THE NATURE OF A NOVEL

Reading Wilhlem Meisters Wanderjahre (1821) in light of Goethe's scientific writings

with particular emphasis on his Colour Theory

by

Renata Schellenberg

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
Graduate Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures
University of Toronto

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ABSTRACT

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Goethe’s work Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre is difficult to comprehend. It was published in 1821 as the sequel to the immensely popular Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre, but failed to elicit the same type of acceptance on part of the reading public. Reasons for this can be found primarily in its complex structure, for missing from the work are both a solid narrative structure and a reliable narrative frame that would help guide the reader through the ongoing endeavours of the central character. Instead, Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre takes on the form and structure that is as itinerant as the title itself, appearing in the process both endless and meaningless to its readers. The predicament is further compounded by the label Roman Goethe attached to his work, a designation that unnecessarily confined it to a specific and traditional genre.

This thesis will examine the Wanderjahre in light of the many scientific writings Goethe wrote, many of which overlapped chronologically with the novel itself. Thus an attempt will be made to read the novel through Goethe’s scientific paradigms - bearing his naturalistic philosophy in mind. The colour wheel emerges as a particularly relevant structure for the reading of the novel because it appears as an adequate scheme to encompass the many complexities of the text. However, because of its incompatibility with the genre of the novel and the absence of any other attempt at designation on the part of its author, the 1821 version of Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre emerges ultimately as a causa sui of literature, defying any definitive classification.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One</td>
<td>Goethe's Scientific Work culminating in his Colour Theory</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two</td>
<td>The <em>Wanderjahre</em>: An Anomalous Novel</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three</td>
<td>The <em>Wanderjahre as a Scientific Construct</em></td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td></td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td></td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

In 1821, Goethe published *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*, a sequel to his immensely successful *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* of 1794. The unconventional nature of the sequel drew immediate attention from the reading public, as well as a variety of critical responses. Known supporters of Goethe stepped forward to defend both the novel and its author, while others dismissed the work as an artistic failure. Typical of the published reviews is a general tone of confusion and disappointment, echoed in this article by Karl Förster:

> Man hoffte ... auf eine Fortsetzung von den *Lehrjahren*: und durch sie ward für möglich gehalten, das einstweilen noch mangelhafte Urtheil in Zukunft zu vervollständigen. So blieb ein zureiehender Ausspruch über das Werk als Ganzes und als Einheit von manchem noch aufgeschoben. Nun ist der erste Teil jener *Wanderjahre* erschienen: aber man hat sich seitdem vom erwünschten Aufschluß über das Werk viel mehr entfernt gefunden, als ihm näher gerückt gesehen.¹

Other of Goethe's contemporaries were less charitable. Leading this vociferous group was Friedrich Karl Julius Schütz, a professor at the university of Halle. Together with fellow critics such as Adolph Müllner, Schütz lambasted the novel, dismissing it entirely. While Müllner attacked the quality of verse and language in the novel as bordering on "Undeutschbarkeit,"² Schütz referred to the work as a "kunstgewissenloses Verfahren," claiming that Goethe "an seinem Ruhm, wie an der Kunst und an seiner Nation vergangen

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¹ "Zeitgenossen über Wilhlem Meistes Wanderjahre" Vol. 17 of *Johann Wolfgang Goethe: Sämtliche Werke nach Epochen seines Schaffens* (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1991) 1035. All subsequent references from this edition will appear as MA in parenthesis in the text, followed by the volume and page numbers.
zu haben scheinen würde,” suggesting finally that: “statt >Entsagende< zu schreiben.

[Goethe] lieber selbst den Entsandten gemacht [hat].”

Goethe himself was sufficiently moved by this unanticipated public failure to rework the novel and publish it again in an expanded version in 1829. However, he was either unable or unwilling to alter those features which its detractors found most troubling: so, in effect, the second Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre managed merely to corroborate the public’s opinion of the first and cement its reputation as a work of an author who is in decline. In 1830 Theodor Mundt thus wrote:

... die Zeit der unbedingten Bewunderung und Anbetung ist für Goethes Werke gewiß vorüber...Goethes Werke haben bereits ihre Zeit gehabt, wir dürfen es uns nicht leugnen..., daß uns die Goethesche Poesie in manchem Betracht als eine vergangene, in manchen Interessen als eine veraltete gelten muß, der wir zwar einen unschätzbaren Teil unserer Bildung verdanken, die aber die Interessen unserer Zeit nicht mehr befriedigt und ausfüllt...

It is interesting to note the contrast between this external critical observation and Goethe’s own views of his work at this time. In 1829 he wrote the following to Johann Friedrich Rochlitz:

Denn das darf ich wohl sagen: was ich in meinen Schriften niedergelegt habe ist für mich kein Vergangenes, sondern ich seh es... als ein Fortwirkendes an, und die Probleme, die hie und da liegen, beschäftigen mich immerfort, in der Hoffnung daß, im Reiche der Natur und Sitten, dem treuen Forscher noch gar manches kann offenbar werden.

In terms of critical response, comparatively little has changed in the decades since

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3 Gille 109 ff.
4 Gille 133.
5 “Äusserungen Goethes” Vol. 10 of Johann Wolfgang Goethe: Sämtliche Werke, Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche (Frankfurt/Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1989) 860f. All subsequent references to this edition appear as FA in paranethesis in the text, followed by the volume and page number.
the nineteenth century. The novel remains, in Emil Staiger’s assessment, an aberration in Goethe’s overall literary work. He does not attribute this to the changing literary tastes of a new age, but to the absence of direction in the novel. He then compares the novel to Faust II, completed even later by Goethe, in which he finds many similarities in style. He considers the latter a far superior work based on its effect, because as he states of the former: “Der Roman bezaubert uns nicht; wir bleiben frei für Urteil und Kritik und suchen darum und vermissen den zuverlässigen objektiven Halt.”6 A number of other intriguing critical investigations have been published on the subject of Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre, all of which presuppose that the work is essentially marred by its internal inconsistencies, its disjointed structure, and its glaring lack of an overarching narrative structure. In short, as a sequel, and, more significantly, as a sequel to a work that defined the form of the Bildungsroman, the Wanderjahre constitute a formal anomaly: a sequel that conspicuously forfeits the shape, the drive, and the spirit of its precursor— a novel that, in effect, refutes its own nature.

For the purposes of this thesis, however, the criticism that greeted the Wanderjahre, despite its obvious merit as a subject for critical investigation by literary historians, is significant only as a symptom of something essentially problematic about the novel itself. Accordingly, this thesis will attempt to avoid entanglement in any debate on the relative worth of the novel; on the specific way in which it disappoints aesthetic expectations or violates novelistic conventions; or fails on how it lives up to the standards of literary quality established by Goethe’s previous fictions. Instead, this study will be motivated by the assumption that the relative ferocity of the critical response indirectly

testifies both to the work’s unconventionality (perhaps even its singularity) and to its abiding and proven power to frustrate any approach based on formal literary-critical conventions.

Positively stated, this thesis is based on the belief that *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* is a unified work, that its unity can be described, and that this description requires neither terminology nor theoretical paradigms imported from beyond what is available in Goethe’s collected works. What is necessary is a working familiarity with Goethe’s scientific writings, and sufficient respect for the complex unity of his mind to allow for the possibility that the work of his maturity might have been, in some sense, interdisciplinary work, and that he might have been attempting a sort of hybrid text when he produced the *Wanderjahre*.

As will be demonstrated in the first chapter, science in Goethe’s experience was more a form of natural philosophy than a means to mechanical innovation. It was therefore primarily practical in and through its power to deepen the mind’s awareness of its relationship with the physical world. His interest in optics, for example, was guided not by any detached desire to probe the properties of light, but rather by an intense curiosity regarding the relationship implicit in the act of perception, that complex and dramatic event in which light engages the eye, and through the eye the body, and through the body the human mind. Thus, by scientific means Goethe sought to extend the experience of the body to include the experience of phenomena at deeper and subtler levels than any simply conventionally conditioned individual could reach within the framework of his own immediate social world.
Accordingly, Goethe's science was not incompatible with his literary endeavour, although it did reveal a range of real human experience that presented a challenge to the art of verbal representation. In effect, his science prompted an expansion of his world view and therefore an expansion of what 'world' could mean in a dramatic or poetic or novelistic context. As will be discussed in the second chapter, some of the most disconcerting features of the *Wanderjahre* can be understood in terms of this challenge posed to art by science. Wilhelm's rather unheroic comportment, his apparently abstracted or disengaged relationship to his surroundings, for example, can be readily described as a mode of engaged abstraction comparable to that demanded in Goethe's scientific approach. Similarly, the fitful movement of whatever narrative exists in the novel, its continual interruption by both novella and epistle, its abrupt sketching of character after character, has its analogue in the 'plot' of light which also seems wayward in its various modulations from colour to colour and intensity to intensity but remains consistent both in its own nature and in its fidelity to deeper, universally valid synthetic principles.

The thesis will conclude with a description of the manner in which this underlying order, the order of the *Urphänomen*, makes its presence felt in the texture, the mood, the symbology, and, most importantly, the reading of the novel. In some sense the result will be a tentative classification of the work as an allegory of science, an allegory of the emergence, the presentation, and the intellectual appropriation of ideas in nature. However, as such, it also grounds itself firmly in the world of the novel per se; for, to state the obvious, novels are written to represent the various ways in which characters are transformed by their encounters with worlds - the ways in which the inward self is altered by its encounter with external reality and, reciprocally, the ways in which that self is
externalized, made part of the world, through an operation that begins when the external world becomes part of the self. In Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre Goethe executes a unique variation on that great theme by focussing on the necessary boundary between the internal and the external - and by dramatizing the interweave.

The second edition of the novel yields rather more insights in this regard because it contains more elements representative of these developments. The hostile response to the first Wanderjahre prompted Goethe to re-evaluate the original, expand it, and refine it into an even more intriguing work while at the same time leaving its essential nature intact and, in effect, reaffirmed. It also initiated a period of far-reaching literary inquiry that left subtle marks on the revised edition - most notably and symbolically the removal of the term "Roman" from the subtitle. However, for the purposes of this thesis, the larger issues raised by these shifts in Goethe’s literary approach will remain unexamined. Instead, only the 1821 version of the Wanderjahre will be considered, primarily because it preserves Goethe’s dawning vision of an art informed by natural mystery, an art made more consciously mysterious by its assimilation of scientific insights, and its willingness to participate in a world irradiated, as it were, by more natural light. As he states in the introduction to his Farbenlehre:

Die Lust zum Wissen wird bei dem Menschen zuerst dadurch angeregt, daß er bedeutende Phänomene gewahr wird, die seine Aufmerksamkeit an sich ziehen. Damit diese dauernd bleibe, so muß sich eine innigere Teilnahme finden, die uns nach und nach mit den Gegenständen bekannter macht. Als dann bemerken wir eine große Mannigfaltigkeit, die uns als Menge entgegengedrungen. Wir sind genötigt, zu sondern, zu unterscheiden und wieder zusammenzustellen; wodurch zuletzt eine Ordnung entsteht, die sich mit mehr oder weniger Zufriedenheit übersehen läßt.

(FA 23.1: 23)
Chapter One. Goethe's Scientific Work culminating in his Colour Theory

It is important to recognize at the outset that Goethe's scientific approach was highly eclectic, showing clear traces of a variety of scientific traditions. As Nisbet elaborates at some length, he moved through both the Neo-Platonic and the Empirical traditions, appropriating the practices and views of a wide spectrum of scientists. Given his selective and ever-changing alliance with the scientific tradition, it is scarcely surprising that one often encounters a sense of contradiction in his scientific works. In addition, those who most influenced Goethe could often be his intellectual foes, as can be seen from his essay "Geschichte meines botanischen Studiums" written in 1790 (FA 24:407-412). Here he points to the influence Shakespeare, Spinoza and Linnaeus have had on him in his scientific endeavour. Perhaps surprisingly, it is Linnaeus in particular who stands out because of the very great difference in his scientific method compared to Goethe's own. The Linnaean taxonomy of plants is quite the opposite of what Goethe derived from his quest for the Urpflanze, an indication that shows that the two scientists belonged in two very different ideological camps. However, as Stevenson points out, Goethe viewed science as something complete, rather than cumulative, which meant that for him fallacies were not only legitimate, but also integral to the structure of science itself. He expresses this view in the introduction to historical part of Zur Farbenlehre:

Der Kreis, den die Menschheit auszulaufen hat, ist bestimmt genug, und ungeachtet des großen Stillstandes, den die Barberei machte, hat sie ihre Laufbahn schon mehr als einmal zurückgelegt. Will man ihr auch eine Spiralbewegung zuschreiben, so kehrt sie doch immer wieder in jene Gegend, wo sie schon einmal

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durchgegangen. Auf diesem Wege wiederholen sich alle wahren Ansichten und alle Irrtümer. (FA 23.1: 515)

Sustaining this generous and forgiving view of science was a genuine respect on Goethe’s part for scientists who were willing to commit to the helical structure to which he refers. In the case of Linnaeus he writes: “ich [fühlte] immer mehr Ehrfurcht für diesen Mann, immer mehr Hochachtung für seine Nachfolger, welche die von ihm ergriffenen Zügel nicht aus den Händen gelassen, sondern auf seine Weise sich am Regimente zu erhalten gewußt” (FA 24:413). His praise for Linnaeus’s obvious contribution to science is followed, however, by an assertion of personal disagreement for the method he employed. In Goethe’s words: “Dabei fühlte ich aber, daß für mich noch ein anderer Weg sein möchte, ananlog meinem übrigen Lebensgange” (413). His response to the Linnaean classification of plants was to create a similarly thorough method of botanical studies which would encompass and represent his own divergent views. His rejection of the Linnaean system was, after all, based on a fundamental difference in both approach and view, as he explains:

Denn indem ich sein scharfes, geistreiches Absondern, seine treffenden, zweckmäßigen, oft aber willkürlichen Gesetze in mich aufzunehmen versuchte, ging in meinem Innern ein Zwiespalt vor: das was er mit Gewalt auseinander zu halten suchte, mußte nach dem innersten Bedürfnis meines Wesens zur Vereinigung anstreiben. (FA 24: 408-409)

This early passage of scientific writing reveals the underlying principle of Goethe’s entire approach to nature, which was, as Nisbet points out, a fundamental and unshakeable belief in unity (6).

Such a conviction of the unity of nature links Goethe inevitably to the Neo-Platonic tradition, as well as to the philosophy of both Leibniz and Spinoza. However, as
Cassirer warns, this is not to be taken literally nor lightly, for “Goethes Platonismus ist kein starrer und fertiges Schema.”

What Cassirer is alluding to here can be seen in the manner and method by which Goethe adopts and employs Neo-Platonic practices. Nisbet observes a strong parallel between Goethe’s view and that of Leibniz’s follower Charles Bonnet, concluding that the latter was probably Goethe’s source of knowledge of the former (8). Bonnet’s work *Contemplation de la nature* (1781) propagates the notion of the chain of being, echoing very distinctly Goethe’s own views on this subject. Nisbet shows that both Goethe and Bonnet adhered to Leibniz’s *lex continui*, the principle of continuity (8), which endorsed the gradual development of the natural world, while stressing the doctrine of *natura non facit saltus*. Goethe is even further indebted to Leibniz by appropriating his revolutionary theory of entelechy. Critics such as Fritz Martini claim that the concept of entelechy was Leibniz’s greatest contribution to German philosophy because it separated the physical from the metaphysical – a distinction that Goethe consistently made throughout his scientific career. This concept could, however, also be attributed to Spinoza, whose philosophy Goethe also acknowledged as influential for his own thought and who in a similar fashion distinguished between the subtle difference of substance (“eternal reality”) and mode (“a particular thing/form”).

