THE ETHICS OF SUICIDE AND SELF-SACRIFICE IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY: PROBLEMS IN LESSING, GOETHE, AND KLEIST

DISSEMINATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

Gregory Herric Wolf, B.A., B.A., M.A.

*****

The Ohio State University
1996

Dissertation Committee: Approved by
Barbara Becker-Cantarino, Adviser
Mark Roche
Bernd Fischer

Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures
Copyright by
Gregory H. Wolf
1996
Dedicated to my wife
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to all those who supported and encouraged me throughout my graduate study at The Ohio State University. Sincere thanks go to my adviser, Barbara Becker-Cantarino, whose ceaseless support and enthusiasm made this dissertation possible. I thank Mark Roche and Bernd Fischer for the many hours of stimulating discussion of my topic and their patient reading of my dissertation. I also want to thank the Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures for their support in the form of teaching assistantships and fellowships.

I express sincere thanks to my wife, Susanne, who encouraged me throughout my studies and especially while writing my dissertation. Without her emotional support, none of this would have been possible.
VITA

March 13, 1967 .......... Born, New Kensington, Pennsylvania

1989 .................... B.A., History; B.A., German, The University of the South, Sewanee, Tennessee

1991 .................... M.A., German, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

1989 - present ........... Graduate Teaching Associate, The Ohio State University

FIELD OF STUDY

Major Field: German
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication .................................................................ii  
Acknowledgments .........................................................iii  
Vita ........................................................................iv  
Table of Contents ..........................................................v  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapters</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| I. Introduction ....................................................1  
   A. An Introduction to the Problem of Suicide in the Eighteenth Century .............1  
   B. Suicide: Problems of Terminology .................4  
   C. Cultural Views of Suicide and Death in the Eighteenth Century ....................7  
   D. Theological Views of Suicide .........................9  
   E. Political Views of Suicide ............................17  
   F. An Enlightened Reaction to Religious and Political Views of Suicide ...........23  
   G. The Rise of the Philosophical Discourse on Suicide ......................................26  
   H. Pseudo-Scientific Interest in Suicide in the Late Eighteenth Century ...........34  
   | Excursus: The Twentieth Century: The Rise of the Social Sciences and Changes in the Perception of Suicide ........37  
   I. An Introduction to Lessing’s, Goethe’s, and Kleist’s Conceptualization of Suicide and Self-Sacrifice ........44  

v
II. Lessing’s Problematization of Self-Sacrifice: A Social and Political Critique .................46

A. An Introduction to Philotas .........................46

B. The Framework for Philotas: Lessing’s Literary Friendship with Gleim, von Kleist, Mendelssohn, and Nicolai ................51

C. The Framework for Philotas’s Reflection on Suicide ........................................59

D. The Eighteenth Century: The Heroic Suicide, Inclination, and Duty ......................68

E. Philotas’s Suicide: A Conflict Between Inclination and Duty ............................73

F. The Effect of Suicide on the Private and Public Spheres: The Destruction of the Family .................................82

Excursus: The Depiction of Women ..........83

G. Philotas’s Actions: Reason vs. Constraint ...90

H. The Private and Public Ramifications of Suicide ...........................................96

I. Philotas’s Suicide: The Un-Heroic Hero ....102

III. Goethe and Werther: Suicide and Self-Construction ......................................105

A. Goethe and Suicide .................................105

B. Werther’s Death Instinct and Desire for Form and Control ............................112

C. Werther, Society, and Nature ..................114

D. Werther and Lotte: The Beginning ...........121

E. Werther and Albert on Suicide ..............127

F. A Source of Torment: Nature ..................134

G. Werther and the Court ...........................140
H. The Return to Lotte ..........................145
I. Parallel Stories: The School Master’s Daughter, the Flower Collector, and the Farmboy ..........................153
J. The Final Letter ..............................156

IV. Kleist and Homburg: The Desire to Control Death .................................162
   A. An Introduction to Kleist .....................162
   B. Kleist’s Concept of Lebensplan, Glück, and Schicksal, and its Relationship to Suicide ..........................165
   C. Kleist’s Kant-crisis and its Effect on his Views of Death ..........................172
   D. Metaphysical Differences: Natural or Accidental Death vs. Suicide .............179
      Excursus: Lessing and Wie die Alten den Tod gebildet ..........................186
   E. The Final Letters: Depression and Enthusiasm .............................188
   F. Prinz von Homburg: A Departure from Kleist’s Depiction of Violent Death .........195
   G. Homburg’s First Monologue: The Desire for Fame, Social Limitations, and Non-Reflection ..........................198
   H. The Todesfurchtszene: Death as “der hässliche Tod” ..........................203
   I. Homburg’s Second Monologue: The Eschatological Change ........................209
   J. Homburg’s Longing for Death: Reconciliation, a Good Deed, and Love ..............214
CHAPTER 1

Introduction

A. An Introduction to the Problem of Suicide in the Eighteenth Century

"There is only one serious philosophical problem: suicide." Albert Camus from "The Myth of Sisyphus."¹

Camus' observation about suicide characterizes the dilemma and the intense personal, religious, and political struggle Western man has had with the act of purposely taking one's life. The moral, ethical, and philosophical questions concerning an individual's right to end his own life have concerned Western philosophers, theologians, and intellectuals since antiquity. In his dialogue Phaedo, Plato writes about Socrates' decision to drink hemlock, instead of allowing himself to be freed forcefully from prison. Socrates uses a mythological argument to suggest that humans are the property of the gods, and life is but a gift; therefore one does not have the right to commit suicide. Christian dogma against suicide, forged by Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas of Aquinas, modified the
mythological component to Socrates' argument, substituting the one Christian God in the place of the many pagan gods. The Christian and pagan views of suicide are similar in that both stress the individual's duty to live and subjugation to a higher authority. This argument against the act of suicide raises questions about personal freedom and responsibility.

In his seminal work, *The Hour of Our Death*, Philipe Ariès suggests that "changes in man's attitude towards death either take place very slowly or else occur between long periods of immobility" (xvi). One can apply Ariès' insights to suicide as well. From the time of the Stoics to the beginning of the eighteenth century, Western European views on suicide remained fairly constant. A marked change occurred in the eighteenth century, a period when European intellectuals began to address theological, philosophical, and judicial questions raised by suicide. In this manner, the eighteenth century served as the meeting ground for century-old cultural and religious views on suicide and a new interest in reforming these views by Enlightened literati, theologians, and philosophers. With the advent of the Enlightenment and its shift away from religious dogma to a secular world view, the individual and his increasing self-awareness of his own existence became a central point for intellectual discourse.
The Enlightenment succeeds in freeing authors of essays and fiction from the religious confines and stock imagery of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century. Authors such as Lessing, Goethe, and later Kleist, begin to personalize the decision to commit suicide. Suicide is no longer just a means to attain religious martyrdom; rather it is the result of personal ambition, problems, and failure. The literary thematization and problematization of suicide begin to reflect and address real-life issues. Within the framework of intellectual history, my dissertation proceeds with an analysis of how Lessing, Goethe, and Kleist conceptualized suicide as expressed in their correspondence and literature. After reconstructing the eighteenth-century views on suicide, and how the Enlightened discourse on suicide altered these views, I give a close reading of the role of suicide and self-sacrifice in Lessing’s *Philotas*, Goethe’s *Die Leiden des jungen Werther*, and Kleist’s *Prinz Friedrich von Homburg*, and how each author problematized suicide in his correspondence. In doing so, I elucidate how each author problematized the prevailing cultural, religious, and political views on suicide, and posed new questions about the tabu topic. I have chosen to analyze Lessing’s, Goethe’s, and Kleist’s views on suicide not only because they represent three distinct literary and historical periods in Germany, but also because their conceptualizations of suicide radically differ. Each
author’s view on suicide and death reveals his view of the individual in society and reflects the individual’s recognition of himself.

B. Suicide: Problems of Terminology

The noun Selbstmord first appeared in 1643 in two sermons by Johann Konrad Dannhawer (Lenzen 13). In his Straßburger Kathechismus the word is accompanied by an explicit theological evaluation of the ethical and moral aspects of the act. The word gradually became part of the German language by the end of the seventeenth century (Holderegger 34), as did the negative implication of the word.3 Suicide was viewed as an act no different than murder and contrary to the teachings of the Bible.

For centuries German scholars, theologians, and philosophers have debated how one should express the act of purposely ending one’s own life. Scholars of the twentieth century commonly use Selbstmord, Selbsttötung, Freitod, and Suizid in reference to the act. Each word carries with it certain connotations, reinforced by the general public’s perception of the moral and ethical implications of the act itself. Jean Améry argues that everyday language has influenced our ideas about death and the notion of a natural and unnatural death, a vocabulary about suicide ensues which demonstrates our lack of understanding of the act (43).
Adrian Holderegger points out: "oft gehen unreflektierte einseitige oder falsche Werturteile in die ethische Reflexion ein, indem einseitige wertbesetzte Begriffe gewählt werden," (33) resulting in an attempt by scholars to search for the most neutral terminology. No consensus, however, is achieved. Whereas Holderegger prefers the Latinate Suizid, others, such as Améry, prefer Freitod, and others, such as Verena Lenzen, use the term Selbsttötung, which demonstrates the problem semantics poses in a discussion about suicide.

Among modern scholars there appears to be a consensus that the term Selbstmord can no longer be used in a neutral manner to describe the act of suicide without passing an implicit judgement on the person and the act. Critics cite the Church’s role in defining suicide as an immoral act and the state’s role in designating it a punishable crime, as influencing the public’s understanding of the word (Lenzen 13). A recent debate has developed whether the term Freitod can adequately describe the act without an implicit ethical judgement. The word Freitod, often associated with Friedrich Nietzsche, is actually from Arthur Schopenhauer’s Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung. Nietzsche uses the phrase freier Tod to refer to Selbstmord in Also sprach Zarathustra (1883). Holderegger suggests that the term Freitod glorifies the act of suicide as a heroic act of self-sacrifice, "die Substantivbildung Freitod ... meint die
dem Menschen in seiner Freiheit zustehende und allein von
ihn zu verantwortende Tat, nicht ohne den Akt der
Selbsttötung zu heroisieren" (35). Améry not only refutes
any claim of heroism, he suggests the word is the only
neutral term capable of expressing the freedom and autonomy
of each individual to choose how and when to die (12), "im
letzten Grund gehört der Mensch in seiner Entscheidung, zu
leben oder zu sterben, sich selbst."⁵ Holderegger and
Améry present valid points but fail to recognize that the
word Freitod has both meanings. Historically it has been
used to designate a selfless sacrifice in the name of the
fatherland, and it simultaneously emphasizes the independent
decision of an individual to determine when and how he will
die.

Despite the interest in the study of suicide, there is
no definitive subject specific bibliography on the topic.⁶
The most helpful for scholars of German is Hans Rost’s 1927
publication Bibliographie des Selbstmords.⁷ In the forward
to each section Rost includes excerpts from selected works
and often evaluates and comments on the works. Rost is
especially helpful in establishing the historical period in
which works were written. In a section on other
bibliographies of works about suicide Rost includes three
main sources, whose entries are not all included in his
work. The first attempt at producing a bibliography on
suicide was undertaken by E.M. Oettinger in 1857⁸, followed
by Emilio Motto's *Bibliographia del suicidio*.\(^9\) In 1907 Max von Boehm privately published sixty copies of his manuscript *Selbstmord und Selbstmörder*, a bibliography citing sources concerned with both the topic of suicide and its victims.\(^10\) Not only do these bibliographies document treatises and works thematizing suicide which otherwise may have become forgotten, they become cultural texts representing how the discourse on suicide developed. By including and excluding certain works, the authors of these bibliographies pass a moral and ethical judgement on suicide and elucidate the public's perception of suicide.

C. Cultural Views of Suicide and Death in the Eighteenth Century

Independent of Church and state laws which punished the suicide victim and his family, the peasantry, and to a lesser degree, the growing middle class, of eighteenth-century Germany held views on suicide which one can describe as uninformed. Although superstitious views were in no way universal, the fear of the suicide corpse extended to all strata of society. One can read the entry on *Selbstmord* in *Das Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglauben* to discover that suicide was attributed to the work of the devil and to the "schöne Musik, die einer zu hören glaubt, wenn er sich umbringen will."\(^11\) Suicide was not considered just a personal decision that affected solely the victim and his
family, rather its results were felt by the entire village. Ferocious storms, hail storms, floods, and bad harvests were attributed to suicide and were perceived as punishment from God (HddA 1628). The peasantry feared the corpse of a suicide victim as something not only unholy, but as a dangerous ghost (HddA 1630), as if the victim were not really dead, but in a state of suspended animation. One attempted, therefore, not to touch the body, as that resulted in bad luck (HddA, 1629). In many areas executions were considered equivalent to suicide. Before removing the body from the gallows, one often beat the corpse so that it would not be able to attack anyone (HddA 1629). The possessions of the victim were equally as sinister and to be avoided. The victim’s money and identification often remained on the body in order to avoid a return from the dead (HddA 1629). His entire estate was haunted and those sleeping in his bed were plagued, as the entry on suicide in Zedler’s Universal-Lexikon of 1743 states (Zedler 1609).

Because of one’s fear of the corpse, many questions arose about how to dispose of the body, how to lessen one’s own danger by coming into contact with it, and how to lessen the danger the corpse presented the community. Often the town’s executioner was required to remove a suicide corpse from private residences and bury it "unter den Galgen wie einen Rund" (Zedler 1605). Rost notes "sie [the corpse] durfte nicht über die Schwelle des Hauses getragen werden,
sondern sie wurde entweder unter der Schwelle durch ein Loch hinausgezogen oder aus dem Fenster geworfen" (186). Typically, doors, door locks, windows, and thresholds were changed after the removal of the body (HddA 1630). Other customs prevailed, such as carrying the corpse head first and laying the corpse face down in the coffin (HddA 1630). The corpse of suicide victims was often placed in a barrel (Rost 186); this custom known as "rinnen" was practiced with the hope of confusing the corpse so that it would not be able to locate the area where it once lived, thereby freeing a village from potential danger (HddA 1630). To ensure against an unwanted return of the corpse as a spirit or ghost, a corpse was often burned, decapitated, or shot (HddA 1630). Not all of the common eighteenth-century practices concerning the suicide victim have changed because of the Enlightenment. The entry in Zedler’s Universal-Lexikon underscores the brutality behind these beliefs which are characterized by a lack of concern for the body of the suicide victim.\textsuperscript{12}

D. Theological Views of Suicide

The eighteenth-century Catholic and Protestant views about suicide were basically identical. The Catholic position had remained unchanged since the fifth century when St. Augustine interpreted the sixth commandment, "thou shall
not kill," to include suicide. After the Reformation the Protestant Church assumed the position established by St. Thomas of Aquinas that suicide is contrary to nature. Because life is a gift, a loan from God, one has the duty to live. Lexika of religion define suicide in moral and ethical terms; that it is immoral and contrary to natural law; that suicide is something unnatural, against God and duty.¹³ The suicide victim sins against nature, God, and his fellow man. Zedler’s *Universal-Lexikon* captures the religious zeitgeist of the eighteenth century. It defines suicide as an act contrary to the law of nature, because it supposedly refutes man’s instinct to live:

> es sey der Selbstmord was Unnatürliches, welches wider die von Gott in der Natur des Menschen eingepflanzte Begierde, sein Leben zu erhalten, streitet.... Wider Gott indem er nicht nur sein Gesetz überschreitet; sondern sich auch etwas anmasset, so ihm zukommt, welches die Herrschaft über das Leben ist (1595-96).

Zedler’s definition elucidates a pseudo-religious, economic consideration for prohibiting suicide, equating a worker with property. Suicide is a sin against one’s fellow man because the victim robs his family and community of potential services: "die Schuldigkeit gegen den Nächsten durch den Selbstmord beleidigt wird, sofern man ihn durch solchen Tod derjenigen Dienste, die man ihm noch hätte leisten können, beraubt" (Zedler 1596). Whereas St. Augustine’s comments on suicide were spurred by a rash of
Christian martyrdom-suicides, religious debate on suicide in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries responded to economical considerations. Though the lexicon precedes the advent of critical discussion on suicide in Europe, it surveys the history of intellectual thought on suicide through the 1730’s, but works propagating relativist views on suicide, or ones which question the Church’s view on suicide, are evaluated as "schlimme," "gefährliche" and "lächlerliche Dinge."\textsuperscript{14}

The Church punished the suicide victim, and intensified the trauma for family members by denying a Christian burial. Not only was burial denied in a Christian cemetery or on consecrated grounds, the burial was robbed of all dignity, to be performed "ohne alle Ceremonien und nur in der Stille" and normally in the night or early morning (Zedler 1611). Suicide victims were commonly buried on the outskirts of town, near town halls and in areas "wo man sonst keine ehrliche Leute zu begraben pflegte" (Zedler 1611). It is still common in the twentieth century to deny suicide victims burial in cemeteries or confine them to a non-consecrated section.

Catholic and Protestant theologians feared the increased attention given by authors and political figures to the judicial and ethical aspects of suicide, thus during the last thirty-five years of the eighteenth century there was a rise in conservative religious publications in the form of
pamphlets and sermons condemning the liberal views on suicide found in literature, philosophy, and politics. Because neither the Old Testament nor the New Testament expressly condemn or prohibit suicide, and in fact, both books contain a number of suicides, the most well-known being Sampson’s, Christianity historically has relied on the authority of Church fathers, such as Augustine and Aquinas, to define Canon law. The theological writings of the eighteenth century use the Church fathers for support. The many pamphlets were written with the intent of reinforcing the Church’s conservative position on suicide, and securing the Church’s defining role in the public’s life. Theologians commonly viewed works condemning injustices against the dead body, confiscation of property, and an end to all laws against suicide as works propagating and justifying suicide, in essence, as an attack by pagans and non-Christians on the Church. The Church’s power within the worldly sphere, though decreasing, was still evident and its influence in shaping the views of the masses, especially with regard to suicide, was even greater. The many pamphlets, manuscripts, and sermons appearing during the last half of the eighteenth century seem to have had the greatest effect on the peasants and other residents in rural areas, where the influences of the Enlightenment were minimal.
The theological faculty at the University of Göttingen was a bastion for conservative theologians condemning the liberalizing forces of the Enlightenment. Even before the appearance of Goethe's Werther, the Lutheran theologian Gottfried Leß published the sermon Vom Selbstmord in 1767 with the intention "die Moralität des Selbstmordes zu bestimmen" (3). The rhetorical structure of the work sets the precedent for later works on the topic. The theological tract reads like a contemporary religious pamphlet, presenting the reader with questions about the morality of suicide and situations in which one may contemplate suicide, then gives the definitive Christian answer. By stressing the New Testament, Leß hopes to demonstrate that Christian love of life and of God is sufficient to prohibit suicide. Not wanting to alienate himself completely from the Enlightenment, he describes the Bible as the archetypical book of reason, "dies ist eines der größten, und ich darf wohl sagen, ein unaussprechliches Verdienst der Bible um die Welt, die sich selbst Überlassene Vernunft" (34). The Bible does not need to condemn suicide specifically, because the enlightened individual recognizes that suicide is a sin and contrary to reason. Despite characterizing suicide as a "schimpfliche Feigheit" (25), Leß recognizes that not all suicides are the result of the same conditions or committed for the same reasons. He writes, "ist der Mensch seines Verstandes, auf irgendeinige Art beraubt, indem er sich
selbst das Leben nimmt, so hat seine Handlung für ihn keine Moralität" (17). This breaks from the Christian practice of condemning all suicides regardless of circumstances. Leß insinuates that insanity and melancholia, though he does not use those words, free the victim from moral evaluations. Leß is, however, cautious with his approach and condemns suicide because of poor health, unhappiness, or poverty. Leß’ colleague Johann Peter Miller\textsuperscript{17} published Abhandlung von der Erhaltung des Lebens und dem Selbstmord in 1771 in which he argues that it is a Christian duty to do everything to keep one’s life. God is an "Eigenthumsherr der Menschen"\textsuperscript{18} concerned with every detail of a person’s life, thus one’s existence is devoid of arbitrariness.

Gottfried Ernest Groddeck,\textsuperscript{19} Leß’ and Miller’s most prominent student and later faculty member at the University of Göttingen, published Commentatio de Morte Voluntaria (1785), in which he denounces the polemic views of Montesquieu, Rousseau, and David Hume. Groddeck objects to Mendelssohn’s Briefe Über die Empfindungen, even though the dialogue condemns suicide and Mendelssohn describes suicide as the "größte unter allen Übeln" (Bernstein 35). Groddeck’s work was well received within the academic community, but because the text was in Latin, few outside academics circles read it. His colleague, Georg Wilhelm Block, translated and edited the work while expanding it with a lengthy introductory chapter containing his own
views, which drastically differ from Groddeck’s. Block
titled the work *Vom Selbstmord, dessen Moralität, Ursachen
und Gegenmitteln*, which appeared in 1792 and caused quite a
controversy. Whereas Groddeck believes an intolerable life
is neither limiting nor reason for suicide, Block writes:
"wenn die Summe der unangenehmen Empfindungen das noch
Übrige Gute und Angenehme weit überwiegt; wenn anhaltendes
Unglück und Kummer mir alle Hoffnung eines zufriedenen und
angenehmen (Lebens) raubt; so will ich lieber Nichts
empfinden, als so viel Übel und Schmerzen" (9). Like Leß
and Miller, Block uses reason to support his argument, but
unlike them, he argues that reason and the
"Glücksseligkeitstrieb" (10) dictates one should commit
suicide when life is no longer enjoyable, rendered
intolerable by pain and misery. It is difficult to follow
Block’s logic, because he does not indicate where his
introduction ends and the translation of Groddeck begins,
challenging the reader with diametrically opposed views on
suicide.

Perhaps the most widely-read religious pamphlet of the
late eighteenth century was Johann Michael Sailer’s *Über den
Selbstmord* (1785).20 Sailer’s arguments against suicide
are no less than a reformulation of Augustine and Aquinas,
as demonstrated by selected chapter titles: "Suicide is an
Indignation Against the Natural Instinct of Self-
Preservation," "Suicide is an Unauthorized Intrusion in the
Realm of the Creator," and "Suicide is the Death of all Rational, Enlightened Love for God, Humanity and the Self." The Regensburg Bishop directly blames literature for a proliferation of suicides, "seine Lobrednerinnen findet man in Schriftstellerstuben" (1), and even credits Goethe’s Werther as the reason for his writing the work. To prevent possible suicides, Sailer attempts to provoke feelings of guilt in potential suicide victims by stressing how suicide only hurts family members (7). His scare tactics take him out of the realm of theology and into a pseudo-medical sphere, as he claims the suicide victim suffers from "eine Art Verrückung der Gedankenreihen" (8). With a patriarchal tone he adamantly opposes all passions, a la Werther, and warns the reader to "learn moderation in all things," and "guard yourself especially from the passions, which I would like to call the suicidal passions, because they cause the most suicide. They are: greed, pride, luxury and lust." Sailer suggests a modest, unassuming lifestyle will offer fewer temptations to commit suicide. Although other theologians condemned authors thematizing suicide, such as Leß who refers to them as "wizige Köpfe" (35), none were so dogmatically opposed to literature as Sailer, who shunned even the traditional dramatic tragedy, suggesting it is better not to read, especially "keine Schrift, die dem Selbstmorde das Wort
redet; denn sie ist, wenn sie die beste ist, eine schöne Schale, worin überzuckertes Gift geboten wird" (52).

In his historically oriented work Über den Selbstmord in Deutschland (1787) Heinrich Wilhelm Heller defines suicide as "ungezwungenen, mit überdachttem Vorsatz und gewaltsam sich des Lebens berauben, das, das allein ist der Selbstmord" (18). Aside from the basic arguments that suicide is a sin against nature, God, and one’s fellow man, Heller argues that suicide is an affront to the government. Because the government has established livable conditions for its subjects and takes an active role in the welfare of each citizen through the implementation of laws, each citizen has the obligation to follow these laws and to dedicate his life to society and to the government (20-23). Heller, like the other theologians cited, makes no attempt to understand the problem of suicide, or the reasons one commits suicide, thereby often revealing a lack of care for the individual and his problems.

E. Political Views of Suicide

One of the most polemical questions raised by suicide in the eighteenth century revolves around its judicial aspects within civil law. Whereas the Church interprets suicide as an act against God’s laws, therefore punishable, civil laws punishing suicide lacked the religious authority of their
counterparts and historically have been poorly documented, inconsistently enforced, and geographically quite varied with regard to their severity. In his work *Der Selbstmord. Ethik. Recht. Kriminalistik*, Clemens Amelunxen notes one of the apparent irreconcilable differences arising from suicide: "der Selbstmord ist kein Strafbestand. Aber man kann nicht leugnen, daß er der Kriminalphäre angehört" (7). By refusing Christian burials to suicide victims and robbing them of all Christian dignity, the Church hoped to deter suicide. Because the state believed it was in its best interest to limit suicide, governments began to search for means to deter suicide, which mainly included stiff fines levied on the victim, his estate, or family. During the eighteenth century the state was not entirely free from the Church's influence; the Church's views on suicide and other crimes affected how the state reacted to certain crimes. Most often, official state laws prohibiting suicide were merely a reformulation of the canon laws defining suicide as an immoral, criminal act, yet the rhetoric of state law books attempted to avoid overtly religious language, grounding their position in economics and interpreting suicide as a crime against the state and one's fellow man. As with canon law, civil law interpreted suicide as murder, and because murder is punishable, so is suicide.

Despite the Church's well-documented conservative position on suicide, surprisingly few state law codes
contained explicit laws punishing the act of suicide and/or what the punishment would be for committing the crime. Many cities, especially in Southern and Central Germany, deviated from official law codes and punished suicide as they wished (Amelunxen 30). Bernstein notes that in the eighteenth century "die großen Handelsstädte [waren] liberal in der Behandlung des Selbstmords" (5), partly because urban areas were more receptive to the ideas of the Enlightenment and were centers for the debate on suicide.

In eighteenth-century Prussia discussions concerning the legal aspects of suicide raged. A decree by Frederick I of Prussia on January 24, 1728 stipulated that "derjenige, welcher sich selbst um das Leben bringet, durchgehends, ohne Unterschied, es möge aus freyem Willen, oder aus Schwermuth, geschehen, von dem Schinder, oder Büttel, andern zum Schrecken und Absehen, öffentlich weggeholet und verscharret werden solle" (Zedler 1613). As an addendum to the 1721 law code, Verbessertes Preussisches Landrecht, it further ordered a "verwirkliche Todesstrafe an der Leiche" as well as loss of property for attempted suicide. The prevailing conservative religious and state attitudes toward suicide make Frederick II’s decree of December 6, 1751 all the bolder. With this decree he officially lifted the ban on suicide as stipulated by the Verbessertes Preussisches Landrecht (Bernstein 16) and ordered that all victims receive honorable burials (Oettinger 57). Frederick II’s
prime motivation in lifting the ban was that the "Angehörige ganz unverschuldet leiden mußten" (Knüppeln 36). Laws enacted to deter suicide, such as the levying of fines against family members and confiscating property, proved to be unsuccessful and tended only to worsen the financial situation of family members. His decision was not met without opposition, especially in Prussia, as "dieser Erlaß ist selbst im eigenen Lande auf beträchtlichen Widerstand gestoßen" (Oettinger 57). The uproar forced him to issue another decree on October 28, 1752 which clarified the first. This decree addressed the questions about the removal of the body and burial procedures.23 Despite Frederick II’s efforts to decriminalize suicide, not all of the restrictions on how the body was to be buried were removed until 1796.24

While Frederick II made efforts to decriminalize suicide in Prussia, many other civil laws punishing suicide in other German speaking lands were reinforced and intensified during the later half of the eighteenth century when the German debate on suicide arose. In 1751 the Bavarian law code Codex Juris Bavarici tightened its laws against suicide. Not only did the state fine the family one third of its estate, the corpse was to be carried out of the house "wie ein Vieh" concluding with an "Eselsbegräbnis," an unceremonious disposal of the body into a hole in the ground (Rost 59). Frederick August of Saxony undertook an effort
in 1779 to hinder any liberal attitudes about the punishment of suicide by threatening to fine all family members of suicide victims (Rost 190); however, he was unable to enact any formal legislation concerning this. Because of their lack of observance and inability to prevent the suicide, family members were blamed for the suicide.

The Austrian law code *Constitutio Criminalis Theresiana* from 1768 "ordnete eine grausame Vertilgung der Leiche an" (Amelunxen 32), mirroring the general public’s superstitions about the suicide victims, and underscoring how civil laws tended to reinforce and validate superstitious beliefs. The Church and state cooperated to legitimize each others official condemnation of suicide by espousing similar views and predicing their laws on an element of fear and the public’s ignorance. Instead of enlightening their subjects, they allowed them to continue barbaric practices and in this manner exercised unlimited control over them. The public display of violence sanctioned by the *Constitutio Criminalis Theresiana* was designed to scare people from committing suicide. The last official law book in a German speaking country to interpret suicide as a crime was the Austrian *Allgemeine Gesetze über Verbrechen und Strafen* in 1787 (Bernstein 16), also known as the *Strafgesetznovellierung von Josef II*. These laws did not differentiate between suicide and attempted suicides, as paragraph 125 reads "ist der Selbstmord zwar versucht, aber nicht vollbracht worden,
so ist der Verbrecher ins Gefängnis zu verschaffen" (Rost 188).

With the exception of Prussia, the liberal influences of the Enlightenment established themselves slowly in civil law, but by the end of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth century civil laws punishing suicide began to be abolished. Although legal reforms were ongoing in the German states since the 1770’s, the French Revolution and its influence on civil laws helped to speed up the process of decriminalizing suicide. In 1790 the French parliament ended the confiscation of property and a state enforced dishonorable burial (Amelunxen 32). The "Badische Strafgedikt" of 1803 officially ended all laws punishing suicide in the state of Baden, and during the same all laws against suicide were abolished in Austria (Bernstein 44). In Germany, however, some cities and villages continued to punish the suicide victim or his family, even though suicide had been decriminalized. Braunschweig, for example, continued to prosecute suicide until 1828 (Rost 190). One factor which helped to end the ban on suicide was the rise of indirect suicides all over Europe in the late eighteenth century (Amelunxen 32). In order to relieve the family of the stigma attached to a suicide victim, as well as to relieve them of heavy fines, individuals began to commit violent crimes to receive the death penalty. Whereas earlier all suicides were punished without regard to the
reason or situation of the victim, trials were initiated to determine the mental condition of the victim. Consequently, exceptions were made for those who were mentally ill or in a state of melancholia at the time of suicide (K. Oettinger 58). Juries gradually became sympathetic to the victims and their families resulting in an increase of verdicts of "mentally ill" or "melancholy" to forego criminal charges.

F. An Enlightened Reaction to Religious and Political Views of Suicide

By publishing essays, political pamphlets, and literary works which openly criticized and condemned the unjust and inhumane civil and canon laws punishing suicide, philosophers and literati played an important role not only in transforming the public’s view of suicide as a criminal act, but also in reforming the laws themselves. In his essay "On Suicide," published during the period when he was in contact with Frederick II, Voltaire is taken aback by the pointlessness and barbarity of eighteenth-century views and laws on suicide, which seemingly contradict all reason. He writes:

Despite [the] humane law of our ancient masters, we still rip apart and pierce with a stake the body of a man who dies voluntarily; we render his memory infamous; we dishonor his family to the extent we can; we punish the son for having lost his father and the widow for
being deprived of her husband. We confiscate the possessions of the deceased, which is tantamount to plundering the patrimony of the living to whom it belongs (A.377).

In a direct and forceful manner, Voltaire argues that civil laws do nothing to deter suicide, but only penalize the family. Shortly before the French Revolution Robespierre published a political pamphlet in 1784 "On Dishonorable Laws" attacking the French government and demanding an end to the practice of confiscating property of suicide victims, claiming the practice did more harm than good (Bernstein 27).

Whereas governments began to make efforts to decriminalize suicide in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Canon Law continued to punish the suicide victim. Almost one hundred years after Voltaire, Arthur Schopenhauer reproaches religion and government for being inhumane. Though his argument is similar to Voltaire’s, Schopenhauer’s rhetoric in "Über den Selbstmord" is more accusative, referring to the religious condemnation of suicide as "leere Redensarten" (362). He demands that the "Geistlichkeit einmal aufgefordert werden sollte, Rede zu stehen, mit welcher Befugnis sie, ohne irgendeine biblische Auktorität aufweisen zu können ... das ehrliche Begräbnis verweigert" (362). About civil law he writes: "bestraft man den Versuch zum Selbstmord, so ist es die Ungeschicklichkeit, durch welcher er mislang, die man..."
bestraft" (362). Such comments by Voltaire and Schopenhauer were seen by the Church as interference into a domain in which they did not belong and as an apology of suicide designed to rob the Church and state of power.

Not to be reduced to the single theme of suicide nor the injustices of laws against it, Charles de Montesquieu’s *Persian Letters* (1721) and Moses Mendelssohn’s *Briefe Über die Empfindungen* (1761) offered similar perspectives on the topic. Both works present a main character who contemplates suicide because of an unsuccessful love and who voices his discontent over the laws punishing suicide. Montesquieu uses the epistolary novel form to juxtapose Persian and European letters to highlight and criticize problems in Europe. In *Persian Letters* Usbek writes to his friend about the confiscation of property, "it seems to me...that these laws are most unjust" (129). Ibben presents a typical argument against the laws, namely, they are irrelevant to one who has decided to commit suicide, "Society is based on a mutual advantage; but when that society becomes onerous to me, who is to prevent me from renouncing it?" (130).

Moses Mendelssohn believes suicide to be "gegen die wahre Religion, gegen die Vernunft und das Staatsinteresse" (Bernstein 33), but argues that all measures to punish the victim or act are pointless. In his dialogue *Briefe Über die Empfindungen* Mendelssohn argues that suicide prohibits man’s natural progress toward perfection. The main
character, Theokles, who has pondered suicide, writes his friend Euphranor, "ob man sich durch die Furcht einer schämfplichen Beerdigung vom Selbstmorde abschrecken, oder durch die Hoffnung eines vergötternden Nachruhms dazu antreiben lassen soll? So antwortet die Vernunft: keines von beyden" (98). According to Mendelssohn it is not rational to believe that a dead person could actually be affected by any law prohibiting suicide. Mendelssohn, through the voice of Euphranor, disputes the justification of suicide by suggesting all decisions must be based on what an individual wants, and reason demands that what one desires must be better than what one does not desire. If one chooses death, it must appear better than life. An individual’s eschatological view of perfection requires that all actions and decisions be based on the belief that they lead toward perfection. Because suicide abruptly ends life, one’s personal progress toward the eschatological telos of perfection is halted. Any form of life, therefore, is better than suicide, "das Gefühl eines geringern Grades der Wirklichkeit befördert unsere Vollkommenheit unendlich mehr, als die Vernichtung."26

G. The Rise of the Philosophical Discourse on Suicide

Despite the number of eighteenth-century literary works thematizing suicide and theological works condemning the
act, suicide was still tabu. Those who voiced polemical views on suicide were subject to ostracization by colleagues, universities, and the public, as well as being threatened with censorship and monetary fines. With the rise of the Enlightenment, there arose a new-found freedom to debate the topic within philosophical circles; however the established theological community often considered published philosophical essays addressing suicide dangerous outside views because their arguments against suicide were not grounded in traditional Christian thought.

Lenzen suggests that philosophy has failed in attacking the problem of suicide and that "eine philosophische Suizidologie im analytischen Sinne fehlt bis zur Gegenwart"(147). Upon a closer examination of philosophical texts of their period, her claim does not mete itself out. To be sure, surprisingly few German intellectuals of the eighteenth and nineteenth century presented a complete systematic philosophy against suicide, and a number of philosophers, notably Hegel, avoid the topic almost altogether. The tabu attached to the subject of suicide forced many intellectuals to forego publishing works which opposed the established Christian view of the eighteenth century. Lenzen overlooks the fact that Mendelssohn, Kant, Fichte, and Schopenhauer, among others, addressed thanatology, specifically suicide, and demonstrated how suicide fits into their eschatological systems.
One of the first systematic efforts to relativize the discussion of suicide and refute the established teachings of Augustine and Aquinas was undertaken by the Englishman John Donne in his work *Biathanatos*, written in 1608 and published posthumously in 1646/7. In *Biathanatos*, which was quickly labeled a justification of suicide, Donne argues that suicide is not a sin against nature, reason, or God, if one commits it for non-personal reasons. If one commits suicide with the intention of achieving personal gain in the form of fame or martyrdom, then Donne contends that the glory of God has not been respected and the act is a sin. Alfred Alvarez suggests that Donne's Stoic outlook portrays suicide as an act of deliberation and self-conscious nobility proceeding from a philosophy of life (30-35). Though Alvarez's insight is helpful, I believe one should not place too much emphasis on suicide resulting from a certain way of life, as was the case with the Stoics. Donne does not present a philosophy of life in *Biathanatos*; rather he offers a paradigm for when and why suicide is valid. Donne opposes a dogmatic ban on suicide based on Scripture because such a view nullifies subjective reason, which he believes to be the voice of God in man. David Hume's short essay "Of Suicide," 27 published posthumously in 1777 with neither his name nor that of the publisher on the title page, attacks the same issues as *Biathanatos*, but with the goal of proving that suicide is not a crime. A rhetorical
masterpiece, Hume’s entire argument is based on a relativization of human life. He attempts to demonstrate that human life has the same value as the lives of animals and nature, "the life of a man is of no greater importance to the universe than that of an oyster" (583). To refute the argument that man is the property of God and has no right to exercise control over his life, Hume suggests that we transgress this self-imposed law every time we attempt to cure a dying man with medicine. Humans constantly control nature by manipulating it so that it can best serve them; building bridges or dams, for example, is manipulation of the natural course of nature. To prohibit suicide on the premise that it transgresses God’s will is ludicrous and an arbitrary decision lacking all logic. Hume ironically claims that if suicide were criminal "it would be equally as criminal to act for the preservation of life or for its destruction"(583). Hume does not advocate suicide in his essay, rather he demands that the reader reexamine his own views and the Church’s view on the subject. He contends that laws condemning suicide reveal man’s narcissistic and blasphemous attitudes by believing "any created being can disturb the order of the world, or invade the business of the providence" (585).28

Like Donne and Hume, Johannis Robeck’s De Morte Voluntaria, published one year after his suicide in 1735, offers relativist views on suicide. He suggests no natural
laws exist prohibiting suicide and argues "es giebt kein eigentliches Gesetz, unser Leben so zu lieben, daß wir es in keinem Falle endigen dürfen" (Stäudlin 190). He contends that life alone is not worth living, rather "Liebe zu einer vernünftigen Glücksseligkeit" (Stäudlin 194) is the prime consideration in determining the value of life. He differs from Donne and later Hume, in that he suggests Glücksseligkeit (the quality of life, one’s happiness and bliss) is a requirement in life. If it is lacking, then one may consider suicide. He calls upon reason to justify his position on suicide, claiming that reason dictates that one should commit suicide when life becomes a burden. Suicide is a last resort, decided upon only after the realization that a tolerable life is no longer possible.

Immanuel Kant argues that suicide is an act which leads to the "Destruction der Menschheit" (C.190). In his work Der Tugendlehre from Metaphysik der Sitten Kant presents his system of philosophy against suicide. Lenzen rightly observes that Kant sees suicide as not only contradictory to the natural law of self-preservation, but also as a violation of moral law, "die Selbsttötung wird nicht nur metaphysisch oder psysisch als Widerspruch zum Naturgesetz der Selbststerhaltung, sondern auch anthropologisch-moralisch als Verstoß gegen die soziale Selbststerhaltungspflicht des Individuums, gegen das allgemeine Sittengesetz, verurteilt" (Lenzen 170). According to Kant, each individual has the
moral responsibility to guard the dignity and morality of man’s existence, accomplished by fulfilling one’s duty to oneself and others. In order to achieve this, "die erste Pflicht des Menschen gegen sich selbst... ist die Selbsterhaltung" (B.553). Kant perceives no difference between suicide and murder, "die Selbstentleibung ist ein Verbrechen (Mord)" (B.554), which is morally reprehensible because it is an insult to human existence and a conscious denial of one’s duty, "dieser [suicide] kann nun zwar auch als Übertretung seiner Pflicht gegen andere Menschen (Eheleute), Eltern gegen Kinder, des Untertans gegen seine Obrigkeit oder seine Mitbürger, endlich gegen Gott betrachtet werden" (B.554). Kant employs the "watchpost" allegory to illustrate the relationship between duty and suicide, "ein Selbstmörder ... widerstreitet dem Zweck seines Schöpfers; er kommt in jene Welt an, als ein solcher, der seinen Posten verlassen hat; er ist also ein Rebell wider Gott anzusehen" (C.192). Kant argues that one’s courage and fearless view of death should lead one to act morally and to recognize that there exists something greater than life, instead of inciting one to commit a Stoic suicide.

