

Ways of Living: An Ethical Realism in the Prose of Gottfried  
Keller

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## ABSTRACT

Ways of Living: An Ethical Realism in the Prose of Gottfried Keller

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My dissertation, *Ways of Living: An Ethical Realism in the Prose of Gottfried Keller*, takes as its focus the extensive discourse in mid-nineteenth century German letters on what constitutes a properly “realist” work of literature. My study examines three major works by Gottfried Keller: *Der grüne Heinrich*, the *Leute von Seldwyla* cycle, and the political satire *Martin Salander*. Keller, I argue, is less interested in offering a comprehensive social portrait of his native Switzerland than he is in exploring contrasting *ethics*, or modes of disposition towards the world: resentment and affirmation, parsimoniousness and wastefulness, sensuality and renunciation. To this end, Keller uses the familiar structures of Realist prose, like the construction of characters as types, the extensive description of physical objects, or the use of narrative *topoi* like the marriage plot, to dramatize conflicts between various *Lebensarten*: self-sacrifice in service of an unattainable ideal or fleeting happiness in the here and now, for example. For Keller, then, the “objectivity” championed by the Realists is above all a way of directing the reader’s attention towards the crises of value underpinning the most unremarkable of people and the most mundane of occupations. In Keller’s prose, I conclude, Realism is less an aesthetic program than a way of comporting oneself, a survival mechanism by means of which the hard truths of life, above all the vanity of human endeavor and the painful renunciations demanded by the world of work, are poeticized in order to make them bearable.

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Dedicated, with thanks, to  
Neil Christian Pages  
and  
Dorothea von Mücke

## I. Introduction

### 1. Keller as Poetic Realist

In his 1927 review of the first published edition of Gottfried Keller's collected works, Walter Benjamin observed that Keller occupied a curious place in the canon of German letters. The new-old truth that Keller is one of the three or four greatest prose authors is too old to interest a modern readership, wrote Benjamin, and too recent to oblige anyone to read him.<sup>1</sup> Nearly a century later, the difficulty facing a scholar preparing a study of Gottfried Keller is very much the same as the one that faced Benjamin. Certainly, Keller's status as a canonical author of German-language literature has been cemented. His *Romeo und Julia auf dem Dorfe* and *Kleider machen Leute* remain staples of the *Gymnasium* reading list; and the rest of his works have been read consistently since his death—Keller's legacy even managed to survive the National Socialist period without the message of tolerance and liberalism in his texts being abridged or distorted. In Zürich, Berlin, and Munich, the cities where he lived and worked, his memory is preserved by street signs, stamps, and plaques bearing his name. The last decade alone has seen scores of articles, conferences, and omnibus collections of criticism on Keller's work, a sign not only of its depth and complexity, but of the abiding loyalty it inspires in its readers.

At the same time, the defining features of Keller's work—its proud provincialism, its gentle irony, its skepticism of lofty philosophical speculation—have always prevented

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<sup>1</sup> "Wie dem nun sei—die neu-alte Wahrheit, die Keller unter die drei oder vier größten Prosaiker der deutschen Sprache aufnimmt, hat immer noch einen schweren Stand. Sie ist zu alt um die Leute zu interessieren, und zu neu um sie zu verpflichten." Benjamin, Walter. *Erzählen*. "Gottfried Keller." Suhrkamp: 2007. p. 40.

him from attaining the highest rank in the pantheon of German writers. Theodor Adorno, in his remarks on the centennial of Heinrich Heine's death, mentions the "utterly dismal" level of the prose written during what he dismissively refers to as "the epoch between Goethe and Nietzsche"—the era, in other words, of Keller and poetic Realism.<sup>2</sup> The periods that bookend Keller's time, that of Idealism and Romanticism on the one hand, and "the Modern" on the other, have always attracted Germanists and comparatists because of the extremely close relationship to speculative philosophy enjoyed by literature during those times, as though the latter, lacking in nobility, is only justified as an object of inquiry by association with the former. Realism, by contrast, has the ring of the philistine, the blithely unreflective. For Erich Auerbach, an admirer of Keller's, the simple fact that Adalbert Stifter and Gustave Flaubert were contemporaries was definitive proof of the mediocrity of nineteenth century German letters. Even Keller's appearance, W.G. Sebald observes, suggests a fundamental lack of seriousness in his work. With his pointy goatee and round spectacles, he seems more a provincial bureaucrat, the ink-stained holder of an insignificant public office, than an artist with penetrating insight into human existence.<sup>3</sup> The difficulty, then, is why one ought to write about an author whom everyone is familiar, but in whom, because of his attachment to a little-loved period, no one expects to find the fertile ground for scholarly research afforded by a Hölderlin or a Kafka.

As a result, recent scholarship has tended, largely though not exclusively, to soft-pedal Keller's relationship to the Realist period. In his book *Sprachbilder*, published in the year 2000, Helmut Pfotenhauer observes that the overwhelming tendency of scholarship

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<sup>2</sup> "Das Ärgernis umgeht, wer sich auf den Prosaschriftsteller (Heine) beschränkt, dessen Rang, inmitten des durchweg trostlosen Niveaus der Epoche zwischen Goethe und Nietzsche, in die Augen springt." Adorno, Theodor W. *Noten zur Literatur*. Suhrkamp, 2003. p. 72.

<sup>3</sup> Sebald, W.G. *Logis in einem Landhaus*. Fischer Verlag: 1998.

on Realism in the previous years has been to attack the notion that an objective reality is represented in the works of the period. “Das Interesse der Realismus-Forschung in den letzten Jahren richtete sich vonehmlich darauf,” writes Pfothner, “die Gebrochenheit der in den einschlägigen Texten konstituierten ‘Wirklichkeit’ zu erweisen,” best represented by scholars like Ursula Amrein, Gerhard Neumann, and Christian Begemann. That tendency has become still stronger in the decade and a half since Pfothner’s book. Many studies choose to side-step the question of representing reality by adopting a tighter thematic focus—Sabine Schneider, Ursula Amrain, Caroline von Loewenich, for example, on representations of the female figure and the role of the family<sup>4</sup>; Karl Wagner and Phillip Anjouri on Keller’s relationship to the natural sciences and other emerging modes of knowledge in the mid-nineteenth century<sup>5</sup>; Richard Ruppel, and Karl Pestalozzi on the themes of happiness and the good life in his work<sup>6</sup>; Thomas Binder and Alexander Honold on the role of affect and socialization.<sup>7</sup> The complex *Textgestaltung* of Keller’s works, which were written, re-written, and then revised again by Keller later in life remains a perennial subject of inquiry for Keller scholars.<sup>8</sup> Those scholars who, like Ernst Osterkamp

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<sup>4</sup>Cf. Schneider, Sabine. *Der grüne Heinrich neu gelesen*. “Ikonen der Liebe. Frauenbilder.” Ed. Wolfram Groddeck. Zürich: Chronos Verlag, 2009. pp. 201-220; Amrein, Ursula. “Süße Frauenbilder zu erfinden, wie die bitter Erde sie nicht hegt!” Inszenierte Autorschaft bei Gottfried Keller. *Rede zum Herbsbott 1996. Fünfundsechzigster Jahresbericht*. Gottfried Keller-Gesellschaft-Verlag, 1997. pp 3-24. von Loewenich, Caroline. *Gottfried Keller: Frauenbild und Frauengestalten im erzählerischen Werk*. Würzburg: Königshausen u. Neumann, 200. 224.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Wagner, Karl. “‘Das Glück des Wissens’: Formen des Wissens und der Wissenschaft in Kellers Roman.” *Der grüne Heinrich neu gelesen*. Ed Wolfram Groddeck. Chronos, 2009. pp. 91; Anjouri, Phillip. *Erzählen nach Darwin: Die Krise der Teologie im literarischen Realismus*. De Gruyter, 2007.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. Ruppel, Richard. *Gottfried Keller: Poet, Pedagogue, and Humanist*. Peter Lang, 1988; Karl Pestalozzi. “Sprachliche Glücksmomente bei Gottfried Keller.” *Gottfried Keller: Elf Essays zu seinem Werk*. Ed. Hans Wysling. Fink, 1990. pp. 185-202.

<sup>7</sup>Cf. Binder, Thomas. “Zwischen Experimentfreude und Pflichtgefühl.” *Gottfried Keller: Romane und Erzählungen*. Ed. Walter Morgenthaler. Stuttgart, 2007. pp. 154-171. Honold, Alexander. “Vermittlung und Verwilderung: Gottfried Keller’s *Romeo und Julia auf dem Dorfe*.” *Deutsche Vierteljahrschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*. Issue 78. Vol. 3, pp. 459-81.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Müller, Dominik. “Wiederlesen und weiterschreiben. Gottfried Keller’s Neugestaltung des ‘Grünen Heinrich’: Mit einer Synopse von beiden Fassungen. Peter Lang, 1988.

and Rainer Nägele, do engage more concretely with *Verklärung*, the poetic transfiguration of reality—the central concept of the Realist program in Germany—tend to do so without reference to the other authors and critical writing of the period, preferring instead to link Keller’s artistic process to other, more attractive areas of inquiry—the former to the tradition of landscape painting and medial differences between literature and the visual arts, the latter to the relationship between the affects and literary representation, with Kafka’s Surrealism as the primary counterpoint.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, these studies all share what Pfothenhauer identifies as the central insight of contemporary scholarship on Realism: “Gebrochen, so zeigt sich, sind die Realitäten des ‘Realismus’ durch die Modi ihrer Darstellung, die sich in ihrer Eigenart und imaginativen Leistung vor den Referenten im Draußen, in der gegebenen Welt schieben, die suggeriert wird. Auf Semiose statt auf eine schlichte Vorstellung von Abbildung richtet sich die Aufmerksamkeit.”<sup>10</sup> My work shares the view that a close examination of Keller’s work yields not a transparent portrait of the world in which Keller lived, as even some of Keller’s most perceptive readers have tended to assume, but rather a prose of remarkable semiological heterogeneity, in which the act of representation is no less foregrounded than that which is represented, in which the act of poetic transfiguration is itself dramatized and performed. That poetic images are somehow realer, fuller, more alive, and, in some crucial and ultimately mysterious way, independent of life itself is one of the main *Leitmotive* of Keller’s writing. At the same time, however, I do not go so far as to say that the concept of “reality” or of “life” can be so readily

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Osterkamp, Ernst. “Erzählte Landschaften”. *Der grüne Heinrich neu gelesen*. Chronos, 2007. pp. 141-158.; Nägele, Rainer. “Keller’s Cellar Vaults: Intrusions of the Real in Gottfried Keller’s Realism.” *Rethinking Emotion: Interiority and Exteriority in Premodern, Modern and Contemporary Thought*. Ed. Rüdiger Campe and Julia Weber. De Gruyter, 2014. pp. 187-201.

<sup>10</sup> Pfothenhauer, Helmut. *Sprachbilder. Untersuchungen zur Literatur seit dem achtzehnten Jahrhundert*. Königshausen & Neumann, 2000.

jettisoned when discussing Keller. It is my view that, while the rich weave of metaphor, personae, narrative voices, and intertextual allusions expands ever outward, the belief that something called customs, manners, institutions, and emotions of human life *do* exist, that they *can* be represented, and that, though he might not succeed, it is the artist's duty to attempt to capture them, serves as a centripetal force that pushes back against this play. In this view, literature is not simply a bearer of meaning, but a creator of meaning, in the very real and concrete sense of allowing the reader to orient himself in the jumble of perceptions that constitutes his daily life. This sentiment is expressed most succinctly by Julian Schmidt in one of his many polemics against Romanticism: "Wir sind in der Edda, im Homer, in den Vedas zu Hause, aber nicht bei uns."<sup>11</sup> The scholar Kinder is right to say, then, that while all artworks make some claim to truth, it is only Realist literature that submits itself to the judgment of *richtig/falsch*—that whatever else the text undertakes, whatever else it offers, it must produce an image of the world that the reader can recognize.

As a consequence, I found myself returning again and again to the question of Realism as I read Keller. I found myself consistently puzzled by what appeared to me to two opposite poles in Keller's unique, remarkable style. On the one hand, I was struck by the extent to which Keller's work, particularly the second volume of *Der grüne Heinrich* and the *Seldwyla* novellas, demonstrated a penetrating insight into the working of his world—and ours. The gradual obsolescence of handicraft and the rise of the debt economy; the twin bounds of love and guilt, of need and the desire for independence as constitutive of family life; the triumphs and disappointments of artistic life; and, perhaps most forward-thinking for the nineteenth century novel, the depiction of a sexuality liberated of Christian

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<sup>11</sup> Schmidt, Julian. "Die Reaktion in der deutschen Poesie." *Realismus und Gründerzeit: Manifeste und Dokumente zur deutschen Literatur 1848-1880*. Vol 2. Ed. Max Bucher. Springer Verlag, 1981. p.85.

shame without descending into libertinis as indispensable for a happy and fulfilling life—all these appeared to me to be rendered with unerring fidelity and considerable pathos. On the other hand, I was struck, particularly when I contrasted his work against his contemporaries in England and France, by the extent to which Keller's work appears to be set not in the present, but in the timeless, fairy-tale like realm of allegory, in which social and historical detail that might anchor Keller's writing more firmly to a world that was recognizably his seemed to be deliberately withheld. In what sense, I wondered, did Keller consider himself, and can we consider him now, a Realist? And how can we understand this process of poetically transfiguring reality, the *Verklärung* or *Verschönung* of the world to which Keller repeatedly refers in his work, his letters, and his critical essays? These are the questions that motivate this dissertation.

It is the central argument of my dissertation, then, that Keller's relationship to the movement known as Realism is crucial to any understanding of his work. Before Keller's novels can advance a theory of the family or of alienated labor, it must pluck these themes out of the stream of everyday experience and fix them in prose. To do that, the author must have some sense, some understanding, as to why he or she is embarking on this enterprise, of what he or she hopes to achieve. And while some authors resolve the how and the why of their work without explicitly expressing them, Keller returns again and again in his work, his letters, and his conversations with friends, to the question of the relationship between art and life. The reason he does so, I will argue, has to do with the unique position of German Realism as a deeply programmatic movement that saw itself as inaugurating a modern German literature.

I believe that these questions are the more pressing in reading Keller because, whereas in England and America, Realism emerged more or less organically from the pages of the newspaper, combining reportage with genres like travel-writing, humor, and satire; and while in France the authors of the Realist period drew openly on the social observation of aristocratic memoirs and letters; the authors of German Realism believed themselves to be inventing a new kind of literature from whole cloth in the wake of the defeated revolutions of 1848.<sup>12</sup> They distinguished their own pessimistic, ostensibly non-political outlook from the overtly political, revolutionary writing of the *Vormärz*; as well as from Romanticism, whose fantastical style belied, as the Realists saw it, a thinly veiled nostalgia for a feudal agrarianism, dynastic aristocracy, and the unchallenged power and security of the Catholic Church. The authors of the period—Gustav Freytag, Theodor Storm, Berthold Auerbach, Jeremias Gotthelf, Wilhelm Raabe, Adalbert Stifter, and later, Theodor Fontane, together with critics like Julian Schmidt, Theodor Vischer, and Emil von Horowicz—saw it as their task to draw “ordinary life” onto stage of artistic representation. Ordinary life, of course, is skewed to the middle class perspective of these authors. Common themes included the transformation of labor from agriculture to industry; the conflict, often a romantic one, between the aristocracy and the rising middle classes; the struggle for freedom in times past, from medieval times up to Napoleon; city life as it was newly emerging; and the serenity of nature.

And so while every work of literature makes a claim to truth, it is, as Hermann Kinder observes, Realism alone that asks to be valued for its verisimilitude. Only

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Bucher, Max. “Voraussetzungen der realistischen Literaturkritik.” *Realismus und Gründerzeit: Manifeste und Dokumente zur deutschen Literatur 1848-1880*. Vol. 1. J.B. Metzler, 1976. pp. 32-47.

Realism asks that the category *richtig/falsch* be applied to its representations.<sup>13</sup> One of the main affective responses that Realist prose seeks to produce, then, is not only a pleasing sensation of beauty but also a sense of familiarity and recognition. In a frequently quoted letter to Auerbach from June of 1860, for example, Keller writes: “Ich halte es für Pflicht eines Poeten, nicht nur das Vergangene zu verklären, sondern das Gegenwärtige, die Keime der Zukunft so weit zu verstärken und zu verschönern, daß die Leute nun glauben können, ja, so seien sie, und so gehe es zu!”<sup>14</sup> Or, in his *Prolog zur Schillerfeier in Bern*, he praises Schiller’s work for the mirror it holds up to reality: “daß Dichtung sich und kräft’ge Wirklichkeit / in reger Gegenspiegelung so durchdringen / Wie sich, wo eine wärmre Sonne scheint, / am selben Baume Frucht und Blüten mengen.”<sup>15</sup> However beautiful or glorious art might be, its beauty and its glory must stand firm-footed on the ground of recognizable reality, which remains the rubric within the inventive power of the poet functions. For Keller, that meant adopting the techniques now broadly recognized as “realistic”: the abolition of chance and unlikely occurrence in the construction of plot and character; the frequent use of descriptive detail, particularly of physical environments; and setting the action against the background of recent historical events, that allowed the contemporaneous reader to judge not only the work’s beauty, but the likelihood of the narrated events having actually transpired.

The questions that the critically inclined reader of 2017 might ask of this program—whose perspective is left out when “ordinary” life is represented?; what substantive relation

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<sup>13</sup> “Vorausgesetzt wird dabei eine Bestimmung des Realismus, die mir in ihrer, fast leeren, Allgemeinheit unproblematisch zu sein scheint: der Anspruch auf Realismus beinhaltet eine Aussage über Wirklichkeit, Werk und das Verhältnis beider mit dem Werturteil falsch/richtig.” Kinder, Hermann. *Poesie als Synthese*. Athenäum Verlag, 1973.

<sup>14</sup> Keller, Gottfried. *Seine Briefe und Tagebücher*. Wilhelm Herz Verlag: 1894. p. 465.

<sup>15</sup> Keller, Gottfried. *Sämtliche Werke*. Vol. 1. Ed. Kai Kauffmann. Deutscher Klassiker Verlag: 1995. p. 548.

can language have with empirical reality, given that the former is riven with contradiction and opacity?—did not plague the Realists. That is not to say, however, that their view of literary production was a naïve one. The potentially crippling question facing the authors of Keller’s time was the selection of subject matter. In his lectures on aesthetics Hegel had observed that the modern world was drained of the reservoirs of mythic imagination that were the source of the poetic. And because of the highly collectivized nature of the contemporary world, which can be best understood as a network in which human beings subjugate one another for their respective ends, poetic deeds—Achilles’ return to the Trojan War after mourning the death of Patroclus, for example—are simply no longer possible.<sup>1617</sup> One need not accept Hegel’s view of art in the modern world to recognize that, for aestheticians of Realism like Theodor Vischer and Julian Schmidt, who venerated Hegel not only for his theories of art but for having demonstrated the historical inevitability of the bourgeois liberal state, Hegel’s dim view of what he referred to as the *prosaische Weltordnung* was, if not the final word on the matter, then at least a credible explanation of why Germany had produced no great authors since Goethe and Schiller. Their challenge was to postulate a contemporary aesthetics of the German novel. In Vischer’s study of poetics, begun in 1847 and completed 1858, he suggested three possible ways that the poetic might be recovered in the time of the prosaic. First, contemporary author might change the setting of his work to the past to those times when poetic deeds was still possible; second, he might focus on those aspects of contemporary society—“grüne Stellen”, as Vischer calls them—where the poetic still dwells: among gypsies, criminals,

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<sup>16</sup> Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Ästhetik III*. Suhrkamp, 1986. p. 471-8.

<sup>17</sup> I have also drawn on Paul Fleming’s gloss of Hegel’s argument in *Exemplarity and Mediocrity: The Art of the Average from Bourgeois Tragedy to Realism*. Stanford University Press, 2009. p. 121.

and traveling artists, or during revolutions and other times of political upheaval; and finally, in the depths of the human mind, where madness dwells, as Goethe had when he created the character of Mignon, in *Wilhelm Meister*. There were, in other words, still veins of poetry to be mined in the contemporary world, they had only to be unearthed from beneath the rock of the prosaic.<sup>18</sup>

The first version of *Der grüne Heinrich*, Keller's first major work, opts to take the latter course. In a letter to his publisher Vieweg in advance of the 1854-5 edition, Keller presents his protagonist as a portrait of the deleterious effects of poverty and familial on the psyche—a sorrowful, case study worth recounting because it is true.<sup>19</sup> The grim ending, in which Heinrich dies of shame at having failed his mother, is rather at odds with the playful irony of the rest of the book; that Keller felt compelled to add it suggests the extent to which that, following Vischer, he felt that to warrant literary treatment Heinrich had be presented as extreme, an aberration. Keller discarded this belief with the publication of the first cycle of his *Seldwyla* novellas in the 1855-6, where he embraced the notion that reality in all its forms, the town and the country, the drawing room and the garden, the farm and the factory, is worthy of poetic representation. It is not a sense of his own specialness that causes Heinrich to become an artist, but a powerful sense of fidelity to the ordinary. Art, as he tells his uncle, “besteht nicht darin, daß man merwürdige und berühmte Orte aufsucht und nachmacht, sondern darin, daß man die stille Herrlichkeit und Schönheit der Natur betrachtet und abzubilden sucht... Wenn man nur ein einfältiges Sträuchlein abzeichnet, so

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<sup>18</sup> Vischer, Theodor. Cit. *Theorie und Technik des Romans im 19. Jahrhundert*. Ed. Hartmut Steiecke. Niemezer Verlag, 1970. p. 70.

<sup>19</sup> “Eine der vielen Seiten des Zweckes ist die Verherrlichung der mütterlichen Pflichterfüllung und Aufopferung und diese Verherrlichung kann im größeren Style nur geschehen durch ein trauriges Ende, durch das Martyrthum der Trägerin.” *SW*. Vol. 2, 1119.

empfindet man eine Ehrfurcht für jeden Zweige, weil derselbe so gewachsen ist und nicht anders nach den Gesetzen des Schöpfers.”<sup>20</sup> The divine, as Heinrich sees it, lies not in the miraculous, but in the consonance of each individual detail with the law set down by its creator.

With the problem of subject matter for the Realist novel arose the problem of style. The question of style—of how to write, of what techniques to adapt and which to discard—is a question faced by every writer; but for the Realist, the problem is a particularly thorny one. If, as the Realists claimed, the purpose of art is to offer as loyal a representation of reality as possible, then why should art exist at all? Would not the best and most moving art simply be reality itself? To that end, the critics and authors of Realism found it expedient to distinguish literature against other modes of representation that, as the Realist program saw it, depicted only the surface of reality, while remaining silent about its depths, where reality’s true substance lies—in the visual arts, photography, which offered only a cold, indifferent, inhuman repetition of reality’s surface; and in literature what Otto Ludwig called a “prosaic Realism,” an unconsidered representation of reality’s surface, untouched by a moral or aesthetic intellect. The Realist movement saw “prosaic Realism” in certain works of *Junges Deutschland*, but by and large the worst perpetrators of “naturalism,” as it was sometimes called, were the French. A typical perspective is the one offered on Flaubert by Emil Homberger in a series of articles on the Realist novel for the *Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung* in 1870: “Wie der Idealismus, welcher den Boden der realen Welt verläßt, zu luftiger Phantasterei wird,” wrote Homberger, “so sinkt der Realismus, welcher die Wirklichkeit [...] nicht durch das Ideal vergeistigt, zum plumpen Materialismus herab.

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<sup>20</sup> *SW*, Vol. 3, p. 145.

Der Verfasser der *Madame Bovary* scheint uns interessant als vollendetes Muster eines materialistischen Dichters.”<sup>21</sup> To bring the ordinary into view is only half the task of the Realist; the other half, as Keller put it in his letter to Auerbach, is to subject reality to a process of transfiguration, of *Verklärung*—to make it more beautiful, to sharpen events, objects, individuals, and actions that, to the naked eye, seem immaterial and insignificant so that their pure essence shines through. A properly Realist work of literature would be a perfect imitation of reality, only truer, clearer, and more beautiful—the same, yet somehow changed. It is the challenge of overcoming these contradictions and synthesizing them into an artistic whole that is the singular mission of the Realist project in Germany

Such, at any rate, was the theoretical understanding of Realism, and it must be noted that Keller makes repeated reference to these problems and concepts in his critical writing, his prose, and his poetry. In an essay on Jeremias Gotthelf, Keller writes: “Es wäre die Aufgabe des Dichters gewesen, allfällige eingeschlichene Roheiten und Mißbräuche im poetischen Spiegelbild abzuschaffen und dem Volke eine gereinigte und veredelte Freude wiederzugeben, da es sich einmal darum handelt, in der gemeinen Wirklichkeit eine schönere Welt wiederherzustellen durch die Schrift.”<sup>22</sup> This theme is echoed in Heinrich’s encounter with his benefactor the Count, who offers the following advice to the young man at the nadir of his personal and creative fortunes about art’s proper subject and process: “Der Graf rät Heinrich sich der produktiven Behandlung [understood here in the sense of treatment or representation] des öffentlichen Lebens zu widmen, als der einzigen noch möglichen und würdigen Form, die Gestaltungskraft und dichterische Phantasie zu

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<sup>21</sup> Homberger, Emil. “Gustave Flaubert.” *Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung*. March 18, 19, 20, 1870. Cit. Plumpe, *Theorie des bürgerlichen Realismus*. Ed. Gerhard Plumpe. Reclam, 1997. pp. 198-204.

<sup>22</sup> Keller, *SW*, Vol. 1, 75.

benutzen, welche, wenn sie eine gesunde sein wolle, auch das wirkliche Leben die besten und schönsten Erfindungen leisten müsse.”<sup>23</sup> As Keller’s career progressed, the poetic tendency would be made more and more distinct from the artistic process. The transfiguration of the world would be portrayed more and more as an anthropological fact—an inclination and a mode of perception of which all human beings are capable. Indeed, for the hapless protagonists of Keller’s novellas—for Pankraz, the incurable moper; for John Kabys, the stymied businessman and social climber; Wenzel Strapinski, the penniless tailor; the austere comb-makers Jobst, Fridolin, and Dietl—their very existence is a push and pull between the circumstances of their lives and the pleasure of their dreams, which bubble up and gently ease them back down to the reality from which the dreamers started. This returns us once again to the question of the role of *Verklärung*, and the self-designation of Realism in Keller’s work.