Spinoza’s philosophical terminology translates into a dual view of nature: *natura naturans* (nature which is begetting and which is substance), and *natura naturata* (nature begotten, which is then mode). Duality is, in both Goethe’s and Spinoza’s view,

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indicative of a deeper underlying totality, denoting complementary rather than divisible qualities. It thus takes on an animated and dynamic nature and assumes the contradictory connotation of process (rather than mere state). The key to the mechanics and method of this process remain, however, vague and hidden, because they function on a higher metaphysical plane beyond human comprehension: “Das Unendliche … oder die vollständige Existenz kann von uns nicht gedacht werden” (FA 25: 14). As incomprehensible as the underlying reality may be, the physical manifestations of this process are evident in nature, because it is nature itself, and one must learn to view it accordingly. The departure point in observation for both Goethe and Spinoza is the premise of absolute totality, because as Goethe concluded in his “Studie nach Spinoza”:

In jedem lebendigen Wesen sind das was wir Teile nennen dergestalt unzertrennlich vom Ganzen, daß sie nur in und mit demselben begriffen werden können, und es können weder die Teile zum Maß des Ganzen noch das Ganze zum Maß der Teile angewendet werden, und so nimmt… ein eingeschränktes lebendiges Wesen Teil an der Unendlichkeit, oder vielmehr es hat etwas Unendliches in sich… (FA 25: 15)

Goethe’s views on the autonomy of nature are not, however, entirely synonomous with Spinoza’s. He diverges from Spinozan philosophy with his insistence on the responsibility and function of the observer, to whom he allocates a distinctive role: “Wir müssen … alle Existenz und Vollkommenheit in unsre Seele dergestalt beschränken, daß sie unserer Art zu denken und zu empfinden angemessen werden; dann sagen wir erst, daß wir eine Sache begreifen oder sie genießen” (FA 25: 15). By relating the aesthetics of nature outside of itself and directly to the individual, Goethe liberates it from a state of stagnation, a feat that Teller describes in the following manner: “Goethe [hat] freilich das Totum von Spinozas Substanz aus deren Allruhe herausgelöst und es in die Dynamik und
Mannigfaltigkeit des tätigen Lebens hineingerissen." The dynamics of this relationship between the individual and aesthetic image are clear testimony that Goethe was not interested merely in the contemplation and apotheosis of nature. Through his study of Spinoza he seems to have reached the limits of both theory and philosophy, bringing his scientific interest back to the level of empirical research. It is important to note the method and elements by which he achieves this, for they are both eclectic and varied and constitute the essentials of the later, characteristically Goethean experiment.

In his essay "Der Versuch als Vermittler von Objekt und Subjekt" (1792) Goethe creates a brief synopsis of his views on the scientific experiment. His relative emphasis is on the Erfahrung of the observer, a fact that grounds the human individual as the centre of the experiment for: "der Mensch ... betrachtet [Gegenstände] in Bezug auf sich selbst....." (FA 25: 26). The importance of Erfahrung had already been communicated in the "Studie nach Spinoza" (1785) with its emphasis on one's direct response to nature. In "Der Versuch als Vermittler von Objekt und Subjekt", Goethe's focus on personal Erfahrung, however, foreshadows the profound scepticism he was developing towards hypothesis and theory - a factor that would later become a hallmark of his scientific studies. A good outline of these views is found in his essay "Analyse und Synthese" (1829) in which he specifically states:

...es haben die Freunde und Bekenner der Wissenschaften aufs genauste zu beachten, daß man versäumt, die falschen Synthesen, d.h. also die Hypothesen die uns überliefert worden, zu prüfen, zu entwickeln, ins Klare zu setzen, und den Geist in seine alten Recht sich unmittelbar gegen die Natur zu stellen, wieder einzusetzen. (FA 25: 83)

By the 1790's Goethe was firmly rooted in many interesting and relevant scientific activities. His approach to nature had ceased to be a purely philosophical one as his engagement began to reflect more pragmatic and scientific qualities. That he was working from a scientific rather than a philosophical framework at this time was confirmed by Goethe himself in 1828, when he wrote his response to “Die Natur”, the so-called “Tobler Fragment.” This essay, written between 1781 and 1783, was generally regarded as Goethean in origin because of its depiction of nature which revealed a strong Spinozan influence. Goethe, however, distanced himself from the fragment while stressing his scientific activities in anatomy and botany at the time. He endorsed the basic thought content as representative of his earlier thinking, but criticized the essay itself for its scientific inadequacy: “Die Erfüllung aber, die ihm [dem Aufsatz] fehlt, ist die Anschauung der zwei großen Treibräder aller Natur: der Begriff von Polarität und von Steigerung, jene der Materie, insofern wir sie materiell, diese ihr dagegen, insofern wir sie geistig denken, angehörig: jene ist in immerwährendem Anziehen und Abstoßen, diese in immerstrebendem Aufsteigen” (FA 25: 81). In addition to highlighting Goethe’s own advances in terms of scientific insight, this passage highlights the problem of his scientific terminology, a problem that would plague him throughout his scientific career, for concepts that he regarded as self-explanatory remained vague to the rest of the world.

The problem of terminology first arose in the 1780’s after Goethe’s return from Italy. There he had made the significant discovery of the Urpflanze which, as he claimed, encompassed the “ursprüngliche Identität aller Pflanzenteile.” However, as Rudolf

12 “Über die Metamorphose der Pflanzen” FA 24: 748.
Magnus points out, the *Urpflanze* is not an evolutionary classification from which other plants can be derived, but rather “a simply organized, primitively constructed plant, its structure apparent by mere inspection”. The significance of the *Urpflanze* for Goethe, as Magnus further explains, was that he was able to reduce by comparison all other plant forms to it, no matter how complex and involved they were.\(^{13}\) The method by which the botanical prototype that the *Urpflanze* represents manifests itself, revealing the unique combination of scientific and aesthetic observation employed by Goethe. He claims to have reached the discovery because of the inadequacies of pure scientific methods used by scientists prior to himself, as he explains: “Wie sie sich [die Pflanzengestalten] nun unter einen Begriff sammeln lassen, so wurde mir nach und nach klar und klarer, daß die Anschauung noch auf eine höhere Weise belebt werden könnte: eine Forderung, die mir damals unter der sinnlichen Form einer übersinnlichen *Urpflanze* vorschwebte” (FA 24: 748). The challenge, as Goethe sees it, requires an enhanced awareness on part of the observer who is able to capture something within content, but beyond form.

Hans Fischer elaborates on the meaning of form for Goethe, claiming that, for him, form was merely the expression of function and that “Funktion bestimmt das Werden der Gestalt.”\(^{14}\) This seems to be confirmed by Goethe’s scientific studies at the time, which were moving from a concentration on morphology towards the study of metamorphosis. Before entering into his botanical studies, he completed a series of anatomical studies of the skull, publishing in 1784 a treatise entitled “Versuch aus der vergleichenden Knochenlehre daß der Zwischenknochen der oberen Kinnlade dem Menschen gemein sei”

(FA 24: 16-24). Around this time he discovered the intermaxillary bone, *os intermaxillae*, a significant achievement that is fully credited to him, and that confirms his validity and competence as a scientist. Furthermore, because of the comparative method he employed, which focuses on form and structure, he is also often referred to as the founder of the science of morphology. Such a claim, however, is in all probability untrue because, as Voigt and Sucker indicate, the term “morphology” was used independently of Goethe by contemporary scientists such as Carl Friedrich Burlach. But founder or not, Goethe’s originality in this field lies in his application of both morphology and morphological finds, which for him were suggestive of larger, underlying developments.

Goethe’s interest in morphology could be interpreted in light of the way he perceived things. As Stephenson points out, he viewed objects in a concrecent, rather than concrete form (1). This poses immense difficulty in defining the object because the form of the object (by which it manifests itself) is always changing and never complete. It also inevitably highlights the problematic relationship of language and science, the former being insufficient to express the latter. According to Nisbet, Goethe’s solution to the conflict of science and linguistic discourse was to adopt a descriptive approach to nature, with which he could not discriminate, but only encompass its dynamic processes (66). Goethe, however, also seemed aware of the enormity of the task in undertaking such an approach to nature, whose unknown and unpredictable qualities make it impossible to measure. Thus, that “natural system” which might seem desirable or practical, or indeed any given system of actual observation, is in fact an oxymoron. In Goethe’s own words:

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Die Natur hat kein System, sie hat, sie ist Leben und Folge aus einem unbekannten Zentrum, zu einer nicht erkennbaren Grenze. Naturbetrachtung ist daher endlos, man mag ins Einzelnste teilend verfahren, oder im Ganzen, nach Breite und Höhe die Spur verfolgen.\textsuperscript{16}

"The incommensurability of nature," a quality impossible to contain, forces Goethe to engage in what Stephenson observes is an "interplay between both ontological and genetical modes of thought" (3). The concept that enables him to link these two opposing dynamics is the concept of the archetype, which in the case of his botanical studies was the symbolic \textit{Urpfanze}. The notion of the \textit{Typus} became subsequently an indispensable part of his approach to science and was carried over to other areas of research, as he applied it to his zoological and his later osteological studies. He argues the necessity of the \textit{Typus} in his essay "Über die Gesetze der Organisation überhaupt, insofern wir sie bei Konstruktion des Typus vor Augen haben sollen" (1795-1796) and claims:

\begin{quote}
So vereinen und trennen sich die einfachen Stoffe, zwar nicht nach Willkür aber doch mit großer Mannigfaltigkeit, und die Teile der Körper, die wir unorganisch nennen, sind, ohngeachtet ihrer Anneigung zu sich selbst, doch immer wie in einer suspendierten Gleichgültigkeit, indem die nächste, nähere, oder stärkere Verwandtschaft sie aus dem vorigen Zusammenhange reißt und einen neuen Körper darstellt, dessen Grundteile, zwar unveränderlich, doch wieder auf eine neue, oder, unter andern Umständen, auf eine Rück-Zusammensetzung zu warten scheinen. (FA 24: 273)
\end{quote}

The difficulty that emerges with Goethe's \textit{Typus} is that in contrast to the factual objects that it designates, connects and foreshadows, it is not itself a visible phenomenon. Furthermore, because it does not exist as an empirical reality, it must be created within the mental faculties of the observer - emerging as an idea and a product of the imagination.

The mental engagement of the observer is thus crucial in the process of both visualising and, more importantly, accepting the concept of \textit{Typus}. While acknowledging

\textsuperscript{16} "Problem und Erwiderung" (FA 24: 582).
Goethe's otherwise meticulous data research skills, Engelhardt and Kuhn explain: "Der Typus steckt nicht in einer ... Tabelle, sondern in dem sie durchschauenden Verstand, der vom Unwesentlichen absehen, das Wesentliche erkennen kann..." By moving deductively from the concrete to the abstract Goethe moves from the observation of form to the sensation of quality of a particular phenomenon, creating a new category of scientific investigation. Consequently, the Urphänomen, rather than the phenomenon itself, becomes the limit and goal of scientific observation, as Goethe writes in his essay dedicated to Karl Wilhelm Nose (1820):

Wir sind aber schon weit genug gegen sie [die Natur] vorgedrungen, wenn wir zu den Urphänomenen gelangen, welche wir, in ihrer unerforschlichen Herrlichkeit, von Angesicht zu Angesicht anschauen und uns sodann wieder rückwärts in die Welt der Erscheinungen wenden, wo das, in seiner Einfalt. Unbegreifliche sich in tausend und aber tausend mannigfaltigen Erscheinungen bei aller Veränderlichkeit unveränderlich offenbart. (FA 25: 580)

The Urphänomen, which is detectable through the focus on Typus, is the necessary and missing requirement for Goethe's concept of metamorphosis, providing not only a basis from which all organisms originate, but also projecting the possibility of what they could become.

Thus, Goethe’s metamorphosis touches both on the principle of preformation as well as on that of epigenesis. As he sees it, the tension that emerges between these two opposing concepts is contained within the momentum of metamorphosis, which merely lends its name to designate this natural dynamic: “So viel aber getraue ich mir zu behaupten, daß, wenn ein organisches Wesen in der Erscheinung hervortritt, Einheit und Freiheit des Bildungstriebes ohne den Begriff der Metamorphose nicht zu fassen sei” (FA

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24:452). In a pure and logical sense it is of course impossible to merge the concept of preformation with epigenesis. Goethe sidesteps this difficulty by evoking his own creation of the *Urphänomen*, which as an idea has the propensity to make the transition between that which is permanent (preformation) and that which is developing (epigenesis). What is interesting here above all is the question of temporality. The oscillation between preformation and epigenesis appears to negate the entire question of temporal change as it is generally understood - which is quite relevant in regard to any observation of metamorphosis. Underlying such a view, as Cassirer explains, is Goethe's insistence on and belief in the unity of nature, which in this context assumes the trait of timelessness as well:

Seine Anschauung stellt den Inhalt, der in einem besonderen Zeitpunkt gegeben ist, nicht als einen für sich bestehenden hin, sondern faßt ihn nur als die fließende und bewegliche Grenze, an der das Alte in das Neue, das Vergangene in das Zukünftige übergeht. Nirgends anders als in diesem Übergang und durch ihn vermag sich die Einheit der lebendigen Gestalt zu erweisen. (220)

The scientific community did not, however, share Goethe's views. As Fischer notes, after publication of the "Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen" (1790) Goethe strove for recognition from the scientific establishment (25). They for the most part ignored him, a fact that Fischer claims discouraged Goethe, leading him to postpone further publication of scientific material (26). His misunderstandings with the scientific community are similar in nature to the misunderstandings he encountered with Schiller at one of their original meetings in 1794. When Goethe tried to convey to him the value of the existence of the symbolic *Urpf lane*, Schiller responded: "das ist keine Erfahrung. das ist eine Idee" (FA 24: 437). Schiller's response largely summarizes the contemporary reception these innovative scientific views had, while also demonstrating that the synthetic connection Goethe sought to make was not a commonplace - even among literary peers. Goethe's
own reaction to this incident is recorded in "Glückliches Ereignis" (1817) in which he writes the following:


This exchange with Schiller confirms not only Goethe’s resolute conviction of the validity of his scientific discoveries, but also indicates the degree to which he truly was an "Augenmensch," depending not only on a direct sensory experience of nature, but on a direct correlation of this experience to a visual manifestation within the realm of his imagination.

In defense of his views, Goethe contends that the inability to perceive Idee and Erfahrung as a synthetic unit is the result of traditional scientific practices. He examines the effect philosophy may have had on this development, focusing specifically on Kant.¹⁸ It is somewhat ironic, particularly in regard to Schiller who was a known adherent of Kant’s philosophy, that Goethe finds many similarities in thought between Kant and himself. Rather than disclaiming the philosopher, however, Goethe claims useful input from him.

ideias which led to the reinforcement of his own convictions:


His appropriation of Kant’s philosophy differed greatly, however, from that of his contemporaries because he applied Kantian thought in a synthetic, rather than analytical

manner. The differentiation of subject and object, espoused in such works by Kant as *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, thus (paradoxically) helped Goethe in forming his own synthetic approach to nature. He overcomes the breach between the subjective and the objective by means of the *Aperçu* - a moment of recognition which is the necessary “Form der Selbstbezüglichkeit” between subject and object.  

