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Sex – Class – Form

Epicization in Gottfried Keller's Bourgeois Tragedy *Therese*

1 Introduction

Gottfried Keller is widely considered one of the great narrators of the nineteenth century. But while he is venerated for his novels and novellas, the same cannot be said for his forays into drama. These attempts, draft manuscripts that were never completed, are commonly considered failures. The *Gottfried Keller-Handbuch* declares this in broad terms: “Das Drama ist die einzige Gattung an der [Keller] scheiterte” (Vilwock 2016, 184). Gerhard Kaiser affirms this pessimistic evaluation, particularly with regard to Keller's bourgeois tragedy *Therese*: “Das Drama ist unmöglich” (1981, 269). Nevertheless, to overlook these works simply because they were left incomplete would be a mistake. In fact, the very difficulty of Keller's struggles with the genre of drama between the 1850s and 1880s, especially in his drafts of *Therese*, can be productively understood as a profound effort to grapple with the so-called crisis of the absolute drama that Peter Szondi (2011, 21) describes as occurring at the end of the nineteenth century.

As I will demonstrate, Keller's bourgeois tragedy *Therese* remobilizes elements characteristic of Sturm und Drang, and the incorporation of these elements has a twofold effect: on the one hand, since Sturm und Drang dramas contain “epische[] Element[e]” (Kittstein 2012, 296), Keller's bourgeois tragedy, inscribed with modalities of Sturm und Drang, is also configured with epic elements. On the other hand, Sturm und Drang thematizes the discursification of sexuality and class (Luserke-Jaqui 2017, 20–24), which can be recognized as the content of the “Unsägliche” (Kaiser 1981, 263) that enters drama and renders its absolute form impossible. By analyzing these epic elements, we can read *Therese*, Keller's attempt at bourgeois tragedy, as bearing traces that gesture toward forms of drama alternative to the idealistic aesthetic paradigms dominant at the time.

In order to show this, I will survey drama theory in the mid-nineteenth century, highlighting the fundamental ways in which Keller's approach differs from that of Friedrich Hebbel and Hermann Hettner, who sought to modify bourgeois tragedy by focusing on the sublimation of an idea within an aesthetic paradigm based on idealism (Hettner 1852, 102). Drawing on the model of Sturm und Drang put forward by Matthias Luserke and Reiner Marx (1992), I will show how Keller's draft incorporates such elements as the discursification of sexuality and class struggle. These elements introduce a discourse of the body into the dramatic

text, a depiction of a visceral corporality anathema to puritanical, bourgeois social norms that I relate to Kaiser's remark on Keller's *Therese*: "[d]as Unsägliche betritt die Bühne" (1981, 263). This rendition of the "unspeakable" flouts contemporary idealist aesthetic discourse and upends the drama's absoluteness. Unlike Hettner's and Hebbel's tendencies to set dramas in the ancient past (Kaiser 1981, 250–251), I will show in a close reading how Keller's *Therese* employs Sturm und Drang elements to depict present-day society and expose its injustices to criticism, particularly its repression of sexuality (Luserke-Jaqui 2017, 20–24). As a rhetorical operation of affection, *Therese* verbalizes feelings of desire through apostrophes (Halsall 1992, 830–836), which function as vehicles for the discursification of sexuality and class and also feature epic elements. Through apostrophes, various quotation strategies are inscribed into the dramatic text that introduce external discourses, such as the philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach or the Bible. Where the former lays the groundwork for libidinal materialism, the latter can only answer with sublimation and abnegation. Between these two references, *Therese*, the protagonist, self-destructs. In the end, my analysis shows that tracing these epic elements allows us to read impulses in *Therese* that transgress the limits of aesthetic idealism and anticipate the Szondian crisis of the absolute drama in the late nineteenth century.

2 *Therese* in Light of Drama Theory of the 1850s

Keller first began working on *Therese* in 1848, but within a few years he shelved the project to turn to his autobiographical novel, *Der grüne Heinrich*. He resumed work in 1857 only to abandon it once again, and piecemeal revisions continued in this manner through the mid-1880s, leaving the project unfinished at the time of his death in 1890 (Vilwock 2016, 187–188). During these decades of drafting, the landscape of drama theory went through a revival of the doctrine classique (Müller-Wille 2012, 274–275). Particularly significant were the neoconservative contributions introduced by figures such as Gustav Freytag, Hermann Hettner, and Friedrich Hebbel.

Hebbel, in his famous preface to *Maria Magdalene* (1844), discusses how the widely proliferated and much-criticized genre of bourgeois tragedy, as it had been produced since the eighteenth century, had reached its limits: "Das bürgerliche Trauerspiel ist in Deutschland in Mißkredit geraten, [. . .] hauptsächlich durch zwei Übelstände" (Hebbel 1963, 325). One of the genre's main problems, according to Hebbel, is that it does not limit its conflicts to those contained within a middle-

class sphere. Instead, it depicts content based on exterior determining factors, on “allerlei Äußerlichkeiten, z. B. [. . .] d[er] Mangel an Geld bei Überfluß an Hunger” and especially “d[as] Zusammenstoßen des dritten Standes mit dem zweiten und ersten in Liebes-Affären” (Hebbel 1963, 325). We can read this as an expression of dissatisfaction with the genre of social drama as well, then in its early stages. Rather than debase itself with bread-and-butter concerns, drama should rise above material necessity and aspire to represent the “Welt und Menschenzustand in seinem Verhältnis zur Idee” (Hebbel 1963, 307). Because of this, as Kaiser points out, “[s]eit *Maria Magdalene* (1843) und dem *Trauerspiel in Sicilien* (1846) wendet [Hebbel] sich von der Gegenwart ab und versinkt in der Geschichte” (1981, 250). Grounded on this Hegelian notion of the idea, Hebbel’s “Ideendrama” avoids quotidian, concrete realities:

Spezifische Themen der Moderne wie die Emanzipation der Frau (*Herodes und Mariamme*) oder der Konflikt der Person mit den Institutionen (*Agnes Bernauer*) werden in die Geschichte zurückgeworfen. Weil er in seiner eigenen Zeit die Idee des Ganzen nicht mehr wahrnehmen kann [. . .]. (Kaiser 1981, 250–251)

In Hebbel’s “Ideendrama,” Hettner saw a formula for rehabilitating and reinventing bourgeois tragedy in a modality suitable for the mid-nineteenth century: “Wo aber ist diese höchste Tragik? Sie ist dort, wo auch der letzte Rest äußerer Zufälligkeit und Willkür verschwunden ist. Diese höchste Tragik nennen wir Tragödie der Idee” (1852, 102). Like Hebbel, Hettner’s normative notion of the content of the highest form of tragedy adheres to a Hegelian philosophy of history: “Die Gegenstände, die hier den tragischen Conflict bilden, fordern sich durch sich selbst, sie liegen im innersten Wesen der Menschheit und in den Gesetzen ihrer Entwicklung” (1852, 102). He insists that the central aim is a question of content and not of form: “Diese Tragödie der Idee ist auch eine Tragödie der Leidenschaft: aber nicht mehr der subjectiven, sondern der substantiellen. Der Unterschied ist nicht ein Unterschied der Form, sondern ein Unterschied des inneren Gehaltes” (Hettner 1852, 103). In this vein, in accordance with Hettner’s urging, the form of tragedy would indeed be determined by the dominance of the “idea” through the second half of the nineteenth century, a trend that was further galvanized by the idealist aesthetics of Gustav Freytag’s 1863 *Die Technik des Dramas* (Müller-Wille 2012, 274). In the dramatic world defined by aesthetic idealism, the depiction of contemporary social reality and injustices is eschewed in an attempt to transcend such temporal concerns in favor of dramatizing a supposedly higher order of universal, humanistic problems and conflicts.

Of course, such a principled exclusion of class issues and the challenges of material deprivation has the unstated effect of restricting the content of drama to the immanent structures and conflicts of middle-class life, where they are

normatively represented as universal human experience (Schößler 2015, 73). This can be seen in Hettner's criticism of Sturm und Drang bourgeois tragedy, whose form he considered too explosive and whose content, with its lowly preoccupation with class struggle and hardship, he diagnosed as a sign of its immaturity, little more than "eitelste Gefühlssophistik," characteristic of the "Flegeljahre der deutschen Bildung" (Hettner 1872, 6). His harshest words were reserved for Sturm und Drang's excess of passion and desire; he considered dramas of this movement a "wüste Orgie der Liederlichkeit" (Hettner 1872, 9) and a "Freigeisterei der Leidenschaft" (Hettner 1872, 16), remarking, "[m]an träumte den holden Traum, auch das Leben poetisch leben zu dürfen; und man verstand unter dieser Poesie des Lebens nur die Eingebungen und Gelüste ungebundener Gemüthswillkür" (Hettner 1872, 6–7). Against the backdrop of these fundamental criticisms leveled by the leading theorists of Keller's day, the incorporation of Sturm und Drang elements in his *Therese* appears radically heterodox. To offer an interpretation of these elements, I will first briefly introduce the play's plot and expound a productive model of Sturm und Drang.

3 The Configuration of Sturm und Drang as S&D

In *Therese*, a middle-class landlady, thirty-six years of age, suffers from her desire for her seventeen-year-old daughter's fiancé, Richard. After confessing her love to both him and her daughter, she reaches the conclusion that the only way to channel and fulfill her love is to renounce herself – in this case, by taking her own life – and at this point the dramatic draft cuts off. While Keller's *Therese* has largely been overlooked, a small group of scholars have considered the unfinished text worthy of elaborate analysis. Kaiser, for instance, points to the dialectic between sexual desire and societal constraint embodied in its conflict between the "clean and pure" Christian model of life ("christlich [ist] die lebensarme Ordnung") and the incompatible pagan model, "[h]eidnisch ist die bedrohliche Fülle" (1981, 268). As Kaiser notes, *Therese* exemplifies the genre of bourgeois tragedy in that it opens the private sphere of individuals "fast propagandistisch" (1981, 263) to a large audience. He suggests a connection between Keller's urge to address a broad, contemporary audience and his interest in satire and political comedy in the 1850s (Kaiser 1981, 252–253). Moreover, Laurence A. Rickels draws out a political and class aspect in the configuration of desire in Keller's *Therese*, citing an editorial note in which Keller states that the drama is suffused with so-called lower, working-class characters who quite explicitly and freely – "sorglos und unbefangen" (XVIII, 617) – gratify their physical desires

and needs. Rickels reads the “kryptische Wirkung” (1990, 158) of Keller’s draft as a rejection of the repressed sexuality of the so-called higher and intellectualized class in opposition to the unrestrained sexuality of lower classes, who apparently are able to satisfy their corporal needs in a more unencumbered fashion. These themes – the unleashing versus the repression of sexuality within a constellation of class differences – bear the stamp of Sturm und Drang.

