the subject who strives to be an Übermensch must want to be a mother, i.e., creator of new values by means of great suffering:

Schaffen – das ist die große Erlösung vom Leiden, und des Lebens Leichtwerden. Aber daß der Schaffende sei, dazu selber tut Leid not und viel Verwandlung. Ja, viel bitteres Sterben muß in eurem Leben sein, ihr Schaffenden! Also seid ihr Fürsprecher und

Rechtfertiger aller Vergänglichkeit. Daß der Schaffende selber das Kind sei, das neu geboren werde, dazu muß er auch Gebärerin sein wollen und der Schmerz der Gebärerin. (125).

Initially, Cornelia does not want to become a mother. She sees herself primarily as a writer and after the pregnancy she plans to resume her life as an independent woman. However, in the process of mental and physical disintegration as a result of the unwanted pregnancy, Cornelia cannot write. Thus, the single most important aspect of her life as an independent woman eludes her, and she undergoes a regression of sorts. When faced with a *jouissance* so intense that it drives her to the brink of insanity, the protagonist experiences the symbolic death of her own self. This annihilation or reduction of self to the status of an object explains why the Other of Cornelia's hallucinations appears as fragmented and separated into body parts. Cornelia is temporarily without access to the unifying principle of the Name-of-the-Father, and thereby the trauma of unwanted pregnancy appears to be beyond signification and unattainable and threatening to the protagonist.

Simultaneously, the unborn child is the past event that helps the protagonist overcome herself and to act as a mother and creator. Here, the term creator signifies Cornelia's role both as sole provider and caretaker of the unborn child as well as her position as a writer. As an established writer, Cornelia differs from Ellen and Agathe in that she has successfully managed to secure a position for herself as an independent woman. She is not in need of marriage to support herself or the unborn baby. But, to be a woman and a writer is not enough to break with convention. As one of few professions open to bourgeois women, writing does not in itself constitute an act of defiance. Neither does pregnancy out of wedlock. But by combining the two experiences Cornelia constitutes motherhood as an act of resilience situating the protagonist as a creator within and of discourse, i.e., as a writer.

At the beginning of her pregnancy, Cornelia is unable to identify with other women in a similar situation, and she does not see womanhood or femininity as a shared experience. Rather, she sees being a woman as an individual, personally lived experience, translated in writing into a text of self-expression and identity-in-making, characteristic of the human condition. It is not until the magnitude of public debate caused by her first book reaches her in her self-imposed isolation in Frau Uffenbacher's establishment that Cornelia reflects on her position as a *woman* writer: "Ihr Name war ein Kriegsruf geworden, den andere nun schon auf ihre Fahne schrieben, mit dem sie, unabhängig von ihr selbst, freie Bahn und Glück und Erfolg suchten ... Da draußen in einer Welt, die so unendlich ferne lag ... Es überfiel sie plötzlich mit jäher Gewalt das Bewußtsein, erreicht zu haben, wonach tausende von kraftvollen Männern vergebens ringen und kämpfen ..." (204-5). Up until this point unaware of her privileged position as a woman *and* a writer, Cornelia enjoys a moment of revelation bordering on exaltation, and for the first time since taking up residence in the *Tränenhaus*, she feels the will to write again: "Dort draußen lebte sie ja! War denn dies alles um sie her nicht nur ein wirres beängstigendes Traumland? Hinaus – hinaus in das wahre Leben! Zum Kampf – zum Wirken – zu neuen Taten, neuen Siegen! schrie plötzlich jubelnd ihr erwachender Mut" (205).

The title of her second book is "Der Seelenzustand des modernen Kulturweibes." During her stay at the *Tränenhaus*, Cornelia has had plenty of time to contemplate the situation of women of any class facing pregnancy out of wedlock. Sharing the experience of unwanted pregnancy with other women in a similar situation, the protagonist learns the importance of solidarity and friendship across age and class barriers. At times utterly helpless and dependent on the other women in the *Tränenhaus*, Cornelia experiences a kind of rebirth also in terms of intersubjective relationships. She develops maternal feelings for some of the younger residents,

and experiencing a desire to protect them from Frau Uffenbacher's abuse, Cornelia eventually comes to identify with the other women, recognizing through her affiliation with them that the sufferings of pregnancy out of wedlock is a unique female experience.

Further, Cornelia appropriates the position in the symbolic order reserved for the symbolic father to discuss femininity and womanhood in a time in which women's access to and participation in public discourse was limited. Of importance to understanding Cornelia's significance as a *woman* writer with influence on public discourse is the fact that the newborn baby is a girl. Not a boy and flawed Messiah as in Ellen's case but a girl, Cornelia's baby is represented as a possible heiress and fellow companion in future battles for women's rights. Expressing a wish that the newborn be endowed with a strong will and intelligence, Cornelia recognizes that the life of any woman who strives to be treated as an equal to men will have to fight for her rights: "Wieder umfaßte ihre Hand liebkosend sein festes, rundes Köpfchen, das ihr fast das Leben gekostet hatte, und dabei dachte die Mutter: Gott erhalte dir deinen harten Schädel und einen harten Willen geb' er dir dazu, denn beides kann ein Weib gebrauchen" (254). While the girl is not yet a subject capable of sharing the burdens and obstacles of life as a single mother with Cornelia, her very existence situates Cornelia as a mother within the discourse of public life. At this point in her life happily willing to face the rejection and disapproval of others, Cornelia decides to disclose the existence of her baby to the public, thus actively resisting the conventions of her time labelling unlawful babies as unwanted.