The significance of the *Aperçu* is that it levels the subject and the object onto the same plane, as Johannes Schilling explains: “Da die Einheit des Lebens, als das Eins der Harmonie, in den Dingen und im Menschen, in erkanntem Objekt und erkennendem Subjekt nicht eine andere, von sich teilbare sein kann, ist damit das harmonische Eins für das Eins, das Eine für das Eine” (70). This correlation alienates Goethe from the practices of modern science which acknowledge the autonomy of the examined object, while also distancing him from associations of mysticism. The underlying premise of this scientific method is that “Gleiches Gleiches erkennt,” which means that it does not relegate natural phenomena to a sphere outside of human experience and into the unknown. However, as the theory of the Urphantomen has already demonstrated, there is also a limit to human inquiry into nature that sets a barrier preventing a total comprehension of natural phenomena. The precarious balance that Goethe sought to maintain here is explained by Erich Heller, who makes the necessary correlation between Goethe’s scientific endeavour and his approach to literature, concluding the following: “Seine [Goethes] Wissenschaft ist wie seine Poesie auf die Überzeugung gegegründet, daß der Mensch, wenn er sich nur in allen Gaben des Verstehens übt und bildet, ‘genugsam ausgestattet’ ist, alles zu wissen.  

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20 Ibid.
was zu wissen ihm zusteht, ohne die Natur auf die Folter spannen zu müssen...”\textsuperscript{21}

Goethe’s conflict with Newton and his colour theory most notably rests on the transgression of these principles, a problem he seeks to expound and clarify throughout large portions of his own work on colour theory.

\textit{Zur Farbenlehre} was published in 1810 and contains three separate segments - didactical, polemical and historical. Here Goethe attempts to expose the history and development of chromatic studies as inherited by both Newton and himself. It has been well documented that Goethe often referred to his interest in colour theory as a matter of legacy, handed down by other scientists’ previous (and faulty) work. In a conversation with Eckermann from 1824 he thus stressed the inevitability of his involvement in colour theory by claiming: “Um Epoche in der Welt zu machen, dazu gehören bekanntlich zwei Dinge: erstens daß man ein guter Kopf sei, und zweitens, daß man eine große Erbschaft tue... mir ist der Irrtum der Newtonische Lehre zu Teil geworden” (FA 39: 105). \textit{Zur Farbenlehre} was preceded by an earlier publication entitled \textit{Beiträge zur Optik} (1790) which disputed Newton’s optical and colour studies in a similar manner. The early publication is much more direct in its attacks against Newton, a position which, as Goethe explains, had left him in a vulnerable position:

\begin{quote}
Erstlich hatte ich mein kleines Heft: Beiträge zur Optik betitelt. Hätte ich Chromatik gesagt, so wäre es unverfälschter gewesen; denn da die Optik zum größten Teil mathematisch ist, so konnte und wollte niemand begreifen wie einer, der keine Ansprüche an Meßkunst machte, in der Optik wirken könne. (FA 23.1: 982)
\end{quote}

\textit{Beiträge zur Optik}, however, anticipates the later \textit{Zur Farbenlehre} by exposing the fundamental difference in view between Goethe and Newton. Newton’s “error”, as Goethe

sees it, lies in his insistence on the *diverse Refrangibilität* of light, a premise accepted by the scientific community but dismissed by Goethe as mere hypothesis, rather than as scientific fact (FA 23.2: 134).

This is not to say that Goethe overlooked Newton’s contribution to the development of colour theory. He duly acknowledged Newton’s place in the history of chromatic studies, by including him among the long list of other scientists who contributed to this field throughout the centuries. His criticism of Newton rests on the conclusions that the latter had made and sought to implement - conclusions Goethe thought were both rash and premature (FA 23.2: 136). He thus ascribed the idea of colour formation from refracting light to Newton’s personal experience, which, while valid for Newton himself, had no universal validity:

…die ganze Stärke der Newtonischen Theorie bestand [darin], daß der Erfinder sowohl als seine Schüler ausdrücklich verlangten, daß man von ihrem Standort, auf ihre Weise, die Gegenstände betrachten und sich von dem scheinbaren Zusammenhang als von einem wirklichen überzeugen sollte. (FA 23.2:138)

Newton’s theory abides by the premise that colours are monochromatic and that together they comprise a composite white colour. The primary colours red, green and blue create the spectrum that displays colour differentiation, which is caused by their differing degrees of refrangibility. Goethe, who imitated Newton’s experiments but failed to find reason to draw the same conclusions, does not accept this theory of colour. He claims that Newton violated the nature of chromatics by approaching the field in the abstract and artificial manner of a mathematician:

…daß eine Physik unabhängig von der Mathematik existiere, davon schien man keinen Begriff mehr zu haben. Die uralte Wahrheit, daß der Mathematiker sobald als er in das Feld der Erfahrung tritt, so gut wie jeder andere dem Irrtum unterworfen ist, wollte niemand in diesem Falle anerkennen. (FA 23.1: 982)
It is important to recognize that Goethe’s disagreement with Newton’s theory touches on the very principle of the Urphänomen. In Goethe’s views colours are “Leiden und Taten des Lichtes” (FA 23.1:12), an autonomous and inseparable manifestation of the original Urphänomen. In his opinion, colour emerges as the simple result of contrast between light and, what he terms “Nicht Licht” (FA 23.1: 302). The polarity of this observation is reminiscent of the polarity found in other areas of Goethe’s scientific research which he defends as the universal principle and “speech” of nature:

So mannigfaltig, so verwickelt und unverständlich uns oft diese Sprache scheinen mag, so bleiben doch ihre Elemente immer dieselbigen. Mit leisem Gewicht und Gegengewicht wag sich die Natur hin und her, und so entsteht ein Hüben und Drüben, ein Oben und Unten, ein Zuvor und Hemach, wodurch alle Erscheinungen bedingt werden, die uns im Raum und Zeit entgegentreten.

(FA 23.1: 302)

With his theory of refraction Newton sidesteps the complexity of the Urphänomen, attributing colour to colour alone. By claiming that white light is composite, Newton relates that which Goethe sees as Urphänomen to the Phänomen rather than vice versa, a move Goethe regards as a violation of the “innere Eigenschaft des Lichtes” (FA 23.1: 800), accomplished by artificial means and contrary to the true perception of the eye.

Goethe’s frustration with Newton’s optics and colour theory is alleviated by his discovery of physiological colours. His contributions to this particular field of colour theory are significant and he is generally considered one of its founders. The problem, however, is that this field became the basis and reference point for all his subsequent discoveries in colour studies. Goethe consistently referred his physical and chemical

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22 The polarity of Ausdehnung and Zusammenziehung in plants, for example (FA 24: 107ff).
23 Voigt and Sucker 39-44.
colours to physiology, a step he saw necessary not only to maintain the validity of his own
theory, but in order to do justice to the colours in question:

Diese [physiologischen] Farben, die wir billig oberan setzen, weil sie dem
Subjekt, weil sie dem Auge, teils völlig, teils größtens zugehören, diese Farben,
welche das Fundament der ganze Lehre machen und uns die chromatische
Harmonie, worüber so viel gestritten wird, offenbaren, wurden bisher als
außerwesentlich, zufällig, als Täuschung und Gebrechen betrachtet.
(FA 23.1:31)

For Goethe colours were "ein elementares Naturphänomen für den Sinn des Auges" (FA
23.1:24), which means that unlike Newton he did not employ any mechanical devices
(such as a telescope) in his viewing of colour. His attacks on Newton's theory were
therefore faulty and illogical, for he approached colour theory in a manner unprepared to
view colour in terms of rays.

Goethe's approach to colour theory does, however, enable him to preserve a view
of natural phenomena consistent with his previous scientific endeavour. His perceptual
approach to colours both highlights and resolves the relationship between Phänomen and
Urphänomen. The eye is seen by Goethe as a direct extension of light, thus assuming not
only the role of sensory receptor but that of the original Urphänomen as well: "Das Auge
als ein Geschöpf des Lichtes leistet alles, was das Licht selbst leisten kann" (FA 23.2 269).
By establishing a continuous link between the external and the internal, Goethe manages
to resolve the conflict and paradox underlying the synthetic concept of Idee und
Erfahrung:

Wenn wir den Kreis der Erscheinungen übersehen, so sind wir eher berechtigt, das
als allgemein auszusprechen, was wir bisher im besonderen gewahr geworden. Wir
sind berechtigt, uns zu Ideen zu erheben und die Erfahrung in einen höheren Kreis
einzuführen. Wir sprechen ihre Natur und Eigenschaft aus.
(FA 23.2: 210)
The repercussions of this insight become especially significant because of Goethe’s emphasis on physiological colours. They have the propensity not only to modulate the process of colour perception to the individual experience but also to extend it. Unlike physical or chemical colours, physiological colours are the innate property of the eye and not limited to certain outside conditions; as a consequence, they also encompass and affect everything perceived within visible range of a particular subject.

Because the physiological colours are contained within Goethe’s *Elementarkreis*, it becomes a visible and viable paradigm for demonstrating how this subjective synthetic process occurs. The *Elementarkreis* is constructed on the basis of blue and yellow, colours that epitomize for Goethe the antithetical relationship between light and darkness. As a product of this relationship the other four (rather than Newton’s five) elementary colours emerge: red, green, yellow-red/orange and blue-red/violet (FA 23.2: 273). The colour wheel represents a homogeneous whole because one colour evokes the other, the manifestation of a single colour always presupposing and producing the existence of another:

Wenn das Auge die Farbe erblickt, so wird es gleich in Tätigkeit gesetzt, und es ist seiner Natur gemäß, auf der Stelle eine andre, so unbewußt als notwendig, hervorzubringen, welche mit der gegebenen die Totalität des ganzen Farbenkreises enthält. Eine einzelne Farbe erregt in dem Auge, durch eine spezifische Empfindung, das Streben nach Allgemeinheit. (FA 23.1: 257)

The eye thus has the capacity to respond to an impulse inherent in human perception demanding totality. It does this by interacting with the visual sensation and by actively creating this sense of totality, as Emil Staiger explains: "Es [das Auge] setzt der Wirkung von Licht und Finsternis eine eigene Wirkung entgegen und zeigt sich bestrebt, ein Plus
In addition, the existence of physiological colours guarantees that the interplay between eye and colour never becomes a dull and uniform process. By belonging to the singular (and subjective) eye, the physiological colours always create from the universal scheme a new and unique experience.

In the preface to his colour theory Goethe defends the value of this discovery by claiming:

Jedes Ansehen geht über in ein Betrachten, jedes Betrachten in ein Sinnen, jedes Sinnen in ein Verknüpfen, und so kann man sagen, daß wir schon bei jedem aufmerksamen Blick in die Welt theoretisieren. Dieses aber mit Bewußtsein, mit Selbstkenntnis, mit Freiheit, und um uns eines gewagten Wortes zu bedienen, mit Ironie zu tun und vorzunehmen, eine solche Gewandtheit ist nötig, wenn die Abstraktion, vor der wir uns fürchten, unschädlich, und das Erfahrungsresultat, das wir hoffen, recht lebendig und nützlich werden soll.

(FA 23.1: 14)

In this paragraph he connects sight with insight, drawing a direct parallel between perception and thought, and perpetuating a method congruent with his earlier scientific studies. However, as the paragraph also stresses, this scientific method is not an end in itself, but merely a means and mode of thought leading to the discovery of other things.

The ambiguous Erfahrungsresultat is thus not entirely synonymous with the results of a standard scientific observation, but at the same time Goethe never really clarified what this term is meant to encompass. From other passages in his colour theory it is known that he did equate art and science - the question that arises is whether Goethe utilized this thinking outside of a scientific context, and if he did, to what degree it successfully communicated his intent.

This issue will be explored within the framework of his novel Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre which was published in 1821 as the much-anticipated sequel to Wilhelm

24 Emil Staiger, 2: 417.
Meisters Lehrjahre. The interval between novels extends over a quarter of a century and overlaps with a period of intense and productive scientific study in Goethe’s life. Bearing his scientific axioms in mind, an analysis of Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre will be made, in an attempt to reveal the true bilateral complexity of both the novel’s structure and its theme. The complexity of the novel is comparable in many ways to the complexity of Goethe’s scientific approach and must therefore be read accordingly.
Chapter Two. The Wanderjahre: An Anomalous Novel?

The first documented indication of a possible sequel to Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre was made in July 1796, in a letter Goethe wrote to Schiller. Here he acknowledges the difficulty of writing such a novel, claiming that the appropriate Verzahnungen must be found in order to make the relation between the two novels work. He does not specify the nature of the connection referred to, but alludes to a certain ongoing quality which must persist in order to make the transition to the sequel plausible: "Was rückwärts nothwendig ist muß gethan werden, so wie man vorwärts deuten muß, aber es müssen Verzahnungen stehen bleiben, die, so gut wie der Plan selbst, auf eine weitere Fortsetzung deuten" (FA 10: 777). The most obvious connection between the two novels is the character of Wilhelm Meister, who, according to the new title, has passed on from apprenticeship to journeymanship. This transition, however, has significant repercussions felt at all levels of the sequel and most notably in its structure. As will be shown, the cryptic and complex structure of Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre takes on a central importance in reading the novel, leading the reader to believe that the departure point for Wilhelm Meister is perhaps not its specific forerunner but the author’s convictions on the genre of the novel itself.

The difficulty of confining any interpretation of Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre to one particular literary genre is confirmed by the absence of a unified critical response. It is impossible to list all of the works dealing with this particular topic, hence only a representative sample of the available criticism will be presented here. In her approach to the novel Jane Brown compares it to Goethe’s earlier publication Unterhaltungen Deutscher Ausgewanderten (1794), claiming that the two novels are both cyclical
narratives. In her view, both novels imitate the model of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, the fourteenth century Italian novel which popularized the structure of the framed narrative tale. In *Unterhaltungen Deutscher Ausgewanderten* the narrative frame is easily discernible through the characters of Fritz, Karl and the priest, whose stories comprise the greater part of the novel. The arbitrary relationship of their individual tales is compensated for by their relationship as narrators, all of whom share a single occasion. In the novel Fritz, Karl and the priest are all connected by their present status as refugees, which then becomes the shared context within which they narrate their stories. This commonality of both circumstance and purpose creates a plausible framework for the rest of the narrative and makes the comparison to Boccaccio’s *Decameron* legitimate.

The difficulty with *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* is that its narrative frame is not so easily distinguishable. The frame shifts with each narrative voice introduced to the novel, making the interdependence of the frame and its tales highly complex. In order to give structure to the novel, Brown asserts that one should read it in conjunction with *Unterhaltungen Deutscher Ausgewanderten*, claiming that the latter is “a simple example on which the problems of the former can be examined” (32). A comparison between these two works is possible for several different reasons, the similarity of a framed structure, as Brown sees it, notwithstanding. There is a striking similarity of genesis with both *Unterhaltungen Deutscher Ausgewanderten* and *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*: stories from both novels were originally published in literary journals, and only later brought together as sections of the individual novels. However, whereas the seven stories of *Unterhaltungen Deutscher Ausgewanderten* are successfully integrated into the finished

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product precisely because of the narrative frame, the novellas of *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* are not. The analogy drawn with *Unterhaltungen Deutscher Ausgewanderten* based on this presence of a narrative frame is, therefore, somewhat weak and requires further consideration.