Fichte postulates that each individual is a being which should not arbitrarily exist; therefore one must establish a purpose for existence. The purpose for living arises from the recognition of one’s duty to act morally and in
accordance with natural law (Sittengesetz). In paragraph 29 of "Über die allegemeinen bedingten Pflichten" Fichte posits man's existence as a product of natural law, which "unsere Erhaltung fordert" (233). He grounds his eschatological system on the establishment of all relationships based on reason. Natural law is an eternal undeniable truth; therefore Fichte orders, "Unternimm nichts, was deinem eigenen Bewußtsein nach, der Erhaltung deiner selbst in dem angegebenen Sinne des Worts, Gefahr bringen könnte" (235). Suicide is an immoral act because it transgresses one's initial duty of self-preservation, and more importantly, transgresses the Sittengesetz, "ich kann mein Leben gar nicht zerstören, ohne mich, so viel an mir ist, der Herrschaft des Sittengesetzes zu entziehen. Das kann das Sittengesetz nie gebieten; es versetzte dadurch sich in Widerspruch mit sich selbst" (237). For Fichte formal freedom and autonomy arise from the recognition of natural laws (Sittengesetze); because suicide is contrary to natural laws, it is a self-limiting and confining action, rather than one which produces freedom. As a moral being, one does not live for life's sake, "sondern um einer Handlung willen" (238); consequently, even the wish to die is contrary to one's duty because it repudiates the will to live and act morally. Fichte condemns suicide as an "Ausübung der Oberherrschaft" (240). The suicide victim exploits the
powers granted to him by the Creator and elevates himself above the moral system in which he lives.

In paragraph 69 of *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* Arthur Schopenhauer argues that although suicide is "eine ganz vergebliche und thörichte Handlung" (492), it is not a renunciation of life, rather a confirmation of the will to live:


According to Schopenhauer, a suicide victim does not wish to end his life, rather he wishes to change his present living conditions. Unable to alter the physical circumstances of his life, the suicide victim internalizes his dissatisfaction and ends his life, and paradoxically achieves his original goal. A person living under deplorable social and personal conditions will lose his desire to continue his present existence because of the suffering he endures. Central in Schopenhauer’s thesis is the belief that the suicide victim negates neither life nor the human species, rather only the individual’s present condition. Each individual’s will to live appears as a
Hindu trinity, manifesting itself at various times in the form of suicide (Shiva), self-preservation (Vishnu), and self-perpetualization (Brahma) (493). Schopenhauer admits that his philosophy may appear to have contradictions, that it ends life and simultaneously confirms the will to live; therefore he offers the analogy of a self-declared war against the self to ameliorate any misunderstandings. He contends that an individual never loses the desire to live, constantly fighting against personal and societal restrictions. The suicide victim commits suicide as an act of self-sacrifice so that his suffering can not destroy his will to live. The act of suicide safeguards the will and allows the will to establish control over itself through the seemingly contradictory act of self-destruction.

H. Pseudo-Scientific Interest in Suicide in the Late Eighteenth Century

During the last decades of the eighteenth century and first decades of the nineteenth, several pseudo-scientific works appeared that attempt to free suicide from theological constraints by analyzing suicidal motives and case studies. Christian Heinrich Spieß’ Biographien der Selbstmörder (1788) and Johann Albrecht’s Neue Biographien der Selbstmörder (1794) were the first two works entirely dedicated to documenting and classifying suicides with
actual case studies. These works border on sensational literature and are a cross between fact and fiction. They are limited in their scientific approach and are mainly listings of biographies of suicide victims with occasional commentary. There is no mention of how the lists were compiled, but based on some of the sketchy, unusual biographies, one must assume the majority of the field work was based on private conversations, court records, journal notices, and rumor.

Knüppeln’s Über den Selbstmord (1790) is a more interesting work which, despite its listing and categorizing suicides, is not bogged down by boring and repetitive details. The work is historically oriented, beginning with a survey of classical history through the eighteenth century with reference to views on suicide. Although Knüppeln writes that suicide can not be a topic of theological morality (44), he relies on Christian morality to construct his argument against suicide. Knüppeln suggests there are identifiable medical reasons which predispose one to suicide. He argues suicide is the result of "eine gänzliche Zerrüttung der körperlichen und Seelenkräfte" (130), a belief commonly found in medical journals of the eighteenth century. The deterioration of bodily and spiritual powers can be cured only by the establishment of a moral codex, enforced by "gute Polizei Einrichtungen, die Tugend zu erwecken, zu erhöhen, und zu belohnen" (179). Without
medical training or jargon, Knüppeln explains that a "Zerrüttung des Körpers" is the result of "unmäßige Befriedigung des Geschlechtstriebes, daraus entsteht nun der Selbstmord durch thierische Wollust bewußt, oder durch Sittenlosigkeit, und aus dieser entsteht a) der Selbstmord aus Müßigang und Faulheit und b) der Selbstmord durch die Treulosigkeit und Herrsucht des weiblichen Geschlechts" (130). "Überspannte Leiden," "Melancholie," "schädliche Schriften," as well as masturbation and the preoccupation with sex lead to the "Zerrüttung der Seele," whose outward symptoms include loss of thoughts, vocabulary, and energy (112).

Friedrich Benjamin Osiander’s Über den Selbstmord proceeds from Knüppeln’s basic premise, but without the misogynous and prudish tone. Similar to Knüppeln, he diagnoses medical reasons for suicide, "der Hauptgrund eines jeden Selbstmordes ist Mangel an richtigem Verstande; diesen Mangel führt oft eine Krankheit oder organische Zerrüttung des Körpers herbei" (13), but he avoids blaming human sexuality for suicide. Osiander’s contribution to the debate on suicide lies with his contention that although all suicides are committed "ohne tugendhaften Zweck" (1), not all suicide victims are immoral. Osiander is one of the first authors who differentiates between the morality of the suicide act and the morality of the suicide victim. This is a giant step in helping usher in changes on how the act of

36
suicide is perceived as a whole. He advocates a strong moral education by the Church and state necessary to avoid the temptation of suicide and places heavy responsibility on the "Schädlichkeit der Romanlektüre" (306), and especially Werther for confusing individuals and leading them to commit suicide.

Excursus: The Twentieth Century: The Rise of Social Sciences and Changes in the Perception of Suicide

The Enlightenment succeeded in bringing an end to the inhumane and unjust civil laws punishing the suicide victim and his family and reforming the barbaric practices and superstitious views regarding the corpse, but the prejudices against the victim and his family remained, as did the religious condemnation of the act. Not until the end of the nineteenth century did a shift occur in the social perception of suicide. Suicide was a shocking revelation, but the social and religious condemnation of the act was less prevalent, and in some cases suicide was even considered respectable (Alvarez 69). The rise of science, which questioned the notion of a natural world order, and the development of the social sciences, sociology, psychiatry, and psychology, played a major role in bringing about this shift in attitude. By exploring the questions
suicide raises and by attempting to understand why one commits suicide, the social sciences move away from abstract philosophy and address suicide as an individual and social phenomenon.

Emile Durkheim's monumental work, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (1897) marks the shift in social perceptions of suicide. The work was one of the first which used statistics systematically to analyze suicide. In his forward to the first English translation of the work in 1952, George Simpson notes that according to Durkheim, suicide cannot be explained in individual forms; rather one must examine social conditions and currents (14). Durkheim suggests that suicide demonstrates a deep crisis in modern society because it is a social phenomenon which cannot be eradicated by education, wealth, or repression. His definition of suicide, "any death which is the direct or indirect result of a positive or negative act accomplished by the victim himself...which he knows will produce the result" (169), is broad enough to include iconoclasts, martyrs, soldiers' sacrifices, and any other individual who renounces existence. He begins his study by refuting all "extra-social factors," such as heredity, race, and weather, which other scholars argued predispose one to suicide. By stressing neither the morality of the act, nor the mental state of the victim, Durkheim insists that suicide is a fact of society, which can be ameliorated only by addressing
social structures. Durkheim organizes suicides into three broad categories based on social conditions: egoistic, altruistic, and anomic. An egoistic suicide occurs when one is forced to rely on personal resources resulting from a lack of integration into society. Religious, domestic, and political integration have a prophylactic effect on suicide (168). An altruistic suicide is the opposite of an egoistic suicide, whereas "excessive individualization leads to suicide, insufficient individualization has the same effects" (217). Social integration becomes so strong that ones loses one’s identity and assumes the goals of society. Durkheim notes this is the case in the military, where the suicide rate is much higher than in the civilian population, and where altruism can lead to heroic military self-sacrifices (240). The final category, anomic suicides, betrays the "chronic state in modern society," (150). Such suicides result because "one’s existence is governed by economic and national stability. When these factors are unstable, then suicides rise. Either economic or national prestige or the opposite of both can have such an effect" (241). This theory on suicide explains why the suicide rate increases during politically unstable periods and during and after wars. He postulates that one may commit suicide when, after a radical change occurs in one’s social position (jobs, family), or social order (government, economic conditions), the individual is unable to cope.
On the opposite pole from Durkheim and his theories about society’s role in suicide is Sigmund Freud and psychoanalytic theory, yet both their approaches exhibit similarities. Erwin Stengel points out that both Durkheim and Freud view an individual’s action as resulting from forces over which the individual has limited control (42). Before splitting from his colleague Alfred Adler, Freud, along with the Vienna Psycho-Analytic Society, held a symposium in 1910 on suicide. Adler argued that suicide results from pressure, grief, weariness, and the strength of the aggression instinct. Freud disagreed, citing depression and melancholia as the probable causes, and noted that suicide must be more than displaced hostility. The result of their debate is Freud’s 1917 essay, "Trauer und Melancholia," in which he defines melancholia as the pathological side of mourning. For the melancholic, the suffering incurred from losing a beloved object, and the hostility arising from the belief that he murdered the object, becomes unbearable. He begins to reproach himself for his actions and the belief that he wanted to kill the object (C.181). Having prior noted "daß kein Neurotiker Selbstmordabsichten verspürt, der solche nicht von einem Mordimpuls gegen andere auf sich zurückwendet" (C.182), Freud postulates that the ego treats itself as the displaced object and directs its hostilities against itself, thereby committing suicide, "das Ich kann sich nur dann töten, wenn
es durch die Rückkehr der Objektbesetzung sich selbst wie ein Objekt behandeln kann, wenn es die Feindseligkeit gegen sich richten darf, die einem Objekt gilt, und die ursprüngliche Reaktion des Ichs gegen Objekte der Außenwelt vertritt" (C.182). This essay proved the psyche to be more complex than Freud expected and sprouted the concept of the death instinct, which Freud analyzes in his 1920 essay "Jenseits des Lustprinzips." In this essay Freud maintains there exist two types of primordial instincts: death instincts (Todestriebe), whose goal it is "das Endziel des Lebens möglichst bald zu erreichen," and life instincts (Lebenstriebe), which create life and attempt to prolong it as long as possible (B.226). This differentiation does not satisfy Freud completely; thus he expands upon these observations in his 1923 essay, "Das Ich und das Es." He argues the super ego, capable of being hypemoral or cruel, can transform "bei der Melancholie...zu einer Art Sammelstätte der Todestriebe" (A.291). In this scenario, the death instinct assumes control in melancholia when the super-ego goes against the ego, destroying it. Not wanting to dismiss suicide as unnatural, Freud searched for meanings of and reasons for suicide after experiencing the ravages of World War I and the many suicides which followed.

The Viennese intellectual and advocate of man’s right to commit suicide, Jean Améry, argues in Hand an sich legen that an analysis of suicide must lie outside psychology,
sociology, and psychiatry, because these sciences are grounded in logic and dedicated to the preservation of life. A Jew, Améry was forced to emigrate to Belgium in 1938, where he later was active in the resistance movement for which he spent two years in a concentration camp. Améry, who experienced the evils of National Socialism, represents the modern, skeptical outlook on life. After the horrors of the Holocaust, every person’s life must be put into perspective. He does not deny the value of life; instead grants each individual the right to do with his life what he wishes. Suicide presents its own "Todeslogik," "Wer den Freitod sucht, bricht... aus der Logik des Lebens" (24). He disputes the social sciences’ ability to understand suicide, because of their inherent logic. He writes, "die Aussagen der Logik [sind] leer. Sie sind nach ihrem Wesen nach tauto-logisch, sind analytische Urteile. Sie sagen nichts aus über die Wirklichkeit, bzw. sie bringen niemals Neues zur Erkenntnis diener Wirklichkeit bei" (29). He contends that suicide studies speak in the name of society, even if they criticize the social order and social institutions. They do not address the victim in his specific system of "Todeslogik." Améry, who published the work in 1976, two years before his suicide, envisions the work not as a justification of suicide, but rather as an attempt to restore dignity to suicide, which religion, philosophy, and science have robbed from the act, and to demonstrate that
suicide is a privilege of humans. According to Améry, each person lives in a state of "echec," a French word he uses to describe the constant threat of failure each person feels, "nun steht der echec als Drohung im Hintergrunde jedermanns Existenz, und dies augenfälliger als der Tod. Man muß sich bewähren" (51). When the "echec" becomes intolerable, one will necessarily commit suicide, an act arising neither from weakness nor insanity, rather arising from the "Ekel des Lebens" and a desire for freedom (57). Améry interprets one’s relationship to the self as primary and the relationship to society as secondary, "ein freier Tod [ist]...eine hochindividuelle Sache, die zwar niemals ohne gesellschaftliche Bezüge vollzogen wird, mit der letztlich der Mensch mit sich allein ist, vor der die Sozietät zu schweigen hat" (103). Suicide victims have no responsibility to family members or society because the "echec" in which they live and their "Todeslogik" are entirely personal, cognizable only to them. Améry refutes the notion of narcissism, a term he believes to be contradictory because each individual belongs only to himself, therefore each individual is intrinsically narcissistic (69). Where other scholars, notably Alvarez, have recognized a minimal freedom granted by suicide, namely the opportunity to die when and how one wishes (136), Améry perceives suicide, and especially the willingness to commit suicide, as the ultimate act of freedom, "im Augenblick, wo
ein Mensch sich sagt, er könne das Leben hinwerfen, wird er schon frei" (136). He concludes his work with a pessimistic belief that when one recognizes the absurdity and fraudulence of life, one will automatically reflect upon suicide, the only act which can free an individual from all restrictions (147-51).

I. An Introduction to Lessing’s, Goethe’s, and Kleist’s Conceptualization of Suicide and Self-Sacrifice

In his seminal work Der Todesgedanke in der deutschen Dichtung vom Mittelalter bis zur Romantik, Walter Rehm writes: "Von der Stellung eines Menschen zum Tode aus lassen sich alle seine übrigen Beziehungen zum Ganzen der Weltanschauung und den übrigen großen Daseinsaugenblicken voll ergreifen" (1). Rehm believes that one’s world view is necessarily influenced by one’s view of death. To build on Rehm’s notion, I argue that a dialectic exists between one’s views of life and death; they have a reciprocal influence on one another. How authors thematize death or suicide offer insights to how they view humanity and specifically the individual within a collective. In the following three chapters I analyze Lessing’s, Goethe’s, and Kleist’s problematization and thematization of suicide as expressed in correspondence and literature and demonstrate how each author conceptualizes suicide. Within the framework of the
discourse on suicide in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, as reconstructed in this chapter, I examine how the increasingly secularized view of suicide coincides with the individual's recognition and assertion of himself.
CHAPTER 2

Lessing’s Problematization of Self-Sacrifice: 
A Social and Political Critique

A. Introduction to *Philotas*

In his early comedies, *Der junge Gelehrte*, *Der Freigeist*, and *Die Juden*, each published in 1754, but written during 1748-49, Lessing uses satire to question and problematize controversial topics, religious dogma, and bourgeois morality. In the protagonist of each work Lessing imbues certain traits or characteristics, be it the pedantry of private tutors, the arbitrary and contradictory views of certain free-thinkers, or the anti-semitism of many Germans, to force the recipient to confront social problems of the mid-eighteenth century. The comic overtones of each drama bring the viewer to laugh, but Lessing’s ability to exaggerate the protagonist’s behavior to highlight social and moral problems forces the reader into a state of reflection. By problematizing cultural problems through satire, Lessing skirts censorship to break from established social and theological norms in order to thematize tabu
subjects. Following the basic structure and format of the above-mentioned dramas, Lessing writes Philotas in 1759 to problematize suicide, war, and political fragmentation. In no other work do Lessing’s ideas on suicide appear so evident. From Philotas’s initial monologue in scene one to his suicide in scene eight, every scene revolves around his planning, reflecting on, justifying, and committing suicide.

Other than Emilia Galotti, none of Lessing’s dramas has been the object of more divergent interpretations than Philotas. Though this drama has been neglected by twentieth-century scholars, it initiated a volatile and controversial response from Lessing’s contemporaries. When it appeared in 1759, during the height of the Seven Years War between Prussia and Austria, Lessing’s contemporaries formed two distinctive interpretive camps: those who enthusiastically received the tragedy and Philotas’s suicide, ostensibly in the name of the fatherland, as heroic, honorable, and patriotic, and those who viewed Philotas as the antithesis of the modern, enlightened individual. Philotas’s reflection on suicide and the manner in which he takes his life prompted such diametrically opposed views of the young prince.

Instead of passing an ethical judgement on Philotas’s actions or presenting an artistic evaluation of the work, a better understanding of the drama arises when one employs a heuristic method to interpret Philotas’s suicide.
Philotas’s decision to commit suicide initially arises out of inclination, out of his desire to avoid shame and obtain honor. To legitimize his decision, Philotas attempts to justify his decision as part of patriotic duty. I suggest that this dialectic responds to the eighteenth-century debate on duty (Pflicht) and inclination (Neigung); a dialectic about which Kant will write in *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*. Lessing constructs this dialectic within Philotas’s monologues. The monologues, paired with the individual scenes, present Philotas as an individual whose behavior is defined by paradoxes.

Philotas must deceive himself and others to attain a certain goal: heroism. Through Philotas’s contradictory behavior, Lessing is able to present a multi-faceted view of suicide and then introduce his own ideas. By concentrating my interpretation on the theme of suicide, I show how two central conflicts, between father and son, and between youth and age, are imbedded within Philotas’s decision to die. Whereas scholarship of the twentieth century has formed a consensus that Philotas is incapable of any action other than suicide, I suggest Philotas, until the final act of suicide, exhibits moments of doubt and fear about ending his life. In this manner, Lessing ironizes the military enthusiasm and heroism of the period. Lessing’s depiction of Philotas and his apprehension present the protagonist in a modern, un-heroic light, and in doing so, Lessing breaks
from the eighteenth-century tradition of the heroic tragedy in favor of a humane, enlightened tragedy.

In the figure Philotas, Lessing does not create a modern psychological case study, where the advantages and disadvantages of suicide are presented. Philotas, rather, appears as a dramatic construct, as a medium for Lessing to present his views on the subject. I investigate how Philotas, as a dramatic construct, grapples with the question of suicide. To accomplish this I elucidate Lessing’s correspondence on tragedy and how Philotas appears as the concrete rejection of the heroic tragedy. By uncovering the essential paradoxical nature of the drama and of Philotas’s behavior, I probe how Philotas reflects on suicide and how he manipulates his eminent suicide to appear as a product of patriotic duty. Imbedded in Philotas’s reflection on suicide are questions concerning the family, reason, and the military. I address these issues to demonstrate how Lessing, by parodying Philotas’s suicide, criticizes enthusiastic patriotism and heroism, and portrays suicide as an irrational act destructive to the family.

Modern scholarship has neglected to explore fully Philotas’s suicide. Pre-World War II discussion of the drama is characterized by an oversight of the inherent parody of Philotas’s suicide. Interpretations, such as Rehm’s, which view Philotas’s suicide as "den großen Tod fürs Vaterland" and as a recognition of Prussian military
greatness (265), are the norm. Beginning with Wiedemann’s ground-breaking essay in 1967, scholarship on the work has become multi-faceted, and has moved beyond labeling the drama an artistic failure or product of the Seven Years War.\(^{32}\) Two recent essays have shed light on Philotas’s suicide. Burgard reads Philotas’s decision to commit suicide as a the result of a conflict within himself and as an act devoid of social considerations. He considers Philotas a Storm and Stress "Kraftgenie" who wishes to posit himself as the ultimate authority. Philotas’s suicide reveals itself as an imprisoning act, though he is convinced otherwise (Burgard 445, 450, 451). Schneider takes the opposite pole, arguing that Philotas is a psychological figure, who commits suicide because of his social situation. Philotas falls victim to the military and its value system (A.12). Neither Burgard nor Schneider addresses how Philotas manipulates his suicide to reflect patriotic duty. Though both acknowledge that Philotas enthusiastically greets his death, neither perceives his moments of doubt or insight on death.
B. The Framework for Philotas: Lessing’s Literary Friendship with Gleim, von Kleist, Mendelssohn, and Nicolai

In the four years preceding the publication of Philotas, Lessing formed close friendships with four individuals, Johann Wilhelm Ludwig Gleim, Ewald von Kleist, Moses Mendelssohn, and Friedrich Nicolai, who each played a role in either the publication or thematic matter of the drama. On March 13, 1759 Lessing sent Gleim an anonymous manuscript of Philotas, claiming a second party wished to have Gleim’s opinion, "Noch hierbei folgt ein Exemplar von einem kleinen Trauerspiele, welches Ihnen der Verfasser, der sich nicht genannt hat, mit ergebenstem Empfehle zuschickt. Er möchte gern durch mich erfahren, was Sie davon hielten." Gleim, an enthusiastic patriot and author of military poems, greeted the young Prince as the ideal heroic patriot. After an assurance from Lessing, Gleim began working on his version of Philotas. Gleim wanted to highlight Philotas’s military enthusiasm and created an even more ambitious character, conscious of his suicide. Upon reading Gleim’s own changes and adaptation into free verse, Lessing wrote Gleim and sarcastically applauded the improvements, which produced an overt patriotic tone, "Ich kann Ihnen nicht beschreiben, welche eine Freude Sie dem Verfasser des Philotas durch die angefangene Übersetzung

51
made. He concludes, therefore, that he should have been pleased with their approval. I add, however, that their translation...the best criticism for the author will be published." While Lessing’s and Gleim’s hand-written manuscripts circled within the literary and learned community, it became known that Lessing was, in fact, the original author. On April 25, 1759 Gleim writes Kleist informing him that he knows that Lessing wrote the original. Gleim, however, never confronted Lessing about the drama, nor did they discuss his changes. After receiving the final version of Gleim’s Philotas, Lessing included in a longer letter to him the following: "Receive your letter with all my thanks for your Philotas. You have done a great thing, and the unmentioned prosaic author can hardly claim anything from it." Enraged by the appearance of two Philotas dramas, and what he believed to be Philotas’s lack of reason and anti-enlightened stance, Johann Jakob Bodmer published two parodies of the drama in 1760: Der kindische Held in the collection of fables Die Lessingischen unäsopischen Fabeln, and Polymet. Ein Trauerspiel. Durch Lessings Philotas oder ungerathenen Helden veranlasst. Lessing neither discussed the drama with Bodmer nor publicly defended himself against the strong criticism.

One will never know why Lessing sent Gleim the original manuscript of Philotas anonymously, but he might have wanted
to find out whether Gleim’s reaction to Philotas and his suicide would be that of admiration (Bewunderung) or compassion (Mitleid). As a mentor for many young poets of the period, Gleim’s opinion of the work would have been of value to Lessing. Furthermore, Gleim’s literary reputation was built by his heroic poetry and patriotic songs. From his enthusiastic reception, Gleim obviously admired Philotas. During the outbreak of the Seven Years War in August, 1756, Lessing began his literary correspondence with Nicolai and Mendelssohn about the role of the tragedy.\textsuperscript{37} Nicolai, who began the debate, argues that the role of a tragedy is to arouse strong passions, such as fright (Schrecken) and admiration. Mendelssohn stresses the role of admiration as a quality, that leads the viewer to a higher moral existence. When one sees an admirable figure on stage, one will attempt to emulate his actions; therefore admiration contains a didactic element. In his response to Nicolai’s opening letter, Lessing rejects admiration and fright as the goal of tragedy, and posits compassion as the desired emotional response:

\[
\text{Wenn es also wahr ist, daß die ganze Kunst des tragischen Dichters auf die sichere Erregung und Dauer des einzigen Mitleidens geht, so sage ich nunmehr, die Bestimmung der Tragödie ist diese: sie soll unsre Fähigkeit, Mitleid zu fühlen, erweitern.}\textsuperscript{38}
\]

Lessing’s insistence on the role of compassion in tragedy is imbedded in his concept of the bourgeois drama.
and his rejection of the heroic tragedy. He argues that fright and admiration are only transitory emotions which ultimately lead one to compassion, "Schrecken und Bewunderung sind nichts als die ersten Sprossen, der Anfang und das Ende des Mitleids." In a letter to Mendelssohn, Lessing rejects the heroes of French Classicism and German Baroque drama because of their lack of enlightened characteristics. He writes Mendelssohn that he misunderstands his own impressions:

Sie haben einen zu richtigen Begriff von der menschlichen Natur, als daß Sie nicht alle unempfindliche Helden für schöne Ungeheuer, für mehr als Menschen, aber gar nicht für gute Menschen halten sollten. Sie bewundern also mit Recht; aber eben deswegen, weil Sie bewundern, werden Sie ihnen nicht nacheifern.

The "schöne Ungeheuer," as Wiedemann has pointed out, are the heroes in Racine’s, Corneille’s, Gryphius’s, Lohenstein’s, and Gottsched’s tragedies. These heroes do not incite admiration; on the contrary, they cause astonishment and surprise because of their actions. Lessing believes the traditional heroes of French and German drama are moved by enthusiasm, a dangerous quality, and not by reason or humanity.

In his correspondence with Nicolai and Mendelssohn about tragedy, Lessing appeals for a new, enlightened dramatic tradition. As Wiedemann writes, "Lessing fordert die volle persönliche Entscheidung für den neuen Geist, und
zwar gegen eine ‘ungeheuerliche,’ auch ‘schöne’ Tradition” (384). For the enlightened individual, compassion is an essential quality. Lessing’s new poetics ideally lead one to a more compassionate, enlightened, societal existence. In a letter to Nicolai, Lessing underscores the importance of compassion for the enlightened individual:

Der mitleidigste Mensch ist der beste Mensch, zu allen gesellschaftlichen Tugenden, zu allen Arten der Großmut der aufgelegtesten. Wer uns also mitleidig macht, macht uns besser und tugendhafter.\(^42\)

Barner sees Lessing as a representative of an "Übergangsphase" (28). Nowhere is Lessing’s originality more evident than with his break from French and German literary traditions in favor of a humane, bourgeois theater.\(^43\) He appeals for a new drama because of the inherent enthusiasm and heroism of traditional tragic figures. Admiration, enthusiasm, and heroism are contrary to the enlightened norm; therefore they must be excluded from tragedy:

Ich will nur diejenigen großen Eigenschaften ausgeschlossen haben, die wir unter dem allgemeinen Namen des Heroismus begreifen können, weil jede derselben mit Unempfindlichkeit verbunden ist, und Unempfindlichkeit in dem Gegenstande des Mitleids mein Mitleid schwächt.\(^44\)

For Lessing, heroism is a personal decision resulting directly from enthusiasm and has no socially or personally redeeming qualities. Unlike compassion, enthusiasm and
heroism reveal an unhealthy concern for the self at the expense of humanity. The admired hero can no longer be the center of tragedy; instead he forms the subject matter for heroic poems or epics.\textsuperscript{45}

While de-heroizing the tragic hero in his correspondence with Nicolai and Mendelssohn, Lessing addressed the relationship between war, patriotism, and literature in letters to Gleim. Though Lessing was devoted to the development of a German literary tradition, free from French influences, he was not engulfed by patriotism, as Gädeke-Schmidt suggests (15). One must differentiate between nationalism and patriotism. Deeply rooted in the meaning of patriotism are heroism and "Vaterlandsliebe," which Lessing believed to be irrational. He writes that love for the fatherland is nothing other than heroic weakness, "Ich habe überhaupt von der Liebe des Vaterlandes keinen Begriff, und es scheint mir auf höchste eine heroische Schwachheit, die ich gern entbehre."\textsuperscript{46} Barner explains the meaning of patriotism and love of fatherland changed in the eighteenth century. No longer were they considered a "republikanische Tugend, die eine gemeinschaftliche Sorge um das Gemeinwohl mitbegriff" (Barner 253). The two qualities were identified with an idolization of the monarchy and coupled with an irrational tendency to sacrifice oneself or commit heroic acts for the preservation of the kingdom.\textsuperscript{47} During this period two
influential works appeared, Johann Georg Zimmermann’s *Von dem Nationalstolze* (1758) and Thomas Abbt’s *Vom Tode fürs Vaterland* (1761) which helped form the myth around Frederick II and his military conquests. Zimmermann, Frederick II’s personal physician, and Abbt argue that patriotic ideology and enlightened despotism are beneficial not just to a country as a whole, but also to each individual. In his letters to Gleim, Lessing argues that patriotism and heroism lead one away from social integration and towards isolation.

Though Lessing considered patriotism irrational and anti-enlightened, many of his contemporaries did not fully understand his views of the Seven Years War, as the divergent contemporary views of *Philotas* demonstrate. Alternating his residence between Leipzig and Berlin from 1755 to 1760, Lessing was criticized by both Saxons and Prussians as an enemy and as serving the interests of the other. In a letter to Nicolai, Lessing sarcastically questions the reasons for such hostility, "...so muß ich gegen mich selbst auf den Verdacht geraten, daß ich entweder einer der unparteiischsten Menschen auf der Welt oder ein grausamer Sophist bin."48 Despite his close friendship with Gleim and Kleist, Lessing distanced himself from their enthusiastic patriotic views by criticizing the popular military poetry of the period. Upon Gleim’s request that he compose two odes commemorating Frederick II’s military successes and the death of the General of Schwerin, Lessing
used the opportunity to criticize the war and military enthusiasm. Typical of Lessing, he voiced sharp criticism in letters and in conversations, but he ameliorated his criticism in published articles and writings, partially because of censorship. Whereas Lessing sharply criticized Gleim’s Preußische Kriegslieder in den Feldzügen 1756 und 1757, von einem Grenadier in their correspondence, he softened his critique in the preface of the 1758 edition which he edited.

Lessing’s correspondence with Nicolai and Mendelssohn about the role of tragedy and with Gleim about heroism and patriotism historically grounds the appearance of Philotas, but it does not explain the work. A contemporary interpretive approach is to explain Philotas as a stage in Lessing’s development as an author or as a dramatic experiment. Gädeke-Schmidt argues that Philotas fits into a progression of works, beginning with Miß Sara Sampson and ending with Nathan der Weise, in which reason is the key to overcome the inherent misunderstandings of the characters (5). Eibl suggests Philotas is a dramatic experiment, in which Lessing tests the limits of tragedies. A more complete understanding of the work, Eibl argues, arises when one considers other dramatic experiments of the period, for example from Pfeil, Cronegks, Kleist, Klopstock, and Wieland (169). These two strategies present the danger that Philotas itself will not be the center of analysis; rather
emphasis will be placed on outside issues and poetological questions. By constructing a larger system in which Philotas should fit, the work itself can be neglected or manipulated. Thus, I suggest the historical period and Lessing’s correspondence should not be the sole basis for interpretation, but can augment and historicize one’s textual analysis.

C. The Framework for Philotas’s Reflection on Suicide

The drama opens with the first of Philotas’s monologues, in which he laments his captivity. Though Philotas does not mention heroism, we learn that his childhood and adolescence have been marked by a fascination with weapons and military battles, "Meine frühere Kindheit hat nie etwas anders, als Waffen, Läger, und Schlachten und Stürme geträumet" (I 107).50 He is troubled by his preferential treatment since his capture. Despite not mentioning his age, he objects to being called a "Kind" (I 107) by his capturer. He seems insulted by being housed in a tent reserved for women and equipped with comforts not normally associated with imprisonment. I agree with Burgard’s suggestion that Philotas continually misinterprets his situation, but not that he deliberately creates his problems (445). Philotas’s problems do not develop because of imprisonment; rather they result from his conflicts with
age and his father. These conflicts existed before his captivity, which serves as the impetus for the manifestation of his problems. The opening monologue illustrates Philotas's conflict between youth and adulthood. He disapproves being considered a child, "[der] König muß mich für ein Kind, für ein verzärteltes Kind halten" (I 107), when he considers himself an adult and a worthy soldier. He describes his living conditions as "ein ekler Aufenthalt für einen Soldaten" (I 107), stressing not only his function as a military representative, but asserting his manhood, as well. Overcome by shame, Philotas wishes that his wound were deadly, "sie sollte tödlich sein" (I 107), but only toys with the idea of committing suicide, "Wüßte ich, daß ich sie tödlich machte, wenn ich sie wieder aufriss’, und wieder verbinden ließ’, und wieder aufriss’,~..." (I 107). At this juncture Philotas does not seriously consider suicide, because he lacks the necessary moral reason or justification to commit such an extreme act. Because of his present situation and his limited knowledge of the battle and its consequences, suicide would appear as a product of weakness and shame, an impression he would not want to give.

Philotas begins genuinely reflecting on suicide in his second (4th scene) and final monologue (6th scene). Before reaching that stage of development, a situation must arise which gives way to serious reflection on suicide. The second and third scenes serve as, but not only, a technical
mediator in creating the circumstances which pave the way for Philotas's reflection. In the second scene Philotas reveals his life-long desire for heroism to the war-experienced Strato, and his fear that his imprisonment will prohibit the realization of such a dream. Demanding that Strato treat him as a soldier and not as a child or son of the king, Philotas divulges that he stands in conflict with his father, because of his father's insistence on recognizing him as a son and member of the family, rather than as a prince, soldier, and subject. This conflict demonstrates Philotas's view of the private (familial) and public (governmental) spheres. Philotas actively downplays his inclusion in a private sphere, specifically his familial relation to his father as son, and recognizes the validity only of the public sphere, in which he occupies the position of prince, a royal subject subservient to the king and empire. His discussion with Strato suggests that he believes his inclusion in a private, familial sphere is detrimental to the entire kingdom, and, more importantly, precludes him from realizing his dreams of heroism. When Philotas speaks with King Aridæus in the third scene, he learns that his son, Polymet, coincidentally, has been taken prisoner in the same battle. Rejoicing upon hearing this news, Philotas now finds himself in the ideal situation which will allow him to fulfill his dreams of heroism.
Philotas, however, has not yet associated Polymet’s imprisonment with his own plans for heroism.\textsuperscript{51}

Philotas’s second and final monologues function much like Werther’s letters in Goethe’s \textit{Die Leiden des jungen Werther}. They allow for Philotas’s self-reflection on his present situation and on suicide. In Number 48 of the \textit{Hamburgische Dramaturgie} Lessing writes about the function of monologues: "Warum haben gewisse Monologe so große Wirkung? Darum, weil sie mir die geheimen Anschläge einer Person anvertrauen."\textsuperscript{52} Lessing suggests that monologues attract the attention of the viewer by allowing a better understanding of the person. Philotas’s monologues are technical devices which make the viewer acutely aware of the hero’s potential for suicide.

Philotas appears to be thinking aloud as he ponders his future, but he does not lucidly analyze his situation, as Vincenti suggests (202). Lacking the necessary insight, Philotas manipulates his situation to achieve the required goal of heroism. The monologues give the reader an intimate view of Philotas’s thought process and struggle with suicide.\textsuperscript{53} Nölle rightly argues that Philotas’s monologues are characterized by his contradictory thought process (53). Burgard notices that the monologues emphasize the discrepancy between Philotas’s thoughts and the social reality (447-48). I suggest they also reveal his fear of death and how he must go through a continual process of
self-persuasion to garner the strength to kill himself. Through Philotas's reflection on his conflicts with age and with his father, the monologues help to explain his behavior in the ensuing dialogues.

Philotas begins his second monologue obsessed with his father's reaction to his capture. Overcome by shame, he fears having to face him, "Nun darf ich wieder vor dir erscheinen, mein Vater! Zwar noch mit niedergeschlagenen Augen" (IV 114). Philotas's feelings of shame make it impossible for him to approach his father as a soldier. To avoid such an encounter, Philotas raises himself to a new, stricter system of morality which eventually gives way to thoughts about suicide. He claims that he should judge himself by higher standards than his father, implying that although his father will forgive him for having been captured, he can never forgive his actions. Though others can forgive him, they can never alleviate the shame resulting from his actions:


Philotas suggests that if he is to be a man and soldier, then his father must not use his familial relationship to excuse an act, which, if committed by a different person,
would be inexcusable. Philotas fears the personal realm, and demands that his father treat him only as an ordinary soldier.

After brooding over the effects his imprisonment will have on his father’s military success, Philotas’s thoughts about suicide arise suddenly, as if he has no control over them. In the middle of his monologue, he pauses, overcome by the intensity of a thought, which appears as a product of divine intervention, "Und nun-- welcher Gedanke war es, den ich itzt dachte? Nein, ein Gott in mir dachte-- Ich muß ihm nachhängen" (IV 115). Philotas is unable to articulate the thought, yet intuitively recognizes its magnitude. Doubting that he could muster such a thought, Philotas fights to continue the thought and struggles to comprehend its ramifications. The thought unfolds as an autonomous being and with such strength, that it appears to control Philotas. By addressing the thought, Philotas personifies it, and attempts to assert control over it "Laß dich fesseln, flüchtiger Gedanke!" (IV 115). Again, he produces the same thought, but this time it transforms into an emotional energy, which he experiences mentally, physically, and spiritually, "Itzt denke ich ihn wieder! Wie weit er sich verbreitet, und immer weiter; und nun durchstrahlt er meine ganze Seele" (IV 115). In his description of the experience, Philotas stresses how the thought radiates
through his body. The intensity of the feeling overcomes his entire being, producing a cathartic-like effect.

Though Philotas does not immediately deduce suicide from his intense experience, the experience markedly affects his ensuing thought process.\textsuperscript{54} He becomes calculative and begins to reflect on his earlier conversation with Aridäus. He remembers that Aridäus suggested that he send a messenger to his father with news of his health in order to avoid arousing suspicions and thereby causing harm to Polymet or a resumption of the war. Suspecting Aridäus for being less than truthful in his intentions, Philotas questions Aridäus by asking rhetorically whether his own death could produce positive results for himself and his father, rather than personal shame and defeat, "Also meint er doch, wenn ich bereits an meiner Wunde gestorben wäre, so würde das ein ganz anders Ansehn gewinnen?" (IV 115). Philotas is uncertain whether that would be the case, "Würde sie das?"

After more contemplation, Philotas recognizes that his father would regain the military advantage by having the imprisoned Polymet, while Aridäus would have only the body of a dead prince:

\textit{Und freilich hätte alsdenn einen gefangenen Prinzen, für den er sich alles bedingen könnte; und der König, sein Feind, hätte-- den Leichnam eines gefangenen Prinzen, für den er nichts fordern könnte; den er-- müßte begraben oder verbrennen lassen, wenn er ihm nicht zum Abscheu werden sollte} (IV 115).\textsuperscript{55}
Philotas’s use of the subjunctive voice and indirect references to himself and Polymet suggest that he has not yet decided to commit suicide. Despite the reference to himself in the third person as an imprisoned prince, his two pauses (after hätte and er) demonstrate his fear of dying. Curiously, he does not mention suicide, but shudders when he envisions himself as a corpse. In this manner, Philotas ponders whether his life is perhaps more important than military success.

Philotas arrives at the conclusion that his death can drastically alter the course of events between his father and Aridäus only after a period of reflection about his status as prisoner and its potential advantages. His reflection takes the form of a question and answer session, in which he analyses his situation. He writes: "Folglich, wenn ich, ich armer Gefangener, meinem Vater den Sieg noch in die Hände spielen will, worauf kommt es an? Aufs Sterben" (IV 115). Despite this conclusion, he displays an apprehension, "Auf weiter nichts?" Pausing briefly, Philotas concludes that death will provide military victory and revels in his insight that one can assert one’s power through the seemingly contradictory act of self-negation, "O fürwahr: der Mensch ist mächtiger, als er glaubt, der Mensch, der zu sterben weiß." Philotas realizes that he will soon be exchanged for Polymet, but he consciously chooses not to consider how his new found freedom could
affect the war. He completely ignores the possibility that existing hostilities between his father and Aridäus could be solved amicably. Coinciding with his belief that his suicide will offer the necessary means to end the war, is his recognition that his suicide can serve his personal agenda. His suicide will solve his personal conflicts with adulthood and his father, as well as enable him to fulfill his life-long dream of heroism. Philotas’s decision to commit suicide is not a result of his patriotic duty; rather it arises out of a desire to assert himself.