Chapter 5: Concluding Remarks

Gabriele Reuter enjoyed great success as a writer during her lifetime. Her first novel, *Aus guter Familie*, was published in 1895 and it received immediate critical acclaim, making Reuter famous overnight. In the novel we follow the young protagonist Agathe's journey from her first attempts at formulating ideals of romantic love and revolution in her adolescent years until her retirement from the world as a woman in her early forties's numbed by electroshock treatment, and ultimately, the pressures of conformity. *Aus guter Familie* sparked heated debates in magazines and feminist pamphlets, equal in magnitude and importance to another one of Reuter's (later) novels, *Das Tränenhaus*.

Das Tränenhaus appeared in 1905, and ten years after the publication of *Aus guter Familie* the novel caused a new scandal. The controversy surrounding the book came from the rather stark descriptions of the conditions in a home for unmarried pregnant women. Some years earlier, in 1897, Reuter had given birth to her illegitimate daughter, Lili, and the circumstances of her pregnancy and childbirth may have informed the novel *Das Tränenhaus*. Although much was made of the complex relationship between autobiography and fiction in discussions of *Das Tränenhaus*, it was not the extent to which the author's personal life informed her literary work that shocked the public. It was instead the fact that Gabriele Reuter used her privileged position as an educated woman of the bourgeoisie to address some of the hardships suffered by women that scandalized.

As a woman and a writer Gabriele Reuter felt the urge to discuss certain issues from a female perspective, including the pressures to conform to stale gender conventions and the

hardships of pregnancy out of wedlock. Her work may or may not have been influenced by personal history, however it's beyond doubt that some contemporary writers and intellectuals exerted an influence on her thinking, perhaps especially Friedrich Nietzsche.

As a member of a small group of writers and intellectuals, in the early 1890's Reuter read some of Nietzsche's texts, including *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*. The reading had an immense impact on her, both in terms of how she viewed herself as a woman and a writer. Hardships early on in life had prepared her for a life of self-sacrifice and struggle. After her father died and the family lost its fortune, the then sixteen or seventeen - year old Reuter used her writing talent as a source of income. Throughout her adult life, Reuter continued to support her mother financially and cared for her when she was ill. The responsibility for the elderly woman restricted Reuter's personal freedom; in her autobiography she discusses the strenuous relationship between mother and daughter and how it influenced some of the sentiment of *Aus guter Familie*.

As evidenced in Lisbeth Hock's article "Shades of Melancholy in Gabriele Reuter's 'Aus guter Familie,'" Sigmund Freud's work on hysteria also had a profound influence on Reuter's writing. In many ways, we may read *Aus guter Familie* as an excursion into female psychology as understood in contemporary scientific discourse: however, it would be a mistake to reduce Agathe to a symbol or token of female hysteria. Rather, her character functions as an anti-hero informing the readers of the dangers associated with conformity and the hardships suffered by women as a consequence of gender inequality. Reuter's attitude toward the contemporary women's movement was ambiguous; she never openly associated herself with the feminists of her time. In Reuter's work we encounter instead a strong focus on the individual; an approach to identity formation and its relationship to human interaction/community very much informed by Nietzsche's teachings.

A common feature of all three female protagonists discussed in this thesis is their isolation as individuals, making them vulnerable to the influence of a small circle of friends and family. At the end of *Das Tränenhaus*, Cornelia understands herself and her position as an unmarried mother partly in relationship to other women in her situation. The effects of her new understanding can be seen as the sense of community or belonging she feels, which allows her to break with some of the expectations associated with her social class, and her family, especially her mother. But neither Agathe nor Ellen manages to liberate or distance themselves from the authority of their fathers. It is true that Ellen, unlike Agathe, experiences some sort of erotic and romantic fulfillment or bliss; however, it is shortlived, and in the end both Ellen and Agathe reside peacefully with their fathers. For Ellen the chance remains of redemption through her son, but in Agathe's case it is unclear if she will ever establish any contact with other human beings and/or the world outside her father's home.

All three protagonists share a profound need to find something that can give them the fortitude to face their futures, and it is the shared need that causes them to seek solutions in Nietzsche's powerful concepts. Nietzsche's teachings, including the concepts of the will to power and amor fati, prove essential in helping Cornelia and Ellen to redirect and focus all of their desire onto life itself. Obstacles and problems are overcome by turning suffering into joy; an approach to life that is not easily copied or understood. Rather than offering a solution to all metaphysical problems or concerns, Nietzsche's philosophy should be viewed as the epitome of a bourgeois lifestyle that was crumbling under the pressure of the onset of modernity and the effects of mass industrialization and new urban lifestyles. This shift came with challenges for both men and women, and Reuter's literary importance lies in her portrayal of bourgeois women's struggle to find a foothold and a place for themselves in a changing world.

Jacques Lacan's work may be viewed as a continuation of this process in modern times. Bourgeoise life in both Germany and France in the nineteenth and early twentieth century was centered upon the family as the highest principle for structuring society. Women and men who broke with these expectations were viewed as outcasts or failures, and it took another sixty years or so for the second wave of feminists to challenge the structures of patriarchy. The work for gender equality continues today, in the twenty-first century, and those interested in learning more about women's history would, I am sure, take some interest in Gabriele Reuter's work.

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