It is not my position that Keller’s writing is “Realist” in the sense that he consulted the numerous literary-theoretical texts published in the fifties before setting about his own work. Such an assertion, besides oversimplifying—if not entirely misunderstanding—the writing of literature would simply be in chronological error, as many of the major critical and theoretical texts of the period, from Julian Schmidt’s *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur seit Lessings Tod* to the latter volumes of Vischer’s *Kritische Gänge* appeared only after Keller’s first major works were already written. But a program is not simply a set of written instructions: Keller, like Schmidt, Vischer, and the other Realist authors, worked under the impression that they were righting decades of benightedness, sloppiness, and general mediocrity in German literature, and so they felt compelled to reflect, in their

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<sup>23</sup> *SW*, Vol. 3, p. 576.

correspondence, in literary reviews, in face to face conversation, and in the literature itself—on the task of transforming the material of empirical reality into poetic truth. Keller’s work, to be clear, does not “instantiate” this program; rather, this discussion gives Keller’s work its impetus. He dramatizes and gives it narrative form, he mines it for comedy and for pathos, he satirizes and criticizes it. The discourse of Realism furnishes Keller with a vocabulary for his reflections on the relationship between art and life, on the faculty of poetic imagination, and on the ultimate purpose of art. Without reference to Realist movement, Keller’s repeated, and frequently idiosyncratic, use of terms like *objektiv*, *kritisch*, *Wirklichkeit*, *Verklärung* and *Verschönung* make little sense.

In beginning with the question of Keller’s relationship to the articulated program of literary Realism, and the problems posed by setting the “representation” of “reality” as one’s task, I see my work as reaching back to the German scholarship on Keller from the late seventies and early eighties. The central works of this time are Adolf Muschg’s biographical study, *Gottfried Keller* (1977) and Gerhard Kaiser’s *Das gedichtete Leben* (1982). These works offer substantial insight into Keller’s project as the process of poeticizing life—for Keller’s protagonists, as for Keller himself. In this, Muschg and Kaiser build on and deepen the early, highly biographical studies of Keller, like those of Jakob Baechtold and Emil Ermatinger. Muschg and Kaiser closely explore the act of turning the jumble of life into a personal symbolic language, whose elements are ceaselessly combined and recombined, revalued and rearranged, placed into an endless variety of constellations. I also draw considerable influence from Hermann Kinder’s *Poesie als Synthese* (1973) and Peter Uwe Hohendaal’s *Kultur im Zeitalter des Liberalismus* (1985), both of which offer considerable insight into the relationship between the largely

abstract language of the Realist program and the very concrete political situation in which it arose. Both Kinder and Hohendaal present Realist aesthetics as deeply rooted in the political realities of the middle class during the *Gründerzeit*—hoping, still, for a German nation in middle class hands, with a leadership morally beholden to other nations as well as to its own citizenry, but leery of the revolutionary measures that had amounted to nothing in 1848. Both scholars characterize aesthetics as a politics by other means for the authors and critics of Realism, a notion to which I will return repeatedly in this dissertation. These authors build in their turn, on the seminal essays on Keller written by Walter Benjamin and Georg Lukács during the late twenties and thirties, from which Keller emerges as a pointed critic of the chauvinistic militarism and unrestrained capitalism of the *Gründerzeit*; as a sensitive defender of a true democracy in which even the lowest members of society would find the power to determine their own destinies; as an ethicist engaging, through the stories of his characters, with the question of how one can retain one’s humanity in a world that demands that happiness be sacrificed today so that one can survive tomorrow. In attempting to untangle what role the poetic transfiguration of reality plays in Keller’s work, it is my hope to combine the thematic focus of recent Keller scholarship with the broader scope of this older work.

## **2. *Versittlichung*: The Ethical Turn in Realism**

In summary, the initial question of my dissertation is *how* Keller represents reality, what role the Realist program plays in his work, and *to what end* reality is represented. This latter is a question no less difficult than the first two. Reading Keller, one is struck by the extent to which the right life, the good life, happiness and pleasure recur as themes, not only in the essayistic reflections that recur in Keller’s work, but in the actual metaphoric

and symbolic language of the prose. *Seldwyla*, Keller reminds us in the introduction to his novella cycle, means “happy place,” though the Seldwylers that we encounter are certainly anything but happy. Throughout Keller’s work, characters seek happiness in food, in love, in travel, in dress—and cross-dressing—in the familial home, and in nature. They find happiness and lose it, learning from their various hardships and forgetting the lessons once more. In my reading of Keller, I found myself asking to what extent Keller believes that literature has the ability or the right to counsel the reader as to what the right life is, and how to attain it? Is this, in fact, what Keller is attempting to do? Here, too, the recent scholarship is hesitant. Certain authors, like Richard Ruppel, Karl Pestalozzi, and Martin Swales have argued in individual essays that Keller’s poetics revolve around the idea of happiness. Ruppel argues that Keller’s work models an individual ethics rather than a normative one, fostering a self-reflection and an introspection that might serve as the ground for a personalized *ethos*—in this, he builds on older studies of Keller like those Ermatinger and Thomas Roffler that linked Keller to a Feuerbachian project, in which the self is liberated from harmful illusions. Swales and Pestalozzi go further in arguing that evoking the experience of happiness and contentment is the primary goal of Keller’s poetics. Keller’s correspondence offers little insight here. His answer to this question was limited by the modesty of his character: literature is meant to give pleasure, it is a respite, a pleasure garden, a *Blumengarten und Erholungsplatz*.<sup>24</sup>

It is here that the recourse to the Realist program offers its greatest yield. For the critics and authors of the period, the question of art’s purpose was an explicit one, set at the very heart of their poetics. On the one hand, Realism claimed a decided coolness

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<sup>24</sup> *SW*, Vol. 7, p. 653.

towards demanding that this or that condition in the world change, that its readers cultivate one behavior over another. This position went hand in hand with their rejection of the explicitly revolutionary program of the authors of *Junges Deutschland*. Such openly political writing was rejected as artful pamphleteering; it was, as Hermann Kinder expresses it, “allein dem Leben verpflichtete,” that is, *too* firmly grounded in the real. Openly moral or political literature voided the autonomy of art, and with it, the legitimacy of art’s poetic dimension. Keller participated ardently in the political strife of Switzerland in the early 1840s, in the anti-Catholic struggles of the *Sonderbundskriege*; his first literary productions were ardently nationalistic, patriotic poetry.<sup>25</sup> In his mature literary work, however, the themes of patriotism and citizenry are only represented, not directly enjoined. Instead, Keller pleads for what he calls, in an 1884 letter to Paul Heyse, the “Reichsunmittelbarkeit der Poesie”—the unlimited privilege of the poetic over the worldly.<sup>26</sup> By contrast, the Realists frequently pointed to what they considered the poetic insufficiencies of the nascent naturalist novel of Zola, the Goncourts and Eugene Sue, in which society’s worst ills, like poverty, alcoholism, sexual incontinence, the working poor, prostitution, avarice, and the selfish desire for social advancement in hopes of rousing the reader’s sympathies against them. “Was liegt denn der Welt an den ewigen Lebensläufen dieser Pariser Huren und an ihrem täglichen, ja stündlichen Lakenreißen!” Keller continued in the same letter. “Nichts! Aber... die unseligen Auotren sind eben die gleichen Glücks-

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<sup>25</sup> For more detail on Keller’s role in the anti-Catholic struggles, cf. Andermatt, Michael. “Hussah! Hussah! Die Hatz geht los!” *Antikatholizismus bei Gottfried Keller. Germanistik in der Schweiz*. Ed. Michael Stolz. Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Akademischen Gesellschaft für Germanistik, 2013. Vol. 10. pp. 305-317. For an overview of Keller’s early political poetry, cf. Hartmann, Regina. “Die Macht des Wortes: Gottfried Kellers frühe Lyrik im politischen Kampf.” *Macht in der Deutschschweizer Literatur*. Ed. Goncalo Vilas-Boas and Teresa Martins de Oliveira. Frank und Timme, 2012. pp. 73-85.

<sup>26</sup> *SW*, Vol. 6, p. 1095.

und Geldsüchtler wie die Tröpfe, die sie beschreiben.”<sup>27</sup> In Keller’s estimation, to use the ugly and the moral repulsive as a morally instructive tool was to disfigure the poetic, to destroy the artistic value of the work of literature. Vischer, for his part, dismissed the mindset animating such literature as a “rein pädagogisches, paränetisches Bewußtsein.”<sup>28</sup>

Why write, then? Why read? If the poetic impulse amounts to quietism, why not simply devote one’s attentions and energies to the world, rather than waste them on representations of it? To that, Realism had a qualified answer. While art could not directly compel, wrote Vischer, it could nonetheless influence and cultivate by reconciling poetically the seemingly irreconcilable conflicts of empirical reality, by showing “daß sich eine Aussicht auf die Hebung aller jener entsetzlichen Übel der Gesellschaft in ihrer *Wurzel*, auf eine Umänderung im Organismus der Gesellschaft eröffnete.”<sup>29</sup> By synthesizing the particular with the universal, the ideal with the real, poetry demonstrated the triumph of “Harmonie und Versöhnung.” The very unity and balance of the poetic work demonstrated for its reader that these virtues were possible in a world he might otherwise have given up as hopeless. The artwork thereby planted the seed for harmonious and humane action in reality itself. By means of this anti-political politics, this anti-moral morality, the Realist work was able to preserve its poetic autonomy by uniting aesthetics, politics, and metaphysics all under a single principle—that of harmony. And while the other programmatic pronouncements on the subject are not so rigorously systematic as Vischer’s, the notion that an artwork’s aesthetic qualities must model the tendencies it wishes to bring about in its readers without directly commanding its readers to behave one

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Vischer, Theodor. *Kritische Gänge*. Ed. R Vischer. Olms Verlag, 1922. p. 128.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 152.

way or another is present even in the more explicitly political writing of Robert Prutz, Julian Schmidt, and Keller himself.<sup>30</sup> In Schmidt's view, simply choosing the middle classes as subject matter was bound to strengthen the diligence and clarity that that class learned in the parliament, the military, the factory, and the public school. If the novel could not change society without voiding its aesthetic content, then it could at least be a tool in the slow, organic cultivation of the individual.

The second argument of my dissertation, then, is that what distinguishes Keller from the other authors and critics of the Realist period, in Germany as well as in the rest of Europe, is that the question of *to what end reality is to be represented* is placed front and center in his writing. *How* reality is to be represented is always paired with the question of *why* it is to be represented. These questions are not only the implicit programmatic assumptions of his writing; they give shape to its every technical aspect, from the description of characters to the development of plot and perspective. They serve as the red thread uniting his entire literary project, transforming the social landscape of the Realist novel into an ethical one. Where for Balzac social station is all, Keller's work is peopled with customs, values, dispositions—what Keller refers to as *Lebensarten*, or ways of living. Where the former depicts courtesans, peers, artists, priests and bureaucrats, Keller describes quasi-allegorical figures like Wurmlinger, the purveyor of a corrosive, all-pervasive skepticism, or Züß Bünzlin, the virginal daughter of a washerwoman who spends her days washing white linens and playing with soap figurines. These characters are not only disposed in a certain way towards the world—they *embody* that disposition,

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<sup>30</sup> I will discuss Schmidt's political views in the third chapter of this dissertation. Robert Prutz was the editor of *Das deutsche Museum*, a literary newspaper, and argued that literature's task was to give expression to historical consciousness as it progressed. Cf. Prutz, Robert. *Vorlesungen über die deutsche Literatur der Gegenwart*. Mayer Verlag, 1847. pp. 329-331.

everything that they do bears the mark of the way of living that they have chosen, or that has chosen them. In the central romantic conflict of *Der grüne Heinrich* the protagonist must choose not between a woman of his class and a woman of the aristocracy; but between his cousin Anna, who embodies an ethic of idealism and renunciation, and the sensuous widow Judith, who stands for happiness in the there and now. That is why, though the themes of Keller's work are undoubtedly those of the Realist novel—the transformation of European life from an agrarian society to an industrial one; the eclipse of the production of goods by debt and speculation; the place of moral and ethical certitudes in a society no longer oriented around God; the conflict between familial obligation and personal liberation—the world depicted appears to be so firmly rooted in the fairy-tale-like world of the allegorical.

This ethical focus in Keller's work distinguishes him not only from the canon of European Realism but from his countrymen as well. Despite German Realism's aversion to *reine Pädagogik* and its supposed fidelity to the non-binding power of the *allgemein Menschliche*, Vischer's *Versittlichung* often functions as a prescriptive morality, praising certain behaviors and warning the reader away from others. One might think here of Theodor Fontane's treatment of louche aristocratic decadence in *Schach von Wutenow*, which ends with the suicide of its dissipated protagonist; in the off-hand observation by the grandfather narrator of Adalbert Stifter's "Granit" that a local village was wiped out by the plague when they abandoned their old customs. One might consider the German novel's persistent avoidance of the typically Realist themes of social aspiration and the sensuality of the city; and its yearning, nostalgic depictions of the unchanging customs and wise morality of village life. Keller himself noted with displeasure the highly moralizing

tendencies in the work of Jeremias Gotthelf, otherwise an aesthetic lodestar for the young author. “Es steht einstweilen nicht mehr in der Macht der Kirche, ihre Gegner körperlich zu verbrennen;” wrote Keller, “daß man hingegen mit Vergnügen ein moralisches Scheiterhäufchen unter den Füßen Andersdenkender anzündet, davon ist Jeremias Gotthelf ein neues Beispiel, und dieß moralische Verbrennen ist kaum menschlicher.”<sup>31</sup> Keller’s work is highly skeptical of those perspectives on life that cheat man of his happiness, that offer a position of certitude from which one judges and punishes others. Here, one might draw a distinction between the moral, understood as the realm of those binding, universal judgments as to what is *right*; and the ethical, understood as a personal, and therefore necessarily pluralistic inquiry into what is *good*. Keller’s work is an investigation into the latter question. It is an exploration of the full range of human ways of living, or *Lebensarten*.

The term *Lebensarten*—a typical Kellerian usage in its substitution of a conversational term for a complex philosophical concept—is first introduced by Keller as the title of a chapter in the final volume of *Der grüne Heinrich*, as Heinrich weighs his own profligacy against the joyless austerity of his mother. What might, in another work, be treated as a moral question, as a question of continence or filial duty, is treated by Keller as a matter of happiness. Who is happier, Heinrich wonders, he or his mother? Neither, it turns out. His mother’s financial stability allows her no pleasure, whereas the joys Heinrich purchases for himself are quickly soured by the humiliations of poverty. But the full scope of Keller’s understanding of a *Lebensart* emerges in the consideration of the relationship between labor and value that follows. Here, Heinrich’s glum reflections cause him to

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<sup>31</sup> *SW*, Vol. 7, p. 100.

contrast the sale of *relevanta Arabica*, a cheap, worthless lentil product whose brief popularity generates enormous value for its owners and their employees before the factory is shuttered and the fortune it produced evaporates; and the life of Friedrich Schiller, a human being who was rewarded for his constant struggle for authenticity and self-fulfillment with a life of endless hardship. To Heinrich—and to Keller—whether one *ought* to save one’s money or spend it freely is a superficial matter, when compared against the deeper inquiry into the true nature of work and the real basis of durable value. Neither the bitterness that the young Pankraz feels at never receiving his allotted portion, nor Martin Salander’s ardent, if foolish taste for patriotic pageantry, nor John Kabys’s desire to achieve status and control his existence are mere moral behaviors. Keller makes use of the process of poetic idealization described by Vischer not only to reproduce reality but to depict a full range of dispositions *towards* reality, ways of being *in* reality; the drama of his work lies in the contrast and the conversation between these. Consequently, Keller never finally decides for one way of living or another, never enjoins the reader to behave like this or like that. The utopian strain of Realist thought—that the techniques of aesthetics directly model and make sensible the better world they might one day bring about—is balanced in Keller with many rueful reflections on the limit of art’s ability to instruct in a life whose most handy pedagogical tools are pain and loss. It may be recalled that Heinrich only truly grasps the meaning of “objectivity,” that beloved Realist concept, as he watches his cousin’s coffin lower into her grave. For Heinrich, as for many of Keller’s protagonists, enlightenment only comes once, only comes *because*, the chance for happiness has decisively passed.

The second aspect of my argument, then, is that in Keller's prose the moral and instructive element that remained present in the Realist novel is expanded into a broader consideration of numerous *Lebensarten* or *Lebensweisen*. In moving away from moral behaviors Keller also brings to the forefront the ethical tension that follows from the representational tensions of the Realist program: if a Realist art is at pains to justify its existence without becoming either pure repetition of empirical reality or pure abstraction, then how can art bring about a better world, a better individual, without voiding its artistic and poetic value by becoming a didactic work of moral or political instruction? It is not in the synthesis, but rather precisely in the unresolved tension of these questions that what I will call Keller's "ethical Realism" is located.

### **3. Keller as Ethical Realist**

I offer the above not as a condensation of the following dissertation, but rather as an account of the assumptions from which I will approach the more concrete, technical questions of Keller's writing. My specific point of investigation will be the intersection in Keller between the representation and transfiguration of reality, and the question of the good life. Each chapter of my dissertation will approach the above questions in greater nuance and detail by following them in the grain of a single work of Keller's I see as typifying both a particular aspect of Realist prose, and Keller's own "ethical Realism"—a literature constituted by the push and pull between the question of how life is best lived and the technical demands of capturing and "poeticizing" empirical reality. To this end, I have chosen the three works of Keller's that best exemplify, and cut most boldly against, the Realist program: *Der grüne Heinrich*, *Die Leute von Seldwyla*, and his final novel, the

political satire *Martin Salander*. These three novels are distinguished from the remainder of Keller's work in that they are set in the Switzerland in which Keller came of age and that he observed around him as a *Staatsschreiber* to the canton of Zurich. It will be my task to observe how throughout his career Keller's sense of the *Verklärung* of reality develops and how his sense of the "the good life" changes during his career, how in each project he works the two together and plays them against one another, how each takes its own distinct aesthetic form and makes its own distinct ethical judgments.

The first chapter will focus on the second edition of *Der grüne Heinrich*, from 1878-9. I have chosen the second edition, roughly concurrent with the second cycle of *Seldwla* novellas over the first for two reasons. The first is Keller's own stated preference for the second, apparent in comments throughout his letters, about the lamentable formlessness and cypress-dark ending of his first attempt. The second reason, more to the point of my argument, is the decisive step towards Realism taken by Keller in the 1870s. The second version adds two chapters to the beginning, in which the Switzerland of Heinrich's early childhood, then in the full bloom of liberalism and nationalism, is sketched in vivid and humorous detail against the background of the Napoleonic Wars and the Greek War of Independence; and two chapters to the end, in which Heinrich takes on a career in public life and surveys, with tired resignation, the "democratic" and "republican" Switzerland of his adulthood. With this explicit grounding of the events of *Der grüne Heinrich* in the real world as it might be recognized by Keller's Swiss readership there comes an accompanying shift from the pathological character of Heinrich's life to the universal nature of his experience. It is specifically this anthropological aspect of the book that will be my focus, above all, the Realist technique of construction of characters as types.

The literature connecting typology to Realism is an extensive one; here, I have focused my attention to the programmatic texts of the Realist period. The theorists of Realism agreed that it was a given fact of modern literature that the surface of reality was far too diverse and complex, packed with far too much information, to be easily reproduced by any writer. It followed that the modern author was compelled to abstract and to condense singular facts and individuals into general ones, which would stand in for the multiplicity of reality. Given the highly changeable and jumbled character of empirical reality, Vischer argued that the author's task was to purify the forms of things, to depict the coherence between their inner, invisible depths and the characteristic features of their surface, so as to reveal their fixed essence. This practice is precisely the one engaged in by Keller when he transforms individuals and scenes around him into idealized types, ennobled by the sublime poetic treatment with which Keller represents them. But where the Realist novel, in Germany and abroad, saw this essence as a distinctly social one—where, for example, Balzac, in his “Avant-Propos” to the *Comédie Humaine* fashions himself as a zoologist or botanist of social milieus, Keller's novel considers a range of modes of comportment towards reality. Every character in *Der grüne Heinrich* is, as Keller claimed, directly traceable to someone he knew in life, and the same time, an allegorical representation of a way of living, whether joy, skepticism, melancholy, austerity, profligacy, philosophical inquiry or religious bigotry.

Typology also serves as a central link between the Realist novel and another form that Keller employs to his own ends—the *Bildungsroman*, or novel of education and self-development. I draw here on Phillip Ajouri's reading of typology in the *Bildungsroman* as an *Ordnungsmuster*, a tool by means of which Heinrich, the novel's protagonist, is able to

arrange and categorize the experiences he undergoes and the individuals he encounters in his adult life, by means of which he is able to make sense of his present moment and project his desires for the future. This teleological use of typology and poetic imagination is, however, just one side of *Der grüne Heinrich*. The same polarities of the Realist project—its ambivalence about representing the world; its ambivalence about offering instruction to its reader—are at work in the relationship between imagination and typology in the *Bildungsroman*. Longing for the future, the power of artistic abstraction is in Keller rooted in a *Lebensart* of privation and renunciation, practiced by Heinrich's mother and his cousin Anna. In the company of the widow Judith, however, Heinrich learns to suspend his desires by giving himself to them completely and totally, by surrendering to the moment and foregoing both the regrets of the past and longing for the future. This latter way of living, which serves throughout the novel as contrast and a complement to the first, suggests as a different way of considering the typifications that he encounters—not as a sequence approaching a final endpoint, but rather as an anthropological compendium, a collection of human manners, with no one way of living privileged over the others. Here Vischer's *allgemein Menschliche* is transformed into the tolerance of difference and imperfection, a simultaneous despair and celebration of the vanity of all attempts to curing oneself of ignorance and folly.

The same tensions between reality and ideal, instruction and tolerance are at work in the lengthy descriptions to be found in the novellas of *Die Leute von Seldwla*. Telling of a town in Switzerland whose defining characteristic is its lack of industry and the tendency of its inhabitants to lend and borrow irresponsibly, these tightly plotted novellas are filled with detailed descriptions of the homes, clothing, possessions, and meals of the residents

of *Seldwyla*. These scenes, like the enumeration of the baubles jealously collected by a washerwoman's daughter or the extensive golden accoutrements donned by an up-and-coming businessman about to ask for a woman's hand in marriage are, in one sense, typical of the detail-rich prose championed by the Realists, for whom details were the magnet filings by means of which expansive social reality made itself perceivable. In Otto Ludwig's 1858 essay reflecting on the emergent Realist novel, he sets it as the task of the poet to represent "the multitude of things"—*Dinge*, understood here as not only the entirety of human affairs, but the sheer variety of the sensible world—through which the law governing them would become perceivable. Ludwig's own *Zwischen Himmel und Erde* begins not with an action or an event with a description of a physical location, a garden house; a technique imitated by Keller in *Der grüne Heinrich* and by Fontane in his *Stine* and *Irrungen, Wirrungen*. For the author depicting the travails of a class whose primary form of self-expression was ownership, the detail serves as a crucial mediating point, where the inchoate realm of private self-conception, yearning and aspiration, encounters the abstraction of social reality in the fixity of the physical world.

In the *Seldwyla* novellas, Keller takes up the theme of "the good life" in a different manner than he does in *Der grüne Heinrich*. Here, the attention lavished onto his characters' material circumstances goes hand in hand with the belief that man's true being, and therefore, his only chance for happiness, is to be found in his physical existence. The play of repetition and difference that marks these passages, which draws on the listing tradition of the Bible and Renaissance humanism, evokes plenty and freedom from the material want that is the basis of all servitude. These meditations on man's fate as an essentially material condition dovetails with the novellas' treatment of the themes of

poverty, privation, financial exploitation and uncertainty, and the search for a labor that satisfies man's need to commune with the physical world. In this sense, the idealized, utopian tenor of these descriptions serves to create an imaginary, poetic space in which the cleft between the appearance and the being of things opened by the exchange economy is finally healed. In this space the natural world is no longer something to be mastered; the worth of objects is no longer limited to their monetary value. Instead, a freer, more open, more reconciled relationship toward the material world becomes possible. And in telling the stories of characters with no artistic aspirations, *Die Leute von Seldwyla* uncouples poetic imagination—exclusively the provenance of the author in Realism—from art and places it in the realm of the anthropological. The ability to poeticize reality belongs to every human being. For Keller's dejected, forlorn protagonists, imagination is a recompense for the privations and renunciations that their lives demand of them.

The final chapter of my dissertations considers the relationship between the ethical and the political in the social realism of Keller's final novel, *Martin Salander*. *Martin Salander* holds a particular significance in Keller's *oeuvre* for being the only one of his works not begun during his stay in Berlin from 1850-1856. For this reason, *Martin Salander* can be considered a final reflection not only on the political aspirations of his generations and a meditation on the future of liberalism, but above all as a reflection on the legacy of poetic Realism itself. In this respect, *Martin Salander* represents Keller's most earnest embrace not only of the stylistic features of the French Realist novel—the social plots of Balzac, the terse naturalism of Emile Zola and Henrik Ibsen, then at the peak of their European popularity—but of the liberal strain of German Realism that considered the *Zeitroman*, or the social panorama, the *de facto* form of the modern novel. Like Gustav

Freytag's *Soll und Haben* or Wilhelm Raabe's *Hungerpastor, Martin Salander* seeks to represent a unifying social reality from the perspective of an individual. That individual is the eponymous character, a schoolteacher-cum-businessman-cum-politician who experiences with bewilderment the banking crises, environmental catastrophe, rapid industrialization, and political apathy of Switzerland during the *Gründerzeit*.

Here Keller also seizes on the implicitly pedagogical and instructive aspects of the liberal Realist novel. Industry, parliamentary democracy, the imminent formation of a meritocratic German nation in which the privileges of the aristocracy had been abolished and replaced with bourgeois diligence—those aspects of reality that a middle class author like Freytag considered most real, were very little in evidence in the Germany in which *Soll und Haben* was written. These realities, according to Freytag and the more rigorous critical justification afforded his work by Julian Schmidt, already existed in the present, albeit as a germ; the Realist novel's poetic project was wholly within its rights to depict what that germ might look like when it sprouted. Indeed, the novel ensured that outcome by modeling and strengthening the very tendencies in the present that would help bring it about. Keller's eponymous hero serves as a mouthpiece for the understanding of poetic Realism as a kind of civic education; he is constantly at work imagining ways that an artwork, or a walk through nature, romantic love, or a wedding toast, can be turned into a work of political pageantry that teaches social harmony and good citizenry to the factional Swiss. It is telling of Keller's final position on the political powers of Realism that these projects fail—without the cultivation of the self and the development of character, the phantasm that poetic Realism pawns off as reality merely further serve to distort an already

distorted present, stoking the longing of the reader and the populace for the insubstantial and the unreal.

How, then, should the self be cultivated, and how should character be developed, to create not only the most active, but also the happiest citizenry, and what role might art play in this cultivation? Here, too, *Martin Salander* distinguishes itself from Keller's previous work in tackling this question directly, and offering a seemingly direct answer in the form of Salander's son, Arnold. Unlike his father, Arnold practices a remarkable continence as far as poetic abstraction, or abstraction of any sort, is concerned. He firmly refuses to participate in politics or to listen to political speeches, preferring to limit himself to accounts of the facts as they are; he refuses to turn the family businessman, a dry goods store, into a money-making enterprise against which he can borrow; and he refuses to fall for the charms of the classically beautiful, though dim-witted sister-in-law of the novel's antagonist, the grifter Louis Wohlwend. In the character of Arnold, Keller offers as a way forward a critical realism that is Stoic in its refusal of idealizations, all abstractions or poetic imaginings; this realism is above all an inward disposition, a kind of *askesis*, that consists of curbing one's desire, teaching oneself to see things as they are to be content with them. But even in the idealized Arnold, I argue, the novel evinces a great ambivalence. Arnold never errs and never imperils his family with his short-sighted decisions, as does his father, but nor does he produce anything, do anything, or hope for anything. Keller places himself clearly with the Salander father. With the end of desire must come the end of imagination, both political and poetic, and with it, the end of Keller's project.