Doubting whether he possesses the worldly experience needed to know how to die, Philotas constructs three parallel arguments to persuade himself of the personal benefits of suicide. By doubting his worldly experience, Philotas not only questions his will to die, he also casts a shadow on his manhood, a quality he is ultimately trying to prove. Though he insists solely on the existence of the public, political sphere, Philotas’s arguments dwell within the personal, private sphere, and in this manner uncover a paradox. He must manipulate the private sphere to achieve his goals. He does not begin his argument by illustrating the effects his suicide will have on the war and the monarchy (public sphere), but how they will affect him (private sphere). Suicide will confirm his manhood, which allows him to overcome his conflict with youth and age. Because manhood is a prerequisite for heroism, Philotas will
now have the necessary requirement to attain his primary goal. In achieving heroic stature, he believes that he can prove his military worth to his father thus secure his place in the public sphere. After this circular argument about the personal benefits of suicide, Philotas cloaks his decision to commit suicide in a shroud of patriotic duty to legitimize and sanction his act.

D. The Eighteenth Century: The Heroic Suicide, Inclination, and Duty

Lessing depicts how Philotas grapples with the question of suicide and how he manipulates it to appear as patriotic duty instead of as a product of desire. This thematization of the heroic suicide in a framework of duty and inclination mirrors eighteenth-century views which differentiate between suicide and the heroic suicide. Despite religious condemnation of suicide, exceptions were made for soldiers held captive. Just as Tomas Abbt argues almost twenty years later in _Tod fürs Vaterland_, the entry on suicide in _Zedlers_ underscores an individual’s duty to the monarchy and depicts suicide as a product of patriotic duty in some cases. In order to avoid shame and torture, a soldier could commit suicide before being taken prisoner, or if one has been taken captive by the enemy, "[dann] ist er als Glied der Republik anzusehen, und wenn er sterben muß, so stirbt er

68
für das Vaterland, und zwar in seinem Beruf" (Zedlers 1599). This view of suicide frees the individual from personal responsibility by considering suicide a military and patriotic issue. Because the king is God’s earthly representative and divinely ordained, dying for the king is the same as dying for God. In his pamphlet Vom Selbstmord (1767) the protestant theologian Leß vehemently attacks suicide as weakness, but admits that in certain situations, such as religious (martyrdom) and military (heroism) persecution, suicide should not be considered suicide and is devoid of morality. About situations which make martyrdom and heroism possible, he writes "Ferner giebt es Fälle, wo der Mensch durch äußere Ursachen unwiderstehlich gezwungen wird. Und durch da hört es auf, Selbstmord zu sein" (Leß 22). He cites Biblical passages (2 Maccabees 14: 37-46) to support his argument that soldiers may be permitted to commit suicide while in captivity.

Philotas’s struggle over duty and inclination reflects the importance eighteenth-century theologians and philosophers placed on the notions of duty and honor. Catholic (Sailer) and Protestant (Groddeck, Leß, Miller) theologians defined duty as an individual’s moral obligation toward God, fellow man and oneself. Because duty must not be without a reference to God, theologians believed that strict adherence to the Bible enables one to act out of duty. Theologians maintained, unlike philosophers, that an
individual cannot perform an ethical act alone, but only in accordance with God and through his grace. Coinciding with God’s grace must be an individual’s conscious meditation on the act and redemption from God.

Though pre-Kantian philosophers addressed the role of duty, only in Kant’s philosophy does duty occupy the central position in moral-philosophical reflection. Christian Thomasius rejects theological views of duty in favor of individualism. In Fundamenta juris naturae et gentium (1718) he suggests that theology limits self-realization by demanding that an individual behave in accordance with a pre-determined definition of nature. He pleads for a rational form of Glückseligkeit, "Zu tun sind jene Handlungen, die das Leben möglichst lang und möglichst glücklich machen; und zu unterlassen sind jene, die das Leben unglücklich machen und den Tod beschleunigen." While Thomasius’s idea of a rational Glückseligkeit influenced subsequent philosophical thought, theologians rejected Glückseligkeit as a factor in determining duty and morality. As the first German systematic philosopher, Christian Wolff recognizes the existence of apriori laws that determine duty and thus the practical goodness and morality of a given action. In Philosophia practica universalis (1738) he writes:

Der Mensch wird durch das Wesen und die Natur sowohl des Menschen als auch der Dinge zu Handlungen verpflichtet, die zur Vollkommenheit
Wolff believes that duty demands that an individual act in such a manner as to reach perfection. Hoping to avoid the irrational tendencies which present a danger to Thomasius’s interpretation of Glückseligkeit, Wolff believes that Glückseligkeit is synonymous with a higher, moral existence, to which reason and duty lead. Martini cogently describes Thomasius’s position: "die Vernunft und die Tugend [sind] allein auf das Nützliche, auf die Glückseligkeit des Menschen nun klar und eindeutig Überschaubaren Welt gerichtet." Thomasius’s and Wolff’s observations about duty open the dialogue for Kant fifty years later.

Though Kant’s Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten (1785) appeared approximately twenty-five years after the first edition of Philotas, I suggest Kant’s differentiation between duty and inclination can be used as a heuristic tool to illustrate how Lessing criticizes specifically Philotas’s suicide and generally the heroic suicide. Kant grounds his definition of duty in an individual’s good will. An individual’s desire is more important than its attainment, "Der gute Wille ist nicht durch das, was er bewirkt, oder ausrichtet, nicht durch seine Tauglichkeit zu Erreichung irgend eines vorgesehenen Zweckes, sondern allein durch das Wollen"(A.19). Kant admits that his definition of duty is
abstract and difficult to grasp; therefore he differentiates between an action undertaken out of duty and in accordance with duty. An individual may commit an action in accordance with duty; however, the act could lack moral value, if the action was predetermined by the individual’s inclination. Kant uses the example of an individual’s desire for honor to illustrate this point. Though the final result of the action may be positive (honor, heroism), the individual, because of his inclination, did not act out of duty (A.23). Duty results only from the recognition of and submission to moral law, a set of apriori, laws that run counter to inclination. When one acts out of duty, one necessarily observes moral law and is free from inclination. Kant writes:

Eine Handlung aus Pflicht hat ihren moralischen Wert nicht in der Absicht, welche dadurch erreicht werden soll, sondern in der Maxime, nach der sie beschlossen wird, hängt also nicht in der Wirklichkeit des Gegenstandes der Handlung ab, sondern bloß von dem Prinzip des Wollens, nach welchem die Handlung...geschehen ist (A.26). 59

Central in Kant’s conception of duty is personal freedom, which he argues is attained only when one recognizes moral law, thus acts out of duty. For Kant, the desire for heroism can never be integrated into duty, because heroism necessarily results from a conscious inclination. Heroism is the consequence of an action, ostensibly committed out of duty, but which is actually a product of inclination.
E. Philotas’s Suicide: A Conflict Between Inclination and Duty

Almost twenty-five years before the publication of Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten Lessing differentiates between duty and inclination much the way Kant does. Lessing’s concept of duty is grounded, like Kant’s, on the elevation of reason as the measure of all actions, and in this sense, conforms to Kant’s later formulation of the categorical imperative. In Philotas’s monologues Lessing clearly differentiates between duty and inclination, showing how Philotas manipulates his desire for heroism to appear as a product of duty. Because Lessing developed no systematic philosophy addressing duty and inclination, Kant’s definitions of duty and inclination become important to clarify how Lessing criticizes heroism and suicide. I suggest Lessing’s concept of duty is similar to Kant’s; therefore all subsequent references to duty will be based on the Kantian formulation.

Philotas enthusiastically greets death in general terms as a precursor to military victory and personal fame, but then exhibits doubt in reference to his specific suicide. Burgard reads such a change in Philotas’s emotion as his “conflict...between a passionate nature and a conviction of the necessity of maintaining a stoic attitude” (444). More than illustrating a conflict between attitudes,
Philotas’s emotional inconsistency symbolizes the incongruities of his arguments and is typical of his contradictory behavior throughout the drama. He has insisted on his manhood during his captivity, yet he defines himself as a child, who may not know how to die, "Aber ich? ich, der Keim, die Knospe eines Menschen, weiß ich zu sterben?" (IV 116). Philotas recognizes the contradiction between the reality of, and his perception of, his age; therefore he consciously argues against physical age as a requisite to heroic suicide. Instead, he claims that only the completed (vollenomen) individual, regardless of age, can prepare for suicide:

Nicht der Mensch, der vollendete
Mensch allein, muß es wissen...
Wer zehn Jahr Zeit gelebt hat,
hat zehn Jahr Zeit gehabt, sterben
zu lernen; und was man in zehn Jahren
nicht lernt, das lernt man auch in
zwanzig, in dreißig und mehreren
nicht (IV 116).

Philotas’s argument is circular because he bases the knowledge to die on personal experience, which he earlier suggested he lacked. Because he does not possess the chronological time to overcome his conflict with age, he must convince himself of the validity of his age. Pleased with his proof, he addresses the relationship between age and heroism.

Convinced that he has proven his manhood, thus making heroism possible, Philotas recognizes that he must now perform an act which will actualize his dreams. Knowing
that he will be freed the following morning and lose his opportune chance, he reflects on the immediacy of the situation, "Alles, was ich werden können (sic), muß ich durch das zeigen, was ich schon bin" (IV 116).\textsuperscript{61} These comments suggest a paradox of time. Philotas has dreamt of great deeds and heroism his entire life, and because of his captivity wishes to overcome reality to actualize his dreams. Pütz rightly observes that Philotas is distraught by his inability to be a hero, "er kämpft gegen die äußeren Widerstände als gegen die Insuffizienz, ein Held zu sein" (112). Philotas is not a hermetically sealed figure who completely closes himself off from outside reality (Burgard 446, Nölle 57); rather he requires outer reality to reinforce his isolation from it. His notion of heroism is grounded within the value system of the royalty and outer reality, yet Philotas must manipulate his situation to pursue his concept of heroism within his own reality.

Philotas does not initially associate his desire for heroism with patriotic duty; rather he associates it with the intention of proving his manhood and military worth to his father. His conflicts do not solely arise within himself, as Burgard maintains (442, 445); they contain social components, as well. Philotas’s desire for heroism is, to be sure, a product of personal inclination, but his definition of a hero reveals the importance royalty and
aristocracy place upon it. He wishes his father were present to hear such a poignant definition:


Philotas’s conceptualization of heroism is based on that of his father. Schneider correctly observes "Viemehr ist die Familie (die familiäre Sozialization) als Ort zu sehen, an dem 'Heldentum' entspringt, bzw. sich festhalten kann" (A.14). Although to the twentieth-century reader Philotas’s quest for heroism may seem illogical, neither Philotas nor members of the royal court circles would have thought so. In their social strata heroism played a major role within their value system. By depicting Philotas’s arguments as circular, Lessing criticizes the aristocratic view of heroism of the eighteenth century by uncovering its emptiness and inhumanity. Barner rightly observes that Philotas also exhibits blind rationalism in his attempt to legitimize his quest for heroism (257). Philotas’s monologue is characterized by a continual process of self-persuasion, especially of his maturity, because manhood is the prerequisite for heroism and overcoming his conflict with his father. After his definition of heroism, Philotas again persuades himself of his manhood to dispel
his resurfacing doubt, "Wie alt muß die Fichte sein, die zum Maste dienen soll? Wie alt? Sie muß hoch genug, und muß stark genug sein" (IV 116).

Once he is convinced of his manhood, Philotas legitimizes suicide as patriotic duty. He believes that his patriotic duty lies within the public sphere, and should fulfill his duty without familial considerations. He envisions the effect death will have on the state, but fails to recognize its effects on his family as individuals. Because duty can only be performed by those who are "vollkommen," Philotas’s willingness to perform his patriotic duty is a direct indication of his manhood, "Jedes Ding...ist vollkommen, wenn es seinen Zweck erfüllen kann" (IV 116). He can fulfill his purpose by dying "Ich kann meinen Zweck erfüllen, ich kann zum Besten des Staats sterben." Philotas does not rejoice that his insight about patriotic duty (Zweck) allows him to serve his country, rather because it permits him to cover his true inclinations. He manipulates his conception of duty to prove his manhood to achieve heroism and overcome his conflict with his father.

Despite his rhetoric and attempt to legitimize suicide through patriotic duty, Philotas consciously deceives himself. He calls himself a man, though he considered himself a child a few days before, "Ein Mann, ob ich gleich noch vor wenig Tagen ein Knabe war" (IV 116). He recognizes
that the assertion of his manhood is an empty gesture, which leads him to doubt his will to commit suicide. Whereas critics such as Wiedemann point to Philotas’s moments of rapture as signs that he has no alternatives other than death (391), I suggest such moments belie his doubt. After arguing in favor of suicide by disguising his inclinations as duty, Philotas is overcome by a sudden, incomprehensible burst of enthusiasm, "Welch Feuer tobt in meinen Adern? Welche Begeisterung befällt mich? Die Brust wird dem Herzen zu eng" (IV 116). His rhetorical questions imply that he does not understand why he has enthusiastically argued in favor of death. His sudden enthusiasm prevents him from thinking rationally. The use of the word befallen has a negative connotation, suggesting that he has been infested or sickened with overt enthusiasm, which has negatively impacted his thought process.

Lessing uses the term Begeisterung in an ironic manner to criticize enthusiasm and its effects. Through the seventeenth century and beginning of the eighteenth century, the term "enthusiasm" had a negative connotation, and was associated with religious superstition and fanaticism; however by the mid-eighteenth century, this concept of enthusiasm had begun to change, giving way to a more positive meaning. The change in the social perception of enthusiasm can be traced to Anthony Lord of Shaftesbury (1671-1713), who published several works at the turn of the
eighteenth century, in which he proposed a new notion of enthusiasm. Shaftesbury argues that enthusiasm is devoid of reason; it has a mystical, magical element which can lead one to virtue and absolute truth. Though Mendelssohn and Wieland, among others, received positively these ideas, Lessing considered Shaftesbury and enthusiasm, because of its disregard of reason, dangerous. By portraying Philotas’s sudden feeling of enthusiasm and suggesting that this feeling produces his decision to commit suicide, Lessing employs a Shaftesburyian paradigm in an ironic manner to criticize enthusiasm and to show enthusiasm as an irrational, self-centered notion.

Philotas’s emotional outburst of enthusiasm does not last long, as he pleads for "Geduld" to calm himself. He once again thinks about suicide and the personal benefits it brings. Upon hearing Parmenio approaching, to whom he shall give a message for his father, Philotas pauses, then utters "Geschwind entschlossen," which one can read in two ways. Because he says immediately following "Was muß ich ihm sagen?" one could read the phrase as Philotas’s struggle with himself to find the right message for Parmenio so that his exchange for Polymet may be hindered. I suggest the phrase, because of its exclamatory tone and its being preceded and followed by a pause, is the moment when Philotas definitively decides in favor of suicide. He must "quickly decide" on suicide, so that he can inform Parmenio
of his message to his father. Parmenio’s arrival prohibits Philotas from further reflecting on suicide and artificially forces Philotas to come to a decision.

With stylized meta-language Lessing reveals the emptiness of Philotas’s concept of heroism. Philotas reflects upon his behavior after forcing Parmenio to take an oath of allegiance and lie to forestall his exchange for Polymet, "Es soll viele Betrüger in der Welt geben, und das Beträügen ist doch so schwer, wenn es auch in der besten Absicht geschieht" (VI 124). On the literal level Philotas’s comments refer to his deception of Parmenio by withholding his true intentions. On a meta-level, however, the comments are a self-reflexive demonstration of Philotas’s willingness to deceive himself. He recognizes that his desire for heroism can be fulfilled only through the manipulation of others. Relieved that his deception of Parmenio was successful, he says "habe ich mich nicht wenden und winden müssen!" The statement is a self-reflexive commentary on Philotas’s behavior and manipulation of his captivity, of heroism, and of others.

Philotas’s inability to define himself clearly as a man or as a child and his wavering between an enthusiastic acceptance of death and doubt underscore the paradox of his behavior. Reflecting on his situation he says:

Nun habe ich Zeit genug gewonnen!
Zeit genug, mich in meinem Vorsatze
zu bestärken—Zeit genug, die sichersten
Mittel zu wählen. — Mich in meinem
Philotas admits that he still is not completely sure that he has the resolve to commit suicide; therefore he needs time to persuade himself. His doubt and lack of resolve force him to question whether he is a man or still a child. Unsure which he is, he calls on the power of both, the steadfastness of manhood and the stubbornness of adolescence to give him the courage to end his life. When he imagines himself lying on the ground with a sword in his chest, "ein Jüngling gestreckt auf den Boden, das Schwert in der Brust," he suddenly realizes that he has failed to consider how he will kill himself. Philotas’s child-like enthusiasm of heroism, however, has blinded him to the fact that he possesses no tool, with which he can end his life. Denton argues that Philotas thinks backwards, first envisioning the effects of his suicide, then his corpse, and finally the act itself (219). Though such a thought process is typical among suicide victims, Lessing employs it to criticize Shaftesbury’s paradigm of enthusiasm and military heroism. By clearly showing how Philotas first envisions the effects his suicide should have, then the individual act itself, Lessing depicts heroism as a product of enthusiasm and as an inhumane and anti-enlightened ideal. Upon realizing that he has no sword, Philotas irrationally calls on the gods to
supply him one. His tone is indicative of a child wishing for a certain gift. Though Philotas associates heroism with manhood, he purposely decides to act like a child to manipulate King Aridäus. When he hears him approaching, he comments, "Wenn ich das Kind spielte?- Dieser Gedanke verspricht etwas.- Ja! Vielleicht bin ich glücklich" (VI 124). He consciously chooses to assume the role of a child in order to procure a sword with which he will kill himself and, in his mind, appear as a man. The discrepancy between his actions and subsequent appearance of them causes him no problems. Philotas’s contradictory behavior reveals heroism to be an illusion. Because no one from Philotas’s kingdom notices his child-like behavior, Philotas has no qualms with his paradoxical behavior.

F. Suicide’s Effect on the Private and Public Spheres: The Destruction of the Family

Throughout the drama the private and public spheres stand in strict opposition. Philotas demonstrates in his monologues that he considers his inclusion in the private sphere to be a sign of weakness and dependence. In order to attain heroism, Philotas must renounce his familial ties and view himself and his relationship with his father within a framework of power and subservience. By operating only within the public sphere, Philotas can manipulate his
concept of duty to reflect patricistic concerns. With his desire for heroism, Philotas wishes to establish his position in the public sphere at the expense of the private sphere, but the consequences of his decision prove destructive to the family.68

**Excursus:** The Depiction of Women

Set in a military camp, the drama is conspicuously absent of women. Philotas’s references to women and their supposed qualities are negative, as if they were a sign of weakness. In his opening monologue, Philotas objects that he is housed in the tent of Aridäus’s "Beischläferinnen" (107), suggesting a whore-like quality of their existence. The women’s realm is not only the family, but also sexuality; Philotas views these realms as anti-heroic. When Parmenio jokes about Philotas’s sexuality, Philotas reacts indifferently, rhetorically asking how he should know about such things (V 118). To be a soldier, one must overcome women and sexuality; therefore Philotas demands that one treat him "als ein[er] Soldat, und nicht als ein Weib" (II 108). Despite the negative view of women in the drama, Lessing does not uphold a "frauenfeindliche Ideologie" as Pütz suggests (108). With Philotas’s antagonistic view of women, Lessing criticizes how the public sphere and Philotas’s own desire for honor negatively impact women and
destroy the family. Because the women’s realm is the private and familial, Philotas clearly differentiates his soldierly existence from theirs. Women appear as a threat not only to his masculinity, but to his desire for heroism, as well. Philotas can not imagine anything worse than living with the "Spott der Weiber" (V 123), because he has failed to achieve greatness in his life. The woman and her realm serve as the symbol for worthlessness, weakness, and the family, all of which Philotas wishes to transcend.

In his initial dialogues with Strato (scene II), King Aridäus (scene III), and Parmenio (scene V), Philotas anticipates encountering career military men, who will recognize his existence as soldier, and thereby legitimize his inclusion in the public sphere. After arriving at Philotas’s tent to announce the arrival of King Aridäus, Strato notices a contradiction in Philotas’s behavior. Despite his excited condition and complaints about imprisonment, Philotas appears to have a youthful air, "Prinz, deine Bildung voll jugendlicher Anmut, verspricht ein sanftes Gemüt" (II 108). Philotas feels ashamed and insulted that a war-experienced soldier would address his personal characteristics and indirectly refer to his age. He deflects Strato’s comments by idealizing his appearance as a soldier, "Laß meine Bildung unverspottet! Dein Gesicht voll Narben ist freilich ein schöneres Gesicht."

84
Discovering that Strato once defeated his father in battle, Philotas assumes that he must have been driven by the same passionate desire for heroism and honor. Philotas elevates himself to Strato’s level as soldier by insinuating that Strato’s success resulted from the conscious decision to suppress the private sphere and live only within the public sphere. Philotas’s age and naiveté lead him to conclude that all great soldiers must have elevated their love for the fatherland over their love for their family; thus he believes Strato can empathize with his present feelings of shame owing to his captivity, "Nur du kannst mich verstehen; denn auch dich hat das herrschende Feuer der Ehre, der Ehre fürs Vaterland zu bluten, in deiner Jugend, verzehrt. Wärest du sonst, was du bist?" (II 109).

Strato patiently listens as Philotas narrates the past seven days since receiving his toga, the outward sign of his manhood and citizenship. Philotas admits that he begged his father to permit him to go to battle, and that his father consented only after his military advisor, Aristodem, intervened on Philotas’s behalf. Philotas knowingly resorted to trickery and manipulation to procure an opportunity to go to battle. After Philotas’s emotional oration, Strato suggests to Philotas that his reading of the present situation is the result of his youth and lack of experience, "Fasse dich, lieber Prinz! Es ist der Fehler des Jünglings, sich immer für glücklicher, oder
unglücklicher zu halten, als er ist" (II 111). At this point, Philotas does not yet know of Polymet’s capture. When Strato states, "Dein Schicksal ist so grausam noch nicht," he demonstrates that not only does Philotas misunderstand his problems, but he himself misunderstands Philotas’s view of the fatherland and the family. Strato’s comments suggest that he assumes Philotas will rejoice in learning that he will be reunited with his father. With such a view, one can conclude that Strato places equal importance on the private and public sphere, and thereby shatters Philotas’s belief that all great soldiers are obsessed with only the public sphere.

Philotas expects King Aridäus’s behavior and their meeting to be structured by the military formality of the public sphere and to be devoid of personal references. Instead, Aridäus arrives informally and embraces his enemy as a friend. Philotas’s youthful appearance reminds Aridäus of his own youth, "0 welcher glücklichen Tage erinnert mich deine blühende Jugend!" (III 111). Aridäus reflects on his childhood and his friendship with Philotas’s father, whose youth and decency is recalled by Philotas’s appearance. By addressing friendship and youth, Aridäus not only dwells within the private sphere, he embraces Philotas’s innocence. He suggests that Philotas should not be concerned with the military or heroics at his age; rather he should cherish the time when one can do as one wishes, "Das war das selige
Alter, da wir uns noch ganz unserem Herzen überlassen durften" (III 111). Aridäus criticizes the public, military sphere by blaming it for the end of his friendship with Philotas’s father, "Bald aber wurden wir beide zum Throne gerufen, und der sorgende König, der eifersüchtige Nachbar unterdrückte, leider! den gefälligen Freund" (III 112). Because of Aridäus’s failure to discuss the military situation, Philotas feels insulted. He demands to be treated as a military representative and prisoner, not as a prince and child; thus he admonishes Aridäus to speak in the name of the monarchy, not as a polite friend or elder statesman, "Du hast als der höfische Staatsman gesprochen; sprich nun als der Monarch, der den Nebenbuhler seiner Größe ganz in seiner Gewalt hat" (III 112). After listening to Philotas’s "frühe, männliche Sprache," and his suspicions that he will attempt to use Philotas’s captivity to exact revenge on his father, Aridäus divulges that his own son is held captive. Instead of exacting revenge, Aridäus is prepared to exchange the prisoners. While demonstrating his compassionate and moral qualities, this gesture underscores Aridäus’s elevation of the private sphere above the public and the importance he places on the family. Instead of rejoicing or considering his father’s relief that he will return safely, Philotas immediately thinks about the military situation. He is overcome by shame because he sees his father’s military advantage (Polymet’s captivity)
nullified by his own captivity. Throughout his captivity, Philotas ponders only his situation which he believes is potentially tragic, and fails to recognize the tragic situation of Aridäus and his son.

Parmenio’s inability to understand Philotas’s adamant desire to prolong his captivity dominates their encounter. As with Strato, Philotas concentrates on Parmenio’s outward appearance. He appears elated to have found someone who defines his existence in military terms. Parmenio considers his many wounds "Kleinigkeiten," because bones are made to be broken, "Wozu hat man die Knochen anders, als daß sich die feindlichen Eisen darauf schartig hauen sollen?" (V 118). As Philotas’s messenger to his father, Parmenio is prepared to tell him whatever Philotas wishes, but when Philotas questions what he will say, he offers a surprising answer, "Je eher, je lieber wieder bei ihm sein. Deine kindliche Sehnsucht, deine bange Ungeduld" (V 118). Although Philotas becomes irate and calls him "Schalk," Parmenio does not intend to demean him. Unlike Strato und Aridäus, Parmenio does not hesitate to confront Philotas’s existence and crush his illusion of reality and age. Foreshadowing Philotas’s suicide, Parmenio refers to Philotas as a "premature hero," "Mein frühzeitiger Held, laß dir das sagen: Du bist noch Kind! Gib nicht zu, daß der rauhe Soldat das zärtliche Kind so bald in dir erstickte" (V
Parmenio criticizes Philotas’s military ethos, warning him not to lose his youth because of it.

Parmenio and Philotas both clearly differentiate between the private sphere of the family and the public sphere of the monarchy, but their results are markedly different. Though an archetypical soldier willing to sacrifice his life for the fatherland, Parmenio speaks to Philotas as a representative of the family. Parmenio, himself a father of a child not much older than Philotas, is outraged that Philotas could deny his feelings for his father. He reprimands Philotas, claiming that if his son did not long to see him like "ein Lamm nach seiner Mutter," then he would rather not have a son. Parmenio implies that familial ties precede political duty. Philotas appears to have heeded Parmenio’s comments, telling him, "sage meinem Vater alles, was du glaubst, daß ihm ein zärtlicher Sohn bei dieser Gelegenheit muß sagen lassen" (V 119). Philotas, however, is incapable of articulating what a son could say in such a situation; thus he turns to sarcasm for an answer.

By differentiating between himself as son and prince, Philotas’s acquiescence reveals itself as a sham. Speaking as a son, he is willing to dispatch Parmenio, but not as prince, "Der Sohn hat dich abgefertigt, aber noch nicht der Prinz." Astounded by his reaction, Parmenio’s questions Philotas for reasons. Instead of confronting reality and admitting his desire for heroism, Philotas chooses to
deceive him by refusing to reveal his intentions. As a war-hardened soldier, Parmenio would necessarily see through the thin veneer of Philotas’s notion of honor and recognize it as an attempt to beguile himself and his father. Parmenio’s, Strato’s, and Aridäus’s visits to Philotas and their elevation of the private sphere above the public sphere have no effect on Philotas. 70

G. Philotas’s Actions: Reason vs. Constraint

Philotas’s "sanftes Gemüt" and language convey his enlightened education, but he himself perceives reason and the Enlightenment solely as an educational system within the familial sphere and believes that one should avoid or suppress reason in the public sphere. Indeed, Philotas must suppress his reason to allow himself to embrace enthusiastically the situation at hand which facilitates his military ethos and supposed heroic action. Wehrli astutely observes, "der junge Held führt laufend aufklärerisches Erziehungskredo im Mund, das sich aber immer wieder als bloßes Lippenkenntnis und seiner Handlungsweise als diametral entgegenstehend erweist" (87). In his dialogues with Aridäus (scene III) and Parmenio (scene V), Philotas cautions each not to use reason to explain his actions. He fears that reason will lead him to recognize the importance
of the family and uselessness of war with Aridäus, not to mention the emptiness of his action. After Aridäus’s laudatory comments about his father, Philotas responds indignantly, "man hat meine Jugend denken, aber nicht reden gelehrt" (III 112). Differentiating between the world of reason and the world of military prowess, he suggests that an enlightened education cannot be integrated into military actions. The comments serve as a subtle hint to Aridäus to avoid reason and any mention of the family to solve their problems. When Parmenio asks Philotas why he differentiates between his existence as prince and son, Philotas demands that he not rationalize the situation, "Aber, Soldat, kein vernünfteln" (V 120). The word "vernünfteln" suggests that Philotas wishes to avoid hearing overly critical thoughts and to end what he considers to be empty conversation. By coupling "Soldat" and "kein vernünfteln" Lessing offers a coy criticism of the military, suggesting it is devoid of reason. After Parmenio’s incessant questioning, Philotas reiterates his demand, "Ha! ich untersage dir, zu vernünfteln" (V 120). In order to create the illusion of his heroism, Philotas must suppress not only his reason, but that of others, as well.

Set against Aridäus’s humane gesture of reconciliation, Philotas’s insistence on military might over right and his refusal to enter a rational dialogue appear ironic, even sarcastic. Aridäus mistakes Philotas’s behavior and blind
paternal obedience as altruistic and views his stoic attitude in a positive light, "Prinz, es zeigt einen großen Verstand, seinen Verstand so zu verleugnen" (VII 125). Despite the remark’s obvious irony, Philotas lacks the necessary distance to comprehend fully Aridäus’s implications, and mutters only "Jawohl, unseliger Krieg."

Philotas admits his father initiated the war, but shunning all reason, argues in favor of godly intervention, knightly virtue, and honor to determine the "victor," "Die Götter aber, du weißt es, König, sprechen ihr Urteil durch das Schwert des Tapfersten" (VII 126). Whereas Wehrli believes Philotas misunderstands his enlightened education and manipulates it ad absurdum as an instrument of ideology, I suggest that Philotas knowingly reserves reason for the private sphere and consciously chooses to stand outside of all enlightened norms when in the public sphere. When in the public, political sphere, Philotas’s behavior is characterized by his enthusiasm, which Lessing reveals as irrational and dangerous.

Philotas does not manipulate reason, as Wehrli suggests; rather he, in the face of its major proponent, scoffs at its usefulness in the public domain. Amazed at Philotas’s lack of reason, Aridäus fears perpetual hostilities with an enemy whose sole concern is military success at the expense of humanity. The ever-calculative Philotas recognizes that his ego and confrontational
demeanor may be impeding on his plan of procuring a sword; thus he changes his course of action by offering a self-effacing account of his behavior. Though he wishes to prove his manhood, he excuses his temper as a byproduct of his youth, which will calm in time. Using an antonymous historical reference to prove his point, he says "ein weibischer Prinz, hat mich die Geschichte gelehrt, ward oft ein kriegerischer König" (VII 126). The eighteenth-century viewer of Philotas would have recognized this as a reference to Frederick II. Lessing offers a subtle criticism of Frederick II by associating him with Philotas. Whereas personal courage and fame within the public sphere constitute Philotas’s concept of heroism, Aridäus recognizes humanity and one’s love for it as the chief ingredients for heroism, "Was ist ein Held ohne Menschenliebe" (VII 127). Philotas effectively tricks Aridäus into believing that he speaks in the name of humanity.

Throughout the drama, Philotas’s behavior remains incongruous with the goal of heroism he hopes to achieve by committing suicide. In his monologues he moves from enthusiastically receiving death to questioning it, but the decision to commit suicide never appears genuinely greeted. Depending on the situation in his dialogues, he alternately acts like a young, strong prince, who demands to be treated as a military representative, or as a weak child, more interested in his appearance than substance. Because he
requires the help of others to garner the necessary time to carry out his plan and to secure a weapon with which he can commit suicide, Philotas selfishly manipulates all characters by incorporating them into his grand scheme. Framed by his dialogues with Parmenio and Aridäus, the obvious discrepancy between his "noble" intention of heroism and the deceitful method used to obtain the sword often produce a comical effect. Norton observes "the comic action typically ensues when the hero attempts to surmount, or assert his own incongruent code against, the barriers erected by the rational norms of society" (457). Comical situations arise due to the deficiencies in Philotas’s behavior and character, which prove incommensurate with heroism. As a drama of the Enlightenment, Philotas’s complete lack of measure violates the enlightened norms, represented by Aridäus. Owing to his behavioral flaws, Philotas oscillates between two behavioral norms, that of a child and adult. A pragmatic contradiction arises between his actions and his goal of heroism, thereby giving way to comical incidents.

Historically, critics have underestimated Philotas’s intelligence and cunning by explaining his actions as infantile-like, and have overlooked his ability to read his situation and modify his behavior accordingly. Riedel denies Philotas a chameleon-like behavior and maintains Lessing purposely stresses Philotas’s adolescence to create
a psychologically believable character (74). Because of Philotas’s conflict between adolescence and adulthood, Pütz argues "die Schwierigkeiten des Prinzen auf dem Weg zum Heros bestehen in seiner fragwürdigen Prädisposition für ein fast kindisches Heldendaseins" (111-12). I suggest Philotas, who, by nature of his toga, would be considered an adult, occupies a mediary position between the realms of childhood and adulthood. His desire for heroism is not doomed because of his youth; rather it is doomed because of the means he uses to obtain it. By consciously acting like a child, though he wishes to prove otherwise, manipulating others, and mocking social codes, Philotas’s quest for heroism appears as an individual goal without social reality or ramifications. In the penultimate scene, Philotas recognizes that a self-efficacious approach with the king will be most prosperous. He warns the king not to admire him because of his courage, "Männer, König, müssen kein Kind bewundern" (VII 125). Not only does he define himself as a child, he insinuates that he, by nature of his age, should not be admired. By deduction, he suggests that he is incapable of heroism because of his youth. With these remarks Lessing recalls his debate on tragedy with Mendelssohn and Nicolai and criticizes the entire genre of the heroic tragedy. Knowing the conclusion of the drama, a reader might interpret these comments as Lessing’s implicit critique of Philotas’s actions. Philotas ultimately
receives a sword only after lying, claiming he cannot enter Aridäus’s court without a sword, the outward symbol of a soldier. Aridäus gives Philotas a sword not because he thinks he is an innocent, harmless child (Weiermüller 205); instead Aridäus grants him this wish because he believes Philotas adheres to the same enlightened tenets as he.

H. The Private and Public Ramifications of Suicide

Upon receiving a sword in the last scene, Philotas undergoes a physical and emotional transformation, overcome by the euphoria of the situation. He falls into an adolescent dream-like state, unaware of his physical reality or those around him. Aridäus notices his behavioral change, commenting that he shudders. Recalling his childhood, Philotas seems mesmerized by the sword. Unsatisfied with just viewing it, he draws it, and begins to swing it as if he were in an imaginary battle. Though he warns Strato not to come too near, neither he nor the King suspect Philotas of killing them or himself. Aridäus even expresses concern over Philotas possibly aggravating his injuries. Philotas becomes outraged at the king’s gentle warning, "Woran erinnerst du mich, König? - An mein Unglück; nein, an meine Schande! Ich ward verwundet und gefangen" (VIII 129). Momentarily aroused from his trance-like state, he reveals that personal embarrassment and shame are the ultimate
reasons for his suicide. His attempt to legitimize suicide as patriotic duty uncovers itself as nothing more than a means to comfort himself and to avoid personal responsibility. If suicide appears as a product of patriotic duty, then no one will question Philotass’s intentions, nor will they discover his fear of dying.

In the face of death, Philotass experiences fear of committing suicide. He asks Strato to kill him, "Töte mich! Nimm mich nicht gefangen!" (VII 129). Philotass’s remarks suggest that he recognizes the deceit in his plan of a "heroic" suicide and reveals his desire for death as a purely personal decision to avoid the shame of facing his father. By wishing to be killed, Philotass hints that suicide, no matter in what situation, is un-heroic, but ultimately his heroic enthusiasm overtake him. Hovering between his dream-like state, in which he fights an imaginary enemy, and reality, his final act of suicide appears as a recreation of the original battle scene when he was taken prisoner. With his suicide, Philotass symbolically regresses in time to erase his captivity, thus erasing the shame felt over it. His suicide serves not only to end his life, but, through reenacting the battle scene, to end it at that moment that he was taken captive. In this manner, Philotass symbolically denies his existence since his captivity. Through his reflection on death in the monologues, the suicidal act appears as a product of
rational calculation. He does not rationalize the political situation between his father and Aridäus, deciding to die to ensure a balance of power (Schneider A.27); rather he rationalizes how he personally can profit from suicide. As his language demonstrates, he commits suicide out of an inclination to avoid shame, while giving the entire act the appearance of heroism. His suicide takes the antithetical form of his legitimization of it. In his monologues, Philotas suppresses personal feelings in order to legitimize suicide as political duty. However, immediately preceding his suicide, Philotas refers to neither the political situation nor Polymet, only to his specific predicament, which proves his suicide to be a personal decision.

A consensus exists among scholars that Philotas enthusiastically greets death, while failing to recognize the effect his death will have on others. Upon a closer examination of Philotas’s language immediately following his mortal stab, I suggest that he experiences a fleeting moment of insight, that he comes to recognize the value of human life. To avoid any suggestion that he accidentally stabbed himself, Philotas tells the king and Strato, "das wollte ich" (VIII 130). Then, in uncharacteristic language, he asks the king for forgiveness "Vergib mir König! Ich habe dir einen tödlicherehen Streich versetzt, als mir!" (VIII 130). For the first time, Philotas considers how his death will affect others. His use of the comparative form of the
adjective "tödlich" suggests he recognizes that his death will effect Aridäus far greater than himself. Aridäus, as a symbol not only of the Enlightenment, but also of his dynasty, will be robbed of his most prized possession, his son and future king. Philotas does not ask Aridäus to forgive his suicide, but for causing the harm and eminent death of Polymet.

Philotas's fleeting moment of insight immediately gives way to heroic language. If the drama were to end with Philotas's recognition of his faults, then one could consider Philotas a truly tragic figure. He, however must revert back to his "heroic" attitude, or the drama would appear as a glorification of the heroic tragedy, a genre Lessing despised. By hinting at Philotas's insight, subtle and fleeting as it may be, Lessing suggests that all humanity eventually will accept the universality of reason in both thoughts and actions. If Philotas had failed to recognize his faults, then the drama could appear as an indictment against the Enlightenment, suggesting that although one may have an enlightened education, enlightened ideals may not be integrated into government and the military. Though the possibility of success is not negated, Lessing reflects the difficulty of integrating the dichotomy of theory and practice into society.

Aridäus's immediate reaction to Philotas's suicide seems out of character and disrupts the classical setting of
the drama. After ordering Strato to help the dying prince, Aridäus exclaims, "Prinz, welche wütende Schwermut" (VIII 130). His words suggest an eighteenth-century view of suicide and potential reasons for it. Set within an eighteenth-century context, the coupling of "wütend" and "Schwermut" creates a mood of melancholia. In the eighteenth century, theologians and philosophers identified melancholy as a potential cause of suicide. Aridäus’s actions seem curious because melancholia, to this point of the drama, has not been thematized. Aridäus speaks as the voice of Lessing and hints that he has thought about the problematics of suicide. The sudden appearance of this reference functions as Lessing’s subtle criticism of the melancholy person, as well as a hint to the audience about the dangers of the mood.⁷⁶

Aridäus’s reaction to Philotas’s suicide has attracted considerable attention as a key to understanding the drama as a whole. Most critics point to the two most obvious changes in Aridäus, i.e., his subsequent, albeit momentary, atavistic behavior caused by Philotas’s suicide and his abdication of power in favor of a private life, as a condemnation not only of heroism, but of the military as well. Barner writes, "Die Konsequenz des Aridäus ist der Rückzug ins Private, in dem alleine Menschlichkeit enfalten kann" (257). Lessing’s cosmopolitan view of society and belief in a broad community of men, where the individuals
work with the state tend to preclude an interpretation which idealizes only the private realm of existence. Lessing criticizes the inhumanity of Philotas's suicide by showing how it can arouse the most primordial emotions of rage and revenge even in an enlightened individual. Philotas's decision to ignore the private sphere proves detrimental to the individual and, paradoxically, to the public sphere. The result of his suicide will be the continuation of hostilities between warring sides, thus increased tensions between the public sphere of both parties. Like Philotas's moment of insight, Arидäus's atavistic behavior does not last, soon giving way to paternal pathos and concern for his son.

Lessing ends the drama with one final condemnation of Philotas's suicide and the heroic drama. Strato, overcome by the emotional situation of Philotas's suicide, considers Philotas admirable, "ein wunderbarer Jüngling" (VIII 131). Critics have also upheld this view. This comment recalls Lessing's debate on tragedy with Mendelssohn and Nicolai. With such a view, Lessing targets Mendelssohn's assertion that a heroic tragedy should arouse admiration thereby leading one to a higher moral existence. Lessing effectively negates this view by depicting Philotas, despite the heroic pretext of his actions, in an un-heroic light by showing the disastrous ramifications his suicide has on others. Arидäus's reply to Strato begs to be read
ironically, "Beweine ihn nur! - Auch ich!" (VIII 131). Whereas Lessing's contemporary enthusiastic viewers would interpret this comment as Aridäus's agreement with Strato, the cautious reader recognizes Aridäus's contempt for Philotas. With his reply, Aridäus suggests that not only Strato, but we the readers, should mourn Philotas's rejection of reason in favor of heroism. With only Strato on stage, Aridäus closes the drama by exclaiming, "Glaubt ihr Menschen, daß man es endlich satt wird" (VII 131). With only one living person accompanying him, Aridäus’s use of the word "Menschen" is unnecessary. As a meticulous writer and editor, Lessing would not make such a mistake. It is not Aridäus, rather Lessing himself, who ends the drama, by asking the audience whether it has seen enough heroic tragedies. With this last line, Lessing closes the book on heroic tragedies in German literary history.