Most of the novellas belonging to *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* were written by 1806 and published in Cotta's *Damenkalender*. They appeared as separate and seemingly independent stories with no interconnection. However, referring back to these tales in 1807 Goethe noted the following in his journal, demonstrating that he was in fact planning to include them into a larger narrative whole: "An kleineren Geschichten, ersonnen, angefangen, fortgesetzt war diese Jahrzeit reich; sie sollten alle durch eine romantischen Faden unter dem Titel *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* zusammengeschlungen, ein wunderlich anziehendes Ganzes bilden" (FA 17.1: 204). From other entries in his journal it is also known that at this time he was examining various different sources, actively researching new narrative techniques. In her book *Goethe und 1001 Nacht* Katherina Mommsen explores the influence oriental tales in particular may have had on this pursuit.26

Mommsen interprets *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* in terms of its overall motif which, in her view, justifies the loose and disconnected structure. This focus on literary motif is traced to Goethe's activities in 1807, when, as his Karlsbad journal attests, he was reading and exploring a variety of different literary traditions, including the oriental tradition that produced the most famous of all framed tales: *The Arabian Nights*. Of this work he simply noted: "Den Gang der Tausend und Eine Nacht in Absicht auf die Folge der Motive zu betrachten" (FA 17.1: 302). Mommsen claims, on the basis of this

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evidence, that Goethe’s interest in the motif element of literature subsequently became his predominant literary fascination and the matrix out of which his later works, including the Wanderjahre, emerged. Indeed, in her view, the motif principle constitutes the key to any adequate interpretation of the novel’s complexity, because it alone harmonizes the elements of an otherwise anti-novelistic characterization; specifically the absence of “external” determinants:

...speziell in Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre [wurde] für die formale Ungebundenheit ein Äquivalent geschaffen... vom Inhaltslichen her. Die Auswahl der Motive ist es, welche die Wanderjahre bei aller Inkohärenz der Episoden doch zu einem nicht völlig willkürlich zusammengewürfelten Kunstgebilde macht. (121)

Thus, the means to a coherent reading of the novel must be latent in the terms of the novel itself. Accordingly, if the reader groups recurring thematic fragments together according to principles articulated within the novel, the reward will be a clear and unified internal pattern: “Wir sehen einen fest begrenzten Kreis unter sich gleichstimmiger Themen, den sowohl die Erzählungen wie die Rahmenhandlung mit deutlicher ‘Folge’ umspielen” (121). As Mommsen sees it, all the disparate elements of Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre are subject to the same opposing, but yet complementary, thematic pattern(s) of Selbstbeschränkung and Maßlosigkeit, Besonnenheit und Ungestüm, Entsagung and Leidenschaft, which are found at various stages of the novel (121). She claims there is a similar pattern to be found in Arabian Nights where the various tales are Leitmotive connected by a similar unified and ethical thread. She claims, furthermore, that the latter is a cultural construct with a specific purpose, which she describes as “die allgemeine Tendenz orientalischen Dichters zum Didaktischen” (125). By contrast, she sees Goethe’s appropriation of such a technique as a conscious choice - a fact that further
complicates, rather than clarifies, the appearance of this particular technique/structure in

**Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre.**

Ehrhard Bahr agrees with Mommsen’s theory of oriental influence in the

**Wanderjahre,** but claims that the larger underlying motive is never fully revealed.\(^{27}\) He refers to this as yet another technique on Goethe’s part, which he terms *obscuritas*:

> Das Erzählprinzip läßt sich nicht auf stimmige Kompositionsfiguren zurückführen, sondern besteht in der *obscuritas*, in der zarten, halb andeutenden ironischen Manier, wodurch man sich des Einen Sinnes plötzlich gewiß wird, ‘und sich doch immer des Zweifels nicht ganz erwehren kann’… (98-99)

According to Bahr, the principle of *obscuritas* encourages the reader to rearrange the novel in order to decode its meaning: ‘Er [der Leser] kann walten und schalten wie er will. Es geht ihm [Goethe] darum, den Einen Sinn in vielen verschiedenen Stücken auszudrücken’ (97). The extended role the reader is given in the reading of **Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre** will be discussed at length at a later point. Here it is important to note the manner in which the reader is asked to interpolate himself into the process of arranging the text. In order to comprehend the text as a novel in the traditional sense, the reader is indeed obliged to create a linear sequence out of the circular structure of the **Wanderjahre.** However, a linear organization of the novel does not do justice to the message and intent of the work. Confronted with unconnected episodic fragments and searching for meaning, the reader is left with no real choice but to transfer and relate information back to the circular structure.

The result of this apparently intentional process - this overlapping of the circular and linear, this process without procedure - is a sense of suspension for the reader, who is

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caught in a variety of ways between content and form. Bahr maintains that this is a typical manifestation of Goethean irony, which he describes in the following manner:

Was hier zugrunde liegt, ist nahezu eine Sabotage der Rhetorik, deren Aufgabe gerade darin besteht, den Hörer oder Leser durch eine bestimmte Anordnung der Gedanken und Worte mit dem Sinn vertraut zu machen. Die Erzählordnung wird hier absichtlich verwirrt, und rhetorische Einzelformen werden nur scheinbar ihrer Funktion gemäß eingesetzt. (99)

Determined to resolve this ironic impasse, Peter Eichhorn, in his work Idee und Erfahrung im Spätwerk Goethes, also examines the peculiar structure of Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre. He maintains that the form of the cycle is indispensable to both the content and the structure of the work (82). Nevertheless, he treats the work in a hermeneutic fashion, refraining from any concrete literary classifications. The cyclical structure maintains the ambiguity of genre, because, as he states: “die Möglichkeiten des Romans und der Novelle werden in einem neuen Wechselverhältnis beider Gattungen ausgemessen” (82). The consequence of this unorthodox relationship between forms is a renewed emphasis on content, for “Die Komposition ist von der Konstitution des Werkes unablösbar geworden” (82).

Eichhorn, furthermore, draws upon philosophy in his work, quoting Gadamer’s separation of “wirkungsgeschichtliche[n] Bewußtsein[s]” from “historische[m] Bewußtsein”, claiming that the former is traceable throughout all of Goethe’s later works. According to Eichhorn, the “wirkungsgeschichtlich[e] Bewußtsein” entails a certain openness and freedom of perspective, which welcomes hermeneutic developments while also considering past achievements. This type of perspective is characteristic of the mature style of a number of writers and Eichhorn mentions a similarity in style between

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the later works of both Wieland and Goethe. The retrospective and recapitulative connotations of this perspective would suggest a didactic trait in Goethe’s later works, and some critics have attempted to approach *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* in this manner. However, newer criticism has refuted this approach, claiming that Goethe’s narrative technique is employed to deconstruct, rather than reinforce meaning. Hans Rudolf Vaget is a representative of this opinion, because as he sees it, the peculiar structure of the novel, in addition to its other elements, seems to suggest that the *Wanderjahre* anticipates the *nouveau roman* of the twentieth century.  

Goethe himself commented on the novel at various stages both before and after its publication. He does not apologize to his readers for the difficulty inherent in reading the work, and his comments regarding its unorthodox and problematic structure are vague. However, before its release to the publisher he did note the following, validating an important link between this late novel and himself as the author:

> Es kommt mir sehr wunderlich vor, ein zwanzigjähriges Manuskript, an das ich bisher kaum gerührt, redigierend abzuschließen. Es erscheint mir als ein wiederkehrender Geist, freilich jungendlicher und liebenswürdiger als der jetzige Autor und die jetzige Zeit. (MA 17: 1018)

The personal nature of the novel seemed to obstruct Goethe’s view of its problematic structure because, as it appears, he did not anticipate any difficulties in its reception. His confidence in the success and clarity of the novel is revealed in an 1821 letter to Zelter, shortly after the publication of the first version. Here he discusses the novel and endorses its existence by expressing a certain faith in the reader who will grasp the novel’s intention: “…denn ich kann mich rühmen, daß keine Zeile drinnen steht, die nicht gefühlt

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oder gedacht wäre. Der echte Leser wird das alles schon wieder heraus fühlen und
denken” (FA 10: 853). However, his expectation that the reader would perceive the novel
as he did proved to be naive and erroneous, as the immediate and continuing barrage on
the work demonstrates.

The gap Goethe experienced between himself and his readers can be attributed to
the intricacies of his Altersstil which prevailed in several of his mature works. Erich Trunz
defines this approach to literature in the following manner: “Die Weltanschauung des
Alters denkt an das Leben als Ganzes: sie erkennt auf Erden immer wieder das Gleiche:
jeder Einzelfall repräsentiert ein Allgemeines.” 10 The mature outlook and universality of
view Trunz refers to here constitutes a valid insight in terms of Goethe’s choice of subject
matter in his Alterswerk, but it still does not explain the unorthodox structure of the
Wanderjahre. Karl Otto Conrady interprets the correlation between Goethe’s mature style
and the novel in a somewhat more coherent fashion. 31 As he explains, in the novel the
writer is not only communicating the wisdom of a long and fruitful life, but also testing the
capacity of literature to carry the weight of this experience:

Er trug hier zusammen, was er als Beobachter der Zeit und menschlichen
Verhaltens ausgekundschaftet hatte, übergab der dichterischen Erprobung, welche
Antworten wohl auf Herausforderungen der gesellscähtlichen Lage möglich
sein könnten, nahm dieses umfangreiche Prosabuch als ein Reservoir, das
Geschichten und Gedanken, ausgeführte Entwürfe und bloße Anregungen in sich
faßte, und legte es dem Leser zum Nachdenken (auch zur unterhaltsamen Lektüre)
vor...(515)

If Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre is indeed the product of this sort of literary experiment,

Conrady’s point would require that we think of Goethe as fully consumed by his own

work, incapable or unwilling to rise above its personal content and thus unable to recognize its formal features from an objective point of view.

Direct evidence does little to help clarify this situation. In a number of letters dating from 1821 Goethe repeatedly stresses the importance of content in the novel, which, in his view, should clarify and compensate for its lax structure. In a letter to Zauper, for example, he acknowledges the overall complexity of the work, perceiving it, however, only in terms of its main idea:

Zusammenhang, Ziel und Zweck liegt innerhalb des Büchleins selbst: ist es nicht aus Einem Stück, so ist es doch aus Einem Sinn, und die war eben die Aufgabe, mehrere fremdartige, äußere Ereignisse dem Gefühl als übereinstimmend entgegen zu bringen. (FA 10: 853)

The overt message is quite clear here: substance and structure are inseparable in this novel, and, according to Goethe, it is impossible to discern one without the other. Furthermore, in the same letter to Zauper he anticipates that the projected second part of the Wanderjahre will be similarly difficult to comprehend, but places his faith in the reader, "der diesen [ersten Teil] wohl gefaßt hat," in the hope that the second part will meet with an appropriate reception.

For Goethe, the difficult nature of the novel could be interpreted in light of its thematic core. His emphasis on the inner structure was revealed as bound to his choice of subject matter. In his view, the emphasis on the internal (rather than external) structure of the novel is inherent and natural to the theme of Wanderschaft, which prevails throughout the work. The increased complexity of this novel as compared to its "predecessor," Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre, is consistent with the heightened internal developments of the central character, who has passed from the stage of apprenticeship to a period of
journeymanship. It is not certain whether Goethe seriously intended to expand the
Wilhelm Meister material into a trilogy (advancing from the *Lehrjahre* and *Wanderjahre*
to the immanent conclusion of the *Meisterjahre*), but he did indicate that this was a
possibility. Before publication of the *Wanderjahre* in 1821 he said to Friedrich von Müller:
“...da Wilhelm so vieles schon in den Lehrjahren gelernt, so müsse er ja auf der
Wanderschaft desto mehr fremdes an sich vorübergehen lassen: die Meisterjahre seien
ohnehin noch schwieriger und das schlimmste in der Trilogie” (FA 10: 852). The novel of
Wilhelm Meister’s *Meisterjahre* never materialized: nor did the anticipated second part of
Wilhelm Meisters *Wanderjahre*. Instead of completing the novel, Goethe rewrote and
published it as a separate and independent version in 1829.

Thus, the 1821 version of *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* - the work that this
thesis focuses on – was and remains a fragment. However, in expectation of a thematically
linked trilogy (which in 1821 was still a possibility) the reader and critic alike are
encouraged to link the *Wanderjahre* to the earlier *Lehrjahre*. A comparison between these
two novels is, however, a mistake, for, as Hans Reiss warns, each novel is a separate and
distinct work of art.\(^{32}\) In an attempt, perhaps, to clarify the distinct nature of *Wilhelm
Meisters Wanderjahre* Goethe rewrote the novel between 1825 and 1829. The 1829
version is not a continuation but rather an expansion of the 1821 narrative. To the existing
novellas of the 1821 version, new novellas were added, all of which had been re-arranged
in a new order. Another notable distinction between the two novels is the exclusion of the
word “Roman” from the 1829 title, a deletion of literary classification that may have
reflected Goethe’s retrospective awareness of its unsuitability for the 1821 version as well.

The genre of the Roman was still a largely unidentified category in the eighteenth century. Opinions on the definitive qualities of the Roman varied, but it was agreed that the genre was meant to represent, as Johann Carl Wezel termed it, a type of bürgerliche Epopee. The Roman was perceived as a modern and realistic counterpart to the superhuman and fantastic epics of ancient Greece and in his Versuch über den Roman, one of the first attempts at a theory of the novel in the eighteenth century, Friedrich von Blanckenburg analyses the novel as a genre that specifically focuses on the “Handlungen und Empfindungen des Menschen.” He views this as the distinguishing quality that separates the novel from the traditional Greek epopee. The Roman, consequently, captures and brings to literature some of the complexities of everyday life, a process described by von Blanckenburg as the interplay of internal and external circumstances: "Das Innre und das Aeußere des Menschen hängt so genau zusammen, daß wir schlechterdings jenes kennen müssen, wenn uns die Erscheinungen in diesem [dem Roman] , und die ganzen Aeußerungen des Menschen erklären und begreiflich machen wollen" (263).

Representation within the novel, von Blanckenburg continues, is left to the judgement of the writer, whose responsibility it is to convey a sense of veracity and credibility in his work to his readers:

Wenn die Absicht des Dichters zuforderst und vor allen Dingen ist und seyn soll, uns an seinen Menschen, an seinen Personen das zu zeigen, was wir, der Wahrheit nach, am Menschen sehen können: so darf er diese aeußere und innre Verbindung der wirkenden Ursach irgend einer Begebenheit, die er durch eine Person

ausführen läßt, schon deswegen nicht vernachlässigigen, weil wir bey dieser Vernachlässigung nie das sehen würden, was wir bey ihm sehen sollen. (264)

Returning to *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* and examining it in light of this commentary, the question that arises is: did Goethe “neglect” his novel in a similar fashion? The answer, perhaps, is not that he neglected the linkages between internal and external events (as referred to by von Blanckenburg), but that he took the freedom of the “Romanform” a step too far - stretching it to encompass not only contemporary social truths, but those of his own personal beliefs. Among his *Maximen und Reflexionen* a definition of the Roman is found in which he shuns the notion of the “bürgerliche Epopée,” defining the form instead as a vehicle of personal expression:

> Der Roman ist eine subjektive Epopée, in welcher der Verfasser sich die Erlaubnis ausbittet, die Welt nach seiner Weise zu behandeln. Es fragt sich also nur, ob er eine Weise habe, das andere wird sich schon finden. (FA 13:133)

> Goethe moulds *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* after its central character. Wilhelm Meister is, however, as the subtitle reveals, a renunciant, which means that as a character he is confined to limited personal choices within the novel. His pledge to renounce is revealed in the first chapter, and defines the entire work. His renunciation consists of his journeymanship and his promise to spend no longer that three days in the same place, a role that Wilhelm adopts as a type of voluntary bondage to Natalie from whom he is now separated. He hints at the dual nature of his renunciation in which the journeymanship is only an outward manifestation of deeper developments to come. In his first letter to Natalie he describes the pain of separation the journeymanship has imposed and writes:

> Doch will ich Dir gern gestehen, daß ich oft diejenigen Lehrer und Menschenführer bewundere, die ihren Schülern nur äußere, mechanische Pflichten auflegen. Sie machen sich’s und der Welt leicht. Denn gerade diesen Teil meiner
In this letter Wilhelm makes the distinction between external and internal duty, establishing an implied duplicity of image that continues throughout the novel. The nature of the journeymanship is also indicative of a pattern of deeper textual layering encountered throughout the narrative in which no margins have been set and in which the framework of the novel collides with its various novellas.