In these chapters I will draw as needed on the wide range of Keller scholarship from the last decades. Of particular importance to me will be those studies that offer perspective

on the question of labor, especially affective labor; the role played by gender and sexuality in Keller's work; and the relationship between politics and poetics. It is my hope that the analyses that follow will be able to bridge the gap between the more specialized Keller scholarship and the poetological-political studies to which I am more directly indebted. It is the uniquely attractive aspect of Keller that his work supports such a wide spectrum of interpretation, and that the programmatic questions that drove it are far from resolved—indeed, are more relevant than ever—today.

## *II. Lebensarten: Ethical Typology in Der Grüne Heinrich*

### **1. Introduction**

Of the many regrets regarding his artistic career that plagued Gottfried Keller in the last years of his life, chief among them was the voyeuristic pleasure that his readers took in *Der grüne Heinrich*. The publication of the second, revised version in 1878 had brought him considerable success, but with it had come the sense that his readers had fundamentally misunderstood what he was hoping to achieve by writing a novel whose protagonist's life tracked so closely with his own. "Es gibt noch Esel, die es für bare biographische Münze nehmen," Keller wrote tartly to Maria Melos on the 29<sup>th</sup> of December in 1880.<sup>32</sup> The Germanist Jakob Baechtold would reach out to Keller shortly afterward about producing a biographical overview of his works, something akin to Goethe's *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, a prospect that held little interest for Keller. In a letter to Paul Heyse four years later, Keller wrote: "Ich sagte Baechtold geradezu, ich möchte nach meinem Tode jedenfalls nicht in seine Hände fallen." The grim language—and the grim sentiment that they express—portray biographical inquiry as a clinical and icy medical procedure, something akin to the vivisection of a corpse lying helpless on the coroner's slab.

And yet, in many of his letters Keller repeatedly claimed precisely the opposite—that *Der grüne Heinrich* was, in fact, connected to his life quite intimately. In a book proposal that he sent to his publisher, Friedrich Vieweg, as he was drafting the novel's first version in 1850, he wrote that he had "noch nie etwas produziert, was nicht den Anstoß

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<sup>32</sup> I have cited this quote, and the following three, from Sabine Schneider's essay "Poesie der Unreife," to which I am indebted for this overview of Keller's expression as to the autobiographical content *Der grüne Heinrich*. Schneider, Sabine. "Poesie der Unreife." *Der grüne Heinrich: neu gelesen*. Ed. Wolfram Groddeck. Chronos Verlag: 2009. pp. 55-77

dazu aus meinem inneren oder äußeren Leben empfangen hat”; and, in more emphatic terms, in the same letter: “Es ist wohl keine Seite darin, welche nicht gelebt und empfunden worden ist.” In this, Keller was, in a way, only stating the obvious. His novel told the story of a distinctly Keller-like protagonist, born in Switzerland, whose father, active in public life, dies at a young age, leaving the family destitute. Like Keller, Heinrich is kicked out of school over a misunderstanding over his role in a rowdy incident with his schoolmates, he struggles with his disenchantment with religious orthodoxy and gradually embraces atheism. Heinrich and Keller both attempt careers as painters, wracked with guilt at not undertaking a career more useful to his mother and his country; and, most significantly, both give up. The novel, he claimed was an “Autobiographie [...] mit Anlehnung an Selbsterfahrenes und Empfundenes.” For Keller, the entire value of his first major literary attempt lay in the access it gave him, and others, to the substance of his own life. In a letter to Hermann Hettner wrote that the single purpose guiding him as he wrote was “mich selbst mir objektiv zu machen, und ein Exempel zu statuieren.”<sup>33</sup>

The literature commenting on the ostensibly autobiographical character of *Der Grüne Heinrich* is considerable, beginning in his lifetime and running to the present day. The first major studies of Keller’s work immediately after his death by Baechtold, into whose hands Keller did indeed fall, and by Emil Ermatinger are biographical studies, whose purpose is to demonstrate the continuity between his poetic project and his life.<sup>34</sup> More recent studies, like Sabine Schneider’s “Poesie der Unreife,” as well as Martina

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<sup>33</sup> Schneider, Sabine. “Poesie der Unreife.” *Der grüne Heinrich: neu gelesen*. Ed. Wolfram Groddeck. Chronos Verlag: 2009. p. 57.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Baechtold, Jakob. *Gottfried Kellers Leben: Seine Briefe und Tagebücher*. Besser Verlag, 1894-97; Emil Ermatinger, *Gottfried Kellers Leben, Briefe und Tagebücher*. J.G. Cotta, 1915-18.

Wagner-Egelhaaf, portray the process as one that frequently subverts the conventional expectations of autobiography.<sup>35</sup> A definitive answer as to the autobiographical status of *Der grüne Heinrich* would fall beyond the realm of this dissertation; rather, what I wish to investigate in this chapter is the artistic process described by Keller to Hettner in this last letter, the process of making an example, whether of oneself or of others. What Keller describes here is, in fact, a double process. By “example,” Keller means as an individual or a particular case that stands in for a general principle or class of person. To be exemplary is, in this sense, to be typical of something. At the same time, the word “statuieren,” with its emphasis on the practical, instructive aspect of this example—“to make an example of someone,” as one might say in English, although Keller’s preceding remark about making himself “objective” seems to dispel the pejorative emphasis carried by the phrase. How, and to what end, does Keller accomplish this process of taking his life, as well as the lives of others, and transforming it into an instructive example?

To the critics and authors launching the Realist movement just as Keller was completing *Der grüne Heinrich*, this remark of Keller’s would have read simply as a recognition of the difficulties facing the modern novelist. The primary hurdle that the novel as it stood in the 1850s had to clear was the obvious impossibility of representing a world whose surface had become so variegated, whose visible ways of living had become so numerous and so diverse. An author could scarcely hope to achieve a perfect one-to-one reproduction of empirical experience, a “photograph,” as Julian Schmidt put it in his *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur seit Lessings Tod*, not without disdain for a technology

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. Wagner-Egelhaaf, Martina. *Autobiographie*. De Gruyter, 2000.

he considered inhuman and mechanical. As the novel was necessarily limited in scope, the modern novelist was compelled to condense and to generalize:

Was der moderne Roman als Convenienz vorfand, war die rationalistische Art und Weise, aus der bunte Mannigfaltigkeit des Lebens in die Darstellung nur dasjenige auszuwählen, was was zu den herrschenden Ansichten über Freiheit und Sittlichkeit stimmte. [...] Die Charaktere wurden nach der geraden Linien entworfen, man hatte ein bestimmtes Urtheil über ihren Werth und Unwerth, ihr innerer Zusammenhang und ihr Unterscheid gegen Andere zeichnet sich ab, in der Handlung zeichnet sich ein festes Gewebe von Grund und Folge.<sup>36</sup>

Schmidt saw this “Convenienz” as precisely that—a convenience, a kind of short-hand that left the modern novel at a considerable disadvantage when it came to producing characters with natural motivations or psychological depth. The sheer clamor of the world forced the author to begin with this limiting “Idealism,” as Schmidt calls. It fell to the individual talent to paint these condensed characters and types with poetic energy and vigor, to make them jump off the page and truly come to life once more. (In Schmidt’s view, Keller was one of the few modern authors who possessed this gift.)

What happens, then, to the crude material of life in this process of simplification, condensation and delineation? In his *Ästhetik des Schönen*, Vischer suggests that the process is one of beautification, or *Verschönerung*. By this Vischer does not mean that the author simply scrubs those aspects of life that he considers unpleasant or disturbing—the reader need only recall the many scenes of brutal violence in Homer’s *Iliad*. Rather, the process is one of “reine Formentwicklung,” the purification of a person, object, or event of anything contrary, dissonant, or accidental, anything secondary to their fundamental meaning. Writing in 1843, Vischer did not believe that this technique had ever been properly used in German literature. Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister* and Schiller’s plays had

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<sup>36</sup> Schmidt, Julian. *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur seit Lessings Tod*. Vol. 3. Grünow Verlag: 1867. p. 589.

attempted it, but they were hampered by their aristocratic bias. A modern novel, such as was not yet written, would find a way to democratize this technique and apply it not to just the rarified heights of society, but to society in its entirety, turning what appeared to be a garbled mish-mash into a harmonious whole of general expressions, of forms—of examples, to use Keller’s phrase. Following Vischer, the expansive cast of *Der grüne Heinrich* can be seen as a compendium of precisely such types and examples, reflected in a darkly comic manner in the scene early in the book in which, still reeling from his father’s death, the young Heinrich assembles a menagerie from insects and spiders in the yard of his childhood home. By plucking these animals out of the jumbled grass and dirt of his yard, by taking one from many, it is transformed from an unremarkable creature into a specimen, bearing the weight not only of its species, but of all animal life.

Scholars in recent years who have probed into the typological character of Keller’s work have stressed the zoological, that is to say, scientific aspect of Keller’s realism.<sup>37</sup>; Both Phillip Anjouri and Dietmar Schmidt (citing Anjouri and building on his argument) have stressed the central role of typology as an *Ordnungsmuster* for the world, a way of ordering, categorizing, and differentiating the bodily and the material. Both authors connect the poetic techniques of Realism to the rise of the natural sciences in the mid-nineteenth century, with Anjouri exploring the links between Keller and Darwin’s categorizations and phylogenetic typologies, with Schmidt stressing the novel’s

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<sup>37</sup> The menagerie scene is dissected by Gerhard Kaiser his essay, “Ein Blick in Gottfried Kellers Bestiarium,” Gerhard Kaiser stresses, as he stresses elsewhere, the significance of animal life in Keller’s stories of maturation and socialization, as that element that must be bound and overcome so that the individual can enter harmoniously into society. Karl Wagner, for his part, has traced the links between Keller’s style and popular science writing of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Cf. Kaiser, Gerhard. “Ein Blick in Kellers Bestiarium.” *Dichtung als Sozializationsspiel*. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978. pp. 125-134; Wagner, Karl. “ ‘Das Glück des Wissens’: Formen des Wissens und der Wissenschaft in Kellers Roman.” *Der grüne Heinrich neu gelesen*. Ed. Wolfram Groddeck. Chronos, 2007. pp. 91-110.

concurrency with that other typological science, physiognomy. These studies are borne out by the heavily—if ironically—scientific language of one of the key programmatic texts of European Realism, the “Avant-Propos” to Honoré de Balzac’s *Comédie Humaine*, which I will explore later in this chapter, in which Balzac refers to himself as a botanist and zoologist of humanity. But my investigation will go in a different direction. I readily accept that typology is a constitute technique of the modern novel, as both scholars definitively prove and as the programmatic literature of Realism definitively states. The question that I will attempt to answer in this chapter is: according to what criteria, what values does Keller differentiate one type from another? *How* does Keller classify individuals? What *kinds* of types does Keller distinguish from one another? And what does this tell us about Keller’s relationship with Realism—both as a movement and as an artistic program?

Keller’s contemporaries in England, in France, and in Germany had a ready answer to these questions: the task of the modern author is to distinguish social types above all. The rubric according to which the hundreds of characters in Balzac’s *Comédie Humaine* are classified is simply one of social station: peer, prostitute, solicitor’s clerk, soldier, cleric. Their fates, as Balzac conceived them, were journeys up society’s ladders and down its chutes. For Keller—and this will be my answer to the above question—characters typify not classes or social *milieux* but rather inner dispositions, inclinations of character, determinations of value, what Keller calls, in a word, *Lebensarten*, or ways of living. Where the broad tendency of Realism was to represent visible aspects of the social world, Keller sought to represent ways of existing in it and attitudes towards it. Rather than depict the full range of professions, Keller offers a wide spectrum of understandings of labor. Rather than show how characters make or lose their fortune, Keller presents the reader with

different understandings of monetary value. These considerations will, in their turn, return us to our initial question of what Keller means by *ein Exempel statuieren*. What does Keller want us to *do* as we read through his compendium of *Lebensarten*? Is one privileged over the others? And if so, does art, or should art, have the power to enjoin the reader to embrace it?

These questions recur throughout all of Keller's work, but they are particularly salient for *Der grüne Heinrich*, the second version of which I will examine in this chapter. I have stated in the introduction that I favor the second version as the more properly realistic of the two versions. As a novel of development, rather than a case study of a pathological individual, it foregrounds precisely the formation and growth of an individual consciousness as it learns to make sense of the world, and as it begins to ask the very questions of value and significance that it uses to distinguish human beings, events, and actions from one another.

In the following chapter, I will argue while Keller's autobiographical novel *Der grüne Heinrich* conformed to the program of Realism delineated by critics like Julian Schmidt and writers like Otto Ludwig and Theodor Fontane, Keller not only dramatically expanded the scope of that program, but often ran sharply counter to it as well. The Realists demanded that the author not simply describe the world, but also make use of an active narrative voice to poeticize and idealize it. *Verklärung*, as the Realists called this technique, was literature's true task over and above the "mere" reproduction of reality, a charge they leveled against the *impassivité* of French "naturalists" like Zola and Flaubert. In the first section, I will argue that, with its extensive depictions of the manners, customs and characters of the Switzerland in which he was raised, Keller's autobiographical novel did

indeed answer the Realists' call for a return to *das Reale*—to the world “as it is.” I go on to assert that what Keller referred to as the *Reichsunmittelbarkeit der Poesie* is most immediately apparent in the construction of the supporting cast of *Der grüne Heinrich*. The joiners, tailors, craftsmen, builders, farmers, schoolteachers and public functionaries encountered by Heinrich as he attempts to establish himself as an artist, are, on the one hand, drawn directly from the artisanal class and the *petit bourgeoisie*. On the other hand, Keller's novel raises these ordinary individuals into archetypal figures embodying inclinations of character, temperament, philosophical inclination—*Lebensarten*, to use Keller's term, or “ways of living.” In Keller, the sociological landscape of the Realist novel is transformed into an ethical one.

In the second section, I will argue that the delineation of these “ways of living” in *Der Grüne Heinrich* comprises not only the novel's substance but also its guiding structural principle, completely determining Keller's approach to the novel's main themes—money, art, work, love, shame, familial obligation and self-fulfillment. Several of the chapters of the novel are devoted to the outright expression and comparison of different worldviews, life courses, and personalities, often in the form of characters who varied, contradictory advice to Heinrich and his mother. The same principle also inheres in the planning of many of the book's chapters, in which a discursive division, as between essay and narrative, also occasions an ethical division, as between two *Lebensarten*—hardening oneself in the face of death, or celebrating; living for one's work, or working for profit—in which neither quite gains the upper hand. I will argue that this narrative principle is most fully and most subtly at work in Heinrich's torn affections between Anna and Judith, the conflict that dominates the second and third volumes of the novel. Keller uses both female figures to

draw an explicit connection between ethical disposition and the programmatic questions of Realism: what are people like, how should they be, and how should the two be reconciled and represented? Anna, who first seems to be struck in the mold of Goethe's Gretchen, occasions a wider consideration of the relationship between renunciation and its relationship to the aesthetic act of idealization. Judith inversely embodies an ethic of emphatic joy that goes hand in hand with a refusal to abstract away the hard truths of life and the failings of those who have to live it—a *Lebensart* that sees a harsh, but ultimately forgiving light as far more favorable to the world than the veil of *Verklärung* for which the Realists, Keller among them, proselytized so forcefully.

In the chapter's final section, I will argue that what makes *Der grüne Heinrich* so distinctive among the great novels of the nineteenth century is that it avails itself of didactic forms while taking a highly skeptical stance *vis á vis* the possibility of self-directed ethical improvement. I will frame my argument as a question of genre: I hold that Keller's novel is and is not a *Bildungsroman*. Drawing on David Wellbery and Phillip Ajouri, I argue that the *Bildungsroman*, though a notoriously difficult genre to distinguish, contains two distinctive features. The first is a teleological structure—not necessarily one in which the protagonist reaches a final goal, but nonetheless one in which the protagonist categorizes his past experiences and uses these typified experiences in order to project new, longed-for experiences which he then attempts to realize. This process is carried out by a desire that is fundamentally one that wishes, one that longs for something—the second identifying aspect of the *Bildungsroman*. In his longing to become a painter and a great citizen, in his chaste encounters with Anna, *Der grüne Heinrich* gives just such an account of desire, and consequently, of development and growth. But in *Judith* it *also* offers a countermodel. In

his encounters with Judith, Heinrich learns to suspend his desires, his reflections on the past and his longing for the future, by giving himself to them completely and utterly in the moment. At such moments, Heinrich sees the diversity of experience and character around him and accepts it; and instead of a *Bildungsroman*, the novel becomes a kind of menagerie, a compendium of *Lebensarten*, a colloquy, in which the despair that Heinrich feels at ever achieving happiness is compensated for by the humanity he achieves in the tolerance of difference.

## 2. “Zwei erklärte Atheisten”: A Typology of Ethics

I would like to begin the chapter by examining a passage that appears in both versions of *Der grüne Heinrich*, Heinrich’s recollection of the two atheists in the coterie of traders, merchants, and superstitious townspeople that passed through the junk shop across the street from the house in which he grew up. As Heinrich recalls the two men, “Es waren dies zwei erklärte Atheisten.

Der eine, ein schlichter, einsilbiger Schreinersmann, welcher schon manches hundert Särge gefertigt und zugenagelt hatte, war ein braver Mann und versicherte dann und wann einmal mit dürren Worten, er glaube ebenso wenig an ein ewiges Leben, als man von Gott etwas wissen könne. Im übrigen hörte man nie eine freche Rede oder ein Spottwort von ihm; er rauchte gemächlich sein Pfeifchen und ließ es über sich ergehen, wenn die Weiber mit fließenden Bekehrungsreden über ihn herfuhrten. Der ander war ein bejahrter Schneidersmann mit grauen Haaren und mutwilligem, unnützem Herzen, der schon mehr als einen schlimmen Streich verübt haben mochte. Während jener sich still und leidend verhielt und nur selten mit seinem dürren Glaubensbekenntnisse hervortrat, verfuhr dieser angriffsweise und machte sich ein Vergnügen daraus, die gläubigen Seelen durch derbe Zweifel und Verleugnungen, rohe Späße und Profanationen zu verletzen und zu erschrecken, als ein rechter Eulenspiegel das einfältige Wort zu verdrehen und mit dick aufgetragenem Humor in den armen Leuten eine sündhafte Lachlust zu reizen. Er besaß weder großen Verstand, noch Pietät für irgend etwas, selbst für die Natur nicht, und schien einzig ein persönliches Bedürfnis zu haben, das Dasein Gottes zu leugnen oder wegzuwünschen, indessen der Schreiner sich bloß nicht viel daraus machte, hingegen auf seinein Wanderjahren die Welt aufmerksam betrachtet hatte, sich fortwährend noch unterrichtete und von allerlei merkwürdigen Dingen mit Liebe zu sprechen wußte, wenn er auftauchte. Der Schneider fand nur Gefallen an Ränken und Schwänken und lärmenden Zänkereien mit den gegeisterten Weibern: auch sein Verhalten zu den Juden, gegenüber demjenigen des Sargmachers, war bezeichnend [...] Als er späterhin starb, that er dies so verzagt und zerknirscht, heulend und zähneklappend und nach Gebet verlangend, daß die

guten Leute einen glänzenden Triumph feierten, indessen der Schreiner eben so ruhig und unangefochten seinen letzten Sarg hobelte, welchen er sich selbst bestimmte, wie einst seinen ersten.<sup>38</sup>

Here, Heinrich leaves the two men to pick up his recollection of the religious debates that went on with the shop's owner, Frau Margarete, who held the existence of ghosts as scientific fact. The rest of the chapter is devoted to the ruin of the marriage of Frau Margarete and her husband Jakob, when, egged on by his friends, among them the tailor, Jakob demands that Margarete turn over half of the gold she has put away to him by marriage right.

This aside immediately strikes the scholar concerned with the question of Keller's relationship to the program of Realism. To start with, except for clearly singular characters like Frau Margarete, Meretlein, or Heinrich's immediate family, the tailor and the joiner are the first personages in Heinrich's world whose personality, profession, and moral character are described in depth by Keller. After the general sketches in the novel's introductory chapters, they are the first concrete instances of what sort of people inhabit the world in which *Der grüne Heinrich* is set, the Switzerland of the 1830s and 40s. Though hopelessly provincial compared to the metropolitan centers of Europe, where the old order has been seriously destabilized by rapid technological development, urbanization and the parceling of the old estates, the region has nonetheless also felt the aftershocks of the recently-settled Napoleonic Wars. The dynamic spirit of the new times is embodied for Heinrich, the book's narrator, in the person of his father, a stonemason who returns to Switzerland from an apprenticeship in Germany armed with the "the French ideas"—an indefatigable work ethic, a powerful civic commitment, and a sense of common purpose

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<sup>38</sup>*SW*, Vol. 3, p. 68.

with the artisanal class. The mere fact that Heinrich, a child of the *petite bourgeoisie*, encounters the joiner and the tailor as full human beings in their own right firmly roots *Der grüne Heinrich* in the perspective of Metternich's Europe as experienced by a liberal member of the lower middle class. As Heinrich grows older, he will also share his class's disappointment that, though the so-called enlightened classes have been swept into political prominence and economic power over the aristocracy, the promised freedom and immediacy of human relations they were to have brought with them have not yet come.

That much may be said for Keller as a Realist in the popular sense of the term. Just the same, Keller withholds far too much information from the reader for the anecdote to serve a purely sociological function. There is no mention of how the two men figure into the life of the town, no description of their places of business—crucially absent is an account of how they interact with those above or below them on the social ladder. Their respective trades are mentioned by Keller also as an entrée into their moral characters. The steady, upright work of the joiner, whose trade forces him to consider the mortality of all things, turns him into a steady, upright man, while the bow-backed needlework of the tailor, whose work stokes his customers' vanities, is a mean-spirited man for whom the mantle of enlightenment is merely a pretext for attacking the happiness of those he resents. The joiner's work forces him to contemplate the inevitability of death and so, in his life, he is able to keep cordial relations with the people around him, even those who are differently minded. The tailor, meanwhile, only pretends to have achieved this peace in order to harass those who have actually found it. To heighten the parable-like effect of the story, Keller removes the rich physical description with which the book abounds. After the first chapters, apart from a passing mention of Louis Phillipe, the novel offers no places or dates until its

conclusion. The result of Keller's severing, or at least downplaying, their specific social circumstances is that the two otherwise unremarkable men are raised to the status of archaic, universal figures, existing no longer in the Switzerland of the 1830s, but in the timeless, ahistorical realm of story-telling. The joiner has all of the rectitude of a Seneca, while the tailor is transformed from a provincial artisan into a villain on the scale of a Richard III or Iago, taking pleasure in doing evil for evil's sake.

Seen now from a more technical perspective, this passage offers a highly instructive example of how Theodor Vischer's aesthetics, couched as they are in the abstract and the metaphysical, might be put into actual practice by an author attempting literary realism without a literary antecedent to imitate. The first and most crucial hurdle that the passage clears is that of "Zeitmäßigkeit"—timeliness not only in the sense of being *of* the present, but of being an urgent, compelling subject of poetic representation *for* the present. Of the three "grüne Stellen" that Vischer identifies as repositories of the poetic in the prosaic world, the tailor and the joiner are taken from the second, that of uncommon people, people on the margins of society, like criminals, gypsies, and traveling musicians, and who, as being outside of the ordinary, might therefore be valid subjects of sublime poetic treatment. As denizens of Frau Margarete's junk shop, a place out of time where the ghosts of the dead still haunt the living, and where magic can still be used to curse one's enemies or to gain luck in one's endeavors, where the proprietress does accounts in dust using only three roman numerals, the tailor and the joiner are, despite the modesty of their professions, clearly not individuals encountered by the narrator every day. Their status as men apart is further underscored by the fact that they are atheists, a self-identification that puts them on the outside even of the motley community at the shop.

Secondly, by sharpening each character so that he complements and contrasts the others, Keller is able to achieve the “reine Formentwicklung” and “Verschönerung” that Vischer praises so highly in the epic poets. Every aspect of the character perfectly harmonizes with the sentence-long description that Keller provides for each man, from the pipe that the joiner peaceably smokes in the company of others, enacting, in a tiny everyday gesture, his rejection of transcendence for the happiness of the here and now; while the gadfly disposition of his counterpart, the tailor, is on ready display in his cruelty for the Jewish visitors to Frau Margarete’s shop, who are otherwise tolerated by the diverse crowd there. All extraneous details and interactions, all aspects of the men’s characters that do not accord with those initial descriptions is cast-off—we never learn, for example, how each man dresses, or whether he is married, and so on. Each portrait moves cleanly, without a single false step, from each character’s first presentation to their death, the ultimate proof of their character. But rather than resulting in the loss of each individual detail in this generality, the clear contours of each man’s character makes each individual detail that much more vivid—the third aspect of Vischer’s *Idealisierung*. In Vischer’s anti-transcendent, immanent aesthetics, harmony is not something over and above the individual parts that produce it, but rather given, or, perhaps more aptly, embodied in them—or, “daß der Geist, der die Dinge im Lichte der inneren Unendlichkeit auffaßt, gerade eine schärfere Zeichnung der Einzelzüge begründet..., weil im Lichte des eröffneten Zusammenhangs mit der unermesslichen vertieften inneren Welt selbst das Kleine, Enge, höchst Eigentümliche berechtigt, bedeutend wird.”<sup>39</sup> Nowhere is this more apparent than in the lively, if grim comedy of each man’s death that rounds off each story—

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<sup>39</sup> Vischer, Theodor. *Ästhetik des Schönen*. Vol. 6, 67.

the joiner finishing his last coffin and then climbing into it, the tailor piteously recanting all of his beliefs in what is celebrated by the community as a victory for religion. In each detail, the episode's theme—the rejection of transcendence, the wisdom of happiness in the present, tolerance as an expression of happiness—is driven home once more.

It is at the final point, that of *Versittlichung*, that the matter becomes more complex. Vischer argued that the very process of *Verschönerung* was itself instructive, without being didactic. In harmonizing the seeming contradictions of the visible world, and in simplifying its mass of impressions into clear, comprehensible forms, the poetic transfiguration of reality made sensible and graspable a reconciled and humane attitude towards the world: a “wahrhaft bejahende und positive Weltanschauung... muß der Kunst so willkommen sein, wie die helle Sonne welche... frei und klar die Erde und jedes ihren Wesen beleuchtet.”<sup>40</sup> It demonstrated, without being openly didactic, that things simply were as they were, gave the reader this knowledge and this vision and let him find his own way. Certainly, Keller seems to favor the joiner over the tailor, and the humorous, detached, darkly comic voice seems more of a piece with former man than the latter. And yet, the story is a story of *two* men, not one. Keller gives equal care and attention to the taylor and the joiner alike; each man's character receives the same dignified, elevated poetic treatment, each man's life is rooted in his trade and his trade in his character. It is the contrast and complement between the two, and not the obvious enlightenment of the joiner, that gives the episode its dramatic thrust and satisfying conclusion. And while the anecdote's strong formal connection to the Christian parable—in the didactic contrast of the two men, the moral weight thrown on their professions, the subtle touches of Christian anthropology, namely, the assumption that

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<sup>40</sup> *Kritische Gänge*, Vol. 1, 91.

life is suffering and the only wisdom in the preparation for death—makes the episode feel as though it is intended to be instructive, the characters in the episode, comic though they are, are meant to be familiar, too. They stand for existing moral, psychological, and even physical dispositions in the world shared by Heinrich, Keller, and his readers.