I. Philotas's Suicide: The Un-Heroic Hero

Despite moments of doubt about suicide and his fleeting insight, Philotas dies with the conviction that his suicide is a heroic action. His penultimate lines suggest that he has persuaded himself that suicide is his patriotic duty, which both Strato and Aridäus, as virtuous military men, must recognize,

Lebe wohl, Strato! Dort, wo alle
Tugendhafte Freunde, und alle Tapfere
Glieder eines seligen Staates sind, im Elysium sehen wir uns wieder! - Auch wir, König, sehen uns wieder- (VIII 131).

With his symbolic gesture of negating time, Philotas imagines himself dying on the battlefield as a heroic soldier. He, however, dies without confronting his true actions and their subsequent effects. Desiring to be a hero his entire childhood, Philotas, in the moment of death, purges all thought of shame and dishonor, and believes he dies a hero.

By suggesting he will meet Strato and Aridäus in Elysium, the resting place of great soldiers, Philotas demands his suicide to be perceived as a public decision, meant only to affect the public sphere. Though he does not ask for forgiveness, Philotas attempts to admonish himself from any sin or guilt. He insinuates that he is not responsible for any ill-effects his suicide might have on the private, familial sphere. Because Philotas consciously overlooks his incongruous behavior throughout the drama and his initial inclination for committing suicide, his death presents itself as a final act of self-negation. His failure to recognize reason and social reality destroy his belief that he has attained freedom through suicide.

As I hoped to have shown, the drama Philotas serves as a medium for Lessing to problematize suicide. Philotas’s behavior reveals itself as paradoxical; by altering between existences as a child and adult, depending on his desired
effect, Philotas reflects on suicide. Ultimately exhibiting a fear of dying, he attempts to manipulate his death as a product of patriotic duty while trying to conceal his personal ambitions. Through the depiction of Philotas and his suicide, Lessing breaks from established theological, political, and poetological norms, and declares the end of heroic literature.
CHAPTER 3

Goethe and Werther: Suicide and Self-Construction

A. Goethe and Suicide

In his autobiographical work, Dichtung und Wahrheit, written over forty years after the first edition of Die Leiden des jungen Werther, Goethe reveals that he was haunted by suicidal urges during the early 1770's while in Strassburg, Frankfurt, and Wetzlar:

diesen [Dolch] legte ich mir jeder
Zeit neben das Bett, und ehe ich
das Licht auslöschte, versuchte ich,
ob es mir wohl gelingen möchte, die
scharfe Spitze ein paar Zoll tief in
die Brust zu senken (D&W, XIII, 585). 78

Though tormented by these feelings, Goethe transformed them into creative energies. Instead of becoming inactive, he felt compelled to write in order to overcome his suicidal drive:

Um dies (to survive) aber mit
Heiterkeit tun zu können, mußte ich
eine dichterische Aufgabe zur
Ausführung bringen, wo alles, was
ich über diesen wichtigen Punkt empfunden,
gedacht und erwähnt, zur Sprache kommen
sollte (D&W, XIII, 585).
Writing about his fears served as a means of self-analysis and self-therapy, and as he mentions in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, in this therapy "war der Plan zu *Werther* gefunden" (*D&W*, XIII, 585).

Although Goethe may have overcome his suicidal urges through self-reflection and the creation of the epistolary novel *Die Leiden des jungen Werther*, he never stopped thinking about the topic of suicide, a theme prevalent throughout his literary career (*Egmont*, *Faust*, *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*). His thematization of suicide stresses the human and individual questions, which suicide forces each individual to confront. He notes a specifically human component to suicide:

> Der Selbstmord ist ein Ereignis
der menschlichen Natur, welches,
> mag auch darüber schon viel gesprochen
> und gehandelt sein, als da will,
> doch einen jeden Menschen zur Teilnahme
> fordert, in jeder Zeitepoche wieder
> einmal verhandelt werden muß (*D&W*, XIII, 583).

Several scholars have been attracted to the peculiar relationship between Goethe’s life, his literary works, and death (Rehm, Koch, Schulz), yet surprisingly few critics have addressed how Goethe conceptualizes suicide in his literary works, and instead have dwelled on autobiographical questions or moral and aesthetic aspects of suicide.

In Book XIII of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* Goethe downplays his literary genius as contributing to the immense popularity of *Werther*: "Die Wirkung des Büchleins war groß,
ja ungeheuer, und vorzüglich deshalb, weil es genau in die richtige Zeit traf" (D&W, XIII, 589). The interest aroused by the novel is closely related to the interest in Goethe’s life, and although it would be an injustice to the literary genius behind Werther to read the work only as a portrayal of Goethe’s early years in Wetzlar and his experiences during that period, one cannot overlook the autobiographical aspects imbedded in the novel. In his correspondence and Books XII and XIII of Dichtung und Wahrheit Goethe has left us a plethora of information about the origins and reception of the work, from which we can construct an outline of his reasons and motives for writing the work, and thereby better understand the novel itself. Goethe’s comments in Dichtung und Wahrheit present the critical reader with the task of deciphering how Goethe’s recollection of the Werther-period and his own self-representation may have shaped his account of Werther. The title of the work, Dichtung und Wahrheit, poses a question: what is fictitious and non-fictitious in the work? Despite the questions the work raises, it is nonetheless helpful in understanding Goethe’s relationship to Werther.

Goethe’s stay in Wetzlar was rather brief; he arrived there in May, 1772, as a newly promoted doctor of jurisprudence, and departed Wetzlar in mid-September that year. He matriculated with number 956 in the Wetzlar Reichskammergericht as Johann Wolfgang Goethe von Frankfurt
am Main. Goethe’s professional activities and involvement with the court were minimal. Soon after his arrival he encountered a "drittes akademisches Leben" (D&W XII, 531) through the membership in a medieval-type club, a secretive society whose members included Friedrich Wilhelm Gotter from the Göttinger Hainbund and the co-editor of Boie’s almanac and future author of a Werther-drama, August von Goué. Goethe reflects upon his colleagues’ involvement with the group and their literary and esoteric conversations:

an einer großen Wirtstafel traf
ich beinah sämtliche
Gesellschaftsuntergeordnete,
junge muntere Leute, beisammen;
sie nahmen mich freundlich auf,
und es blieb mir schon den ersten
Tag kein Geheimnis, daß sie ihr
mittägiges Beisammensein durch
eine romantische Fiktion erheitert
hatten (D&W, XIII, 531).

Although the exact date is unknown, probably in spring, 1772, Goethe met the career-oriented lawyer Johann Christian Kestner, a colleague at the Kammergericht who was engaged to the nineteen year old Charlotte Buff.\(^{80}\) Goethe took a liking to Kestner, who, as it has been pointed out countless times, served as the impetus for the literary figure of Albert in Werther. As with Werther in the novel, Goethe first met Charlotte Buff at a formal ball and was immediately attracted to her (Flaschka 26).\(^{81}\) During the forthcoming month, while her fiancé’s professional activities demanded more of his time, Goethe’s affection for Charlotte grew and his visits to her household became more
frequent. Flaschka suggests "Goethes Liebe zu Lotte war kein verstiegene oder phantastische Liebe, sondern hatte ihren Grund in einer echten und tiefen Zuneigung... Sein Aufenthalt in Wetzlar fand in Lotte Ziel und Inhalt (30). Despite Kestner’s tolerance of Goethe’s visits, tensions gradually began to grow and reached an apex in mid-August. Upon returning home after a business trip Charlotte informed him that she kissed Goethe. August 16 proved to be the decisive day, as Kestner notes in his diary entry, "Bekam Goethe von Lotte gepredigt; sie declarirte ihm, daß er nichts als Freundschaft hoffen dürfte; er ward bläß und sehr niederschlagen." Realizing that he had no future with Charlotte Goethe departed Wetzlar on September 11, 1772, leaving Charlotte und Kestner with only a letter. Taking the advice of friends, he traveled to Koblenz to visit close friends, Sophie von La Roche and her family.

Soon after arriving at the La Roche household Goethe became enamored with their sixteen year old daughter, Maximiliane, whom he described as "Eher klein als groß von Gestalt, niedlich gebaut, eine freie anmütige Bildung, die schwärzesten Augen und eine Gesichtsfarbe, die nicht reiner und blühender gedacht werden kann" (D&W XIII, 560). Not yet over his relationship with Charlotte, Goethe found in Maximiliane "eine neue Leidenschaft, ehe die alte noch ganz verklungen... so sieht man bei untergehender Sonne gern auf der entgegengesetzten Seite den Mond aufgehen und erfreut

109
sich an dem Doppelglanz der beiden Himmelslichter” (D&W, XIII, 561). Goethe’s affection toward Maximiliane, who married Peter Anton Brentano within a year, did not become as intense as with Charlotte. Throughout the two-year period before writing Werther Goethe remained obsessed with Charlotte, with whom he exchanged silhouettes and to whom he wrote. As Goethe stated in Dichtung und Wahrheit, writing Werther was an act of self-preservation, but equally so was his departure from Wetzlar, where Charlotte’s existence tormented him.

The event that had the most profound effect on Goethe as a person and as an author was the startling news of Karl Wilhelm Jerusalem’s suicide on October 30, 1772. As Goethe writes in Dichtung und Wahrheit, his contact with Jerusalem was minimal, "der Verfasser hat ihn nie besucht, auch nicht bei sich gesehen; manchmal traf er ihn bei Freunden. Die Äußerungen des jungen Mannes waren mäßig aber wohlwollend" (D&W, XII, 544). Jerusalem’s suicide corresponded to the period during which Goethe was fighting similar suicidal urges. His interest in Jerusalem’s suicide is as much personal as it is literary. Jerusalem, son of the well-known theologian Friedrich Wilhelm Jerusalem, was rising in status at the Braunschweig court and seemed to be disenchanted with his career at the time of his death. Goethe narrates the reasons for his suicide and the pronounced effect it had on him:
Jerusalems Tod, der durch die unglückliche Neigung zu der Gattin eines Freundes verursacht ward, schüttelte mich aus dem Traum, und weil ich nicht bloß mit Beschaulichkeit das, was ihm und mir begegnete, sondern das Ähnliche, was mir im Augenblicke widerfuhr, mich in leidenschaftliche Bewegung setzte (D&W, XIII, 587).

Goethe immediately contacted Kestner and requested a complete description of the events leading up to Jerusalem’s suicide. Although Goethe claims his relations with Charlotte Buff, Johann Christian Kestner, and Maximiliane La Roche influenced how he wrote Werther, I agree with Christian Wagenknecht’s belief that Goethe’s personal experiences with the aforementioned had little effect on his literary creativity until they were given meaning by Jerusalem’s suicide: "Für den Werther-Roman werden alle diese literarische Versuche und persönliche Erlebnisse des jungen Goethes erst in dem Augenblicke nutzbar, wo sich die Idee zu einem Werk einstellt, unter der sie sich angreifen und miteinander verbinden lassen."86 Beginning the end of 1772 and continuing through early 1773 Goethe received letters from Kestner, in which he described Jerusalem’s situation. Through correspondence with Sophie von La Roche and Johann Kaspar Lavater one can assume Goethe completed the novel in late May or early June, 1774.87 In Dichtung und Wahrheit Goethe describes his writing process and how he fused fictive and non-fictive events to create the literary work in four weeks.
So konnte es nicht fehlen, daß ich in jener Produktion, die ich eben unternahm, alle die Glut einhauchte, welche keine Unterscheidung zwischen dem Dichterischen und dem Wirklichen zuläßt. Ich hatte mich äußerlich völlig isoliert, ja die Besuche meiner Freunde verboten, und so legte ich auch innerlich alles beiseite, was nicht unmittelbar hierher gehörte. Dagegen faßte ich alles zusammen, was einigen Bezug auf meinen Vorsatz hatte, und wiederholte mir mein nächstes Leben, von dessen Inhalt ich noch keinen dichterischen Gebrauch gemacht hatte (D&W, XIII, 587).

B. Werther’s Death Instinct and Desire for Form and Control

Scholarship on *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* historically has paid little attention to Goethe’s observations about the human element of suicide. Critical interpretation of Werther’s suicide ranges from an act committed by a "moralisch positiven, unglücklichen Wahnsinnigen" (Reuchlin 131), to an act which is nothing more than "Selbsttäuschung" (Asslingen 134, 196), "selbstherrliche Entgrenzung" (Rehm 332), "neuerliche Selbstvergötterung" (Meyer-Kalkus 99), or resulting from insanity (Feise 188). I believe that a better understanding of the novel arises when one closely examines Werther’s suicide, related motifs, and parallel stories. To build upon Margaret R. Higonnet’s notion of "self-construction"
(69-81), I suggest that Werther's suicide not only functions to shape and form his life through his decision willfully to end it under the pretext of eternalizing his love for Lotte, suicide also serves as Werther's attempt to gain control over his life.

Following his move to the countryside, Werther consciously chooses a naive lifestyle, appears to be at one with himself, and enjoys a paradisiacal relationship with nature. After meeting Lotte, he gradually loses all self-control and his life becomes chaotic, because his self-constructed subjective world is threatened. He becomes disenchanted with himself, and nature serves only to heighten his unhappiness and suffering. Unable to integrate himself into empirical reality and tormented by his self-limiting view of it, Werther develops a pathological sickness, which he diagnoses himself. A death instinct and a conviction that his suicide is irreversible arise from his pathological sickness. He believes his suicide to be the only end to his suffering caused by the clash of his self-constructed perspective of reality and empirical reality itself. To support his belief Werther attempts to legitimize his right to commit suicide through the manipulation of nature and religion. Ignace Feuerlicht writes that "Werther has no reasons that induce him to suicide but that his suicidal drive is anxious to find reasons and uses them as a disguise and pretext" (482).
Feuerlicht, like many other critics, see Werther’s problems beginning with Lotte and stemming from his supposed love for her. I suggest his suffering, emanating from his insistence on subjective reality over objective, empirical reality, has long existed. His conscious blindness to the existing world is the beginning of his suffering. The encounter with Lotte makes him acutely aware of his self-deceptive view of reality, but he can neither forgo his subjective world, nor enter empirical reality. His death instinct arises because he feels death is the only possible means to shape his fragmented existence.

C. Werther, Society, and Nature

The novel begins with Werther’s flight, "wie froh bin ich, daß ich weg bin" (May 4), from the city and a personal relationship to the countryside. This wanderer motif permeates the entire novel and raises several questions about Werther’s health (mental and physical), his need for an "other" and social intercourse, and his desire for form and order. In his first letter to Wilhelm, Werther explains he leaves the city because he unconsciously encouraged the romantic passions of his lover’s, Leonore’s, sister. Instead of confronting the problem and the chaos it has caused, Werther chooses to escape to find solace elsewhere.
He recognizes, however, that he has made a mistake by doing so, "Ich will, lieber Freund, ich verspreche dir’s, ich will mich bessern" (May 4). Werther’s comments force the reader to confront his mental and physical stability, but more than diagnosing a sickness, Werther articulates a need for order.

There are signs already in the first letter, that Werther, although aware of his emotional state, has difficulty articulating his feelings to others. He implies that the relationship with Leonore ended because of misunderstandings caused by articulation problems, and implies that they were avoidable, "Mißverständnisse und Trägheit [machen] vielleicht mehr Irrungen in der Welt, als List und Bösheit" (May 4). Werther suggests that relationships are doomed and fated from the outset because humans are incapable of communicating without being misunderstood, "Mißverstanden zu werden, ist das Schicksal von unsereinem" (May 17). These comments about one’s inability to express emotions and true feelings to others have a foreshadowing effect on Werther and Lotte’s relationship, as well as on Lotte and Albert’s.

Soon after the initial escape, Werther comments about his acquaintances, "die geringen Leute des Ortes kennen mich schon" (May 15), but the elation, so apparent in his first letter, has faded when he admits he has no specific personal contacts, "Ich habe allerlei Bekanntschaften gemacht, Gesellschaft habe ich noch keine gefunden" (May 17). The
difficulty of meeting friends appears to be more the result of Werther than of the townsfolk, whom he describes as being like people "wie überall" (May 17). Blackall suggests Werther "has been unable to establish contact with an outer reality because he has been thinking all the time in abstractions like 'Nature,' 'Peace,' 'Paradise,' and searching for theses rather than empirical reality" (22). The farthest thing from Werther's mind is outer and empirical reality. He encounters many peasants, and idealizes their existence to draw a parallel between their non-reflexivity and his own conscious non-reflexivity. Despite the beginnings of his heightened awareness of nature, there are moments when Werther seems plagued by his lack of personal contact. Upon learning that his childhood sweetheart has died, he mourns not so much her death, as his loss, namely the feeling of completion and form, "in deren Gegenwart [schien] ich mir mehr zu sein, als ich war, weil ich alles war, was ich sein konnte" (May 17). The tone and content of this letter demonstrate Werther's need for an "other" to help him define himself and give him meaning.

 Werther projects the lack of form and meaning he senses onto the general public. He notes that the townsfolk appear as a non-descript mass, who go through the motions of life devoid of purpose:

\[
\text{Es ist ein einförmiges Ding}
\]
\[
\text{um das Menschengeschlecht. Die}
\]
\[
\text{meisten verarbeiten den größten Teil}
\]
\[
\text{der Zeit, um zu leben, und das bißchen,}
\]
das ihnen von Freiheit übrig bleibt, ängstigt sie so, daß sie alle Mittel aufsuchen, um es los zu werden (May 17).

Werther becomes more disillusioned by societal restrictions which tend to usurp one's energy and will to live, relegating an individual to a series of meaningless actions "die keine Zweck haben, als unsere arme Existenz zu verlängern" (May 22). His existential desire for form is not self-specific; he notes this deficiency in others, who are unaware of it. Werther's feeling that "das Leben ein Traum sei" (May 22) underscores the apparent lack of meaning. Werther chooses, at this juncture, a self-styled naivety which will afford him the opportunity to explore the self through the means of an intense personal relationship with nature.

Werther's escape to nature allows him to avoid the tensions of the real world and his failed relationships, while giving him the opportunity to construct his own world. Without a physical "other" he begins a dialogue with himself, using nature as a medium for his self-exploration. Werther embodies the Rousseauian notion of an individual's alienation through the development of civilization. He hopes to revive his natural side by merging with nature, where he experiences an initial euphoria caused by his seclusion, "Die Einsamkeit ist meinem Herzen köstlicher Balsam in dieser paradiesischen Gegend" (May 4), and "Ich bin allein, und freue mich meines Lebens in dieser Gegend"
(May 10). I concur with Asslingen that Werther’s move to the countryside is a conscious effort to lead a naive lifestyle,\textsuperscript{91} which frees him from reflecting upon his personal problems (136). Although he writes, "Ich will das Gegenwärtige genießen, und das Vergangene soll mir vergangen sein" (May 4), he can neither forget the past nor free himself from reflecting upon it, because Wilhelm constantly reminds him of it in letters. The quote illustrates Werther’s desire to forget time, which he hopes to achieve by constructing his own subjective world. Free from interpersonal relationships, Werther wishes to lead an existence determined by his heart and emotions. There are signals that his situation is only transitory and potentially dangerous, despite his heightened awareness of nature. He is unable to describe nature’s beauty, it is "unaussprechlich" (May 4) and it has a numbing effect on his wish to paint.\textsuperscript{92}

Nature does not appear to Werther as an autonomous entity, rather he views it as an outgrowth of himself and perceives only those aspects in nature which do not threaten his self-constructed world. I disagree with Reiss’ suggestion that Werther is unaware of an objective, existing reality, "die Welt außer ihm scheint ihm unwirklich" (21). It is precisely Werther’s awareness of the real-world which influences his decision to leave it in favor of nature. While outside of the real-world, he constantly refers to it
directly, or indirectly, by mentioning those people unaware of social limitations. In nature Werther can fulfill his selfish agenda because he is not forced to reckon with society and social norms, which plague him mentally and physically. Desiring to be naive, and in this sense free from restrictions caused by self-reflection, Werther is attracted to the lifestyle of peasants and readily identifies with children, who by their age and intellect are naive, "diejenigen [sind] die Glücklichsten, die gleich den Kindern in den Tag hinein leben" (May 22). Asslingen successfully argues that Werther criticizes the societal limits with which each individual must contend, but at the same time, he envies those individuals who are unaware of their socially imposed limitations (82). Asslingen illustrates one of the central problems confronting Werther, namely the collision of two realities, consciences, and norms. Werther is unhappy with his social reality because of its social restrictions and renounces it by fleeing into the country. In nature he attempts to construct another reality, in which he can consciously be naive and non-reflexive, but becomes aware of the limitations of this second reality.

Werther’s quest for form and order in nature is doomed from the beginning because of the diastolic nature of his personality. Instead of concentrating on one aspect of his existence, inter-personal relationships, for example,
Werther expands his feelings into nature, which results in a loss of self because he spreads his finite existence into an infinite space. This modification of the Spinozan idea of infinite substance to finite existence interested Goethe his entire life. His diary entry from May 17, 1808 contains the following definition: "Diastole...das Fortgehen ins Unendliche." Outward characteristics of Werther’s loss of self through expansion include his lack of personal relationships, his inability to produce art, and his temporary inability to communicate feelings. Instead of achieving order in nature, his diastolic rhythm leads to fragmentation. Daemmerich correctly observes that "the emotions evoked by nature appear too intense" (157). Werther forces his self-styled naive world onto nature, and it begins to crumble even before Lotte enters the story. I disagree with Paulin’s suggestion that "the first manifestation of Werther’s nature mysticism...contains the seeds of self-destruction" (64). Werther’s experience with nature forces him to recognize that order and form cannot be achieved solely in an ego-centric world. Werther’s involvement with Lotte is not accidental. It happens at that moment when he feels the weakness of his desired naive reality. Werther’s failure to recognize nature as an independent entity does not cause his downfall, as Reiss maintains (42), but it does contribute to his diastolic rhythm and ultimately to his fragmented existence.
D. Werther and Lotte: the Beginning

Whereas nature heightens Werther’s emotional awareness and allows him to cultivate his narcissism, Werther lacks a physical "other," onto whom he can project his personality. In Lotte he finds this person, whom he perceives as an outgrowth of nature and whom he describes in terms of himself, recognizing only those qualities in her which he does not possess or those which are non-threatening to his self-constructed world. In his first letter to Wilhelm about her, he mentions her name only after an idealized description of her in her domestic setting. Werther is quick to call Lotte "vollkommen" not necessarily because of her virtue, but because of the effect she has on his senses, "sie hat allen meinen Sinn gefangen genommen" (May 16). He depicts her in an allegorical manner, without voice, as a self-sacrificing "Ur-Mutter," who prepares the evening meals for her siblings because of the absence of her mother, cares for her ailing father, and remains steadfast by her dying friend. Lotte does not replace nature, rather she is the human symbol of it, in whom all positive qualities of nature unite to create a harmonious being. By objectifying and idealizing Lotte, Werther’s refusal to see reality further fragments his existence. Although he credits Lotte for his personal happiness and his heightened awareness of his senses, he remains plagued by an inability to communicate
intense emotions, "Noch nie war ich glücklicher, noch nie waren meine Empfindungen an der Natur, bis aufs Steinchen, auf Gräsen herunter, voller und inniger, und doch - Ich weiß nicht, wie ich mich ausdrücken soll" (June 24). Like nature, Lotte heightens Werther's awareness of his surroundings, but he has difficulty expressing his feelings.

Despite Werther's claim to be enamored by Lotte, his perspective of her reflects his narcissism and undercovers his willingness to see only his subjective reality. Before arriving at Lotte's for a formal ball, Werther is unconcerned by a warning that Lotte is quite attractive and engaged, "die Nachricht war mir ziemlich gleichgültig" (June 16). He consciously avoids social reality, the only possible way to continue his subjective existence. I disagree with Blackall's suggestion that Werther breaks out of his self-centered world upon meeting Lotte.\(^\text{93}\) The encounter with Lotte intensifies Werther's resolve to continue his subjective world. Werther does not enter into an equal relationship with Lotte; rather he views her on his terms in order to support his world. In a previous letter to Wilhelm, Werther mentions that he would rather continue perceiving a woman through the eyes of her lover so that his idealized picture of her may not be destroyed, "Es ist besser, ich sehe sie durch die Augen ihres Liebhabers; vielleicht erscheint sie mir vor meinen Augen nicht so, wie sie jetzt steht, und warum soll ich mir das schöne Bild
verderben" (May 30). Werther’s revelation can be applied to his relationship to Lotte as well. A limited perspective is easily manipulated and reveals only the positive qualities in Lotte.

Werther reduces Lotte’s existence to function. By believing that she loves him, she shall provide him with the necessary meaning in his life and reinforce his physical reality. His irritation when he feels that she does not notice him arises because he begins to feel threatened in his world, "aber auf mich! mich! mich! der ganz allein auf sie resigniert dastand, fielen sie nicht...Und sie sah mich nicht" (July 8). Werther wishes to interpret Lotte’s words and gestures as a signal of her love for him, even though she gives no outward sign of this. When her eyes meet his, Werther’s mood drastically changes from the previous letter. He reveals how his notion of self-worth requires Lotte’s recognition, "Mich liebt! - Und wie wert ich mir selbst werde, wie ich - dir darf ich’s wohl sagen, du hast Sinn für so etwas - wie ich mich selbst anbete, seitdem sie mich liebt" (July 13). Werther’s belief that Lotte loves him is not predetermined as Fricke implies (B.155); rather his belief arises when he is convinced that, with an idealized view of her, he can integrate her into his consciously naive world. Erika Nolan suggests that Werther never wanted a relationship with Lotte and consciously avoids any meaningful contact with her. Nolan overlooks the
psychological aspects of Werther wanting a relationship with Lotte. Realizing that his one-to-one relationship with nature is crumbling and he is unable to continue his existence purely in nature, Werther needs Lotte to give him form and order. A recognition of Lotte’s love would necessarily serve as an affirmation of his existence and simultaneously shape his fragmented existence. Werther envelops Lotte and demands to be the object of her attention and thoughts. He searches for an "other" in whom he can find himself and thereby reinforce his existence and desired limited reality.

While Albert is away on business, Werther’s presence in Lotte’s life increases because of the many chores he gladly does for her. Before Albert’s return, however, Werther feels as if he is beginning to lose control of himself and his situation. He writes, "ich habe mir schon manchmal vorgenommen, sie nicht so oft zu sehen. Ja, wer das halten könnte!...Ich bin zu nah in der Atmosphäre" (July 26). Werther senses that it is becoming increasingly difficult to uphold his world and continue his perception of Lotte in empirical reality. His comments have an ominous ring, as if he foresees his downfall by remaining in Lotte’s proximity. Albert’s return looms in his mind, and with his return comes the recognition that his world and perception of Lotte have been self-deceptive. Werther does not realize that he and Lotte have been living in two separate worlds, because his
only contact with her has been with his desired portrayal of her. 95

The arrival of Albert on July 30 destroys Werther’s world and forces him to come to terms with his life and existence. His first reaction is to leave, "Albert ist angekommen und ich werde gehen" (July 30). Not only does Albert serve as the tangible evidence that Lotte loves another man, he also signals the crashing point between Werther’s naive world and empirical reality. After discrediting Albert’s love for her, no matter how virtuous he may be, Werther recognizes, nonetheless, that he is a "braver Mensch" engaged to Lotte. To salvage his world, Werther feebly attempts to persuade Wilhelm that he never made a claim on Lotte, "Ich wußte, das ich keine Prätension auf sie zu machen hatte, machte auch keine," then he slips back into his reality and justifies his comments, "das heißt, insofern es möglich ist, bei so viel Liebenswürdigkeit nicht zu begehren" (July 30). He tries to legitimize his actions, in essence blaming Lotte’s beauty and grace for causing him to think he was in love, but seems, at this point, resigned to the fact that he must leave.

Contrary to Werther’s claim, the reader learns that he does not leave, and I suggest his reluctance to depart is due to the letter he received from Wilhelm, to which he replies on August 8. In his "Entweder-Oder" letter, Wilhelm
offers Werther two clear-cut alternatives, with no middle ground: either you stay, if you have a reasonable chance to begin a relationship with Lotte, or you leave and never look back. Werther’s noticeable irritation arises from his adamant conviction that nothing in life is an either-or proposition, that each situation is unique and consequently relative and immune to any universal judgement. To counter Wilhelm, Werther offers an allegory of a dying man; should he commit suicide to hasten the inevitable, or would that drastic act preclude any resolution of the problem? This allegory has great importance to Werther, especially because after this letter he begins to deliberate suicide, and it reflects Werther’s intention to continue his naive conscience despite realizations that it is self-deceptive and limiting. Werther suggests that one should not alter a course of action, if one believes the situation salvageable. The allegory typifies Werther’s thought process in that it is poorly suited to his situation with Lotte and underscores how he confuses his reality with empirical reality. He wants to believe that he and Lotte can be together, but realizes upon Albert’s return that their union is impossible. He fears the uncertainty he would encounter without Lotte. He stresses the role of courage, a quality which he implies is necessary if he is to continue supporting his self-constructed world, "Ja, Wilhelm, ich habe manchmal so einen Augenblick aufspringenden
abschüttelnden Muts, und da — wenn ich nur wüßte wohin" (August 8). Werther does not misuse his phantasy; rather he continues his limited perspective because he envisions no alternative. He suggests that he experiences moments of courage to continue his subjective world, but these are displaced by the recognition of its limits. Despair ensues because he fears encountering empirical reality, which offers him no guarantees of form and order, and where he must create order and form instead of having it imposed by others.

Werther's relationship with Lotte illustrates two central points: his willingness to continue a limited perspective of reality, and his recognition that his insular, subjective world is the reason for his sufferings. Werther fails to treat Lotte as a subject; rather he uses her as a tool, with which he hopes to achieve inner peace. By convincing himself that she loves him, Werther hopes to confirm his existence. Upon Albert's return, Werther recognizes that he will be unable to appropriate Lotte for his own. Instead of confirming his existence, Werther becomes acutely aware of his fragmentation.

E. Werther and Albert on Suicide

In his letter from August 12, Werther describes his first prolonged discourse defending the right to commit
suicide. During an afternoon walk in the mountains, Werther, who had just asked to borrow Albert’s pistols, listens to him explain why he keeps them unloaded. While Albert tells of a young woman accidentally shot when his servant was cleaning the pistols, Werther gradually becomes bored with the story, and raises a pistol to his head in a gesture of suicide. Albert becomes outraged and both enter into a discussion of suicide. Werther is irked by Albert’s comment, "Ich kann mir nicht vorstellen, wie ein Mensch so töricht sein kann, sich zu erschießen; der bloße Gedanke erregt mir Widerwillen." Astounded by the generality of the statement and Albert’s apparent lack of concern for the individual and his reasons for committing suicide, Werther replies sardonically, "Habt ihr deswegen alle inneren Verhältnisse einer Handlung erforscht?" Werther reacts to Albert’s harshness and lack of empathy, but also raises an increasingly important question regarding suicide in the eighteenth century, namely does one know the specific situation and reasons for the suicide before passing a blanket judgement. Now knowing Albert’s position, Werther begins to plot his strategy.

Werther’s argument with Albert in defense of man’s right to commit suicide takes form in three distinct phases. The first two phases are concerned with general ideas; to demonstrate how specific situations require extreme action, and how an extreme course of action
is a byproduct of human nature and intense passions. In the final phase, Werther suggests that suicide is a specific action, to which the above two situations can be applied. After granting Albert that certain actions may be depraved, Werther offers two examples of crimes committed because of an extreme situation; a man steals food to avoid starving, and another man murders his wife and her lover after discovering their affair. Werther suggests that certain crimes, such as thievery and murder, would not always merit a criminal penalty, if one knew the specific reasons forcing an individual to act in such an extreme manner, "Unsere Gesetze selbst, diese kaltblütigen Pedanten, lassen sich rühren und halten ihre Strafe zurück." Unmoved by Werther’s suggestion, Albert claims that anyone who loses control of his emotions and reason should suffer the consequences, "ein Mensch, den seine Leidenschaften hinreißen, alle Besinnungskraft verliert, und als Trunkener, als ein Wahnsinniger angesehen wird." Werther scoffs at Albert’s elevation of reason above emotion and his quick judgement of the person without knowing the facts. Albert missed Werther’s point, namely one must scrutinize the act and the reasons for it, instead of damning the person. Not sure where Werther’s discourse leads, Albert reminds him about the specific act of suicide. Albert, as the embodiment of the Enlightenment, takes a conservative stance on suicide, "da man es (suicide) doch für nicht anders als
Eine Schwäche halten kann. Denn freilich ist es leichter zu sterben, als ein qualvolles Leben standhaft zu ertragen."

Werther realizes that he and Albert are talking on two different levels. It appears as if he will end the argument but then offers two final examples of individuals neither insane nor inebriated to illustrate his point: the country whose citizens rise up to overthrow their tyrant and the man who develops superhuman strength when confronted by personal danger. Albert again fails to see the relevance of the examples to suicide. 103

In the second phase of his argument, Werther demonstrates that extreme actions result when the boundaries of one’s ability to experience intense emotions are exceeded. He explains to Albert the relationship between suicide and nature:

Die menschliche Natur, fuhr ich fort, hat ihre Grenzen; sie kann Freude, Leid, Schmerzen, bis auf einen gewissen Grad ertragen, und geht zugrunde, sobald der überstiegen ist. Hier ist also nicht die Frage, ob einer schwach oder stark ist? sondern ob er das Maß seines Leidens ausdauern kann? es mag nun moralisch oder körperlich sein...

Werther again refrains from using the specific example of suicide, because he wants Albert to recognize that passions have limits and a transgression of these limits is not related to physical or mental strength or weakness. To flesh out his argument, Werther defines actions caused by extreme suffering as "eine Krankheit zum Tode, wodurch die
Natur so angegriffen wird, daß teils ihre Kräfte verzehrt, teils so außer Wirkung gesetzt werden, daß sie sich nicht wieder aufzuhalten..." By defining such actions as a sickness, Werther places the action outside the realm of personal responsibility. He suggests that an individual should be free from moral judgements because he has lost control of the situation. An individual committing such an action can not be considered immoral or insane because of his specific situation which warranted the action. Flaschka notes that Werther legitimizes suicide "nicht als ein tödliches Ereignis an sich, sondern als Glied einer Krankheitsentwicklung und als Endpunkt einer kräftezerrüttenden Krankheit" (236). Werther’s argument and definition of sickness harken back to the letter from July 1, in which Werther recounts the discussion between him, Lotte, Fredericke and the pastor’s wife about personal moods and their relationship to sickness. Werther concurs with the pastor’s wife’s observation, "wir haben aber unser Gemüt nicht in unserer Gewalt," and expands upon it by replying "wir wollen es also... als eine Krankheit ansehen und fragen ob dafür kein Mittel ist?" Werther makes a parallel statement in his discussion with Albert. He argues just as one can not control one’s mood, because of its dependence on the body, one can likewise not control the actions resulting from extreme passions or suffering.
Realizing that Albert has again failed to grasp the relationship between suicide, extreme suffering, and human nature, Werther launches into the third phase of his argument, which begins with the explicit example of a young woman who commits suicide after having been spurned by her lover. Like the young woman, Werther, too, feels spurned, but not by a physical entity, rather by his false conscience, which he has cultivated and nurtured since moving to the country. Albert’s return forces Werther to confront the limits of his subjective world. Werther’s description of the young woman’s psychological situation aptly describes his own, "erstarrt, ohne Sinne steht sie vor einem Abgründe; alles ist Finsternis um sie her, keine Aussicht, kein Trost, keine Ahnung." The woman commits suicide not just because her lover left her, but because of her state of consciousness at the moment he left her. She is abandoned at the moment when she experiences the height of her conscience, the height of her being, and the effect of her abandonment is to destroy her consciousness; "denn der hat sie verlassen, in dem sie allein ihr Dasein fühlte." Werther will begin to contemplate suicide because of the exact same reason. With Lotte he believes he has reached a state of complete consciousness, even if that feeling is at the expense of reality. Albert’s return, and with it the tangible evidence that Lotte’s love is directed to another person, disrupts Werther’s moment of oneness.
With this recognition, Werther will no longer be able to experience heightened conscience in his self-styled naive world.

Werther universalizes the psychological situation of the young woman to draw a parallel between suicide and nature. Suffering induced by intense emotions pushes one beyond one’s physical and mental capabilities to experience and process the emotions. One no longer has control over the body and mind and all appears hopeless. The end result will be suicide, not as a conscious act of self-negation and self-destruction undertaken by the individual, but as an act of nature, "die Natur findet keinen Ausweg aus dem Labyrinth der verworrenen und widersprechenden Kräfte, und der Mensch muß sterben." Werther anticipates Albert’s objection on the basis of reason, arguing that reason and time heal all wounds. Noticeably aroused, Werther argues that reason is worthless when extreme suffering and emotions are at stake. Even an enlightened individual will reject reason when under extreme emotional duress.

Werther’s comments present a serious charge against the Enlightenment and religion. He suggests that man is governed by human nature and instinct, and that reason is a human construct placed onto the individual from the outside. Suicide, by Werther’s definition, is a product of human nature, committed out of instinct. Although it may be in man’s best interest to act in accordance with reason, when
confronted by extreme emotions, an individual will act
instinctively, even if that action causes personal harm and
appears to the outsider to be irrational. Werther’s suicide
would not be a product of "nihilistische Sinnlosigkeit"
(Fricke B.161), but rather natural instinct.

Some scholars argue that Werther imposes limits on
himself when he defines suicide as a result from sickness;
Stefan Blessin sees this "Krankheit als Form der Unfreiheit"
(287). Such interpretations, like Albert’s in his
discussion with Werther, fail to come to terms with the
suicidal act, instead concentrate on what Werther suggests
are secondary considerations. True, Werther claims that one
must perish in certain situations of extreme suffering, but
he does not view the suicidal act as limiting.
Paradoxically, he suggests that one experiences true freedom
in this situation, because one acts as a natural being and
fully in accordance with reason. Conversely, reason is, in
certain situations, limiting, because it dictates that one
act against instinct. Werther exemplifies that chasm
between the Rousseauian "homme civil" and "homme naturel."

F. A Source of Torment: Nature

After his conversation with Albert about suicide,
Werther begins to feel tormented by nature. Whereas nature
once supported his self-constructed naive world, it no
longer offers him solace. Nature only intensifies his pain arising from the recognition of his limited perspective of reality. He writes Wilhelm about his pain:

_Das warme Gefühl meines Herzens an der lebendigen Natur, das mich mit so vieler Wonne überströmte, das rings umher die Welt mir zu einem Paradiese schuf, wird mir jetzt zu einem unerträglichen Peiniger, zu einem quälenden Geist (Aug 18)._ 

Werther objectifies himself in the description of his sufferings, implying that nature is responsible for his feelings. Nature seems to have usurped his energy and phantasy, as he appears lethargic and indifferent in his letters. He writes Wilhelm, "meine tätigen Kräfte sind zu einer unruhigen Lässigkeit verstimmt, ich kann nicht müßig sein und kann doch nichts tun. Ich habe keinerlei Vorstellungskraft, kein Gefühl an der Natur..." (Aug 22).

Reiss rightly observes "indem [Werther] die Natur nicht als etwas Selbstständiges, sondern nur im Zusammenhang mit seinem Gefühl sieht, trennt er sich von ihr und ist deshalb von ihr entfremdet" (42), but that is not the only factor at play. Reiss' observation is a variation of Rousseau; just as one alienates oneself from nature through civilization, one can alienate oneself from nature by having a limited view of it. Forced to confront empirical reality, Werther broods. He continues a limited perspective of nature, but now perceives those characteristics in it which are dark, destructive, and potentially beneficial to his arguments.
Werther manipulates nature’s own self-destructive tendency to legitimize suicide. Thomas Saine argues that with the August 18 letter, Werther begins his serious consideration of suicide, claiming that all other references to it, mainly in his conversation with Albert on August 12 are hypothetical and "for no apparent reason" (337). I agree with his assertion that Werther begins to ponder suicide more after August 18, but his mention of it in his earlier conversation with Albert was equally as serious. From the conversation in which Werther suggests that suicide is in accordance with nature, the reader learns why he will later manipulate nature’s destructive forces to legitimize suicide. Werther posits nature, as well as the individual acting in accordance with nature, outside the realm of the rational and irrational thereby freeing it from any moral or ethical judgement leveled by man. He perceives a paradox within nature, namely it produces life, yet destroys it as well:

Da ist kein Augenblick...da du nicht ein Zerstörer bist, sein mußt; der harmloseste Spaziergang kostet tausend armen Würmchen das Leben, es zerrütet ein Fußtritt die müheseligen Gebäude der Ameisen, und stampft eine kleine Welt in ein schmähliches Grab (Aug 18).