The first of these is *Sankt Joseph der Zweite*. Wilhelm accidentally encounters the Joseph figure when their paths cross at the top of a mountain at the very beginning of the novel. He is intrigued by the appearance and biblical imitation presented by the character and, after entrusting his son Felix to his care, follows Joseph home. Here Wilhelm notes the similarities between the religious paintings in a chapel and the life of his host. And, curious about the circumstances that led to this imitation, asks Joseph to tell his story. This story becomes integrated into the framework of the novel with no obvious transitions and Joseph assumes a narrative voice alongside Wilhelm’s own. The presence of his narrative voice is the first indication of a multiplicity of perspectives to be introduced into the novel, creating the pattern that makes it so difficult to read with ready comprehension.

The Saint Joseph novella could be thus interpreted as a model according to which the entire *Wanderjahre* should be read. In the novella the idea of renunciation is also compressed, and we as readers learn the visible results of the process. It is important to note that the Saint Joseph encounter occurs after Wilhelm has written his letter of renunciation to Natalie, because the Saint Joseph figure and his way of life become empirical proof of the possibility of Wilhelm materializing his intent. The whole novel
moves, consequently, towards a similar (successful) completion of the ideal of renunciation and documents the process in the form of the other individual novellas present in the work. The narrative voices and individual characters in the novellas vary in many different ways; however, on the level of the larger framework of the novel they also become conjoined by their common bond of (incomplete) renunciation.

In his commentary on the novel Erich Trunz similarly defines the structure of *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* in terms of its theme of renunciation. He separates the frame from the novellas by claiming "daß die Rahmengeschichte der Bereich derer ist, die zu Entsagung und Vergeisterung gelangt sind, die Novellen der Bereich derer, die noch davor stehen oder erst dazu kommen" (548). By making this separation Trunz draws the important conclusion that the structure of the novel must be perceived in terms of its content, rather than its form. The first character to adopt the ideal of renunciation is Wilhelm himself who, after writing his letter of intent to Natalie, writes a second letter in which he completes the story of Saint Joseph. The transition back to the authority of his narrative voice is surprising as it is not anticipated within the given context. He completes the Saint Joseph story by claiming a certain kinship with the character that allows the amalgamation of their (individual) stories:

So eben schließe ich eine angenehme, halb wunderbare Geschichte, die ich für Dich aus dem Munde eines gar wackern Mannes aufgeschrieben habe. Wenn es nicht ganz seine Worte sind, wenn ich hie und da meine Gesinnungen, bei Gelegenheit der seinigen, ausgedrückt habe; so war es bei der Verwandtschaft, die ich hier mit ihm fühlte, ganz natürlich. (41)

Only with this conclusion of the novella do we learn that Wilhelm, rather than Joseph, was the actual narrator of the end of the story - which is totally unexpected since the entire tale was told from a first person’s ("ich") point of view.
With this passage an important clue is given that indicates that the novel is not to be read in a purely literal and textual sense. In addition, language does not seem to capture and communicate all the necessary nuances of the narrative, because as Wilhelm further confesses to Natalie: "Gar manchen schönen Zug des Zusammenseins dieser frommen und heitern Menschen muß ich übergehen: denn wie liebe sich alles schreiben!" (41). The shift away from language as an unreliable means of communication results in the compounding of images which, within the novel, form a syntax and order all of their own. This is primarily seen in the recurrent symbolism Goethe uses, starting with the mysterious Kästchen found by Felix at the beginning of the novel. Wandering with his friend Fitz, Felix accidentally stumbles across a locked casket in the ground. The casket cannot be opened because its key is missing and the mystery surrounding its contents remains unrevealed to the very end of the novel. The casket begins thus to represent an implicit symbol for Wilhelm's journey itself, which similarly lacks a definitive and clear meaning. In a conversation with Jarno, whom Wilhelm has also met in the mountains, hints are given as to how one should approach the interpretation of such mysterious objects. As Jarno explains, the key to interpretation does not lie within the definition of a particular object, but rather in the symbolism itself. It is impossible to explain the complexities of the objects around us and therefore: "In einem jedem neuen Kreise muß man zuerst wieder als Kind anfangen, leidenschaftliches Interesse auf die Sache werfen, sich erst an der Schale freuen, bis man zu dem Kerne zu gelangen das Glück hat" (47). The casket reappears subsequently in several of the other novellas, each time assuming a different purpose and a different role. Its repetitive presence in the narrative augments the reader's expectation of its significance, leading him/her to believe that the casket is of great interpretative value to
the novel as a whole. When the key to the original casket is found finally in Chapter 17, the discovery appears surprisingly irrelevant, and as Hersilie (who has found the key but not yet opened the box) exclaims: “Ich wollte es fände sich gar nichts drinne...” (219). An additional irony is that the key was found at the very same time the casket was found; it was in Fitz’s jacket that the company had in their possession throughout the entire novel. Contrary to what may have been perceived as a possible etymological clue, the key thus was never meant to unlock the Kästchen, for it was never the true missing part of the symbolism. In his interpretation of the novel Hans-Georg Dewitz renders Goethe’s use of symbolism in Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre as a highly developed semiotic structure. He claims that through his characters Goethe developed a threefold symbolism in the novel by adding to the external and internal significance of objects an Operator “mit dessen Hilfe [deren] Zusammenhang entschlüsselt werden kann” (961). By supplying this additional element Goethe achieves, in Demitz’s opinion, a balance between “purer Dinglichkeit und purer Zeichenhaftigkeit” which results in a perfect and permanent three-dimensional symbolism:

Von wesentlicher Bedeutung aber ist, daß Zeichen ihre identifikatorische Kraft nur dann entfalten, wenn ihr Spiel selbst, gebunden an die Bewegung der Figuren, im Raum sich bewährt: den Innenräumen der Gebäude, der Weite der Landschaft, der Unermeßlichkeit des Kosmos. (961)

As its central character, Wilhelm is made aware of the nature of the novels’s symbolism in the Collector’s house when the latter deters him from prematurely opening the casket:

“Denn wenn Sie glücklich geboren sind und wenn dieses Kästchen etwas bedeutet, so muß

---

35 The etymology of the word “symbolon” alludes to a certain token of identification that must be shown as a counterpart to another token, with which it can then be pieced together.

sich gelegentlich der Schlüssel dazu finden, und gerade da wo Sie ihn am wenigsten erwarten” (83).

The encounter at the Collector’s House is a pivotal scene for several other reasons as well. In the house another pertinent symbolic image for the novel is presented, namely that of the Collector’s crucifix. It could be associated with and interpreted in light of the Saint Joseph encounter, but much more relevant here are the story and appearance surrounding the object itself. The crucifix lacked a horizontal axis because the arms on the cross had been broken off and the Collector, anxious to supply meaning to the object, had the arms of the cross made, adding them to the vertical axis. However, only with the rediscovery of the real arms did he grasp the true meaning of the crucifix, as he explains to Wilhelm:

…entzückt über ein so glückliches Zusammentreffen, enthalte [ich] mich nicht die Schicksale der christlichen Religion hieran zu erkennen, die oft genug zergliedert und zerstreu, sich doch endlich immer wieder am Kreuze zusammen finden muß. (83)

The episode serves as a rather oblique encouragement to the reader who struggles with the meaning of the perpendicular nature of the novel and attempts to read it in a linear and sequential fashion. The Collector’s experience advocates to Wilhelm (and indirectly to the reader) a certain patience in the winding search for meaning. This chapter also marks an important departure point for the narrative, leading Wilhelm into the next episode of the novel: the highly symbolic and complex Pedagogical Province, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

Hans Reiss compares Goethe’s order and use of images in Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre to that of a kaleidoscope mixing many colours (229). The purpose, he says,
is to express and interconnect all the complexities of life which the novel is meant to represent. Beginning with *Sankt Joseph der Zweite* Goethe connects the various images and concepts in his novel by establishing a parallel structure that runs throughout. He does this in the first novella by mirroring Wilhelm’s existence into Joseph’s and vice versa, a connection manifested by the letter written to Natalie in which Wilhelm assumes Saint Joseph’s narrative voice. Later in the novel, as will be shown, he parallels individual novellas with each other. Wilhelm’s correspondence with Natalie plays an important role in maintaining the figurative imagery developed in the novel. Because of his pledge to share with her all of his journeymanship experiences, he is constantly writing to her in a descriptive style that supports a figurative perception. It is thus not surprising that some of the actual novellas are also represented in epistolary form, for this becomes a convenient way of maintaining the semblance of a uniform method of presentation.

The second novella, *Das nüßbraune Mädchen*, is also presented in letter form. The letter has passed through several hands before being passed on to Natalie, which somewhat distorts the perspective on events. However, the novella is very important for the direction of the main narrative because it clarifies and explains Wilhelm’s movements and whereabouts since the Saint Joseph episode. From the novella we learn of his encounter with Lenardo and his family, who all later play a defining role in the narrative. *Das nüßbraune Mädchen*, as the introduction to a significant series of subsequent events, signifies the official beginning of Wilhelm’s journey. His involvement in the lives of those around him is closely connected to his vow of renunciation, as the following passage reveals:
Man vertraut mir, man gibt mir einen Pack Briefe, ein paar Hefte Reisejournale, die Konfessionen eines Gemüts, das noch nicht mit sich selbst einig ist, und so bin ich in Kurzem überall zu Hause. Ich kenne die nächste Gesellschaft; ich kenne die Personen, deren Bekanntschaft ich machen werde und weiß von ihnen beinahe mehr als sie selbst, weil sie denn doch in ihren Zuständen befangen sind und ich an ihnen vorbei schwebe...(60)

Here Wilhelm also presents the paradoxical order that will prevail in the work. He claims to know the people around him before he has even made their acquaintance, reversing thus the order of perception in the novel while also distorting the reader’s possibility of a straightforward linear approach.

The subsequent sequence of events in Wilhem Meisters Wanderjahre becomes seemingly altogether arbitrary, as they are too in Das nussbraune Mädchen. Here we learn of Lenardo’s involvement with a girl that happened many years ago. Details involving the event are so remote that he no longer even recalls her name – hence her designation as the nut-brown maid. The incident, however, has had a chain of significant repercussions: (a) it has made Lenardo leave home, giving rise to (b) his letters home and inquiries about her, which finally (c) engages Wilhelm to resolve the mystery. Wilhelm’s ability to intervene on Lenardo’s behalf stems from the nature of his journeymanship which, as he revealed to Natalie, enables him to be and feel “überall zu Hause.” His role as mediator increases as the novel progresses, and as he harmonizes, on a structural level, all the diverse elements of the work. Heidi Gidion explains:

\begin{quote}
In jedem Bezirk, in den er eingeführt wird, ist Wilhelm zwar noch unbekannt mit den Einzelheiten, jedoch sofort im Einklang mit dem Geist des Bezirks. Aus seinen Fragen, aus seinem Verhalten lassen sich weniger Rückschlüsse auf seinen Charakter als vielmehr auf die Umgebung ziehen, in der er sich gerade befindet und deren Eigenart an ihm als einem Indikator ablesbar ist.\end{quote}

\footnote{Heidi Gidion, Zur Darstellungsweise von Goethes “Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre” (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969) 30.}
By mirroring the particular circumstances of a given situation in his person, he also connects them, combining them to become part of the larger framework of the novel to which he belongs.

Under the veil of personal renunciation Wilhlem easily moves from the main narrative to the novellas, adapting and integrating their stories into his own. The most obvious result of the novellas' interpolation into the frame is the disintegration of the frame itself which suddenly loses its function - which initially was to contain them. The novellas gradually grow into the frame of the novel, while the diversity of their stories begin to reflect the diversity of a growing and new frame, as Eberhard Sarter observes:

Die ganze Form der Wanderjahre ist Abbild der in Einzelheiten beobachteten Neigung zum Episodischen. In eigentlichem gerahmten Novellenzyklus erscheint der jeweilige Übergang aus der Rahmenerzählung zu einer der Novellen nicht als ein Abbiegen in Nebenwege; doch hier, wo der Rahmen seine dienende Funktion aufgegeben hat und sich durchaus als Haupthandlung des Romans gibt, ist jede Novelle Episode.\textsuperscript{38}

The episodic and fragmented nature of the narrative captured within such an erratic and varied frame make Wilhelm appear as the only constant presence in the novel, and once the reader has realized that all the individual novellas are somehow directed to him he becomes the guiding principle in the narrative. However, his directive presence is deceptive, for, as Eric Blackall reminds us, the novellas are merely re-directed from Wilhlem to Natalie, who is the real "ethical focus ... of the action of the book."\textsuperscript{39} Her physical absence and sketchy spiritual presence in the book makes the final destination of these novellas unknown, leaving the reader to decide at what point beyond the novel the


narrative actually ends.

Natalie’s absence from the main narrative right from the beginning anticipates other voids encountered in the course of the novel. Halfway through, the voice of the Editor emerges to emphasize the structural gaps in the work and the reader is suddenly forced to realize that it is he who directs and manages the narrative. The Editor apologizes for the amorphous structure of the novel and addresses its fragmentary nature:

Das eine gewisse Lücke, vielleicht in kurzem fühlbar, im Ganzen hie und da bemerklich und doch nicht zu vermeiden sein werde, sprechen wir lieber aus, ohne Furcht den Genuß unserer Leser dadurch zu kränken. Bei der gegenwärtigen, zwar mit Vorbedacht und Mut unternommenen Redaktion stoßen wir dochauf alle die Unbequemlichkeiten, welche die Herausgabe dieser Bändchen seit zwanzig Jahren verspäteten. (127)

It is not known whether the presence of the Editor is meant to be equated with Goethe’s authorial presence or not. Among his personal notes it is found, however, that at times he did use the technique of an objective editor to gain distance from his own work. He would create this neutral persona in order to gain “control” over his writings, as he explains:

“…[mich] als Redakteur verhaltend [gegen meine eigenen Papiere], [durfte ich] das Überflüssige und manches Unbehagliche daraus verbannen.” In the same commentary he admits that this method was also not always successful and that some texts, despite his extended effort, “konnten nimmermehr zur Einheit gedeihen” (FA 24: 441).

