

BREAKING FROM TRADITION:
J.M.R. LENZ'S VIEWS ON MORALITY AND THEIR EFFECTS ON HIS DRAMA

by

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In loving memory of

Jane Veronica Curran

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the unique way in which J.M.R. Lenz incorporates topics of morality into his 18th-century playwriting. It examines his various theoretical texts and how they influence his playwriting and views on morality, presenting his insights as a complete system. It describes his rejection of Aristotelian-influenced French Classicism and his unique take on traditional views of morality. These ideas are brought together in discussion of three of his plays, *Der neue Menoza*, *Der Hofmeister*, and *Die Soldaten*. Through these plays Lenz demonstrates the varying ways in which his characters view morality's influence on their lives. The main argument made in this thesis is that Lenz rejects the concept of theater as a tool for moral teaching and instead uses it to teach his audience about real life and to give them an opportunity for self-reflection.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

<i>WS I</i>	<i>Werke und Schriften I</i> , Eds. Britta Titel and Hellmut Haug
<i>WS II</i>	<i>Werke und Schriften II</i> , Eds. Britta Titel and Hellmut Haug
<i>Anmerkungen</i>	<i>Anmerkungen übers Theater</i> , Ed. Hans-Günther Schwarz

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz's (1751-1792) approach to theatrical writing and theoretical explorations of the theatre were ground-breaking for his time. As one of the earliest anti-Aristotelian playwrights and pioneers of the *Sturm und Drang*¹ movement, his insights were bold and at times controversial. He opposed the authoritative views of Aristotle on a fundamental level, which continued to be the guide for the way in which most of his European contemporaries were composing their work, particularly the members of the French Classicism movement. Lenz systematically railed against the Aristotelian unities and the concept of *Mimesis*² as the underlying principles for the theatre. While Aristotle writes that the poet does not try to represent "was wirklich geschehen ist, sondern vielmehr, was geschehen könnte," (Aristotle 29), Lenz believes that the writer should depict "alle der Dinge, die wir um uns herum sehen, hören" (*Anmerkungen* 9). It is this relentless commitment to the depiction of reality that gives him an extremely early role in the realist movement.

Beyond the qualities of his realism, Lenz radically redefined the terms comedy and tragedy in an attempt to rid the theatre of the typical definition of comedy depicting happy events and tragedy depicting sad ones. Instead, in his definition, "Die Hauptempfindung in der Komödie ist immer die Begebenheit, die Hauptempfindung in der Tragödie ist die Person, die Schöpfer ihrer Begebenheiten" (*Anmerkungen* 36). This change in the way of looking at the basic concepts of comedy and tragedy highlights the

¹ In English this is translated as the *Storm and Stress* movement. It consisted of young Germans in the 1770s, most notably, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832).

² *Mimesis*, μίμησις, a Greek word used by Aristotle in his *Poetik*. It is often translated as "imitation" or "representation."

extent to which Lenz renounces the inherited traditions of his time. Lenz does not oppose one or two points while working within the system; he rejects the system in its entirety. He does, however, take one playwright, William Shakespeare (1564-1616) to be the great example of theatre writing and bases many of his own theories about dramatic structures on the works of the English writer (27). However, as with everything, he views Shakespeare's work critically and is not merely an imitator, but tries to make improvements on the qualities in Shakespeare which he admires. He also eliminates the role of destiny and fate in the theatre, which he sees as an archaic left-over of Aristotle, and allows his characters to control and create their own lives and destinies (17). He sees this as the pure imitation of nature, and believes that the natural world is a world in which gods do not, at least not directly, interfere in the lives of humans. Outside of the fact that Lenz opposes the physical representation of the world in Aristotle, he also opposes what he perceives as Aristotle's depiction of the character as a sort of animal or puppet with no control over its own actions. This concept suggests that a higher power, be it the Greek Gods or the Christian one, determines everything in the lives of humans (*Briefe von und an J.M.R. Lenz* 115, *Anmerkungen* 28). For Lenz a character should be considered "freihandelnd" and "selbstständig" (compare with *Anmerkungen* 9).

This freedom of the character not only affects the way in which he defines tragedy and comedy, it also brings to question the accountability of characters for their actions and what the consequences of these actions are. For Aristotle, "die zwei Ursachen der Handlungen" of drama are "die Gesinnungen und die Sitten" (Aristotle 11). This is a clear indication of the inclinations of the dramatic tradition leading up to Lenz. Aristotle sees drama as upholding a certain moral code, one from which his audience can learn.

However in Lenz's view of the world, the consequences are certainly no longer divinely orchestrated and this creates doubt for the reader about the role that "Sitten," or what is known as the English *mores* or morality itself, play in his works. Are there consequences for the actions of his characters at all? Is there now an overarching determination of right or wrong, or does this freedom also free the character from any kind of accountability whatsoever? Questions of morality in relation to Lenz are rarely asked, despite the fact that he himself wrote his own theories on morality. Equally rare are questions concerning the role that morality has in the works of other writers, and in the theatre in general. This study will attempt to explore the varying characters of Lenz's dramas, while comparing the way in which they are depicted to the things that Lenz has to say about morality in his theoretical writings. The conclusion should bring us to understand that what should be and what is are two very different concepts and that for Lenz this important distinction is the groundwork on which all drama theory should be laid. It will also become clear that according to Lenz, a moral story that is not true to life should not be the goal of theatre; the only thing that theatre should strive for is the pure imitation of nature. This again is related to his rejection of Greek ideals. For the Greeks, the concept of nature was that it was a thing of beauty, while Lenz does not view nature as a concept, but depicts the nature that he experiences with his own senses. The nature contains the ugly and the beautiful and the imitation and representation of both are necessary.

The discussion of morality is complicated by the ambiguity of the term itself. In German the terms "Sittlichkeit" and "Moralität" are both often used. Etymologically, the *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* states, "[d]as deutsche Lexem ‚Sittlichkeit‘ [...] begegnet seit dem Anfang des 16. Jh. als Äquivalent für das lateinische *moralitas*" (318). Although

these terms were eventually distinguished by such writers as Immanuel Kant, since the term “Sittenlehre” was commonly used in the 17th century to signify ethics, or the study of morality, for the purpose of this paper, the terms will be treated equally (“Sitte/Sittlichkeit” 318).

The discussion of morality was particularly present in French culture of the time and this also had a great deal of influence on German thinkers. The first French moralist was thought to be Michael de Montaigne, but France was particularly well-known for its moralists in the 17th and 18th centuries (“Moralistik” 634). Lenz's age becomes the height of Germany's entry into this discussion, Peter Werle writes in his article “Moralistik”:

In Deutschland, wo die Schriften der französischen Moralisten zwar z. T. früh übersetzt, aber erst im späten 18. Jh. allgemeiner bekannt werden, sind die Probleme einer erfahrungsorientierten Morallehre im systematischen Zusammenhang naturrechtlicher Morallehren abgehandelt worden. (635)

Morality as a concept is even more difficult to make clear than its various headings. It is at times related to religion or society, but it is not exclusively linked to any organization at all. It is generally accepted as the way in which behaviours are viewed as being right or wrong, bad or good and as a guideline for how humans should and should want to behave. Although it is not always meant as a formally devised system, but can also exist conceptually without being systematically developed at all. Early 17th-century thinkers were generally thought to be traditionalists in this matter and for this reason the decisive definition of St. Thomas Aquinas is worth consulting. In Aquinas' way of thinking, “[d]ie Moralthologie war harmonisch in das Ganze der Theologie eingebettet; sie trug die

Struktur einer Tugendlehre, ihr Finalitätsbezug lag im letzten Ziel, verstanden als beatitudo” (“Moraltheologie” 295). From this definition it is discovered that morals are not merely arbitrary laws placed upon humans, but they are developed through purposeful actions, with the end goal of blessedness or a God-granted bliss. It can also be determined that one cannot become a moral person by accident, but that the real worth is understood by the intentions behind these actions. Aquinas’ definition is sufficient to the reader’s understanding of the general view of morality in Lenz’s time and will be used as the backdrop for a more detailed discussion.

CHAPTER 2: LENZ AND ANTI-ARISTOTELIANISM

Lenz's strong objections to Aristotle's works stem in a large part from the lasting influences that they had. Aristotle's theories were the definitive ones for over two thousand years and were strongly present in Lenz's Europe. French classicism was the leading genre of play writing that aimed to work within these principles and its influence extended over the entire continent. He truly detested the worldview in which God is so in control of the fate of all men that they have little choice over their own actions. To this end he considers characters that are depicted in the manner Aristotle suggests to be more like animals than human beings. He writes in *Brief an einem Freund*:

Laßt uns erst den Menschen als Tier betrachten, und da ist er weder moralisch noch metaphysisch frei [...] Die Natur geht und wirkt ihren Gang fort, ohne sich um uns und unsere Moralität zu bekümmern³.

Lenz says that the Greek character is not free because he is controlled by an "iron fate" (*Anmerkungen* 17). He is also suggesting that the character is morally "unfree" because the intention behind the actions is not there, the actions are all resulting from the interference of the Gods. This brings to question whether a character in a Greek play can even be seen as moral or immoral at all. The character is acting as he must, not as he chooses to. Hans-Günther Schwarz explains this view further, in his work *Dasein und Realität: Theorie und Praxis des Realismus bei J.M.R. Lenz*: "Seit der Aufklärung ist das Ideal einer moralisch-vernünftigen, normstatischen Weltordnung, das den Hintergrund

³ This significant quotation from an obscure writing by Lenz has been reproduced as *Brief an einen Freund* and is cited by Volker Demuth in *Realität als Geschichte Biographie, Historie und Dichtung bei J.M.R. Lenz*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1994, p. 40.

der älteren Poetik bildet, Angriffen ausgesetzt und verliert an Gültigkeit” (63). Lenz does not see the plays that were being churned out in his time as true art. He sees them as moral lessons and mere imitations, and he feels passionately that for the future of the theatre, this could not go on.

Despite Lenz’s adamant views against these Aristotelian concepts, they were the popular influence on the leading theater writing of his day. He particularly objected to the dominating trend of French classicism which had reached its height in the previous century with such writers as Jean Racine (1606-1684) and Pierre Corneille (1639-1699) (*Anmerkungen* 7). He openly mocks this tradition several times in his most important theoretical text, *Anmerkungen übers Theatre*. With regard to the role that his own German contemporaries play in this tradition, he calls them imitators, accusing them of not bringing any original thought to their works (8). Certainly some German playwrights, such as Lessing, did, in fact, depart in some ways from the traditional standard. Lessing moved away from the previously established tradition of writing about world historical, or prominent and influential figures and moved to the depiction of family settings, a trait which Lenz is also known for (Schwarz 89). However, Lessing and others continued to hold on to the authority of the three unities and other Aristotelian principles, for which Lenz saw them as followers and not leaders. The one playwright that Lenz did admire above all others, however, was Shakespeare. Lenz claimed that Shakespeare did, in fact, fulfill many of the anti-Aristotelian qualities that were lacking in the plays of his contemporaries. Many of the structural and stylistic characteristics in Lenz’s plays are based on the plays of Shakespeare. However, although Lenz greatly admired Shakespeare and was indeed inspired by him, even the inspiration that Lenz took from him was not a

mere imitation of methods. Lenz took concepts that saw as being introduced in Shakespeare's works and refined them (Schwarz 26).

In order to begin to understand the role of morality in Lenz's works and theoretical texts, one must first understand his anti-Aristotelian standpoint. This standpoint is entirely centred on what has come to be seen as Lenz's realism. He strives to depict life as it is and not as it ought to be. In the *Anmerkungen* he writes, "das Wesen der Poesie sei Nachahmung und was dies für Reiz für uns habe" (9). From this early point in the text it is clear that the orientation of theatre that Lenz is aiming for is nothing like what has come before it. Aristotle's concept of *Mimesis* was about imitating what should be, not what actually is and the purpose is not merely for pleasure, but also instructive. Not only does what Lenz calls the "essence of poetry" exclude Aristotle's view of *Mimesis*, it suggests that more important than a moral message is the pleasure of the viewer. Lenz's views on morality in literature are riddled throughout his critique of Aristotle.

In addition, Lenz rejects Aristotle's three unities of plot, time, and place⁴. Aristotle, who wrote his most definitive thoughts on the theatre in his work *Poetik* considered unity the chief principle of drama. He wrote that a theatrical work had to flow from one central plot, with minimal characters, in order to achieve a unity in the location of the action (27). He also advises in his *Poetik* that this action should take place within a short period of time ("eines einzigen Sonnenumlaufs") in order to unify the plot further (17). Bringing these points together, Aristotle writes,

⁴ Although Aristotle himself did not name the "three unities" as such, this is how his *Poetik* had been generally interpreted in Lenz's time and how Lenz refers to them in the *Anmerkungen*; thus, for continuities sake, they will also be handled as such here.

Man muß die Fabeln wie in den Tragödien so zusammenfügen, daß sie dramatisch sind und sich auf eine einzige, ganze und in sich geschlossene Handlung mit Anfang, Mitte und Ende beziehen, damit diese, in ihrer Einheit und Ganzheit einem Lebewesen vergleichbar, das ihr eigentümliche Vergnügen bewirken kann. (77)

This idea of unity creating a kind of “closedness” [*Geschlossenheit*] becomes central to Lenz’s objection to this kind of writing. He and the other writers of the *Sturm und Drang* strove for openness, freedom, and wholeness but not unity. Unity for Lenz suggests uniformity; the representation of a world as it should be, without the flaws and differences inherent in reality. Unity is a negative aspect to drama for him because it is unreal and he is attempting to depict and celebrate the real world.