There is a demonic quality in his description of nature. He describes himself as standing before an abyss waiting to die, just like the young woman in his conversation with Albert, "es hat sich vor meiner Seele wie ein Vorhang
weggezogen, und der Schauplatz des unendlichen Lebens verwandelt sich vor mir in den Abgrund des ewig offnen Grabs" (Aug 18). He employs violent nature imagery to suggest that one cannot fight the urge to commit suicide, though he does not mention suicide specifically. The violent nature imagery demonstrates his feelings of helplessness. He asks Wilhelm whether he has also experienced the same feelings of being "in den Strom fortgerissen, untergetaucht und an den Felsen zerschmettert" (Aug 18). To underscore his impending doom Werther employs a series of grave metaphors, for example, "Adieu, Ich seh' dieses Elendes kein Ende als das Grab" (Aug 30). Like his use of nature imagery, his use of grave imagery is violent and refers to his own death.

Werther’s heightened awareness of his mental and psychological state coincides with his manipulation of nature’s destructive forces to underscore what he believes to be his demise. The lack of responsibility for his self-diagnosed "sickness," his belief that his condition is irreversible, and his insistence on fate characterize his self-analysis. He implies that all personal joy derived from relationships is fated to deteriorate into misery, "Mußte dann das so sein, daß das, was des Menschen Glückseligkeit macht, wieder die Quelle seines Elendes würde?" (Aug 18). Instead of attempting to ameliorate his problems, Werther contemplates leaving the area, but he
remains passive, waiting for someone to help or the situation to change on its own. When he writes, "wenn meine Krankheiten zu heilen wäre, so würde diese Menschen es tun," he suggests no plan to overcome his "sickness."

With slyly crafted doublespeak, Werther hints to Wilhelm that he is not really suffering from his separation from Lotte, inasmuch as he is from his own self-deception of not just his relationship with Lotte, but of his entire conscience and perception of reality. He begins the letter, "Unglücklicher! Bist du nicht ein Tor? betriegst du dich nicht selbst? was soll diese tobende endlose Leidenschaft?" (Aug 30). After his August 12 conversation with Albert, Werther becomes increasingly tormented by the clash of his world and empirical reality and becomes increasingly aware that his self-styled naive world no longer offers the form and control it once did.

Not to understated Werther’s initial concern for Lotte as a person, I suggest his subsequent intense passions for her are not genuine; Werther consciously arouses these emotions in order to give form to his life. Werther forces these emotions onto Lotte, because of the effect they have on him, namely they construct his fragmented existence. Flachka interestingly notes that in the eighteenth century there existed a difference between "sanfte Leidenschaften," such as virtuous affection, cheerfulness, joy, and rapture, all of which are pleasant and beneficial for the soul, and
the destructive "heftige Leidenschaften, such as wild, aggressive, passionate love and affection, which obscure one's ability to think and judge (Flaschka 233). When he feels his self-styled naive world crumbling, Werther's initial "sanfte Leidenschaften" for Lotte transform into "heftige Leidenschaften." At this point he begins his serious deliberation on suicide.

It is an oversimplification of the problem to suggest that Werther can save himself by leaving Lotte's proximity.105 Upon Albert's return (July 30), Werther writes that he will leave and repeats those sentiments in his September 3 letter ("Ich muß fort") and his final letter of Book One, September 10 ("Ich habe mich losgerissen"), when he finally departs from Lotte and Albert. Werther fears having to face reality because there are no guarantees of success when he enters a situation over which he believes he has no control. These fears produce a unique paradox. Werther recognizes that he deceives himself by continuing his consciously naive world and desires to enter empirical reality because it can form his fragmented existence, yet he fears leaving the friendly confines of his world, because of the potential chaos of reality. In his self-constructed world, he is master of his emotions and they form his reality. When scholars such as Reiss suggest that Werther does not wish to heal himself (22), they overlook that Werther, after some hesitation, leaves Lotte and Albert and
goes to work in the court. Werther recognizes his problems and his departure should be seen as an attempt to find form and order in empirical reality, as well as his attempt to disprove his earlier suggestion that suicide is a product of nature and is fated in some cases. 106

G. Werther and the Court

Upon beginning his job at the court, Werther is immediately struck by the emptiness and pointlessness of the court, as well as of its members. Instead of finding a society, whose members are aware of their existence, Werther becomes increasingly agitated by their lack of concern for themselves and others and their desire for the ceremonial instead of the substantial. He writes Wilhelm, "seit ich unter dem Volke alle Tag herumgetrieben werde, und sehe, was sie tun und wie sie's treiben, stehe ich viel besser mit mir selbst" (Oct 20). He detects the lack of meaning in society and one’s blatant contempt for it and comes to the conclusion that in society one deceives oneself in just the same manner as he did by perpetuating his self-constructed naive world. He believes that society acts unnaturally, because its members are forced to suppress human nature and phantasy in order to be productive members.

It is during Werther’s stay at the court (end of October through the end of March) that he vents most of his
social criticism. His criticism is not, however, as the Marxist Lukács suggests, "die Tragödie des bürgerlichen Humanismus, [die] bereits den unlösaren Konflikt der freien und allseitigen Entwicklung der Persönlichkeit mit der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft selbst zeigt" (26). His criticism is directed at how societal members live without recognizing what they do and why they do it. Werther points out class differences, not to argue that one class suppresses another, but rather to illustrate how the aristocracy denies human nature, in favor of pursuing a lifestyle based on outer form without inner substance. He complains, "was das für Menschen sind, deren ganze Seele auf dem Zerimoniell ruht..." (Jan 8). The insistence of a ceremonial veneer causes society to break down and become inefficient. Werther is aware of social limitations due to class differences; he encounters such disgraces at the court. His sufferings, however, before and after working in the court arise not from social restrictions, but from the self-imposed restrictions of his perspective.

While at the court Werther feels as if he has lost control of his destiny. He writes Lotte: "ich werde gespielt wie eine Marionette, und fasse manchmal meinen Nachbar an der hölzernen Hand und schaudere zurück" (Jan 20). I suggested earlier that Werther departs for the court as a measure to gain control over his life and to leave the chaos caused by his self-deception, but he soon discovers
that he has less control over himself at the court. His stay there, coupled with his personal failures, only intensify his desire to go back to Lotte, the sole place he feels he can retreat. Although Werther speaks about "escaping" from his current situation throughout the novel, his fear of a wrong decision causes him to be indecisive about his direction.

Werther’s February 20th letter to Lotte and Albert, in which he admonishes them for not informing him of their wedding date proves to be a decisive date in Werther’s suicidal development. From October 20 to this date it appears as if Werther has (somewhat) overcome his relationship with Lotte. In the seven letters preceding this one, Werther has, to be sure, admitted having suffered, but because of his actions within the court, not because of Lotte. He writes Lotte (Jan 20), but the tone of this letter is a far cry from what it was at the time of his departure. Werther feels betrayed by Albert and Lotte and writes: "Ich danke dir, Albert, daß du mich betrogen hast." Infuriated, he changes his entire course of action. After this letter Werther is willing to forgo empirical reality and force his imaginary union onto Lotte. Werther perceives Albert and Lotte’s failure to inform him of their wedding as a negation of his existence, an even greater insult than those suffered at the hand of the court. He believes that by doing so, Albert and Lotte have suggested that he has
deceived himself all along. The truth hurts Werther to such a degree that he initiates a course to prove them and himself wrong. He becomes obsessed with maintaining the second position in Lotte’s heart, even if that is at the expense of reality, "Ich weiß, ich bin ja auch bei euch, bin dir unbeschadet in Lottens Herzen, habe, ja ich habe den zweiten Platz darin und will und muß ihn behalten." Werther revert to his prior self-deceptive conscience and convinces himself of his place in Lotte’s life. His importance to her becomes an existential struggle.

Werther’s self-destructive tendencies and aggression towards others becomes more evident after the February 20th letter. I agree with Thomas Saine’s suggestion that Werther is frustrated and aggressive in the second part of the novel, but I do not believe that Werther’s aggression is "unfocused" (Saine 338). Werther vents his anger and frustration not at everyone, rather only at those who can affect his desire to establish an everlasting union, an "unio mystica," with Lotte. Even at the end of the February 20th epistle, Werther appears capable of committing a violent act against Lotte because she forgot to inform him of her wedding, which he interprets as forgetting him as a person, "O ich würde rasend, wenn sie vergessen könnte..." His aggression also manifests itself in his insistence that Wilhelm, Albert, and Lotte are somehow responsible for his sufferings because they advised him to go to the court and
become active, "ihr seid doch allein schuld daran...mich in einen Posten zu begeben, der nicht nach meinem Sinne war" (March 15). He feels as if he has been forced to betray himself by taking a job which contradicts his nature. 

Werther’s discussion with Fräulein B., his only confidant at the court, intensifies his self-destructive urge and his aggressive feelings towards others. From Fräulein B. he learns how she has been scolded for her friendship with him, because he does not belong to her class. Werther is greatly disappointed to find out how the court insulted him behind his back. He uses suicidal imagery to describe the effect her revelation has on him: "Jedes Wort, das sie sprach, ging mir wie ein Schwert durch Herz" (Mar 16). 107 When Werther reiterates his intention "Ach ich habe hundertmal ein Messer ergriffen, um diesem gedrängten Herzen Luft zu machen" (Mar 16), he gives the impression that he has pondered suicide often and that he wishes to kill himself so that others may become aware of his suffering. Saine rightly describes Werther’s aggression as "justification for therapeutic blood letting [which] are all mixed up together as alternative moods for feeling better" (339). Unlike his reference to suicide in his February 20th letter, Werther’s mention of suicide is general. Frustrated, Werther reflects on suicide, because he does not know how to fight the limits of society. His violent outburst also has a calming effect on him so that he
can muster enough energy to leave the court. His suicidal thoughts signify his overall unhappiness with how he has been forced to live in accordance with society’s notion of proper behavior and how the court conducts itself and limits others in doing so. Werther exhibits his aggression by writing that he would feel relieved if he could commit murder, "ich [könnte] ihm den Degen durch den Leib stoßen; wenn ich Blut sähe, würde mir es besser werden" (Mar 16). The culmination of the aggression towards himself and others is his resignation from the court.

H. The Return to Lotte

Upon his departure from the court, Werther wanders aimlessly in search of form and order. After a brief stay at the Elector’s estate, Werther returns to his birthplace, hoping to find solace in his past. His pilgrimage to Wahlheim serves as a rejection of empirical reality and a retreat back into the confines of his self-constructed world. He writes Wilhelm that he has failed in his attempt to solve his crises and to enter society on its terms: "Jetzt komme ich zurück aus der zweiten Welt- o mein Freund, mit wie viel fehlgeschlagenen Hoffnungen, mit wie viel zerstörten Planen!" (May 9). Werther experiences fleeting moments of happiness when seeing the familiar buildings and gardens, before they begin to plague him. They force him to
recognize that he is no longer a member of this community. Werther realizes that he can not return in time, but must move forward. He writes Wilhelm several times that he must go, but does not know where. Finally, he makes the decision to return to Lotte, cognizant that this will result in his personal downfall, "Wo ich hin will? Daß las dir im Vertrauen eröffnen... Ich will nur Lotte wieder näher, das ist alles. Und ich lache über mein eigenes Herz..." (June 18).

Having realized before leaving for the court that he will never have a physical relationship with Lotte, Werther returns to her proximity under the pretext of establishing a "unio mystica." In order to achieve this, Werther revives his self-deceptive perception of Lotte, Albert, their relationship with each other and with him. He looses himself in his own world, and, although he has not seen Albert and Lotte in ten months, soon convinces himself that Lotte would be happier with him than with her husband, "Und, darf ich es sagen? Warum nicht, Wilhelm? Sie wäre mit mir glücklicher geworden als mit ihm!" (July 29). The knowledge that he deceives himself in wishing to establish a "unio mystica" with Lotte, paired with his return to her proximity, catapults Werther back into his self-destructive mood.

After receiving a letter requesting his presence, Werther visits Lotte, only to leave upon seeing her canary
eat seeds from her mouth. To convince himself of Lotte’s affection for him, Werther interprets this action as a conscious effort to torment him. Werther assigns a sexual meaning to Lotte’s act; it appears as if the bird kisses Lotte, something he would like to do. Werther and Lotte are not mutually in love, as Vincent suggests (153), but Lotte is aware of Werther’s feelings for her. She exhibits poor judgement in their first meeting since his departure and her overall behavior with him can be described as "gehäßte Koketterie" and "gefährliche Lieblichkeit" (Mann 15), but she is neither overtly aggressive and seductive (Warrick 131, 134) nor exploitive (Bennett 66). I concur with Reiss’ observation that Werther receives no special treatment from Lotte (68). Asslingen rightly points out that Werther realizes no love is possible between him and Lotte, but his belief in love becomes increasingly important, "Werther hält an seiner unglücklichen Liebe fest, weil sie inmitten der entfremdeten Welt für ihn zur Existenzfrage geworden ist" (164). In an effort to convince himself that a "unio mystica" is possible, Werther symbolically interprets Lotte’s actions as her way of indicating her love for him.

Following his visit with Lotte, Werther’s aggressive tendency towards others and himself resurfaces. He learns that a walnut tree has been cut down and becomes hysterical, "Ich möchte den Hund ermorden, der den ersten Hieb dran tat"
(Sep 15). The tree had sentimental value for him, as he used to sit there with Lotte, and it symbolized their love. When he discovers the tree is gone, it reminds him of the emptiness of his love for her, but more importantly it reminds him that he has reverted to his self-deceptive view of reality to give him meaning. He cloaks the emptiness he feels because of his renunciation of empirical reality in a shroud of emotion, suggesting his pain and suicidal drive arise from his inability to have Lotte, "Ach diese Lücke! diese entsetzliche Lücke, die ich hier in meinem Busen fühle!" (Oct 19). To compensate for this emptiness, Werther becomes increasingly hostile to himself and others, while his vision of reality becomes more skewed.

Despite the repeated references to suicide in his letters and diary entries, Werther confesses to Wilhelm that he himself is the source of his sufferings. After articulating his desire "nicht wieder zu erwachen," he writes: "Ich fühle zu wahr, daß an mir allein alle Schuld liegt, - nicht Schuld! Genug, daß in mir die Quelle alles Elendes verborgen ist, wie ehemals die Quelle aller Seligkeiten" (Nov 3). Although he begins to say that he is responsible for his suffering, Werther is unable to continue the thought and contradicts himself. Werther wishes to portray himself as a passive individual, onto whom sorrows are placed. He later blames Lotte for his impending suicide, "sie sieht nicht, sie fühlt nicht, daß sie ein Gift
bereitet, das mich und sie zugrunde richten wird" (Nov 21). If he were to admit that he is responsible for his sufferings, Werther would necessarily admit all problems have resulted from his self-deceptive view of reality, a view he still upholds.\textsuperscript{110} Any admission, furthermore, would undermine his plan of establishing control over his life through a self-deceptive "unio mystica" with Lotte. By admitting the "Quelle alles Elendes" lies within him, Werther suggests that he can not control the source of his suffering, and by deduction, any action resulting from this suffering. Though Scherpe notes, "mit der Entscheidung zum Selbstmord zerbricht er [Werther] das Trugbild einer idyllischen Existenz jenseits der sozialen Wirklichkeit" (67), I contend that Werther was aware of the impossibility of an idyllic existence before his decision to commit suicide. Werther realizes he limits himself by continuing his self-constructed world, but after his disappointments at the court, he can not muster the courage to enter empirical reality. Consequently, he believes suicide to be the only way to shape his life.

Near the end of the novel Werther begins to manipulate religion to insinuate that his suicide is not only predetermined and irreversible, but also acceptable within the bounds of Christianity. This strategy harkens back to his August 12 discussion with Albert, during which he argues that suicide should be free from moral and ethical
evaluations. Werther does not turn to God, as critics have argued because of religious longing (Trunz 537-38), or to establish a relationship outside of himself (Blackall 34); rather he manipulates religion to legitimize his suicide. I agree with Feuerlicht’s assertion that religion does not block Werther’s death instinct, but instead aids and abets it (483). When he enjoyed a paradisiacal relationship with nature, his references to religion were set against the backdrop of nature. He had a pantheistic outlook, noting creation and beauty everywhere. Suddenly, beginning November 15, he refers to God and Jesus specifically. He veils his language with Biblical verses to suggest his death is in accordance with God’s will, "Sagt nicht selber der Sohn Gottes: daß die von ihm sein würden, die ihm der Vater gegeben hat? Wenn ich ihm nicht gegeben bin? Wenn mich nun der Vater für sich behalten will, wie mein Herz sagt?" (Nov 15).

Werther exaggerates his sufferings to equate himself with Christ. Trunz (540) and Schöffler (174) argue that religious doubt forces Werther to call upon God in a cry for help. Werther assumes a "Christ" position when he writes, "Mein Gott! Mein Gott! warum hast du mich verlassen? Und sollt ich mich des Ausdruckes schämen ...?" (Nov 15). Werther consciously deceives himself by suggesting that God is perhaps responsible for his sufferings. He uses religion
to give him comfort and courage, "Ich habe Mut zu sterben" (Dec 12), and to support his self-destructive urges.

Lotte warns Werther that he has fallen into a similar behavioral pattern as he exhibited before his initial departure. Although the reader does not know what Lotte says, Werther admits Lotte cautioned him about his excesses, which the reader can infer as Werther’s increased presence in her life. He dismisses his actions as side-effects from alcohol consumption (Nov 8). Werther’s visits to Lotte’s house become a forum for him to express his emotions. Lotte gradually becomes concerned for his and her own welfare. She tells Werther that he is sick, and in no uncertain words, that he must change, "Sie sind sehr krank, Ihre Lieblingsgerichte widerstehen Ihnen. Gehen Sie! Ich bitte Sie, beruhigen Sie sich" (Dec 4). Lotte’s directness intensifies Werther’s desire for death. When informing Wilhelm about the afore-mentioned scene, he writes "Siehst du, mit mir ist’s aus, ich trag es nicht länger" (Dec 4). Lotte’s forceful language makes it difficult for him to deceive himself that a "unio mystica" is possible. Before Werther can commit suicide, an action must take place, which he can (mis)interpret as Lotte’s gesture of love. This gesture will come after he and Lotte read Ossian.

Werther prepares for death after a discussion with Lotte during which she begs him to change. The fictional
narrator informs the reader Lotte "war fest bei sich entschlossen, alles zu tun, um Werthern zu entfernen," because of the trouble he begins to cause in her and Albert’s relationship. One must not overlook Lotte’s affection for him. It is not love, as Vincent argues (142), but rather feelings of genuine friendship and concern for his well-being. The fictional narrator conveys that Lotte realizes Werther will be hurt by her insistence that he spend less time with her. She confronts Werther’s entire existence, asking him, "Fühlen Sie nicht, daß Sie sich betriegen, sich mit Willen zugrunde richten?" (102). She is not aware of Werther’s plan of a "unio mystica," but interprets his interest in her as a result of her unattainable status as Albert’s wife. Lotte pinpoints the source of Werther’s problem: his suffering arises from his self-limiting perspective of her and reality, "denn schon lange ängstigt mich, für Sie und uns, die Einschränkungen, in die sich diese Zeit her selbst gebannt haben" (103). Lotte’s observations and astute evaluation of his situation leads Werther to write his final letter to Lotte.
I. Parallel Stories: the School Master’s Daughter, the Flower Collector, and the Farmboy

The novel contains three parallel stories narrated by Werther, which if closely analyzed, uncover Werther’s insistence on a consciously naive, limited perspective of reality over empirical reality. The story of the schoolmaster’s daughter is narrated in two parts, one in each book on the novel (May 27, 1772 and August 4, 1773). While at the zenith of his paradisiacal relationship with nature, Werther writes Wilhelm about the fate a young woman, whose husband is tending to hereditary matters in Switzerland. As he later does with Lotte, he depicts idyllically the young woman as an archetypical mother concerned for her two children. He is attracted to her peasant, naive lifestyle. When Werther returns to Wahlheim the following summer, he learns that her husband is ill, her youngest son died, and they lost their inheritance. He readily draws a parallel between their lost hopes with his, "Es geht mir nicht allein so. Alle Menschen werden in ihren Hoffnungen getäuscht" (Aug 4). He manipulates their tragic situation to confirm his pain caused by his self-limited view of reality, and to insinuate that he, too, will meet such a tragic end.

Like the previous story, Werther narrates the story of a young scribe in two letters (Nov 30 and Dec 1, 1773). The
young man intrigues Werther, who discovers from the man's mother that he has gone insane after an unhappy love. In the middle of winter the young man searches for wild flowers to give to his friend. Whereas Werther identifies with peasants and children who are naive and unaware of their situation, he envies the man's situation and his inability to reflect, "Elender!...wie beneide ich deinen Trübsinn, die Verwirrung deiner Sinne, in der du verschmachtetest" (Nov 30). Werther idealizes the man's situation and his close identification with him suggests that he wishes he himself could lead a naive existence without the constant torment of self-reflection.

Before meeting Lotte, Werther writes Wilhelm about a farm boy and his passionate love for his Herrin. As Vincent points out, the farm boy "underlies Werther's love of naturalness and spontaneity" (161). He is captivated by the farm boy's intense emotion when describing her, but does not wish to see the woman in person. Werther would rather continue his limited idyllic view of her based on the boy's description, instead of running the risk of having his view shattered by reality, "Es ist besser, ich sehe sie durch die Augen ihres Liebhabers; vielleicht erscheint sie vor meinen eignen Augen nicht so, wie sie jetzt vor mir steht, und warum soll ich mir das schöne Bild verderben?" (May 30). These comments set the tone for Werther's perspective of his own life. He chooses to see and believe what he wants
instead of what is actually there. When Werther returns to Wahlheim in early autumn, 1773, he learns that the farm boy’s idyllic situation has worsened, much like his own. The son of the house has forced the boy out, yet the boy’s passions remain. Werther sees the boy’s downfall as resulting from his adherence to his emotions. The boy continues his view of his woman, despite all odds of them ever being together. Werther identifies with him and suggests to Wilhelm that like the boy, he is not in control of his life and will soon experience the same pain, "Ja so ist es mir gegangen, so wird mir’s gehen, und ich bin nicht halb so brav, nicht halb so entschlossen als der arme Unglückliche, mit dem ich mich zu vergleichen mich fast nicht getraue" (Sep 3).

When Werther discovers that the young boy murdered the son of his lover, he does not condone violence, as Albert later suggests. Werther believes the boy cannot control his urge to be with his lover, and thus falls prey to his intense passions. Just as Werther defends suicide in his August 12 conversation with Albert as the result of a sickness, over which the individual has no control, he suggests the farm boy’s action is similar. The main difference between a suicide victim and the farm boy is how the sickness manifests itself. The suicide victim ends his life because, as Werther suggests, one can not overcome the emotional pain. Instead of introverting his aggression like
the suicide victim, the farm boy displaces his will to die on an other by committing murder. Albert charges Werther with defending an action which, if it were to go unpunished, could damage the security of the land. Just as he earlier argued in defense of suicide, Werther demands that the emphasis be placed not on the act of murder, but on the situation which elicited the action and on the emotional duress of the individual. Werther sees the boys as a mirror of himself, whose tragic end will be like his own.

J. The Final Letter

Werther writes his final letter, which is given to Lotte after his death, in five distinct phases, which are interrupted by his last visit to her and various last-minute preparations. Werther’s decision to die is not the result of his unfulfilled love with Lotte (Asslinngen 194, 196) nor a belief that his life is worthless (Schöffler 175). Before leaving for the court, he believes that suicide is his only chance to shape and form his life. Lotte’s recognition that he continues to deceive himself prompts him to make his move. By committing suicide Werther will act as a realist: he leaves his self-limiting world, determines his situation and defines himself by his action. Scherpe insightfully perceives, "als Selbstmörder handelt er [Werther] nur noch in Beziehung auf sich selbst" (69).
Scherpe points out a personal dimension of Werther’s suicide, which I interpret as Werther’s attempt to gain control of his life. Scherpe, however, overlooks the public dimension of Werther’s act. Werther consciously plans his death in such a manner as to make an impact on those surrounding him.

Although Werther decides to die to give his life meaning, and in this manner, paradoxically, to end his self-limiting view of reality, he is unable to inform Lotte of his true intentions. He continues his self-deception by portraying his suicide as a self-sacrifice to free her and Albert. He is guilty of writing the letter in a vengeful, condemning tone. Despite feigning to be emotionally detached, "Es ist beschlossen Lotte, ich will sterben, und das sage ich dir ohne romantische Überspannung" (104), he is romantic, going into detail about his desire to die. Werther assures Lotte that he knows what he is doing. He, however, is weak and unable to take responsibility for his death, and therefore incorporates Lotte into his decision. He suggests he dies for her and Albert, which indirectly places responsibility on them for his death, "ich opfere mich für dich. Ja Lotte! warum sollte ich es verschweigen: eins von uns dreien muß hinweg und das will ich sein!" (104). Werther torments Lotte with this letter, in which he admits having played with the idea of murdering her and Albert to end his suffering, "O meine Beste! in
diesem zerrissenen Herzen ist es wütend herumgeschlichen, oft - deinen Mann zu ermorden! - dich! - mich!" (104).

Werther chooses not to give Lotte the letter at this time, because he has not yet received the self-deceptive signal from her that she loves him. He decides, therefore to visit her, despite promising he would not before Christmas. It is during this visit that Werther reads Ossian. Both Werther and Lotte react to the tragic content of Ossian, which also heightens their emotions for one another. Werther misinterprets Lotte’s outpouring of emotion as arising from him and "preste sie an seine Brust und deckte ihre zitternden stammelnden Lippen mit wütenden Küssen" (115). Lotte becomes outraged and asks Werther to leave and never to see her again. Werther leaves, but with the self-deceptive proof of their love: their kiss. His self-deception of eternal togetherness gives him the courage to die. Upon his return home, he begins the third part of the letter, in which he writes of their eternal togetherness in afterlife. He allows Lotte to be with Albert on earth, but announces that their kiss sealed their everlasting union, "Du bist von diesem Augenblicke mein! mein. O Lotte" (117). He can now die, knowing that their momentary separation yields to eternal togetherness, "Ich gehe voran! gehe zu meinem Vater, zu deinem Vater. Dem will ich’s klagen, und er wird mich trösten, bis du kommst, und ich
fliege dir entgegen und fasse dich und bleibe bei dir vor
dem Angesichte des Unendlichen in ewigen Umarmungen" (117).

Werther admitted earlier to Wilhelm that he fears being
forgotten and must do anything to maintain the second
position in Lotte’s heart. He carefully plans his suicide
to maximize the effect it will have on others so that he
will not be forgotten once he is dead. Saine rightly
observes, "His death will tear a hole in the fabric of her
[Lotte’s] life, and he seems to manage death in such a way
that this hole will be permanent" (342). To do this Werther
directly engages Lotte in his death by sending his servant
to request Albert’s pistols. Upon learning that Lotte
handed the servant the weapon of his destruction, Werther
seems to take joy in learning that Lotte has given him the
pistols. He torments her by mentioning he wanted her to be
a part of his suicide, "und du, Lotte, reichst mir das
Werkzeug, du, von deren Hände ich den Tod zu empfangen
wünschte" (121). For Werther, Lotte functions as an
intermediary for his death. She gives him courage to die
and she gives him the necessary tools with which he can
commit suicide. He suggests Lotte has made his decision to
die easier, because her involvement has alleviated any fears
he may have had, "Ich schaudere nicht, den kalten
schrecklichen Kelch zu fassen, aus dem ich den Taumel des
Todes trinken soll! Du reichtest mir ihn und ich zage
nicht" (123). He closes his letter by mentioning the guns are loaded and the time has come.

The final scene of Werther is well known. He is found the next morning wearing his blue jacket and yellow vest, and with a severe pistol shot above his right eye. Ironically, he is found alive, and fights death the entire day, dying at eleven in the evening. Even in death Werther suffered. One could interpret his suffering after the gun shot as perhaps a reconsideration of his decision to die, that he may have pulled the gun away at the last second. Such interpretations lack textual evidence and are more speculative than insightful. I suggest that even in death Werther tried to deceive himself, that he still could not leave the confines of his self-limiting, subjective reality. Only when he does die, does his death instinct find an outlet. He finally confronts empirical reality and realizes his desire to die. He leaves his world to begin a new existence, which shapes his fragmented life.

With his death, Werther overcomes the chasm between subjective and objective reality, and in doing so he also overcomes the chasm between civilized and natural man. For the first time, Werther confronts reality to commit an action which will produce an ever-lasting control over his life. Tormented by the limits of his subjective world, Werther’s death instinct finds an outlet when he leaves the confines of his world to commit suicide. Without Lotte, who
gives him courage, Werther would not have been able to make this step. I do not imply Lotte is responsible for his death,\textsuperscript{116} rather Werther uses Lotte and his affection for her to help him transcend this world. Throughout the novel Werther vented criticism towards society because of the alienation from its natural side. Werther, too is never completely in touch with his natural side. His relationship with nature changes from paradisiacal to tortured because of his limited view of nature. With his suicide, Werther becomes one with nature by accepting it and objective reality.
CHAPTER 4

Kleist and Homburg: The Desire to Control Death

A. Introduction

"Nun, o Unsterblichkeit, bist du ganz mein"\textsuperscript{117}

Taken out of their context, the opening lines of Prinz Friedrich von Homburg’s monologue, in which he enthusiastically greets and awaits his execution, could be mistaken as Heinrich von Kleist’s own words shortly before his suicide on November 21, 1811 at Wannsee near Berlin. Indeed, in his farewell letters to his half-sister, Ulrike von Kleist, and confidant, Marie von Kleist, such exaltation of death and specifically suicide, resonate throughout. The meticulously planned and initiated double suicide of Heinrich von Kleist and Henriette Vogel, with whom he formed a close relationship in the summer of 1811, has been well-documented, from biographical, literary, and legal perspectives. There remain, however, unexplored peculiar similarities between Kleist’s suicide and Prinz Friedrich von Homburg’s views on death and the afterlife. In Kleist’s
correspondence with family members and close friends, the theme of suicide forms a thematic thread which weaves its way from his earliest letters to his last day. In his letters, though often cryptic, Kleist reveals his developing views of suicide and death, much the way Prinz von Homburg does in his three monologues in the drama Prinz Friedrich von Homburg.

Kleist’s correspondence provides the modern reader with a literary image of an individual in crisis. Because of the psychological nature of the letters, they offer insights into Kleist’s thought processes. Karl Heinz Bohrer in his interesting essay on Kleist’s suicide even refers to Kleist as a "literarischer Selbstmörder," because of the prominent theme of suicide in his letters and writings (1089). In my analysis of Kleist’s correspondence, I probe how he moves from one existence to another, from soldier to civil servant, without finding order and fulfillment, and how he deconstructs eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philosophical discourses, which inform the language of his day, without finding meaning. By concentrating on the theme of suicide in his letters, I explore how he becomes disillusioned with the Enlightenment, of which his so-called "Kant-crisis" is just one aspect of his personal dilemma. As a literary critic, my task is not to offer an explanation of why Kleist committed suicide. Instead, I elucidate Kleist’s views on suicide and death, and how he
differentiates between sudden death and suicide. It is my contention that Kleist, though willing to control his death through the act of suicide, has an aversion to a sudden, unexpected natural, or catastrophic death.

Similar to the development of Kleist’s thoughts about suicide and death, Prinz von Homburg also undergoes a radical change in how he perceives his physical end. During the course of the drama, Prinz Friedrich changes from a non-reflexive character, who is cognizant of his limitations, to a self-reflexive figure, who views his imminent execution and death as a transition into eternity. Though his execution is not a suicide in the strictest sense, I argue that it is structurally similar because it allows Homburg to plan and indirectly control his destiny. In my analysis of the drama, I concentrate on Homburg’s three monologues and the Todesfurchtsczene to uncover the Prince’s metaphysical development. Along the way, I show literal, figurative, and symbolic similarities between Homburg’s and Kleist’s language as it pertains to suicide. I explore how Homburg’s preparation for death and views of love, action (Tat), and reconciliation coincide with Kleist’s. Though I do not ignore tensions between Homburg and the Elector and their individual desire for fame and power, Homburg’s decision to die is influenced, I submit, by a radically different notion of fame, prompted by his metaphysical insights.
B. Kleist’s Concept of Lebensplan, Glück, and Schicksal and its Relationship to Suicide.

In Kleist’s correspondence, and especially preceding the Kant-crisis, three notions, an individual’s Lebensplan, Glück, and Schicksal, guide and shape his ontological view of himself within the larger macrocosm. As the telos of his existence he posits Glück, informed by either moral/aesthetic beauty and understanding, metaphysical insights, or by personal fame and well-being. Though the notion of Glück is individualistic, the path which leads each to this telos is a Lebensplan. A life-plan is necessary to avoid uncertainty and chaos, brought about by Schicksal, fate. Though Lebensplan and Schicksal appear as binary opposites, the mere adherence to a plan for life does not ensure against the uncontrollable onslaught of fate. Precisely in periods of uncertainty and lack of control, despite a life-plan, Kleist’s language borders, but does not cross, the threshold into nihilism. These are also the periods during which Kleist mentions or insinuates suicide as a measure to take charge of his destiny.

Kleist’s definition of Glück is all-encompassing, but also contradictory and paradoxical. In a letter to the theologian and close friend of the family Christian Ernst Martini from 18/19 March 1799, Kleist offers a long, detailed definition of what Glück is and could be.\textsuperscript{113} The
language of the lengthy letter is characterized by a naive understanding of the Enlightenment; he uses words such as Wahrheit, Vernunft, Pflicht, Vollkommenheit, and Tugend, without offering any definition of his usage. Although he argues that the life-plan leads an individual to Glück, it is imperative that one trust one’s feelings, intuitions and convictions during this odyssey. He posits one’s feelings and convictions as an absolute which should not be influenced by other individuals, because only the individual knows what his Glück is (472-74). Kleist broadly defines Glück as "die vollen und überschwenglichen Genüsse, die..., in dem erfreulichen Anschauen der moralischen Schönheit liegen" (476). He includes the feeling of personal satisfaction which is derived from moral action, but paradoxically allows room for worldly goods which are not normally associated with "moralische Schönheit," such as money, material possessions, and fame, and refers to such goods as "Vergnügen und Wohlbefinden" (476). Kleist does not propagate a hedonistic lifestyle, but admits that money and reputation constitute an important physical and psychological dimension of Glück.

In a letter to his sister Ulrike in May, 1799, Kleist draws a parallel between the individual with a plan for life and a traveler with an itinerary. Without an itinerary, a traveler is robbed of his control and given to fate, "Ohne Reiseplan sich auf die Reise begeben, heißt erwarten, daß
der Zufall uns an das Ziel führe, das wir selbst nicht
kennen" (No.5, 490). Writing his half-sister because he
fears she has no plan for life, he deems her or any other
person without a plan irresponsible. Kleist’s letter has a
pedagogical tone; it describes his feelings derived from his
plan of life:

Ich fühle, an der Sicherheit, mit
welcher ich die Gegenwart benutze,
an der Ruhe, mit welcher ich in die
Zukunft blicke, so innig, welch ein
unschätzbares Glück mir mein Lebensplan
gewährt...(490).

Though no earlier letter from Kleist exists, in which he
laments living without a plan of life, his description of
how one feels without one, suggests that he may have also
lived such an existence:

der Zustand, ohne Lebensplan, ohne
feste Bestimmung, immer schwankend
zwischen unsichern Wünschen...ein
Spiel des Zufalls, eine Puppe am
Drahte des Schicksals...(490).

Kleist poignantly describes how a plan of life and Glück are
related; one’s life plan is the means to achieve a certain
end, namely Glück. Because Kleist believes in the
absoluteness of the Lebensplan-Glück paradigm, he would
rather die than live without a plan. He writes "dieser
unwürdige Zustand scheint mir so verächtlich..., daß mir der
Tod bei weitem wünschenswerter wäre." While it is ambiguous
whether he deems life without a plan or life without Glück
as unworthy of living, Kleist does imply, even state
expressly, that death would be more desirable than life.
Despite Kleist’s belief that a life-plan leads one to Glück, he himself is unable to adhere to one. During the course of his life Kleist moves from an existence as soldier, scientist, civil servant, to political publicist, and author without finding the Glück he anticipated.¹²² Kleist’s belief in a plan of life has a practical dimension. By writing about his plan and assuming a pedagogical tone about it in his letters, Kleist attempts to legitimize his current existence to his family. Born into an impoverished, Prussian family of lower nobility status, Kleist’s Lebensplan and early career as a soldier beginning at age 15 was determined by his father, a low-ranking captain in the Prussian army. After his discharge from the army in 1795, Kleist did not have a permanent address, while experiencing many professional job changes and numerous moves and changes in residence. This lack of stability and grounding had a pronounced effect on his search for Glück. Throughout his body of letters, Kleist continually asks friends and family for money or loans because of his inability to retain a steady job or source of income. In his letters he writes of his desire to begin a new existence, only to write later about his disgust with that new profession.¹²³ Though Kleist had many acquaintances and contacts, he had few friends during the course of his life. He writes Ulrike on 5 February 1801 that he seldom receives invitations to social gatherings: "In Gesellschaften komme ich selten"
(No.36, 628). Though the motif of the artist as "outsider" may appear stereotypical for German Romantic authors, it is quite fitting in Kleist's case. Kleist's perception of being an outsider among those he knows may explain his refusal to submit to established social codes of behavior. He writes Ulrike:

Ich passe mich nicht unter die Menschen, es ist eine traurige Wahrheit, aber eine Wahrheit; und wenn ich den Grund ohne Umschweif angeben soll, so ist es dieser: sie gefallen mir nicht (628).

Kleist dislikes the company of others because of the social role he feels he must play: "Die Notwendigkeit, eine Rolle zu spielen, und ein innerer Widerwillen dagegen machen mir jede Gesellschaft lästig" (628).

By the end of 1800 Kleist's belief in the absoluteness of feelings begins to vanish which causes him to feel increasingly threatened by fate. He writes Ulrike on 5 February, 1801 that he has been impaired by severe uncertainty, "Dieser innere Zustand der Ungewißheit war mir unerträglich..." (626). He is incapable of deciding for which civil servant position he should apply.¹²⁴ His uncertainty about life, brought on by a failure to adhere to a plan of life, prompts him to withdraw into his own room:

Ich beschloß, nicht aus dem Zimmer zu gehen, bis ich über einen Lebensplan entschieden wäre; aber 8 Tage vergingen, und ich mußte doch am Ende das Zimmer unentschlossen verlassen (627).
A profound sense of pessimism and of impending doom characterize Kleist’s perception of fate. In this and other letters a dialectic of control versus lack of control is evident, whereby Kleist feels driven by uncontrollable forces. He suggests fate is one of the causes for his present condition of uncertainty and failure to have a life-plan. He sees life as a card game for which he does not know what the trump card is:

Das Leben [sei] ein schweres Spiel; und warum ist es schwer? Weil man beständig und immer von neuem Karte ziehen soll und doch nicht weiß, was Trumpf ist; ich meine darum, weil man beständig und immer von neuem handeln soll und doch nicht weiß, was recht ist (629).

The quotation illustrates Kleist’s longing for, but inability to know the right answers in life; this is the real cause for his uncertainty and inactivity. With his belief in absolute ideas and answers fading, Kleist perceives fate as the destroyer of his belief in an absolute system of knowledge and consequently his metaphysical grounding.

Kleist’s growing conviction that he is and will be controlled by an irrational, unpredictable fate coincides with a belief that fate will deny him Glück, fame, or inner peace, regardless of what he might do. On 9 April 1801 he writes Wilhelmine von Zenge, to whom he was engaged at the time, "Ich will dir erzählen, wie in diesen Tagen das Schicksal mit mir gespielt hat," and later in the same
letter, "Wir dünken uns frei, und der Zufall führt uns allgewaltig an tausend feingesponnenen Fäden fort" (No. 41, 641-42). This passage suggests that Kleist is unable to analyze his situation clearly; he implies that personal mishaps or struggles, which are often the result of political tensions, are the result of fate. His letter to Wilhelmine suggests that he suffers from paranoia, or Lebensangst.125

Not every letter Kleist wrote contains references to fate or his mental and physical condition because of it; rather he alternates between moods of serenity and despair on two levels. On the social level, public recognition of his poetic genius becomes increasingly important to him.126 Despite his mood swings, he is capable of writing and producing literature. These moments of depression and creation have led critics to suggest that Kleist suffered from manic-depression.127 In his body of correspondence and often in the same letter, his alternation between moods of triumph and despair, even melancholia, comes to light. On the epistemological level, Kleist’s struggle with absolute questions leads him to the edge of modernity. His struggle and dilemma are similar to the modern man’s, except that modern man has the emotional capacity to continue life, though he knows he can never find absolute answers. Although it would be difficult to define exactly when Kleist is afflicted with this illness, his letters suggest that it
begins to set in late 1800 or early 1801. This period coincides with his increased references to suicide as a method to achieve control and Ruhe, tranquility or peace of mind,\textsuperscript{128} and it is connected with his Kant-crisis. Because Kleist makes no reference to a physical ailment, his reference to his health in a letter to Karl Freiherrn von Stein zum Altenstein on 30 June 1806 may be a reference to his mental state, which he pleads necessitates his release from all responsibilities of his office. He writes: "Ein Gram...zerüttet meine Gesundheit. Ich sitze, wie an einem Abgrund ... das Gemüt starr über die Tiefe geneigt, in welcher die Hoffnung meines Lebens untergegangen ist" (No.94, 763).\textsuperscript{129} Kleist holds this physical condition and its accompanying side effects of "Unruhe" (764) responsible for his inability to work and read.