The editors of the Munich edition of Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre agree that the presence of the Redakteur is a means and technique of detachment on Goethe’s part. They claim, however, that in the Wanderjahre he used this figure to detach himself from the novel’s predecessor Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre, rather than from the text itself. In their view, the Redakteur is the physical reminder of the lapse of time between the
Lehrjahre and the Wanderjahre - and the excuse for the inconsistency in their styles (MA 17: 982). They go on to state that he is strategically placed midway through the novel as a necessary justification for the reader, who by this point has realized that the two novels are very different in nature. Another critic, Eberhard Sarter, makes a similar point regarding the Wanderjahre, adding that the editorial/narrative voice also enables Goethe to slip effortlessly in and out of its story:

...an die Stelle des fingierten Erzählers schiebt sich der Dichter selbst: ...nur erst so, daß das wirkliche Verhältnis Goethes zum Stoff der beabsichtigten Fiktion zum Trotz hie und da durchscheint, ohne daß damit notwendig wird, diesen dichtenden Erzähler mit Goethe zu identifizieren. (25)

Structurally it would have been more practical to place the Editor’s comments in the introduction of the novel as a means of orientation for the reader. However, it is not until the Editor’s Zwischenrede, which is in Chapter 11, that clues are finally given as to how one should read the work. As the Editor admits, there is so much disparate material in the archive it is impossible to convey and present it all. He therefore must choose only the most important material, a process that forces him to refrain from smooth and comprehensible transitions between episodes of the novel. Because of this selection he requests a certain cooperation from his readers who are asked to supply the missing pieces:

Und so geben wir daher einige Kapitel, deren Ausführung wohl wünschenswert gewesen, nur in vorüber eilender Gestalt, damit der Leser nicht nur fühle, daß hier etwas ermangelt, sondern daß er von dem Mangelnden näher unterrichtet sei und sich dasjenige selbst ausbilde was...nicht vollkommen ausgebildet oder mit allen Belegen gekräftiget ihm entgegen treten kann. (128)

The demand on the reader’s involvement increases as the novel progresses, becoming finally the true indispensable element for a comprehension of the work.
The appearance of the archive results in what Sarter terms the "Inkongruenz der beiden Fiktionen," a splitting of the narrative between what the novel presents and what remains hidden with the Editor in his collection. The split nature of the novel obliges the reader to become sceptical and to choose whom and what to believe: is the pertinent information for the novel really presented in the novel itself, or has it been withheld in the archive? The answer lies in the approach of the reader to the text, as Sarter explains:

Die Wirklichkeitsillusion wird durch das Vortreten des beliebig erschaffenen Erzählers aufgehoben, das Dargestellte erscheint als weniger ernsthaft gemeint, fast als unwichtiges Produkt einer dichterischen Laune. Eben die Inkongruenz beider Fiktionen gibt den schwimmenden Zustand, der die Möglichkeit läßt, daß das Publikum die ihm gemäße wähle, der ganz Verstehende die höhere. (11)

With the bilateral narrative Goethe is able to exercise a selective process of his own, by distinguishing between the reader who accepts the novel as is, and the reader who wants to comprehend the novel in its entirety - with its hidden archives. To those who opt for the latter, the process of understanding the work becomes a real challenge, for they must read its difficult structure in a decidedly non-literary way - as the following chapter will demonstrate.
Chapter Three. The Wanderjahre as a Scientific Construct

In Chapter Ten Wilhelm reaches the border of the Pedagogical Province (84). His arrival in the Province has been anticipated since Chapter Six when Montan first mentioned the place, describing it in utopian terms:

So muß ich Dir vertrauen, fuhr Montan fort, daß Du Dich an den Grenzen einer Provinz befindest, die ich mit Recht ein pädagogisches Utopien nennen würde. In der Überzeugung, daß nur ein Einziges in vollständiger Umgebung getrieben, gelehrt und überliefert werden könne, sind mehrere solche Punkte tätiger Belehrung über einen großen Raum gleichsam ausgesäet. An jedem Ort findest Du eine kleine Welt, aber in ihrer Beschränktheit so vollkommen, daß sie jede andere Welt, ja sogar die große, abbilden und vorstellen muß. (50 f.)

It is important to note that since this encounter with Montan, the action has considerably progressed. Wilhelm has become acquainted with the dynamics of Lenardo and his family by means of Das nußbraune Mädchen, which then later led him to other important events. Felix, on the other hand, has stumbled across the ubiquitous Kästchen, another relevant and recurring element of the novel. Yet, as the conversation with Montan reveals, the Wanderschaft itself has not progressed and, physically at least, Wilhelm has not progressed much beyond the stage of the first few chapters of the novel. Thus a discrepancy emerges between the momentum and growth of the novel and the momentum of Wilhelm’s journeymanship, which appears to be losing ground in face of this growing, larger framework. The disproportional relationship between the development of the novel and that of the journeymanship also sheds new light on Wilhelm’s journey, while undermining it somewhat by making it appear so (paradoxically) stationary.

Heidi Gideon maintains that the journeymanship continues to provide the necessary transitions between events of the novel. She devises a scheme to demonstrate this, and
maintains that the journeymanship consistently moves in a pattern of "Weg-Gang-Gegend" (24). However correct her observations may be, it is also necessary to look at the realization of this scheme and the effects it may have. Closer scrutiny reveals that the realization of this scheme is, in fact, detrimental to the journeymanship because it gradually cancels out both the journeymanship as such and also its original purpose. At a certain point, the events of the novel become so well interpolated and mutually integrated that they begin to ignore the journeymanship as part of the narrative. The connective and synthetic qualities the journeymanship provided are thus no longer needed - hence its apparent stagnation. Furthermore, once the narrative focus no longer privileges the journeymanship, the latter ceases to be of any significant importance. With the development of the narrative the purpose of the journeymanship seems to disintegrate entirely, signalling the collapse of the original narrative frame. The disappearance of this frame leads eventually to a total and complete emancipation of the events it encompassed - which then themselves become (simultaneously) both the structure and the substance of the novel.

The role of the novellas thus becomes extended, as their interpolation gradually excludes the journeymanship as the main focus and frame of the novel. The intent of this process is, however, not to eliminate the presence of a narrative frame (and to cause chaos), but to replace the frame with a more diverse counterpart. The thematic concept of the novel remains unchanged, because all of the novellas continue to deal with the same theme of renunciation Wilhelm is exploring. The diminished role of his journeymanship should not be seen as an obstruction in developing this thematic core, but as a mere shift in perspective, because, through the novellas, the narrative continues to progress. The
original narrative frame and directive the journeymanship provided is replaced, rather than eliminated, as the novellas reflect the same ideological content.

The relationship that emerges between the journeymanship and the novellas is, consequently, a harmonious one because they remain conjoined by the idea of renunciation. The diverging and confusing presentation of the novellas within the work would appear to contradict this statement; however, once again, it is necessary to observe the larger theme in the novel. In her analysis of the work, Waltraud Maierhofer insists that Goethe consciously resisted the consistency of content and form in order to develop its thematic core and maintains thus that the disparity of form is in all actuality intended.40 She explains this phenomenon subsequently in light of the development of the modern novel and claims:

Dieses überganglose "Nebeneinander" erfordert jedoch ein erweitertes Verständnis von Roman, unabhängig davon, ob es auf Traditionen dieser jungen Gattung aufbaut oder ein völlig neuen Ansatz darstellt. Die Verknüpfungsprinzipien, Analogien und wechselseitige Spiegelung und die Technik der Nebenordnung ergeben ein vielstrahliges Beziehungsgeflecht, das es ermöglicht, übergreifende geistige Zusammenhänge und komplexe Strukturen, die sich nicht in eine eindeutige logische oder kausale Ordnung auseinanderlegen lassen zu erhellen.

(151)

In her criticism, she alludes to several other valid points, stressing specifically what she terms an understanding of the "polyfunctional" nature of the structure of the novel (157).

Nevertheless, rather than relating and comparing this information to the modern novel, it is possible to understand it within the scope of Goethe's own work by comparing it to scientific rather than literary precedents.

Returning to some of Goethe’s basic scientific principles, it is fruitful, for example to examine the structural basis of the novel as a relationship of *Urphänomen* and *Phänomen*. As mentioned above, there is a synthetic relationship between these two concepts, with one always complementing and evoking the other. The *Urphänomen*, as the idea, is the mental constant underlying the *Phänomen*, which, as its visible construct, is manifested in many different ways. The *Phänomen*, however, is never meant to be interpreted as an isolated object, because this violates its symbiotic relationship with its *Ur*-component. Connecting both, regardless of diversity in form, is an absolute assumption of totality - a defining quality that governs all of Goethe’s scientific work. His entire scientific approach was based on such a heuristic and bilateral system, that extended to many different fields of research. That some of these ideas made their way into his literary works is detectable in his novel *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*. Here a dual view of reality is, in fact, offered in the very first dialogue of the novel, suggesting that the work may well be a similar bilateral scientific construct.

This first dialogue between Wilhelm and his son rests on a question that examines the problem of duplicity:

> Wie nennt man diesen Stein, Vater? sagte der Knabe.  
> Ich weiß nicht, versetzte Wilhelm.  
> Ist das wohl Gold was darin so glänzt? sagte jener.  
> Es ist keins! versetzte dieser: und ich erinnere mich, daß es die Leute Katzengold nennen. (19)

In this particular chapter the distinction between *Gold* and *Katzengold* is successfully made by Wilhelm; however, this is not to say that the same decision has been made for the entirety of the novel. This initial insight into what is real gold and what is not, translates in the course of the novel into other probing inquiries of other duplicities: the duplicity of
perspective, duplicity of image, duplicity of frame etc. With the advancement of the narrative, and with Wilhelm's own disappearance from its frame, such an authoritative discernment is clearly no longer his to make. Instead, Goethe presents his readers with the material itself and asks them to become involved, appealing to their subjective perception - thus revealing indirectly yet another important principle of all his scientific work.

The abstract nature of his Urphänomen demanded a similar mental involvement on part of the scientific observer. As the underlying basis of the Phänomen, it has the unique quality of containing both the palpable and the abstract, the separation of which was never overtly made and left, thus, to the observer to ascertain. The criteria for its discernment oscillated between a visual and a projected image, or as Theda Rehbock explains, between Phänomen and Idee:

Phänomen ist es [das Urphänomen], sofern es Grundaspekte der wahrnehmbaren Erscheinungen enthält, welche selbst sinnlich-qualitativen Charakter besitzen und gewissermaßen die sichtbare 'Gestalt' oder 'Form' der Erscheinungen ausmachen... Als Idee unterscheidet es sich anderseits von den konkreten Einzelphänomenen dadurch, daß es ausschließlich allgemeine und wesentliche Aspekte der jeweiligen Erscheinungen enthält. Es ist somit als Urphänomen nicht als eigenständiges Phänomen neben den übrigen Phänomenen, sondern allein in und an ihnen anschaubar.41

Returning to the novel, and examining it in light of this Phänomen-Urphänomen dynamic, it is possible to detect a similar oscillating tendency between the novellas and the main narrative frame. Wilhelm, whose title role in the work is undermined by the growing influence of the novellas, personifies the process in question. As his journeymanship (which constituted the initial frame and objective of the novel) disintegrates, he becomes visibly less significant for the progression of events. Nevertheless, through his involvement

with the other characters, he still retains the unique ability to slip in and out of the narrative, remaining current with its momentum, without necessarily being always physically present.

Wilhelm winds his way into the lives of those around him by mediating in their correspondence, becoming initially the messenger between Lenardo and his family. He finds a certain kinship with this role and writes to Natalie that his advantage over those around him is that people “in ihren Zuständen befangen sind, und ich an ihnen vorbei schweb' im an Deiner hand, mich mit Dir alles besprechend” (60). Proportional to this freedom, however, is the growing disregard for Wilhelm’s role as the novel’s main character, which eventually makes him appear totally superfluous to its narrative. This development is primarily manifested in his disappearing personal presence and the changing role of his journeymanship. Most notable is that his personal correspondence with Natalie stops, eliminating her previous directive and, more importantly, authoritative presence in the novel. By doing this he reneges on one of the primary conditions of his journeymanship, which was, as he outlined to her, to have the right to share the confidence of others with her: “Auch ist es meine erste Bedingung, ehe ich ein Vertrauen annehme daß ich Dir alles mitteilen dürfe” (60). With Natalie’s disappearance - and it was she who initiated Wilhelm’s journeymanship in the first place - the personal element of his journey is also gone, transforming his role in the work into something much larger than the fulfilment of a personal agenda.

The question that arises out of this is ultimately: what does Wilhelm’s transient presence signify for the rest of the narrative? By becoming detached from the personal conditions of his journeymanship, he widens its scope, opening the narrative frame to
encompass other diverse elements. His diminishing lead/title role in the novel gives impetus to the development of other characters and other stories, which eventually overwhelm his own presence. However, unlike Natalie, Wilhelm does not entirely disappear, and remains a quiet, but lingering influence. His influence is not manifested by the command of authority over the individual novellas that subsequently develop, but by the underlying connective powers with which he correlates them. As we already saw, there is a common theme of renunciation unfolding in the novel which connects the various tales. Wilhelm’s increasingly disjointed narrative presence appears to highlight this connection, making him the correlate of all the novel’s diverse plots. With Natalie’s disappearance and the loss of a wholly subjective agenda, Wilhelm’s character begins to embody the theme of renunciation itself, fluctuating between his initial role as one of the novel’s characters and this new role as its moral principle.

As the theme of renunciation becomes the predominant focus of the novel, Wilhelm’s presence is adapted accordingly. His role in the narrative begins to verge on the abstract by an increasingly inactive physical participation in the novel’s development. After the initial few chapters, his role is largely limited to that of a willful intermediary between other characters of the work, as shown, for example, in the situation of Lenardo and the nut-brown maid. Wilhelm’s ability to shift and move between the novellas guarantees, however, their completion, maintaining a significant, albeit less visible, role for him. He maintains a connection between the novellas, not by providing a narrative frame, but by epitomizing a common theme and by thus supplying meaning to their existence. The confusion and paradox surrounding this role is that it is not manifested structurally, i.e. there is no single visible paradigm that clarifies and identifies it as such. Instead, there is
only the chaotic thematic advancement of the novel - that once more reinforces the premise that the novel is indeed a matter of content rather than form.

A system that does offer an explanation for Wilhelm's mysterious involvement in the lives of those around him is the dynamic of *Phänomen*/Urphänomen. His influence over the novel is akin to that of the Urphänomen, precisely because it is a subliminal influence not exhibited in an obvious and/or direct way. He withdraws from the surface of the novel to orchestrate events from a deeper level, a presence detected only by the very observant reader. In light of his disappearance, the novellas begin thus to take on the form of a quasi-*Phänomen* which, when interpreted alone, paints a distorted and incomplete picture of the larger Urphänomen it is meant to represent. As an example, without understanding the novel's principle of renunciation it is impossible to understand the pertinence and relationship of such novellas as *Die pilgernde Törin* and/or *Die neue Melusine* to the work as a whole. Both novellas are examples of incomplete and/or failed renunciation - a theme that Hans Reiss claims the majority of the novellas share (247). The diversity in plot prevents any coherent comparison between the novellas and, as such, their meaning (and place) within the novel can only emerge when juxtaposed to Wilhelm and to his own ideal of renunciation. Wilhelm's presence becomes thus the focal point in which all the novellas converge, making him (and, more importantly, what he indirectly represents) the true undeviating fulcrum of the work.

However, this is not to say that the novellas are of secondary importance or that they exist only to highlight Wilhelm's underlying presence and role. Within the larger structure of the novel, the novellas and frame form an almost symbiotic relationship, because one initiates and completes the other. Arthur Henkel sees this fusion as a matter
of poetic licence, in which Goethe purposely did not discriminate against the novellas: he writes the following:

Dann wurde die Zweiteilung des Romans in Rahmen und Novellen für das Problem der Entsagung diejenige zwischen solchen, welche entsagt haben und denen, welche noch im Vorhof der Entsagung leben oder die scheiternde Unruhe des Herzens zur Entsagung sich zu entschließen nötigt. Damit wäre allerdings, vom Dichter aus, nur ein zarter Rangunterschied angedeutet. Denn die poetische Gerechtigkeit Goethes nimmt beide gleich ernst, seine Liebe gehört ebenso den in milder Ironie verklärten Torheiten und Mutwilligkeiten derer, die, noch undurchschaudend im Raum des Leidenschaftlichen leben, nicht gewillt sind, zu entsagen, wie den Entschlossenen. Und das heißt doch wohl, daß beide Haltungen dialektisch aufeinander bezogen sind: ohne die Unruhe des Herzens verlore die Entsagung ihre Spannung, ohne die Forderung der Entsagung bliebe jene im Kreise der dumpfen Fatalität. Goethe sieht auch hier die Polarität.