As a counterpoint to these three unities and as a representation of wholeness over unity, Lenz employs the principle of variety [*Mannigfaltigkeit*] as the necessary ingredient in drama (*Anmerkungen* 27). Variety is a major part of realism for Lenz. He sees the world as fluctuating and attempts to depict it in its multiplicity; it is for this reason that a dedication to unifying principles is not suited to his work. Unity implies that the world can be neatly categorized and summed up, while he sees the reality as infinitely varying. Lenz is committed to being true to nature and as he says, “[d]enn die Natur ist in allen ihren Wirkungen mannigfaltig” (27). Instead of unity, he endorses the idea of a wholeness which includes all aspects of the world. Wholeness is an acceptance of the variety of people, and of time, place, and plot and seeing it positively in its realness instead of negatively fragmented. He objects to the concept of *la belle nature* which the French are depicting a sort of elevated and faultless nature. He wants to depict the real and the flawed. This creates strong implications for the discussion of morality because it

separates beauty and morality. Variety is not a negative aspect of the theatre and yet by definition it includes the representation of the ugly and the wrong. To speak of morality in these plays no longer implies a pureness, but the possibility of morality in a world that is infinitely varying. Variety is one of the principles he inherits from Shakespeare and he even argues that variety is not merely a characteristic of reality, but also, as we learn from Shakespeare, a representation of beauty. He writes in his essay “Über die Veränderung des Theaters in Shakespeare” that the public belief is that “Shakespeares Schönheiten bestünden bloß in seiner Unregelmäßigkeit” (105)⁵. In this model, variety becomes no longer purely a representation of chaos and ugliness, but rather something to enjoy and accept as a fundamental part of life.

The development of variety as an essential component to theatre stems in part from the fact that Lenz also opposed the Aristotelian view that man is controlled by an “iron fate,” [*eisernes Schicksal*]. That is to say, that his actions are not his own, but controlled by the Gods (*Anmerkungen* 17). Lenz’s view opposes and changes the entire course of the history of theatre. The French writers that Lenz objects to, although no longer seeing the *Greek* gods as controlling the actions of humans, held on to this concept, viewing it through a Christian lens. Instead of the Greek gods interfering in the lives of men, it was now seen as the one true God who holds the fate of all people in His hands. The characters of the French classical plays, being Greek, still appeal to the Greek gods, but the Christian view of God was maintained and allegorically represented,

⁵ It is worth noting here that Lenz was not the first to appeal to variety in art. In Diffey and Schwarz’s notes on the *Anmerkungen* they write: “*Mannigfaltigkeit* (‘variety’) is a key word for understanding German literature in the 18th century. The word first appears in the translations of *Les milles et une nuits* (1704-1717). In Hogarth’s *Theory of Beauty*, the latter is defined by variety: ‘The essence of beauty is variety.’ Hogarth refers to Enobarbus’ barge-speech from Shakespeare’s *Anthony and Cleopatra*: ‘Age cannot wither her/nor custom stale her infinite variety/but she makes hungry where most satisfies...’ Variety is the very opposite of the Aristotelian unities. It is also the design principle of the English garden.” (85)

making their plays fairly uncontroversial and, in Lenz's eyes, painfully generic (26). What Lenz saw as the separation of man from this iron fate was meant to be establishing a sort of freedom of the character, making the character finally one of the "freihandelnden und selbstständigen Geschöpfe" (9). The modern character is not restricted by a preordained destiny (unlike the Greek Oedipus, whose fate is established prior to his own birth), but is free to act in his own manner. Lenz attributed the lack of freedom in ancient Greek plays to the fact that they were religious. He writes, "[d]a nun fatum bei ihnen alles war, so glaubten sie eine Ruchlosigkeit zu begehen, wenn sie Begebenheiten aus den Charakteren berechneten, sie bebten vor dem Gedanken zurück" (35). This point demonstrates to us that the further that Lenz enters into his argument, the further he moves from traditional piety. This becomes important in the way that he demonstrates morality and in a way his conception of it is different from what comes before him. It also demonstrates Lenz's view that the Greek characters were mere objects of fate, having no true identity at all. Not only does Lenz's method bring forth variety, it also brings forth the concept of the individual. The freedom that characters are given makes them more different from one another. A great emphasis is put on the individual's ability to be the master of his or her own life and also on the individual personalities of his characters (19). As Lenz asks in an argument against iron fate, "Wo bleibt die individuelle?" (17). Martin Rector, in his work *Unaufhörlich Lenz gelesen...*, details the theory behind Lenz's version of the world-hierarchy which places man as individual on the top:

Die seine theoretischen Schriften durchziehende Grundüberzeugung Lenzens ist das emphatisch-aufklärerische Axiom, daß der Mensch als an der Spitze der

Gattungshierarchie stehendes, gottähnliches Geschöpf sich vor allen anderen Lebewesen dadurch auszeichne, daß er sich als >>unendlich freihandelndes<< gegen die Fremdbestimmung durch äußere >>Umstände<< behaupten könne und solle. (294)

The human is no longer seen as an animal or puppet, but as a person with logic in his or her behaviours and thought behind them. In fact, being at the top of the earthly hierarchy, Rector goes so far as to call Lenz's humans godlike [*gottähnliches Geschöpf*], a bold statement which is certainly present in Lenz's work. This emphasis on the individual is most easily seen in the fact that Lenz has redefined the term comedy to be about how individuals react to situations that they find themselves in, while tragedy is now seen as being occupied with the actions and decisions of one single character. As Schwarz writes:

Dieser entscheidet sich nicht mehr zwischen Gut und Böse, sondern zieht sich auf eine rein analytische Beobachterrolle zurück. Das kosmische Schicksal weicht dem individuellen Schicksal. Seine Darstellung wird zur Aufgabe der realistischen Kunst. (50)

The writer is now seen as the observer and critic. Schwarz also brings the moral question into view by pointing out that an observer is not meant to control. Characters should be free to act as they truly would in the world. This freedom is a key concept of the *Sturm und Drang* and will become a key concept in understanding morality's role within it.

The new definitions of tragedy and comedy are also significant in the discussion of morality. Lenz defines the two genres in this way: "Die Hauptempfindung in der Komödie ist immer die Begebenheit, die Hauptempfindung in der Tragödie ist die Person, die Schöpfer ihrer Begebenheiten" (*Anmerkungen* 36). In changing the

sentiments associated with comedy and tragedy from happiness and sadness, to the events of the plot and to the actions of the main character, Lenz is turning Aristotle on his head. Aristotle says, rather, that the individual character is not the main focus of tragedy. He writes, “die Tragödie ist nicht Nachahmung von Menschen, sondern von Handlung und von Lebenswirklichkeit⁶ [...] Ferner könnte ohne Handlung keine Tragödie zustandekommen, wohl aber ohne Charaktere” (21). In his “Rezension des Neuen Menoza” Lenz sheds some light on the distinction between these two genres of theatre that he would like to implement:

Ich nenne durchaus Komödie nicht eine Vorstellung, die bloß Lachen erregt, sondern eine Vorstellung, die für jedermann ist. Tragödie ist nur für den ernsthafteren Teil des Publikums, der Helden der Vorzeit in ihrem Licht anzusehn und ihren Wert auszumessen imstande ist. (418)

These distinctions are extremely significant, not only because Lenz has through them completely redefined the meaning of the ancient concepts of comedy and tragedy, but also in that he claims to be, like Shakespeare, writing for the entire public and appears to be doing so without placing judgement upon them. In a letter written to his friend Sophie von La Roche, he makes it clear that, in his eyes, writing something that is accessible to the common man should not be considered as negative. Although the general public is typically less educated, which Lenz implies in his comments, there are no moral implications present in his statement: “mein Publikum [ist] das ganze Volck [...]; [...] ich [kann] den Pöbel so wenig ausschließen [...], als Personen von Geschmack und

⁶ "Lebenswirklichkeit" is actually an incorrect translation of the Greek word βίον, the correct translation would be "leben." While "Lebenswirklichkeit" implies that there is a perceived reality for the individual, "Leben" makes it clear that Aristotle means to say life as an indisputable fact.

Erziehung.” (*Briefe von und an J.M.R. Lenz* 115)⁷. Again the concept of wholeness comes into play. Lenz writes with a sense of wholeness and variety within his dramas and therefore, he expects that they should be possible to be taken in by the people as a *whole*, despite their variety as *individuals*. The imitation of reality in his plays should be something that appeals to all.

The supposition that Lenz had a non-judgemental approach to the types of people who were viewing his plays is, again, in conflict with the way that his predecessors were writing and, in particular, the writings of Aristotle. In the *Poetik*, Aristotle ponders whether tragedies or epics are the greater art form. In order to make a judgement on this he turns to consider the kinds of audiences that can enjoy both art forms. He writes,

[d]iese wendet sich, so wird behauptet, an ein gebildetes Publikum, das der Gesten nicht bedarf, die tragische Kunst hingegen an ein ungebildetes. Wenn sie nun in dieser Weise vulgär ist, dann ist sie offensichtlich die geringere Kunst. (95)

Albeit not the most strongly put argument, his suggestion that the more accessible a work is, the more vulgar it must be in order to suit the sensibilities of the audience is most certainly a judgement on the audience itself. The less unified and more all-encompassing a piece is, the more people it will appeal to, and those people are viewed to be lesser themselves than the educated elite. In fact, Aristotle brings forward the problem of morality directly in the way in which he describes the genres at one point in the *Poetik*, “Die Komödie sucht schlechtere, die Tragödie bessere Menschen nachzuahmen, als sie in der Wirklichkeit vorkommen” (9). Comedy is the lower art form, because it deals with lower people, this is the genre which, according to Aristotle, is reserved for what is

⁷ Lenz named his character Gräfin von La Roche in his play *Die Soldaten* after Sophie von La Roche.

comical. The claim of vulgarity in itself is in a sense a moral judgement on the way that regular people handle themselves. Again, the more like the people the work is, the lesser status it will have.

Aristotle's judgements on the audience and on the characters that are represented in drama bring to light just how deeply and unapologetically Lenz differs from him. Lenz strives to imitate as loyally as possible the way in which these so-called vulgar people carry out their day-to-day lives and he does so without trying to teach anything moral with his work. His teaching is focused on the development of a new kind of drama. It is in this difference that we can begin to understand that the relationship between morality and Lenz's works. For Lenz, the education of the people about morality has no place in the theatre, while he does attempt to display behaviours, conditions, and social pressures for the audience to be confronted with. It is worth adding here that although Lenz does name tragedies as being oriented toward more educated audiences, he never wrote one himself. He was attempting to educate his audience through comedy about his radically new theories on the theatre, in order to prepare them for what tragedy truly should be. In the "Rezension des neuen Menoza" he writes:

Tragödie ist nur für den ersthaften Teil des Publikums, der Helden der Vorzeit in ihrem Licht anzusehn und ihren Wert auszumessen im Stande ist. So waren die griechischen Tragödien Verewigung merkwürdiger Personen ihres Vaterlandes in auszeichnenden Handlungen oder Schicksalen; so waren die Tragödien Schackespears wahre Darstellungen aus den Geschichten älterer und neuerer Nationen. Die Komödien jener aber waren für das Volk [...] (*WS I 419*)

This certainly deepens the atmosphere that his theoretical texts suggest, namely that Lenz was not judging or educating his audiences in the traditional sense of the rights and wrongs of morality. It is for this reason as well, that this study is dealing primarily and almost exclusively with comedies, the only form of drama that Lenz actually wrote, at least in the way that they are defined by Lenz himself.

Practically, the emphasis that is put on variety and freedom in Lenz's theoretical works creates some signature characteristics in the way that Lenz wrote his plays. Many of these characteristics he sees as having been first been employed by Shakespeare. First of all, he has many more characters in his plays than the classical format would allow. For example, *Der Hofmeister* has the highest count with twenty-three. With these characters it naturally follows that he introduces highly varying locations, storylines and sub-plots. He springs forward in time, advancing plots with time-lapses where he sees fit. These innovations are a direct response to the three unities. The characters are no longer the great figures of history or mythology, but are often everyday people, whose lives cannot change the course of history or even affect that many other people, but are completely and utterly their own. The scenes are sporadic and numerous; sometimes they would be only a few lines and sometimes several pages. He would put as many scenes into an act as he saw fit, no longer following the pattern of five scenes making up an act that stemmed from the other great, antique theater theorist, Horace (Horaz 17)⁸. He attempted to represent the behaviours he observed in everyday life, while also depicting the people who were displaying them the way that they truly appeared. In the real world, immoral acts are not singularly carried out by ugly, unappealing characters, and Lenz

⁸ Horace actually writes that a play should have five acts, but the custom became, albeit not exclusively, five acts with five scenes in each act.

wants to depict real people as they are. In *Die Soldaten*, Marie Wesener is a perfect example. The daughter of a bourgeoisie family, she looks to her father, who is preoccupied with reputation, for her understanding of society. She is considered very beautiful and it is her very beauty which ends up giving her so much trouble for the power it gives her over men. These various structural changes to the theatre truly did radicalize the parameters of what could be written for the theater, but even more deeply than merely through these formal alterations. In fact, on a theoretical level, Lenz rejects entirely the idea that literature should manipulate events and characters for any sort of goal at all. He writes,

... eine Figur mit eben der Genauigkeit und Wahrheit darzustellen, mit der das Genie sie erkennt, als zehn Jahre an einem Ideal der Schönheit zu zirkeln, das endlich doch nur in dem Hirn des Künstlers, der es hervorgebracht, ein solches ist.
(*Anmerkungen* 18)

Schwarz summarizes this view in this succinct way: “Dabei geht es nicht um den zeitlosen Menschen, der zeitlose Ideale wie das Gute, Wahre und Schöne verkörpert, sondern einzig der geschichtliche Mensch wird zum Thema des Realismus” (16). He does not see art as requiring to teach something or even to create an artificial source of beauty but simply to be an imitation of nature itself.