C. Kleist’s Kant-crisis and its Effect on his View of Death

On 14 August 1800 Kleist writes Ulrike: "Schicke mir doch durch die Post meine Schrift, Über die kantische Philosophie" (No.11, 516). This letter and his apocalyptic letters from 22 and 23 March 1801 have led scholars to overemphasize Kleist’s Kant-crisis and to suggest that Kleist struggled with Kantian philosophy and ethics, and this struggle and apparent misunderstanding of Kant led to
Kleist’s mental breakdown and subsequent suicide.\textsuperscript{130} Muth (78) and Ide (261) argue that Kleist’s misunderstanding of Kant caused Kleist to become increasingly nihilistic, while at the opposite end of the spectrum, Fricke (A.33) suggests Kleist turns to Kant because of his metaphysical crisis in hope of finding solutions. Equally as problematic as overemphasizing the Kant-crisis is to deny the existence of one (Schmidt 5). The crisis should not be viewed as a period in Kleist’s life which had no effect beyond March, 1801. The Kant-crisis influenced Kleist’s conceptualization of death and views of suicide, and it opened him to new emotional and metaphysical experiences.

Modern scholarship has begun to address the importance Kleist’s Kant-crisis played in his metaphysical views. To understand how Kleist’s views changed, one must differentiate between his views on death and the afterlife before and after the Kant-crisis. Prior to the crisis, Kleist believed in a dogmatic form of rationalism; his views on death had been influenced by Wieland’s 1758 work \textit{Sympathien} about the individual’s gradual perfection in the afterlife. As Schneider points out, the Enlightenment was a contemporary experience for Kleist, not an abstract ideal (B.150); this may account for inconsistencies in Kleist’s beliefs. To illustrate this point, I draw from his 22 March 1801 letter to Wilhelmine in which he articulates his earlier held belief in absolutes:

Kleist believed that the individual’s purpose on earth was to acquire as much education and truth as possible, enabling the individual to reach a certain level of perfection. The afterlife was not viewed as an antithesis to physical life, rather as a continuation of it, albeit in a different form, with the same telos: perfection (Vervollkommnung). The "Kantische Philosophie" forces him to reconsider the validity of his belief in absolutes. His belief in an absolute, objective truth is replaced by a fear of subjectivity:

Wir können nicht entscheiden, ob das, was wir Wahrheit nennen, wahrhaft Wahrheit ist, oder ob es uns nur so scheint. Ist das letzte, so ist Wahrheit, die wir hier sammeln, nach dem Tode nicht mehr - und alles Bestreben, ein Eigentum sich zu erwerben, das uns auch in das Grab folgt, ist vergeblich (634).

Death ceases to be a bridge to the after-life rather it is an abrupt end to the physical existence. Kleist moves towards modernity by suggesting that life and after-life are
two completely disassociated existences. Kleist’s teleological purpose is no longer the strive for perfection; it is replaced by a profound sense of uncertainty. The collapse of his entire metaphysical system forces him to retreat from his Lebensplan-Glück paradigm in which he thought his beliefs thus far to have been actualized.

The profound effect the Kant-crisis had on Kleist’s eschatological views becomes clearer when one compares his views on death immediately preceding and during the crisis. While in Würzburg Kleist writes Wilhelmine on 15 September 1800 about one’s destiny (Bestimmung) after death. He warns her not to trouble herself with thoughts about the afterlife, because one can never truly know about it. One should concentrate on the purpose of the earthly life, i.e., the pursuit of knowledge and truth. He finally warns her that too many individuals have wasted their time on such questions, and in doing so neglected and failed to fulfill their purpose on earth (No.22, 565).131 He writes Wilhelmine on 16 November 1800 again about an experience in Würzburg. The tone of the letter is not pessimistic or nihilistic as some critics have argued, but on the contrary full of hope. Kleist writes how dusk and the setting sun evoke a mood of reflection. He ponders departing from this earth and from those dear to him. When he walks through an arched city-gate, he rhetorically asks himself why the
entire gate does not collapse since it has no outer structural support. He answers:

weil alle Steine auf einmal einstürzen wollen – und ich zog aus diesem Gedanken einen unbeschreiblichen erglickenden Trost, der mir bis zu dem entscheidenden Augenblicke immer mit der Hoffnung zur Seite stand, daß auch ich mich halten würde, wenn alles mich sinken läßt (No.28, 593).\footnote{132}

Kleist uses the city-gate as a metaphor for human existence. Kleist suggests a happiness-disaster dialectic, whereby an individual’s happiness is perpetually endangered by a disaster. Kleist does not view this jeopardy to one’s happiness as negative; rather he is resigned to the fact that this dialectic can not be changed. He suggests that his fate is not unique, but tied with a collective’s or society’s; if he were to meet a catastrophic end, so would society. The alienating active-passive structure of the end of this quotation is clarified by the suggestion that Kleist begins to reject the Enlightenment and recognizes that absolute knowledge is not possible; while his belief in absolute knowledge "sinks," Kleist realizes that he must assert himself. Kleist’s feelings of hope despite ever-present peril are reinforced by his use of a rainbow image as a traditional symbol of luck and hope immediately following the metaphor of the city-gate. This letter appears to contradict Kleist’s earlier comments about death. Whereas Kleist earlier articulates his fear of an uncontrollable death, these letters suggest that Kleist (at
least at this juncture) was not concerned with his state of existence in the after-life, because he has no control over it. As the continuation of one's worldly life, death fits into his metaphysical view of man's complete existence.

The loss of metaphysical grounding during the Kant-crisis pushes Kleist closer to the nihilistic belief that he is at the will of fate and has no control over his life. In both the 22 and 23 March 1801 letters he writes of being driven by restlessness, "eine innere Unruhe treib mich umher,"¹³³ and proceeds to act in an alienated manner. He is incapable of working, reading, or relaxing because his belief in absolute truth has been shattered, leaving him without a life-plan. Though he does not mention suicide in either the 22 or 23 March letter, his desire to depart from his present situation could be read metaphorically as a desire to transcend his present existence. He admits he wishes to leave Berlin, "mein Wille ist zu reisen" (No.38, 636), but does not know where he shall go or what he shall do. That Kleist does not commit suicide at this point suggests that he does not project a nihilistic view of himself and the world. Kleist is searching for peace of mind rather than for answers or a new philosophical system.¹³⁴ His desire for calmness or for an existence free from fate, forms a leitmotif through his letters until his suicide.
The Kant-crisis is paradoxical in nature: it destroys but creates as well. Kleist's naive idealism is shattered, and replaced by developing a view of life, where suicide is a ready possibility. His belief in truth and knowledge as absolutes crumbles and his literary language and poetic genius begin to develop. Throughout his life Kleist is plagued by crises of existence. He turns increasingly to literature as a refuge where he is in control of his destiny. Literature offers a therapeutic effect; it mediates his crises, but can not solve them. By April, 1802 he has begun working on Robert Guiskard and Der zerbrochene Krug. Arntzen suggests that the Kant-crisis is a mini-language crisis for Kleist. By analyzing the language of Kleist's letters, Arntzen believes that Kleist's personal reception of Kant resulted in a "Vernichtung des Allgemeinen der Sprache" (68), whereby Kleist loses his ability to communicate with others. Because Kleist is no longer capable of communicating with others, he is forced to become an author in order to find a voice. Such a bold statement is however weakened by a substantial lack of knowledge about Kleist's life and relatively few surviving letters from him. Baker submits the traditional view that instead of destroying his value system, the Kant-crisis allowed Kleist to retreat from society and search for his "Glück" in literature (12). This perception of Kleist may be too idealistic; Kleist did not consciously free himself from all
social obligations to become an author. Throughout his life he entertained ideas, though often coaxed by family, to earn a living as a scientist or civil servant.

I suggest that because the Kant-crisis destroys Kleist’s views on the clearly-established relationship between life and death, Kleist increasingly reflects upon and writes about death. He will begin to differentiate between a sudden, natural death, which he views as fatalistic and a product of fate because he has no control over this end, and suicide, which he perceives as a dignified end to his life because he can control the action.

D. Metaphysical Differences: Natural or Accidental Death vs. Suicide

A tendency exists in literary criticism to demonstrate in Kleist’s letters that he was in love with death and therefore committed suicide. Unger argues that Kleist perceives death as a "Befreier" (101); Rehm contends that Kleist undergoes a process of "Todesreifsein" until he commits the act (443); Blöcker (116) and Baker (112) maintain Kleist’s correspondence shows how his life reaches its completion, thus suicide is inevitable. This approach only mystifies his suicide, but does not explain his views on death or suicide. These and other critics turn to Kleist’s words, "Ach, es ist nichts ekelhafter, als diese

179
Furcht vor dem Tode" (No. 49, 670) to support their claims that Kleist wanted to die. Though critics rightly point to this quote to underscore Kleist’s willingness to commit suicide, most critics have taken the quote out of context to generalize Kleist’s views on death. By misappropriating this quote, critics have failed to recognize how Kleist differentiates between different types of death, either natural or accidental.

The afore-mentioned quote appears in a 21 July 1801 letter to Wilhelmine, in which he also writes about a near-death experience. Kleist, however, first wrote Karoline von Schieben three days earlier about this experience.136 While in a village, Butzbach, near Frankfurt/Main, Kleist’s carriage became separated from its horses, and it came to a crashing halt after tipping over. The wording in both letters about this incident and his thoughts afterwards are almost identical. He writes Wilhelmine:

Also an ein Eselsgeschrei hing ein

Kleist questions the meaning and purpose of his existence after this frightful accident. He appears perplexed that his life could come to an unexpected end, and wonders why it did not. Kleist’s fear of a sudden death was not unusual for this period. Philippe Ariès notes that even in the late
eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a sudden death, a "mors improvisa" was considered a "vile and ugly death" and "greatly dreaded" (11, 108). Within the context of the letter, Kleist expresses a profound sense of aversion that his life could be robbed from him. Kleist’s views of a sudden death reveal his obsessions with his existence, and how he questions the meaning of his existence within the context of an unnatural, premature death. He does not mention fate, but his use of "Himmel" despite its overt religious connotation, suggests a fate-like power ready to strike him down. During the entire episode, Kleist portrays himself as a helpless object to whom this action happens. By understanding how and why Kleist differentiates between a natural and sudden, unexpected death, one is better prepared to interpret Kleist’s quote about his lack of fear of death.

Kleist views suicide as a tool with which he can control his life and thereby escape fate. The 21 Juli 1801 letter to Wilhelmine clearly underscores how Kleist perceives a metaphysical difference between a sudden or natural death and suicide. He writes:


Kleist stresses the participation of an individual to assist in suicide. Whereas in the narrative about the accident he
questions the meaning of life when one dies suddenly, he assigns value to life when an individual is the active agent in ending it. Life in itself is devoid of meaning, and receives meaning only through the willful intention to end it. Paradoxically, the only way to affirm life is to end it intentionally. Kleist’s argument revolves around suicide as the ultimate act in determining the value of life. Such consequences are startling for him. If his life ends suddenly, his life and actions are empty gestures, but if he commits suicide, his entire life receives meaning and closure. Kleist insinuates this by mentioning "Zwecke," purposes. He suggests that one can envision and fulfill certain teleological purposes in life when one is capable of committing suicide. Increasingly, the idea of fulfilling his teleological purpose before dying becomes important for Kleist.

Kleist was not in love with death as earlier scholars have postulated; rather he desired to control his end. An accidental death would rob him of more than just his life, it would rob him of the chance to fulfill his teleological purposes. On 1 May 1802 Kleist writes Ulrike precisely about his fears of a premature death, as if fate stalks him, "So habe ich zum Beispiel jetzt eine seltsame Furcht, ich möchte sterben, ehe ich meine Arbeit vollendet habe" (No.65, 724). He does not qualify or explain these abrupt comments, which appear thematically disjointed in the letter. He
follows them with news of his finances and health, information which appears in almost all letters to Ulrike, and which is intended to manipulate her into sending him money. He articulates a necessity to complete his unspecified "Arbeit" before dying. Near the end of the letter he explicates the ideal situation under which he could end his life:

Ich habe keinen anderen Wunsch, als zu sterben, wenn mir drei Dinge gelungen sind: ein Kind, ein schön Gedicht, und eine große Tat. Denn das Leben hat doch immer nichts Erhabeneres, als nur dieses, daß man es erhaben wegwerfen kann (725). \(^{138}\)

Kleist uses clichés which have Baroque references for the familial sphere (fathering a child), the political sphere (a good action), and the artistic sphere (producing art) to define the purpose of life. These actions, however, are in themselves meaningless. Only through the act of suicide will these actions be granted meaning; therefore their value is directly related to suicide. Kleist reformulates his prerequisites before committing suicide in a letter to his close friend, Otto August Rühle of 31 August 1806. Here he suggests a great deed suffices before or while one commits suicide, "Komm, laß uns etwas Gutes tun, und dabei sterben" (No.97, 768). Though the comments may appear whimsical, they are quite serious within their context. Was Kleist "ready" to commit suicide approximately four years after explaining the ideal situation to Ulrike in 1802? He
produced extraordinary literature, but had no child, and his concept of a great deed is obscure, so we do not know whether he ever succeeded at this.\textsuperscript{139} Bohrer (1102) correctly notes cynicism in Kleist’s correspondence, an aspect which most critics have overlooked, but Kleist’s references to suicide are with few exceptions, most notably in his letter to Ulrike on 26 October 1803, serious in their intent.

Kleist’s violent image of an accidental death in the 21 July 1801 letter to Wilhelmine contrasts sharply with his portrayal of suicide as a mild, indeed painless death. Strikingly, Kleist rarely mentions in his letters the manner in which he will kill himself, and his letters are completely devoid of gruesome details about anyone’s death or about how his suicide will be. In a letter to Otto August Rühle from 31 August 1806 Kleist describes the state of death as sleep which leads an individual into another state of existence. The post-mortem existence is an eternal continuance of life, whereby one metaphorically moves from one room to the next for all infinity. He writes to Rühle:

\begin{quote}
Denke nur, diese unendliche Fortdauer! Myriaden von Zeiträumen, jedweder ein Leben, und für jedweden eine Erscheinung, wie diese Welt...Es ist, als ob wir aus einem Zimmer in das andere gehen. Sieh, die Welt kommt mir vor, wie eingeschachtelt (No.97, 768-69).
\end{quote}

Utopian thinking and hope characterize his description of death as an existence where the individual is free from
fate, thereby freeing him to move from one existence to another. B. Fischer convincingly argues that Kleist perceives the change of state from this world to beyond to be like waking from a dream (287). Kleist’s mention of the transmigration of souls from one room into another is a reference to cosmological concepts of the period. \(^{140}\) His reference to the eternal movement of souls suggests that he is attempting to overcome nihilism by searching for meaning in this cosmological system. Kleist, however, does not completely identify with this system of thought, and asks Rühle whether his view of the afterlife as an eternal continuation of life is too romantic, "O Rühle, sag mir, ist dies ein Traum?" (768). Kleist suggests that the afterlife is, in fact, an eternity from which an individual never awakens. As Ariès has noted, in the eighteenth century a "new emphasis is placed on beauty, the ineffable beauty that appears after the last horrors of the death agony" (311). Kleist’s imagery of death as sleep as exhibited in this letter will characterize his farewell letters shortly before his suicide.
Excursus: Lessing and Wie die Alten den Tod gebildet

Kleist’s conceptualization of death as a peaceful state and as sleep was influenced by Johann Joachim Winckelmann’s and Lessing’s writings about artistic representations of death. Though he often depicts death as gruesome and violent in his literary works, Kleist’s portrayal of his imminent death and the imagery he evokes correspond to the classical models Winckelmann and Lessing suggested. Stimulated by Winckelmann’s seminal work on the art of Greek antiquity, Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerei und Bildhauerkunst (1755), Lessing turned to antiquity to establish modern aesthetic norms. In 1769 he wrote Wie die Alten den Tod gebildet, which was more than a detailed historical study on how artists and authors portrayed death in antiquity; it was an analysis and interpretation of death in eighteenth-century Europe. With this analysis, Lessing hoped to overcome the commonly held eighteenth-century view of death as "ugly" or "frightful." Lessing argues that artists and authors have strayed from the Greek ideal of death as a brother of sleep or as a genius with a torch symbolizing the end of life.141 Throughout the analysis, Lessing departs from antique subject matter to address eschatological questions. Death and the act of dying must be divested of prejudices, and as Ariès argues, also of the gloomy ceremonies preceding and
following death, such as the last farewells, mourning, and 
funeral processions, which tend to reinforce superstitions 
and frighten the viewer (410-11). Death and dying have 
their own aesthetic, which should evoke a solemn and 
peaceful attitude. Baroque literature’s depiction of the 
torture and gruesomeness of death is the antithesis of 
Lessing’s notion of a "schöner Tod," because of its emphasis 
on the act of dying and its intention to arouse fear. 
Lessing writes:

Tot sein hat nichts Schreckliches;
und insofern Sterben nichts als der 
Schritt zum Totsein ist, kann auch 
das Sterben nichts Schreckliches 
haben (760-61).

Lessing argues that death and the afterlife can not cause 
fear, rather they offer salvation from it. Because he views 
death as a step in the natural progression of man, death 
should be accepted as a necessary component of life. He 
does not address suicide; suicide is not a natural death, 
and as such can never be peaceful or beautiful. By 
contrast, the methods in which artists of antiquity and 
the eighteenth century portray death, Lessing concludes that 
eighteenth-century artists should incorporate Enlightened 
ideals in their depiction of death, and thereby reintroduce 
death as the peaceful, non-threatening brother of sleep.
E. The Final Letters: Depression and Enthusiasm

Kleist’s correspondence underscores how his social surroundings profoundly affect his mental state. His letters reveal how his personal relationships with Ulrike and Wilhelmine, his literary career and failures, and the continued political problems in Prussia lead him to one mental crisis after another. Until the autumn of 1811, Kleist experiences many personal failures, which often illicit signs of nihilism, but which do not lead him to suicide. Indeed, the majority of Kleist’s references to suicide and the afterlife do not arise from personal failure. Kleist’s ability to overcome his many crises stems from the continued moral and financial support of Ulrike. It is she who helps him through the difficult period after terminating his relationship with Wilhelmine in May, 1802. Ulrike’s, among others’, financial support not only enables Kleist to carve out a daily existence, it helps him to publish his works. Though Ulrike urges Kleist to take a job as a civil servant, she comforts him after his literary failures. His first completed drama, Der zerbrochene Krug, fails miserably at the Weimar Court Theater under Goethe’s direction in March, 1808. This prompts Kleist to challenge Goethe to a duel. Kleist founded the literary journal, Phöbus in December, 1807, and after a period of success, it finally folded because of financial problems. Though he was
engaged in political and military matters his entire life, Kleist's biography remains enigmatic.\textsuperscript{142} In January, 1807 he is arrested by the French in Berlin under suspicion of being a spy and spends several months in Fort de Joux, a French prison. Ulrike's intervention helps him to be freed. By mid-1810, however, Kleist operates within the parameters of society as he had never done before. He becomes acquainted with a number of intellectuals, notably, Adam Müller, Clemens Brentano, and Achim von Arnim. He helped to found the Berliner Abendblätter, a conservative political journal, and was a member of the "Deutsche Tischgesellschaft," a society for political and intellectual discussion. Kleist's world, however, begins to disintegrate in the summer of 1811.

On 10 November 1811 Kleist writes Marie von Kleist, a close familial friend, that he shall commit suicide. A depressive and helpless tone characterize the letter. Kleist, under the strain of having the Berliner Abendblätter censored and ultimately closed down, had a heated argument with Ulrike at her home in Frankfurt/Oder a week earlier. She had refused to give Kleist additional financial support which pushed Kleist to despair. In his most vulnerable state, Kleist was without contacts in Berlin. His friendship with Adam Müller, who had recently moved to Vienna, had soured, and Brentano and Arnim were not in
Berlin at the time. In his letter to Marie, Kleist suggests he completely controls his decision to commit suicide:


He explains his "soul is hurt," which suggests that he suffers from mental duress, not physical problems. Despite the admission to his depression, he adamantly claims that he is not sick. He explains how he has been inundated by social, personal, and political problems, for which no solution is possible. As B. Fischer has argued, Kleist’s letters are not without an attempt to manipulate the recipient (283), either to incite sympathy or extricate money. This letter, however, appears strikingly devoid of the typical Kleistian manipulation. Kleist admits that his desire for success was not just individually determined; he wanted to appear eminent and honorable to Ulrike and other family members (883). Kleist fears his family perceives his literary failures as the cause for his personal and social problems, and that he is a "nichtsnutziges Glied der menschlichen Gesellschaft" (884). The political problems, such as the Prussian alliance with the French only accentuate his problems. Though Kleist mentions on several occasions that he will die, he does not refer to the afterlife or metaphysical notions of it. Though poetic in its language, the letter with its lack of philosophical
reflection will mark a sharp contrast to his final letters
dating after 19 November 1811.

Kleist’s last four farewell letters, to Marie von
Kleist, Ulrike von Kleist, and Sophie Müller, dated between
19 and 21 November 1811, form a thematic unity. The tone
and imagery of each letter is similar; Kleist
enthusiastically greets a death which he portrays as a
savior or redeemer from his current mental and spiritual
state. Kleist’s enthusiasm for his imminent suicide
contrasts sharply with earlier portrayals of an accidental
death as meaningless. On 19 November 1811 he writes Marie
about his "Triumphgesang" (No. 223, 884) which his soul
celebrates in the face of death. He warns Marie not to view
his death as a premature end to life because "meine Seele
[ist]...zum Tode ganz reif geworden" (885). He suggests
that he has fulfilled his teleological purpose, thus his
life is complete. He reiterates this sentiment by claiming
he has no more to learn or experience, "ich sterbe, weil mir
auf Erden nichts mehr zu lernen und zu erwerben übrig
bleibt" (885). Such comments have led critics to interpret
Kleist’s intentions instead of his language. On the basis
of his literary production, Baker views Kleist’s life as
complete, therefore he can commit a heroic suicide, which is
essential to progress (112, 115); Blöcker offers a similar
interpretation suggesting Kleist’s literary production was a
"Sättigung des Lebens," which forced him to commit suicide
(118-19). Both critics, however, overlook Kleist precarious mental condition and his manic-depressive state suggested by the body of his letters. By interpreting Kleist’s final letters too literally and failing to consider his emotional state, one runs the risk of making trivial comments about his suicide or even approving of it.

Kleist’s portrayal of death as his redeemer plays an important ideological role within his metaphysical views. He perceives death as a "soft death" (sanfter Tod) which harkens back to Enlightened views of death. Because Kleist envisions his other-worldly existence as eternal happiness, suicide is viewed in peaceful terms. Kleist refrains from any mention of physical destruction, instead he mystifies his death. Because Kleist does not specifically use the word "suicide" in his final four farewell letters, one unfamiliar with them could be led to believe that Kleist suffers from an incurable disease and is about to die a natural death. Though Kleist takes the active role to end his life, he perceives death coming to him, to release his soul. His ideas suggest a unity of subject and object. To Sophie Müller on 20 November 1811, he describes death with "Flügeln an den Schultern" which will carry him to a paradisiacal world (No.224, 886). Kleist’s personification of his soul corresponds to his imagery of death. His and Henriette’s souls will fly away like "Luftschiffer" (885). Death allows Kleist to move consciously from this worldly to
other-worldly existence; therefore death is creative rather than destructive.

Despite Kleist’s overt acceptance of his suicide and subsequent death, there are signs that he is afraid to commit suicide alone. As I have shown, Kleist had on a number of occasions claimed he would commit suicide. Though each incident is not confirmed in his letters, Kleist asked several friends and family members to commit suicide with him. He reminds Marie on 21 November 1811 that he asked her to die with him, "erinnerst Du Dich wohl, daß ich Dich mehrmals gefragt habe, ob du mit mir sterben willst?" (No.227, 888). In autumn, 1811, when Kleist’s closest friends were away from Berlin, Kleist develops a close friendship with a married woman, Henriette Vogel, whom he had met in December, 1810. Henriette, who suffered from ovarian cancer, offers Kleist a chance to realize his dream of dying.

In his final farewell letters Kleist attempts to give his suicide meaning by associating death with love. In his last days, Kleist believes that the coupling of death and love will produce utopian results. He writes Marie on 21 November 1811:

Wenn Du wüßtest, wie der Tod und die Liebe sich abwechseln, um diese letzten Augenblicke meines Lebens mit Blumen, himmlischen und irdischen, zu bekränzen, gewiß würdest Du mich sterben lassen (887).
The greatest sign of love is a double suicide, "wir [haben] uns...von ganzem Herzen lieb gewonnen, und der beste Beweis davon ist wohl, daß wir jetzt miteinander sterben," as Kleist writes Sophie Müller on 20 November 1811 (886). Kleist’s language about love and its relationship with death appears forced. Though Kleist was sympathetic to Henriette’s suffering, he did not have enough time to begin a serious relationship with her. Kleist continually refers to his death in relationship with hers, whereby their souls will depart from earth together. Kleist appropriates her voice in the letters, and speaks for her, assuming she views her death in the exact same terms as he views his. By coupling death with feelings of love for Henriette, Kleist can subconsciously ameliorate his fears of dying alone while effectively hiding his feelings of failure to which he referred in his 10 November 1811 letter to Marie. With this view, suicide appears as a creative act which enables the victim to move into another existence instead of a destructive act which ends life. Kleist’s enthusiastic view of his death and his coupling of death with love contain conventional elements of Romanticism.145

Kleist’s life can not end until he reconciles with Ulrike, a gesture which harkens back to his notion of a "große Tat," though the deed will be performed within the familial sphere. Kleist’s writes Ulrike on the day of his death asking for forgiveness:
Ich kann nicht sterben, ohne mich...
mit der ganzen Welt, und somit auch,
vor allen anderen, meine teuerste Ulrike,
mit Dir versöhnt zu haben (No.226, 887).

This gesture is remarkable considering his mental condition
after their fight and his feelings of worthlessness as
expressed in the 10 November 1811 letter to Marie. In the
letter, Kleist absolves Ulrike of any feeling of guilt or
responsibility. Recognizing that she constantly considered
his best interests, Kleist insinuates that his problems stem
from sources beyond his or anyone’s control. He writes,
"die Wahrheit ist, daß mir auf Erden nicht zu helfen war" (887). Kleist’s suggestion of his depression casts a cloud
of doubt over the content of the last four farewell letters.
Though he wishes to commit suicide, he subconsciously
suggests he actually has not accepted his suicide, that he
is being driven to it by his depression. Kleist’s letter of
reconciliation to Ulrike and his farewell letters to Marie
and Sophie serve as a symbolic confession. Not intended to
tortment the recipients, Kleist’s farewell letters allow him
to end his life with a belief that he is reconciled with
fate and to depart from this world with a clear conscience.

F. Prinz von Homburg: A Departure from Kleist’s Depiction
of Violent Death

In his essay on "Todeslust" in Kleist’s works, Gerhard
Schulz writes: "Kleist gilt gern als eine Art Spezialist des
Todes" (113). Indeed, few authors, with the exception of Edgar Allen Poe, are more renowned for their use of violence and violent imagery in their works. Kleist’s œuvre reads like a catalogue of gruesome actions, with murders, death sentences, executions, and suicide commonplace. Both Der Findling and Michael Kohlhaas conclude with the protagonist receiving a death sentence, which he gladly accepts. Piachi demands to be executed to meet Nicolo in hell, where he shall revenge his wife’s death. Kohlhaas goes to the gallows with the belief he has committed no wrong, though he has robbed and committed murder. In Penthesilea, the Amazon queens rips her lover Achilles to shreds, and later commits suicide. Gustav, in Die Verlobung in St. Domingo, shoots himself after recognizing that his murder of the young slave, Toni, was a product of miscommunication and lack of trust. Each of these examples is characterized by not just hideous violence and destruction, but also by the suddenness or willingness of each individual to perpetrate the violent act. These literary images of death as destructive, violent, and even nihilistic, contrast sharply with Kleist’s portrayal of his own death in his last letters as peaceful, solemn, and desirable.

In none of Kleist’s stories or dramas does the action and plot revolve around death as much as in his last work, Prinz Friedrich von Homburg, completed a few months before his suicide. The majority of the action in Prinz von
Homburg is initiated by the Elector’s decision to sign Prince Homburg’s death sentence, and Homburg’s reaction to his sentencing. Despite the drama’s thematization of Homburg’s imminent execution and his reflection on death, Prinz von Homburg, ironically, concludes with the Elector revoking the death sentence and the Prince living. Kleist’s portrayal of death in his last drama differs thematically and symbolically from earlier dramas and stories, and as I show, it approximates his views on death and the afterlife. Like Kleist himself, Homburg enthusiastically awaits a death he feels he controls. The sentencing Homburg receives is unorthodox; unlike the ones in Der Findling and Michael Kohlhaas, Homburg has the freedom to decide whether he will die or be freed. He manipulates the verdict so that it appears structurally as a suicide, a "Freitod." By consciously deciding in favor of execution, Homburg can play an active role to end his life.

One year after the premiere of Prinz Friedrich von Homburg at the Viennese Burgtheater, Caroline Pichler wrote to a friend, "Ja, diese Schlacht von Fehrbellin! Sie hat...viel Redens gemacht."¹⁴⁷ Her comments pertain to the initial political furor the drama caused, but also aptly characterize the enormous amount of scholarly interest Homburg has stimulated. Few works in German literature have elicited as many divergent interpretations or caused such basic disagreements among scholars.¹⁴⁸ Ellis notes that
the majority of scholarship on **Homburg** probes whether the play’s "true" values, represented by the Elector or by the Prince, or whether a synthesis of the Elector’s and the Prince’s values prevail at the conclusion (89). Following Ellis’ lead and suggestion to move away from these "traditional" questions, scholarship since the 1980’s has begun to address the function of other characters and themes in the drama. Though I recognize the complexity of the drama and the multitude of questions it raises, my analysis of **Homburg** concentrates on Homburg’s developing metaphysics, his views on death, and the relationship of these to Kleist’s letters.

G. Homburg’s First Monologue: The Desire for Fame, Social Limitations, and Non-Reflection

Throughout the first two acts of **Homburg**, the Prince appears as a non-reflexive character, who is driven by his desire for fame. This desire causes the Prince to act often in a seemingly irrational manner and to commit acts without considering their consequences and problems they may pose. The drama’s initial scene allows one to view Homburg’s unconscience and his desire for fame. The scene begins with an image of the Prince as a somnabule in the courtly garden. A court procession, including the Elector and his wife, spy the Prince weaving a victory wreath. When the Elector takes
the wreath from the sleep-walking Prince, the Prince
mutters, "Natalie! Mein Mädchen! Meine Braut" [65].
Harkening back to medieval images, the Prince dreams that
love and a beautiful maiden will accompany his fame. This
informs the King, as well as his step-daughter, Princess
Natalie, that the Prince desires more than victory in the
following day’s battle, he harbors feelings for the
Princess. While in his somnambulistic trance, he grabs
Natalie’s glove, which causes him great confusion when he
awakens. Though the Elector has raised the Prince as a son,
he reacts angrily to Homburg’s subconcious revelations, and
yells at him, "Ins Nichts mit dir zurück, Herr Prinz von
Homburg,/ Ins Nichts, ins Nichts" [74-75]. The Prince’s
transgression of military rank and failure to observe
courtly etiquette prompt the Elector’s tirade against him;
however, the initial scene also presents questions about the
Elector’s true feelings for his adoptive son and sheds light
on the Prince’s behavior in subsequent scenes.

Natalie’s glove is the point of intersection between
Homburg’s subconscious, dream world, where he desires fame
and love, and his reality, where these dreams are to be
realized. Homburg, however, does not see the difference
between these two worlds. Homburg’s inability to
differentiate between the two worlds and his confusion over
the glove will effect his behavior until he receives the
death penalty from the Elector. Homburg’s lack of an
eschatological and metaphysical view characterize both worlds, where the preoccupation for fame and love eliminates questions about the afterlife. When he retells his dream to Hohenzollern, he mentions worldly goods and desires, e.g. money, fame, and love [140-47]. He sees the Elector as a Zeus-figure, who gives the wreath to a maiden to place upon him [157-63]. The maiden appears as a "Genius des Ruhms" [172], to crown the hero. Homburg believes the glove belongs to this figure, though he does not know who she is. Hohenzollern is careful not to divulge his involvement with the glove or how it appeared; instead he prods the Prince with continual questions. The Prince, who is not conscious of his feelings for Natalie, mentions many women, who must have been in his dream, and who must have given him a glove.

Homburg’s first monologue appears at the point when he feels his dream from the first scene is on the verge of being actualized. During the discussion of the battle plans the Prince is still confused about the origin of the glove, thus pays little attention to the battle details. Oddly, the Elector’s wife and Natalie are present during this briefing, at which time he discovers that Natalie is missing a glove. Quietly, the Prince drops the glove, which Natalie finds. The Elector ends the briefing by ordering Homburg to assume a tactical waiting position, "dir empfehle ich Ruhe!" [348], while he takes the lead.\textsuperscript{149} When the Elector
leaves, Homburg begins his monologue, in which he indignantly addresses the Greek goddess, Fortuna:

Nun denn, auf deiner Kugel, Ungeheures, 
Du, der der Windeshauch den Schleier heut 
Gleich einem Segel lüftet, roll heran! 
Du hast mir, Glück, die Locken schon gestreift: 
Ein Pfand schon warfst du, im Vorüberschweben, 
Aus deinem Füllhorn lächelnd mir herab: 
Heut, Kind der Götter, such' ich, flüchtiges, 
Ich hasche dich im Feld der Schlacht und stürze 
Ganz deinen Segen mir zu Füßen um: 
Wärst du auch siebenfach, mit Eisenketten, 
Am schwedischen Siegeswagen festgebunden! [355-65]

Homburg’s entire existence is dedicated to his search for fame, which could be understood as a parallel to Kleist’s search for Glück. Homburg’s perception of fame and Kleist’s perception of happiness are similar with regard to the role of fate; by addressing the goddess Fortuna, Homburg suggests that fame is a product of fate and something he can influence. In his monologue Homburg personifies fame as fortuna, who appears as a veiled goddess atop a ball. This image recalls his image of the "Genius des Ruhms" in his dream and narrative to Hohenzollern. Homburgs feels as if fame has touched him [358], but it was just a fleeting moment. He anticipates achieving fame the following day in battle [362], which suggests he either did not hear about the tactical waiting position he was ordered, or plans to ignore the order. His actions after the battle indicate that he felt he was authorized to disobey the orders.

Homburg’s view of fame is grounded in an egocentric view of this world and is devoid of a concern for the universal. In
the last four lines of the monologue, Homburg verbally attacks fortuna; he claims that even if fortuna is on the side of the Swedes during the battle, he will attack her and wrestle fame from her. His tone evokes a Prometheus-image, as Homburg challenges the goddess. He wishes to attain fame to enjoy the benefits it brings, such as love and respect, but not to help his country defeat its arch-enemy.

At the conclusion of the battle, during which the Elector is supposedly killed, the Prince assumes his dream to be fulfilled. Homburg does not reflect or hesitate to claim he will assume control of the country, "Ich, Fräulein, übernehme eure Sache!" [581]. The Prince appears personally motivated to seize control of Natalie’s and the kingdom’s patriotic concerns. He will revenge the Elector’s death and lead his kingdom to glory, "Ein Engel will ich, mit Flammenschwert, / An eures Throns verwaiste Stufen stehn!" [582-83]. Continuing his religious language, Homburg prays to God about the Elector, "O Gott, wär er jetzt da, den wir beweinen, / Um diesen Bund zu schauen! Könnten wir/ Zu ihm aufstammeln: Vater, segne uns!" [609-11]. Homburg wishes the Elector were present so that he could accept and bless his ascent to the throne, and importantly, his union with Natalie, whom he kisses. He takes his union with Natalie for granted as part of his dream in which he envisioned such a love. He immediately goes to the Electress whose words he interprets as her approval of his union with Natalie [707-

H. The Todesfurchtszene: Death as "der häßliche Tod"

Believing that his dream of battle glory and union with Natalie has been realized, Homburg considers, ironically, his subjective, dream world to be reality, while ignoring objective reality. Upon recognizing that he is actually under arrest and that the Elector is serious with the death sentence, Homburg thinks he is dreaming, "Träum ich? Wach'ich? Leb'ich? Bin ich bei Sinnen?" [765]. Submersed in his egocentric world, the Prince views any event threatening his world as a bad dream. Upon a closer review of his arrest and death penalty, Homburg recognizes that his transgression of the battle order is serious, but it does not warrant such stern punishment [819-26]. In an attempt to avoid shattering his subjective world, Homburg persuades himself that the Elector formally must pass such a judgement to ensure the integrity of the army, but will not carry out the sentence [870-76]. The Prince's dream world finally shatters when Hohenzollern assures him that the Elector has signed the death penalty, thus making his death immanent.150 Up to this moment, the Prince believes in
the goodness of the Elector and that their relationship will prohibit any drastic actions. Homburg recognizes, helped by Hohenzollern’s insinuations, that his death penalty is a result of his relationship with Natalie [925-29]. Because of Homburg’s announcement of his relationship with Natalie, the Elector cannot fulfill his plan of marrying her to the Swedish Duke in order to end hostilities between the two principalities. Pfeiffer accurately interprets the death penalty as a "entsexualisierende Verbot" (76). The Elector betrays the Prince and uses Homburg’s disobedience to cover his true intentions. Realizing that the situation is beyond his control, Homburg feels lost, "O Freund! Hilf, rette mich! Ich bin verloren" [931], and begins to think about death. The Elector’s reaction to Homburg is symbolically similar to fate in Kleist’s letters. Whereas Kleist believes fate will control him, Homburg recognizes the Elector’s feelings and thoughts have more control over his life than his own actions.

In the famous Todesfurchtzene with the Electress, Homburg fears death as a sudden and complete end with no afterlife. On his way to the Electress, Homburg passes his open grave, which, along with the realization that the Elector controls his fate, prompts his metaphysical change. For the first time Homburg becomes aware of death and its role within life. Paradoxically, Homburg recognizes the importance of life at the point when life may be negated.
His description of death and its imagery recalls Baroque images of death and of the "häßlicher Tod." He personifies death and feels as if it hovers over him [972]. The Prince associates death with the night, darkness, and shadows [985, 987], which suggests the infinite nothingness which shall follow it. A spatial metaphor of downwardness characterizes Homburg’s language. His view is directed downwards, as one climbs into death, as if it were an abyss [988, 997]. Not knowing how he will die, he mentions the "mörderischen Kugeln" [986], which implies he still believes he is unjustly sentenced. Homburg is eerily aware of the viewers’ perspective of his death, as he mentions the windows along the market have been rented.¹⁵¹ For Homburg, death is a rotting corpse and a gravestone symbolizing the life which no longer exists, "Liegt in zwei engen Brettern duftend morgen,/ Und ein Gestein sagt dir von ihm: er war!" [990-91].

Homburg’s perception of death as a skeleton and the sudden end to life awakens his desire to live. His desire for life, ironically, does not coincide with his image of what his new life will be. He tells the Electress he is willing to give up his desire to fame, if he could just live, "Seit ich mein Grab sah, will ich nichts, als leben,/ Und frage nichts mehr, ob es rühmlich sei!" [1003-04]. The Electress, amazed at his reaction and sudden willingness to change his personality, demands that he regain his
composure. When one scrutinizes Homburg’s suggestion of his
"new" life, his absolute will to life reveals itself as
similar to death.¹⁵² He tells the Electress that he shall
give up any hope of being happy, "Ich gebe jeden Anspruch
auf an Glück" [1022], and that he has suppressed his
feelings for Natalie. He hopes this gesture of revoking his
claim of Natalie, as if she were his property, and thereby
allowing the Swedish duke to make his move, should prove his
desire to live. Kleist uses a Romantic motif of a Rhine
idyll to show the pointlessness of an existence in which one
has no hope for happiness and how such an existence is
symbolically similar to death:

Ich will auf meine Güter gehn am Rhein,
Da will ich bauen, will ich niederreißen,
Daß mir der Schweiß herabtrieft, säen, ernten,
Als wär’s für Weib und Kind, allein genießen,
Und, wenn ich erntete, von Neuem säen,
Und in den Kreis herum das Leben jagen,
Bis es am Abend niedersinkt und stirbt. [1030-36]

A profound sense of vanitas characterizes this inverted
idyll. The antithetical imagery (bauen, niederreißen) and
the altered Alexandrine verse reminds one of Baroque
poetry.¹⁵³ Instead of progress, Homburg would build, only
to destroy.¹⁵⁴ As a hermit living outside of society, he
would lead a circular life, cultivating his fields, not just
for the sake of harvesting food, thus allowing for life, but
for the sake of work. Homburg, however, does mention that
he would enjoy (genießen) such an existence.¹⁵⁵ His
circular, tautological life suggests a profound lack of
progress and direction. Progress is replaced by continual repetition and stagnation until he finally dies. The finality and pointlessness of the existence in the idyll is striking similar to the image of eternal nothingness conjured by Homburg’s image of death.