An incisive model of Sturm und Drang has been put forward by Luserke and Marx (1992) in their famous essay *Die Anti-Läufer: Thesen zur SuD-Forschung oder Gedanken neben dem Totenkopf auf der Toilette des Denkers*. They describe Sturm und Drang as a movement with a critique of the Enlightenment at its core, which they explicate in four theses. The first thesis underscores the “Chiffrenthese.” According to this thesis, “S&D” are understood as ciphers for “Sexualität” and “Diskursivierung.” Based on this cipher thesis, sexuality is set within a puritanical middle-class society, which can accept it only as a form of reproduction: “Die dominant-orthodoxe Aufklärung legitimiert Sexualität nur in der standesgemäßen Ehe und mit Kindesfolge” (Luserke-Jaqui 2017, 20). In this case, the middle class propagate a repressed, pious, and tabooed sexuality in order to distance themselves from the decadent nobility. Following a Foucauldian understanding of discursification, such an exclusion of sexuality from representation generates even more representation by circulating around the tabooed desire. The permanent staging of suppressed sexual drive surfaces in excessive writing: “Das Scheitern einer repressionsfreien Sexualität erzeugt bei den Autoren ein permanentes Diskursivierungsbedürfnis.” This discursivity is revealed in a “rhapsodisch-wilden Sprech- und Schreibzwang” (Luserke-Jaqui 2017, 21). Ultimately, S&D as cipher underscores the orality and literacy of sexuality in the wake of an insurgency against the middle class’s highly repressive, puritanical values. Second, Sturm und Drang supersedes the Enlightenment critique of the nobility with a critique of middle-class norms and paradigms by depicting their mutual configurations, which Luserke and Marx refer to as the “Verschiebungsthese” (Luserke-Jaqui 2017, 21). Here, the critique of the middle class is camouflaged as a critique of the nobility. Relatedly, the “Dialektikthese” addresses the generational conflict between sons and their fathers, the latter understood as “Instanzen aufgeklärter bürgerlicher Ordnung und Macht” (Luserke-Jaqui 2017, 22). This conflict allegorizes the fight between the individual and middle-class order and power. In this case, the generational conflict is also an attack against the middle-class domestic ideal: the patriarchal family. Ultimately, and from a more general perspective, the “Kokonisierungsthese” underscores the separation and isolation of the individual in the wake of the Enlightenment; it describes the “Vereinzelung, [und] Versinglung [. . .] der Individuen als [. . .] Antwort der literarischen Avantgarde der 1770er Jahre auf den Prozess der Verbürgerlichung im 18. Jahrhundert und der damit verbundenen Repression” (Luserke-Jaqui

2017, 22). In the historical context of the 1770s, “Versinglung” emphasizes the right to one’s own passions: the emancipation of the individual’s emotional expression and “sexueller Autonomie” (Luserke-Jaqui 2017, 23) as an attempt to upend social control.

The four theses comprising S&D emphasize that the notion of the bourgeois tragedy in the 1770s sought to criticize ongoing real-world issues induced by middle-class sexual repression. But in the programmatic reconfiguration of bourgeois tragedy propagated by Hebbel and Hettner in the 1850s, the explicit identification of current problems was excluded. This abandonment of issues of political injustice and sexuality stemmed in part from these authors’ idealist approach, as discussed above. But alongside this was a more practical motivation: censorship and repression in the reactionary German states of the nineteenth century effectively excluded political issues from the various subgenres of drama and art more generally. As Hettner states in his remarks on political comedy: “Unser Staat, der noch immer nicht ein Rechts-, sondern nur ein Polizeistaat ist, erlaubt nicht die Komödie staatlicher Zustände” (1852, 162). As the product of a more revolutionary age, Sturm und Drang openly criticized its own society with regard to the repression of sexuality and the many injustices of the ancien régime; it is this very configuration, I suggest, that can be read in Keller’s take on bourgeois tragedy. With this framework in mind, I will now look at some key passages from *Therese*.

4 Traces of Epic Elements in *Therese*

With regard to the discursivity of desire in a setting of restrained sexuality, *Therese*’s lengthy opening soliloquy, which goes on for 136 lines, is particularly revealing:

O du unbarmherzige Nacht wie folterst du mich? Schläft denn Gott auch, daß diese dunkle Zeit, die keines Menschen Freund ist, so viel Macht haben kann über mein armes Herz. Gibt es keine Religion mehr für mich, wenn die Sonne untergegangen ist und jetzt die letzte Lampe ausgelöscht ist? Alle Fenster sind dunkel, wie süß schlummernde Augen, jede Noth ruht, die ich sonst mit selbstzufriedenem Gemüthe gelindert habe, nur ich bin wach und elend! Verlassen und einsam in meiner sündhaften Gluth! Wo seid ihr, stille glückselige Gebete, ihr zarten verwöhnten Kinder meiner Seele? Alle geflohen! Und wenn eines sich noch aus meinem Herzen ringt, so beginnt es unter elenden Seufzern und verwelkt unreif auf meinen trockenen Lippen, die nach seinem Munde dürsten. O Du unglückliches Weib! (XVIII, 485; emphasis mine)