The poet who can do everything that Lenz prescribes is of great artistic power. Like the characters, which he depicts as having control over their own destinies, the poet is also free and is in the greatest worldly sense a creator. Lenz suggests in the *Anmerkungen* that this ability to create is, in fact, God-like. He writes:

[...] und da wir eine Welt hie da um uns sehen, die der Beweis eines unendlich freihandelnden Wesens ist, so ist der erste Trieb, den wir in unserer Seele fühlen, die Begierde 's ihm nachzutun; da aber die Welt keine Brücken hat, und wir uns schon mit den Dingen, die da sind, begnügen müssen, fühlen wir wenigstens Zuwachs unsrer Existenz, Glückseligkeit, ihm nachzuäffen, seine Schöpfung in kleine schaffen. (9)

This bold statement is essential to understanding the weight with which Lenz's view on the theatre will affect his views on morality. He sees the work of the poet as important on a divine level. It demonstrates the fact that nature is seen as having been created by God and that therefore the imitation of it should be as faithful as possible to the original. He says that since one cannot take a bridge to God's realm, the imitation of the one that God has placed humankind in is the best that a poet can do. In fact he sees the act of imitating nature through poetry or art as akin to the work that God did in originally creating it. He also believes that this action will award the poet favour in the eyes of God himself:

Der wahre Dichter verbindet nicht in seiner Einbildungskraft, wie es ihm gefällt, was die Herren die schöne Natur zu nennen belieben, was aber mit ihrer Erlaubnis nichts als die verfehlt Natur ist. Er nimmt Standpunkt – und dann *muß er so verbinden*. Man könnte sein Gemälde mit der Sache verwechseln und der Schöpfer sieht auf ihn hinab, wie auf die kleinen Götter, die mit seinem Funken in der Brust auf den Thronen der Erde sitzen und seinem Beispiel gemäß eine kleine Welt erhalten. (13)

However, this not remotely humble view is not connected to the religiosity of his own time. Traditional Christian doctrine suggests that one should attempt the impossible feat

of being like Christ, in action, but would never suggest that one could achieve this or qualities of the “creator” through artistic pursuit. Lenz is putting the poet on a higher level, no longer attempting to teach of God’s works and reproduce God’s lessons, or the lessons of Christian morality, but to become a kind of God himself.

CHAPTER 3: MORALITY AND ITS LITERARY HISTORY

Although a standard definition of morality has already been discussed, a true understanding of the meaning of the term is much more nuanced. The biggest dispute in the discussion of morality is whether it is a system that is inherent to all rational beings or a system that is rationally drawn up and agreed upon within a societal group. This question is pivotal to the understanding of Lenz's view of morality. These two sides of the argument have become known as two different strands of theories on morality: normative and descriptive. Bernard Gert defines normative morality as thus in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (online):

[Normative] “morality” refers to a code of conduct that applies to all who can understand it and can govern their behavior by it. In the normative sense, morality should never be overridden, that is, no one should ever violate a moral prohibition or requirement for non-moral considerations. All of those who use “morality” normatively also hold that, under plausible specified conditions, all rational persons would endorse that code. (Gert)

This view of morality does not require a specific religion or societal group in order for a moral standard to exist. It exists as something unchangeable and universal to all people.

On the other hand:

“Morality” when used in a descriptive sense has an essential feature that “morality” in the normative sense does not have, namely, that it refers to codes of conduct that are actually put forward and accepted by some society, group, or individual. If one is not a member of that society or group, and is not that individual, accepting a

descriptive definition of “morality” has no implications for how one should behave.

(Gert)

This suggests that there is no universal morality, or if there is, it has been overshadowed by a contract of specific moral principles that have been drawn up and agreed upon by a specific group of people and applying to a specific group. Understanding the fundamental difference between these two strands of theory of morality is essential to understanding Lenz’s own stance and his stance in relation to his predecessors and contemporaries.

For Lenz, as will be further explored below, morality is available to all individuals and it means the same thing for everyone. However, it does not require any kind of group consensus, but rather is inherent to free individuals, and therefore, it is universal to all individuals. This can be understood as a normative view of morality, and one that was radically different from its predecessors in that it is not connected to any specific social construct, but rather exists in the same way that humans exist and by virtue of this. Lenz’s view of morality is complicated further, however, by incorporating the role of the individual into this universal understanding. While the principles of morality are universal and universally acceptable, the role of the individual in striving for this morality is equally important. For this reason it is not normative in the traditional sense nor traditional at all. Despite this universal look at morality, religion does play a role in Lenz’s study. The term “Christian morality” normally denotes a descriptive view in which the laws provided by the Bible are the principle guidelines of the system (among other decisive theological texts). In order to make his views accessible to the society he was working within, Lenz uses Christian terminology and concepts to make his arguments. This does not, however, mean that he understood his work to be in line with

current Christian doctrine. While there are strong connections to and influence from the Protestant tradition, he was primarily, tactfully writing in a style that the society he was writing for could digest. Although his morality makes reference to specific Christian traditions, this does not automatically make it a descriptive theory. Gert writes:

However, “Natural law” theories of morality claim that any rational person in any society, even one that has a defective morality, can know the general kinds of actions that morality prohibits, requires, discourages, encourages, and allows. In the theological version of natural law theories, such as that put forward by Aquinas, this is because God implanted this knowledge in the reason of all persons. In the secular version of natural law theories, such as that put forward by Hobbes, natural reason is sufficient to allow all rational persons to know what morality prohibits, requires, etc [...] These are not empirical claims about morality; they are claims about what is essential to morality, or about what is meant by “morality” when it is used normatively.

Lenz’s moral system exists always, with or without the connection to the Christian religion. This means that a breach of this moral system would be universally understood as wrong, regardless of the societal and religious background of the individual who has breached its terms. This paper will not occupy itself with what is specifically considered right and wrong in this system, but rather with the principles by which such a system is upheld. The discussion of specifically moral and immoral actions will be confined to literary examples of behaviours that were generally understood as right or wrong in the time of the author’s writing or in the eyes of other characters and will be used in order to

discuss the general system, not the validity of their role within it. Lenz's own views on morality or a moral system will be explored in much greater detail below.

Of interest to understanding Lenz's standpoint is not only the meaning of morality in a general sense, but what it meant for Lenz's audience. The dominant philosophers of the German early 18th century were Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz (1646-1716), Christian Thomasius (1655-1728), and Christian Wolff (1679-1754). Leibniz outlined his understanding of morality in a greater work, entitled *Théodicée*, Thomasius, in *Einleitung and Ausübung der Sittenlehre* and Wolff in *Vernünfftige Gedancken von der Menschen Thun und Lassen, zu Beförderung ihrer Glückseligkeit*. Leibniz is known for having seen the moral world as the foundation for the physical one ("Moral" 160). This type of theory demonstrates precisely how important the moral life was in the early 18th century; a person's morality was above their own existence. Thomasius was considered a modern, enlightened thinker, however, as Brigitte Sassen writes in her essay, "18th Century German Philosophy Prior to Kant," "when it came to matters of morality [...] he retained distinctly non-Enlightenment ideas, particularly the belief in an evil will and the belief in the necessity of God's salvation." This is an example of the view of an iron fate which had been passed down since the Greeks, which Lenz went on to oppose. In fact, Thomasius had a pivotal role in the way in which morality is spoken about in the German language. Werle attributes Thomasius' writing with introducing the terms "*morale*" and "*moralist*" to the German language (634). While Lenz was to argue that the individual was at the centre of all things, for Thomasius that centre is taken up by God himself. Sassen goes on to explain the way in which this salvation played out in the world for Thomasius:

[For Thomasius] a good instinct or good inclinations may make us good, may even be desirable, but by itself this is not enough to make us moral. Morality requires a conscious act of will. The trouble with morality arises because the will is determined by evil desires, in particular, lust, ambition, and avarice. Although there are noble sentiments as well, which similarly influence the will, they are in conflict with the negative dispositions. The conflict can be brought to a positive conclusion only by appeal to divine grace (God's salvation).

Although this seems to be suggesting that the human has some role in the matter, the truth is that, in this model, without God's grace there is no salvation, evil dominates in the human race, and the iron fate holds firm. The distinction of a willed action simply explains that there is no such thing as an accidental moral action: morality comes from the inner will. Wolff, like Leibniz, saw the moral world as the original one, the "a priori" world. He pairs this with traditional Christian theology, seeing these morals as stemming from Jesus Christ ("Moral" 160). In all of these cases the moral, Christian life is held up as the good and happy life and the view is that without it there will be corruption and decay of happiness and the loss of salvation.

With these strong perspectives on morality being dominant within German philosophy the response from the literary world was given with an equal strength of conviction. Johann Christoph Gottsched (1700-1766) was a prominent and well-respected figure of the early 18th-century German literary scene and his literary theory was strongly in keeping with the view of the French Classicists and thus, Aristotle. In his work *Versuch einer Critischen Dichtkunst vor die Deutschen* he explores the cumulative concepts that make literary works what they are. He focuses in his first half on the

requirements of a tragedy, of which he says, “Ein Trauerspiel, meine Herren, ist ein lehrreiches moralisches Gedichte” (5). There is no question here, tragedy and art in general have a *purpose* (*Zweck*) and that purpose is to teach its audience how to live morally. He says that evil people and actions can be depicted, but they must be represented in an unattractive manner, so that they do not appear appealing to the audience, while good people and actions should be represented as pleasant and attractive (51). It is needless to say that this is entirely at odds with Lenz’s realist requirements for the theatre. Indeed, this is an opinion that Gottsched shares with Aristotle, who saw what one could call the end-goal of literature as being a moral one. Gottsched’s views on literature, being in line with Aristotle and other more contemporary European writers, was the dominant one before the *Sturm und Drang* came into existence and the question of morality’s role in literature was easily answered: literature was to serve the teaching of morality as its primary role. It is in this literary climate that Lenz and the rest of the founders of the *Sturm und Drang* began to write.

CHAPTER 4: LENZ'S "VERSUCH ÜBER DAS ERSTE PRINCIPIUM DER MORAL"

When looking purely at Lenz's theatrical and theoretical works, one could come to the conclusion that his world excluded the idea of a God entirely. He repeatedly brings forward the notion that the character as an individual is now at the centre of his realist paradigm and that the role of the poet has moved away from following the established rules as they are outlined by Aristotle and has become that of the God-like creator. However, this view of realist literature should not be seen as definitively Godless. The 18th century in Europe still strongly identified as Christian and even the *Sturm und Drang* writers saw themselves in this way. Lenz does include theology in some of his theoretical texts and did, in fact consider himself to be a theologian. To some extent the fact that he deals with so many aspects of modern society and that he would even be interested in theology at all, can be attributed to his thoroughness in trying to understand and represent the real world. In the *Anmerkungen* he urges that all must be "durchdacht, durchforscht, durchschaut" (14). However, further reading into his most definitive text on morality, "Versuch über das erste Principium der Moral," brings forth a different perspective. In this text he makes it clear that on a fundamental level, he did in fact believe that a moral life existed, and that it to some extent stemmed from God. He manages, however, to make this theory coexist with his emphasis on individuality, and he, in fact, comes to the conclusion that the actualization of this morality is in the individual.

Lenz begins the "Versuch" by reiterating the fact that his view will not be in line with those previously established. After listing the attempts of many other thinkers to understand what the underlying principle behind morality is, he writes, "[k]einem von

allen diesen Herren aber ist es eingefallen, das erste Principium der Moral, das *summum bonum* in uns selber zu suchen” (*WS I 485*). Getting directly to the point, Lenz makes it clear that his literary theory and moral theory will match up, that they will both bring the individual to the centre of understanding nature and the outside world. He then goes on to name the two drives by which he believes that people are brought toward a desire to better themselves. “Diese beiden Grundtriebe, die in die menschliche Natur von ihrem Schöpfer gelegt sind, heißen: der Trieb nach Vollkommenheit und der Trieb nach Glückseligkeit” (487). Here we see that God is in fact present in this individual-centred theory. God, the first creator, bestowed the desire and drive in man that makes him want to improve himself. In doing so, however, it is not suggested that God lays out a plan for his creations which they will not be able to do anything about. Instead, God places the desire within man, but from then on, man is free to choose how he will act on these desires.

Lenz places the desire for perfection as the original of the two principle desires. He says that it is a desire that we learn from infancy, as we discover the world and attempt to take part in it. He continues, by saying that at these early stages, we feel great joy at the discovery that our abilities have improved and at being able to complete a task properly. As an explanation as to what the drive for perfection really is, he then writes, “Der Trieb nach Vollkommenheit ist also das ursprüngliche Verlangen unsers Wesens, sich eines immer größern Umfanges unserer Kräfte und Fähigkeiten bewußt zu werden” (*WS I 488*). Here he also emphasizes that the individual is in control of how this development turns out. We are faced with the decision of which qualities we should wish to improve in ourselves and with regards to the possible characteristics that could be

developed, such as personality traits. Some of these qualities will be more positive than others. “Sein inneres Gefühl, seine gemachten Erfahrungen und die Entscheidung seiner Vernunft wird ihn darin am besten unterrichten” (489). Again the control of the events and of the outcome is given to the human, but worth noting is that it is in fact “given.” Humans are the way that they are because that is how God made them, this is one of the few claims Lenz makes that truly is in line with a Christian way of thinking. The point of contention is that Lenz’s God is not active in the lives of the people He has created.

The second drive that Lenz describes is the drive for happiness. He does not describe these two drives as being entirely different in character. He writes, “[d]ie Vollkommenheit beruht auf uns selber, die Glückseligkeit nicht. Die Vollkommenheit ist eine Eigenschaft, die Glückseligkeit ist ein Zustand” (*WS I* 491). This suggests that there is more choice for the human when he is looking for perfection; yet, when it comes to happiness, man is a kind of servant to this pursuit. This does not mean, however that the drive is depriving man of the freedom of his will. It means that the natural condition of man is to desire happiness and his will shall always be pointed in that direction. An integral part of understanding what this will look like in the world is to remember that although the individual is at the centre of this theory, man was not born to exist alone in the world. For this reason Lenz calls the third drive “mitzuteilen,” or “to communicate” (490). Communicating with others through society and friendship is an essential step towards man’s happiness and it therefore plays a role in the morality of man as well. This is to say that a person’s happiness will always be dependent on the happiness of the people around him, as it is impossible to live a life without relying on relationships and human contact.