The polar atmosphere described here is intended to help (rather than prevent) the reader understand the thematic content of the novel. The novellas become relevant to the larger scheme of the work precisely because of their diverging character - because their diversity reflects the universal overtones of renunciation. Moreover, by compiling these different novellas into one large work, Goethe creates an assortment of approaches to understanding the complexity of renunciation, an effort directed, however, only to the very observant reader who is ready to comprehend the novel in terms of its thematic core.

Interestingly enough, it is in the scientific work that one finds an appropriate term for the type of reader Goethe is addressing here. In his essay "Ordnung des Unternehmens" (1798) he attempts to outline his method of approach and quotes four standard types of people who participate in scientific activities, namely: those who use, those who know, those who observe and, finally, die Umfassenden - those who comprehend. After describing the advantages and disadvantages of every type, he reveals

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his support for the qualities of the Umfassenden, stating:

Die Umfassenden, die man in einem stolzen Sinne die Erschaffenden nennen könnte, verhalten sich im höchsten Grade produktiv, indem sie nähmlich von Ideen ausgehen, sprechen sie die Einheit des Ganzen schon aus, und es ist gewissermaßen nachher die Sache der Natur, sich in diese Idee zu fügen. (FA 24: 351)

The skill of those who fall into this category lies in their ability to recognize the abstract and grasp the idea underlying physical (and visible) phenomena. Once this has been accomplished, the connection between the idea and its external manifestation is no longer an issue, for the mystery surrounding the appearance of a phenomenon has been resolved.

As it would appear, Goethe demands the same quality of perception from his readers in their approach to Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre. By developing a frame whose purpose within the novel is eventually only to disintegrate, he in fact outlines the elliptical process in question - the responsibility of the reader being to make this transition towards the abstract.

As the frame becomes increasingly abstract, the novel begins to offer more and more parallels to Goethe’s scientific works. The growing gap between Wilhelm’s level of renunciation (which increasingly resembles the example of Saint Joseph at the beginning of the novel) and that of the novellas is particularly striking. As Wilhelm begins to epitomize the essence of renunciation expounded in the novel, his character becomes akin to an idea that provides the necessary and underlying pattern of the work. The novellas are a representation of the same idea, with the disadvantage of being both imperfect and incomplete, and confined thus to a more surface and physical plane of the novel. In her analysis Jane Brown asserts that the variety of novellas provide a “formal parallel to the variety of perspectives that has been developing as a basic philosophical standpoint of the
novel" (48), without, however, elaborating on what her assertion precisely means. The
novellas emerge in opposition to the narrative frame in order to communicate a complete
experience, one that encompasses both fulfilled and an unfulfilled renunciation - that then
together comprise an inseparable totality. By doing this they create a dynamic that reflects
Goethe's concept of Idee und Erfahrung, another paradigm essential for a complete
understanding of the novel.

Idee und Erfahrung constitute yet another basic binary synthetic concept in his
approach to nature. In their appearance they are reminiscent of the dynamic of the
Urphänomen and Phänomen, for in Goethe's view, Idee and Erfahrung are present in
every living form, creating what he calls: "das bewegliche Leben der Natur" (FA 24: 394).
Erfahrung is formed by the observer's perception of the Idee that is present in the living
organism, and varies thus - depending both on the complexity of the Idee and on that of
the form in question. Complex organisms appear therefore in an appropriate (and
corresponding) complex form for:

Je unvollkommener das Geschöpf ist, destomehr sind diese Teile einander gleich
oder ähnlich, und destomehr gleichen sie dem Ganzen. Je vollkommener das
Geschöpf wird, desto unähnlicher werden die Teile einander. In jenem Falle ist das
Ganze den Teilen mehr oder weniger gleich, in diesem das Ganze den Teilen
unähnlich. Je ähnlicher die Teile einander sind, desto weniger sind sie einander
subordiniert. Die Subordination der Teile deutet auf ein vollkommneres Geschöpf.
(FA 24: 393)

A diverse set of experiences from the observation of a single organism is thus interpreted
as a positive result, because it reflects the great intricacy of the underlying idea. Erfahrung
becomes the complementary term to Idee through its ability to reflect and represent it-
qualities that create the parallel bond between the two. This, of course, runs contrary to
the Kantian doctrine, which sees these two concepts as strictly separate. Goethe, however,
does not fully identify Idee with Erfahrung either. He merely attempts to connect them, to create a synthetic unit, and maintains: "...daß der Philosoph wohl möchte recht haben. welcher behauptet, daß keine Idee der Erfahrung völlig kongruiere, aber wohl zugibt, daß Idee und Erfahrung analog sein können, ja müssen” (FA 24: 449).

Returning to the Wanderjahre, we see that the frame and the novellas are similarly arranged. Placed together they create a tension that is similar to that of Idee and Erfahrung. On one side of this dynamic are characters like Wilhlem, who have reached a certain level of self-development and who appear to hover over the narrative as a whole. Saint Joseph, Montan and the Collector are all characters who in a similar manner exist outside of the momentum of the novellas. Whether their presence constitutes a narrative frame in the conventional literary sense has already been discussed; however, it is fair to say that these characters are connected by certain qualities missing from the novellas. They have all reached a higher level of renunciation, a distinction that separates them from the stream of the (disjointed) main narrative and places them in a position akin to that of a narrative frame. The novellas remain on the other side, creating a mosaic impression of the same basic idea of renunciation. They do not equate with the idea itself and, as a consequence, remain incomplete. What they do provide, however, is a level of concrete representation - by creating a framework in which the idea is able to become manifest. The fact that the novellas are so incredibly diverse is a reflection of the complexity of the idea they contain, i.e. the multifaceted principle of renunciation developing in the work.

The polar and dialectic interplay between the novellas and narrative frame should therefore provide a thorough synopsis of renunciation. The novellas complement the narrative frame by translating this ideal into the realm of personal experience and by
making it a more viable and identifiable concept. That most of the novellas, within their own frameworks, are not successful at realizing this ideal is not important - for they are meant to be read as incomplete and episodic counterparts. As the underlying Idee, renunciation is inherent only to the frame of the novel, a structure from which the novellas have been excluded. The novellas emerge thus as Erfahrung, a transferred and filtered experience of the ideal, and form a counter-structure that parallels, rather than mimics, the actual frame. By creating this parallel structure the novellas begin to collectively reflect the Idee (renunciation), which compensates for their own incomplete appearance by becoming the point in which they all converge. Goethe's entire approach to morphology was based on this system of Idee and Erfahrung, because as he maintained:

Jedes Lebendige ist kein Einzelnnes, sondern eine Mehrheit: selbst insofern es uns als Individuum erscheint, bleibt es doch eine Versammlung von lebendigen selbständigen Wesen, die der Idee, der Anlage nach, gleich sind...Diese Wesen sind teils ursprünglich schon verbunden, teils finden und vereinigen sie sich. Sie entzweien sich und suchen sich wieder und bewirken so eine unendliche Produktion auf alle Weise und nach allen Seiten. ("Die Absicht eingeleitet," FA 24: 392)

The vigorous dynamic described here is directed towards an external effect, which is manifested in a certain physical form. For Goethe, however, form and structure were never static terms. He perceived them as incessantly moving and dynamic and, hence, as always changing, as he outlined in his introduction to his morphological studies: "Die Gestalt ist ein bewegliches, ein werdendes, ein vergehendes. Gestaltenlehre ist Verwandlungslehre. Die Lehre der Metamorphose ist der Schlüssel zu allen Zeichen der Natur" (FA 24: 349). In the realm of scientific studies this constant Produktion may result in the appearance of a leaf, flower or any another example of organic and natural growth. Translated into a literary context, the visualization of the same effect becomes much more
difficult, depending almost entirely on the moment of Aperçu. The Aperçu emerges as the culminating moment in the tension provoked by the conceptual polarity of phenomena, appearing as the final result of the enhancement (*Steigerung*) produced by this polar and dialectical effect.

*Aperçu* is thus both a moment of recognition as it is the aesthetic experience in which the observer connects and relates to the phenomenon in front of him/her. It offers a resonant insight into the workings of the *Idee - Erfahrung* dynamic, while also providing a system of overcoming the *Urphanomen/Phänomen* separation - emerging thus as the concept that ties the entirety of Goethe’s scientific work together. It achieves this by introducing a mode of thought that embraces the entirety of mental faculties available to the observer, including the use of imagination in scientific experiments. The latter becomes the single most important element in the success of the observation. As Theda Rehbock explains:

> Goethes Begriff des Aperçu könnte man als eine Art paradigmatisch Wahrnehmung bezeichnen, die den Einzelfall als prototypischen Musterfall erkennt und daran das Allgemeine, Charakteristische und mit anderen Fällen Gemeinsame erfaßt. Das Aperçu ist deshalb für Goethe zugleich eine Sache der Sinnlichkeit und des Verstandes, und darüber hinaus auch der Einbildungskraft, die solche Fälle zu fingieren hat, da den faktisch wahrgenommenen Fällen meist das Prototypische fehlt. (126)

Moments of *Aperçu* are also available to the reader in *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* but they must be read and interpreted as such. They do not appear in any specific order or by any anticipated system, and, as with the editorial inserts, the *Aperçus* are not placed strategically to help guide the reader through the novel. As a consequence, they do not appear as the culminating revelations towards which the novel is geared, but merely as significant moments within the existing narrative.
Among Goethe’s maxims an explanation is offered which clarifies the use of the 
Aperçu. As he sees it, the Aperçu is just another instance in a continuing series because:
“Alles wahre Aperçu kommt aus einer Folge und bringt Folge. Es ist ein Mitglied einer
großen produktiv aufsteigenden Kette” (FA 24: 568). A key moment of Aperçu in the
novel is Wilhelm’s visit to the Pedagogical Province. It is clearly an important part of the
narrative frame because it has been anticipated and announced since his initial meeting
with Montan. The episode is, however, also the product of a series of “coincidences” that
happened through Wilhelm’s contact with characters of the individual novellas. As
described above, his journeymanship increasingly lacked authoritative direction, becoming
dependent on the momentum of the novellas. The manner in which he reached the
Pedagogical Province is important, however, for all the incidents he encountered along the
way play a detrimental role in his actual arrival. Wilhelm eventually reaches the Province
with help from the Collector, who gives him the address, which is the final piece of
information needed to reach this destination. The presence of the Collector is, however, a
cumulative outcome of all Wilhelm’s previous experiences: his departure from Saint
Joseph where he met Fitz; Fitz who brought him to the estate of Hersilie and the Aunt: the
family through whom he learned of Lenardo and the nut-brown maid; and, finally, Lenardo
who directed him to the Collector.

There is, consequently, a distinct sense of arrival in the Pedagogical Province.
Unlike previous episodes, the Province has a clearly marked border that distinguishes it
from the rest of the novel. Both Wilhelm’s arrival and departure are marked by the
crossing of that border, isolating his visit as a separate and special experience. His first
impression of the Province is, furthermore, that of a plentiful and fertile region that is in full bloom, as described in the following passage:

...beim ersten Eintritt gewahrten sie sogleich der fruchtbarsten Gegend, welche an sanften Hügeln den Feldbau, auf höhern Bergen die Schafzucht, in weiten Talflächen die Viehzucht begünstigte. Es war kurz vor der Ernte und alles in größter Fülle; das was sie jedoch in Verwunderung setzte war, daß sie weder Frauen noch Manner, wohl aber durchaus Knaben und Jünglinge beschäftigt sahen auf eine glückliche Ernte sich vorzubereiten, ja auch schon auf eine fröhliches Erntefest freundliche Anstalt zu treffen. (84 f.)

In light of subsequent events it is difficult not to interpret these images as significant.

Wilhelm arrives in the Pedagogical Province almost midway through the novel, and with his arrival the novel appears to reach a maturity of its own, manifested by a disclosure of certain clues that help the reader comprehend the remainder of the work. These clues are not revealed in an overt fashion, but must be interpreted. It is thus interesting to note that within the novel the Pedagogical Province precedes the Zwischenrede in which the "Editor" steps in to clarify his intentions, because both serve the same purpose. However, whereas the editorial comments interrupt the already very fragmented text to appeal to the reader, the events of the Pedagogical Province do not: they incorporate the reader into the narrative without discontinuing its momentum.

In the Pedagogical Province the virtue of Ehrfurcht is explained as a key virtue in human conduct and as the philosophical basis of the Province itself. For the reader who is still struggling to grasp the purpose and full meaning of renunciation, the introduction of yet another philosophical principle is, at best, problematic. To alleviate these difficulties Goethe outlines the comprehension required, by placing Wilhelm (and indirectly the reader as well) in a position of inquiry. Wilhelm's observations begin, however, to highlight other problems inherent to the reading of the novel, and thus take on a more general and
universal significance. Wilhelm’s request to learn more of the Province ("...bei Euch bezieht sich gewiß das Äußere aufs Innere und umgekehrt, laßt mich diesen Bezug erfahren" 90) becomes the reader’s first opportunity to gain insight into the inner functioning of the novel. Through Wilhelm’s conversations with the school masters, we finally learn a method of perception that is acceptable and appropriate to the nature of the work, because it derives from the work itself. That this should happen more than midway through the novel should be interpreted as intentional, rather than accidental, because as the Aperçu it provides a link that unites the entire work.

The educational framework of the Pedagogical Province becomes, furthermore, the perfect background for the demonstration of the experience of the Aperçu. By questioning the school masters about their program, Wilhelm receives an almost systematic explanation into the nature of the Aperçu. Interpreted and mirrored through the example of the threefold reverence, the Aperçu is presented as a stratified experience. Students are taught that transference from one level to the other is both the imperative and the test for attaining “higher reverence”, a lesson to which their education in the Province is geared: "...wir überliefern eine dreifache Erfurcht, die, wenn sie zusammenflußt und ein Ganzes bildet, erst ihre höchste Kraft und Wirkung erreicht" (91). In this layered context higher reverence becomes synonymous with the Aperçu for several different reasons. Primarily, because it emerges as the result of enhancement - the outcome of the layering of other singular stages of reverence. The layering and enhancement of reverence produces, furthermore, a pinnacle effect with lasting repercussions, one that echoes the very essence of the Aperçu:
...aus diesen drei Ehrfurchten entspringt die oberste Ehrfurcht, die Ehrfurcht vor sich selbst, und jene entwickeln sich abermals aus dieser, so daß der Mensch zum Höchsten gelangt was er zu erreichen fähig ist, daß er sich selbst für das Beste halten darf was Gott und Natur hervorgebracht haben, ja, daß er auf dieser Höhe verweilen kann, ohne durch Dunkel und Selbstheit wieder ins Gemeine gezogen zu werden. (93-94)

The focus on the development of self - and the conscious utilization of that self to achieve reverence - is the bond that ties this episode to the experience of the Aperçu, where self-realization is a key moment because it grounds, halts and centres the experience before impending metamorphosis. Through the Aperçu, the sense of self reassures the observer of the premise of absolute totality underlying all natural phenomena, to which the observer also belongs. Once the observer recognizes him/herself as part of the phenomenon, and establishes this as part of the experience, the seemingly endless gulf between observation and perception is gone, lending the observer a unique and full insight into the phenomenon. Goethe’s views on this matter are clearly stated in his essay “Nachträge zur Metamorphose” (1830) in which he defends the necessity of the synthetic Aperçu:

Indem nun der Naturforscher sich in dieser Denkweise bestärkt, im höheren Sinne die Gegenstände betrachtet, so gewinnt er eine Zuversicht, und kommt dadurch dem Erfahrenden entgegen, welcher nur mit gemessener Bescheidenheit ein allgemeines anzuerkennen bequemt. (FA 24: 707)

The success of the Aperçu relies, however, almost entirely on the imagination of the observer, who must be willing to employ and embrace this faculty in scientific observation.