In these first lines of the opening monologue, *Therese* addresses the night (“O du unbarmherzige Nacht”) as a dark time (“dunkle Zeit”) in which God supposedly sleeps and that is no friend to humanity. With this address, the rhetorical device of apostrophe is mobilized in a twofold manner: as the *Historisches*

Wörterbuch der Rhetorik states, apostrophe is used to evoke and represent strong pathos and affection; it entails turning away from the audience, due to the orator's strong affection, so as to address another entity, person, or thing (Halsall 1992, 830). Therese's affection of desperation and unfulfilled desire is configured by a series of metonymical shifts initiated through apostrophe; here the merciless night in a spring evening conjures the topos of lustful, pagan, Venusian configurations of desire, which remain once the natural sun and artificial light disappear ("Sonne," "Lampe"). Only she, the "ich" is "wach und elend," suffused with "sündhafte Gluth." In this dark time, she is abandoned by religion: "Gibt es keine Religion mehr für mich, wenn die Sonne untergegangen ist und jetzt die letzte Lampe ausgelöscht ist?" The residue of her desire remains inextinguishable in the dark spring night in May and confronts her with her "Gluth" when she is "einsam und allein," with nowhere to channel her desire apart from into her monologue. The affection of desire verbalized in her apostrophic address "O du unbarmherzige Nacht" is a pagan, non-Christian desire.

Additionally, the "unbarmherzige Nacht," which is charged with such restless, pagan desire and which had served as the apostrophic addressee at the monologue's opening, is answered a few lines later by an alternative addressee that embodies the relentless night's frustration: "Oh Du unglückliches Weib!" Here, Therese employs another rhetorical device often combined with apostrophe: *exclamatio* (Till 1996, 48–52). As an emotive figure of speech, *exclamatio* is applied in order to evoke strong passions in the audience and readers, and it serves as a kind of proof of passion, that is, as a manifestation of affections in speech punctuated by the exclamation mark (Till 1996, 48). So when Therese concludes her train of thought with the *exclamatio* "O Du unglückliches Weib!," this affective expression is linked to the desirous address to the pagan "unbarmherzige Nacht" with which the monologue began. Therese's desperation and feeling of relinquishment toward this very incessant desire that ought to be restrained are expressed in the interplay between these two addresses. This overflowing yet unsatisfied desire becomes discursified when it is inscribed in the dramatic text through the rhetorical device of apostrophe.

Furthermore, in certain ways, apostrophe may be seen as akin to the aside, a dramatic device that often takes the form of a turning toward the audience in comedies or "im epischen Theater" in order to evoke a "Distanz und Kommentierung" (Schößler 2017, 130). Because of the association between these two devices, the configuration of apostrophe can appear as a form of epicization, a vehicle by which epic elements enter the drama. In this case, the rhetorical and dramatic device of apostrophe can be read as serving a commenting function that intertwines elements from both *Sturm und Drang* and epic theater. Through it, the unspeakable enters the stage and upends the drama's absoluteness (Kaiser 1981, 263).

In this configuration of apostrophe, Therese's desire is addressed and at the same time materialized through her verbal actions. In the process, external orders of knowledge are weaved into the drama. For Therese's excessive discursivity can also be read as a kind of performing of the Feuerbachian notion that not only wine but also love can indeed loosen the tongue: "Wir können mit gleichem Rechte sagen: in amore veritas, in gaudio veritas, in dolore veritas, denn in Liebe, Freude, Schmerz wirft der Mensch die Schranken und Rücksichten weg, die er sonst beobachtet und enthüllt so sein wahres Wesen" (Feuerbach 1834, 189).¹ At the same time, the Feuerbachian loose tongue goes hand in hand with the S&D notion of a discursified sexuality that is circumscribed on one side by the Enlightenment embodied in the symbolic staging of the artificial light and the sun ("Lampe," "Sonne") and on the other by religion through the address to God. In this way, Therese's desire materializes into text in her apostrophic monologue and becomes discursified as S&D in Luserke and Marx's sense (Luserke-Jaqui 2017, 20). In addition, apostrophe evokes a strategy of rhetorical quotation that imports exterior discourses into the drama. As an outside reference, quotation is strictly excluded in the model of absolute drama, in which all references must be internal (Szondi 2011, 18). This exteriority, anathema to Hebbel and Hettner, is what I read as significant in Keller's dramatic text.