For Keller, then, the *Verklärung* of the world consists not simply in using poetic language to glorify the experience of the bourgeoisie but rather of transforming the people he observed into the moral and psychological *types* with whom he carried on a kind of ethical *Puppenspiel*. The joiner, who joyfully embraces the disappointments of life and the finality of death, recurs in the person of the journeyman joiner called in to build the coffin for Heinrich's cousin; he is also to be found in Hulda, the shopgirl who urges Heinrich to work a simple job six days a week and love on the seventh, as well as the hungover workmen cheerfully building a dam the day after the town's *Tellfest*. The tailor, meanwhile, is cousin to the many resentful misanthropes in Keller's *oeuvre*, from Heinrich's schoolmate Meierlein to Wurmlinger, "welcher sich ein Vergnügen daraus machte, den Leuten, welche sich mit ihm abgaben, allerlei Erfindungen und Aufschneidereien vorzutragen, um sie nachher ihrer Leichtgläubigkeit wegen zu verhöhnen,"<sup>41</sup> and Pankraz the moper, who flies into a rage whenever his sister cheats him of his share of the mashed potatoes on which the poor family subsists. Hardly a character appears in *Der grüne Heinrich* without being set in the service of some general anthropological insight, either through a dramatization that makes the point explicitly, or *via* a casual linguistic usage, especially some variant of *jene*—a favorite formulation of Keller's: "Denn er gehörte zu *jenen* Menschen, die nicht gesonnen sind, sich in ihren Begierden im mindesten zu

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<sup>41</sup> *SW*, Vol. 3, 340.

beschränken, und in der Gemeinheit ihrer Gesinnung dem Nächsten mit List oder Gewalt das entreißen, was er gutwillig nicht lassen will”<sup>42</sup>; “[Frau Margaretes] Mann war *einer von denjenigen*, welche nichts Eigenes gelernt haben noch thun können und daher darauf angewiesen sind, mehr die Handlanger einer thatkräftigen Frau zu machen und auf eine müßige Weise unter dem Schilde ihres Regimentes ein ruhmloses Dasein zu führen,”<sup>43</sup> to list just several. Such a level of detail, characterization and clarity of judgment is nowhere to be found in Keller’s German language contemporaries, none of whom had the observational power to paint in any but the broadest colors: aristocrat, banker, merchant, farmer and the like.

It is precisely this technique, the typification and dramatization of psychological traits and philosophical dispositions, that sets Keller distinctly apart from his fellow German realists and sets him into conversation with the “cynical” Balzacian Realism that the “Herren Grenzboten” held in such contempt. Keller, typically for the period, took, or claimed to take, little interest in the French novel and preferred to define himself against his immediate German language predecessors—Gotthelf, Auerbach, and Goethe, virtually the only German prose author respected by the Realists, and then only for his *Wilhelm Meister*. Nonetheless, it was Balzac who, in his “Avant-Propos” for the sprawling *Comédie Humaine* in 1846, first detached explicitly the Realist novel from the production of plots and set as his task the investigation and representation of human character in all its variety: “The creator used but one and the same pattern for all organized creatures. The animal is a principle which takes its external form, or to put it more precisely, the differences of its form, from the milieu in which it is called upon to evolve... Does not Society make of man,

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 76.

according to the milieu in which his activity takes place, as man different men as there are variety in zoology?”<sup>44</sup> Though the arch casting of the author as a pith-helmeted researcher following in the footsteps of Buffon, Saint-Hilaire, and Humboldt is utterly foreign to the drier, and as we have seen in the passage under consideration, much darker sensibility of *Der grüne Heinrich*, the deemphasis on plot and the absence of the protagonist for entire stretches of the book in favor of characters with little or no relation to the plot would have been unthinkable before Balzac. On repeat readings of the novel, one is struck by just how little of its space is occupied by Heinrich, and just how much space is given over to everybody—*anybody*—besides him: to Heinrich’s teacher at school, who is incapable of commanding the respect of the students and inadvertently sparks a student revolt; his religious instructor, who confuses Heinrich’s childish enthusiasm with demonic possession; Heinrich’s playful female cousins, who never tire of mocking his vanity; a homeless man he meets on the road home from Munich, all of whom represent some difference of “form” in the human animal, as Balzac puts it, and who, together, swallow the much weaker story of Heinrich’s development.

But here, too, the comparison to French Realism reveals as many differences as it does similarities. It is clear that Keller is no mordant chronicler and cataloguer of *mores*—in comparison to Balzac even the Munich chapters of *Der grüne Heinrich* read as though they are set in the Middle Ages. Much scholastic ink has been spilled to demonstrate that the discrepancy between the German-speaking world and the rest of Europe is above all a social and historical one; that Switzerland, divided as it was between cantons and dialects simply did not allow for a portrait as comprehensive as Balzac’s—that Keller had to walk

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<sup>44</sup> Balzac, Honoré de. *The Human Comedy: Vol. 1*. Trans. Clara Bell and R.S. Scott. New York: Noumena, 2008.

the so-called *deutscher Sonderweg* to modernity.<sup>45</sup> And yet the difference of worldview, which grew wider, not narrower, as Keller's Switzerland became more and more like the rest of Europe, is not simply developmental. The two writers experience life at fundamentally different levels. To Balzac, social station is everything: whether his characters were soldiers or greengrocers or merchants or prostitutes or peers of France, their station said everything there was to say about them. Their "fate," as far as he was concerned, was identical to their position on the social ladder. For Keller, status is an entirely superficial consideration. Without the first two chapters of the novel—added almost twenty-five years after its initial publication—the reader would be entirely unable to discern in what century, let alone in what *milieu*, the story of the joiner and the tailor takes place. Work, money, family, prosperity—all these are considered not as emblems of social identification but in terms of the effect that they produce on the inner character of the human being who possesses them. The story of the tailor and the joiner is less rich in social detail than any told by Balzac, but for that it cuts much deeper. It is a story of two natures, two characters, two dispositions: two *ethics*.

The word *ethics* has long plagued Keller scholarship, and its misleading moral tones—in the German *Ethik* as well as in its English counterpart—have often led scholars to confuse the ethical focus in Keller's work with what Schmidt approvingly referred to as *sittliches Benehmen*, correct conduct. Though the moral affects, particularly shame, play a central role in *Der grüne Heinrich*, the resonance we hear in terms like "medical ethics," or "ethical business practice," that is, of right and wrong action, rarely sounds in the novel. Moral crises did not interest Keller; he understood ethics in the far broader Greek sense of

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<sup>45</sup>Cf. "In the Hotel de la Môle" in Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis*.

*ethos*—of custom, habit, values, disposition, and fundamental character. Virtually every figure in *Der grüne Heinrich* stands in for some sort of character, some value, some disposition. Anna's father, the schoolmaster, is a picture of quiet, unjudging piety, an argument for all that is good in the Christian character, while the philosopher who teaches under him, praising the all as he reads Spinoza, terrified that his coffeepot will shatter into a thousand monads as he reads Leibniz, represents the philosophical mindset itself. In Habersaat, the novel offers a consideration of what might be called artistic Fordism, totally mechanized cultural industrial production, while Römer personifies the instability, poverty, and occasional genius of the "independent" artist. Seen beside these characters, Keller's seemingly didactic juxtaposition of the joiner with the tailor no longer appears so didactic. Both characters' behavior is inborn, molded by habit, hardened by experience; it completely lacks the situational dimension of morality—if, for example, while crossing a bridge, I see someone drowning in the water below, ought I risk my life to try and save them? Ethics concerns itself with the constant, the regular, and therefore more fundamental aspects of life. How do I treat the people I see every day? Those who are different from me? What do I believe, and why do I believe it? Am I afraid to die?

It is typical of Keller's work that such lofty conceptual formulations are usually replaced with more informal coinages, and the ethical dimension of his work is no exception. Neither in his work nor in his correspondence does Keller mention *ethics* or an ethic. Instead, Keller offers the simpler, more direct, and yet more elusive notion of a *Lebensart*—simply, a way of living. The term appears only as the title of a chapter right at the mid-point of the fourth and final volume of *Der grüne Heinrich*, when Heinrich has nearly run out of money and is on the verge of admitting his failure as an artist. Suddenly

struck by the contrast between his mother's asceticism and his own wastefulness, Heinrich reflects how strange it is that while his mother eats nothing but "eine Art schwarzer Suppe, welche sie jahraus, jahrein, einen Tag wie den andern um die Mittagszeit kochte, auf einem Feuerchen, welches gleichermaßen fast von nichts brannte und eine Ladung Holz eine Ewigkeit dauern ließ,"<sup>46</sup> the university student "beansprucht, selber in jugendlichem Vertrauen schwärmend, ein außerordentliches Vertrauen, Unfleiß und Geldmangel gereichen ihm nicht zum Nachteil, vielmehr warden beide durch besondere Lieder gefeiert, sogar das Verthun der letzten Habe, das Hänkeln der Gläubiger in alten und neuen rituellen Gesängen gepriesen"<sup>47</sup> Here, the *Lebensarten* under consideration are ostensibly the joyless *ascesis* of Heinrich's mother and the wastefulness of her own son—or, more subtly, maternal self-sacrifice and filial ingratitude. When Heinrich tries and fails to sell a crowd-pleasing painting, however, he returns home and continues his reflections, which now turn to questions of labor, profit, and alienation reminiscent of the work of the young Marx. Heinrich notes that the work of the artist is the one corner of the world where the labor theory of value does not hold: a brilliant idea, lacking any authenticity, is quickly hailed as work if it is realized quickly; years and years of toil with no result are rejected as foolishness. Now on something of a roll, Heinrich seizes on the difference between a brand of cheap canned lentils, whose production strikes him as an example of "die rätselhaften Vermischung von Arbeit und Täuschung, innerer Hohlheit und äußerem Erfolg, Unsinn und weiser Betriebe" that lasts "bis der Herbstwind der Zeit alles hinwegfegt und auf dem Blachfelde nichts übrig läßt,"<sup>48</sup> and the work of Friedrich Schiller, who "aus dem Kreise

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<sup>46</sup> *SW*, Vol. 3, 29.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

hinausfliehend, zu welchem Familie und Landherr ihn bestimmt, alles im Stiche lassend, was ihn nach ihrem Willen beglücken sollte, [...] veredelte sich unablässig von innen heraus und sein Leben wurde nichts anderes als die Erfüllung sein innersten Wesens,” and whose works, though appreciated in his lifetime, only became proper “classics” once they brought in millions after his death.<sup>49</sup>

Heinrich’s recourse to Schiller’s life and literary after-life give the reader a sense of the scope of Keller’s conception of a “way of living.” Wastefulness and thriftiness are, by comparison, behaviors; a *Lebensart* encompasses not only Schiller’s work habits, but his understanding of the *nature* of work and of profit—the unseen determination of character and disposition that serves as the soil for uncounted moral behaviors. For Heinrich, work must be a path to self-actualization, as it was for Schiller; since none of the work he has done has ever “actualized” him, he has never “earned” money, and as a result has no sense of it, he is wasteful. For Frau Lee, on the other hand, a widow, money is saved against inevitable catastrophe. To eat meat twice a week, to heat a bowl of soup on more than the barely necessary wood would be hubris—the pleasure that is denied is then displaced onto the act of renunciation itself. By the same token, the contrast between the joiner and the tailor that we considered at the outset of this chapter is not simply between an upright man and a resentful one. The excursion is an anthropological sketch of two dispositions towards belief: in the one, belief is the natural expression of genuine acceptance of the pains of this life, as well as of its joys; the other a violent expression of a refusal to grasp those limitations. The politeness shown by the joiner to those who do not share his atheism is an example of the *sittliches Benehmen* that Julian Schmidt hoped the

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

Realist novel would uphold; the considerations of happiness, death and God that underpin from which that politeness grows, meanwhile, are the provenance of *Der grüne Heinrich*.

As a provisional summary, we might say then that *Der grüne Heinrich* both employs and subverts a key technique of the German Realist program and that of European Realism—that of the *Idealisierung*, or the type. By making use of the “Convenienz” of synthesizing the full range of reality into broad, recognizable, generalized instances, Keller is able to achieve a coherence of narrative, character, and action in the anecdotes that fill *Der grüne Heinrich*. However, rather than standing in for classes or social *milieux*, Keller’s types represent *Lebensarten*, ways of living, dispositions towards the world. Where these social types might have served as scenery, or as points arranged on what Pierre Bourdieu, in his study of *Sentimental Education*, refers to as “the field of power”—zones of influence that act on one another and the narrator—here Keller is far more interested in exploring different modes of comportment, different directions in which one might choose to direct his life and his personality, for the narrator as well as for the reader.<sup>50</sup> It is this difference of value, and not any presumed aesthetic inferiority, that is responsible for the unique feel of Keller’s work, which transposes closely observed psychological realism into a realm with few recognizable social or historical markers. Rather than seeking to represent the world, Keller seeks to represent how human beings live in it.

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<sup>50</sup> Bourdieu offers a succinct definition of this concept in an interview with Loic J.D. Wacquant, drawing an explicit connection to the characters of Flaubert’s *Sentimental Education*: “Instead of studying... systems of objective relations, these theories study *populations* of agents who occupy positions of power. We have no choice but to deal with populations insofar as, in ordinary life, the properties that determine access to positions of power are only attached to individuals [The banker Monsieur de Dambreuse, the artists, who are poor but possess cultural capital, etc.—ML]” Bourdieu, Pierre. “From Ruling Class to Field of Power: An Interview with Pierre Bourdieu on *La nobles d’État*.” *Theory, Culture, Society*. Vol. 10. SAGE, 1993. pp. 19-44.

### 3. Ethical Typology as Structural Principle

In addition to the glimpse it offers into Keller's ethics and anthropology, the "Lebensarten" chapter of *Der grüne Heinrich* is particularly instructive as a case in point for the mechanics of Keller's unique Realism. Particularly significant in this respect is Keller's subordination of central plot details to lengthy philosophical excurses and character sketches, instead of pruning these down to advance the plot. The full direness of Heinrich's financial situation, for example, is not revealed until the passage considering his wastefulness as a behavior typical of the university student; and though this consideration is ostensibly from Heinrich's perspective, and as such is meant to illuminate something of his inner life, the particularity of his situation serves the broader contrast between the wasteful and the thrifty characters in general, not the other way around, as, for example, Balzac's reflection on the gloomy aspect of certain bourgeois homes serves as an *entrée* into a sketch of the home of Eugenie Grandet.<sup>51</sup> What is more, Heinrich's attempts to sell his paintings, his being swindled by a more experienced artist, an undiscerning crowd of art patrons dismissing him as a dilettante—the central action of the chapter, what might have served as a chapter-length skewering of art world's pretensions and double-dealings—function above all to motivate the reflection on *Relevanta arabica* and Friedrich Schiller that is the primary content of the chapter.

Much, if not all, of the novel is structured precisely according to this principle. "Die Künstler," for example, broadly sketches in the contours of Heinrich's life in Munich; we learn that he is unsure of his artistic abilities and that his paintings cost him an enormous

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<sup>51</sup> "In some country towns there exist houses whose appearance weights as heavily upon the spirits as the gloomiest cloister, the most dismal ruin, or the dreariest stretch of barren land." Balzac, Honoré de. *Eugénie Grandet*. Trans. Ursule Mirouet. Penguin Classics, 1955.

amount of labor. As in “Lebensarten,” Keller offer these details as a cursory introduction on the way to the chapter’s real focus, the two types of working artist represented by Erikson and Lys. (Erikson, a North German of simple and direct character, possesses minor but focused artistic talents that allow him to make salable if uninspiring paintings, while Lys’s melancholic disposition and inherited wealth keep him from pushing himself to develop his considerable inborn ability into a career.) The same structure is at work in the “Ratgeber” chapter, in which the widowed Frau Lee consults three friends of her deceased husband’s regarding Heinrich’s artistic career. Here, the plot point on which not only the chapter but the entire novel hinges—that Heinrich has decided to become an artist—is buried into the friends’ contradictory advice: the one suggests that Heinrich would be best suited designing women’s handkerchiefs; the other that Heinrich become a map-maker; while the final friend advises Frau Lee to dissuade Heinrich from his artistic ambitions entirely. We might also consider the “Tischgespräch” at the end of the novel’s second volume between Heinrich, his uncle and the town’s mayor regarding the nature of sacrifice for the civic good. These chapters—and they are far from the only such chapters in the book—have no action at all; instead, they derive their dramatic tension from the increasing intensity of the prose as it describes each point of view. Keller’s sentences become longer and longer as each point of view reaches its climax, the hypotaxis more and more extreme; the contrasting point of view recedes into the distance; and for a moment the reader is led to believe that the author’s sympathy with the expressed point of view. Then Keller takes up the contrary viewpoint with the same sincerity and conviction, and the process begins anew.

To favor essayistic reflection over plot is hardly a technique exclusive to Keller or to Realism. What distinguishes Keller's use of it is that even the plot of *Der grüne Heinrich* unfolds so as to expound contrasting ethical determinations—that is, even those chapters that foreground plot are structured like the “Lebensarten” chapter. In no scene is this so clear as in the “Totentanz” chapter of the second book. This brief chapter serves primarily to describe Heinrich's deepening relationship with Anna, his frail, almost otherworldly cousin. The plot is, as usual, relatively spare. During an idyllic stay in the country with Anna and her family, Heinrich's grandmother falls ill and dies; Heinrich witnesses his internment and attends her funeral feast—here Keller seems to offer a simple, linear episode that advances the action of the plot. But here, too, the action is as neatly divided as the reflections of *relevanta Arabica* and Schiller or the comparison between Heinrich and his mother. The first half of the chapter recounts his grandmother's illness, her confinement, her funeral and her burial, leading Heinrich ride up to the edge of her grave, as it were, to death itself: “Als ich aber die Schaufeln klingen hörte vor der Kirchen Thür drängte ich mich hinaus, um in das Grab zu schauen. Der einfache Sarg lag schon darin, viele Menschen standen umher und weinten, die Schollen fielen hart auf den Deckel und verbargen ihn allmählich; ich sah erstaunt hinein und kam mir fremd und verwundert vor, und die Tote in der Erde erschien mir auch fremd und ich fand keine Thränen.”<sup>52</sup> His grandmother's death is Heinrich's first inkling of death's utter finality, a significant moment in his later rejection of any afterlife. But once the service has ended, a huge meal is set and, upstairs, a joyful dance begins: “Auf einmal fing es über unseren Köpfen an zu brummen und zu pfeifen. Geige, Baß und Klarinette wurde angestimmt und ein Waldhorn

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<sup>52</sup> *SW*, Vol. 1, 256.

erging in schwülen Tönen... Man spielte einen elendiglichen Trauermarsch... Die Musik aber ging plötzlich in einen lustigen Hopser über, die Älteren zogen sich zurück und die Jugend brauste jauchzend und stampfend über den dröhnenden Boden hin.”<sup>53</sup> Heinrich and Anna dance, and at the end of the chapter, they share their first and only kiss, in seeming illustration of the first chapter of Ecclesiastes: “one generation passeth away, and another cometh, but the earth abideth for ever.”

Ending the chapter on the kiss sounds a didactic note very similar to the story of the joiner and tailor. Because life is short, Keller seems to say, we ought to take our pleasure where we can—a mix of Epicureanism and Stoicism, as it were. But, at the same time, the scene is carefully constructed to qualify, if not completely cancel the emphasis the reader naturally places on its ending. Neither the finality of death nor the necessity of emphatic joy tip the scales against one another. Rather, the two *Lebensarten* are tangled even as they are expounded. The description of the death of Heinrich’s grandmother that opens the chapter also contains, significantly, Heinrich’s first realizations of Anna’s beauty, now the more striking for the sorrow around her: “Anna [trug] ihr schwarzes Kirchengewand und eine ihrer eigentümlichen Krausen, worin sie aussah wie eine Art Stiftsfräulein... Dazu durchdrang sie heute eine tiefe Frömmigkeit und Andacht, sie war still und ihre Bewegungen voll Sitte, und dieses alles ließ sie in meine Augen in neuem, unendlichem Reize erscheinen.”<sup>54</sup> And even the joy that Heinrich takes in the dance is carefully tempered by the schoolmaster’s distaste for it, as well as by Heinrich’s notice of an inconsolable young man in the crowd, who descends the staircase from the dance floor “als ob es in den

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 258.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 253.

Tartarus ginge.”<sup>55</sup> These wrinkles in the text’s allegorical moments work to freeze the two dispositions into a permanent *Gleichgewicht*, like the two Christs in Raphael’s *Verklärung*. Keller refuses to decide finally in favor of one or the other; he preserves instead their necessary interdependence.

The character of Anna is particularly significant for the novel because it is in Heinrich’s inability to choose between her and Judith that Keller brings ethical disposition to bear on the Realist program itself. It is striking that Keller establishes the central romantic plot of his novel as an ethical conflict, and not a social one, no less central a trope in the German Realist novel than it was “abroad.” The conflict of lovers from different classes in Wilhelm Raabe’s *Hungerpastor*, Gustav Freytag’s *Soll und Haben* and the novels of the late Fontane—to say nothing of the work of Dickens, James, Stendhal, *et al.*—used the so-called “marriage plot”, in which true love is trampled by social expedience, to paint a society in which the bourgeoisie’s political and economic prominence had failed to bring about the immediacy of human relations that had been promised by the upheavals of the eighteenth century onwards. In *Der grüne Heinrich*, questions of marriage, inheritance and social advancement, are quite conspicuously absent; Heinrich’s relationship with Anna and Judith is dramatized as entirely as a conflict between two *Lebensarten*—most immediately, between renunciation and emphatic joy. The romantic moments shared by Heinrich and Anna are characterized above all by the refusal—the inability—of the two cousins to express their attraction for one another. They do not touch, they kiss only once, and though they are related, they do not at first address one another as “Du.” (Heinrich compares the familiar second person to a gold coin the more cherished for being laid away.) His first

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 259.

encounter with Judith, by contrast, is one of total physical freedom. Even clothed, the dark-haired widow appears in a state of near-nudity, her body barely covered by a white linen garment, making no pretensions to chastity. With Anna, Heinrich is a child, deeply aware of the expectation that he must make something of himself. His encounters with Judith, meanwhile, take place under the cover of fog and darkness, where Heinrich can accept himself as flawed, possessing murky depths of character he can never bring to light. Simply: Anna stands for the distant, the ideal, the untouchable; Judith the sexual, inflamed by the here and now.

What makes this contrast particularly worthy of consideration is that it is *via* Judith and Anna, and not in the passages on painting, that Keller explicitly confronts the program of Realism. In Heinrich's relationship to Anna, argues Sabine Schneider in her recent essay "Ikonen der Liebe",<sup>56</sup> Keller draws an explicit connection between Heinrich's self-aggrandizement and his tendency to see women as images—like Stendhal's Julian Sorel, who, when he has a love affair, congratulates himself for conducting it *à la Rousseau*.<sup>57</sup> The renunciation between Heinrich and Anna is, at bottom, an utter disinterest in the *real* Anna. She is soon supplanted by a flurry of images: her portrait, the painting of the *Heidenstube*, her corpse. Indeed, the scene in which Anna dies and is buried is simultaneously one of the book's most moving scenes and one of the sharpest examples of its critical irony:

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<sup>56</sup>Schneider, Sabine. *Der grüne Heinrich neu gelesen*. "Ikone der Liebe." Ed. Wolfram Groddeck. Zürich: Chronos Verlag, 2009.

<sup>57</sup> As in the scene, for example, when Julien Sorel arrives in Besancon and proceeds to woo a girl at a café with a passage from *La Nouvelle Heloise*. "His memory served him well; he had been for ten minutes reciting the *Nouvelle Heloise* to Miss Amanda, who was in ecstasies; he was delighted with his own courage,, when suddenly the fair Franc-Comtoise assumed a glacial air. One of her admierers stood in the doorway." Stendhal. *The Red and the Black*. Trans. Burton Raffel and Diane Johnson. Modern Library, 2004. p. 154.

Der letzte Sonnenstrahl leuchtete nun durch die Glasscheibe in das bleiche Gesicht, das darunter lag; das Gefühl, das ich jetzt empfand, war so seltsam, das ich es nicht anders als mit dem fremden hochtrabenden und kalten Worte “objektiv” benennen kann, welches die deutsche Aesthetik erfunden hat. Ich glaube, die Glasscheibe that es mir an, daß ich das Gut, was sie verschloß, gleich einem in Glas und Rahmen gefaßten Theil meiner Erfahrung, meines Lebens, in gehobener und feierlicher Stimmung, aber in vollkommener Ruhe begraben sah; noch heute weiß ich nicht, war es Stärke oder Schwäche daß ich dies tragische und feierliche Ereigniß viel eher genoß, als erduldet und mich beinahe des nun ernst werdenden Wechsels des Lebens freute.”<sup>58</sup>

The reference to the “objectivity” of the Realist aesthetic unmasks *Verklärung* as a symptom of Heinrich’s moody narcissism. Transfiguration is, to use Schneider’s description, “ein ästhetisches Verfahren, in dessen Fortgang die lebendige Frau erst idealisierend entrückt wird, um dann durch das imaginierte Bild ihrer selbst ersetzt zu werden.”<sup>59</sup> To Keller, *pace* Schneider, the calls to objectivity and the subjection of the outer world to the laws of the mind (as in Otto Ludwig’s “Poetischer Realismus”) are nothing more than childish navel-gazing legitimized as an aesthetic program.

Schneider’s reading is not the only one that reads Heinrich’s artistic aspirations, as well as his relationship with Anna, as fundamentally immature.<sup>60</sup> I do not share this view. Just as Keller’s didactic moments are never wholly didactic, so too are his critical moments never wholly critical. Though the burial scene cuts down the aesthetic pleasure Heinrich takes in the scene itself, the course of Heinrich and Anna’s relationship takes a far more ambivalent view of the relationship between idealization and a renunciative ethic. To be sure, *Der grüne Heinrich* is deeply skeptical of the refusals of pleasure demanded both by Christian morality—as in the chapter detailing the torments of Meretlein, a child suspected by the local pastor of being a witch—and by capitalism. And yet the scenes with Anna,

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<sup>58</sup>Keller, Vol. 2. 83-84.