The pursuit of perfection also requires discerning what will make one happiest in the end. In Lenz's view, this pursuit will make one happier in the long run than the pursuit of mere earthly pleasures (*WS I* 493-494). The example that he uses to demonstrate this is simple: the miser uses money as a means to his end, which, as with all of us, is happiness, but as long as he is dependent on this means, he will never be able to be truly happy. It will in fact keep him to an extent unhappy. Money is an imperfect means because it is man-made and impermanent. The miser will never be satisfied and always want more. Using imperfect means to acquire happiness can never create a lasting state, because perfection is the most whole and lasting state of all. There would be no more wanting if one could truly reach this state. Lenz explains this concept further by writing:

Wir sind also nur als denn *wahrhaftig glücklich* wenn wir in einem Zustande sind, in welchem wir unsere Vollkommenheit auf die leichteste und geschwindeste Art befördern können, das heißt, in welchem wir die Fähigkeiten unsers Verstandes, unsers Willens, unserer Empfindungen, unserer Phantasei, aller unserer untern Seelenkräfte, hernach auch unserer Gliedmaßen und unsers Körpers immer mehr entwickeln verfeinern und erhöhen können und zwar in einer gewissen Übereinstimmung der Teile zum Ganzen, in einer gewissen Harmonie und Ordnung, welche uns unsere Vernunft, die von allen Vorurteilen befreit ist und die höchste Oberherrschaft über alle unsere übrigen Seelenvermögen erhalten hat, selbst lehren wird. (494)

It is important at this juncture to note that the type of morality we are here discussing is a normative one. Although there is some mention of Christian values in this work, the

underlying principle is that these three drives are granted to all people. They exist within them despite their cultural and religious background. This does not negate religion, as pursuit of pleasures and non-Christian values would not lead one to the perfection that is desired, but simply suggests that, at birth the drives are equally present and equally attainable for all people. According to Lenz everyone hopes that they can achieve some kind of perfection and everyone wishes to be happy. The fulfillment of these drives, as he shows, will bring the person to a moral lifestyle, no matter their beliefs. Unlike with the morality of Gottsched, man does not need to be Christian to be moral.

Lenz does, however, use Christian concepts to explain his theory. When looked at critically, Lenz was what one would call a heretic. His desire for the God-like and his view of poet as creator do not work within the traditional Christian system, which views man as unworthy of the grace that God bestows. Although Lenz's man does not create within himself the drives that lead him to morality, there is no suggestion of this guilt-ridden sentiment that man is unworthy of what is granted to him. In fact, the suggestion is that with the proper use of these drives, man can indeed make himself worthy. In fact, he also argues (in a truly normative fashion) that man did not require the religious institution to achieve perfection and happiness, but sees the teachings of Christianity as tools to becoming a more morally upright person. He writes, "[d]ie Bibel ist uns nicht gegeben uns eine neue Moral zu lehren, sondern nur die einzige und ewige Moral, die der Finger Gottes in unser Herz geschrieben, in ein neues Licht zu setzen" (*WS I* 497). This claim is another sort of heresy in that the Christian faith sees the coming of Christ as the turning point in internal salvation. The traditional belief is that without Christ's death on the cross, there would be no way to overcome sin, as humans are so naturally corrupt and

unable to save themselves. The Bible, at least the lessons given through it, are essential to the “new life” that a Christian is meant to pursue. It is a life that is prescribed in the writings of the New Testament. These lessons are indeed meant to apply to all people, but are not historically considered to have always been clear or accessible without the help of Christ. No view could be further from Lenz’s individual-centred theory that makes morality an achievable goal despite the level of theological learnedness of any individual. However, this discrepancy is a times interpreted as more in line with Christian views after all. Wulf Koepke in his text, “In Search of a New Religiosity: Herder and Lenz,” attempts to reconcile the two by explaining it in this way: “There is one kind of morality for the human race, and there is only one religion, although it has taken many forms during the course of history with diversification into so many different systems of worship” (126). The problem with this kind of argument is that it seems to suggest that Christianity is the true way, while Lenz truly seems to be suggesting that there is not just one possible entry point into a moral life. Lenz does at times in his theological writings point to Jesus Christ as the mediator to God’s wishes, however, this seems to be an aid in the process, rather than an essential step to achieving it. The flexibility of Koepke’s interpretation, in that it grants validity to other religious traditions, does, however, demonstrate a purposeful quality to Lenz’s arguments. Reinhard Görisch, in his work *Matthias Claudius und der Sturm und Drang* says of the God that was theorized by the writers of that movement that it is the “Vorstellung des reiches Gottes [...] säkularisiert, freilich in diffiziler und versteckter Weise” (453). The idea of a secularized god brings this theory into focus, this is a God that has been manipulated to fit the world that Lenz saw about him, not the other way around. He writes in a more accessible way so that he

works not be interpreted as heretical, making them compatible within the era that he is writing.

Lenz sees this desire for a more lasting sort of happiness as the highest motivation for living a moral lifestyle. He sees the drive for perfection as being in line with living by the principles of morality and he sees the drive for happiness as coming into fulfillment only once this perfection is achieved. Perfection, however, is something that has always been viewed as unattainable for a mortal man. For the Christians, it is a property of God himself, the creator of all things. However, as was mentioned earlier Lenz had already called perfection a property [*Eigenschaft*] of man. This means that for man to live a moral life, he should not only strive for perfection, he should in fact strive to be *God-like*.

Gott gibt unsern Zustand, unsere Glückseligkeit und zwar [...] nach Maßgebung unserer Vollkommenheit, das heißt, unsers Bestrebens nach Vollkommenheit [...]
Es ist dieses der *moralische*, oder wollen Sie lieber, der *natürliche* Glaube, an ein Wesen, das uns die ganze Schöpfung und der Trieb nach Vollkommenheit der beförderlichste ist, schon *als das allervollkommenste Wesen* kennen gelehrt hat.
(*WS I 495*)

The highest pursuit of all this is the pursuit of God. This is another manifestation of the sentiment that has already been demonstrated through the discussion of the poet-creator, which is just one example of a means to the perfection that all people strive for. The poet can strive unashamedly for the perfection that God naturally has. Another way in which this theory creates a desire to act morally is through the idea of the third drive of communication. In order to achieve this drive, we should want to help our fellow man to achieve his own happiness and perfection. This requires acting with fairness and respect

within our relationships with other human beings. “*Wir müssen suchen andere um uns herum glücklich zu machen*” (496). One cannot be happy when everyone around him is miserable and aiding others in becoming happy requires a morally-inspired kindness in actions. Christof Zierath in *Moral und Sexualität bei Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz* while reviewing the “Versuch” explains:

Der einsame Mensch ist unfähig, sich zu vervollkommen, er braucht die gegenseitige, uneigennützigte Freundschaft, um sich seiner momentanen Koordinate auf der Vollkommenheitsskala zu vergewissern. Erst die Kommunikation vermittelt Glückseligkeit. (26)

Again, this is an example of Lenz observing the world in which he lives and making the theory fit what he sees. Society does not exist without relationships, therefore people cannot improve themselves without attempting to do so from within this society. The highest perfection in society, however, still begins with the individual, who has no choice, but to exist within it.

In terms of how this will affect his theatrical writings, Lenz tends to be particularly positive about man’s role in the world. There is no sense of shaming people for not maintaining a moral lifestyle. He is against the idea that one would have to apologize for doing something out of line with this goal. He writes:

[... tut] nicht [...] *Buße* (das Wort hat ein böser Dämon in unser *deutsches* Wörterbuch gebracht) sondern verändert euren Sinn, erhebt ihn, trachtet von ganzem Herzen, das Geschehene zu verbessern [...]. (*WS I* 508)

This demonstrates how Lenz does not choose to dwell on unfavourable actions as sins, but rather on the ability of the human race to be great. Koepke writes that instead of

focusing on asking to be forgiven and apologizing, “becoming more like Jesus Christ, the most perfect human being; that should be the driving force” (126). Again Koepke interprets Lenz in with a purely Christian perspective by emphasizing Christ, but it nonetheless rings true. If one replaces the name “Jesus Christ” with “God,” this sentiment could apply to any religion. The point is that Lenz does away with what is known as “God-fearing.” Koepke continues:

Sin and penance have no place here other than as expressions of imperfections, signals of way stations to be left behind. Moreover, it is not the heavenly hierarchy, very much in analogy to the social hierarchy here on earth, which is at the center now; individual striving is in accordance with nature. (127)

This beautifully summarizes Lenz’s entire theory; everything comes back to nature. Nature contains both the bad and the good, but it is created by God Himself, and the imitation of it, the living in “accordance with it” can help one achieve the moral and perfect life. Mistakes and ugliness are merely degrees of imperfection to be used and learned from in reaching the final goal. He does not believe in condemnation, which will largely influence the role of morality in his plays. His characters very often behave in a way that is out of line with what is seen as moral, but the resolutions of his plays tend to shy away from the demise of those characters one would judge as having taken part in wrongdoing. In fact, in some cases, such as *Der Hofmeister*, the ending is decidedly positive for almost all involved.

CHAPTER 5: MORALITY WITHIN LENZ'S COMEDIES

5.1 THE RELEVANCE OF THE MORAL QUESTION TO LENZ'S COMEDIES

It has already been made evident that, despite Lenz's personal religious views, he is against the supposition that moral teaching should be considered a goal for drama as is demonstrated through his literary theory. Following from this, the question might be asked whether speaking on morality in terms of his theatrical pieces has any relevance or worth at all. The reason that questions of morality are in fact relevant to the overall study of Lenz, and are the focus of this research, is that Lenz was the first to address morality in these works himself. Not only does he write at length in his theoretical texts on the theory of morality, but also, despite the fact that he did not want his plays to represent a moral goal, the discussion of morality is present within them all. The principal way in which this becomes apparent stems directly from an examination of Lenz's views on morality as they are laid out in the "Versuch über das erste Principium der Moral" and how this topic is made present within the plots of his plays themselves. Much of what Lenz believes about morality in the theatre must be understood in opposition to the tendencies of French Classicism. With the objections that Lenz held toward the "iron fate" at work in these dramas kept in mind, there is a new question that can be posed: if, for Lenz, man is now seen as a creator who is in control of his own actions and fate, then does it follow that he is also in control of the system of conduct which he chooses to follow in order to be seen as moral? Following the discussion of normative morality, the individual would not be able to choose the particular moral laws that he feels compelled to follow because morality exists eternally and universally outside of the individual. This is not to say that it

has control over man, but rather that the principles of morality exist, whether they are taken seriously and obeyed or not. A descriptive definition of morality would allow the character to choose between different systems of morality for himself or to choose between different sets of societal laws. However, this is not the one which Lenz himself employs in the “Versuch.” Despite this normative view, Lenz insists that morality is reached individually and the universality does not come from outward dictates, but from within. This brings Lenz’s concept of the God-like playwright (or rather poet) and God-like individual to the forefront, because it suggests that if the character has achieved a level of Godliness, then his morals should naturally line up with this achievement. The realization of the drives for perfection and happiness cannot exist without the presence of morality.

Lenz expressly brings us to this conversation himself by putting debates about morality within his own plays. The plays leave room for interpretation and the questions posed are never definitively answered within these discussions. This leaves the audience to read between the lines and it is by looking at his fuller body of work that some clarity can be brought to these instances. In order to know for certain on which side of the argument Lenz himself stood, one must turn to theoretical texts in which he discusses the connection between morality and literature. In “Briefe über die Moralität der Leiden des jungen Werthers,” he addresses the discussion, that was current during this time, of the moral worth of Goethe’s text, *Die Leiden des jungen Werther*. He criticizes those who attempt to give Goethe’s work a moral meaning, saying, “Warum legt man dem Dichter doch immer moralische Endzwecke unter, an die er nie gedacht hat [...] Nichts mehr und nicht weniger als die Leiden des jungen Werters wollt‘ er darstellen” (*WS I* 384-5).

Although in this case he is referring to Goethe when he says “der Dichter,” ultimately, this statement is much further reaching. It has already been established that the term “moralische Endzwecke” in relation to the theatre was objectionable for Lenz, but further than that, he is here arguing that the critics of *Werther* are putting significance into texts that is not explicitly there. In order to make sense of Werther’s story people try to interpret it as having a lesson for the reader. Lenz continues, “Es ist sehr viele Moral drin, war das erste Wort das ich aus ihrem Munde über dieses Buch hörte und dieses Wort, hab ich mich verheißen, soll das ganze philosophierende Publikum beschämen” (386). By criticizing this kind of reading of Goethe’s work, Lenz is warning his readers against doing the same of his own. This is not to say that the moral discussion cannot take place, but that it should be based on what is actually present within what he has written, not what is surmised in order to give the text a moral purpose. Realism is not meant to be overly interpreted, but stand alone as a representation of what truly is. He also names the purpose of Goethe’s work as he sees it and this is once again in line with what has already been said about Lenz’s thoughts on the role of art and literature. He writes,

Nun sehen Sie Werthers Leiden nur als Produkt des Schönen an, für das Sie es selbst erkennen müssen – und wagen es noch einmal einen so ungerechten Urteilsspruch mit Ihrem Namen zu unterschreiben. (384)

In this citation, Lenz is once again criticizing the readers who view the work as a moral lesson, urging them to see it as a work of beauty instead. Beauty in this case, becomes the principle of literature. This is demonstrating again, that Lenz is not pursuing useful purposes for his works. The goal of beauty is impractical when taken in the most literal sense. However, Lenz preoccupies himself with the state of real people and he recognizes

that beauty aids in the fulfillment of happiness on earth and this brings the audience closer to the state of perfection, which is the highest achievement of all morality.

5.2 MORAL THEMES IN LENZ'S DRAMAS

Lenz's movement away from using the theatre as a tool for teaching society about morality brings forth one main complication: Lenz's plays all contain several references to the questions of morality. It comes up frequently in conversation amongst his characters, who are endlessly judging one another. Again, this is not displayed as a device for scolding characters. Rather, this is another example of Lenz's commitment to the thorough examination of all levels of society, his goal that all be "durchdacht, durchforscht, durchschaut" (*Anmerkungen* 14). It should reveal behaviours of members of society through their dramatic portrayal and make the audience reflect on the role of these in normal life. Lenz's depictions of morality represent the actual way in which morality is talked about in daily life and the many foundations upon which people base their own moral beliefs. These systems are developed from the aspects of a person's life which are most important to them and can range from religious influences to juristic, familial, societal and many more. Whether or not Lenz believes that the true morality is a normative one, he understands that the beliefs that real people have about morality are multiple and varying. Each character in his plays has his own set of influences, which has developed into a set of principles on morality, whether they are conscious of abiding to these or not. These characters are certainly flawed, but they represent the reality of the European society: people are not governed by an overarching set of rules about morality, but what they perceive to be overarching, which is actually individual to each person.

This concept is demonstrated through debates on moral topics between characters within his plays.