With this configuration of apostrophe and the discursification of Therese's desire in mind, we may now turn to Therese's address to God in which she intercosses her love for God with her worldly love for her daughter's fiancé in a Feuerbachian fashion through an amourological speech act:

Du bist ja die Liebe! Warum hast du ihn erschaffen, wenn er nicht geliebt werden soll von mir, die ihn allein so lieben kann, wie es ihm gebührt nach seinem Wesen! Ich kann dich nicht mehr lieben Herr, wenn ich dich nicht in ihm anbeten darf Nein, nein, ich kann es nicht, o verzeih mir meine Sünde! Nein verzeih mir sie nicht, ich vermag deine Gnade nicht zu genießen, wenn sie mir nicht aus den Augen strahlt und von seinem Munde lächelt. Ich kenne dich nur in ihm. Meine Augen sind zu schwach geworden, um dich in deinem reinen Glanze zu schauen, ich sehe dich nur in seinem Bilde, aber in demselben ganz, wie dich sonst Niemand erfasst, Niemand! (XVIII, 487)

1 Feuerbach's philosophical writings display a turn toward materialism, especially with regard to understanding religion and love as unified rather than divergent notions and by understanding the human being to be not only a spiritual but also a physical being: "Die Theologie ist Anthropologie, so muß ich zur Ergänzung jetzt hinzusetzen: und Physiologie. Meine Lehre oder Anschauung fasst sich daher in zwei Worte Natur und Mensch zusammen" (2016, 29). In this shift, Feuerbach identifies the love of God with worldly love – which were long seen as antithetical – making way for the destigmatization of corporal love. On Feuerbach's religious materialism, see Gosepath/Hinsch/Celikates (2008).

Here, Therese evokes a detachment from God in her very act of addressing him, and she thereby displaces heavenly love with worldly love: “Ich kann dich nicht mehr lieben Herr, wenn ich dich nicht in ihm anbeten darf.” In this sequence, the apostrophe – at first a turning away from the audience and toward God as a dialogue partner – becomes instead a turning away from God by assimilating him into her desire for her daughter’s fiancé. Divine mercy is intertwined with the glowing in her eyes and the smile of his mouth: “Nein verzeih sie mir nicht, ich vermag deine Gnade nicht zu genießen, wenn sie mir nicht aus den Augen strahlt und von seinem Munde lächelt.” Loving eyes and his smiling mouth, physically present, become the conditions for God’s grace – the transcendental can attain reality only in material life, and heaven is to be looked for only on earth. The unity of the divine and the worldly in this desire emerges clearly when God is remade in Richard’s image: “Ich kenn dich nur in seinem Bilde.” Her corporal desire becomes divine desire, interweaving a further Feuerbachian notion of worldly, materialized desire into her monologue.

This section can be understood to contain an additional epic element if we draw on Szondi’s (2011, 42–47) model of monologue as comprising a verbalized dialogue within the interior of a character, such as between their ego and their unconscious. Throughout its 136 lines, Therese’s monologue unleashes pent-up waves of desire, which it simultaneously constitutes and manifests as discourse through the configuration of apostrophe. This aspect can be better seen if we note that Keller depicted the flooding of a river in another drafting of the opening scene of the drama: “Eine Straße am Wasser. Im Hintergrunde zieht der hochgeschwollene Fluß vorüber, welcher jedoch zum größten Theil hinter Gebäuden verborgen ist. In der Mitte steht, hart am Flusse ein hölzernes Häuschen. Das Wasser rauscht” (XVIII, 613). An echo of the breaching waves may be heard, we might say, in Therese’s monologue: through the very excessiveness of her speech, the unspeakable enters the stage and becomes discursified in the S&D sense. Because of this epic element in the monologue that externalizes the interiority of the character, the levees guarding the drama’s absoluteness are ruptured and the discourse flows over.

Another intriguing aspect appears in the title of the opening soliloquy, “Monolog der Mutter” (XVIII, 485). This paratextual marker positions Therese’s Feuerbachian production of excessive and prolific speech as a modification of the “Dialektikthese” and hence as a modernization of gender and kinship. In *Therese*, the drama does not depict a conflict of male protagonists against “die Väter als Instanzen aufgeklärter bürgerlicher Ordnung” (Luserke-Jaqui 2017, 22), the common motif of the “Generationenkonflikt” in Sturm und Drang literature. Instead, the role of the protagonist shifts to the mother, and the conflict centers on a rebellion against the authoritarian order of religion expressed in

pietism. Tying the title of the monologue explicitly to the “Mutter” establishes the unfolding soliloquy as a rejection not only of patriarchal genealogy but also of the gender roles of the puritanical, bourgeois social order *tout court*.

This rewriting of the role of the mother is advanced further in the drama through a configuration of apostrophe when Therese refuses to be addressed as “Mutter” in the scene with Richard, her lover-to-be: “Mutter, und immer Mutter! Zehnmal in einem Athemzuge spricht er das Wort aus und jedesmal senkt er mir ein Messer in’s Herz mit lächelndem Munde” (XVIII, 503). In this utterance, Therese displaces the role of the mother onto the role of a lover through the staging of a set of apostrophes: “(sich vergessend, lauter, doch gemäßigt) Mutter! Süßer heiliger Name, Stolz und Zierde des Weibes, wie, wie hat es geschehen können, daß du mir ein Wort des Schreckens und des blutigen Vorwurfes geworden bist?” (XVIII, 505). In her direct address of the word *Mutter*, a further effect of the rhetorical configuration of apostrophe is put into action, namely, the operation of “*fictio audientis*.” This occurs when someone or something is addressed apart from the audience, which rhetorically produces a new character (Halsall 1992, 830). In her utterance, Therese creates new fictitious characters in this way. Here, when Therese reproaches the word *Mutter* configured as “heilig,” she creates the role of the holy mother through speech and at the same time distances herself from it. She does so by staging a conversation between herself and the role of the holy mother: “Schauer und Grauen durchfahren mich bei deinem Klang und wechseln ab mit dem, was noch schlimmer ist, mit Neid und Trotz gegen die ewige göttliche Ordnung” (XVIII, 505). Motherhood is interlinked with the normative, divine order that determines it to be holy, something a woman should take pride in and find completion in. Therese juxtaposes this divine role of the mother with an alternative in another apostrophe:

Therese (an ihn gelehnt, presst beide Hände an ihre Brust) Fliege poche, brich auf, du beklemmte Brust! Du kannst nicht? Du hältst wie Stahl die wilden Dämonen zusammen und zwingst sie, sich gegenseitig auf dem Platze aufzureiben, bis alles alles todt und still ist! – Reißt, stecht, verschlingt einander, wühlt das innerste Herz auf – o so wild kann es nicht zugehen in dem Busen einer wahren Mutter, ich fühle, wie jung ich bin an der Wuth dieses Sturmes (sie tritt nahe vor Richard hin). (XVIII, 507)

In this configuration of apostrophe, she not only addresses her body but in doing so also evokes a further character that becomes present through her speech, namely, her “beklemmte Brust.” Because of this, her chest becomes a battleground that contains and restrains demons. The detached role of the mother is soon set aside when she speaks about it with Richard: “o so wild kann es nicht zugehen in dem Busen einer wahren Mutter.” She then directly addresses Richard, only now, her “I” is detached from the mother role prescribed by the divine order: “Bin ich

nicht jung, lieber Freund? (reißt ihre schweren braunen Haarflechten auseinander, heftig) sind das nicht schöne braune Haare?” (XVIII, 507) As Kaiser indicates, her heavy brown hair can be seen as interrelated with the “Braut des Hohenliedes und dem Geliebten nach dem königlichen Freund Salomo” (1981, 264). The reference in the stage directions to her “schweren braunen Haarflechten” combined with the apostrophically configured “I” and her rhetorical question hint toward a further discursification of desire, in this case, through the rhetorical device of *interrogatio*, which Lausberg described as follows: “Die ‘rhetorische Frage’ peitscht die Affekte durch die Evidenz der Unnötigkeit der fragenden Formulierung auf” (1971, 445). Within this logic, the rhetorical question renders Therese’s desire into discourse, while at the same time, in a mode of the “Generationenkonflikt,” reproaching the role of the mother as constituted by the divine order. In this way, the configuration of the mother within puritanical, middle-class domestic constellations is figuratively put into question through the employment of apostrophe and interrogatio.

Just as Keller’s drama breaches issues of sexuality and gender roles through epic elements configured in rhetorical devices such as apostrophe, so too does it introduce those of class differentiation. This aspect appears clearly in the characters of Marie – Therese’s maid – and her lover Heinrich. One scene paradigmatically depicts them in an exchange not only of unrepressed banter but also, as the stage directions indicate, of unencumbered acts of love: “faßt sie um den Leib, sie küßt ihn” (XVIII, 531). This unrestrained expression of desire is reflected in Marie’s speech:

Marie Daß heiß ich aber geschwärm! Ich muß mich wahrhaftig schämen vor mir selber. Und doch sind wir so hübsch u gut gewesen diese Nacht. Es ist gar zu schön, am Wasser hinauf zu gehen. Die reichen Leute haben’s gar zu gut! Sie genießen u verschlucken die schönen Mainächte so recht expreß. Wie für’s Geld. Es wär mir nie zu Sinn gekommen, daß es jetzt und so schön draußen wär nächtlicherweis, wenn unsre Liebschaft mich nicht drauf geführt hätte. (XVIII, 527)

Their “Liebschaft” reveals the beauty of the spring night to them. Here, the night, which had been charged with pagan markers in Therese’s speech, is recharged with a semantics of fruitfulness and beauty. Furthermore, this fulfilled love stands in contrast to the apparition they saw in the evening, as Heinrich replies: “Ich glaub immer, die Gestalt am Wasser, die du für einen Geist gehalten, ist kein Geist, sondern auch so eine vornehme Person gewesen” (XVIII, 529). Rickels notes, “Im Stück begegnen dem ‘niederen Volk’ Spukgestalten, die sich regelmäßig als der Oberschicht zugehörige Opfer der ‘wahren Leidenschaft’ erweisen” (1990, 158–159). In this scene, Therese is marked by a semantics of death since she is held for a ghost and wears a white dress. Therese’s unfulfilled libido, which her apparition as a ghost symbolizes, contrasts with the fulfilled

love of the young couple. Yet although their desire is unrepressed, it nevertheless cannot withstand the restraint demanded by the social gaze, as Marie indicates: “Nur ärgerts mich, daß der kleine Backfisch so dick thun darf mit seinem Heirathen und ich mit meinen ehrlichen fünf und zwanzig Jahren soll mich schämen und vor allen Menschen verkriechen!” (XVIII, 529). The social reality depicted here is one in which their desire, though fulfilled, must be concealed, while Therese’s unfulfilled desire is condemned to become a ghost. Within these social confines, unrestrained desire is made impossible, or rather it has to be pushed into the outskirts of society, that is, into the classes of servants and laborers. It is desire considered through this restrictive social gaze that is reflected in Marie’s utterance. The latter actively and undisguisedly mirrors the social constraints that Therese is bound to through yet another employment of apostrophe, this time in connection with an exclamation: “oh wenn meine Frau wüsste, wie gut es ist, wenn man einen Liebsten küsst, so würde sie mich gewiss nicht fortjagen!” (XVIII, 531). With the engagement of this configuration of apostrophe in combination with exclamation, Marie verbalizes her desire while evading the social ostracism attached to it by addressing an imaginary Therese. In this way, an apostrophe – here an indirect address – introduces the repressed by discursifying the unspeakable. By alluding to a social reality that exceeds the drama’s enclosed referentiality, the apostrophe breaches the drama’s absoluteness (Szondi 2011, 59–61).