<sup>59</sup>Schneider, 79.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Wick, Nadja. *Apotheosen narzisstischer Individualität*. Dilettantismus bei Karl Phillip Moritz, Gottfried Keller und Robert Gernhardt. Aisthesis Verlag, 2008.

based on Keller's relationship with his cousin Henriette Keller, are quite reverential in their treatment of the "purity" of their relationship. One of most moving and evocative descriptions in *Der grüne Heinrich* is that of the room in which Anna is laid out before her burial. Her father has brought in some of her belongings, and as the night turns to day, the room and the landscape around it spring to life in the presence of the dead girl: "Das tote weiße Mädchen lag unbeweglich fort und fort, die farbigen Blumen des Teppichs aber schienen zu wachsen in dem schwachen Lichte. Nun ging der Morgenstern auf und spiegelte sich im See; ich löschte die Lampe ihm zu Ehren, damit er allein Annas Totenlicht sei, saß nun im Dunkeln in meiner Ecke und sah nach und nach die Kammer sich erhellen."<sup>61</sup> Later, when Heinrich and a journeyman joiner go off to build Anna's coffin, Heinrich rejoices at the sight of a flock of geese on the lake, startled by the banging of the carpenter's hammer. In these scenes, unfulfilled desire charges the objects in its proximity, suffusing them with beauty and nobility. The experience of the physical world offers the fulfillment not possible between the lover and his beloved.

I stress this point not to quibble with Schneider's otherwise highly instructive study. I only wish to argue that the emphasis placed by Keller on character, disposition, value, comportment, what I have called *the ethical*, in his treatment of Anna and of *Verklärung* is fundamentally ambivalent. Each *Lebensart* is presented alongside a completely contradictory and equally valid way of living. That ambivalence is a central tenet of Keller's ethics and his anthropology. Were Heinrich's affair with Anna pure pathology, Anna would present no counterweight to Judith, in whom Keller considers another approach to happiness and another approach to the *Realismusproblem*, an ethic of radical

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<sup>61</sup> Keller, Vol. 2, 79.

acceptance that rejects all idealization. Where Anna might have been Heinrich's Gretchen, Judith is his Mephistopheles, bursting his romantic bubbles one by one. When Heinrich declares her that he would stab himself in the heart and bleed out for her, Judith scornfully asks what he expects her to do with his blood. And when, after Anna's death, Heinrich insists that he must stop seeing Judith in order to remain pure for her, Judith is horrified: "Halt inne!" rief Judith ängstlich und legte mir die Hand auf den Mund, 'du würdest es sicher noch einmal bereuen, dir selbst eine so grausame Schlinge gelegt zu haben! ... Fühlst du denn gar nicht, daß ein Herz seine wahre Ehre nur darin finden kann, zu lieben, wo es geliebt wird, wenn es dies kann? Es würde mich wahrhaft unglücklich machen, allein um unserer Dummheit willen nicht einmal ein oder zwei Jahre noch glücklich sein zu dürfen."<sup>62</sup> Judith's resemblance to a statue from antiquity, to say nothing of her name and dark curly hair, suggest that she is an emissary of a world not yet stifled by Christian shame, a world in which all of the difficulties and pleasures of life, may be faced frankly, without search for a higher purpose or fear of divine retribution in the hereafter. For an author so frequently presumed to be "naïve,"<sup>63</sup> Keller is one of first authors in German literature to depict sexuality as something more than a terrifying loss of self or as "mere" pleasure—a *süße Betäubung*, as Fontane refers to it in *Schach von Wutenow*.<sup>64</sup> The scene in which Heinrich returns to Judith's home after the village's performance of *Wilhelm Tell* is virtually the only one of its kind in nineteenth century literature for the emphasis it places

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<sup>62</sup> *SW*, Vol. 2, 87.

<sup>63</sup> Nietzsche's remark, for example, contrasting Stendhal against his German contemporaries: "Wer die Deutschen darum 'naiv' nennt, macht ihnen aus einem Mangel ein Lob zurecht. (Als Gegensatz zu der deutschen Unerfahrenheit und Unschuld in *voluptate psychologica*, die mit der Langweiligkeit des deutschen Verkehrs nicht gar zu fern verwandt ist.)" Keller is hardly a stranger to *voluptate psychologica*. Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Gesammelte Werke*. Vol. 15. Ed. Friedrich Würzbach. Musarion Verlag, 1920. p. 214

<sup>64</sup> After Schach compliments Victoire's eyes, the narrator remarks. "Ach! Das waren die Worthe nach denen ihr Herz gebangt hatte, während es sich in Trotz zu waffnen suchte. Und nun hörte sie sie willenlos und schwieg in einer süßen Betäubung."

on sexual satisfaction as an integral part of a fulfilled life: “Judith wußte nicht, oder wenigstens nicht recht, daß es jetzt an ihrer eigenen Brust still und klug, traurig und doch glücklich zu sein war. Ich fühlte mich ganz außer der Zeit; wir waren gleich alt oder gleich jung in diesem Augenblicke, und mir ging es durch das Herz, als ob ich jetzt die Ruhe vorausnahme für alles Leid und alle Mühe, die noch kommen sollten.”<sup>65</sup> Heinrich’s prediction proves true: the pleasure that he enjoys with Judith will indeed be a tiny island of joy in the sea of struggle and toil that comprises the rest of his life.

In keeping with her capacity for joy in the here and now, Judith attempts to cure Heinrich of his compulsive idealizations. The closest Keller comes to a statement of purpose for Judith’s character comes during the moment that Heinrich asks Judith to ease his guilt over his refusal to lend money to his unstable painting teacher, Römer, a forgiveness that Judith vehemently denies him: “ ‘Weißt du wohl, Heinrich, daß du allbereits ein Menschenleben auf deiner grünen Seele hast?’ ” she tells him. Heinrich protests that what is done can’t be undone, but Judith refuses to excuse Heinrich’s conducts or sugarcoat its consequences. Just the same, she refuses to reject him: “ ‘Die Vorwürfe deines Gewissens sind ein ganz gesundes Brot für dich, und daran sollst du dein Lebenlang kauen, ohne daß ich dir die Butter der Verzeihung darauf streiche! Dies könnte ich nicht einmal; denn was nicht zu ändern ist, ist eben deswegen auch nicht zu vergessen, dünkt mich, ich habe dies genugsam erfahren! Übrigens fühle ich leider nicht, daß du mir irgend widerwärtig geworden wärest; wozu wäre man da, wenn man nicht die Menschen, wie sie sind, liebhaben müßte?’ ”<sup>66</sup> Judith is clear-eyed illusionlessness personified—a sharpness

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<sup>65</sup> *SW*. Vol.3, 413.

<sup>66</sup> *SW*. Vol. 2. 66.

tempered by forgiveness. Without the former, the “the wisdom of Silenus,”<sup>67</sup> our image of the world is only so much illusion and falsification; without forgiveness, as Ludwig Tieck observed in his novella *Des Lebens Überfluss*, the knowledge of people quickly curdles into hatred of them.<sup>68</sup> For Keller, Ludwig’s *das Wahre* is always understood as emerging from an ethical disposition and realizing itself in ethical action: what sort of person is doing the representing, and to satisfy what emotional need? A wise man? A fool? A virtuous man? A depraved one? To forgive? To condemn? To remember?

#### 4. Typology and the *Bildungsroman*

I have argued until now that the Realism of Gottfried Keller’s *Der grüne Heinrich* is *ethical*. By this I mean that the central concern of Keller’s novel is not only to offer a social portrait of a particular moment and milieu of Swiss society, but to explore the values and dispositions that underpin that moment—to depict joy, sorry, resentment, affirmation, wastefulness, parsimoniousness, chastity, sensuality and other such *Lebensarten* as they concatenate in individual lives. These inquiries frequently take the form of direct essayistic reflection, as in the “Lebensarten” or “Glaubensmühen” chapters; in contrasts drawn—sometimes implicitly, sometimes *via* a device like a debate—between two and sometimes three characters; and also in the primary action itself, which unspools in such a way as to favor one way of living, than another, deliberately ending on an ambiguous note. Finally, I have attempted to argue that in the characters of Anna and Judith, Keller draws an explicit

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<sup>67</sup> In the words of Nietzsche, who narrates the episode of Silenus and Midas in *Die gebürt von Tragödie*: “Das Allerbest ist für dich gänzlich unerreichbar: nicht geboren zu sein, nicht zu *sein*, *nichts* zu sein.” Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Gesammelte Werke*. Vol. 3. Ed. Friedrich Würzbach. Musarion Verlag, 1920. p. 32.

<sup>68</sup> Heinrich, the novella’s protagonist, remarks to his wife Clara, “Denn, mein zarter Engel, es gibt Fälle und Stimmungen, wozu über einen Menschen, den man schon lange, lange kennt, erschrickt, sich zuweilen entsetzt, wenn er ein Lachen aufschlägt, das ihm recht von Herzen geht, und das wir bis dahin noch nicht von ihm vernommen haben.” Tieck, Ludwig. *Des Lebens Überfluss*. Suhramp, 1990. p. 12.

connection between two different approaches to happiness—in Anna’s case, to seek it in the beyond; in Judith’s case, in the here and now—and two different approaches to Realism itself, the one a process of poetic idealization akin to that prescribed by Keller’s fellow Realists in Germany, the other an emphatic rejection of all ideals and an acceptance of human life as it is, incapable of improvement.

It has been my supposition through that Keller’s Realism—that which makes his project a representation of reality, and not simply a vessel for a pre-constructed philosophy—is the ambivalence with which he approaches ethical questions. Certain characters, particularly Judith, appear to espouse a *Lebensphilosophie* that hews quite to the particular mix of Stoicism and Epicureanism that appears in his letters and that has been attributed to him by acquaintances like C.F. Meyer.<sup>69</sup> And yet, as I have attempted to establish, the novel’s dramatic tension emerges precisely from the constant qualification and counterbalancing of one way of living with another. As we saw in the “Totentanz” chapter, joy never wholly supersedes grief, but grief never wholly subsumes joy. That there *are* two poles of human behavior, two ways of facing death, two kinds of alienated labor take precedence over the content of either pole. I would like now to bring this supposition to the foreground and ask: to what end does Keller draw his *Lebensarten*? Is Keller’s anthropology akin to the Brueghel’s paintings showing the four seasons or the Dutch proverbs? Or does the ambivalence become, in the end, a *Lebensanweisung* itself?

I have chosen, in this chapter, to address this question from the perspective of genre—not the genre of autobiography, with which I began this chapter, but rather that of the *Bildungsroman*, the novel of self-cultivation, of education and development. For the

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<sup>69</sup> It is Meyer who recorded Keller’s remark, at once bleak and comic, about his imminent death: “Ich schulde, ich dulde!” Meyer, C.F. *Sämtliche Werke*. Vol. 15. Benteli Verlag, 1985. pp. 179-85.

first studies of Keller, taken up by scholars who did not know Keller personally but were encountering the novel as a potential German classic, the *Bildungsroman* designation had above all to do with prestige—that rose above a simple portrait of the decades of Keller’s childhood into a work with a consistent philosophical perspective no less developed than that of *Wilhelm Meister*, with an artfulness of style to match. The point of debate among these authors was what exactly that philosophical perspective was. Hans Dünnebier, in his 1913 study of Keller, *Gottfried Keller und Ludwig Feuerbach*, argued for the Feuerbachian philosophy as the *roter Faden* of Heinrich’s development into an atheistic, self-aware maturity, a recognition that he and he alone is responsible for his happiness here on earth, and not in the beyond<sup>70</sup>; Thomas Roffler, for his part, saw the novel as a political awakening<sup>71</sup>: highlighting the author’s hopes for the preservation of constitutional democracy in Switzerland; while Emil Ermatinger read Heinrich’s journey as a struggle for personal authenticity in a world inimical to it, in which appearances [*Schein*] are utterly disconnected from inner being [*Sein*].<sup>72</sup> Since then, the perception of Keller’s work as not only depicting a *Bildung*, but charging the reader with his own self-cultivation, has persisted well into the eighties and nineties, in both the Anglo-American context, as in the studies of Richard Ruppel, and in Germany in the work of Kaspar Locher.

Like many genre designations, the *Bildungsroman* is a slippery one, in that many of the novels held up as emblematic of the form do not themselves conform to its definition. (There is considerable scholarship debating, for example, whether any *Bildung* takes place in Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister*, widely considered the inaugural *Bildungsroman*.)

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<sup>70</sup> Dünnebier, Hans. *Gottfried Keller und Ludwig Feuerbach*. Ketner, 1913.

<sup>71</sup> Roffler, Thomas. *Gottfried Keller. Ein Bildnis*. Huber, 1931.

<sup>72</sup> See note 32.

Nonetheless, in his essay “Die Enden des Menschen,” David Wellbery emphasizes two central, identifying aspects of the *Bildungsroman*. The first of these is the typification that Keller alludes to in his letter to Hettner. According to Wellbery, the *Bildungsroman* is a “ein bestimmtes narratives Genre... in dem nicht dieses oder jedes Individuum, sondern der Typus ‘Mensch überhaupt’ zum Gegenstand fiktiver Darstellung wird.”<sup>73</sup> The process of poeticizing human characteristics, whether in the protagonist or in the characters that the protagonist encounters, is not simply a tool of the *Bildungsroman*, but constitutive of the genre itself. This typifying process originates in the faculty of *Einbildungskraft*, or imagination, whose roots lie, Wellbery argues, in *Begehren*, in want, in longing, in desire:

Treibt die Einbildungskraft antizipatorisch über die Gegenwart hinaus so um Vergangenes zu wiederholen. Schwillt und erfüllt sie sich in der Ausmalung der Wunschszenerie, dann deswegen, weil sie sich aus unbewußten Erinnerungsspuren, die das Begehren steuern, speist. Die Einbildungskraft... richtet sich die Gegenwart als Neuauflage vergangener Interaktionskonstellationen ein, agiert im Imaginären eine einst ersehnt Erfüllung aus.<sup>74</sup>

Not only the narrative substance, but also the narrative direction of the *Bildungsroman* are produced by the longing, wishing, and desiring of its protagonist, who submits his experiences in the present to a Vischer-like process of “reine Formentwicklung” in which he transforms them into images, ideals, types that become the past from which he attempts to imagine a future. Whether he reaches this future, whether the novel ends with the character having achieved the happiness he has sought for himself is a secondary matter, it is continuous shuttling between the understanding of the past and the expectation of the future that forms the narrative warp and weave of the *Bildungsroman*, whatever conclusion it might reach. In a similar vein, in his book *Erzählen nach Darwin*, Phillip Ajouri writes, in a concise formulation: “So ist der Typologie also zunächst ein teleologisches

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<sup>73</sup> Wellbery, David. “Die Enden des Menschen.” *Das Ende. Figuren einer Denkform*. Ed. Karlheinz Stierle and Rainer Warning. Wilhelm Fink Verlag: 1996. p.601

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 602.

Ordnungsmuster, nach dem Heinrich die Ereignisse seiner Jugendgeschichte auswählt und anordnet und die geschilderten Ereignisse bei der Lektüre als Orientierungspunkt für die Zukunft verwendet.”<sup>75</sup>

Both Heinrich’s legitimate ambitions for himself—to be a good son, to be a good friend, to be a good citizen, to become not only a painter of great renown, but one with real insight into nature and beauty—as well as his foolish, ill-conceived plans do evince just such a longing. Heinrich spends much time imagining futures and alternate realities for himself: his first aesthetic act is to tell a completely fictitious story about where he learned a swear word that results in swift and painful punishments for the poor students he happened to incorporate into it. Before he returns to Switzerland, he dreams of a warm reception from his family; before decided to take part in politics, he has a vision of the Swiss people. In a moment of utter desperation, when he is at his most destitute and his future is bleakest, Heinrich reaches back to the past by writing the very autobiography we are meant to be reading, in order to get a sense of what mistakes he has made and what he must do. Is there in fact then a teleological development for Heinrich? A *Bildung*? In his 1985 study, *Gottfried Keller: Welterfahrung, Wertstruktur, Stil*, Kaspar Locher argues yes. Locher’s book argues that all of Keller’s work—the novels, the novellas, even the poems—espouses a rigorously formulated philosophical system, conceptually consistent from one work to the next, in which self-development plays a central role. This self-development, Locher argues, consists of three stages. The first is the total lack of self-consciousness, a complete peace with the world, an as *ursprüngliche Unbefangenheit* such as Heinrich experiences at the novel’s very start. Here, the world is present as a sensory mass from

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<sup>75</sup> Ajouri, Phillip. *Erzählen nach Darwin: Die Krise der Teologie im literarischen Realismus*. De Gruyter, 2007. p. 273

which the child must learn to differentiate himself—we might think of Heinrich’s pantheistic recognition of God in a weathervane or the word “pumpernickel.” As that sensory mass becomes more and more bewildering, this state crumbles and the child must produce a self to make sense of the no-longer unified world. This new, immature self grasps at the false norms of society to recover its lost stability. The child, now an adolescent, emerges into the antinomy of the previous state, a constricting *Befangenheit*: “... das Resultat der Flucht aus der Freiheit und Verantwortlichkeit in irgend eine trügerische Gelegenheit, die Sicherheit zu gewähren scheint.”<sup>76</sup> Locher the main action of the plot under this heading. Heinrich’s artistic aspirations and romantic entanglements are only so much *Geniesucht*, “eine weitere, hartnäckig, festgehaltene falsche Rolle,”<sup>77</sup> the symptoms of which are a melancholic disposition, narcissistic self-idealization and the use of imagination as an escape from reality and personal responsibility.

After the hard knocks of experience reveal the folly of society’s empty norms attained by the subject, after much self-reflection, emerges into the third and final phase, *Weltöffentlichkeit*.<sup>78</sup> Here, the naiveté of the child is recovered—one might say *aufgehoben*, given the dialectical flavor of Locher’s argument—through a mature understanding of the workings of the world into an *unbefangene Bewußtsein*. “Es handelt sich,” as Locher puts it, “um das gleichgültige Vorhandsein von Kindlichkeit und Reife; man kann und soll naiv sein können, ‘ohne deswegen Esel zu sein.’ Keller nennt diese Aufgabe ‘die Erhaltung der Freiheit und Unbeschlossenheit unserer Augene,’ eine

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<sup>76</sup> Locher, Kaspar. *Gottfried Keller: Welterfahrung, Wertstruktur, Stil*. Francke Verlag, 1985. 76.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Schönert, Jorg. “Die bürgerlichen Tugenden” auf dem Prüfstand der Literatur. *Der alte Kanon neu: Zur revision des literarischen Kanons in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*. Ed Martin Huber und Gerhard Lauer. Springer, 1996. pp. 47-96.

Forderung, der angesichts des mächtigen Drangs nach vorschneller Deutung das Erringen und das Aufrechterhalten der reifen Unbefangenheit ist die Voraussetzung für ein gutes Leben, das heißt, *die Grundlage aller ethischer Werte in Kellers Welt.*<sup>79</sup> Here Locher draws an explicit connection between the construction of Keller's characters as ethical types and the project of self-cultivation. All of Keller's characters represent some point on Heinrich's trajectory; their archetypical character is then a sort of inner anthropology of Heinrich's development. The less respectable characters, like Würmlinger, or Meierlein, or the tailor, or the renters in the Frau Lee's apartment, or Pankraz, are representations of *Bewußtsein*, while a select few, like the joiner from Frau Margarte's shop; Hulda, the shopgirl who urges Heinrich to give up his artistic pretensions; the Count and Dorothea Schönfund; and above all Judith serve as didactic models of the unselfconscious, active acceptance of to the world attained by Heinrich at the novel's end. These characters live a life of measure and moderation, free of self-deception. They have completed the arduous task of disentangling themselves from the vanities of the world and managed to achieve a lasting happiness in it.

To this, one might respond that the wisdom that Heinrich achieves at the novel's end is rather difficult to distinguish from resignation. Though ostensibly a "happy ending"—happier, at any rate, than the ending in which Heinrich dies of shame—Heinrich's desire to serve his nation by pursuing a career in the public services takes a serious blow from the discovery that his mother has been killed, effectively, by the very forces corroding democracy itself: bureaucratic incompetence, greedy speculation, and industrialization. Heinrich's tenure as secretary to the canton does little to bolster his

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<sup>79</sup> Locher, 78.

patriotism. He learns that “jeder suchte die Wässerlein auf seine Mühle zu leiten” and that for many, “die Begriffe Republik, Freiheit und Vaterland als drei Ziegen, die sie unablässig melten, um aus der Milch allerhand kleine Ziegenkäselein zu machen, während sie scheinheilig die Worte gebrauchten, genau wie die Pharisäer und Tartüffe,”<sup>80</sup> a realization that, together with the pain of his losses, throws him into a wordless melancholy. The small measure of happiness and wisdom that Heinrich attains at the end of the novel is not “earned” by Heinrich—rather it is conferred onto him by Judith, in whose voice Heinrich recognizes the voice of maturity and experience. Until then, Heinrich’s life has been less a linear development than a series of raps across the knuckles delivered by “the School of Life,” just as his neighbor, the tinsmith, predicted it would be.

Nor can the direction in which Heinrich develops be precisely characterized as “forward,” since the meaning of each choice that Heinrich makes is always ambiguous and multiple. In Keller, the multiplicity of the spheres of human life, and the equal legitimacy of competing claims as to how one ought to live is a source of confusion, not reconciliation, particularly in those scenes in which different characters offer Heinrich contradictory advice. The most dramatic of these is without question the scene in “Der Schädel” in which Heinrich takes leave of the renters in his childhood home before setting off to Munich, and each gives him a different piece of worthless counsel. The tinsmith on the first floor, despite his famous crabbiness, offers Heinrich a Brabant Taler and tells him to enjoy himself; only later does Heinrich realize that the generosity was given in the conviction that his journeyman years will be miserable, and “the School of Life” will teach him everything he needs to know. The second renter, who makes weights and measures for a living, urges

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<sup>80</sup> *SW*, Vol. 3, 267.

Heinrich to be measured in all things, but is himself an intemperate drunk, perpetually behind on his rent. The third renter, an incompetent man who has managed to secure himself a well-remunerated public position from which he cannot be fired, is not there at all. Instead, there is only the sound of a clock ticking away, never measuring the same moment twice. The joy and the temperance respectively counseled—if not lived—by the first two men are contrasted by Keller against time, which overturns and exposes all philosophies. In actual fact, Heinrich follows neither man’s advice. The voice of experience is inaudible to the inexperienced; and then, the direness of those moments in life makes a consideration of a choice only so much *spintisieren*, as Heinrich reflects after the impassioned consideration on the importance of work in *Lebensarten*: “Dergestalt spintisierte ich über etwas, worin ich zunächst gar keine Wahl hatte, denn die Not und der Ernst des Lebens standen zum erstenmal wirklich vor der Thüre.”<sup>81</sup>

Indeed, the self-directed reflection that is the motive mechanism of Locher’s system rarely amounts to very much in *Der grüne Heinrich*. Those moments in which Heinrich grasps something significant about his own character are never sublime or elevated, but comic. When Heinrich vows never to forget the wrong that he has done to Römer, Judith bursts out laughing at his grandiloquence: “Der drollige Ausdruck, den sie gebrauchte, stellte mir die Sache noch in ein neues und lächerlich deutliches Licht, daß ich einen großen Ärger empfand und mich einen ausgesuchten Narren, Laffen und aufgeblähten Popanzschalt, der sich so blindlings habe übertölpeln lassen. Judith lachte und rief: “Denke daran, wenn man am gescheitesten zu sein glaubt, so kommt man am ehesten als ein Esel zum Vorschein!”<sup>82</sup> The loss of Heinrich’s “moralische Jungfernschaft,” as Judith playfully

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<sup>81</sup> Vol. 3, 73.

<sup>82</sup> Vol. 3, 489.

calls it, is undoubtedly a step on the path towards autonomy and authenticity. But the assumption of moral responsibility that it is the mark of manhood brings with it a desire for forgiveness and acceptance such as a mother bestows on her child. (Not accidentally, this scene recalls an earlier scene in which Frau Lee consoles Heinrich after his misadventures with Meierlein and his first experience of debt.) Self-reflection succeeds rather as an acknowledgment that one cannot go on on one's own, that one needs the help of another person. Heinrich's vows to be a better person do not make him better. The best that they do is to offer him consolation in a moment of painful crisis.

Still more telling of Keller's highly ambivalent view of teleology is the scene in which Heinrich composes his autobiography, ostensibly the text before the reader. Trying to account for his failure as an artist, Heinrich sets about a critical examination of his life from its beginning right up to that moment. The moment he begins writing, however, the auto-critical purpose of the exercise disappears from view: "Kaum war ich aber recht an der Arbeit, so vergaß ich vollkommen meinen kritischen Zweck und überließ mich der bloß beschaulichen Erinnerung an alles, was mir ehemals Lust oder Unlust erweckt hatte; jede Sorge der Gegenwart entschlief, während ich schrieb vom Morgen bis zum Abend und einen Tag wie den andern." Heinrich goes to get the book bound and, because of a misunderstanding, it is gloriously bound in green silk, costing Heinrich the rest of his money. Hunger occasions a series of fresh reflections, but these, though clearer, accomplish little more than did the first. Heinrich's conclusion is a perfect Kellerian twist on Goethe's love of natural harmony: "Die nächste Empfindung war ein Gefühl der Achtung vor der ordentlichen Folgerichtigkeit der Dinge, wie alles so schön eintreffe; und in der Tat ist nichts so geeignet, den notwendigen Weltlauf gründlich einzuprägen, als

wenn der Mensch hungert, weil er nichts gegessen hat, und nichts zu essen hat, weil er nichts besitzt, und dies, weil er nichts erworben hat.” The very necessity that occasions self-criticism also blunts it, and Keller leaves it deliberately vague as to whether it is Heinrich’s narcissism or the humanity and forgiveness he learned from Judith that softens the blow: “Überdachte ich von neuem mein Leben, trotz des grünseidenen Buches, das auf dem Tische lag, und gedachte meiner Sünden, welche jedoch, da der Hunger mich unmittelbar zum Mitleid mit mir selber stimmte, sich ziemlich glimpflich darstellten.”<sup>83</sup> Whatever the case, Heinrich’s self-reflections fall into the same category of useless aesthetic activity the endless cross-hatching to which he despairs of success as an artist. The one example of moral reform in *Grüner Heinrich* is the example of Heinrich’s father. Herr Lee, Heinrich tells the reader, left his home village a simple stonemason and returned a citizen who unceasingly did good for his fellow Swiss. Tellingly, he lives on for Heinrich not as an example to follow but as an unattainable ideal compared to which Heinrich himself is perpetually *unreif*—perpetually green.