In a lesser-known play, *Der neue Menoza*, Lenz addresses the suggestion that pleasure is an acceptable aspiration on the road to the pursuit of a good and moral life. The moral conflict in this text is addressed as a standpoint between the cultural differences of the east and west. The Prince, being a foreigner from the East, actually has a much more traditional western point of view than the rest of the characters. He comes in as a stranger, posing the same kinds of arguments that many of the thinkers of Western Europe were posing about living productively and in an enlightened and ordered way, instead of in a manner that would be primarily for enjoyment's sake. This is certainly reflective of the Enlightenment age in which thinkers were attempting to quantify and catalog all of human knowledge. In reality, it is in the East that a lot of the ideas that Lenz introduces truly originated. Lenz says as much in the "Briefe über die Moralität der Leiden des jungen Werthers," when, while encouraging pleasure in life, he writes, "die Sitten der Türken [wären] die weisesten, weil sie die ruhigsten sind" (*WS I* 393)⁹. The use of an Eastern (who is actually Western by birth, ironically) character here does not carry these connotations, but simply allows the views of an "outsider" to scrutinize that which the locals take for granted as common knowledge. There also may have been some intended irony here on Lenz's part, because at times, his arguments are almost comically reversed.

In *Der neue Menoza*, Lenz uses the eastern prince, Tandi, as a tool for critically viewing the arguments of Lenz's own time, by having them introduced by a stranger. The

⁹ The first real introduction of the Eastern way of thinking to the Western literary world took place with Antoine Galland's translation of the *Arabian Nights* (*Mille et une Nuits*) in 1704.

discussion that keeps being returned to is in essence a question of whether moral uprightness and living according to societal expectations is the greatest goal of a gentleman, or if “Genießen” is equally important. Also in a paradoxical fashion, it is the European academics, most of whom would have been clerics, or at least deeply involved in the church, Zierau and Beza, who are in support of a pleasure-pursuing lifestyle. Tandi says, “Das bloß Genießen scheint mir recht die Krankheit, an der die Europäer arbeiten... Handeln macht glücklicher als Genießen. Das Tier genießt auch“ (*WS II* 130-131). His opinion is introduced in such an extreme manner, that it emphasizes the point that this play can almost be seen as pure satire. He is actually suggesting that to enjoy oneself is not acceptable on any level, that it is purely wrong to a point of sickness. However, he does suggest that happiness can be attained through action; that laziness is a folly which will not make one happy in the end. The value in this argument is its connection to the argument that Lenz makes in the “Versuch,” that the miser has chosen the wrong means to happiness and therefore can never find it completely. Tandi is accusing the European academics of confusing inaction with happiness, and he may be right, but he is equally guilty of confusing work with happiness and the action of the play brings forth the consequences of this mistake. It is not until he lets go of his principles that he finds love and happiness. This puritanical view is exactly the type of thing that Lenz was objecting to in Europe. By depicting it in this flawed and extreme manner, he is drawing attention to its hypocrisy in this passage.

Prince Tandi does not merely object to the academics’ stance on enjoying life, he also objects to their practice of putting matters of the mind as the leading principle of their lives. He feels it is impious to trust one’s own intelligence without first referring to

faith on all matters. He argues that there is no longevity to this line of thinking. The argument between Tandi and the academics continues:

Prinz: Vernunft ohne Glauben ist kurzsichtig und ohnmächtig, und ich kenne vernünftige Tiere so gut als unvernünftige. Der echten Vernunft ist der Glaube das einzige Gewicht, das ihre Triebräder in Bewegung setzen kann, sonst stehen sie still und rosten ein, und wehe denn der Maschine!

Zierau: Die echte Vernunft lehrt uns glücklich sein, unsern Pfad mit Blumen bestreuen.

Prinz: Aber die Blumen welken und sterben.

Beza: Ja wohl, ja wohl./So pflückt man neue. (*WS II* 131)

Here the academics are arguing similarly to Lenz about the way in which we come to a moral life. They are suggesting that by improving one's capacity to reason, one brings oneself closer to happiness, and so the drives of perfection and happiness are both being pursued. The argument that Lenz makes, that morality comes from within the individual and is not the product of outside forces, is present here. The human mind has the ability to control its own happiness and its own morality. The academics combine this happiness with beauty by using the image of flowers strewn along the path that the development of reason leads to. Because mortal life is temporary, the prince sees this kind of beauty as temporary, unlike the contemplation of the divine. The counter-suggestion is that if a flower dies a new one can be picked. This provides us with the argument that man has control over his own path and that improving one's enjoyment of life is a step towards the morality that Christians believe will be rewarded through paradise after death. It is an argument that there does not have to be a choice between enjoying mortal life and

reaching paradise for Prinz Tandi, but that both of these options can be reconciled. The death of the flower may represent the mistakes and follies that men make, but the plucking of a new one emphasizes the rejection of repentance and shame and indicates the way in which man can learn from mistakes and see them as a way to become closer to the moral life. In this interaction between the prince and the academics, we are introduced to two devices that Lenz uses in his plays. He emphasizes a representation of reality by allowing his characters to bring forward the sorts of moral discussions that he is experiencing in his life and he has these characters represent people of different backgrounds in order to display the many ways in which morality is perceived in society.

A second, more well-known comedy, *Der Hofmeister* introduces the discussion of the freedom of the individual, a theme which was extremely influential in the *Sturm und Drang* movement. In this play, it is the *Geheime Rat* who acts as a kind of mouthpiece for Lenz's opinions. The *Rat* is a non-traditionalist and it is clear that he, like Lenz, believes in a humankind not bound by iron fate, but rather one which possesses the ability to make its own way in the world. The *Rat* tells us:

Ohne Freiheit geht das Leben bergab rückwärts, Freiheit ist das Element des Menschen wie das Wasser des Fisches, und ein Mensch der sich der Freiheit begibt, vergiftet die edelsten Geister seines Bluts, erstickt seine süßesten Freuden des Lebens in der Blüte und ermordet sich selbst. (*WS II 25*)

This bold statement about the necessity of freedom is made in reaction to the fact that the *Rat* sees Läufer, the tutor [*der Hofmeister*], as being treated like a slave because he is subjecting himself to service of his employer and the *Rat* feels that the definition of freedom is being able to do what you would like to do instead of what is necessary to

survive. Although he goes on to explain this view in a rather trivial manner (“essen wenn er satt ist und fasten, wenn er hungrig ist”), the term freedom is not used lightly by Lenz (25). It is clear that one must have freedom in order to live morally at all. The essential element to a moral action is the intention behind it. By having no choice in one’s actions one loses the ability to live morally and, thus, to be happy. This is precisely the objection that Lenz takes up with Greek tragedy. It is the notion that merely by withholding payment from Läufer, his employer could gain a similar level of control over him - that is, his enslavement - that the Greek Gods had over humans in the ancient plays. This comparison demonstrates the way in which this kind of behaviour creates an absence of morality in society. The third drive that Lenz named in the “Erste Principium,” the drive for communication, requires people to better the lives of others to the best of their abilities. By taking away the freedom of another human being, the individual is preventing that person from pursuing his own drive for perfection and is therefore further corrupting society. In order for morality to thrive in a society, the value of freedom must be appreciated and freedom itself must be granted to and by all.

The *Geheime Rat* establishes himself in the role of Lenz’s mouthpiece not only with his comments on freedom, but also through his modern views on authority and hierarchy. In Act 1, Scene 2 he introduces the same opinion as Lenz, that the old ways are ending and that tradition no longer needs to be kept up merely for tradition’s sake. This is most clearly connected to Lenz’s rejection of the Greek authority which French Classicism prescribed to. However, in expressing this sentiment, he is also suggesting that man’s relationship with God is no longer what it once was. It is a relationship in which man has a greater role in his own affairs. In fact, the argument goes one step

further to suggest that the authority of tradition and the role of fate in man's life were only ever perceived roles to begin with. The *Rat* states:

Zeiten ändern sich, Sitten, Umstände, alles, und wenn du nichts mehr und nichts weniger geworden wärest, als das leibhafte Kontrefei deines Eltervaters [...] Ganz gut, aber nach funfzig Jahren haben wir vielleicht einen andern König und eine andre Art ihm zu dienen. (*WS II* 12)

The term “king” here is meant to indicate the norm and the inherited authority of the norm in society. The king is seen as a merely perceived lasting authority, because practically, in the 18th century, kingdoms were frequently being conquered and changing hands, and furthermore, it is only possible for a king to reign as long as his life lasts. The way in which the *Rat* views the relationship between a king and his subjects is comparable to the way in which the *Sturm und Drang* writers see man’s relationship with God. Lenz believes that morality is linked to the individual drives within each person, not specific religious beliefs. The set of rules any one king lays out can be changed or annulled by a following king, just as the beliefs of one religious sect are historically overshadowed by the uprising of another. The religions of the world are all connected to the question of morality, but the imposition of outside laws will not have the ability to create morality; this is only made possible by the individual will. The *Rat* is against a blind commitment to any outside power, be it church or state because the outside world is only temporal and temporary, while the inner world of the individual is eternal. In a similar way, the plays that Lenz writes are not about this eternal world, they are about the temporary one and physical one in which humans live. The representation of this world

through drama cannot in itself teach the audience any singular meaning of morality by virtue of its lacking steadfastness.

Despite the important points that can be learned from the words of the *Rat*, his role as mouthpiece is not absolute. Lenz is not merely depicting himself and his own opinions in the guise of the *Rat*, but has created a much more complex character. Andreas Huyssen elaborates on the idea of the *Rat* as a mouthpiece in his text *Drama des Sturm und Drang: Kommentar zu einer Epoche*. Huyssen provides both sides of the argument which have been developed in the literature surrounding *Der Hofmeister*, demonstrating the inconsistency with which the *Rat* presents his opinions. This is done in order to bring to our attention the hesitancy with which one should make any presumption that Lenz's opinion is being represented in the statements of his characters:

Lenz attackiert dort diejenigen, die den *Werther* als subtile Verteidigung des Selbstmords lesen – und dann zu behaupten, der Geheime Rat sei nicht das Sprachrohr von Lenz, sondern das aufklärerische Lenz'sche Raisonement werde in ihm Person. Das ist mit so vielen Worten die herkömmliche These. Schon in den *Werther*-Briefen ist ja Lenz' Ablehnung jener aufklärerischen Haltung evident, die in jedem literarischen Werk vornehmlich den moralischen Endzweck aufzuspüren sucht. (168-9)

Here Huyssen is comparing the way in which the *Rat* is interpreted as a moral representative of the play with the way in which others had attempted to put a moral meaning into Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werther*. For us to take the *Rat* as an example of the absolutely correct view would be just as wrong as the assumptions of Goethe's critics which Lenz scolds in the "Briefe." It is just as important, and probably

even more so, that Lenz's audience not apply moral meanings to his plays which he did not intend for them to find. Huyssen continues by describing the way in which he views the *Rat's* actions as at times in opposition to the views of Lenz:

[...] der Geheime Rat fungiere gelegentlich als Citoyen und damit als Sprachrohr des Dichters (so in II, 1), gelegentlich aber als Vertreter der Adelsinteressen. Wie sich ein solches nur partielles Sprachrohr mit Lenz' plebejischem Standpunkt vertragen soll, wird freilich nicht näher erläutert. (Huyssen 169)

The *Rat* demonstrates through his speeches the fact that he holds value in the concept of a freedom available to all men. However, in action he remains the product of his hierarchical system. He is in a comfortable position as a member of the nobility and is not looking for an entire class-system revolution. The difference between commenting on injustice and trying to correct it is significant when considering the moral worth of a man. Christoph Zierath adds to these comments in his book *Moral und Sexualität bei Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz* by arguing that the *Rat* does not attempt to help the Hofmeister out of his slave-like conditions, but rather merely comments on how unethical these conditions are:

Der *Rat* predigt zwar die Freiheit des Menschen, er warnt vor gelehrten Bürgerlichen, die im Dienst des Adels dessen Eitelkeit stärken, er preist die Vorzüge öffentlicher Schulen an, doch er tut nichts, um von diesen genügend einzurichten, damit Bürgerliche sich nicht länger als Hofmeister verdingen müßten. (126)

In Lenz's dramas the actions are of utmost importance, many of his scenes contain lengthy and specific descriptions of the movements that the actors should undertake. This

attention to action and the fact that these are not just written pieces, but are meant to be performed, makes it clear that the actions are equally as important as the words. The *Rat* talks and does not act, which demonstrates a serious flaw in his role as mouthpiece. Zierath continues to criticize the *Rat's* inability to live up to Lenz's principles by stating, "[d]er Rat scheitert an der Realität. Statt sein Handeln an der Gegenwart auszurichten, flieht er in die Vergangenheit und praktiziert ein passives Büßertum" (128). The use of the word "Büßertum" is problematic here, as is Zierath's tendency to try and determine the morality or immorality of Lenz's characters, because Lenz was against using sin as a tool for blame and was against this form of judgement, however the flaw in the character is clearly apparent.

It is important to note these differences while examining the *Rat's* role in the play because it again reveals something of the realist nature of Lenz's dramas. His characters are meant to be real people and for this reason, they are not perfect. They have not reached a level of morality that would make them so. The *Rat* has many important thoughts which are worth examining, however, he is not a perfect moral authority. Zierath brings to our attention to the way in which the scale of morality is ever present in Lenz's plays:

Wenn der Mensch für Lenz durch stetes Handeln, durch Verbesserung seiner Vollkommenheit, die Möglichkeit hat, in einer Welt glücklich zu werden, deren physikalische und moralische Grenzen von Gott gesetzt wurden, dann sind die Personen in Lenz' Dramen unter dem Gesichtspunkt ihre moralischen Entwicklung zu untersuchen: welchen Platz nehmen sie zu Beginn des Dramas

auf der Vollkommenheitsskala ein, welchen am Ende – sind sie in der Lage, Glückseligkeit zu empfinden? (Zierath 122)

Lenz's theoretical and literary texts all work in concert. It is important to understand Lenz's "Versuch" in order to understand the way in which his characters are depicted. The *Rat* is an amazing example of a character that has on some level come to understand what it means to be moral, but on the other hand has not yet learned to act upon this understanding. This is another and more subtle way in which Lenz involves the morality discussion in his plays. The characters themselves are on varying levels of morality and bring these questions forward in discussion amongst themselves frequently. While some are closer to perfection than others, their outcomes do not always reflect their "goodness" and they are depicted by Lenz in a realist and non-judgemental manner.