However indirect it may be, this address and employment of apostrophe nevertheless overtly confronts the reality of restrained desire: here the relation to *Sturm und Drang* can be seen in the explicit depiction of contemporary problems rather than in an idealistic depiction of a distant past. On the one hand, one can read the play as a reemployment of the *Sturm und Drang* model of bourgeois tragedy but with a shift toward an uncamouflaged social reality in a modification of the “Verschiebungsthese,” while on the other, the necessity of camouflaging unencumbered and extramarital desire in public is inscribed even in Marie’s speech:

Marie (leiser) [. . .] (sieht sich um) ich glaub wir sind nicht die Ersten, die hier geküßt haben. Da nimm die Hälfte [des Rosenstraußes] und steck sie Morgen hübsch auf den Hut, die andere steck ich vor die Brust und wenn wir zur Kirche gehen, so soll den Blumen kein Mensch anmerken, daß sie beisammen waren! Nun gut Nacht, in zwei Stunden muß ich wieder raus! Ich hab’ aber doch noch keinen Schlaf! (XVIII, 533)

This is the very bouquet of roses Therese attempted to give Richard, but he refused them. This bouquet, split in half by the two lovers, metonymizing Therese’s broken heart, is employed at the same time as a symbol for their fulfilled desire. Through the mirroring configuration of the so-called lower characters, their fulfilled desire is chiasmally intertwined with Therese’s unfulfilled desire. This

politicizes the discursification of suppressed sexuality through an uncamouflaged class difference: as opposed to the pious and repressed upper class, the lower classes fulfill their desires.

It is not only in this restrained social reality that Therese and her desire have no place; the Bible too has no solution to offer her. When, toward the end of the drama, Therese gazes into the Bible, she asks it whether she can still understand it: “Therese (blättert in der Bibel, für sich) laß seh’n, heiliges Buch, ob ich dich noch verstehe! – Das flimmert mir vor den Augen wie eine uralte fremde Schrift (seufzt) O weh weh weh! es schwindelt mir – wo bin ich – wer sind wir Marie?!” (XVIII, 573). Here it is the Bible that Therese addresses, except that, in this case, she does not evoke a shift through her mobilization of apostrophe. On the contrary, as a dialogue partner, the Bible throws Therese into a crisis of selfhood in which she loses all sense of where or who she is. After this loss of self and place, she commands Marie to find a passage that relates to her in the Bible: “da lies mir etwas vor, was du willst, schlag auf (s) Gerathewohl auf.” In response, Marie apparently randomly finds a section: “Ich will mit einer Nadel hineinstechen, wie Sie sonst oft thun (Sie liest)” (XVIII, 573). Eventually Marie finds the teachings of Solomon, which refer to the eternal cycles of the sun: “Die Sonne geht auf, und gehet unter, und läuft an ihren Ort, daß sie daselbst wieder aufgehe.” At this point, Therese interrupts and demands, “Wenn sie aber wider ihren eigenen Lauf fließen müssen, so gibt es jedesmal ein Ünglück! Steht das nicht auch dort?” To this Marie replies: “Nein!” Therese’s question is hence a failed attempt at shaping the Bible according to her command, whereupon she demands yet another passage: “lies weiter unten” (XVIII, 575). Marie then reads once again from Solomon, in a passage that proclaims the right to a friend and to sexuality:

Marie (liest) Komm mein Freund, laß uns auf’s Feld hinaus gehen und auf den Dörfern bleiben, dass wir früh aufstehen zu den Weinbergen, daß wir sehen, ob der Weinstock blühe und Augen gewonnen habe, ob die Granatäpfelbäume ausgeschlagen sind. Die Lilien geben den Geruch, und vor unsrer Thüre sind allerlei edle Früchte. Mein Freund, ich habe dir beide, diesjährige und vorjährige, behalten. – Das macht einem ordentlich Lust, hinaus zu laufen. Heut muß der Heinrich recht weit mit mir spazieren gehen. (lies’t) Seine Linke liegt unter meinem Haupt und seine Rechte herzet mich. (XVIII, 585)