Keller’s deep skepticism of happiness and self-understanding would suggest, then, a strong affinity between *Der grüne Heinrich* and what is usually referred to in literary histories as “the novel of disillusionment”—a later variant of the Realist novel in which society is no longer observed with the dispassionate eye of the zoologist, but now plays an active role as the proximate antagonist of the individual’s happiness and authentic being. (Flaubert’s *Sentimental Education*, Dickens’ *Great Expectations*, and Fontane’s *Effi Briest*, all dated from 1860 onward, are typically placed under this heading.) Maturity here is not the gaining of happiness, but its loss, not the establishment of personal authenticity, but a

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<sup>83</sup> Vol. 4, 59-60.

stoic acceptance of its impossibility. The strongest argument for such a reading is simply the plot of the novel itself: Heinrich fails at every single one of the goals he sets for himself at the beginning of the novel because he grasps only too late the two hard truths of life, according to Keller: that one must work to eat, and that all human endeavor is cut short by death. The novel's end, though not as tragic as in the first version, is hardly a "happy" ending. But then, here too, the fundamental ambivalence of Keller's ethics prevents the reader from making such a judgment. If Heinrich does not achieve a lasting happiness or wisdom at the novel's end, as does Wilhelm Meister, he is certainly granted many moments of happiness throughout. He experiences patriotic pride and a powerful sense of belonging during his town's performance of *Wilhelm Tell*; under Römer he learns the satisfaction of true artistic labor; in the extensive landscape descriptions, as when Heinrich and Anna ride back to her house after the *Tell* performance, or when Heinrich finally leaves his village to go to Munich, Nature itself seems to come alive and embrace him. Such moments of the "right life" are hardly lost when reality inevitably brings Heinrich back down to earth, when the actor who plays Tell squabbles in costume with an innkeeper over the placement of a road, or Römer proves to be mad. Here, Keller's ambivalence cuts the other way; a timidity as far as claiming a lasting happiness goes hand in hand with a stubborn refusal to sacrifice the Ideal—personal authenticity, immediacy of human relations, a reconciliation between man and the material world—to the determining power of reality. The very multiplicity of Keller's characters, the way that one is always balanced against another, is a way of preserving, at least along "the green paths of remembrance," life's openness, its sense of possibility.

In these moments of happiness, *Der grüne Heinrich* demonstrates a rather different understanding of human desire than the unsatisfied longing that, in David Wellbery's view, serves as the animating drive of the *Bildungsroman*. Desire as hoping for what might come, as longing for what one cannot have—that desire is characteristic primarily of Heinrich's relationship with Anna. Because the cousins do not touch, except for a single kiss, and because Anna's illness soon ends the relationship, except for the day of the *Tellfest*, when Heinrich rides after her and kisses her, Heinrich's feelings for her are continuously marked by the sense that the delight of the present consists entirely of imagining what the future will bring—apparent in their continuous use of the formal address, which makes the unused *du* seem like a coin, saved away for later. In Judith's arms, however, Heinrich learns to forego the future and the past; he falls, as in the quote I cited above, out of time, tacitly accepting joy and sorrow, wisdom and stupidity all at once. He learns to forget the ambitions and the conceits that drive him from place to place in search of happiness, and he learns to forget the pain of the humiliations of his youth; he is able to see life not as a perpetual driving forward; he learns, at least momentarily, to survey it as a balance sheet on which every moment of sadness is paid with one of happiness, and every moment of insight is matched with the peaceful realization of the futility of all thought, all self-reflection, all judgment. When desire is fulfilled it is suspended, so is the process of judgment by means of which certain experiences and modes of behavior are privileged over others, selected out of the present and projected as desirable into the future, telescoping into the present the future-oriented process of *Bildung* and the narrative momentum of the text. It would be most accurate to say, then, that *Der grüne Heinrich*

does not exclusively tell a story of self-realization and self-development; it is not itself a *Bildungsroman* so much as it contains one.

Critics of the first version of *Der grüne Heinrich* noted the *Enthaltsamkeit* with which Keller treated all ways of living, and held it as one of the as one of the numerous failures of a promising first novel. In his remarks on Keller in his *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur*, Schmidt observes, in a remark he explicitly connects to Keller, that

Der moderne Novellist vermeidet mit einer gewissen Aengstlichkeit jedes moralische Urtheil: man soll nicht richten, sondern anschauen; aber durch diese scheinbare Objektivität wird nicht selten gerade das Urtheil verwirrt. Indem in jeder Handlung das Naturgesetz von der Bewegung und Verknüpfung der Vorstellung sich zeigt, wird man leicht zu den Mißverständnis verführt, es bestehe zwischen dem Werth der Individuen kein erheblicher Unterschied, und je nach der eignen Stimmung des Poeten klingt durch sein Werk entweder der Refrain durch: alles auf Erden ist gleich göttlich, oder alles ist gleich erbärmlich.<sup>84</sup>

Schmidt observes that a morally instructive work does consist simply of portraying characters who are exclusively good triumphing over characters who are exclusively bad, but rather showing how, through the exercise of the will, a single character containing both good and bad qualities can turn itself towards the good. In his utter lack of will, Schmidt continues, Heinrich simply strains credibility, and in seeing him bumble from one mistake to another without ever successfully learning from any of them, the novel, though brilliantly written, become repetitive and dispiriting. It not only abdicates its instructive duty as a work of art—it fails as a work of Realism. Evidently this criticism weighed heavily enough on Keller that he felt compelled to change the ending of his novel, which allows Heinrich to choose freely, and not from financial pressure, to give up art and enter the public service. At the same time, Keller took no steps to make the second version of *Der grüne Heinrich* a morally instructive work, intended to produce the *sittliches*

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<sup>84</sup> Schmidt, 540.

*Benehmen* that Schmidt believed was central to the Realist project; Heinrich's development remained, as I have argued above, as ambiguous as ever.

What, then, did Keller offer as a counter model to the teleology of the *Bildungsroman* or the moral instruction of the *Grenzboten* circle? The answer, I would like to suggest, lies in the unique, highly digressive structure of *Der grüne Heinrich*. Although ostensibly rooted in Heinrich's perspective, Keller's "protagonist" disappears for large portions of the text—to tell the story of his father, of young Meretlein, of Albertus Zwiehahn, of Wurmlinger and Meierlein, and many others. And in this, the passivity that Schmidt so disdains in Heinrich is in fact simply an openness and a receptivity to the world around him. Heinrich's life is of value—as is any life—because other lives cross it, pass through it, become knotted and entangled in it. At the novel's end, where other Realist works end in marriage, Judith scorns the idea. She refuses to make use of others for her own happiness. Heinrich's own moral diffidence, and Keller's, demonstrates echoes this sentiment in refusing to subordinate others to the narrative of his own self-development. Instead, Heinrich subordinate himself to them. Where the young Heinrich, raging with pain and loss, torments the creatures in his menagerie and destroys them when he loses interest with them, an older Heinrich who has learned the hard way something of the ways of the world, simply takes pleasure in the company of others. As he writes his autobiography in a state of utter destitution, he is able to lose himself in modes of being different from his own. In such moments, the typified *Lebensarten* that Heinrich encounters are not, as Ajouri argues, arranged in sequence, but rather exist side by side, as a kind of ethical compendium, a collection of ways of being in the world that, like the well-meaning neighbors offering

advice to Frau Lee, are both contradictory and complementary, each one arguing over the other.

In this respect, the humanity modeled by *Der grüne Heinrich* is not one of synthesis, as it was for Vischer—the synthesis of surface and depth, form and content, essence and appearance, the harmony that comes with the unity of motive and action, narrative cause and effect—but is rather one based on the tolerance of difference, a resolved acceptance of the overwhelming and irreconcilable ambiguity that plague every person at every turn. Heinrich's failures as a person, the painful irresolution that Heinrich faces every time that he must make a choice, make him an ideal narrator for Keller's *Lebensbuch*, in that he seeks out multiplicity, disagreement and difference. He is uniquely attuned to contradiction and uncertainty. The *allgemein Menschliche* of *Der grüne Heinrich* lies specifically in rendering truthfully and honestly the pain of irresolution, in refraining from adding to that pain by proffering a false and artificial resolution and pronouncing it real. *Der grüne Heinrich* instructs by not instructing, but by showing at every turn the folly of instruction. Happiness, such as it is in *Der grüne Heinrich*, is not something that can be cultivated in its reader because it is not attainable; others bring it into Heinrich's life, where it shines brilliantly for a moment and is gone.

## **V. Conclusion**

In the introduction to this dissertation I observed that as an artistic movement Realism in Germany was characterized by two key oppositions. First, the Realist author sought to represent the world "as it is," such as it had never been rendered before in the German language, *and* in a poetically heightened manner that beautified and clarified it.

And second, the Realist author hoped to have an instructive effect on his readership without either sinking into the didacticism of the moral weeklies or retreating into quietism, into impassivity. What seemed at least in theory to be irreconcilable opposites would prove in actual fact—on the page—to be complementary terms synthesized by the poetic imagination and technical skill of the author. Keller, I have argued, is unique among these German authors for the emphasis that he places on modes of comportment, or *Lebensarten*, in his approach to this aesthetic problematic. Of the works of the Realist period, *Der grüne Heinrich* demonstrates by far the most serious commitment to the question of how one ought to live, and a far greater curiosity about how people *do* live, than any other work, literary or critical. Such questions risked disturbing the narrative unity of cause and effect, of motive and action that German Realism praised so highly. In this respect, Keller's novel proves itself far more interested in depths than in surfaces, far more concerned with the nature of belief than, say, showing scenes of worship in a village church.

It would not be accurate, however, to say that Keller is a discontent in Realism, or that his work is anti-Realistic. Keller was, after all, close friends with Vischer, without whose considerable input and tireless personal encouragement there would likely never have been a second version of *Der grüne Heinrich*. Though in review Keller did not spare Gotthelf, Storm, and Auerbach, he corresponded with them actively and solicited their opinions on his work. What I wished to argue here is that Keller at once embraces and subverts the Realist program's emphasis on synthesis, clarity, and unity in its depictions of ordinary life. Like Vischer's *Idealisierungen*, the characters in *Der grüne Heinrich* have been clarified into a perfectly rounded balance of disposition, appearance, and action. It is for that reason that so many of the anecdotes and asides in the novel—each itself

perfectly streamlined to run from its premise to its conclusion—have the feel of fables or parables, gaining as they do their dramatic impulse from the way that Keller pulls these types together and watches them explode apart again, often adding a comic fillip to drive the point of the story home. (The agonizing death of the tailor comes to mind here, as does Wurmlinger's leap of faith into a fish net.) But, at the same time, Keller layers and combines these types and these parables, whose meaning appears at first to be so transparent, into narrative constellations that are anything but unified. When, after a lecture on materialism, Heinrich observes a spider tirelessly weaving its web, is that an emblem of the indomitable human will, or blind nature, which appears purposive but is in fact pure mechanism? Heinrich himself does not know. In place of Vischer's "Harmonie und Versöhnung," *Der grüne Heinrich* favors everything that is unfinished, open-ended, incomplete—green.

Keller's Realism, then, is devoted to the painstaking representation of life's ambiguities, without sacrificing, as does the chaotic modernist novel, the belief that meaning is nonetheless possible, that clarity is, at any rate, an ideal to strive for. And in offering a clear-eyed, unsentimental, one might say, Stoic representation of life's pain and confusion, *Der grüne Heinrich* is able to preserve that element of humanity and dignity Schmidt found in depictions of bourgeois diligence, and that Vischer believed could only be offered by art insofar as it presented itself, and life, as a harmonious whole. What is striking about the second version of *Der grüne Heinrich* is the way that the disappointments and defeats that the first version treats as tragic are presented as ordinary, and in that way, something marvelous. It is, ironically, the pessimism of Keller's worldview, the central place that he affords indecision, missed opportunity, and the pain of irretrievable loss that

allowed him to create a work that found the humane in offering the reader not the false hopes of a *verklärte* reality, but the compassion of ordinary human suffering and confusion, rendered without sentiment or judgment.

### *III. Der Schauplatz der Dinge: The Role of Description in Die Leute von Seldwyla*

#### **1. Introduction**

The biographical study of Gottfried Keller written by Adolf Muschg in 1977 opens with a curious anecdote about the young Keller recounted by an unnamed friend of Keller's. He recalls a long hike through the woods that he had taken with Keller, who was in usually high spirits that day; for the entirety of their walk, Keller leapt from rock to rock, joked, and chattered amiably—until, at the end of the hike, they'd noticed that Keller had lost his walking stick. To his surprise, Keller, who had frequently chided his friends in his Berlin circle against the unmanliness of tears, sat down on a rock, and began to weep inconsolably. Later, it was discovered that the walking stick had been the only remaining of possession that Keller had of his father. But upon reflection this seeming explanation only deepened the mystery. Keller's father had been dead for decades; since then, Keller had faced a good number of far more pressing hardships, poverty, displacement, a failed artistic career. Why cry now? What memories, and what hopes had his friend invested into that unremarkable object?<sup>85</sup>

As Muschg notes, the mysterious nature of the commerce between human beings and objects is one of the predominant themes in Keller's work. One need think here only of the skull of the ill-fated Albertus Zwielhahn that follows the young Heinrich as he leaves to Munich, serving both as a grim *memento mori* and an amiable travel companion; or the

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<sup>85</sup> Adolf Muschg, *Gottfried Keller*. Kindler, 1977. p. 7.

deeply emotional relationship that Pankraz, the young moper, has with the mashed potatoes that his mother serves him and his sister for dinner every night, at once bitterly resented for their meagerness, and blown up his imagination into a fantastic battlefield on which he battles his sister for his proper portion. That, in their association with people, objects take on a life of their own right, that they are, in a sense, also citizens of the world, is a discovery made by the young Heinrich when a salesman comes to his mother's house peddling the complete works of Goethe. These inanimate volumes, which the friendless Heinrich describes as "eine Schar glänzender, und singender Geister," teach the aspiring painter a proper respect for the material world:

Es war die hingebende Liebe an alles Gewordene und Bestehende, welche das Recht und die Bedeutung jeglichen Dinges ehrt und den Zusammenhang und die Tiefe der Welt empfindet. Diese Liebe steht höher als das künstlerische Herausstellen des einzelnen zu eigennützigem Zwecke, welches zuletzt immer zu Kleinlichkeit und Laune führt; sie steht auch höher als das Geniessen und Absondern nach Stimmungen und romantischen Liebhabereien, und nur sie allein vermag eine gleichmässige und dauernde Glut zu geben. Es kam mir nun alles und immer neu, schon und merkwürdig vor und ich begann, nicht nur die Form, sondern auch den Inhalt, das Wesen und die Geschichte der Dinge zu sehen und zu lieben.<sup>86</sup>

To respect each individual object as having its own right, in the full political sense of that term, and its own significance is the lesson imparted by Goethe to the young Heinrich. Heinrich is dazzled by Goethe's ability to pick individual objects out of the flux of the world and to fix their meaning, not only by slavishly copying them or by picking out and exaggerating their singularity, but by demonstrating, with his Olympian prose, the web of mutual necessity that entwines things with one another, as well as with the human beings in their midst. This unity prevents the text from dissolving into a repetitive list of objects, like the Bible's accounts of livestock, or the exotic treasures of the *Arabian Nights*.

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<sup>86</sup> *SW*. Vol. 3., 89

This moment of artistic insight comes at a decisive moment for the Heinrich, just as he is about to embark in earnest on his career as a painter, and the tribute doubles for him as a profession of artistic faith, a programmatic statement staking out the aesthetic as unique mode of perception and being in the world. But can it also double as a programmatic statement for the deeply expressive and dramatically rich descriptions of objects, clothing, and landscapes in Keller? Certainly, the language tracks closely with that of the critical and programmatic pronouncements of Realism published concurrently with the first version of *Der grüne Heinrich*, which wondered how a genuinely realistic literature, rooted in empirical reality, might be fashioned in Germany. In Vischer's *Ästhetik*, he argued that, since such a literature had never actually existed—apart from Goethe, whose *Wilhelm Meister* was admitted as a qualified exception—the modern novel might look back to the epic and its mastery of “objectivity”, the technique by means of which the author's voice retreated back completely and events and environments simply emerged as though of their own right, “als tue [der Dichter] nichts dazu, als mache sich die Fabel von selbst.”<sup>87</sup> The absence of the distorting, poeticizing presence of the author introduces verisimilitude, likelihood, and believability as categories of aesthetic judgment; the story, and its environment, must seem to come from life itself, and not from the author's imagination. To this, Vischer also adds the significant addition of ‘epic totality; the technique of presenting objects, events, and characters in their necessary relation to one another; the limiting of digression and useless details as in Sterne and Dickens, to those details that only serve to express the whole of events, the unity of the world described. The same language can be found in Julian Schmidt, in Gustav Freytag, in Otto Ludwig, and in Theodor

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<sup>87</sup> Vischer, *Ästhetik*, 179.

Fontane—the descriptive detail is the point at which *Wirklichkeit*, or *die Mannigfaltigkeit der Dinge* reveals the *Notwendigkeit* or the *Einheit* or the *Zusammenhang* of the world, combining surface and depth into a single representation. By way of practical example, we might consider here the way that Theodor Fontane begins his *Irrungen, Wirrungen* with a description of the dilapidated, would-be castle on the Invalidenstrasse that is the setting for the story—a detail that sets the story for the reader in a world that is recognizably his own, while providing a unity of setting and motivation for its characters.

Scholars like Yomb May and Michael Andermatt have argued that the Realist program offers, at the very least, a framework with which to approach Keller's use of description—as a social reality mediated through individual details.<sup>88</sup> But the contemporary scholarship largely tends to jettison the grander claims of Realism in order to focus on the description as a technique, by means of which poetic imagination and empirical reality are synthesized—in other words, as transfiguration, or *Verklärung*. Ernst Osterkamp, for example, explores the links between the descriptions of landscapes in *Der grüne Heinrich* and landscape painting, which he characterizes as an *allegoresis*. Sabine Schneider has used the concept of *Verklärung* to approach the difficulty of categorizing *Der grüne Heinrich* as an autobiography and to describe the process by which Heinrich idealizes and erases the women in his life, while Antje Harnisch argues that Keller's descriptions of female clothing as it is donned by men introduces an element of ambiguity that disrupts fixity and continuity sought by Realist poetics.<sup>89</sup> (I have already mentioned

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<sup>88</sup> Cf. May, Yomb. “Die Leute von Seldwyla als Paradigma des bürgerlichen Realismus.” *Die Leute von Seldwyla: Kritische Studien*. Peter Lang, 2007. pp. 71-92; Andermatt, Michael. “Kontingenz als Problem des bürgerlichen Realismus: Raumdarstellung bei Keller und Fontane.” *Vom Realismus zur Moderne*. Ed. Ursula Amrein and Regina Dieterle. De Gruyter, 2008.

<sup>89</sup> Harnish, Antje. “‘Die Sucht, den Mann zu spielen’.” *Gottfried Kellers Realismus*. *The German Quarterly*. 68/2. 1995. pp. 147-159.

Reiner Nägele's analysis of the affective role played by description in *Die Leute von Seldwyla*, comparing the process to the waking dreams in Kafka's prose.) The focal point of these studies is the manner in which life—unruly, indifferent to human agency, and cryptic in its meaning as it is—is turned by poetic consciousness into a dense weave of signs that never achieves complete coherence. Typical of these essays is the skepticism with which they regard the more troublesome concepts of the Realist program, apart from its emphasis on the conception of reality and of the artwork as a cogent unity, a totality governed by inner necessity. These concepts clash with the modern view of Keller's texts—and all texts—as fundamentally open, their contradictions unresolvable; reality is treated as the liminal, the unassimilable, the extraneous.

It is these concepts that I wish to pick out of the above tribute to Goethe, which provides, I believe, a different path for understanding this notion of inner coherence and necessity. This different understanding emerges in the second sentence of the quote, in the playful metaphoric language Heinrich employs to contrast Goethe against other modes of perceiving and representing the physical world. On the one hand, Keller rejects the “Herausstehlen” of details “zu eigennützigem Zwecke,” a rejection of an overly close attention to detail without consideration for the whole with which Realism charged the French novel, the authors of *Junges Deutschland*, and the weaker works of Charles Dickens and Sir Walter Scott; he also rejects the “Geniessen und Absondern,” here expressly linked to romanticism, which inflates and distorts individual details according to the author's fantasy. Both examples use the metaphoric language of a mode of comportment, an inner disposition, to describe an aesthetic technique, the former a kind of undignified pilfering that leads to insignificance, that fails because of its narrowness and selfishness, while the

latter is an unrestrained, over-passionate pleasure-taking, a kind of aesthetic gluttony. Both fail because they are fundamentally selfish, too oriented towards the self and its demands. Against these Goethe is contrasted as a “hingebende Liebe,” a selfless devoted love, a care, a stewardship. This language might be taken as a colorful and playful way to add dramatic tension to the consideration of aesthetic technique by, in effect, anthropomorphizing them. But, in this chapter, I will argue, that the relationship works in reverse as well—that each technique has its roots in, stands in for, and fosters in its reader a disposition towards the material reality. Inner coherence, necessity, harmony, resolution have, as I have argued earlier, an ethical valence for Keller and the Realists in addition to an aesthetic one; “Zusammenhang” may be understood not simply as a principle guiding description as technique but as a mode of being, a value towards which the individual might aspire. This is precisely the question that I will approach in my chapter, what is the relationship between description, and the modes of comportment towards the world, what I called *Lebensarten*, in the last chapter?

To that end, I will move away from *Der grüne Heinrich* and examine Keller’s novella cycle, *Die Leute von Seldwyla*. For Gottfried Keller, the relationship between the depiction of objects, both man made and natural, and the task of representing the world “as it is” is as its most complex in the richly descriptive novellas. Keller’s intent in writing the cycle, he explains in the oft-cited preface to its first volume, published in 1856, just after the first volume of *Der grüne Heinrich*, is to paint life in the titular Swiss village, a provincial backwater that lives in happy ignorance and perpetual resentment of Zürich, the seat of administrative power, culture and industry in Switzerland. Because Seldwyla’s founders thoughtlessly placed the town thirty minutes away from the nearest navigable

river, the village has neither industry nor trade; nor can the village grow crops and sell them, like the fully rural precincts of Switzerland. Consequently, the distinguishing characteristic of Seldwyla life is its utter lack of productivity. The village's only product is its wine, which only further slows the pace of life in the village, and its timber; its primary occupation is the borrowing and lending of money. The Seldwylers are *Geschäftsleute*, which, as Keller dryly puts it, only means that they are adept at the art of profiting from the toil of others. The only hope for the young people of Seldwyla looking to make their way in the world is to join a foreign army, or to try their luck in one of the far-flung corners of the earth newly opened at the dawn of the Age of Capital. Seldwylers, who just decades before would have lived and died without traveling fifty miles in their life, may now be found in the unlikeliest places as far away from home as India or California.

Part introduction, part statement of purpose, this preface gives us to understand, as we read the novellas that follow, that the descriptions we will encounter are intended first and foremost to evoke this time (the 1850s) and this place (provincial Switzerland). Here description encompasses the sociological eye that Keller casts on the tools and products of labor; the painterly interest he takes in natural landscapes and the interiors of his characters' homes; his recounting of what they eat, what they wear, their physical appearances, their knick-knacks, their trinkets, and the cast-off objects that may be found all over town. For Keller, as is apparent in his preface, the physical world is the common plane on which society and the individual meet. To be *of* Seldwyla means to be subject to the influence of the particular material conditions that hold sway there: its geography and its climate, which in turn influence the Seldwylers' prospects for work. Work, as the actual production and transformation of one's own material circumstances, is the key concept for Keller here.

Everything about life in Seldwyla, from the village's religious attitudes to its politics to the way the villagers spend their leisure time, springs from their attitude towards work. When there is work, Keller observes, life in Seldwyla runs smoothly; if there is political or religious strife, it may be assumed that the Seldwylers are hard up.

In the first chapter of my dissertation, I argued that what makes Keller a particularly worthy object of study for the scholar of Realism is his highly idiosyncratic approach to the so-called *Realismusproblem*, the question of which aesthetic disposition and, consequently, which literary techniques, are most properly suited to represent the world. This approach, I argued, was marked above all by the centrality of all its formal elements, from the construction of characters to the development of plot and the placement of essayistic digression, of the ethical, which I opposed to *the moral* as the question of character, value, and disposition that precedes moral action. For Keller, I argued, representing the world is inextricable from the question of how one ought to live in it. What was true for *Der grüne Heinrich*, namely, that its formal elements were a means of addressing the question of whether a right life was possible in a world in which it is increasingly impossible to determine one's own fate, remains true for the descriptive passages of his novella cycle. Though the enumeration and representation of Seldwyla as a material environment serves to give the reader clues to the inner life of its residents, their position in the world, their aspirations, and their self-perceptions, the digressive character of these passages, which frequently halt a propulsive plot in order to describe a gingerbread house purchased by an orphaned girl or the pot of mashed potatoes over which two impoverished siblings bicker at every mealtime, serve in fact to equalize the position between person and thing. Instead of the object performing the labor of characterizing its

owner by serving as status symbol or social marker, things appear in Keller's novellas as entities in their own right. In addition to doing the work of representation, the description of objects in Keller opens the question of what modes of comportment are possible not only *towards* those objects, but towards the entire physical world in a society for whom the object's only possible existence is as a tool, a resource, or a commodity, as a producer or a bearer of value.

A similar emphasis on the ethical may be found in the highly metaphorical character of Keller's descriptions of Seldwyla. Just as Seldwyla is both a place and, as Keller clarifies in his briefer introduction to the second cycle (written, he claims with a wink, in response to seven Swiss villages proclaiming themselves the inspiration for the fictional town), a way of life that has spread out over all of Europe, so too do individual objects double as conceits, standing in for a deeper consideration of some *Lebensart*. What starts as a description of a card game among the local functionaries of the town of Goldach becomes in Keller's hands a picture of the world itself, its fortunes ever rising and falling. To Jobst, a journeyman comb-maker, a tiny bedbug crawling along the wall besides his bed is a perfect illustration of the journeyman worker, condemned to wander the earth without cease to earn his daily bread. Whereas, as I argued in the last chapter, every character in *Der grüne Heinrich* was emblematic of some ethic, here the descriptive passages serve the same purpose as the *Sinnbilder* decorating the lintels of the houses the village of Goldach, each portraying a virtue to which the house is uniquely devoted—or so it seems to the tailor Wenzel Strapinski, in a moment of poetic fancy. In Keller's treatment, Seldwyla is both a place where the worst tendencies of his time have free reign and, at the same time, a place

where his protagonists struggle to live rightly, to find a lasting and genuine happiness. (In the Alemmanic dialect that was once spoken by the town Seldwyla means “happy place.”)

Considering thematic complexity of the *Seldwyla* cycle, a comprehensive view of the entire project would lie beyond the scope of this dissertation. As with my treatment of *Der grüne Heinrich*, I will investigate the relationship between two tendencies in Keller, one the observation and representation of ordinary life in his native Switzerland as agriculture and handicraft were overtaken by investment and speculation; the other an inquiry into what I referred to in the last chapter as *Lebensarten*, inner dispositions towards the world, ways of living in it.<sup>90</sup> I will ask: what is the relationship between these two tendencies? Are they in conflict? Do they bolster one another? How, specifically, does they manifest in Keller’s prose? And how can they deepen our understanding of Realism as a self-designation on the part of a work or an author?