In *Der Hofmeister* Lenz demonstrates this discrepancy between actions, level of morality, and consequences by giving all of the characters a somewhat happy ending despite their actions within the play. Some might argue this to be untrue, particularly in the case of Läufer, but this is up for debate. *Andreas Huysen* writes in his work *Dramen zu Sturm und Drang: Kommentar zu einer Epoch*, "Zum happy end der Komödie kommt es zudem nur für die, die von vornherein entweder durch Geburt (Fritz) oder väterliches Vermögen (Pätus) privilegiert waren" (172). However, Huysen allows that despite the fact that Läufer's castration and following unconsummated marriage in particular are not what one would consider ideal, it is in some ways the best that could be expected:

Läuffers Seelenheirat mit der Bauerstochter Lise ist in einer körperlichen Verkrüppelung begründet, die schwerlich durch idyllisches Landleben oder geistige Werte wettgemacht werden kann. Ganz und gar unidealische Entsagung

bleibt somit beider Los, und damit widerlegt das Stück den universalen Anspruch der Aufklärung, Freiheit und Selbstbestimmung der menschlichen Persönlichkeit in der Vernunft begründen und gesellschaftlich verwirklichen zu können. Das doppelte Ende des Stücks – die Läufer Handlung kommt ja getrennt von der Gutschen-Handlung schon vor dem Schlußtableau an ihr Ende – bestätigt auch szenisch die fortbestehende Schranke zwischen Herrschenden und Beherrschten, freilich nicht als deren Affirmation, sondern als ebenso radikale wie verzweifelte Negation, die sich künstlerisch sowohl den Ausweg in tragische Notwendigkeit (Tragödie) als auch in echte Versöhnung (Komödie) bewußt verstellt. (172-173)

The point being made here is that the ending is surprisingly positive, despite the follies of its characters.

5.3 DIE SOLDATEN

Die Soldaten is arguably Lenz's greatest dramatic work. It is of particular importance to this study because it demonstrates the entire spectrum of opinions on and approaches to morality in society. It asks some unique questions about morality and the theatre, and their roles in the lives of the public and also demonstrates how varying opinions on this can be. Despite the fact that in *Die Soldaten* Lenz is in some ways the most direct in addressing questions of morality, he wanted one of the first people who ever read the play, Sophie von La Roche, to be clear that this was not a moral tale. In a letter to her he writes:

Ich will aber nichts, als dem Verderbnis der Sitten entgegen arbeiten, das von den glänzenden zu den niedrigen Ständen hinab schleicht, und wogegen diese die Hilfsmittel nicht haben können, als jene. (*Briefe von und an J.M.R. Lenz* 116)

From this statement, it becomes clear that any discussion of morality within the play should not be taken at face value, also that it should not be taken as a cautionary tale of the consequences of acting poorly. Morality is present within it as it is present in regular life, not as a contrived lesson, but as a reflection of reality. He is depicting the “corruption of morals” within society, yet he does not want to teach right and wrong in relation to the French classical principles of “Wohlstand, Geschmack und Moralität” (*Anmerkungen* 8) but rather expose the reality of the manner in which people act in order to create a discussion about this.

Already in Act 1, Scene IV of *Die Soldaten* the characters are engaged in a lively moral debate. This scene represents three entirely different approaches to the role that morality takes in daily life. It is appropriate that in this play the question of morality is regularly posed by a man in the role of the traditional moral-compass, the field priest Eisenhardt. As his name “Iron-hard” implies, he is steadfast in his convictions and those convictions are fully embedded in the traditional, inflexible, and Christian way of thinking about morality. While spending time amongst the army officers, who play a large role in the action, Eisenhardt tries to convince them that attending any play should be an educational affair. This scene immediately follows the proposal of nobleman Desportes that he take the already engaged Marie out to see a French comedy. This is forbidden by her father, as he sees it as immoral behaviour. The audience is then led directly into this debate on the topic. Eisenhardt argues that since the plays being put on

in their town do not have a moral goal, it is wrong for the officers to attend. The officers, who are considered members of the nobility in this period, represent another standpoint on the role of morality in life altogether. In an exchange with the officer Mary,

Eisenhardt asks:

Eisenhardt: Ich bitte Sie, beantworten Sie mir eine einzige Frage, was lernen die Herren dort?

Mary: Ei was, muss man denn immer lernen, wir amüsieren uns, ist das nicht genug.

Eisenhardt: Wollte Gott, dass Sie sich bloß amüsierten, das Sie nicht lernten! So aber ahmen Sie nach, was Ihnen dort vorgestellt wird, und bringen Unglück und Fluch in die Familien. (*WS II* 191)

Eisenhardt represents self-restraint and strict piety, while Mary considers looser self-regulation as perfectly acceptable. In order to understand where Lenz stands in this discussion, first we must consider that in the “Versuch über das erste Principium der Moral” we learn that Lenz is not interested in depicting a God who shames individuals for their behaviours. However, Eisenhardt’s role in the play remains important because it displays the way in which morality is viewed by a large group of people in society. This is the point of view of many of the pious Protestants in a culture where this Protestantism prevails. The “corruption of morals” is being addressed here, but the determination as to what is considered a moral is not clear. Lenz’s overarching goal for the theatre is to depict reality and all the sides of what is determined to be morality are valuable in this depiction.

Lenz also addresses Mary's question as to whether to amuse oneself is enough of a justification for attending a play in his text on *Die Leiden des jungen Werther*. He criticizes those who do not appreciate the charming or pleasant [*reizend*] in art. He writes:

Die Gleichgültigkeit gegen alles was schön und fürtrefflich ist, ist das einzige Laster auf der Welt. Wie sollen, wie können unsere Sitten sich jemals verbessern, wenn wir unempfindlich für wahre Vorzüge bleiben und das aus lieber lauterer Moralität. (*WS I* 393)

Although Lenz condemns the word repentance [*Buße*] in the "Versuch" and repeatedly suggests that people should not be shamed for so-called wrong-doing, here he uses the term vice [*Laster*] to expose those who cannot appreciate beauty. Although Mary is not claiming to be any sort of moral authority, his reply is of equal importance to the consideration of morality in society. He believes the pursuit of pleasure or happiness to be a perfectly reasonable pastime and does not see any harm in it. The soldiers and officers in this play generally act upon fancy, (sometimes affecting others, particularly in the case of a prank played on one of the officers, Rammler, in Act 3, Scene I [*WS II* 210]), but never view their behavior as wrong or consequential. Again the attitude that the pursuit of pleasure is the highest aim is one that is extremely predominant in the upper classes of society that Lenz is observing and needs to be depicted in order to give a full representation of it. Although this scene is in part a commentary on the state of French playwriting (the play in question is entitled "*La chercheuse d'esprit*") it is clear that Lenz's own plays, which concern themselves with real people who err repeatedly, would not be acceptable in Eisenhardt's eyes. His and Mary's views in many ways clash

with the theoretical work of Lenz which has already been discussed. However, Lenz's own opinions do not overshadow the importance of these voices within the play.

There is a third voice present in the discussion of the comedy. It is the voice of one of the ruling nobility who is not a common officer, the *Obriste Graf von Spannheim*. The *Obrister's* view stands somewhere in the middle of the two other men. He is not a servant to the church, but certainly influenced by its teachings by way of his office, and, at the same time, he is familiar with earthly comforts by way of his wealth. His main contribution to this discussion is that he places some of the responsibility for the potential dangers produced by a woman attending a play with one of the officers on the woman herself. He argues, "Welche Familie ist noch je durch einen Officier unglücklich geworden? Dass ein Mädcl einmal ein Kind kriegt, das es nicht besser haben will" (*WS II* 191). This statement of pure naïveté as to the risks that a girl, such as Marie, is undertaking to be with Desportes is not only foreshadowing the destruction that is to come, it also shows the way in which women and soldiers are viewed in the play. Soldiers should simply be expected to act so, while young women have a choice. This distinction becomes extremely important to the final scene and final conclusions about the play. However unfair this discrepancy may seem to be the contemporary audience, the *Obrister* is put in a reasonable light in this scene. He appears to be a kind of mediator between the unregulated soldiers and the uptight priest. He says to another officer, Haudy:

Mayor, ich bitt Euch – Herr Eisenhardt hat nicht unrecht, was wollt Ihr von ihm
[...] Aber Sie gehen auch zu weit, Herr Eisenhardt, mit alledem. Es ist kein
Officier, der nicht wissen sollte was die Ehre von ihm fodert. (193)

In examining this conversation, it becomes clear that the argument is somewhat unwinnable. The *Obrister's* role as mediator is also one of having very little stake in the outcomes. His role as a member of nobility and the ruling class means that he is influenced by a different view of morality. He might in some ways be influenced by traditional religious views, but he is primarily concerned with harmony in the state. His morals are influenced by this. He is not concerned with the actions of individuals per se, but of how these actions affect society. The young woman can be a whore, just as long as this does not affect the harmony within society.

Eisenhardt's argument, on the other hand, continues by speaking of the importance of familial authority and, in particular, paternal authority. He says:

Wenn er Zeit genug hat, dran zu denken. Aber werden ihm nicht in den neuesten Komödien die gröbsten Verbrechen gegen die heiligsten Rechte der Väter und Familien unter so reizenden Farben vorgestellt, den giftigsten Handlungen so der Stachel genommen, daß ein Bösewicht dasteht als ob er ganz neulich vom Himmel ein gefallen wäre. Sollte das nicht aufmuntern, sollte das nicht alles ersticken, was das Gewissen aus der Eltern Hause mitgebracht haben kann. Einen wachsamen Vater zu betriegen, oder ein unschuldig Mädchen in Lastern zu unterrichten, das sind die Preisaufgaben, die dort aufgelöst werden. (*WS II* 193)

Eisenhardt's statements about the importance of fatherly authority nudge the viewer to think of the relationship between the main character, Marie Wesener, and her father, Wesener, and the ways in which it is defined throughout the play. This drama plays heavily on the motif of the relationship between father and daughter. In many ways the plot centres around this relationship and Wesener's views on how Marie should act. Even

the discussion of the theatre for which neither of these characters are present, is meant to be entirely reflective of the struggle between them. From the opening scene, it is clear that Marie's father has a great influence over her. While attempting to write what she considers to be a sophisticated letter she says, "der Papa schreibt ja auch so" (183). She sees her father as the example to be followed in matters of society. Wesener is depicted as a slave to the societal hierarchy. He practically grovels at the feet of the noble Desportes, Marie's love interest, on their first meeting in the play, greeting him by saying "gehorsamer Diener, Herr Baron, wie kommt's den, dass wir wieder einmal die Ehre haben" (186). He is initially very strongly against Marie going to the French comedy with Desportes. He sees his reasons for this strictness as being purely moral: he believes that she will be dishonoured and become Desportes' mistress, which does in fact turn out to be the case. Wesener's view of morality is wrapped up with the class system, which is extremely common amongst the bourgeoisie of the 18th century, of which this family is part. He believes that she must interact with men within her own class in order to be deemed by her fellow citizens as pure. He also bases his view of moral behaviour on how it will be perceived by others. For her disobedience and choice to attend the comedy after all, he calls her a "gottlose Seele" (194). Finally, however, he gives in. It is his great mistake. He believes, once he reads Desportes' words of love in a note, that Marie truly has a chance at breaking the social barrier. While Marie is motivated by fancy and vanity, Wesener is motivated by his desire to break through the class structure and his preoccupation with how he is perceived. Albeit that both of their motivations lead them astray, however, Wesener's role as the father is an interesting one. He starts out by representing the patriarchal society in reaction to characters who are breaching its

authority but later attempts to break through it. All the while he remains completely under the influence of this pre-existing system, merely wanting for his daughter to move higher up from within.

Wesener's morality is completely entangled with his fear of a lost reputation, the common attitude of 18th century citizens. He is always afraid of the way that his own and his family's actions will be perceived and does not express much concern over the inherent right or wrongness of them. Marie, on the other hand is strongly influenced by her familial responsibilities. It is through her home and family that she understands the world. The fact that she chooses to defy these values appears to stem from the fact that she has been spoiled her entire life and is used to getting what she wants. This is demonstrated when she reveals that she has indeed been to the theater against her father's wishes. While at first being somewhat angry himself, Wesener actually defends her to her older sister, who feels humiliated and betrayed by Marie's actions as a member of her family. Although Marie displays some signs of guilt and regret at different points in the play, she remains fairly selfish. Even when given a final chance by the *Gräfin von La Roche* to salvage what is left of her ruined reputation, she once again breaks the *Gräfin's* trust in order to be courted by another man.

While Marie looks to her father and family for guidance at every turn, it is this very guidance is what leads her astray. It leads her to treat Stolzius as if he is worthless and at a moment's notice forget about her so-called love for him (*WS II 207*) and to continue to pursue Desportes once her father sees the potential of this match-up. Duncan attributes Marie's flightiness in relation to Stolzius as the depiction of the typical aspirations of the bourgeoisie. He writes:

Like Gretchen in Faust, Marie is victimized by the rigid criterion of respectability. But while the former girl tragically suffers from the conflict between her individual feelings and the dictates of society, the latter never really deviates from her group's actual values. Marie's will is indistinguishable from the ambitions of the bourgeoisie, which, despite its approbation, urges her to try for an advantageous marriage. It insists only that she maintain appearances and, in the end, succeed. (Duncan 519)

Duncan is here comparing the heroine of Goethe's much-later work Faust with Marie. This comparison is retrospective, but serves the purpose of contrasting the way that young women in similar situations portrayed by two contemporary writers who were at one point contemporaries. The argument is that Marie's desire to marry above her station is not the folly of this particular girl, but is a common and expected goal amongst people of her class. She is in fact representing any number of other people, although her wishes are not fulfilled. In this way her view of morality is very much connected to her father's. Although they take actions outside of what is considered socially acceptable, they are actually working within the social norms. However, this is not so clear to argue. The desires of Marie and her father are idealist, they represent a hope for a better situation for their family and believe it to be possible. This is the kind of thing that makes Lenz's method so valuable, he demonstrates how things that are even seemingly morally motivated are actually often done for entirely different reasons. The realist side of Lenz sees value in understanding the true motivations of people's actions, not the motivation that they hope to present to the world. Although the examination of particular characters is extremely valuable to understanding the diversity of views on morality that are at work

in this play, it is also important to recognise the ways in which these characteristics are common to many and understand that Lenz's work is not a documentation of specific people who actually existed, but an examination of the way that people are. The play demonstrates individuals who either conform to or try to break free of the barriers of class. In this way it demonstrates the relationships of so-called *Stände* through the individuals.