The problematic perception of the Aperçu is explained within the Wanderjahre through the character of Hersilie. After Natalie’s disappearance, she becomes an increasingly important female protagonist in the novel, assuming an intermittent, but active presence whose role is felt at all levels of the main narrative. However, unlike other characters who are somehow bound and connected to each other, Hersilie is isolated. Her
resistance to the momentum of the novel is manifested in her refusal to renounce and her inability to include herself among other renunciants. Whereas these characters of the novellas have tried and failed to renounce, Hersilie simply rejects the entire premise. She emerges thus in opposition to Wilhelm; who in a similar fashion, at the beginning of the novel, existed apart from the narrative, but who gradually assimilated - becoming finally its converging and implicitly focal point.

Hersilie's behavior thus creates an interesting situation for the novel. Thomas Degering stresses the importance of her character's isolation in light of the perspective it grants her: namely, an ability to criticize the work's thematic core. Because she does not immediately adhere to the principle of renunciation developing in the novel, she is able to question its validity. Degering describes her inquisitiveness as the necessary empirical centre of the work (481), a point of counterbalance to Wilhelm and his seemingly blind faith in renunciation. She is furthermore the only character equipped to examine and test Wilhelm's role within the novel and to express scepticism in regard to its purpose. For example, she doubts Wilhelm's success in resolving the predicament of the nut-brown maid, stating:

Sie glauben Lenardo'n zu beschwichtigen, indem Sie ihm versichern, daß es ihr wohl gehe. Er hatte ausgesprochen, beinahe versprochen, dabei wolle er sich beruhigen: was verspricht die Leidenschaftliche nicht alles andern und sich! Wissen Sie also: die Sache ist dadurch keineswegs abgetan. Sie ist, sagen Sie, glücklich, durch eigene Tätigkeit und Verdienst glücklich: nun möchte er wissen wie? wann? und wo?.... (104)

Hersilie's interference with the main narrative leads eventually to the introduction of a new novella, Der Mann von fünfzig Jahren, which she presents to Wilhelm as the test of his

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43 Thomas Degering, Das Elend der Entsagung: Goethes 'Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre' (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1982) 476 ff.
journeymanship vows. This episode becomes subsequently another moment of AperHu - not only because it resolves the growing polarity of Hersilie's and Wilhelm's views, but also because it witnesses a total metamorphosis of Hersilie's stance within the novel.

Wilhelm receives Der Mann von füünfzig Jahren as an unfinished fragment. This is only true of the 1821 version of Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre, for in the 1829 version the novella has a proper ending. In the 1821 version the tale is deliberately interrupted as part of the challenge that Hersilie wishes to present to Wilhelm. Rather than supplying him with a written conclusion to the novella, she provides him with the characters of the novellas themselves. This is a totally new occurrence within the work, because Wilhelm's relationship to the novellas so far has been limited to that of a detached and objective reader - a stance one believed was his intended role within the novel. The incidents at Lago Maggiore are set up to test his ability to maintain this removed and objective poise by directly drawing him into the narrative. Hersilie imposes a type of direct reality on Wilhelm, forcing him to engage himself in immediate circumstances. It would appear that this involvement threatens and negates his conceptual role as moral principle or Idee of the work, for as Goethe himself stated in his essay “Bedenken und Ergebung”. the most significant quality of the Idee is that it is “unabhängig von Raum und Zeit” (FA 24: 449).

The meeting at Lago Maggiore creates an interesting and crucial juxtaposition within the novel, for it is here that the perceptual difficulty of such binary terms as Idee und Erfahrung is resolved. In “Bedenken und Ergebung” (1820) Goethe states: “Der Verstand kann nicht vereinigt denken was die Sinnlichkeit ihm gesondert überlieferte, und so bleibt der Widerstreit zwischen Aufgefaßtem und Ideiertem immerfort unaufgelöst” (FA 24: 450). For the first time in the novel since the Saint Joseph episode, a diverse yet
harmonious situation is presented between the various characters. The enclosed location is thus described as a “Paradies” (133), a meeting place conditioned by powers that appear absent from the remainder of the work. Wilhelm arrives at the lake accompanied by a painter, whose existence has hitherto been unknown and is a new addition to the variety of already existing characters. The presence of the painter in this chapter highlights a dimension in the novel that has been present since its beginning: the existence and importance of (visual) art in the Wanderjahre.\(^{44}\) Up to this moment, the novel was largely centred around the correspondences of its characters whose writings initiated and/or constituted the majority of events presented. In this chapter such written documentation is conspicuously absent, for Wilhelm, who is expected to describe and convey the event to Natalie, never does so within the context of the novel.\(^{45}\)

The absence of his version of this event is compensated for by what appears to be the Editor’s description. However, in addition to the Editor’s information there is also the presence of both the painter’s (and Hersilie’s) art that document it. The paintings are described in great detail, providing a plausible representation of this incident. It is thus interesting to note how the painter at Lago Maggiore assumes a symmetrical role to Wilhelm’s own, by becoming a type of complementary narrator for this particular chapter. This situation becomes even more interesting once it is revealed that Hersilie possesses a similar talent for art and for this type of presentation. After Chapter 12 she replaces the role of the painter in the novel, and becomes a complementary opposite to Wilhelm, by

\(^{44}\) E.g., the presence of the murals in the church in the Saint Joseph novella, the gallery in the Pedagogical Province, etc.

\(^{45}\) “Wilhelm, der die Gabe nicht vermißte sich alles genau zu merken, schrieb die trauliche Erzählung später auf, und wir gedenken sie, wie er solche verfaßt...künftig unsern Leser mitzuteilen.” (142)
providing him with the kind of insight he simply does not have - because as the narrator sympathetically states of him: "Unserem alten Freund hatte die Natur kein malerisches Auge gegeben" (132).

As a consequence, it is not accidental that Hersilie rather than Wilhelm finds the key to the casket that, as a type of palpable symbol for the story, has been hovering over the entire narrative. Since her initial involvement, Hersilie’s character added a much needed physical dimension to the novel, compensating for and complementing Wilhelm’s own inactive presence. She emerges in the form of a physical counterpart to Wilhelm - as a character who is able to act on the more material plane of the narrative. It is thus not implausible to define her as a type of Erfahrung that appears in synthetic opposition to the Idee of the work. After the Lago Maggiore episode she adopts an attitude towards renunciation that is similar in intensity to Wilhelm’s own, and becomes a conceptual companion to him - by personifying a parallel commitment to the thematic core. Her most obvious contribution to the novel remains the discovery of the casket’s key, because this brings the work to a visible conclusion. The casket, which initially belonged to Wilhelm, becomes thus a collective find - important for both him and for Hersilie. To the reader, however, the casket also becomes a unifying element that finally consolidates the strange and contradictory affiliation that has been developing between these two characters.

Their joint collaboration in the narrative is the natural result of the polarity their characters represent, and a definition of this can be found in many of Goethe’s scientific writings. In his commentary following Goethe’s colour theory Manfred Wezel writes: "Die Polarität setzt zwar zwei Größen voraus: diese sind aber paarweise auftretende
Einzelerscheinungen einer ursprünglichen Einheit, die auseinandertreten. um sich wieder zu finden. Ein Teil der polaren Phänomene fordert den anderen und umgekehrt” (FA 23.1: 1073). Hints of this intrinsic polarity were, furthermore, given in the novel itself. Before their meeting at the lake, Hersilie and Wilhelm communicated by means of a magnet - by placing it on a map and viewing which coordinates they were to take. In addition to this function, the magnet assumed another, somewhat less obvious, role - it connected the narrative back to its beginning. As we saw earlier, the very first chapter of the novel begins with Wilhelm and Felix’s conversation about stones. Later, their encounter with Jarno takes place, a character who has since become an expert in mining and hence changed his name to Montan. Both of these incidents played an important role in forming and unraveling the main narrative. The presence of the magnet connects the current events of narrative back to these earlier ones - a move that also leads the reader to revalue and reconsider them.

The magnet emerges as the cumulative and total effect of earlier developments, echoing distinctly certain qualities of the scientific Aperçu. It too appears as a type of compound experience in which diverse events, past and present, are united, as Peter Eichhorn explains:

...das Aperçu...bezeichnet...den Akt des Wahrnehmens, das in diesem völlig unvorhergesehen Wahrgenommene und die Bedeutung des Wahrgenommenen im Zusammenhang der Weltgeschichte [geknüpft wird]; der Zusammenhang als Welt tritt dabei nicht nachtraglich hinzu, sondern ist als gesamter Findungsvorgang anwesend, so daß im Aperçu zugleich Vorentwurf und wissenschaftliches Ergebnis vereinigt sind. (240 f.)

The presence of the magnet also brings the novel back to itself. Lago Maggiore, the place to which the magnet directed both Wilhelm and Hersilie, presents a perfectly comprised
episode of all the diverse elements of the work. Many issues of the novel are resolved here - the basic dichotomy of characters, the relation of art and nature and, interestingly enough, the question of past and present. All these diverse instances could be interpreted in detail; however, what is more relevant is to note that despite the disparity, these elements remain contained, in a manner reminiscent of the complex, yet uniform construct of Goethe's colour wheel.

As referred to above in Chapter 1, this wheel could be perceived as a culmination of all his scientific work. It embodies all the basic principles developed by him - the concepts of *Urphänomen*-*Phänomen, Idee-*-*Erfahrung* as well as the basic dynamics of *Polarität* and *Steigerung*. However, unlike other areas of scientific research, colours have the propensity to manifest the entire process of perception that Goethe believes underlies natural phenomena and that he has such difficulty conveying in his words. Emil Staiger describes the relief Goethe must have felt once he discovered colours, for in this field his entire natural philosophy comes to light: "...in den Farben tritt es [das ewige Gleichnis von Zettel und Einschlag] uns unmittelbar als Anschauung entgegen, als Urphänomen, das heißt, als Erscheinung, die selber nicht weiter erklärbar ist, die aber ihrerseits alles erklärt" (413). In addition to representing the entirety of his scientific outlook, the colour wheel also empirically proved, to Goethe's satisfaction, the inherent unity of the natural world. Because he did not use a prism (like Newton did) individual colours were not externally dispersed nor scattered in an outward direction. The wheel

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46 Lago Maggiore is revealed as the birthplace of Mignon (129), and her memory somehow lingers over this entire episode - from inspiring the paintings of the artist to evoking a direct reference to *Wilhelm Meisters Lehijahre*. 
created a realm that contained not only the colours produced but the inherent perception of those colours as Staiger explains:

Goethe ... biegt die beiden Enden des Farbenstreifens zusammen, gewinnt dadurch den Purpur, den er bei Newton nicht gewürdigt findet...und freut sich jener Geschlossenheit, die kein Entweichen der Phantasie in unbekannte Zonen gestattet, die uns in Gegenwärtigem festhält...Der Farbenkreis ist ein System, vergleichbar der Kategorientafel Kants, der anthropologischen Ordnung, um die sich Schiller so lange bemühte, Schellings System des Idealismus und anderen großen Versuchen der Zeit, das ganze Dasein zu umfassen und im Zusammenhang darzustellen. (414)

At this point it is important to emphasize that the colour wheel is not a fixed, static system. Its internal dynamic of perpetually evoking and creating a different colour demands a constant involvement on part of the observer, for it is s/he who “sees” this process of mutual activity within the Farbenkreis. A similar situation occurs at Lago Maggiore, when the reader is placed in a position not only to read this event, but to correlate its significance to the rest of the novel. As an Aperçu Lago Maggiore contains all the necessary elements to give meaning to previous events of the novel, however it is up to the reader to take this step and apply the presented information. Interestingly enough, in the didactic part of his colour theory Goethe states a similar thought, by claiming that the appearance of colours is merely the surface of deeper existing truths and that one must view them accordingly - as representative of the invisible and complex process that underlies their appearance: “Indem die Farbe in ihrer größten Mannigfaltigkeit sich auf der Oberfläche lebendiger Wesen dem Auge darstellt, so ist sie ein wichtiger Teil der äußeren Zeichen, wodurch wir gewahr werden, was im Innern vorgeht” (FA 23.1: 238).
Conclusion

Given the parallels between the Wanderjahre and Goethe's colour theory, the novel by its very nature and origins is bound to invite only an individual and subjective response - for colours, in Goethe's view, can not be interpreted collectively. In colour theory it was the responsibility of the individual eye to discern and perceive colour and then connect this to the underlying creative process, as Manfred Wezel describes:

...das Auge [reagiert] aktiv und spezifisch auf das aus der Umgebung ihm Dargebrachte und erzeugt aus eigener Leistung in seiner Reaktion die Phänomene und Erscheinungen, die Farben genannt werden. Eine Farbenempfindung ist demnach immer ein komplexes Zusammenspiel aus äußerer, objektiver Vorgabe und spezifischer Antwort des subjektiv reagierenden Sinnesorgans Auge...Die Farbenwelt ist immer in erster Linie ein Erlebnis des einzelnen, konkreten Menschen! (FA 23.1:1070)

In view of the negative response the Wanderjahre received, it is quite obvious that Goethe's reading public was unable to apply this particular method of discernment to the novel. The fault, however, may not lie entirely with the expectations of a public spoiled by literary conventions, but rather with the author himself who failed to specify the involvement needed to read his novel. In his scientific writings he was much more precise in the demands he placed on the critic and observer of his experiments, outlining in detail almost all the skill required:

Der Konflikt des Individuums mit der unmittelbaren Erfahrung und der mittelbaren Überlieferung, ist eigentlich die Geschichte der Wissenschaften: denn was in und von ganzen Massen geschieht, bezieht sich doch nur zuletzt auf ein tüchtigeres Individuum, das alles sammeln, sondern, redigieren und vereinigen soll; wobei es wirklich einerlei ist, ob die Zeitgenossen ein solch Bemühen begünstigen oder ihm widerstreben. (615)
The "more capable individual" is to collect, sort, edit, and integrate all the wealth of detail with which he/she is presented. Is this the real task of the "worthy" reader of Wilhelm Meister's Wanderjahre? Such guidance is conspicuously absent from the 1821 version of the work, which, as a novel, lacks any type of direct instruction on part of its author, other than the implied request to the reader to activate his/her own thought processes in filling out the material of the narrative for him/herself. As with natural phenomena, Goethe does not unravel the mystery of his novel. Instead he presents his readers with a locked casket as the limit to which their inquisitiveness may be openly rewarded. Although the key is at hand, the casket is never opened, for as Hersilie declares: "das Kästchen muß zwischen mir und Ihnen erst uneröffnet stehen und dann eröffnet das Weitere selbst befehlen" (FA 10: 219). The opening is to be achieved at some point in the future, but it is left to the reader to determine when and with what consequences. Whether this is the indication that the reader is expected to treat the novel as a scientific paradigm is uncertain. In conflict with this approach is the label Roman that is attached to the work, a label that makes the reading of the Wanderjahre susceptible to all types of literary criticism and conventions, and that inevitably undermines the great complexity of the work by confining it to the criteria of a single and generally comprehensible category. It is not to be wondered at that Goethe should have removed such a label in rewriting and reissuing the Wanderjahre some eight years after the publication of the first version. Quite clearly, he had come to recognize the inadequacy of such a term for the highly idiosyncratic and extraordinarily ambitious work that he had produced.
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