Though Homburg is serious with his existentialist description of life as an alternative to the heroic, purposeful life, I suggest that Homburg, much like Kleist in his letters to Ulrike, manipulates individuals to intervene on his behalf. He realizes that he cannot change the Elector’s mind, therefore implements a strategy to ensure outside assistance. In his dialogues with the Electress and Natalie, Homburg avoids mentioning his transgression of the battle orders or his premature ascent to the throne; instead he attempts to incite guilt in both the Electress and Natalie to do battle for him. Counting on their frailty and emotion, Homburg reminds the Electress that his mother died and entrusted his welfare to her [1007-19], and insinuates that she has a moral responsibility to protect him. He intertwines Natalie’s fate with his own, arguing that if he dies, she will have no life. Condescendingly, he tells her, "Du armes Mädchen, weinst! Die Sonne leuchtet/ Heut alle Deine Hoffnungen zu Grab!" [1039-40]. He suggests she should commit a symbolic suicide by renouncing her life in society and entering a convent. Natalie, who later reveals her cunning, manipulative side, ignores Homburg’s vision of
her fate. She suggests that he compose himself and look at the grave on his way back to the prison cell.

Homburg’s view of his imminent execution reveals itself as similar to Kleist’s view of fate. A dialectic of control and lack of control characterizes both views. To soothe Homburg, Natalie claims his execution is no different than the death he would experience on the battlefield. She, however, either consciously or unconsciously, overlooks the metaphysics of death in battle. There are certain social ramifications of death in battle; in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a military death was viewed as an honorable end, worthy of a hero. Gleim’s and other’s interpretation of Philotas is an excellent example of this view of a military death. Kleist addresses this topic in a letter to Ulrike on 26 October 1803, claiming that he will join the French army and die an honorable death.¹⁵⁶ By being a soldier, one has control over one’s death insofar as one consciously chooses to do battle; thus the soldier accepts the consequence of death. An execution robs Homburg of the control over his life which he had, but was not necessarily conscious of it, in battle. Homburg’s view of his execution and the circumstances in which it appears is similar to Kleist’s view of fate, in that both are arbitrary forces over which the individual has no control.
I. Homburg’s Second Monologue: The Eschatological Change

Homburg delivers his second monologue while sitting in prison shortly after seeing his open grave for the second time. Unlike in the Todesfurchtszene, the Prince is calm and composed. He addresses his death in the monologue, as he did in his first one, only this time his tone is cynical. Instead of a dark, dreadful end, Homburg views death as the stage between life and the afterlife. In this monologue, Homburg presents a diametrically opposite eschatological view of the first monologue. No longer frightened by death, Homburg is willing to accept it.\(^{157}\) The monologue is characterized by a relaxed fatalistic view:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Das Leben nennt der Derwisch' eine Reise} \\
\text{Und eine kurze. Freilich! Von zwei Spannen} \\
\text{Diesseits der Erde nach zwei Spannen drunter.} \\
\text{Ich will auf halbem Weg mich niederlassen!} \\
\text{Wer heut sein Haupt noch auf der Schulter trägt,} \\
\text{Hängt es schon morgen zitternd auf den Leib,} \\
\text{Und übermorgen liegt's bei seiner Perse.} \\
\text{Zwar, eine Sonne, sagt man, scheint dort auch,} \\
\text{Und über buntere Felder noch, als hier:} \\
\text{Ich glaub's; nur Schade, daß das Auge modert,} \\
\text{Das diese Herrlichkeit erblicken soll.} \quad [1286-96]
\end{align*}
\]

Homburg begins the monologue with the image of a dervish, which not only serves as a metaphor for wisdom, it recalls Lessing’s dervish in Nathan der Weise. The image of the dervish suggests Homburg has undergone a change; that he has reflected about life and death, however, he is not comforted by death. Life exists not just on earth, but like on a continuum, it moves from this world into the next world. At
this juncture, death does not offer Homburg meaning. Homburg’s recognition of "another" world demarcates his new eschatological view. In recognizing the existence of another world, thus of the afterlife, Homburg overcomes his fear of death. Fatalism, however, becomes apparent in the last four lines. He speaks in the subjunctive mood to describe what he has heard about the afterlife, i.e., the sun, brightness, and fields. Though he claims he believes that, he argues it does not matter because the body rots rendering one incapable of experiencing it. At this point [1289], Homburg decides to allow himself to be executed.\textsuperscript{158}

During the monologue Homburg reaches a new level of self-reflection. For Homburg, seeing his open grave is a crisis which profoundly affects his metaphysical views. One cannot overlook the similarity between this event and its effect on him and the effect the Kant-crisis has on Kleist. Both force each individual to modify their metaphysical views. Structurally, the monologue allows for Homburg’s feelings to come to light. Homburg, suddenly, seems to have insights about man’s existence. Kleist borrows from Shakespeare’s \textit{Henry VII} to offer an allegory of man’s existence [1290-92].\textsuperscript{159} The allegory suggests that Homburg perceives the dangers of arrogance, and overcomes his egocentric desire for fame at all costs. By recognizing the dialectic of life and death, the Prince shows how each
individual must undergo this process. He ends his monologue with a series of images of the afterlife as heaven-like, even though he questions them by implying that bodily decomposition prohibits one from experiencing the radiance. Death catapults one into a paradisiacal afterlife where the sun shines. His metaphors of light and color contrast sharply with his earlier references to darkness and shadows. The sun and brightness conjure an existence characterized by peace and serenity. The imagery of death moves astonishingly close to Kleist’s description of death in his farewell letters, in which death is no longer frightening.¹⁶⁰

In his acceptance of death, Homburg expresses a need to experience an exalted (erhaben) death. He comes to terms with his imminent execution, and his entire thought process is directed toward this end. It is not surprising, therefore, to see him react in an astonished manner when Natalie informs him of his possible release. Just as when he was arrested [765], Homburg reacts in disbelief that he could be freed, "Es ist nicht möglich! Nein! Es ist ein Traum!" [1305]. Homburg’s reality since his second monologue, that of preparing for his death, is threatened by this announcement. His decision to die is met by uncontrollable forces, namely Natalie’s involvement in his life and the Elector’s letter. Ironically, this fate-like force for the second time effects his life again. After
reading the Elector’s letter, Homburg objects to its demand that he must admit that he has been given an unjust death sentence [1307-13]. Having revealed in his second monologue that he recognizes the dangers of his unbridled desire for fame, an admission that he has been treated unjustly, would be to assess positively his actions during the battle. This admission would run counter to his desire to act in an exalted manner. The Prince’s new metaphysics are entirely personal. His values and beliefs apply to him only; therefore by recognizing his arrogance, he does not absolve the Elector from any responsibility in the affair or from acting in an unethical way. The Prince’s refusal to sign the letter is the first hint that he, as well as the Elector, are at fault. The letter provides a third ironic twist; while Homburg has already accepted death, the letter allows him to control his fate, i.e., life. He must decide whether he shall live or die, and he can manipulate this process to make his death appear as an exalted act.

Natalie, who does not perceive Homburg’s eschatological change, misinterprets his refusal to sign the letter as arrogance. She does not realize the importance Homburg places on his decision whether to die or live, and how this decision affects his control of his death. When he tells her that she has overlooked the most important line of the letter, she becomes confused, obviously unaware of his intention, as she utters, "Nein! - Welch?" [1341]. Even
after he explains it to her, she does not understand its importance, "Nun, ja!" [1343]. She finally comes to the conclusion that Homburg still suffers from arrogance, which is an insult to the Elector’s generosity [1345-50]. The Prince is forced to tell Natalie that he refuses to say that the Elector has treated him unfairly [1354-59]. He explains the importance of appearing dignified, takes responsibility for his behavior, and refuses to lay blame on another:

Ich will ihm, der so würdig vor mir steht,
Nicht, ein Unwürd’ger, gegenüber stehn!
Schuld ruht, bedeutende, mir auf der Brust,
Wie ich es wohl erkenne; kann er mir
Vergeben nur, wenn ich mit ihm drum streite,
So mag ich nichts von seiner Gnade wissen.

[1380-86]

Homburg recognizes that the Elector’s apparent generous decision is a veiled attempt to make Homburg appear as the arrogant aggressor, who is willing to place all responsibility on the Elector. Natalie, however, follows her cratological agenda; she must do everything in her power to keep Homburg alive, so that she will not be married to the Swedish duke. She leaves Homburg without understanding his true intentions, and begins her ultimate intrigue to keep Homburg alive.
J. Homburg’s Longing for Death: Reconciliation, a Good Deed, and Love

John Ellis and Erika Swales note that *Prinz Friedrich von Homburg* offers the reader many perspectives of the same event. Ellis argues that each reader must come to terms with the conflated perspectives of events in the drama (120), whereas Swales maintains the multi-perspectives of the text subvert the hermeneutic process (409). Each critic addresses how multi-perspectives of the text challenge the reader’s ability to interpret events and discourses; therefore they propose strategies for the reader to come to terms with the drama and to overcome potential discrepancies and textual contradictions. In the drama each character offers a different perspective of a wide range of discourses, and poses questions about governmental reform, obedience, and heroism. The drama’s multi-perspectivism, coupled with the inherent miscommunication between characters, challenge the reader’s perspectives. From the beginning of the drama, the Elector, and later Natalie interpret the Prince’s actions without understanding him nor why he committed them. The mutual lack of communication, as evidenced in Act I, scene 4 between the Prince and Hohenzollern, borders on comedy. The lack of communication and understanding leads Natalie and Hohenzollern to initiate plans to free Homburg. In
addition, misunderstanding and misinterpretation, which are at the surface of the drama’s motivational structure, allow other figures to interpret Homburg’s decision for death as heroic, even though Homburg desires no fame because of it.

While Natalie and Hohenzollern successfully begin their intrigues to save the Prince, the Prince is summoned by the Elector. On his way to him, Homburg views his grave for the third time (Act 5, scene 6). His desire to see his final resting place underscores his calmness and acceptance of death; in the days before his suicide, Kleist, too, walked around and viewed the Wannsee area in Berlin where he would end his life (Lebensspuren 532). The new location of Homburg’s grave is intriguing because it points to a major change in the Elector’s view of Homburg’s crime and death. During the Todesfurchtszene, Homburg refers to his grave as a "Grab" [982]; the grave, which Homburg saw because of lanterns near it, is located somewhere outside of the castle’s proximity on non-consecrated grounds. The location of a grave for a suicide or execution victim outside of a town’s boundaries corresponds to eighteenth and nineteenth century reality; even in the late twentieth century, such restrictions are common in Catholic cemeteries. An Officer informs the Elector that Homburg has gone to the "Kirchhof" [1727] to see the "Grabgewölbe" [1729] where he is to be buried. Though nothing is mentioned about how Homburg’s resting place moves from non-consecrated grounds to the
most-hallowed mausoleum in the church, the move signifies a shift in perspective. When Natalie visits Homburg with the Elector’s letter, she asks him "Saht Ihr die Gruft nicht schon im Münster?" [1325]. Her question whether he has seen the courtly mausoleum in the cathedral must be viewed as a rhetorical device used to make Homburg sign the Elector’s letter. From a dramaturgical perspective, Homburg has had no time to visit the cathedral. Natalie uses the image as a general reminder of his imminent death. The Elector has decided either on his own, or because of Natalie’s influence, to move Homburg’s final resting spot. The location of Homburg’s grave sharpens the difference between Homburg’s perspective of his death and the perspective of others who view it. Because Homburg will be buried with other nobility, and not in a grave outside of town, the court and its subjects can view Homburg’s death as a heroic suicide.

Historically, critics have overwhelmingly viewed Homburg’s actions in act 5, scene 7 as part of an overarching political interpretation; either Homburg recognizes his fault and dies to praise the Prussian state or the Prussian state functions as an iron fist which subjugates its greatest men.\textsuperscript{164} If we attempt to understand Homburg’s perspective of his death, an understanding of Kleist’s final letters may be a useful heuristic tool. I suggest Homburg’s actions and language concerning
reconciliation, a good deed, and love, find similar expression in Kleist’s farewell letters. Whereas Kleist wanted to reconcile with Ulrike after his argument with her, Homburg expresses a necessity to reconcile with the Elector. Secondly, the manner in which the Prince fulfills his last wish is remarkably similar to Kleist’s notion of a good deed. Finally, Homburg’s thematization of love, and its requisite before death parallel Kleist’s notions of love and references to Henriette Vogel.

Homburg reverently approaches the Elector to inform him of his decision to die. Though he has a reputation as a spontaneous and non-reflective character, he admits the decision has been reached only after a period of reflection, "Ich hab’s mir überlegt/ Ich will den Tod, der mir erkannt, erdulden!" [1744-45]. Homburg publicly announces that he accepts the death penalty, a practice common in eighteenth-century, as well as in contemporary judicial practice. The officers around him are quite naturally astonished. Their reaction to Homburg’s announcement contrasts sharply with the Prince’s reactions since the Todesfurchtszene. Since then, the Prince has been unpersuaded by the perspective of others. His metaphysical change is precipitated by his self-reflection, not because of Natalie’s involvement. The difference in reactions further complicates the communication process. Homburg tells the court, "Ruhig! Es ist mein unbeugsamer Wille!" [1749]. His exclamation for
quiet can be read on two levels. Literally, it refers to Homburg’s wish that the others stop speaking. Taken into context with his next sentence, it takes on symbolic significance; it is his unceasing desire to be "ruhig," in other words, to die and experience never-ending rest and calmness. The comment expresses his desire to transcend chaos and arrive at a new, peaceful existence. His following lines are perhaps the drama’s most polemical lines and the ones which have divided scholars since the drama’s publication:

Ich will das heilige Gesetz des Kriegs,  
Das ich verletzt’ im Angesicht des Heers,  
Durch einen freien Tod verherrlichen! [1750–52]

Though the lines point towards Homburg’s anagnorisis of his transcendence of military law, he has already addressed this issue while discussing the Elector’s letter with Natalie [1380–85]. In his second monologue he refers to the danger of an uncontrolled desire for fame. Homburg carefully chooses these words in front of the Elector to manipulate him. He has just voiced his desire to die [1745, 1749]; therefore he takes a calculated risk to ensure himself of the death he wants. In a psychological sense, the lines, because they evoke Homburg’s fault, make it easier for him to reconcile with the Elector.

Homburg views his death as a sign of his desire to reconcile with the Elector. By offering a gesture of reconciliation before he dies, Homburg wishes to receive the
Elector’s mercy [1771-75]. He speaks of this decision as emanating from his heart, underscoring his emotion and sincerity. The reconciliation is a symbolic penance where the Prince admits his sins, not just with regard to the Elector, and receives absolution, 167 "Der Tod wäscht jetzt von jeder Schuld mich rein" [1770]. By reconciling with the Elector, Homburg can die with a clear conscience. The image recalls Kleist’s farewell letter to Ulrike on 21 October 1811, in which he expresses his need to reconcile with her before he dies. The Prince’s absolution comes in the form of a last wish [1776-78]. With this wish Homburg is able to do a great deed, a notion which Kleist believed integral before dying. He asks the Elector not to marry Natalie to the Swedish duke, and the Elector consents [1779-85].

The Elector’s willingness to fulfill Homburg’s last wish unifies the themes of reconciliation, good actions, and love. The Elector, who passed the death sentence because of the Prince’s involvement with Natalie and its potential political repercussions, will inform the Swedish duke that Natalie, ironically, is Homburg’s bride [1790-93]. Homburg’s unconscious feelings for Natalie come to light in the dramas first scene, then are actualized after the battle. Since Homburg’s incarceration, Natalie mentions to him on two occasions that she will be loyal even after his death [1058, 1386-88]. In his farewell letters, Kleist raises the importance of dying while being in love or with
someone whom he loves. Homburg views love in a similar way. After hearing what the Elector will tell the Swedish duke, Homburg enthusiastically tells him, "Jetzt schenktest Du das Leben mir!" [1794]. He reads the Elector’s gesture as a symbolic approval of his love for Natalie, which through his death will be eternalized. Love for Homburg, like Kleist, is incorporated into his metaphysical views.

K. Homburg’s Third Monologue: The Enthusiastic Anticipation of Death and the Ironic Twist

One can draw a parallel between the content and imagery of Homburg’s third and final monologue and Kleist’s farewell letters. Both figures enthusiastically greet death, imply that their lives are complete, employ similar metaphors to describe death, and view death as eternal life. Alone, hearing the drumming of his death march, Homburg delivers his monologue:

Nun, o Unsterblichkeit, bist du ganz mein!  
Du strahlst mir durch die Binde meiner Augen,  
Mit Glanz der tausendfachen Sonne zu!  
Es wachsen Flügel mir an beiden Schultern,  
Durch stille Ätherräume schwingt mein Geist;  
Und wie ein Schiff, vom Hauch des Winds entführt,  
Die muntre Hafenstadt versinken sieht,  
So geht mir dämmerrnd alles Leben unter:  
Jetzt’ unterschied’ ich Farben noch und Formen,  
Und jetzt liegt Nebel Alles unter mir. [1830–39]

Homburg’s reference to his eternal life marks a metaphysical difference between the content and tone of this monologue and his second one. In the second monologue, Homburg’s view
focuses on the existence of the afterlife; here it focuses on his existence in the afterlife. Unlike in the second monologue, where he makes no specific reference to his existence in the afterlife, Homburg now envisions his ascent and existence in the other world. Blindfolded, he speaks as if he were having an out-of-body experience of his own death, which he fully imagines;¹⁶⁸ it is as if he physically experiences the radiance of the afterlife. This perception contrasts sharply to his second monologue when his vision mouldens prohibiting him from perceiving the afterlife. His mention of "Unsterblichkeit" implies that his life on earth is now complete, thus he can assume a different existence. Though not as strong as Kleist’s implications that he is mature for death or that he has no more to accomplish on earth, Homburg’s comments, taken in context with the preceding scenes, are thematically similar. Having reconciled with the Elector, performed a good deed, and eternalized his love for Natalie, Homburg believes he is ready to die.

Homburg’s imagery of death is characterized by spatial and color metaphors. Movement is directed upwards to the heavens, not downwards as in the Todesfurchtszene. Similar to Kleist, and corresponding to Lessing’s aesthetic norms, Homburg views death as a winged angel, only he grows the wings. In death, his spirit is freed from his body and moves towards the heavens, the "Ätherräume." With this
image, Homburg implies he will experience both physical and spiritual eternity. He uses the allegory of a ship leaving a harbor to express his departure from this world. The wind takes the ship out to sea, just as it will propel the winged angel to the heavens. The spirit’s movement upward is contrasted to the downward, sinking motion of the city. This difference highlights the positive transition from this world to the next. The approaching dusk and darkness of his life on earth contrast with the sun and brilliance of the afterlife. The movement within the monologue gives the impression that Homburg himself is moving, and like a Janus-headed figure, can look back on life and forward to afterlife. He describes the fog under him as if he were on his way to the heavens. By using images of darkness and fog to describe his existence on earth, Homburg passes consciously or unconsciously a value judgement on his earthly existence; darkness and fog are metaphors for the unclarity and multi-perspectivity which cloud one’s perception of reality on earth. Homburg implies that through death he can transcend the chaos on earth and attain a type of peace and clarity of mind found only in the afterlife.

Homburg’s reflection on his death and his existence in the afterlife heightens his awareness of nature. Up to this point in the drama, Homburg has not been receptive to nature, but on his way to the gallows, he smells flowers,
specifically violets. After asking his attendant to give him one, he exclaims, "Ich will zu Hause sie in Wasser setzen" [1845]. Unlike his attendant, Homburg's "zu Hause" is the afterlife. Kleist uses a Baroque and Romantic motif to refer to death as a return to one's home, in a sense, to the origin of one's existence. As Ariès shows, it was common in the eighteenth century to refer to people who died as making their final trip back home, or their trip to God.

Feeling as if he controls his fate and death, and having prepared mentally for his physical end and beginning of his spiritual afterlife, Homburg appears on the gallows when his blindfold is suddenly removed. Anticipating his death, he is unexpectedly crowned by Natalie. Because of the abrupt change in his expectation, the Prince faints. In Kleist's works, fainting usually occurs either when a figure's subjective reality meets objective reality or when one's expectations are confronted by an uncontrollable force. These reasons are applicable in Homburg as well; Homburg's subjective reality, his belief that he shall die, is confronted by objective reality, namely that the Elector pardons him; for Homburg, the Elector and his decision to pardon him are structurally similar to fate, an uncontrollable force. Homburg's fainting, carries, however, symbolic significance, which is supported by the comments immediately following it. His fainting is a symbolic suicide; the trauma of encountering reality is too much to
overcome and he dies.\textsuperscript{170} Natalie, in fact, thinks he has
died, "Die Freude tötet ihn" [1852]. The Elector orders
canons to be fired to awaken him, but ironically, this is
the same procedure which would have celebrated his heroic
death. While Homburg is still passed out, the crowd cheers
him, a response they would have had if he were
executed.\textsuperscript{171}

To overcome the crisis between his perception of
reality and reality itself, Homburg interprets all of the
actions as a dream.\textsuperscript{172} He asks Kottwitz "Ist es ein
Traum?" to which Kottwitz replies "Ein Traum, was sonst?"
[1856]. The ending of the drama leads the reader,
ironically, back to its beginning. By processing the
actions as a dream, Homburg effectively assumes the entire
affair of his arrest and sentencing is a dream, therefore
not reality. In this manner, Homburg is able to revert back
to his non-reflective, spontaneous existence at the drama’s
beginning. Forming a circle, the Prince begins and ends the
drama in a dream-state. During his course from beginning to
end, he moves from a non-reflexive- to reflexive-, and with
the conclusion, back to a non-reflexive character, and in
this sense, progress is achieved. Homburg undergoes a three
stage process of development, similar to that described in
\textit{Das Marionettentheater}. Homburg succeeds in initiating
certain changes in how the military will be viewed, how
battle orders will be given, and how great soldiers will be
treated. He also undergoes a personal transformation brought on by his reflection on death and subsequent metaphysical insights about death and the afterlife.

L. Metaphysical Views: Similarities Between Kleist and Homburg

The most glaring difference between Kleist and Homburg is their end: Homburg lives and Kleist dies. Homburg’s symbolic death, his collapse, closes the difference in this regard. More important, however, than the difference between their respective ends, is the similarity between their metaphysical and eschatological views. As I have shown, Kleist’s views on death and the afterlife develop during the course of his life. One specific event, his Kant-crisis, had a crucial effect on his developing metaphysics. The crisis, which in a broader perspective is one of many personal crises he endured, decentered his metaphysical grounding and led to a major paradigmatic shift. Kleist moves from a naive understanding of the Enlightenment to deconstructing it, and ultimately rejecting it. Accordingly, his views on the afterlife change. No longer do truth and knowledge form the crux of his worldly existence. Kleist develops his own value system, in which
the necessity to perform a good deed, and love take on added importance as prerequisites for death. Tormented by fate his entire life, Kleist becomes increasingly pessimistic of his ability to avoid it. His fear of fate increases his desire to control his death through suicide. Whereas a sudden death robs him of control, suicide establishes his control over life and fate.

If one analyses Prince Homburg’s developing views on suicide and death, one will see parallels between his and Kleist’s views. Even though Homburg’s and Kleist’s views on the afterlife do not undergo the exact chronological development, the final views are similar. The death penalty is analogous to the Kant-crisis; it forces Homburg to come to terms with his life and prompts his metaphysical reflection. Because of the unique circumstances surrounding his execution and his freedom to decide whether he shall live or die, Homburg manipulates his execution to appear structurally as a suicide, over which he, not an outside source, has control. In his monologues Homburg’s metaphysical insights come to light. The monologues function similarly to Kleist’s letters, in that they allow his emotions to appear. The most telling similarity between Kleist and Homburg is their imagery about death and the afterlife. As I have delineated, they both articulate a belief that their life is complete, therefore they believe they can die.
A danger always exists in literary criticism when one uses correspondence to interpret or validate a certain reading of a text. Because death is so prominent in Kleist’s oeuvre, his views on death and the afterlife, as expressed in his letters, offer the critic an excellent opportunity to uncover philosophical and thematic similarities and incongruities between his literary depiction of death and his personal views of it. In his last drama, written shortly before his death, one finds metaphysical and eschatological views which are similar to his own.
CONCLUSION

In his work *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung*, Wilhelm Dilthey writes: "Das Verhältnis, welches am tiefsten und allgemeinsten das Gefühl unseres Dasein bestimmt, [ist] das des Lebens zum Tode."\(^{173}\) Though he does not mention suicide, Dilthey addresses how each individual must come to terms with death, and how this process affects one’s life. He suggests that an individual’s view of the world and of humanity is related to his view of death. His comments about the relationship between life and death are insightful, especially when we undertake the endeavor to determine how one’s views are influenced by, or a reaction to, suicide. In the cases of Lessing, Goethe, and Kleist, we have three individuals, whose views on suicide shape their attitudes towards life and humanity. Through their problematization and thematization of suicide in their correspondence and literature, and even personal experiences, their conceptualization of suicide comes to light.

Although Lessing, Goethe, and Kleist lived and wrote within fifty years of one another, their conceptualization of suicide radically differs from one another. One cannot
overlook the originality of each author’s contribution to literature; however, each remains a product of his historical and intellectual period. With this in mind, one must recognize that each author was influenced by, and responded to, social, theological, and political views of suicide, even if the individual was unaware of these influences and responses. Eighteenth-century views of suicide were influenced by religious dogma and to a lesser degree, pagan, indeed superstitious beliefs. With the advent of the Enlightenment, which enabled the European debate on suicide to begin in the eighteenth century, intellectuals, authors, and philosophers were given the opportunity to discuss and thematize in literature the ethical and personal problems suicide raises. In their literature and correspondence, Lessing, Goethe, and Kleist break from traditional religious views of suicide, and address it in secular terms. Their secular view of suicide signals a paradigmatic shift in the view of suicide in the eighteenth century, and corresponds to the individual’s recognition of and assertion of himself.

Lessing’s views of suicide and his problematization of it in *Philotas* reveal his Enlightened view of humanity. This view of humanity has poetological consequences, as Lessing argues for an "Enlightened" form of tragedy, one which stresses sympathy and not fear, and calls for the end of the heroic tragedy, which is characterized by heroic
self-sacrifices, a type of suicide. *Philotas* is Lessing’s attempt to realize this poetological and Enlightened program. Reacting to the Seven Years War, Lessing is able to skirt censorship by portraying Philotas in an ambivalent light, which would allow for diametrically opposed interpretations of Philotas’s behavior and ultimate suicide in the name of the fatherland. Upon a closer examination of the paradoxes in Philotas’s behavior, we see how they reinforce, instead of weaken, Lessing’s intention to portray heroic suicide as irrational. The paradoxes in Philotas’s behavior underscore his fear of suicide and accentuate his attempt to manipulate his decision to die to appear as patriotic duty. With his problematization of and secular views of self-sacrifice in *Philotas* and his correspondence on tragedy with Mendelssohn and Nicolai, Lessing reveals his skepticism and signals his break from accepted theological, political, and poetological norms.

Goethe’s *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* is the paramount text on suicide of the eighteenth century. The epistolary novel, far from being Goethe’s advocacy of suicide, is his attempt to depict in a literary fashion, the human side of suicide. By reflecting on his own suicidal urges in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, Goethe brings suicide to a personal level, and suggests that each individual must come to terms with his view on suicide despite religious or political consequences. When one reads *Werther*, that is precisely the
task Goethe presents; Goethe refrains from passing a moral or religious judgement, instead forces the reader to do this. The reader must interpret Werther’s actions, and in doing so the reader articulates his views on suicide. On the interpretive level, Goethe portrays Werther’s struggle with suicide. Arising from his pathological sickness is a death instinct, a conviction that his suicide is irreversible and the only way to end his suffering caused by the clash of his self-constructed perspective of reality and reality itself. Werther ultimately commits suicide to self-construct his fragmented existence and to reestablish control over his life.

Whereas Lessing regarded suicide as irrational, and Goethe admitted his suicidal urges and reflected on how he overcame them, Kleist views suicide as an essential act which enables him to control his existence and fate. Kleist becomes disillusioned with the Enlightenment, of which his Kant-crisis is just one aspect. In reaction to the Enlightenment, Kleist begins to question his belief in absolutes, especially knowledge and truth. While becoming increasingly aware of his existence as an individual, he expresses in his letters a belief that fate controls his life. Though scholars have argued that Kleist was in love with death, Kleist reveals a fear of a sudden death, because such an end robs him of the necessary control over his life. Reacting to this fear, Kleist reflects on the possibilities
of suicide as a measure to avoid an arbitrary death. In his final letters, he depicts his suicide and ultimately death in Enlightened terms, evoking Lessing’s *Wie die Alten den Tod gebildet haben*. Death, specifically death by one’s own hands in not to be feared, but greeted. In *Prinz von Homburg*, Kleist creates a medium for the protagonist to reflect on death and the afterlife. The development of Homburg’s views is similar, but not identical to Kleist’s. During the course of Homburg’s three monologues, literal and figurative, and symbolic similarities between Homburg’s and Kleist’s language and thoughts as they pertain to death come to light. With his body of correspondence, in which suicide forms a leitmotif, and *Prinz Friedrich von Homburg*, Kleist merges the discussion of embracing death with his own death, and in this way embraces suicide.

Kleist’s views on suicide and the individual in crisis uncover modern fears and concerns of humanity. With the belief in absolutes destroyed, the individual must rely on himself to forge an existence based on his perceptions of the world. In the early nineteenth century, nihilism, which is a response to the lack of philosophical and religious grounding, as well as to the actual political situation of the Napoleonic Wars, appears as a literary motif. One may think of Bonaventura’s *Nachtwachen*, Büchner’s *Danton’s Tod*, or Gutzkow’s *Wally, die Zweiflerin*. Schopenhauer’s insights
about suicide serve as a heuristic tool to shed on nihilism and why suicide is a reaction to it.
Endnotes


2. Whenever possible, sources will be cited within the document. Bibliographic information for such sources is located in the bibliography.

3. The word "suicide" did not become commonplace in the English language until the mid-to-late eighteenth century, approximately a century later than its counterpart in German. Although it first appeared in a religious document by Sir Thomas Browne, Religio Medici in 1642, it remained uncommon for the next century, and did not appear in the 1755 edition of Dr. Johnson’s Dictionary, a seminal English language dictionary of the mid-eighteenth century. As in German speaking countries, many derivatives appeared, such as "self-murder," "self-destruction," "self-killing," "self-homicide," and "self-slaughter," which connotate murder and carry an explicit negative judgement of the act. Unlike their similar German counterparts, these words have disappeared from the English language and sound archaic to the native speaker.


6. Two recent publications attest to society’s interest in suicide and confirm its willingness to enter a discourse on suicide despite its still-existing taboo. The journalist Roger Willemsen edited Der Selbstmord in Berichten, Briefen, Manifesten, Dokumenten und literarischen Texten (Cologne: Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 1986), a diverse collection of
writings pertaining to suicide, including the first German translations of several English and French texts, as well as excerpts from rare German documents which focus on philosophical, religious, and legal aspects of suicide. Gabrielle Dietz edited a similar work, Todeszeichen. Freitod in Selbstzeugnissen (Franfurt/Main: Insel, 1989), a collection of suicide letters and observations about suicide by suicide victims.

7. As the first thorough bibliography on suicide, containing entries written in almost all European languages, Rost’s bibliography serves as an excellent research starting point, with 3771 titles organized by theme, such as theological, literary, and philosophical works.


9. Emilio Motto, Bibliographia del suicidio (Bellinzona: C. Salvonia, 1890). This work contains titles from the sixteenth century to 1889.


11. Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglauben, vol.7, 1628. Further references to the work will be cited within the text as HddA.

12. Some eighteenth-century reactions to the corpse of a suicide victim are common even in the twentieth century. Zedler’s writes, "Wenn auch ein schwangeres Weib sich selbst umgebracht, so soll man ihr den Leib, so viel möglich, als bald aufschneiden, damit das Kind entweder noch bey dem Leben erhalten oder wenigstens nicht zugleich mit der schuldigen Mutter des gewöhnlichen Begräbnisses beraubt werde" (Zedler 1611). This practice of removing an unborn child in order to save it or to give it a proper Christian burial, which its mother would be denied, still exists.

14. Zedler, 1603. References are made to John Donne and Johannis Robeck.

15. Other suicides include Abimelech, Saul, Saul’s servant, Ahitofel, Simri, Eleasar, Pfolmeus Makron, Qasi, and Judas Iskriot.

16. Leß (1736-1797) was appointed professor of theology at the University of Göttingen in 1763, a post he held until his death. A staunch conservative, Leß fought against the influences of deism.

17. As a student at the University of Helmstadt, Miller (1725-1789) was influenced by the theologian von Mosheim. He was appointed professor at the University of Göttingen in 1766.


19. Though a faculty member at the University of Göttingen, Grodeck (1762-1824) is better known as a Classics scholar, and later professor of Classics at the University of Viinius, Lithuania.

20. Sailer (1751-1832) was one of the most respected Catholic theologians of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. While a Jesuit and later Bishop of Regensburg, he crusaded against the evils of politics and literature. His influential pamphlet was reprinted as late as 1919, during the outbreak of suicides after World War I.

21. The German tiles are: "Der Selbstmord ist eine Empörung gegen den Naturtrieb der Selbstverhaltung," "Selbstmord ist ein eigenmächtiges Eingriff in die Oberherrschaft des Schöpfers," and "Selbstmord...ist der Tod all vernünftigen, aufgeklärten, erleuchteten Gottes-, Menschen- und Selbstliebe."


23. Knüppeln goes into detail about why Frederick II issued the second decree and what the effects of it were (36-37).

24. Both Knüppeln (37) and Rost (190) elaborate further on this controversy.
25. Bernstein 33. He dates the height of Frederick II’s and Voltaire’s friendship to be from 10 July 1750 to 26 March 1753.


27. E. Miller, ed. of David Hume’s "Of Suicide," looks at the publishing history of the essay. Hume wrote the essay in 1755, but upon the urging of friends decided not to publish it at that time. Miller mentions that a French translation may have existed as early as 1770, but Hume was unaware of any unauthorized copies of his manuscript.

28. Samuel Sprott’s, The English Debate on Suicide (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1961) is an excellent survey of the English philosophical and theological debate on suicide beginning with Donne and going through the nineteenth century. He includes several lesser known works justifying and condemning the act.

29. Osiander (1759-1832) was one of the leading physicians in Germany during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. He served as a professor at the University of Göttingen from 1792 until his death. He published extensively in the field of medicine. He views suicide as a sickness which can be healed.

30. Alvarez provides a detailed overview of Freud’s ideas about suicide, 90-104.

31. The Viennese psychologist Erwin Stengel views suicide as a personal decision with social implications. In his work Selbstmord und Selbstmordversuche he refutes Durkheim’s notion of a collective conscience and suggests a psycho- dynamic of suicide. A dialectic between psychic powers leading to suicide and defending suicide exists. When the dialectic is disrupted, suicide occurs.

32. Please refer to bibliography for works not cited in complete form. Lamport argues that the drama fails because it is "unduly rhetorical" and because it makes no concessions to the theater-going middle class public of the eighteenth century (105). Lamport seems disappointed that Philotas does not depict bourgeois characters after the success of Miß Sara Sampson; therefore the work is a step backwards into the realm of traditional tragedies. Friedrich Sengle reads the drama as a historical drama and a "Produkt der Kriegskonjunktur," see Sengle, Das deutsche Geschichtsdrama (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1952) 20. Similar to Sengle, Otto Mann considers the drama to be of lesser importance than other Lessing works because it is a

33. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Briefe von und an Lessing 1743-1770*, *Werke und Briefe*, ed. Wilfried Barner, 12 vols. (Frankfurt/Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1987) Vol. 11/1: 314–15. Lessing to Gleim, 18 March 1759. Subsequent references to letters will be noted by addressee and date, as well as volume and page number. References to other Lessing works, except *Philotas*, will be from the Klassiker Verlag edition of his works, and be noted by title of work and volume number. I have chosen to use the Klassiker Verlag edition of Lessing’s works because of its extensive commentary on individual works and its modern format. At the present time, the Klassiker Verlag has not yet published the volume containing Lessing’s early dramas. Consequently, I use the Paul Rilla, Aufbau edition for *Philotas* only. The Lachmann-Müncker edition of 1886–1924 is invaluable as a historical-critical edition and a philological tool, but it lacks commentary on individual works. Beyond this, it may be less accessible to the reader.

34. Lessing to Gleim 31 March 1759, vol. 11/1, 318–19. Lessing’s use of the "Übersetzung" means adaptation into poetic verse.

35. Lessing’s *Philotas* was not published until after Easter, 1759 by C.F. Voß in Berlin, and appeared anonymously.


41. Although she outlines Lessing’s debate with Nicolai and Mendelssohn on tragedy, Gadeke-Schmidt suggests that Lessing writes Philotas to satirize Racine’s unsuccessful tragedy Alexandre le Grand (1665) and to refute Gottsched’s poetics (Gadeke-Schmidt 1-4). It would be a disservice to the literary value of Philotas to suggest it was written for such a limited purpose of satirizing one work. Lessing does refute Gottsched’s poetics, which is at the crux of his debate with Nicolai and Mendelssohn.

42. Lessing to Nicolai, November, 1756, vol.11/1, 116-22.

43. Liewerschied rightly sees Lessing’s break with literary tradition as a signal of his move towards Classicism, "Die römisch-historische Tradition des deutschen Barock und des französischen Klassismus wird historisch verabschiedet durch ein griechisch-menschliches Persönlichkeitsideal, das auf die Klassik vorausweist" (292).

44. Lessing to Mendelssohn, 28 November 1756, vol.11/1, 128-33.

45. In his 18 December letter to Mendelssohn, Lessing writes, "Der bewunderte Held, habe ich mich gegen Hrn. Nicolai ausgedrückt, ist der Stoff des Heldengedichts," vol.11/1, 144-54. Gadeke-Schmidt points out, "Wenn wirklich etwas Neues im Bereich der Dichtkunst entstehen sollte, so konnte dies nur durch eine Trennung von Heldengedicht und Tragödie geschehen und durch ein neues Verhältnis zum Endzweck beider" (64).

46. Lessing to Gleim, 14 February, 1759, vol.11/1, 310-12.

47. See Barner’s entire argument, 252-254.


49. Lessing’s May 1757 letter to Gleim contains the draft of an ode about Frederick the Great, vol.11/1, 187-89. Though a definitive date of the letter is unknown, some philologists date it 12 May 1757. Lessing’s 14 June 1757 letter contains the draft for the death of the Marshal of Schwerin, vol.11/1, 210-14.

50. Citations from Philotas will be noted within the text by scene and page number.
51. I agree with Denton’s observation, "Der Selbstmord kommt nicht in Frage, solange es nur um seine Ehre geht... Philotas braucht einen Grund, seinen Selbstmord zu rechtfertigen" (219). Philotas’s reason is Polymet’s captivity. I disagree with Denton’s suggestion that Lessing criticizes Ewald von Kleist through Philotas’s willingness to die. Denton refers to Lessing’s 6 September 1759 letter to Gleim in which he laments Kleist’s death. Denton perceives Lessing’s tone as critical of Kleist’s military endeavors and insinuates that the result of war is death. Denton, however, overlooks Lessing’s genuine concern for Kleist and his own sadness, which causes him to stop the letter short. Lessing admits Kleist’s involvement in the war suggests he wanted to die, "Er hat sterben wollen," vol.11/1, 332-33. This quote is often taken out of context to illustrate Lessing’s critique of war. In the context of the letter, the quote represents Lessing’s grief that such a young and talented soldier/author died before his time. In "'Er hat sterben wollen' Vorüberlegung zu Philotas," Streitkulturen. Strategien des Überzeugens im Werk Lessings, eds. Wolfram Mauser & Günter Saße (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1993) 373-78, Alexander Michalow also misappropriates this quote to suggest that Philotas wishes to die like Penthesilea. Michalow makes the disastrous claim that Lessing himself entertained ideas of suicide by referring to Lessing’s 8 April 1774 letter to his wife, Eva König, in which he writes, "Ich würde mit mehrerer Freudeigkeiten in den Tod gehen," vol.11/2, 633-35. Michalow fails to read Lessing’s sarcasm in this letter, as well as its context. Lessing’s comments refer to his disdain of a colleague’s, Christian Mayer’s, request that Lessing write and visit him in Mannheim.