Now it is Marie who, through a configuration of apostrophe, not only finds herself in the Bible but inscribes herself in it as well. Once again, Marie becomes a reflection of Therese’s tragic, unfulfilled desire. Moreover, when Marie overwrites the biblical text with her plans of desire – “Heut muß der Heinrich recht weit mit mir spazieren gehen” – she infuses it with worldly, unrestrained desire through a further employment of apostrophe. But in this case, the apostrophe takes the form of an aside. As previously mentioned, Schößler describes the aside as evoking not only a “Distanz” but also a “Kommentierung,” and as

such it connects with and addresses the audience: “In den *asides* werden Intrigen geplant und die Zuschauer|innen zu Mitwisser|innen gemacht” (2017, 130). Following this logic, the insertion of an apostrophe has a set of effects: through the aside, Marie inserts her plans of desire within the biblical text, for she resumes reading after stating them: “(lies’t) Seine Linke liegt unter meinem Haupt und seine Rechte herzet mich.” In this metaleptical inscription evoked through apostrophe, the biblical text is now overlaid with Marie’s desire for Heinrich as a kind of “Kokonisierungsthese” strategy: through her aside, Marie posits a virtual audience, which then relates to the Bible through her and identifies it with her and her desire. Here, desire is individualized and at the same time tied to a disclosed mutuality with the virtual audience. By alluding to and addressing an audience within the enclosed confines of the drama, this operation not only upends the absoluteness of the drama; it also removes the Bible’s character as a holy and ancient text, and attaches it to worldly desire: specifically, that of Marie, and through her, that of the virtual audience.

At the same time, the direct quotation and reading of scripture can be understood as a galvanization of the epic element of quotation through the materially present Bible. In the process, the biblical text is simultaneously imported and overwritten: Marie’s reading of scripture identifies her own desire with the desire inscribed in the Bible and intertwines her, as the servant, with Therese, the landlady, and with the latter’s unfulfilled and tragically restrained desire. For Marie – whose name can be read as a possible reference to the Virgin Mary, employed in Christian literature as a symbol for self-abnegation – not only reads from the Bible but elaborates on it and inscribes herself into it; by doing so, she infuses Holy Scripture with worldly desire and an affirmation of life. Conversely, Therese, who suffers under the societal law of restrained desire, cannot find a fulfillment of her desire in the Bible, nor does she read an affirmation of life in it, but instead infers only death from it: “Therese (noch immer hinaus schauend) stark wie der Tod und Fest wie die Hölle!” (XVIII, 587). By longing for death and by allowing her daughter to fulfill her own desire in doing so, Therese practices the ultimate act of self-abnegation.

After sending Marie away, Therese abandons hope for satisfaction in this world and flees into abstraction carried to its most sinister conclusion in her embrace of the idea of dying. In yet another apostrophe, she exclaims: “Sterben, Tod! – Holdseliger Gedanke, gleich einem strahlenden Engel trittst du aus diesem Sonnenschein, [. . .] zu mir heran; [. . .] und deine Hand trägt die Zweige des Friedens und der Ruhe!” (XVIII, 591). Here, death is a figure who approaches her and offers her peace, a thought she welcomes: “deine Hand trägt die Zweige des Friedens und der Ruhe!” But suddenly she sees her reflection and becomes aware of her exteriority: “(sie sieht sich im Spiegel) Pfui, wie seh’ ich aus! Wer

wird denn so zur Hochzeit gehen?" Having seen her exterior self in the mirror, she can now invert the act of dying and transform it into a wedding – "wer will denn so zur Hochzeit gehen?" (XVIII, 591). In her wedding with God, Therese's fulfilled desire is materially present not through herself but through her daughter, for whom she becomes a metonymy: "Ich lasse meinen besseren und schöneren Theil zurück" (XVIII, 593). Once Therese leaves her better and more beautiful part behind, the reigning puritanical order is reestablished, which apparently causes no more complaints: "niemand soll sich beklagen" (XVIII, 593). In this suicidal marriage with God, Therese is rendered a tragic figure in a Feuerbachian sense, for her worldly, material desire can only be resolved through her death, the termination of her sensible experience. At the same time, the operation of transcending her physical "self" is set in critical tension by the stage directions, which mark her exit as abrupt and frenzied ("rasch"; XVIII, 593). Ironically, her ultimate capitulation to Christian society has the effect of driving her out of it; the nearby river, semanticized with pagan markers such as "tob[end]" and "donnernd" (XVIII, 613), sweeps her and her unfulfilled worldly desire away.

5 Closing Remarks

In this brief analysis, I hope to have shown how epic elements can be made productive when interrelated with elements of Sturm und Drang, since they convey the discursification of sexuality and class and can be read as the "Unsägliche" (Kaiser 1981, 263) that enters the drama and makes its absoluteness impossible. Beyond this, my analysis has demonstrated that the epic elements identified in Szondi's *Theorie des modernen Dramas*, such as quotation, the split "I," or the importation of external discourses, can be specified and more clearly delineated when read alongside rhetorical devices such as apostrophe. Szondi's model of epicization does not offer elaborate rhetorical analysis, so my work here contributes to the theoretical infrastructure by outlining some ways in which rhetorical operations can serve as vehicles for epic structures. Additionally, my analysis provides reasons to question Szondi's account of when the crisis of absolute drama emerged. Keller's *Therese*, its usage of themes from Sturm und Drang, and its infusion of epic forms anticipate this crisis in the very period of a revival of neoconservative dramatic paradigms. The discovery of epic elements in Keller's unfinished drafts reveals a profound effort to formulate alternatives to the idealistic model of drama as illustrated in the works of Hettner and Hebbel. Keller's attempt at drama also shows that long before the advent of naturalist social drama, epic elements were employed to address,

directly and explicitly, current problems and themes in a way that foreshadows their usage by later generations of dramatists, most famously in the works of Bertolt Brecht.

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