To answer this question, I will take a brief detour into a story by Keller’s contemporary, Adalbert Stifter. Like the *Seldwyla* novellas, “Kalkstein,” from Stifter’s *Bunte Steine* collection, which appeared the year before the *Seldwyla* novellas, grapples explicitly with the program of Realism. In telling the story of the friendship between a land surveyor, dispatched to a far-flung region covered with limestone hills, and the local parish priest, the story explicitly asks, in its framing narrative, whether it is the ordinary—here the figure of the priest—or the remarkable that is literature’s proper object. Stifter’s story makes its allegiance clear by paying minute attention to common objects of seemingly little importance, like the dishes and utensils carried by the land surveyor, which are rendered in stark, spare prose completely shorn of the associations of characterization and social

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<sup>90</sup> In the *Seldwyla* cycle, Keller seems to prefer the term *Lebensweise* to *Lebensart*. I will use the two interchangeably throughout.

placement. “Kalkstein”, I will argue, sheds light on the reciprocal relationship between ethics and realism in Keller by confronting the same crisis, equal parts perceptive and ethical, laid out in the *Seldwyla* novellas: the disharmony between human beings and their material surroundings sown by the lending of money and the investment of capital. In Stifter the close observation of objects and, by extension, the work of description is meant to bring about a change of disposition in the author and, above all, in the reader. Martin Heidegger noted that for Stifter the poetic word is not only a sign but also a “call” that enjoins the reader to turn his attention to the invisible, all-pervasive natural forces that hold sway over the earth.

It is this notion of Realism as a disposition, a way of comporting oneself to the world that I wish to highlight in both authors. As in “Kalkstein”, the descriptive *Sinnbilder* in the *Seldwyla* novellas are directed against the increasing disparity of appearance and reality in the world observed by Keller. *Die Leute von Seldwyla* is filled with cases of mistaken identity, transformed appearance, cross-dressing, and what might now be termed “conspicuous consumption”; Keller’s protagonists, like his reader, must learn to free themselves of these mirages of capitalism. I wish, however, to highlight an important and instructive distinction between the two authors: where in Stifter’s story close description is meant to foster an ethic of fixity and constancy—in his “Vorrede” to *Bunte Steine*, Stifter compares himself to the naturalist observing the quiverings of his compass, Keller’s prose embraces above all an ethic of play. For the protagonists of the *Seldwyla* novellas, the act of poetic imagination by which ordinary objects are transformed into ethical symbols substitutes for the productive, personally satisfying labor of which their life is otherwise empty. Gerhard Kaiser has pointed out that Keller frequently associates writing with the

act of spinning, or weaving, a handicraft that produces no fixed, final object. In this way, description in Keller does not so much clarify things so that their essences may be grasped, as the discourse around Realism held that literature must do, so much as it subjects to them to an ongoing process of transformation whose purpose in joining an ethical dimension to physical description is to imagine an inhospitable world as being more humane, however temporarily.

It is not the simply the case, then, that an “ethical Realism” is a literary genre in which different *Lebensarten* are represented. Rather the ethical Realism developed by Keller holds that, despite the vividness with which it represents the Switzerland of Keller’s time, that reality is transient, damaged, incomplete—imperiled not only by the damage done to it by the social changes that Keller witnessed in his time, but by the transient nature of all human life. An ethical Realism tasks itself with rescuing this world, to imagine how it might look if it were fixed. That is its ethical dimension. But its Realist character lies in its awareness that such a project cannot succeed. Keller, like his protagonists, is a “schwerfüßige Träumer,” to use Gerhard Kaiser’s phrase. The *Sinnbilder* in the *Seldwyla* novellas are recompense for the compromises demanded by the world of work, which offers nothing in return for the loss of the comforts of home and of personal fulfillment in labor. In the final analysis, *Die Leute von Seldwyla* depicts the world in order to console the reader for having to live in it.

## **2. Description as Socio-psychology**

I would like to begin this chapter by examining a particularly rich passage from *Die Leute von Seldwyla*, the description of Züß Bünzlin’s drawer in “Die drei Gerechten Kammacher”, the fourth novella of the first cycle. In this novella, three journeyman comb-

makers toil for a master in hopes of becoming master themselves. After a time, their master, who cheats them by insisting that they all sleep in one bed, and by serving them sauerkraut and insisting that it is fish, announces that he can only keep one of them. Dietel, a young journeyman comb-maker from Swabia, decides to forego the competition and secure his livelihood by marrying a young Seldwyla woman. Searching through the town, he comes upon Züß Bünzlin, the twenty-eight year old daughter of a washerwoman, who, Dietel discovers, has a *Guldbrief* of seven hundred guilders. This *Brief* is kept

in einer kleinen lackierten Lade, wo sie auch die Zinsen davon, ihren Taufzettel, ihren Konfirmationsschein und ein bemaltes und vergoldetes Osterei bewahrte; ferner ein halbes Dutzend silberne Teelöffel, ein Vaterunser mit Gold auf einen roten dursichtigen Glasstoff gedruckt, den sie Menschenhaut nannte, einen Kirschkern, in welchen das Leiden Christi geschnitten war, und eine Büchse aus durchbrochenem und mit rotem Taft unterlegten Elfenbein, in welcher ein Spiegelchen war und ein silberner Fingerhut; ferner war darin ein anderer Kirschkern, in welchem ein winziges Kegelspiel klapperte, eine Nuß, worin eine kleine Muttergottes hinter Glas lag, wenn man sie öffnete, ein silbernes Herz, worin ein Riechschwämmchen steckte, und eine Bonbonbüchse aus Zitronenschale, auf deren Deckel eine Erdbeere gemalt war und in welcher eine goldene Stecknadel auf Baumwolle lag, die ein Vergißmeinnicht vorstellte, und ein Medaillon mit einem Monument von Haaren; ferner ein Bündel vergilbter Papiere mit Rezepten und Geheimnissen, ein Fläschen mit Hofmannstropfen, ein anders mit kölnisches Wasser, und eine Büchse mit Moschus; eine andere, worin ein Endchen Marderdreck lag, und ein Körbchen, aus wohlriechenden Halmen geflochten, sowie eines aus Glasperlen und Gewürznageln zusammen gesetzt; endlich ein kleines Buch, in himmelblaues geripptes Papier gebunden, mit silbernem Schnitt, betitelt: Goldene Lebensregeln für die Jungfrau als Braut, Gattin und Mutter; und ein Traumbüchlein, ein Briefsteller, fünf oder sechs Liebesbriefe und ein Schnepfer zum Aderlassen.<sup>91</sup>

Having finished the description of this drawer of curiosities, the description passes over to a collection of presents given to Züß by other journeymen who, like Dietel, have fallen in love with her: a temple made of cardboard with a love-letter hidden away in a secret compartment, a set of bound calendar books, little soap-figurines. It then returns to the story of Dietel and his fellow comb-makers Jobst and Fridolin, who, catching wind of Dietel's plan, now compete to marry Züs for her money. The three decide to run a race, and once again it is Dietel, who, by choosing not to compete, wins Züs's hand. The two

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<sup>91</sup> *SW*, Vol. 4, 228.

purchase the house from the master, but their marriage proves an unhappy one. Jobst hangs himself, when Fridolin sees his body, he goes mad and begins to run without cease.

The passage describing the miniature *Wunderkammer* in Züß's drawer is immediately striking for the sheer density of its descriptive detail. One is immediately taken not only with the exhaustive length of the list, but also with the heterogeneous character of the objects reverently guarded by Züß. Some of these objects, particularly the certificates of confirmation and baptism, are obviously of great personal and religious significance to their owner, as are the more dubiously religious but nonetheless fascinating trinkets like the painted Easter egg, the tiny piece of glass painted with the Lord's prayer, and the cherry pit depicting the suffering of Christ. The sheer variety of the other objects, however, reveal this piousness to be an acquisitiveness that snatches up any and all objects that strike its owners' fancy—a thimble, a bit of ivory, a little candy box made of lemon peel, a needle, and perhaps most tellingly, a tiny mirror. The passage is particularly striking for its earthy emphasis on the varieties of texture and odor: the sweet smelling cologne, the astringent ether, the foul duck droppings. Like Pantagruel's mouth, Züß's drawer contains an entire world, a micro-cosmos whose completely unrelated elements are united by the curiosity and, less charitably, the avarice they must have stoked in their owner.

Of the ten novellas that comprise the *Seldwyla* cycle, "Die drei gerechten Kammacher", with its themes of romantic love as co-extensive with social standing, and economic self-interest, is likely Keller's strongest point of commonality with the familiar tropes of the Realist novel. While Züß, as the daughter of a washerwoman, ostensibly belongs to the lowest rung of Seldwyla society, the attention that Keller pays to the cheap trinkets that she owns, the care with which he depicts the interior space of her room, as

well as her concern with her own marriageability place her in the liminal space between poverty and respectability inhabited by characters like Charles Dickens' Miss Jellyby or Balzac's Eugénie Grandet.<sup>92</sup> That her sole point of desirability is her small dowry gives the reader to understand that, as with her counterparts in Dickens and Balzac, the only event of importance in her life will be her marriage. The inclusion of the *Goldene Regel* in her drawer, a religious book enjoining its female reader to sexual continent, casts Züß's Christianity not as spirituality or as a cosmology but rather as pure economic self-interest, a means of securing for herself the best possible marriage. In the passage that follows, detailing Züs's unconsummated love-affairs with various journeyman passing through Seldwyla, Keller paints her chastity as not only hypocritical, in that she encourages the attentions and accepts the lovingly made gifts of men in whom she has no interest, but as ultimately indistinguishable from the same acquisitiveness with which the master comb-maker exploits Jobst, Fridolin and Dietel. (Though comb-makers' interest in Züs is hardly more noble—each character in the story seeks to exploit the others.) In this respect, the character of Züß, at once piously chaste and flirtatious, calls to mind Nietzsche's many unfortunate epigrams on "woman", such as "Du willst ihn für dich einnehmen? So stelle dich vor ihm verlegen—" or "Wem im Glück ich dankbar bin? Gott! Und meiner Schneiderin."<sup>93</sup> For Züß, religious wonder is hardly to be separated from a childish fascination with baubles and trinkets, many of which are products of the sort of unskilled mass production that would eventually replace the laborious craftsmanship of the comb-

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<sup>92</sup> The former, from *Bleak House*, is the penniless daughter of a woman who spends all day writing philanthropic letters, leaving her family in a state complete poverty and neglect. She later marries the equally penniless son of the instructor of a failing dancing academy. The latter, from the novella of the same name, is the daughter of a wealthy but miserly vintner who eats little and goes to sleep early so as to avoid wasting candles. She falls in love with her dandy-ish spendthrift cousin.

<sup>93</sup> Nietzsche, Vol. 15., 185.

makers. Züß's piety, her chastity, and the carefully tended objects in her room are for Keller only the reverse side of the rough, bare, masculine environment in which the comb-makers share a single bed. In Züß's room the exploitation of the working world has simply been covered over with the gauze of femininity and religious feeling.

No less significant than the thematic content of the passage is the way that this content is introduced by Keller: not through a direct description of Züß's inner thoughts or the omniscient voice of the narrator, but rather through the enumeration of the many objects in her drawer, which give simultaneous material expression to their owner's self-perception and the social reality of her existence. This technique is hardly unique to Keller; it is constitutive of Realism as a literary movement in Germany. In Otto Ludwig's programmatic essay of 1858—the essay in which he coins the term *poetischer Realismus*—he insists that literary prose capture the “objective Wahrheit in den Dingen”, that is capture the empirical reality of dwelling in the physical world precisely as it appears, in all its abundance and clamor, without any poetic distortion on the part of the author, and at the same time, that physical reality, be represented as the coherent world, unified by the laws of necessity, that appears to human consciousness. These two opposites, synthesized into a single poetic unity, would result in “eine Welt, in der die Mannigfaltigkeit der Dinge nicht verschwindet aber durch Harmonie und Kontrast für unsern Geist in Einheit gebracht ist; nur von dem, was dem Falle gleichgültig ist, gereinigt. Ein Stück Welt, solchergestalt zu einer gemacht, in welcher Notwendigkeit, Einheit, nicht allein vorhanden sondern sichtbar gemacht sind.”<sup>94</sup> Ludwig stops short of stressing that this “Notwendigkeit” be a social reality; he, like the other Realists, rejects that literature must intervene in the *now* of

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<sup>94</sup> Ludwig, Otto. Cit. “Der poetische Realismus aus den Jahren 1858-1860. Ed. M. Hezdrich. Genesisius Verlag. 1911. n.196

a historical situation. But, as the scenes of Thüringian life in his work demonstrate, to depict visible reality as unified into a single world means demonstrating the customs, beliefs, and practices of a society; making that law “sichtbar” means making use of typifying indicators of social position. Julian Schmidt expresses this point more clearly in an article from 1850 on the *Märzpoeten*: Gesetz, Verfassung, Moralität erschöpft sich nicht mehr in allgemeinen Formeln, [...] sondern es expliciert sich in bestimmten, concreten Vorstellungen, es wächst in das unmittelbar gengewärtige Leben hinein [...] Diese Ausbreitung und Vertiefung der sittlichen Ideen in das Detail des wirklichen Lebens ist eine nothwendige, die einzige Grundlage einer echten und großen Poesie.”<sup>95</sup> The social fabric of present reality is the stage on which perpetual and general human conditions play out; consequently, telling details are a necessary to produce a coherent plot, a recognizable setting, and characters with credible motives.

Particularly in the later decades of Realism, the observation of social reality, though ostensibly neutral, often takes on a critical edge. In Theodor Fontane’s 1890 novella *Stine*, for example, the middle class’s longing for pedigree is made manifest in the three pictures hanging in the parlor of Pauline Pittelkow: “Zwei davon: ‘Entenjagd’ und ‘Tellskapelle,’ waren nichts als schlecht kolorierte Lithographien allerneusten Datums, während das dazwischenhängende dritte Bild, ein riesiges, stark nachgedunkeltes Ölporträt, wenigstens hundert Jahre alt war und einen polnischen oder litauischen Bischof verewigte, hinsichtlich dessen Sarastro schwor, daß die schwarze Pittelkow von ihm abstamme.”<sup>96</sup> Together with the cheap lithographs, the dubious painting is cast by Fontane

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<sup>95</sup> Schmidt, Julian. *Die Märzpoeten*, Grenzboten 1950/I, 11. Cit. Kinder, Hermann. *Poesie als Synthese*. p. 185

<sup>96</sup> Fontane, Theodor. *Stine*. Munich: Phillip Reklam Verlag, 1986. p 19.

as the very embodiment of bourgeois insecurity, a way of assuaging Pauline's uneasiness at the fact that her apartment is paid for by the Baron Papageno, who uses it to conduct a liaison with her. That Pauline sees lineage as a purchasable commodity paints for the reader a portrait of the wants and the values of Pauline's class in a few carefully-executed strokes. And while the description of the drawer in "Kammacher" is far less pointed in the picture it paints of Züß, there is a similarly critical edge to the way that Keller turns reveals most private possessions as telling signs of an objective social reality. There is no mistaking, in his portrayal of chastity as a virtue preached by a tiny book stored alongside a miniature bowling game, his disdain for Züß's tartuffery, as well as for its proximate cause: the social arrangement that demands that women sacrifice their pleasure, and consequently, their happiness, to secure their livelihood.

The use of objects to depict the inner lives and social positions of their owners in Keller and Fontane is not simply a literary technique. It doubles as an expression *in nuce* of the anthropology underpinning Realist prose. The very precision with which Keller describes Züß's forget-me-nots, her little scented sponge, his silver teaspoons provides a harsh contrast to the romantic vagueness of Züß's inner life. In Keller's work in general and in the *Seldwyla* novellas in particular, human beings' aspirations for happiness and self-determination invariably run up against the hard edges of a material reality, whose inflexible arbitrariness is evoked for the reader by Keller's exhaustive listing of seemingly random nouns: *Teelöffel, Kirschkern, Menschenhaut, Elfenbein, Spiegelchen*. Why a teaspoon and not an egg spoon? Why a forget-me-not and not a pansy? Why ivory and not ebony? Throughout the *Seldwyla* novellas the *thisness* of things, that for no discernible reason they are as they are and not otherwise goes hand in hand with the resistance of

objects and, far more significantly, of social realities to human agency. Indeed, at certain points, observes Hans-Joachim Hahn, objects seem perversely, to contradict the will of their owners, as does the fancy coat worn by Wenzel Strapinski that causes the townspeople of Goldach to mistake him, despite his poverty, for a wealthy count.<sup>97</sup> Keller has an unflinching eye for the material signs of a hopeless existence, from the butter pot in the home of the destitute Pankraz, whose empty green bottom is a sight seen as regularly “als irgendeine am Himmel,” to the thimble that Wenzel Strapinski thumbs for lack of anything else in his pockets, to the dirndl that Sali’s aging mother is forced to wear in hopes of scaring up a few tips from her leering customers. What the objects secreted by Züs in her drawer tell us first and foremost is that, despite the grandiosity of her daydreams, the circumstances of her existence are utterly and immutably fixed.

The central tenet of Keller’s Realist anthropology, then, is the understanding that the seat of man’s being, and by extension, his true happiness, is not the mind or the heart, but in fact the material world. Before the sense of utter powerlessness in the face of an exploitative social order that offers no chance “die Welt zu fassen und etwas zu werden,” as Pankraz ruefully puts it, is felt rationally or emotionally it is felt materially, in the meagerness of one’s surroundings and in the inability to change them. And yet this pessimism contains, for Keller, a corresponding optimism: because the constraints placed

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<sup>97</sup> Hahn, Hans-Joachim. “Die ‘Tücke des Objekts’ – Ein Strukturenmerkmal in den Seldwyla Novellen?”

*Gottfried Keller, Die Leute von Seldwyla. Kritische Studien.* Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007.

Hahn argues for the influence on Keller of Theodor Vischer, the aesthetician and friend of Keller’s who encouraged him to revise *Der grüne Heinrich*, and his famous ‘Tücke des Objekts’, loosely if awkwardly translated as ‘the perfidy of objects’ from his novel *Auch Einer*. The operative idea is akin to “Murphy’s Law”—that just when a pair of glasses is needed most, they are bound to disappear.

For a lengthier and more substantive consideration of the concept, see Matias Martinez’s essay, “Die Tücke des Objektes als negative Theodizee” in his book *Doppelte Welten: Struktur und Sinn zweideutigen Erzählens*. Much of what Martinez argues about Vischer’s approach to the comic may also be argued for Keller, f. ex: „Nur in der komischen Handlung kann die für die modernen, prosaischen Zeiten so kennzeichnende, nicht assimilierbare Widerständigkeit des Faktischen wiedergegeben werden.“

on man's being are above all material, as in the hunger he feels when he cannot find work, his only chance for happiness lies in accepting and celebrating this reality instead of searching for a beyond, whether religious, philosophical or artistic, in which he may avoid it. This hope, argues scholar Martin Swales, is the central insight of the *Seldwyla* cycle. Swales writes that the novellas in general and their descriptive passages in particular “generate a climate of reflection in which we are invited to notice the commerce between human self-hood and materiality.” What the reader experiences in the novellas is not simply “a bitter constatation of the undeniable authority of material things.” Rather, “when the literal facts come into alignment with the force of aesthetic statement, then men and women can truly be home again.”<sup>98</sup>

Swales argues that if Keller's description of objects reveals a critical view of the relationship between human beings and their material circumstances, then they also contain an image of the happiness that is Seldwyla's namesake. As I argued in the first chapter of this dissertation, happiness for Keller is no abstraction. It is the moment when striving abates and desire is, even for a fleeting moment, fulfilled. That moment of emphatic joy in the present described in Rousseau's Fifth Promenade, “when the soul can find a resting-place secure enough to establish itself and concentrate its entire being there, with no need to remember the past or reach into the future, where the present runs on indefinitely but this duration goes unnoticed, with no sign of the passing of time and no other deprivation”<sup>99</sup>—is to be found throughout the *Seldwyla* novellas in the many passages describing plenitude and satiety. Such a moment comes to John Kabys, the protagonist of “Der Schmied seines

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<sup>98</sup> Swales, Martin. “Revelatory Detail.” *Gottfried Keller, Die Leute von Seldwyla. Kritische Studien*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007

<sup>99</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*. Paris : Librairie Générale Française 2001. 99. [translation mine—ML]

Glücks”, when, having secured his fortune, he steps out into Augsburg sunshine and realizes that he is famished:

Er ging ernsthaft hinus auf die Straße, um die Ecke, und trat in einen Gebäckladen, wo er zwei warme Pastetchen samt zwei Spitzgläsern feiner Weines zu sich nahm. Hierauf kehrte er in den Garten zurück und spazierte abermals eine halbe Stunde, doch diesmal eine Zigarre dazu rauchend. Da entdeckte er ein Beet voll kleiner zarter Radieschen. Er zog ein Büschel davon aus der Erde, reinigte sie am Brunnen [...] und begab sich damit in ein kühles Bräuhaus, wo er einen Krug schäumendes Bier dazu trank. Er unterhielt sich vortrefflich mit den Bürgern und versuchte schon seinen Heimatdialekt in das weichere Schwäbische um zu wandeln, da er voraussichtlich unter diesen Leuten einen hervorragenden Mann abgeben würde.<sup>100</sup>

The happiness experienced by Kabys at this moment is no less tangible, no less real for the fact that Keller is having a bit of fun at the expense of his countrymen, for whom the greatest imaginable happiness is a glass of beer and a bundle of radishes.<sup>101</sup> What marks the moment as a glimpse of what life in Seldwyla might be like were it lived rightly is not simply its sensuality. Keller, for all of his praise of food, good cheer, and, albeit more subtly, of sex, is no hedonist; in fact, in the cycle’s third novella, “Frau Regel Amrain und ihr Jüngster” he goes so far as to caution mothers against raising their children to have too great a preoccupation with food. Rather, for the duration of the passage, which goes on for two more pages, the prose allows itself and its protagonist to lose track of the ongoing plot and to exult in the power of language to bring into view the objects nearest at hand. For a brief moment Kabys and the reader are freed from concern for what has happened and from what is still to come and allowed a moment of peace. That peace doubles as a rebuke to Kabys’s unquenchable desire to succeed in the world of business, a desire that Keller scorns for its demand that one toil today to be happy in a tomorrow that never comes. Keller might

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<sup>100</sup> *SW*, Vol. 4, 378

<sup>101</sup> Chronicler of village life though he was, Keller was no hayseed. He had studied both in Munich and Berlin, and was on friendly terms with Ludwig Feuerbach, Richard Wagner and Friedrich Nietzsche. He pokes similar fun at himself in the letter to Theodor Storm included by Walter Benjamin in *Deutsche Menschen*, in which he describes how his sister takes malicious pleasure in disturbing his work by wafting the scent of freshly cooked soup into his study.

mock the attention Züß lavishes on her baubles and criticize her treatment of Jobst, Dietel and Fridolin, but his prose, which gives each object its full, unhurried attention, shares in her delight, which brings into sharp relief the arid, pleasureless existence of the comb-makers. Each of her baubles requires a care and a touch of which the callused hands of an over-worked journeyman would not be capable. This joyful care for the material is echoed in her name, which stretches out the speaker's lips into a kiss. (A "Bünzlin", for that matter, is a small cask of wine.)

Züß's drawer is hardly the only point at which the novellas in *Die Leute von Seldwyla* break off from their main plot to describe in detail an object of peripheral importance to the plot; similar moments of emphatic joy are to be found in Keller's loving description of the gingerbread house purchased by Sali and Vrenchen, showing a small gingerbread couple living in conjugal bliss, or the sleigh ride at the marriage of Strapinski and Nettchen, which describes the sleigh of each of the town functionaries in their wedding party in minute detail. In each of these, description is linked, by means of Keller's loping, detail-rich prose style, to the momentary abandonment of past resentment and future worry. So effectively do they achieve this sense of momentary suspension that they end up achieving the opposite of their intended purpose. What begins, for example, as a tongue-in-cheek skewering of Züß's carnal forbearance—necessary to establish the race between the three comb-makers that serves as the novella's climax—quickly loses sight of the character and gives itself over completely to the trinkets in her possession. The work of establishing Züß is quickly forgotten and the drawer is freed of its subordination to its owner, inverting the expected relationship between object and owner: each bauble is freed

from the work of social signification and given a stature in the novella's narrative space equal to, if not greater than, that of Züß herself.

In his remarks on the *Seldwyla* cycle, Keller linked the digressive character of his novellas to their fundamentally epic structure. In an 1854 letter to the Germanist Heinrich Hettner, Keller observed that the narrative mode of his novellas was meant to be far closer to the loose, open-ended, oral tradition of “Witzen, Motiven, Fabeln, Anekdoten,”<sup>102</sup> of which the epic is part, rather than the tedious and solitary “Strickstrümpfen” of writing a novel.<sup>103</sup> But where, for Vischer, the Homeric epic was to be praised first and foremost for its balance and unity, for Keller its charm lies precisely in the equal dignity that it affords each of its parts, the lack of hierarchy in its narrative and poetic elements. In this, he echoes not Vischer and Schmidt, but the far more subtle classicism of Goethe and Schiller, the favorite authors of young Heinrich. In their correspondence of April 1797, Goethe and Schiller, the young Heinrich's favorite reading, identify the suspension of plot as key element of the epic poem. On the 19th Goethe praises the epic over the drama for its digressive or “retardierende” motifs: “[das epische Gedicht] geht immer vor und zurück, daher sind alle retardierende Motive episch.”<sup>104</sup> Schiller, in his response on the 21st, agrees that the “Selbstständigkeit seiner Teile einen Hauptcharakter des epischen Gedichtes ausmacht.”<sup>105</sup> Instead of subordinating each element of the epic towards the end of plot,

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<sup>102</sup> *SW*, Vol 7, 87.

<sup>103</sup> Even the casual reader cannot fail to miss the classical allusion throughout the *Seldwyla* novellas. “Die drei gerechten Kammacher” alone begins with a play on the Lord's Prayer, compares Züß to a statue of Apollo, and re-enacts the Judgment of Paris as the three comb-makers compete for the hand of the washerwoman's daughter. Cf. Watts, Catherine. “Intertextual Explorations of Keller's *Clothes Make the Man*.” *Gottfried Keller, Die Leute von Seldwyla: Kritische Studien*. Ed. Hans-Joachim Hahn and Uwe Seja. Peter Lang: Oxford, 2007.

<sup>104</sup> Goethe, Johan Wolfgang von and Schiller, Friedrich. *Goethe und Schiller, Der Briefwechsel: Eine Auswahl*. Ed. Rüdiger Safranski. Fischer, 2011. pp. 167.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid*.

continues Schiller, each detail emerges in the full light of its own being: “Die bloße, aus dem Innersten herausgeholte, *Wahrheit* ist der Zweck des epischen Dichters: er schildert uns bloß das ruhige Dasein und Wirken der Dinge nach ihren Naturen.”<sup>106</sup> What Keller critics like Swales describe as the “charm” of his descriptive passages is directly attributed by Schiller to the tendency of epic writing to see each element of the story, no matter how trivial, as an end in itself: “Sein Zweck liegt schon in jedem Punkt seiner Bewegung. darum eilen wir nicht ungeduldig zu einem Ziele sondern verweilen uns mit Liebe bei jedem Schritte.”<sup>107</sup> The long descriptive passage of the *Seldwyla* novellas are precisely such “retarding motifs,” deliberately slowing and stretching the action so that each object populating Keller’s fictional village can shine forth in its “simple truth.” A passage like the one describing Züb’s cabinet deliberately reverses the relationship between narration and description prescribed by the Realist program—rather than carefully pare down its descriptions to better serve its narratives, Keller chooses a narrative mode to better bring forth the unique life and character of the objects in his descriptions.