52. Lessing, Hamburgische Dramaturgie, number 48, 13 October 1767, vol.6, 419-23.

53. Philotas appears as a dramatic creation, not as an individual. He lacks psychological development and individuality to be considered similar to Goethe’s Werther.

54. Schneider suggests that Philotas’s experience immediately leads him to the decision to commit suicide, "Der heroiße Entschluß zum Selbstmord steigt irrational aus Philotas’ Innern auf und wird in der Weise einer plötzlichen religiösen Eingebung begrüßt" (A.20). Schneider overlooks Philotas’s questioning whether his death would produce the intended heroic results. Philotas arrives at the decision only after a period of reflection, not immediately.

55. Such a comment underscores Philotas as a dramatic construct, not as a psychological figure. The drama supposedly takes place in antiquity, but Philotas speaks as
if he were in the eighteenth century. In Antiquity, the corpse was as important as the living person. Aridädus would not have just a useless corpse; instead he would possess something of great bargaining value, because Philotas’s father would go to great measures to secure Philotas’s corpse for a proper burial. Such a motif appears in Antigone. One sees how Lessing’s ideas are presented through the figure of Philotas.


59. In his formulation of the categorical imperative, Kant focuses only on the will of an individual to determine the morality of an act. The results are not considered. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophers, such as John Stuart Mill, have challenged Kant’s notion of morality by suggesting one can never know what another individual thinks; therefore the focus in determining morality should be on the end result, exclusive of the will. Kant argues, however, that one can never determine the intentions of another’s will, but one can determine if an action is committed in accordance with duty.

60. Burgard notes that Philotas’s behavior fluctuates between enthusiasm and stoicism, such as in the first scene. Burgard does not adequately explain the conflict; he suggests that Philotas’s behavior is typical of the aristocracy.

61. In the first dependent clause, the word können, should be kann, könne, or könnte to be correct grammatically. It is apparently a misprint from the original.

62. Without attempting to explain Philotas’s desire for heroism, Neumann passes a value judgement, “das heroische Leitbild des Prinzen erscheint als Wahn” (34).

63. Curiously Eibl suggests that it is uncertain whether Philotas’s decision to commit suicide is approved, “Fraglich jedoch ist, ob Lessings Konzeption, ob das Wertsystem des
gesamten Drama von der Art ist, daß die Entscheidung des Philotas zu Selbstmord gebilligt wird" (170).

64. Without defining his term, Denton calls Philotas a "Wiederholungsspiel, in dem Philotas seinen eigenen Tod entwirft und inszeniert" (214). He argues that Philotas avoids thinking, and attempts to realize his plans of heroism at the expense of rationality. His monologues have the singular purpose of producing the required act: suicide (215-16). Denton does not believe that Philotas ever doubts or questions his suicide; rather Denton contends that Philotas manipulates irrationality to appear as rationality (219).

65. Shaftesbury’s three works major works Letter Concerning Enthusiasm (1707), The Moralists (1709), and Miscellaneous Reflections (1711) all address the notion of enthusiasm. He differentiates between a "true" and "false" notion of enthusiasm. False enthusiasm is the type exhibited by religious fanatics and results in misunderstanding of absolute truth. True enthusiasm, characterized by intense emotions, leads one to virtue and truth. Shaftesbury believes that all actions, such as learning, writing, or painting are products of enthusiasm. For a better understanding of Shaftesbury’s notion of enthusiasm, see Stanley Grean’s introduction to Shaftesbury’s complete works, Characteristics, vols. 1 & 2, ed. John M. Robertson (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), and Grean’s work Shaftesbury’s Philosophy of Religion and Ethics (Athens, OH: Ohio U P, 1967).

66. During his correspondence with Lessing about tragedy, Mendelssohn refers to Shaftesbury as a "Weltweise" (27 Feb 1757). Lessing does not comment on this claim in his subsequent letter. In letters 10 and 12 of the Briefe, die neueste Literatur betreffend Lessing refers to Shaftesbury in a negative manner. In letter 12, he admonishes Wieland for his laudatory comments about Shaftesbury and his ideas on religion. He writes "Shaftesbury ist der gefährlichste Feind der Religion, weil er der feinste ist." Lessing implies that Wieland fails to grasp the subtleties of Shaftesbury’s philosophy. In his essay "Von der Art und Weise der Fortpflanzung und Ausbreitung der Christlichen Religion" Lessing writes about the dangers of Shaftesbury’s concept of enthusiasm "Der Enthusiasmus ist eine wahre ansteckende Krankheit der Seele, die mit einer unglaublichen Geschwindigkeit um sich greift. Shaftesbury." To support my claim that Lessing ironizes Shaftesbury in Philotas, I refer the reader to Lessing’s 1755 work Pope ein Metaphysiker, in which he parodies Shaftesbury by comparing him to Leibniz. Lessing sarcastically writes that everyone has misinterpreted Leibniz’s view of nature, and that it is
Shaftesbury, in fact, who has the clearest understanding of nature and natural order.

67. I use the term private sphere to refer to the family and individuals’ informal inter-personal relationships within that realm; the public sphere refers to the nobility and military, and their formal relationships, founded on feudal traditions and inherent power structures.

68. Critics have concentrated on Philotas’s conflict with his father, but have avoided delving into his view of the public and private spheres and the consequences this view has for the family. Critics rightly view Philotas’s dialogues with Strato, Aridäus, and Parmenio as proof of Philotas’s conflict with his father, but the conflict fits into a larger picture of the family in the eighteenth century. In Philotas’s conflict with his father, Lessing’s criticizes the public sphere and how it destabilizes and ultimately destroys the family by fostering ideas of heroism.

69. Despite such textual evidence, Wehrli maintains that Philotas does not differentiate between private and public spheres; however she admits the public sphere determines his actions (89).

70. Burgard also comes to this conclusion (447) but does not thematize the private and public sphere. He sees Philotas as rejecting society and freedom.

71. Throughout their conversations, Aridäus speaks of the family and reason in the same breath, suggesting their natural association. Philotas, who rejects the family as weakness and a barrier to his heroism, objects to Aridäus’s continual reference to his father and how reason dictates that he should be happy to be united with him again.

72. Wehrli writes about Philotas’s misunderstanding of an enlightened education, "die Vernunft, die für den Aufklärer als wichtiges Erkenntnisorgan die Kontrolle über das menschliche Handeln übernehmen soll, wird ad absurdum geführt, in dem sie vom Gefühl und damit auch vom privaten, individuellen Bereich abgetrennt wird, um sich als Instrument ideologischer Indoktrinierung zu verselbstständigen und zu verabsolutieren" (93). She suggests that Philotas, like Frederick II, possesses an enlightened education, which he manipulates to support his absolutist tendencies.

73. After admitting his astonishment, Philotas replies, "Ach!- Auch ein Weib kann man mit Erstaunen hören" (VII 126). This comment demonstrates again how Philotas uses women, as the symbol of the family, to refer to things of little or no value.
74. Vincenti contends that Philotas is truthful to himself and to others, and that his actions produce an atmosphere of directness (203). If this were the case, then Aridäus would have recognized that Philotas would kill himself with the sword presented to him.

75. I disagree with Ter-Nedden’s suggestion that Philotas commits suicide "weil er sich verlassen von seinen "Gefährten," "Freunden," und "Brüdern," umringt vom "Feind" erlebt hat und weil er der antizipierte Wiederholung dieser Erfahrung zu entkommen sei" (146). Though Philotas is ashamed to see his father and subjects again, all textual evidence suggests they harbor no ill feelings towards him.

76. In his correspondence Lessing makes no reference to melancholy as a reason for suicide.

77. Liewerscheidt argues that all action in the drama revolves around the admiration of Philotas (294). Metzger writes that Philotas hopes that his "suicide will materially affect the world behind." By suggesting that Philotas is a martyr, Metzger insinuates that the audience can admire his actions (97). Schulz contends that the audience can admire and love Philotas because of Parmenio’s and Strato’s praise of him (244). Each of these readings fails to grapple with Philotas’s incongruous behavior throughout the drama. Curiously, none perceives the disastrous effects Philotas’s decision has on others.

78. All quotes from Dichtung und Wahrheit are from the Hamburger edition of Goethe’s collected works, volume 9. Future references to Dichtung und Wahrheit will be noted within the text by the abbreviation D&W, followed by the book and page numbers.


80. Kestner was not active in the "Tafelrunde" where Goethe met so may other colleagues of the court and indulged himself in conversations literary and philosophical.
81. The ball took place on June 9, 1772, at least three months after Goethe’s first encounter with Kestner. Because of professional duties Kestner did not accompany Charlotte to the ball, but did arrive later that evening.

82. From Kestner’s diary (1772). E. Berend, ed. Goethe, Kestner und Lotte (Munich, 1914): 100.

83. Flaschka argues that Goethe’s obsession with Charlotte ended at the time of writing Werther, (Flaschka 33). Edgar Hein notes that Goethe asked for a new silhouette from Lotte on August 31, 1774, several months after the appearance of Werther, and again in 1775 and 1776 (17–18), which implies that Goethe may have still been interested in her. Because the practice of exchanging silhouettes was common during this period of sentimentality, it is difficult to ascertain what was custom and genuine interest on Goethe’s behalf.

84. W. Migge also perceives Goethe’s voluntary departure from Wetzlar as an act of self-preservation, not only for himself, but for Kestner and Charlotte. Goethes Werther. Entstehung und Wirkung (Frankfurt/Main: Insel, 1967) 19.

85. Hein suggests "Goethes menschliche Teilnahme an dem Ereignis (Jerusalem’s suicide) wird überlagert von seinen literarischen Interesse" (14).


87. There is no exact information why Goethe waited one year after receiving the information on Jerusalem’s death to write the novel. He seems to have had difficulty conceptualizing the work and finding the best novel form.

88. Whereas I suggest Werther’s death instinct manifests itself after his initial encounter with Lotte, Thomas Mann suggests that Werther’s death instinct is the reason for his attraction to Lotte, "Werthers Todesinstinkt...läßt ihn auf eine aussichtslose, verderbliche Liebe fallen" (14).

89. Flaschka, for example, suggests Werther’s suicidal drive results from his suppressed sexual urge for Lotte. Sexuality is taboo and a reason for suicide, "Die Tabuisierung des Sinnlichen treibt [Werther] soweit, sich eine Kugel in den Kopf schießen zu wollen" (229). Erika Nolan suggests that Lotte encourages Werther’s feelings for her. Werther, however, suppresses his sensual and sexual desires for Lotte because he elevates her to the role of a "Heilige" (191, 203, 204).
In a current review, Thomas Saine comments about the Hamburger edition of Goethe’s works, "I blame contemporary confusion with regard to the text of Werther primarily on the existence of the Hamburger Ausgabe, which prints only the second version of the novel...If I could be God for a day, I would be sorely tempted to recreate the universe without the Hamburger Ausgabe." Review of Werther’s Goethe and the Game of Literary Creativity, by Deidre Vincent, Goethe Yearbook 7 (1993): 248. I agree with Saine’s assessment of the problems arising from printing just one version of Werther. My discussion of the novel and the cited passages are from the second version (1787) and are from the Hamburger edition, volume 6. I have chosen to cite the Hamburger edition because of its widespread use in academia and accessibility in university libraries. All citations will be noted within the text with only the date of the epistle given.

I use the word naive in the Schillerian sense of non-reflexive, as opposed to the sentimental, self-reflexive personality.

Although Werther claims to be unable to describe nature’s beauty adequately, he attempts to describe nature’s appearance in most of his early letters. He describes how he loses himself in nature, wishing to transcend reality and become part of nature: "Die Einsamkeit ist meinem Herzen köstlicher Balsam in dieser paradiesischen Gegend, und diese Jahreszeit der Jugend wärmt mit aller Fülle mein oft schaunderndes Herz. Jeder Baum, jede Hacke ist ein Strauß von Blüten, und man möchte zum Maienkäfer werden, um in dem Meer von Wohlgerüchten herumschweben und alle seine Nahrung darin finden zu können" (May 4).

Blackall writes that Werther breaks out of his self-centered world and "the effect of this break-out...has been for Werther to lose the external world except for that part of it which pertains to Lotte" (25). Upon meeting Lotte Werther’s relationship to the external world is predicated on a limited view of reality.

"Werther wünsche oder suche gar keine feste Verbindung mit Lotte. Ehe das Gegenteil ist der Fall; alles deutet darauf hin, daß er diesen Schritt nicht tun will" (Nolan 201).

I agree with Fricke’s suggestion that Werther has created his portrayal of Lotte, but not only because of his heart (B.157). True his heart played a role, but Werther used Lotte to support his self-styled naive existence and world view.

246
96. Werther writes, "Und kannst du von dem Unglücklichen, dessen Leben unter einer schleichenden Krankheit unaufläschmlich abstirbt, kannst du von ihm verlangen, er solle durch einen Dolchstoß der Qual auf einmal ein Ende machen? Und raubt das Übel, das ihm die Kräfte verzeht, ihm nicht auch zugleich den Mut, sich davon zu befreien?" (August 8).

97. Asslingen argues that Werther ignores Wilhelm’s advice in favor of the idealistic advice from his own conscience, "so rettet Werther seine Liebe um den Preis ihrer Wirklichkeit; er gibt sie auf, um an ihr festhalten zu können" (156). He reads this letter as Werther’s recognition that his self-constructed world is deceptive.

98. Werther’s definition of courage deviates from the traditional meaning of "bravery in the face of adversity." His definition is self-referential, that one (he) must be strong-willed enough to continue his subjective world, despite realizations that it is limiting.

99. Reiss suggests Werther is a neurotic, whose sickness has "ihren Ursprung im Mißbrauch der Einbildungskraft" (49).

100. Flaschka interprets Werther’s despair resulting from his suppression of the past, "Die Verdrängung beginnt zu versagen. So drängt sich Werthers Vergangenheit, der er abgeschworen hatte, bezeichnenderweise zu dem Zeitpunkt wieder ins Bewußtsein, als die Zuflucht in die Natur mehr und mehr mißlingt" (227). Werther’s difficulties do not arise because of his willingness to forget the past, "ich will das Gegenwärtige genießen" (May 4), rather they begin when he must decide either to continue his subjective existence or enter into empirical reality.

101. In his essay on Werther, Thomas Mann describes Werther’s defense of suicide as "theoretisch" (16). I agree that Werther leads the argument with Albert in a logical manner, trying to prove several points, but one should not overlook that Werther is passionate about his convictions. The term theoretical elevates logic over emotion, which Werther does not do.

102. Werther uses the word "lasterhaft," and gives in to Albert not so much because he agrees with him, rather so that he can begin his argument and force Albert to reconsider his earlier statement.

103. Upon hearing the examples, Albert replies, "Nimm mir’s gar nicht übel, die Beispiele, die du da gibst, scheinen hier gar nicht zu gehören." In one of the few moments where Werther shows his humor, he replies, "Es mag sein, sagte ich
man hat mir schon öfters vorgeworfen, daß meine Kombinationsart manchmal an Radotage grenze."

104. The stress in the dependant clause is my own.

105. I disagree with Reiss’ suggestion that Werther’s sickness could be healed if he were to leave, arguing that Werther can get along with others, such as the peasantry and some nobility (Reiss 52). Close reading shows that Werther is incapable of getting along with others. Werther uses others to give his life meaning, and does not establish a reciprocal friendship with anyone in the text.

106. Reiss places no importance on Werther’s departure from Lotte and Albert, suggesting "Werther selbst glaubt, daß sein Leben richtig geführt ist" (25).

107. Goethe was interested in types of suicide, and in Dichtung und Wahrheit writes that suicide by dagger is the only honorable way to commit suicide. He differentiates between types of suicide, either by gun, hanging, poison, or slashing the wrists, and posits death by dagger as an "edle Tat." He uses the specific story of King Otto’s suicide by dagger and writes "diese einzige Tat schien mir nachahmungswürdig, und ich überzeugte mich, daß wer nicht herien handeln könne wie Otto, sich nicht erlauben dürfe, freiwillig aus der Welt zu gehen" (D&W, XIII, 627-8)

108. Similar to Lukacs, Hans-Heinrich Reuter suggests an economic interpretation for Werther’s suicide. He refers to Werther as a "gekreuzigte Prometheus" because of the historical situation in which he lives. Unlike other Goethe works which are not set in historical reality, Werther is rooted in a historical period. Werther strives, but fails to break through the economic and class barriers set upon him. Reuter, like Lukacs, fails to grapple with questions of personal relationship and the restrictions of Werther’s self-imposed perspective of reality. Hans-Heinrich Reuter, "Der gekreuzigte Prometheus: Goethes Roman Die Leiden des jungen Werthers," Goethe Jahrbuch 89 (1972): 86-115.

109. Bennett argues that education causes the misunderstandings between Lotte and Werther. He suggests Werther is cultured, aware of the arts, and Lotte is an ordinary woman, whose "artistic and cultural pretensions...are not justified." Lotte needs Werther in part because she is a "habitual breaker of hearts," and as her conquest, Werther is her "lifeline to a fuller world, her personal minister of culture" (66).
110. Nolan suggests Albert and Lotte are responsible for Werther’s suffering and ultimately his decision to commit suicide. She suggests Werther becomes involved in a love triangle, and an act of violence is necessary to free one of them (191-92).

111. In Graber’s psycho-analytic interpretation of the novel, he suggests on December 4 Werther quickly makes the decision to commit suicide. All other inferences to suicide were ingenuine.

112. Comments by the fictional narrator will be denoted by page number in the text instead of dates; 101.

113. The fictional narrator writes about Lotte’s decision to remove Werther from her life: "sie wußte, wie viel es ihm kosten, ja daß es ihm beinahe unmöglich sein würde," 101.

114. Vincent argues that the farm boy story inserted in the second edition of Werther is actually Goethe’s account of his life and love for Charlotte von Stein between 1782 and 1786. I refer the reader to her complete argument comparing Goethe’s life with the farm boy’s, pages 161-85.

115. Bennett argues that Werther does not understand his death and his "suicide up to the last minute is not the inevitable result of sufficient causes" (74).

116. Thomas Saine argues that she is actively involved in his death because she encourages Werther’s affection, fails to confront Albert about the potential problems and does not help Werther after 21 December, when she knows he will commit suicide (77). "The Portrayal of Lotte in the Two Versions of Goethe’s Werther," Journal of English and Germanic Philology 80 (1981): 54-77.

117. Heinrich von Kleist, Prinz Friedrich von Homburg, Sämtliche Werke und Briefe, Vol.1. Ed. Helmut Sembdner (Munich: Hanser, 1961). Line 1830. All citations from Homburg are from the Sembdner edition of Kleist’s works, and will be noted by line number within the document. There has been considerable attention given to, and controversy about, the various Kleist editions of the past three decades. The Sembdner edition has been a standard edition for Kleist scholars for almost four decades. At the present time, the Klassiker Verlag edition of Kleist’s complete works is not completed. See Jens Dirksen’s article, "Kleist lesen heißt nicht immer Kleist verstehen. Die allmäßlichen verfertigten Kleist-Ausgaben," text + kritik, Ed. Heinz Ludwig Arnold. (Munich: text + kritik, 1993) 192-205, which presents the history of critical editions of Kleist’s works.
118. To Martini, Letter no.3, pp 472-86. All citations of Kleist’s correspondence are from Heinrich von Kleist, Sämtliche Werke und Briefe, Vol.2. Ed. Helmut Sembdner. The date of each letter and its addressee will be noted in the manuscript, and in parentheses the letter number and its page number in the Sembdner edition will be noted.

119. Arntzen suggests Kleist’s body of letter’s demonstrates his search for language. He reads this letter to Martini as evidence of a language crisis, where Kleist attempts to free himself from social restrictions and develop a personal language (66-67).

120. Kleist identifies generosity, steadfastness, modesty, frugality, and charity as the "moralische Schönheiten" (476), but he does not elaborate on them.

121. I agree with Baker’s claim that "Kleist believed that only by clinging to basic ethical precepts can one endure the onslaught of misunderstanding and deception in a confused and decrepit world" (4). Though he does not define this as Kleist’s quest for Glück, Kleist’s early (pre-Kant-crisis) belief in absolute ideas and a naive Enlightened ethical system is a characteristic of his life-plan which leads to Glück, while avoiding fate. By late 1800 this belief in absolute ideas begins to erode.

122. Jochen Schmidt views Kleist’s move from one existence to another as part of his larger plan to free himself of all social responsibilities so that he may become a writer (6-7). This view, however, does not explain why Kleist, even while writing, continues to pursue other careers as a civil servant.

123. To illustrate just a few instances, I refer the reader to Kleist’s 18/19 March 1799 letter to Martini, in which Kleist informs him of his desire to dedicate his life and time to the study of mathematics (Letter no.3, 473, 480) at the University of Frankfurt/Oder, only to quit later. On February 5, 1801 Kleist writes Ulrike about his education in industrial engineering (Letter no.36, 626) as a civil servant, but just a few months later vents his disgust with all things academic and his need to escape in a letter to his fiancee, Wilhelmine von Zenge, "Du kennst die erste Veranlassung zu meiner bevorstehenden Reise. Es war im Grunde nichts, als ein innerlicher Ekel vor aller wissenschaftlichen Arbeit" (Letter no.41, 641).

124. Jochen Schmidt reads this letter as Kleist’s "Abneigung gegen ein bestimmtes Amt: das Problem des bürgerlich beschränkten Lebens" (5). Though this is without doubt a major reason for the letter, one should not overlook the
psychological dimension of Kleist’s feeling’s of uncertainty and his conviction that he is and will remain an outsider.

125.Baker uses this term for acute paranoia (3).

126.On 26 October 1803 Kleist writes Ulrike that fate has denied him fame, "der Himmel versagt mir den Ruhm, das größte der Güter der Erde." Because of his depression he threatens to join the army and die in battle, "ich stürze mich in den Tod" (Letter no.77, 737). This is the only letter in which Kleist relates the life as soldier to imminent death; it is also one of the few letters that Kleist writes where he links his desire to die with social failure. There is a marked content and semantic difference between his references to suicide because of social failures and suicide as an end purpose in itself. In this letter Kleist does not reflect about the metaphysics of death, but rather speaks rashly, and quite unconvincingly.

127.B. Fischer refers to Kleist’s manic depression as a "Gemütskrankheit," (283); P. Fischer argues that Kleist’s periods of productivity and aggression towards himself reveal his manic-depressive condition (19); in his biography of Kleist, Hchoff sees Kleist’s manic-depression underscored by his lifestyle.

128.On 9 April 1801 he writes Wilhelmine, "und von ganzer Seele sehne ich mich, wonach die ganze Schöpfung und alle immer langsam der rollenden Weltkörper streben, Ruhe" (643). Kleist’s usage of the word Ruhe varies. Often it refers to idleness or inactivity, which he fears (see his letter to Wilhelmine from 21 July 1801, "weil ich mich vor der Ruhe fürchtete..." 667). The usage in his letter from 9 April suggests that he desires to transcend his existence, where he can be free from the torments of fate.

129.This letter can not be read as a reaction to Prussian defeat at the hands of the French. The French did not defeat the Prussians until the Battle of Auerstadt near Jena on 14 October 1806, more than three months after this letter.

130.This interpretation of Kleist and his Kant-crisis begins with Ernst Cassirer and Ludwig Muth and their seminal essays on the topic. Muth suggests Kleist misunderstood Kant’s Kritik der Urteilskraft (1790) which led to Kleist’s belief that true knowledge was not possible. Cassirer argues that it was a philosophical crisis of some kind, but may have been caused by Fichte, and suggests it was his work Über die Bestimmung der Menschen (1800). It should be noted that Kleist does not refer to Kant per se, rather to the "Kantian" philosophy, which could imply that he wants Ulrike
to send certain philosophical manuscripts which are Kantian in nature, i.e. pertaining to absolute knowledge. Cassirer uses this logic to suggest Fichte is a source for Kleist. Kleist’s understanding of Kant seems to be the product of secondary reading and discussion, as there is no direct evidence that he ever read Kant. The teachings of Friedrich Schlegel, with whom he formed a friendship in July, 1801, may have had a pronounced effect on his reception of Kant and Fichte. For a detailed analysis of Kleist’s philosophy and understanding of Kant, see Ulrich Gall’s study on the subject. I do not wish to argue whether or not Kleist read Kant or Fichte in the original, nor postulate which works may have been so problematic for him. Such arguments have led scholars away from central questions concerning the role the Kant-crisis played in Kleist’s developing views of death and the afterlife.

131. In this fascinating letter, in which Kleist castigates Wilhelmine because of her failure to have a life-plan, Kleist reveals quite unintentionally his views about the afterlife. Though he writes in a condescending tone to her, as if what he says is valid only for women, he universalizes his ideas. He writes, for example, "Alle echte Aufklärung des Weibes besteht zuletzt darin, vernünftig über die Bestimmung ihres irdischen Lebens nachdenken zu können." He, however, shows how this should be the case for men also; he insinuates that Epicure, Leibniz, and Kant spent too much time doing this and such results are "unfruchtbar" and "verderblich." He ends the letter with a maxim of sorts, by which one could assume, based on other letters, he lived at this time, "Kümmre Dich nicht um Deine Bestimmung nach dem Tode, weil Du darüber leicht Deine Bestimmung auf dieser Erde vernachlässigen könntest."

132. The exact image appears in Penthesilea, "Steh, stehe fest, wie das Gewölbe steht,/ Weil seiner Blöcke jeder stürzen will!" (1349-50). Penthesilea, Heinrich von Kleist, Sämtliche Werke und Briefe, Vol.1. Just as in his letter to Wilhelmine, Kleist uses the modal verb wollen to mean "must," i.e., the gate will not collapse unless its individual components begin fall.

133. To Ulrike von Kleist, 23 March 1801, Letter no.38, 636. In the 22 March 1801 letter to Wilhelmine he writes almost the same, "eine innerliche Unruhe trieb mich zuletzt..." (634).

134. Though Kleist writes that he needs to depart from Berlin, he manages to stay in Berlin until 15 April 1801 at which time he travels to Dresden with Ulrike. He did undertake a major hike to Potsdam in late March. That Kleist stayed in Berlin for almost one month after the
initial crisis letter to Wilhelmine has led some scholars such as Baker to suggest that Kleist overcame his crisis quickly or that it played a minor role in his life (11). Though I contend that too much emphasis has been placed on the Kant-crisis, it effected Kleist for the remainder of his life.

135.Kleist’s literary career was neither sudden, nor continuous. After publishing his first work, Die Familie Schroffenstein, in 1803, Kleist did not resume literary activity until 1807 while in Dresden. Rich discussion has developed about Kleist’s turn to literature to find solutions to questions which his interest in popular philosophy failed to answer. Odo Marquard describes the change in Kleist brought on by his Kant-crisis, and argues Kleist turns to aesthetics to find answers, see "Kant und die Wende zur Ästhetik," Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung 16 (1962): 231-43, 363-74; Bernhard Greiner argues that Kleist does not overcome Kant’s basic philosophical positions, and reads Kleist’s literature with Kantian philosophy, see "Die Wende zu der Kunst- Kleist mit Kant," Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift 64 (1990): 96-119; Wolf Kittler submits that Kleist’s literary genius lay dormant until he recognized his talents, and from his literary interests arose his military and partisan activities, see Die Geburt des Partisanan aus dem Geist der Poesie: Heinrich von Kleist und die Strategie der Befreiungskriege (Freiburg: Rombach, 1987); Dirk Grathof offers an opposite view to Kittler, and argues that Kleist was born into a military family, and his literary career evolved from his period as an officer, "es war die Geburt des Dichters aus dem Soldaten" (10). Grathoff convincingly writes that Kleist does not turn to art as a replacement for philosophy; rather Kleist uses the medium of art to analyze the same problems, and to test the limits of the literary form (90), see Kleists Geheimnisse (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1993).

136.The letter of 18 Juli 1801, Letter no. 48, 666-67. Schieben was one of Kleist’s confidants, and later married Kleist’s good friend Heinrich Lohse. Interestingly, this is the only letter surviving which Kleist wrote to her.

137.Kleist’s letters are not without grammatical mistakes. The first line should read: "Also an einem Eselsgeschrei..." Kleist uses darum to mean dafür; he asks the rhetorical question: if I would have died in this instance, what would have been the purpose of my life?

138.The lack of a descriptive adjective ending on the word "schön" in the phrase "ein schönes Gedicht..." denotes an
archaic form which supports my belief that "a beautiful poem" is part of a clichee.

139. A great deed could refer to an action which would help his country. Kleist will later be active in the right wing conservative branch of the Prussian reform movement, which included Gneisenau, Scharnhorst, and Stein. At one point, Kleist even entertained ideas about poisoning Napoleon with arsenic in order to free Prussia from French domination (Unger 103). This letter, however, was written in 1802, and Kleist’s political consciousness was not as developed as it was just a few years later. It would be difficult to suggest that Kleist refers to a political action as a good deed in May, 1802.

140. The cosmology about the transmigration of souls was taught at the University of Frankfurt/Oder in this period. This system attempted to interpret the Bible cosmologically as a myth for religion. Life can be compared to day and death to night; this dynamic continually repeats itself. Kleist’s notion about the movement of souls as expressed in the letter to Rühle appears to be influenced by the novel Der Kettenträger, published anonymously by Friedrich Maximilian Klinger in 1796. See Hanna Hellmann’s essay "Heinrich von Kleist und Der Kettenträger," Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift 13 (1925): 350-63.

141. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Wie die Alten den Tod gebildet, Vol.6, 723. The work appeared as a response to Christian Adolph Klotz, who rejected Lessing’s writings about the antiquity (Laokoon, 1766 and Briefe antiquarischen Inhalts, 1768/69) as unsubstantiated. Winckelmann, who had been murdered in 1768, supported Lessing in this public debate, and his work Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerei und Bildhauerkunst helped to lay the foundations for Lessing’s Wie die Alten den Tod gebildet.

142. Grathoff convincingly argues that Kleist’s political and military involvement is the reason that the reconstruction of Kleist’s biography contains several major gaps. He submits that Kleist purposely withheld information about his travels in letters to friends in order to conceal his potential espionage activities, specifically during the Winter of 1803/04 and during the Bohemian military crisis of 1809. Because Kleist was considered a second-rate poet by nineteenth-century scholars, Grathoff argues that biographers and Germanists during this period failed to produce adequate research about his life; the fact that many vital letters are missing only exacerbates the task of reconstructing a biography. Biographical research about Kleist’s death was also hampered by King Frederick William
III’s decree to suppress any information about the circumstances of his death immediately following his suicide. See Grathoff 15-17.

143. I have already noted Kleist’s activity in nationalistic organizations and his involvement in a right-wing reactionary movement for Prussian reform. Shortly before his suicide, Kleist attempted to rejoin the Prussian military, though the exact details of his effort are sketchy. Evidence suggests that he wanted his last drama, Prinz Friedrich von Homburg to be seen as a nationaistic drama. In a letter to Ulrike from 19 March 1810, Kleist informs her about the drama, and his intention to glorify the military in the hope of receiving some recompense (No.159, 832-33).

144. Scholars can not be sure how many people Kleist asked to commit suicide with him. There are second-hand reports (not mentioned in Kleist’s correspondence) about discussions Kleist had with friends with whom he wanted to commit a double-suicide. In a story told to him by Ernst Pfuell, Adolf Willibrandt recalls in 1863 how Kleist wanted to die with a friend, "Schon damals trug er seinem Freunde an, mit ihm zusammen zu sterben und wie von einer fixen Idee gepackt kam er immer von neuem darauf zurück," see Lebensspuren 112.

145. The theme of love and death was predominant in early Romanticism (Jena) and late Romanticism (Berlin). The Romantics did not view death as an end to life, but rather as a beginning of a new phase of life. Novalis’s Hymnen an die Nacht (1800), prompted by the death of his young bride Sophie von Kühn, thematizes death and the afterlife. Brentano’s Geschichte vom braven Kasperl und dem schönen Annerl (1817) and Eichendorff’s Das Marmorbild (1819) present protagonists whose love for another play a role in their perception of death.

146. On the relationship between violence and language in Kleist’s work, see Arntzen’s "Heinrich von Kleist: Gewalt und Sprache."


148. For an excellent historical overview of the reception and interpretations of Homburg, see Kreutzer’s Die dichterische Entwicklung Heinrich von Kleists, 9-44.

149. Ellis has been a pioneering critic to point out the rivalry between the Prince and the Elector. In his excellent study on Homburg, he reads the entire drama as a
product of this rivalry, whereby each figure constantly fights to keep the upper hand. The battle plan clearly shows how the Elector reacts to the Prince’s dream in the first scene. He gives the Prince a tactical position, though he knows this is out of character for him, while he gives himself the glamorous job of leading the charge. By giving the Prince this waiting position, he prevents the Prince from achieving fame, thus from actualizing his dream of fame and winning Natalie, for whom the Elector has his own plans. Based on the above reading, his order of "Ruhe" can be read in two ways. Literally, it is the battle order; symbolically, it warns the Prince to tone down his desire for heroism and any plans to take the Elector’s position.

150. Though most scholars accentuate Hohenzollern’s positive side, W.C. Reeve presents a compelling argument about his will to power. He argues that Hohenzollern is the catalyst for all action in the drama and manipulates both the Elector and the Prince. It is Hohenzollern, he suggests, who manipulates the Elector into signing the death penalty, see W.C. Reeve, "An Unsung Villain: The Role of Hohenzollern in Kleist’s Prinz Friedrich von Homburg," Germanic Review 56 (1981): 95-107.

151. In the eighteenth century, a public execution was similar to a public performance. The gallows, or any other device used to execute the individual, were set up in the town square or market, allowing the townsfolk to come and view the execution. It was common to rent rooms and or windows along the town square to ensure a better view. The image also appears in the beginning of Das Erdbeben in Chili.

152. Jochen Schmidt does not believe that Homburg manipulates Natalie and the Electress. He reads Homburg’s gesture to give up any desire for fame or love with Natalie as sincere gestures (90).

153. These first two lines are strikingly similar to the second and third lines of Andreas Gryphius’s poem "Es ist alles eitel," which reads "Was dieser heute baut, reißt jener morgen ein;/ wo jetund Städte stehn, wird eine Wiese sein." Kleist uses blank verse with a censor following the fifth syllable instead of after the sixth in Alexandrina verse.

154. Most critics view this image as Homburg’s willingness to renounce all worldly goods and emotions for the chance of living, but do not question what type of existence this would be. About this scene, Koch writes, "der glühende Hunger nach Leben...läßt den Prinzen auf alles verzichten" (215). As I have demonstrated, Homburg’s will to live is
awakened by the grave, but his comments in this scene lack sincerity. His manipulation of the Electress and Natalie preclude one from taking his promise too seriously.

155. This quotation suggests that Homburg struggles with his present existence as Prince and searches for meaning elsewhere, though he would not be satisfied completely with the existence of an average man either. Homburg’s ideas about different existences suggest that he searches for a possibility to escape and to rebel against his present position.

156. In a fit of depression, overcome by a feeling that fate denies him fame, Kleist writes Ulrike, "Ich werde französische Kriegsdienste nehmen, das Heer wird bald nach England hinüber rudern, unser aller Verderben lauert über den Meeren, ich frohlocke bei der Aussicht auf das unendlich-prächtige Grab" (Letter no.77, 737).

157. Koch argues that Homburg has not overcome his fear of death. He claims his change in language is due to Natalie’s involvement (218). A closer analysis shows that Homburg is not sure how Natalie will involve herself in his situation, nor what results it could produce. Only after his monologue, where his view of death radically changes from his first monologue, does Natalie arrive with news about her actions. The change in Homburg’s eschatological outlook is not a result of outside influence; rather it results from personal reflection.

158. Blöcker argues that Homburg, like Kleist, chooses to die because of a "Sättigung des Lebens" (122). This view neither explains why Homburg changes from fearing death to enthusiastically greeting it, nor elucidates why life has saturated Homburg’s existence. As with the reference to Kleist, this view only mystifies Homburg’s desire to die.

159. Kleist borrows from Wolsey’s monologue in Act III, scene 2 in Henry VIII.

160. In his survey of the development of the aesthetics of death from Lessing to the twentieth century, Anz argues that though Lessing prescribes a new literary aesthetic, the "schöner Tod," the literature of the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century did not correspond to this norm. Anz overlooks Homburg’s conceptualization of his death, which he describes in peaceful terms. In addition to Prinz Friedrich von Homburg, works from Classicism, such as Hölderlin’s Tod des Empedokles and Goethe’s Die Wahlverwandtschften, as well as works from Romanticism, such as Novalis’s Hymen an die Nacht, portray death as tranquil, and not to be feared. Of course, there are sufficient
examples, such as most works from Kleist, which corroborate
Anz’s suggestion that Lessing’s aesthetic norm was never
actualized.

161. Ellis reads the Prince’s refusal to sign the Elector’s
letter as an example of the rivalry, “The Elector does not
foresee Homburg choosing a hero’s death. It is a
calculative move to make him appear a hero and the Elector
an idiot” (112). Horn offers a similar reading; because
Homburg can not achieve fame on the battlefield, he attempts
to achieve fame in afterlife, “Der Opfertod an sich,
losgelöst von jeder vernüftigen Begründung, erscheint als
Kern des abstrakten und wesenloses Heldentums, als
notwendiger Übergang in den Ruhm” (130). He further writes
"[Ruhm] muß im Opfertod für die Erhaltung des absolutischen
Prinzips...erworben werden" (131). Like Ellis and Horn,
Thum argues that Homburg’s acceptance of the death penalty
is part of his rivalry with the Elector, "The Prince accepts
the death sentence to upstage the Elector in the game of
appearances" (10). Ellis, Horn, and Thum ignore that
Homburg makes no references to fame in his second monologue
when he decides to die. In fact, Homburg castigates the
desire for fame as a limit to one’s human existence.
Natalie and the Elector interpret the Prince’s refusal to
sign the letter without perceiving, let alone understanding,
his eschatological change; therefore they read his actions
as typical of his earlier behavioral pattern.

162. Wolfgang Kayser’s "Kleist als Erzähler" is a seminal
essay on perspectivism in Kleist’s work. With countless
examples, Kayser wishes to demonstrate that Kleist’s prose
does not offer a perspective which presents a complete idea,
instead it leads to paradoxes. Kayser, however, addresses
only Kleist’s prose works. Both Ellis and Swales agree that
because of the multi-perspectives in Homburg, the drama is
similar to the prose works in this regard.

163. In her excellent study Selbstreflexion der Literatur.
Studien zu Dramen von Lessing und Kleist, Hommon addresses
the comical and tragic elements of the drama. Though she
does not refer to the drama as either a comedy or a tragedy,
she sees the drama transforming from a comedy in act one
and part of two to a tragedy for the remainder (396).

164. This is the pivotal scene for scholars who wish to
determine whose values prevail at the conclusion of the
drama, either the Prince’s, the Elector’s, or a combination
of the two. The three types of interpretations also address
whether Homburg or The Elector undergo a process of
education or development. For a detailed outline of the
three interpretations and a thorough survey of pertinent

165. Baker argues that Homburg reconciles justice and duty; therefore Homburg is willing to die (39). This reading insinuates the drama is one of reconciliation in the Hegelian sense. Homburg's desire to reconcile with the Elector is not motivated purely by insights about justice and duty, but rather by his desire to die.

166. One could psychologize in this instance. If the Prince were to say something completely opposite to this, such as he has been mistreated, the Elector may pardon him, thus robbing him of his goal. One must keep in mind that although Homburg has overcome his rivalry with the Elector, he is still aware of the Elector's view of him. Homburg uses this opportunity to ensure that he controls his own fate, thus death.

167. The same motif is in Goethe's Clavigo (1774). Before dying, Clavigo expresses how his death absolves him from his sins.

168. Horn argues that Homburg, even in the second and third monologues is incapable of imaging death, rather he can perceive it in only abstract dimensions (133). A living being can only imagine death as an abstract existence. Horn overlooks how Homburg's perception of death changes from the Todesfurchtszene to the third monologue. The change in his metaphysical perception of death influences his desire to die.

169. On horticultural imagery in the drama, see Ellis, page 103.

170. Homburg's fainting is similar to Gustav's suicide in Die Verlobung von St. Domingo. Gustav commits suicide after he realizes his perception of reality is radically different than how it really is. The realization of this discrepancy leads Gustav suddenly to shoot himself.

171. The officers, especially Kottwitz and Hohenzollern, have already expressed their admiration for Homburg. They willingly took a risk to support him and Natalie. Had Homburg been executed they would have cheered for him and hailed him as a hero, a response they give upon his fainting.

172. Homburg's notions of dream and reality has been a major focus for critics. For detailed studies on this dynamic, see Arthur Henkel, "Traum und Gesetz in Kleists Prinz von Homburg," Heinrich von Kleist. Aufsätze und Essays, ed.


Heller, H.W. *Über den Selbstmord in Deutschland.* Frankfurt/Main: Andreäische Buchhandlung, 1787.


---  


---  


---  