5.4 DIE SOLDATEN: THE FINAL SCENE

The greatest and most written-about moral discussion that Lenz ever wrote takes place in the final scene of *Die Soldaten*. It is a discussion between the *Obriste Graf von Spannheim* and the *Gräfin von La Roche*. It is a unique scene in many ways, the first being its removal from the action of the play. The two members of the nobility are debriefing the events of the play and discussing the way in which some of the less desirable events could have been avoided. Lenz wrote two versions of the final scene, an original and then one which was revised after taking at least some of the advice he received in a, since lost, letter from fellow *Sturm und Drang* writer, Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803)¹⁰. Lenz had sent the play to Herder in order to receive his comments on it and this letter addresses the comments and criticisms that Herder assumedly made. The versions written before and after this letter have similar content, but the role of the *Gräfin* and some of the wording changes between them. In the first version, the *Gräfin* makes a suggestion that state brothels be introduced as an outlet for the soldiers'

¹⁰ The letter from Herder has been lost, but Lenz's response to it has been preserved and from it, critics have surmised what Herder must have said. In it, Lenz points out specific changes that he has made in the final scene, which he believes will be appealing to Herder (*Briefe von und an J.M.R. Lenz* 145).

passions. She believes that this could deal with the transgressions of the soldiers and keep their actions from affecting ordinary citizens. In the second version, she disagrees when the same suggestion is made by the *Obrister*. The role of the *Gräfin* in the scene alters its implications greatly and it is for this reason that they must be considered as separate entities.

In both versions of this final scene, the two nobles are discussing how the relationship between officer Desportes and the merchant's daughter Marie ended up destroying the lives of many. The two had become involved despite Desportes professionally-required celibacy and Marie's previous engagement to another man, Stolzius. By the end of the play Marie's previous betrothed has killed Desportes and committed suicide and Marie's entire family is in financial ruins due to a guarantee by Wesener of Desportes' debt. In both versions of the final scene the *Gräfin* claims these unfortunate events to be the fault of the restrictions on the soldiers from taking wives. She says, "[d]as sind die Folgen des ehlosen Standes der Herren Soldaten" (*WS II* 244, 246). However, the solution is not considered to be simply allowing the soldiers to get married, because it is believed that they do not have the constitution for it. The *Obrister* responds by saying, "[s]chon Homer [hat] gesagt [...], ein guter Ehemann sei immer auch ein schlechter Soldat" (244)¹¹. Because the profession of soldiers requires them to be barbaric in a way, to channel their aggression, it is believed that this side of their character is present in their social lives as well. Lenz elaborates on this in the letter to Herder, confirming that this opinion is, in fact, his own: "Ordentliche Soldatenehen wollen mir nicht in den Kopf. Soldaten können und sollen nicht mild sein, dafür sind sie

¹¹ This is the citation from the first version; the second version is only slightly altered, "Schon Homer hat, deucht mich, gesagt, ein guter Ehemann sei ein schlechter Soldat" (246).

Soldaten” (*Briefe von und an J.M.R. Lenz* 146). The idea that soldiers should be expected to be aggressive because it is the nature of their profession is striking and foreign to a contemporary audience. There seems to be a suggestion in *Die Soldaten* that because they are soldiers their moral code is different from civilians, and that there is a morality in completing a duty over the morality of commonly accepted rights and wrongs of the 18th century. This demonstrates that not only are there multiple ways in which morality is viewed and multiple moral authorities in society, but also that the members of this society are encouraged to follow a particular moral code according to their station. In this scene, although the soldiers are seen as a problem for society by the nobility, they are not seen as needing to correct their actions only the outcomes of these actions. Their seemingly immoral behaviour is acceptable, just as long as it does not affect regular members of society. Their role is vital to the maintaining of peaceful society, and yet they do not belong inside it themselves.

The division of the soldiers from the civilians is a concept that Lenz explores in a political text, *Über die Soldatenehe*. This was written around the same time as *Die Soldaten* and is considered by many to be an appendage to the suggestions made in the final scene of the play. In this text, he outlines the ways in which military men have developed alongside of, but not together with civilian society. His later comments in the text address directly the arguments of the *Gräfin* and *Obrister* in the final scene.

The main differences between each version of the final scene of *Die Soldaten* is that in the first version the *Gräfin* suggests the solution (a highly unlikely scenario in the 18th century), while in the second it is the *Obrister*. They each in turn suggest,

Ich sehe die Soldaten an wie das Ungeheuer, dem schon von Zeit zu Zeit ein unglückliches Frauenzimmer freiwillig aufgeopfert werden muss, damit die übrigen Gattinnen und Töchter verschont bleiben. (*WS II* 244, 246)

There is no way around it. The soldiers cannot marry, yet they must have their desires met. In order to protect those innocent women who wish to keep from the soldiers, there must be a way found to satisfy them. In the first version the *Obrister* suggests a system “Konkubine,” which the *Gräfin* finds very reasonable (245), but in the second this language is replaced for the less loaded term, “Pfanzscheule von Soldatenweibern” (246). Lenz brings these changes to Herder’s attention in the letter in which he responds to Herder’s criticisms of it. He writes,

Was die letzte Scene betrifft, so viel ich mich auf die zurückerinnere, deucht mich könnte allen verdrießlichen Folgen durch Weglassung oder Veränderung einiger Ausdrücke des Obristen begegnet werden. Z.E. das mit den Konkubinen, medischen Weibern, könnte ganz wegfallen und der Obriste dafür lieber von Soldatenweibern sprechen [...] (145-6)

This deliberate change in the final scene leaves us wondering how stern Herder really was with Lenz. It also makes it clear that the original version was seen as being somewhat scandalous and unbelievable. The willingness of Lenz to change it is very telling of his own opinion towards it. It seems to admit to us that he was well aware of the moral difficulty with which such a scene would be viewed. However, it is equally important to note that Lenz under no circumstances wanted the scene removed altogether. Lenz’s refusal to give up on the scene completely (a scene which is not entirely necessary

to the development of the plot) is very telling. It suggests the importance of this conversation for Lenz and its essentiality for the plot.

In addition to the change in vocabulary, the *Gräfin*'s reaction to the proposed solution to this problem has also changed in the newer version of the ending. Instead of suggesting the changes herself, which would have been very improper for a woman of the 18th century, she vocally doubts the probability of women being interested in this arrangement and says: "Wie wenig kennt ihr Männer doch das Herz und die Wünsche eines Frauenzimmers" (*WS II* 246). It is believed by some that Herder's letter had advised Lenz to remove this scene entirely from the play (Hill 302). However, Lenz reacted by using a more veiled language and having the *Gräfin* object to the plan, in order to make the scene a little easier for the audience to take. It is difficult for the audience to believe that the *Gräfin* would be interested in wholeheartedly supporting a system which exploits her sex so explicitly and so she is made to counter it. The *Obrister* also demonstrates here the difference between actively creating an environment in which it is possible to act morally and allowing the immoral behaviour to carry on in the first version of this scene. David Hill explains,

In the first version of the last scene the Graf had appeared fatalistic (>>Es ist das Schicksal des Himmels über gewisse Personen<<), while it was left to the Gräfin to offer a specific and therefore in principle alterable cause (>>Das sind die Folgen des ehlosen Standes der Herren Soldaten<<), to which the Graf had replied with a resigned shrug of the shoulders (243). This resignation fits well with the Graf's acceptance of the situation in Act I, Scene 4, but conflicts with his

subsequent claim long to have cherished a plan for institutional reform (>>Ihre Idee ist lange die meinige gewesen<< (245)). (Hill 306-7)¹²

The *Obrister's* role in this play is that of the nobility hoping to maintain the status quo, while the *Gräfin's* role within the play is one of power and independent thinking and thus she is unlike other women of her time. Due to her position, she is free to disagree with the *Obrister*, although she may not be powerful enough to change any outcomes.

The specific actions that the *Obrister* and *Gräfin* are determining is the wooing and the subsequent rejection of Marie Wesener by the officer Desportes, and her own role in succumbing to these advances. The nobles blame the motives that lead to these actions on the law-required celibacy of the officers, but also on the character of soldiers themselves. There is no talk of punishment for officers who commit these types of transgressions. The discussion deals with the way in which these actions could be harnessed to work within society. The emphasis is put on the impossibility of altering these behaviours and, therefore, learning how to work with them. Peter Horn, in his study on *Die Soldaten*, “Das Heißt, Sie Wollten die Welt Umkehren,” explains this point of view:

Männer und vor allem Soldaten sind nun einmal so. Der Versuch, sie ethisch zu bessern, ist ebenso sinnlos wie der, die Welt verändern zu wollen. Die These, in der das Stück mündet, ist offensichtlicher Unsinn – ohne daß damit die Fragen, die das Stück aufwarf, hinfällig werden. (167)

It is important to observe here that despite the fact that Herder had some objections to it, this scene is much more startling to the modern audience than it was for Lenz's. The view

¹² Hill's pagination is taken from the Titel/Haug edition.

of women as the “lesser sex” was uncontested in Lenz’s time and the view of soldiers as being outside of society was not really abnormal either. James Gibbons explains in his text, “Politics and the Playwright: J.M.R. Lenz and ‘Die Soldaten’”:

The plan for the institution of state brothels, or, in its more sophisticated guise, military marriages based on the coercion of women, is not in itself absurd, at least not for Lenz himself. [...] Instead the attempt to communicate any such vision in the theatre is made to look absurd. Social criticism, here understood in the enlightened sense of offering meaningful proposals to meet the grave social ills depicted, finds no room in the theatre. (742)

Gibbons claim that social criticism has no place in the theater is mirroring the objections Lenz has about using the theatre as a tool for teaching the public about morality.

However, it is not clear that he did feel the same way about these two aspects of drama-writing. In *Über die Soldatenehe* the suggestions that Lenz makes, which he intended to be read by high-ranking political officials, are so closely related to the suggestions of the *Gräfin* and *Obrister* that they must be taken seriously. Instead of referring to women who would to especially disposed to the soldiers he suggests a system of “Soldatenfamilien” (824) and replaces the concept of “Pflanzenschule” with “Baumschule” for “Soldatenkinder” (815). In this model the soldiers would remain removed from civilian society, but would be able to continue to have families. Their children would be raised, however, to either be the wives of soldiers or soldiers themselves. It is a more involved system than the one proposed in *Die Soldaten*, but it is somewhat less controversial. Just as the play centres on the lives of the middle class, this

suggestion of reform is meant to protect them. Wilfried Wilms explores this text in his work, “Dismantling the Bourgeois Family: J.M.R. Lenz’s “Soldatenfamilie””:

Lenz’s position embodies ‘Sturm und Drang’ philosophy, as Martin Rector recognizes, insofar as he opposes the reality of the middle-class’ political helplessness with the ideal of an autonomous and sovereign subject, put on stage to inspire the audience to at least identify, if not to act. (Wilms 344)

Again, the emphasis is placed on the individual’s ability to change his circumstances.

Wilms goes further by bringing this together with the discussion of morality:

If, indeed, Lenz no longer sees happiness [...] as the guaranteed outcome of a virtuous life lived in ‘private’ seclusion from the oft-portrayed temptations and delusions of the court, what, then does bring about happiness? (344)

This rhetorical statement brings us back to the “Versuch” in which we understand all motivations under the influence of the drives for perfection and happiness. Wilms is making the argument that these removed temptations will bring happiness because, as the “Versuch” teaches us, the moral life is the happiest of all. While the final scene of *Die Soldaten* must be taken seriously as a suggestion for social reform, it must be understood through a thorough examination of all of Lenz’s works.

The social reform, however sincerely suggested, is not the main thing to be taken away from the play. As the *Anmerkungen* suggests, this is not the chief goal of theater.

Hill explains:

The Graf allows himself, both in the discussion with the officers and in the final scheme for reform, to close his mind to the feelings of women and merely to regard them as subordinate components of a man’s world. The concluding

proposal may not have the unambiguous absurdity that Kipphardt¹³ gives it in the mouth of Pirzel, but it can no longer be read as the ‘message’ of the play. (307)

Lenz was rather depicting the manner in which two nobles might view the situation. It is not the same as the suggestion he makes in *Über die Soldatenehe* and is not as good of a suggestion either. The entire set-up of this final scene, the way that it follows after the plot, the removal of the characters from the action, suggests a retrospective view and an analysis of a society which cannot be reformed because of the class structure which cannot be touched, and is not properly challenged until the French Revolution. There is a sense in which it seems as if he is reflecting on the way that his audience might react to the contents of the play. Such a reaction would be out of place. It would require the audience to place moral judgment on the events that have taken place, or to postulate on what the playwright might have been trying to teach, neither of which are the goal of theater. As Wilms writes, the self-reflection on their own situation, would be the most valuable for them.

Despite the fact that the final scene is placed outside of the plot, it is not wholly separate from it. Bruce Duncan brings the issue of the final scene together with our former discussion of Eisenhardt and the opinions he voices throughout the rest of the play. He writes in his work “The Comic Structure of Lenz's Soldaten”:

There is one code of honor for soldiers, another for civilians. In assuming that the soldiers deviate from the bourgeois ethic by individual choice, the chaplain fails to recognize the validity of their own code. (521)

¹³ Hill is referring here to a 20th century adaption to of *Die Soldaten*, written by Heinar Kipphardt, published by Reclam in 1968.

Here Duncan is referring to Eisenhardt's attempts to reform the soldiers and have them learn about morality. He continues:

“Schon Homer,” says the colonel, “hat gesagt, ein guter Ehemann sei ein schlechter Soldat” (p. 246). The soldiers, on the other hand, assume that the girls come to them by personal decision: “Eine Hure wird immer eine Hure, gerate sie unter welche Hände sie will” (p. 191). Since neither side recognizes the determining socio-economic factors, the arguments never meet. The debate centers on a totally irrelevant object, the theater, and only strengthens the lines of demarcation between the *Stände*.¹⁴ (Duncan 521).

The term “socio-economic” is too modern of a concept to be using to analyze this work, however, when replacing it with something like “class pressures,” the point stands. The claim that the theatre is “a totally irrelevant object” is also problematic. The topic of conversation is the theater precisely because the way in which the theater is viewed is of utmost importance to Lenz¹⁵. If he is teaching his audience anything, it is the way that theatre is viewed, the role that it should have in their lives. However, Duncan's claim that the argument is never resolved certainly is true. None of the morality-based arguments developed in Lenz's work are ever truly resolved and this is helpful in several ways. First, it displays the way in which these questions get further complicated by people and are never truly resolved. Second, it shows the way in which the extreme views on either side can never see eye-to-eye and that the societal backgrounds of this characters make it

¹⁴ Italics inserted.

¹⁵ Another critic, Gibbons, writes, “Most significantly of all, the dangers Eisenhardt perceives in ‘den neuesten Komödien’ act as a warning to the audience that they will not be repeated by Lenz in his own play” (740). This is true, insofar as we understand that the theatre being criticized is in the French tradition, which Lenz has specifically chosen to work outside of.

highly improbable that they would have the same views on this. Third, it points out once again how ill-fitting these types of discussions are in relation to the goals of the theatre.

Duncan's comments also bring forward an important connection between the final scene and the rest of the play. There is a sense in which the final scene is entirely a product of the *Hure* motif. The soldiers, amongst others, have been referring to Marie as a whore because she succumbed to Desportes seduction, and do not see his manipulation of her naïveté as playing a great role in the matter¹⁶. As Horn elaborates, this is a product of the expectations of society that such courtships should result in marriage:

Grundlage der kleinbürgerlichen Heirat ist die Virginität, und ein Mädchen, dessen Ruf durch allzu lockeren Umgang mit den Soldaten in Frage gestellt wird, hat keine andere Wahl, als eine ‚Hure‘ werden. (161)

In the final scene, the *Obrister* is merely mimicking the opinions expressed by the officers earlier in the play. He believes that the women are willing and happy to enter into relations with soldiers and that this arrangement will be to the benefit of everyone involved. The *Obrister's* views on the moral question have already been brought forward near the beginning of the play. The “Hure” response that Duncan cites, comes from one of the officers, Haudy, who is in total agreement with the *Obrister*. The interesting nuance that is taking place here is that by having a relationship Marie and Desportes have broken the boundaries of the class society. The reaction of society to this breach is to attempt to bring one of the parties involved entirely over to the other side. Wesener would like for Desportes to become a gentleman and marry Marie, thus leaving his life as an officer behind, while the *Obrister* and the officers believe it to be more sensible for

¹⁶ There is, in fact, some debate as to how fully she did succumb to seduction, and whether, despite her ruined reputation, she can be considered a whore at all (Gibbons 737).

Marie to accept that she is, in fact, a whore, thus the comment made by Haudy, “Eine Hure wird immer eine Hure, gerate sie unter welche Hände sie will.” Neither side can see the resolution being that both of the parties move on from their transgressions. The societal values are strongly influencing all of the characters despite their various roles and affiliations.

The *Obrister's* comments in the earlier scene are strongly connected to his later proposal in the final scene. Between Lenz's changes to this scene, the reaction of the *Gräfin* to the proposal in the second version and the applicability of the proposal to the events of the play, it becomes clear that the state-brothels would not really solve the problem of the soldiers behaviour, nor satisfy either side. Despite its similarity to the suggestions made in *Über die Soldatenehe*, it still requires the women and soldiers to cross class boundaries, while the “Soldatenfamilie” would allow the soldiers to exist peacefully within their class. David Hill elaborates:

[T]he Graf's proposal has to be reinterpreted as one further symptom of the problems it claims to solve, an absurdly inadequate scheme whose avoidance of root causes reflects the interests of the Graf in the survival of a system which grants him a privileged position. (Hill 301)

The execution of this proposal would require the women to go into disgrace and the soldiers would inevitably continue to be tempted by women that they met in the outside world.

The only suggestion that women may not be so willing to fall into the arms of the soldiers comes from the *Gräfin* and then only in the second version of the final scene. The *Gräfin's* role in the play is an interesting one. Many have suggested that she plays a

similar role as that of the *Rat* in *Der Hofmeister* (Hill 311). It is clear that she is seen favourably in Lenz's eyes, as he named her after his good friend Sophie von La Roche. This is not to say that she is a mouthpiece for the author, but like the *Rat*, she is able to represent some of the *Sturm und Drang* values, while containing several flaws. She attempts to help Marie out of a bad situation by taking her under her wing, this demonstrates the *Gräfin's* compassion. She is not in judgement of Marie, but is trying to help her. This is in line with the moral drive of communication, of trying to create morality outside of one's self, not only within. The trouble is that she does not go about this in the right way. She takes away Marie's freedom, by telling her that she cannot speak to men under any circumstance and that she must remain in her care. She also starts off her relationship with Marie by listing all of Marie's faults, something that clearly is not encouraged in Lenz's view of the world. She is not entirely calling Marie immoral, but she is trying to shame her from behaving this way in the future. Gibbons writes,

In her ensuing analysis of Mariane's situation, the *Gräfin* reels off a list of character faults [...] Firstly, Lenz plays on the notion that literature is a corruptive influence through Mariane's reading of Richardson's *Pamela*. Secondly, the *Gräfin* warns about the dangers of beauty, something Mariane vehemently denies when the *Gräfin* states, 'Schönheit ist niemals ein Mittel, eine gute Heurat zu stiften' (III.10). Thirdly, the heroine's missed vocation as a good 'bürgerliche' wife is lamented. (737)¹⁷

¹⁷ The spelling of "Marie" as "Mariane" is used in the Titel and Haug edition and seems to have stemmed from an early manuscript of the play. The more prominent spelling is "Marie" and it is, therefore, the one that I have chosen to use (313).

The attempt to pursue Desportes, an unattainable “celibate,” instead of the good citizen, Stolzius is her greatest mistake. The *Gräfin* tells Marie that by believing that she could ever really be with Desportes. She says to her: “Sie wollten die Welt umkehren” (*WS II* 227). This statement connects once again with the final scene. According to the *Gräfin*, Marie had forgotten the unchangeable nature of the soldiers and her own place within society.

Like the *Rat* of *Der Hofmeister*, the *Gräfin* does not manage to be as good in action as she is in word. Despite her attempts to help Marie, she does not put forward a plan that is truly fitting to helping Marie do well on her own. She tries to educate her in a noble manner and takes away her freedom by requiring Marie to stay in with her and to not have contact with any men. As has already been discussed the lack of freedom, for Lenz, can never help anyone to become more morally-upright. Hill writes,

If there is one single theme which dominates Lenz’s theological, moral and philosophical essays it is that the divinity of man and his happiness consists in his freedom, his ability to interrupt the chain of causal determinacy, or, in Kant’s terms, to assert his autonomy. (313)

This forced education and restriction from men perhaps even sends her into the arms of the officer Mary. The *Gräfin* finds Marie in conversation Mary with in the garden, even though she has been banned from interactions with men. Hill equates this flaw in the *Gräfin*’s plan with a “lack of realism about her ideals” (310). The error here is taken directly from Lenz’s own mouth. When one does not take into account the reality of human nature, but makes decisions based on moral and other principles, one can in fact lead that person astray. The only thing that could be learnt here is something that Lenz

might actually approve of his audience learning: that taking away a person's freedom to choose to do right or wrong will never lead to a development of morality. The other instance of the *Gräfin* falling short on her intention to help is when Marie's mother tries to get some help in finding Marie who has run away. The only response from the *Gräfin* is to go and lie down because the situation is too perplexing for her. However, Hill continues his analysis of the *Gräfin* by saying:

We should not be too hasty in accusing the *Gräfin* of hypocrisy: for Lenz humility was a less problematic virtue than it is for us today, and in any case, realism does not necessarily imply cynicism or irony: to the extent that the *Gräfin* is revealing self-interest, Lenz is perhaps primarily showing that someone with her background is most likely to have her insights. (311)

As with the final scene, the implications of what is being said may not be as important as understanding the context for it: who has said it and in what position they are in. The *Gräfin*, after all, has no real reason to be so invested in the Weseners. She does not owe them anything. She cannot really be judged for not having helped them in the right way because the help she does give is generous and unprecedented.

A common error in reading *Die Soldaten* is believing it to be a commentary on class rivalry. Nothing in it, however, seems to suggest that the system needs to be changed, but it works rather as an observation that it is based on social class and the roles through which people develop their values and ambitions and are able to understand their place in society. This interpretation comes more from the reader's own views on morality than the views of Lenz himself. Those who do argue that this work is such a commentary

often argue that Lenz is rejecting the social system altogether. Hill addresses the contradiction in such a debate once the final scene is taken into consideration:

[*Die Soldaten*] cannot logically both advocate a specific corrective reform and reject the totality of what was to be reformed. The point at which this issue becomes acute is the final scene of the play. Either the play itself, through the Graf, presents its own reformist conclusions, or the Graf's proposal has to be reinterpreted as one further symptom of the problems it claims to solve, an absurdly inadequate scheme whose avoidance of root causes reflects the interests of the Graf in the survival of a system which grants him a privileged position. (301).

As much as the various characters each in turn make their decisions based on the influence of the class system, none of them are looking for a way out of it, least of all the *Obrister* and *Gräfin*. Hill summarizes this thought clearly by bringing the discussion back to Lenz's overarching principle, realism:

If *Die Soldaten* is political, then, it is not because of any particular 'message' which is found in the last words of the play but because of the realism with which Lenz in the play as a whole portrays individual human behaviour, including that of the Graf in his final speech, as an inextricable part of the social situations in which people find themselves. This realism shows the conditionality of the world of human action, shows in what sophisticated and complex ways the social order interrelates with the thoughts, feelings and behaviour of people. (300)

This assessment is intrinsically related to the ways in which the play can be viewed as having anything to do with morality. As has been demonstrated, the social structure is

strongly connected to the way that the characters determine their moral values, therefore the morality of the play is simply found in the thorough examination of it through its realistic depiction. These is the goals for the theatre that Lenz lays out in his *Anmerkungen*, when he writes that all must be be “durchdacht, durchforscht, durchschaut” (14) and that a play should depict “alle der Dinge, die wir um uns herum sehen, hören” (9).

The final, perhaps most simplistic way in which *Die Soldaten* shows itself to be anything but a simple moral or cautionary tale is in the outcomes of the characters. If the play can be said to have a villain, it is Desportes. He seduces Marie, knowing that he will never marry her, and he is the only one to receive his just desserts, death at the hands of Stolzius. Stolzius, on the other hand remains the innocent victim, driven to suicide by the pain that his rejection by Marie causes him. Marie ends up fairly happy, keeping her dowry, despite being the indirect cause of the deaths of her two previous lovers and despite having shown no growth, which is depicted through her relationship with the officer Mary late in the play. Wesener, one of the strong behind-the-scenes influences of the action also suffers some hardship midway through the plot, as his family risks financial ruin, but ends up seemingly unscathed. This very primitive analysis of the plot is in fact very telling of Lenz’s method. He rejects the system of play writing that has come before him in its entirety. In real life, good people do not always end up happy and bad people go unpunished and therefore his plays will not do what is expected of them, but always depict reality, which can be at the same time bleak and joyful.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Lenz's theoretical texts cannot be seen as a mere blueprint for the way that he depicts his characters. We cannot examine each one of them and judge their level of worth on the scale of perfection which Lenz discusses in the "Versuch über das erste Principium der Moral." However, one thing in particular unites these two spheres of his writing. In the "Versuch" he named the drive for happiness a *condition* of all people. A condition that is in everyone and that cannot be altered. The way in which people choose to pursue this drive is, however, in their control. In order for his plays to follow that principle of realism which he outlines in the *Anmerkungen*, his characters must also possess this drive, otherwise they would be lacking something that he says makes people who they are.

In examining Lenz's plays, it becomes abundantly clear that all of his characters are chiefly acting under the influence of this drive. In *Die Soldaten*, by viewing the characters under this principle, it can be determined that Wesener believes that the improved status of his daughter will bring him happiness. Eisenhardt believes that it is his devotion to God, and the officers believe that the pursuit of earthly pleasure is the key. Although it is possible to attempt to examine each of the means that they employ to determine whether any of them are becoming truly happy and, thus, moral, this would be a wasted effort. Even, Eisenhardt, whose wishes are seemingly the most selfless, is not depicted as a particularly happy individual. Lenz's understanding of morality is far more complicated than that.

This examination began, in part, with a look into the definition of morality. From this definition, it was determined that morality is not the result of outward actions, but

inward motivations. Realist drama does not contain monologues, but natural conversation. As in natural conversation the thoughts and motivations of the characters are not always revealed. It only depicts what (in the case of Lenz) is naturally spoken about and what physically takes place. This difference is essential to understanding the role of the theatre and the reasons that it is so valuable. Lenz's realist theatre depicts life exactly in the way that he experienced it, without any insight into the motivations or thoughts of those who come in contact with him, other than what they want to be perceived. It is for this reason that Lenz found the plays of French Classicism so detestable. The writers of this movement did not attempt to depict anything that was true to life, but would allow their characters to give excessive monologues explaining their thoughts and motivations on every action. These were not individual, but represented one unified good. These thoughts and motivations conformed to general values and morals, and fulfilled the expectations of high society. It is impossible given the limited amount of information that Lenz's realism provides us with for the viewer to know anything substantial about the motivations of his characters. For the viewer to make judgement on the placement of each character on the scale of perfection would be just as inappropriate as if they were to do this to actual people in real life. Lenz's focus is on the individual and for this reason the individual should develop himself, not spend time condemning others.

By examining the moral influences that affect Lenz's characters, we can, however, learn something about the nature of morality. The moral principles under which people live are not universal, despite their beliefs, they are only perceived to be universal and stem from a great array of societal and other influences. Perhaps this knowledge will

prompt us to take a greater look at Lenz's theoretical work on morality and his theoretical critic on the theatre and thus help us to individually come to an understanding the moral life. Perhaps it will not. In either case, by understanding this we understand further how outmoded it was in the *Sturm und Drang* period to incorporate moral teachings into drama. Drama is meant to depict reality instead of the moral values of French classicism, that is, to depict what is, not what ought to be.

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