I do not, therefore, see the epic mode of description and of narration as simply a matter of textual reference for Keller, as do scholars like Catherine Watts<sup>108</sup>. Depicting “the quiet existence and operation of things in accordance with their natures” is the key to the ethical stance of *Die Leute von Seldwyla* in several respects. The first is in Keller’s choice of subject. By applying the style of the epic to ordinary people and their possession, Keller ennobled them. He demonstrated that the people of far-flung, provincial Seldwyla

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 168. A surprising amount of Keller scholarship uses unscholarly language (*Liebe*) to describe the effect produced by Keller’s description. Swales, for example, repeatedly characterizes Keller’s descriptive passages as “charming,” while Karl Pestalozzi refers to “Glücksmomente” in Keller’s work, moments that make the reader actually feel the happiness they are describing. I do not intend this observation as a criticism, more a sign of a general reaction produced by Keller’s prose.

<sup>108</sup> See note 12.

were no less worthy of poetic representation than were Achilles, Odysseus, Egmont, and Wallenstein.<sup>109</sup> If each thing is allowed to shine forth in its being, then there is, in Keller's view, no sense that the wealthy are more deserving of description than the poor, or, more decisively for his provincial approach to Realism, whose scene is so often the urban center, that the periphery is less worthy of description than the bustling city, center of life. The second respect is that, for Keller, observing the world carefully requires the cultivation of an inner disposition that runs sharply counter to the innate acquisitiveness of the Seldwylers, who only have eyes for that which has a use or can be sold. Keller's unhurried prose is meant to foster a relation to the world that allows the reader to see objects not as something to be mastered, but as entities in their own right, sharing the same rung in his poetics as do the human beings in his story. And finally, the close observation of things, the ability to take pleasure in them as they are, is meant as an antidote to the brooding narcissism engendered in Keller's protagonists by a time in which fortunes are suddenly and fantastically made, that they are being given less than their share, that the world owes them their proper portion. Kabys ends his days not as a successful business man but working in a blacksmith's shop forging nails and with them, his happiness.

What we may conclude, at least preliminarily, is that the uniqueness of Keller's approach to Realism in *Die Leute von Seldwyla* lies in the fact that his use of description to build a world, to fix his characters socially, or to evoke their inner life is *also* the point at which he raises the question of how human beings ought to comport themselves towards the objects, as well as towards one another. We will see that, despite the critical force Keller brought to bear on those tendencies in his time he considered highly corrosive to the lasting

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<sup>109</sup> A familiar trope in the Russian literature of the time, as in stories like Ivan Turgenev's "King Lear of the Steppes" or Nikolai Leskov's "Lady Macbeth of Mtemsk."

happiness of the individual, his answer to this question is by no means an unambivalent one.

### **3. Sinnbilder**

In the previous chapter, I observed that, though Keller's work addresses complex social and aesthetic questions, he typically abstains from using scholarly vocabulary in his prose, making use instead of a more conversational terminology. Though both *Der grüne Heinrich* and *Die Leute von Seldwyla* clearly deal with the question of the right life, and of how one might best attain it, the word "ethics" or "ethical" never appears in either book. Instead, Keller prefers the more conversational term "Lebensart," or, in *Die Leute von Seldwyla*, "Lebensweise," to describe different values and temperaments. By the same token, the relationship between the description or depiction of the ordinary and the ethical is repeatedly referred to by Keller by means of the more conversational term, "Sinnbild,"—meaning a symbol, or allegory, or more simply, an instructive image.

The word "Sinnbild," to be sure, has an extensive history particularly in painting, specifically in the painting of the Renaissance and in the Baroque. Without a doubt, Keller, who studied as a painter and makes repeated reference to the German literature of the Renaissance, was aware of this history. (Keller would later write a *Sinngedicht* which I will consider later in this dissertation.) But as with the term "Lebensart," rather than make use of a word and fully expecting his readers to be aware of its complex meaning, in the novella "Kleider machen Leute," Keller offers the reader a little scene explaining his private notion of the "Sinnbild." Walking in a poetic mood along the streets of Goldach, Seldwyla's prosperous neighbor, Wenzel Strapinski, the penniless tailor, regards the houses of the town, more specifically, their name plates and lintels:

Mit ganz anderer Miene besah er sich die Stadt, als wenn er um Arbeit darin ausgegangen wäre. Dieselbe bestand größtenteils aus schönen, festgebauten Häusern, welche alle mit steinernen oder gemalten Sinnbildern geziert und mit einem Namen versehen waren. In diesen Benennungen war die Sitte der Jahrhunderte deutlich zu erkennen. Das Mittelalter spiegelte sich ab in den ältesten Häusern oder in den Neubauten, welche an deren Stelle getreten, aber den alten Namen behalten aus der Zeit der kriegerischen Schultheiße und Märchen. Da hieß es: zum Schwert, zum Eisenhut, zum Harnisch, zur Armbrust, zum blauen Schild, zum Schweizerdegen, zum Ritter, zum Bückstein, zum Türken, zum Meerwunder, zum goldenen Drachen, zur Linde, zum Pilgerstab, zur Wasserfrau, zum Paradiesvogel, zum Granatbaum, zum Kämbel, zum Einhorn, udgl. Die Zeit der Aufklärung und der Philanthropie war deutlich zu lesen in den moralischen Begriffen, welche in schönen Goldbuchstaben über den Haustüren erglänzten, wie: zur Eintracht, zur Redlichkeit, zur alten Unabhängigkeit, zur neuen Unabhängigkeit, zur Bürgertugend a, zur Bürgertugend b, zum Vertrauen, zur Liebe, zur Hoffnung, zum Widershen 1 und 2, zum Frohsinn, zur inneren Rechtlichkeit, zur äußeren Rechtlichkeit, zum Landeswohl, (ein reinliches Häuschen, in welchem hinter einem Kanarienkäfig, ganz mit Kresse behängt, eine freundliche alte Frau saß mit einer weißen Zipfelhaube und Garn haspelte) zur Verfassung (unten hauste ein Böttcher, welcher eifrig und mit großem Geräusch kleine Eimer und Fäßchen mit Reifen einfaßte und unablässig klopfte); ein Haus hieß schauerlich: zum Tod! Ein verwaschenes Gerippe erstreckte sich von unten bis oben zwischen den Fenstern, hier wohnte der Friedensrichter. Im Hause zur Geduld wohnte der Schuldenschreiber, ein ausgehungertes Jammerbild, da in dieser Stadt keiner dem anderen etwas schuldig blieb.<sup>110</sup>

In his state of poetic reverie, Strapinski imagines that each *Sinnbild* perfectly encapsulates the life that is going on each house; that each house is uniquely devoted to the “Lebensweise,” to use Keller’s term, depicted on its door, so that as he returns to the house where he is staying, “zur Wage,” it strikes him that perhaps here the unevenness and injustices of fate are brought back into balance, and that a penniless tailor might find himself the recipient of incredible good fortune. The *Sinnbild*, then, is either an inscription, or a picture of an ordinary object that, by virtue of being selected, of being attached to a home and a life grows by means of metaphor into an entire mode of comportment, and understanding of the world and a way of being in it.

Keller is not insensible to the humor in Strapinski’s willingness to see a sword as the image of warfare itself, scales as the belief in the justness of fate. After all, the occupant

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<sup>110</sup> *SW*, Vol. 4., 46.

of “zur Verfassung” does not draft constitutions but puts together barrels and kegs. But here the author also offers what might be taken as a programmatic statement on his own approach to depicting the ethical in his work. Like the name plates on the Goldachers’ doors, the titles of the *Seldwyla* novellas themselves function as inscriptions describing the disposition, or *Lebensweise* to which the novellas are devoted. Jörg Schönert has argued, in his essay “Bürgerliche Tugenden auf dem Prüfstand der Literatur” that novellas like “Kleider machen Leute” itself, or the following novella in the second cycle, “Der Schmied seines Glücks,” which take sayings specifically related to achieving success, are designed to test the maxims of middle class life. The other novellas, like “Pankraz der Schmoller” or “Die drei gerechten Kammacher,” or “Das verlorene Lachen,” however, explore not maxims, but more complex characters and dispositions. Just as each house in Goldach is named after a single virtue to which it is devoted, each of Keller’s novellas may be understood as devoted to a single *Lebensweise*, like the sense of aggrievement that causes Pankraz to mope, or the righteousness of comb-makers, which consists of keeping the counsel of the Lord’s Prayer to forgive others their debts (the German rendering of “trespass”) just as their debts are forgiven, or the laughter and mirth that existed between Justine and Jukundus in “Das verlorene Lachen.”

The same is true of the description of objects in *Die Leute von Seldwyla*. While description, as I argued above, itself emerges from an ethic of close observation and respect for the material, each descriptive passage begins by describing an ordinary object and ends as a *Sinnbild* for some disposition towards the world. The ethic of emphatic joy we considered above, of plenitude and satiety, may be found in the novella’s lengthy descriptions of food. One such memorable description is in the beginning of “Kleider

machen Leute” itself, in which two whole pages of description and dialogue are devoted to listing the delicacies offered by an inn-keeper and his wife to the starving Strapinski under the mistaken impression that he is a wealthy count. Strapinski is served, among other delicacies, *Rindfleisch*, *Hammelkeule*, *Rebkuhnpastetln*, *Kotelette*, *Schnepfen*, *Forellen*, *Brühe*, *Gurken*, *Kirschen*, *Birnen*, *Aprikosen*, some unspecified *Backwerk* and several *Torten*. These details are a bit of local color, treating the reader to a vivid picture of an inn whose idea of a sumptuous meal consists of beef and trout. At the same time, the inn and the meal served there are transformed into an emblem of *Gastfreundschaft* contrasted against the house of the master tailor from which he has been ejected where every morsel of food is to be repaid by trade. To Strapinski, the joy evoked by the sheer variety of dishes is a recompense for the renunciations of his work, which demand that he walk from town to town, searching for a fixed position: “Begann der Hunger, der immerfort so gefährlich gereizt wurde, nun den Schrecken zu überwinden, und als die Pastete von Rebhühnern erschien, schlug die Stimmung des Schneiders gleichzeitig um und ein fester Gedanke begann sich in ihm zu bilden: ‘Es ist einmal, wie es ist,’ sagte er sich, von einem neuen Tröpflein Weines erwärmt und aufgestachelt; ‘nun wäre ich ein Tor, wenn ich die kommende Schande und Verfolgung ertragen wollte, ohne mich dafür sat gegessen zu haben!’”<sup>111</sup> Where privation and limited circumstances cause a character like Heinrich to escape into daydream, the kindness of the inn-keeper and the feeling of well-being engendered by the wine, by satiety, give Strapinski to see the momentary courage necessary to accept his fate.

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<sup>111</sup> *SW*. Vol. 4., 389.

Not all depictions of food are so joyous in Keller, and not all ways of being are necessarily positive. For the sullen Pankraz, for example, the table, and the privation he feels there, is the stand-in for the perpetual sense of inferiority, of being withheld from, that sets him moping until his near-death experience in the wilderness of India cures him of it. As a child who grows up obsessed with the idea of joining the military, and who embraces the notion of military orderliness and regularity, being daily cheated of his mashed potatoes is the daily humiliation that eventually causes Pankraz to run away from home and find his fortune in England's colonial army in India:

Das Söhnlein [Pankraz], welches bei aller Seltsamkeit in Eßangelegenheiten einen strengen Sinn für militärische Regelmäßigkeit beurkundete und streng darauf hielt, daß jeder nicht mehr noch weniger nahm als was ihm zukomme, sah stets darauf, daß die Milch oder die gelbe Butter, welche am Rande der Schüssel umherfloß, gleichmäßig in die abgeteilten Gruben laufe; das Schwesterchen hingegen, welches viel harmloser war, suchte, sobald ihre Quellen versiegt waren, durch allerhand künstliche Stollen und Abzugsgräben die wohlschmeckenden Bächlein auf ihre Seite zu leiten... Alsdann warf er den Löffel weg, lamentierte und schmolte, bis die gute Mutter die Schüssel zur Seite neigte und ihre eigene Brühe voll in das Labyrinth der Kanäle und Dämme ihrer Kinder strömen ließ.<sup>112</sup>

Here, as with Züß's drawer, the description of Pankraz's inner life occurs not through inner monologue or from the omniscient voice of a narrator who might let us know what Pankraz's secret thoughts are; the boy's longing for military order, measure and dignity in a life that lacks all three, his sister joyfully surmounting the difficulties of her life with play and winking subversion, are both conveyed exclusively through the description of the mashed potatoes, their little hillocks and streams and canals of butter. The effect is doubly striking because instead of simply describing a fixed object here Keller is, in fact, narrating—describing an iterative scene in the home of Pankraz's family, thereby setting the mashed potato pot all the more explicitly as the center of the family's entire existence.

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<sup>112</sup> *SW*. Vol. 4., 23.

The playful metaphorical register in which Keller describes the battle over the potatoes begins as a bit of humor, but it opens the idea for the reader that the mashed potatoes are more than mashed potatoes, which the adult Pankraz confirms upon his return: “Wenn ich hauptsächlich wegen des Essen böse wurde und schmolte, so war der geheime Grund hiervon das nagende Gefühl, das ich mein Essen nicht verdient, weil ich nichts lernte und nichts that, ja weil mich gar nichts reizte zu irgend einer Beschäftigung und also keine Hoffnung war, dass es je anders wurde.”<sup>113</sup> What Pankraz eats—or does not eat, as the case may be—is his *Teil*, his *Los*, his portion, his lot, his fate.

What is true of the mashed potatoes is true of nearly every object in *Die Leute von Seldwyla*; there is no detail, no descriptive passage that that does not stand for some facet of character. Even limiting our scope simply to “Die drei gerechten Kammacher” furnishes us with a number of suggestive examples. The combs labored over by the eponymous comb-makers are instruments of the socializing process of which the sterilized, desireless comb-makers are victims, meant to tame the unruly, the desirous, the animal. (Their opposite may be found in the wild-haired lion that menaces Pankraz, in the half-civilized Vrenchen in “Romeo und Julia auf dem Dorfe” who, we are told, has “wild” hair, and in the wild natural growth of the patch of land contested by Vrenchen and Sali’s father.) Züß is not only chaste but chastity incarnate, working among vats of clean white linen, wearing trinket carved from soap. The emotional peak of the novella comes when Jobst, the Swabian comb-maker, encounters a perfect cipher for the desolate rootlessness of his own life in the form of an insect painted to the wall against which he sleeps every night that suddenly gets up and begins to move over the mottled landscape of the wall. Just as with

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<sup>113</sup> *SW*. Vol. 4, 28.

Pankraz seated before the glum sight of the mashed potatoes, the little bedbug trundling its way across the endless expanse of the wall gives Jobst bitter insight into his own existence: “Wehmütig sank Jobst in den Pfülsen zurück; so wenig er sich sonst aus dergleichen machte, rührte diese Erscheinung doch jetzt ein Gefühl in ihm auf, als ob er doch auch endlich wieder wandern mußte.”<sup>114</sup> What I wish to stress here is that Keller’s understanding of the ethical is not simply to give an injunction to the reader to live differently but contains also a profound anthropological interest in the different ways that the Seldwylers find themselves being in the world, providing in its variety a kind of ethical compendium akin to that of *Der Grüne Heinrich*, whose focus is on objects rather than people.

The key to the social observation in Keller, then, is that the social reality he depicts is not simply spatial or temporal, but itself a depiction of an ethic. Keller makes this explicit at several points throughout the novellas cycle, most pointedly in the introduction to the second *Seldwyla* cycle, then, gives us a different perspective on the time and place he is portraying. It is not simply reality, but is itself a “Gemeinwesen.” Keller assures the Swiss villages he claims are bickering over which is the model for Seldwyla, “es rage in jeder Stadt und in jedem Tale der Schweiz ein Türmchen von Seldwyla.” Seldwyla the place is less a fixed place than a tendency, a “Zusammenstellung” of all these little towers, that has no fixed location but is instead, to use Keller’s wonderful formulation, painted on the bright blue sky of Switzerland. Seldwyla, in short, is less a specific place than a manner of being a *Lebensweise*, potentially practicable by anyone, while the capitalism that reigns there is neither an economic system nor a historical moment, but above all, as he writes in “Romeo und Julia auf Dorfe,” a set of “habits, mores, principles, and hopes.” In a passage of far less

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<sup>114</sup> *SW*. Vol. 4, 229.

charitable terms than the gentle humor he describes how speculators from Seldwyla fanned the rivalry between the two farmers, Manz and Marti, over the narrow strip of land between their two fields, and how they suddenly found themselves in the snare of a new and drastically unfamiliar way of living:

Da sie eine faule Sache hatten, so gerieten beide in die allerschlimmsten Hände von Tausendkünstlern, welche ihre verdorbene Phantasie auftrieben zu ungeheuren Blasen, die mit den nichtsnutzigsten Dingen angefüllt wurden. Vorzüglich waren es die Spekulanten aus der Stadt Seldwyla, welchen dieser Handel ein gefundenes Essen war, bald hatte jeder der Streitenden einen Anhang von Unterhändlern, Zuträgern und Ratgebern hinter sich, die alles bare Geld auf hundert Wegen abzuziehen wußten. Denn das Fleckchen Erde mit dem Steinhaufen darüber, auf welchem bereits wieder ein Wald von Nesseln und Disteln blühte, war nur noch der erste Keim oder der Grundstein einer verworrenen Geschichte und Lebensweise, in welcher die zwei Fünfzigjährigen noch neue Gewohnheiten und Sitten, Grundsätze und Hoffnungen annahmen als sie bisher geübt.<sup>115</sup>

The fundamental feature of the capitalist disposition is, for Keller, not its wonted practicality and its materialism, but its fundamental *opposition* to reality, in the sense that it stokes unquenchable desires and bitter resentments out of all proportion to their causes. Seldwyla is as much a part of the expansive panorama of *Lebensarten* as the living characters in Keller's works, while capitalism is treated not as a social or a historical or economic structure but above all as a part of human nature and of human behavior—perhaps more accurately a kind of folly, or, as Keller portrays it in the case of the two warring farmers in “Romeo und Julia auf dem Dorfe”, a kind of madness that reduces those who are afflicted with it to a near-animal state of idiocy from which there is no return. In both cases Keller portrays the social events of his time with a human face, at human scale, one folly alongside the many others that are characteristic of human life.

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<sup>115</sup> *SW*. Vol. 4, 89

We see then that in Keller's notion of the *Sinnbild* the observation of everyday life and the ethical are fused together by means of the metaphorical. Representing objects "as they are" for Keller goes hand in hand with imagining them as products of some way of being, some *Lebensweise*, that they in turn produce, and for which they stand as an emblem. Tellingly, the word *Ding* never refers simply to objects in Keller, but always to human affairs, the commerce between individuals: the Seldwylers, we are told, are always "guter Dinge." Life is not merely "das Leben" but "der Schauplatz der Dinge." Sometimes, as with the barrel-maker whose business is called "zur Verfassung" this connection is a fanciful or humorous one, a conceit meant to show off the range of Keller's descriptive powers; sometimes, as with Pankraz's mashed potatoes or Jobst's bedbug, the connection is a poignant one, illuminating the core of that character's being. In either case, Keller's recourse to the symbolic speaks to an understanding of the task of an ethical Realism as making the world legible, an understanding of the world that holds that even if things are resistant to *individual* human agency, it is nonetheless because of human dispositions, human character, human values, that everything in it is and is and not otherwise. This raises the possibility, which Keller dangles for himself as a possibility, but to which he never wholly commits, that the cultivation of the self and that careful development of more conscientious character and value can allow individuals to achieve happiness in a world largely inimical to it.

#### **4. *Reinigung***

At this point then, we have considered several answers to the question of the relationship between ethics and Realism in Keller. One answer was that, by describing things, Keller

championed an anthropological materialism as means for man to claim his happiness through a renewed attention to his own material being. The second was that the observation of things was a way of drawing a compendium of different ethical modes, or *Lebensweise*, which was anthropological in its scope, of cataloging human values and characters, and anthropological in the sense that it attempted to make sense of the world by trying to connect objects and tendencies in the world with human characters and dispositions. I wish now to consider a third answer: that the observation and description of things is *itself* a mode of comportment, one that is meant not to represent an ethic that it enjoins to the reader but to directly bring that change about. Up until this point, I have attempted to show Keller's distinctive approach to these questions by contrasting him, where appropriate, against contemporaries like the *Grenzboten* circle, Balzac and Theodor Fontane. To consider this third perspective, I would like to consider a writer whose work deals with precisely the question of description producing an ethical change in the reader—namely, Keller's contemporary, and his companion in any cursory overview of German literature, Adalbert Stifter.

The assertion that Keller and Stifter share an affinity is by no means a self-evident one. Keller made no secret of his low opinion of Stifter's work. In a letter to his friend Emil Kuh, responding to a monograph on Austrian literature by the latter, Keller echoes the criticism made by Friedrich Hebbel that prompted Stifter to write the "Vorrede" to *Bunte Steine*, namely, that his writing is boring and deals with inconsequently matters, by referring to Stifter as a *Tüftler*, a fusspot. Keller adds, with an uncharacteristic lack of generosity, that Kuh is overgenerous in mentioning Grillparzer and Stifter in the same

breath.<sup>116</sup> All of what was distinctive in Stifter, from the close observation of nature, to the romantic critique of capitalism, and the loving portrayal of village, Keller found instead in the novellas of his fellow Swiss author Jeremias Gotthelf, whom he cited as a strong influence on his own work. When one takes into account the differences of birth, religion, and politics between the two men, the one a Lutheran Swiss democrat, the other a Catholic Austrian monarchist, the strongest point of commonality are the contiguity in time of their major publications, with Stifter's *Bunte Steine* appearing in 1853, just a year before the first volume of Keller's *Der grüne Heinrich*, while Keller's *Die Leute von Seldwyla* appeared in 1856, a year before the publication of Stifter's *Nachsommer*.

There are two reasons why I hold, nonetheless, that Stifter's work offers a valuable perspective on Keller's. The first is that, as in Keller's writing, Stifter's writing places considerably more emphasis on physical details like knick-knacks, furniture, food, clothing, and nature than he does on rising action or the inner lives of his characters. Stifter, like Keller, creates dramatic tension not by means of plot but rather through the description of objects, man-made and natural. The second is that Stifter, like Keller, sees the onset of speculation and investment, and its replacement of handicraft and agricultural labor, as the cause of a perceptible and ethical crisis that severs human beings from a connection to the material world that is the seat of their existence. Accordingly, the description of things is means both of depicting and resolving this crisis. These similarities are grounds for a productive comparison that will sharpen, I hope, what is unique in Keller, and give us a clearer understanding of his ethical understanding of Realism.

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<sup>116</sup> Krummel, Charles. *Gottfried Keller's Estimation of Men and Literary Movements*. Palala Press. 2015. p. 41

To that end, before resuming my discussion of Keller, I would like to examine a passage from Adalbert Stifter's novella "Kalkstein," from the *Bunte Steine* collection published in 1853. In this passage, a land surveyor sent to the *Kar*, a distant region covered with limestone hills, makes the acquaintance of the local parish priest. During a terrible thunderstorm, the priest, who is known in the region for the uncommon austerity of his living, takes in the traveler to shelter him from the rain. To reciprocate his generosity, the land surveyor opens his knapsack and, though his ashamed at the comparative decadence of the meal he has packed for himself, offers it to the priest:

Der arme Pfarrer sah mir zu, wie ich meine Vorrichtungen auseinander packte. Er betrachtete die kleinen blechern Tellerchen, deren mehrere in eine unbedeutende flache Scheibe zusammen zu packen waren. Ich stellte die Tellerchen auf den Tisch. Dazu that ich von meinem Fache Messer und Gabeln. Dann schnitt ich Scheibchen von feinem weißen Weizenbrote, das ich wöchentlich zwei Mal kommen ließ, dann Scheibchen von Schinken von kaltem Braten und Käse. Das breitete ich auf den Tellern aus. Hierauf bath ich ihn um eine Flasche Wassers; denn das allein, sagte ich, führe ich nicht mit mir, da ich es in der Natur über finden müsse. Als er in ein einem Krüge Wasser gebracht hatte, legte ich meine Trinkvorrichtungen auseinander. Ich that die Flasche, die noch halb voll Wein war, heraus, ich stellte die zwei Gläser—eines habe ich immen zum Vorrathe—auf den Tisch, und dann zeigte ich ihm wie ich den Wein kühle. Das Glas wird in ein Fach von sehr lokerem Stoffe gestellt, der Stoff mit einer sehr dünnen Flüssigkeit, die Äther heißt, und die ich in einem Fläschen immer mit führe, befeuchtet, welche Flüssigkeit sehr schnell und heftig verdunstet, und dabei eine Kälte erzeugt, daß der Wein frischer wird, als wenn er eben von der Keller käme, ja als ob er sogar in Eis stünde. Da ich auf diese Weise zwei Gläser aufgefrischt, mit Wasser vermischt, und eins auf seinen Plaz gestellt hatte, lud ich ihn ein, mit mir zu speisen.

Er nahm, gleichsam um meiner Einladung die Ehre anzutun, ein winziges bißchen von den Dingen, nippte an dem Glase und war nicht mehr zu bewegen, etwas weiteres zu nehmen.

Ich aß von den aufgestellten Speisen nun auch nur sehr weniges und packte dann alles wieder zusammen, indem ich mich der Unhöflichkeit, die ich eigentlich in der Übereilung begang hatte, schämte.<sup>117</sup>

This meal becomes the occasion for a lifelong friendship between the land surveyor and the priest, who tells his life story and chooses him to execute his will. The centrality of this meal is signaled to the reader at the story's very start, when the story's unnamed narrator recalls encountering the now elderly land surveyor at a dinner. Evidently the priest's ascetic

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<sup>117</sup> Stifter, Adalbert. *Werke und Briefe*. Vol. 2.2 Kohlhammer, 1982.

manner has deeply impressed him because he eats little and keenly observes the goings-on around him.

Before we enter into an analysis of the passage itself, it is worth noting the manner in which Stifter introduces it into the narrative. Stifter, as a rule, never makes use of an active narrative voice, imparting information or judgment beyond that possessed by the characters. The reader is given only the few bits of dialogue necessary to set the meal into motion. The interaction of the men up until this point is painted in a series of scenes, in which the two men examine the weather, debating whether or not the thick haze that is hanging over the region will break out into rain, then walking back to priest's house. Instead of giving the reader a glimpse of either character's inner state, Stifter turns his full narrative attention to the meal—or, more accurately, to the food and utensils of which the meal is comprised. The objects, like the actions before them, are presented one by one, threaded together only with the conjunction *dann*. The reader is given no description of their color, their odor, their heft; nor is any attempt made to try to flesh out the world of the *Kar*. It may be presumed that the land surveyor's mention of the fact that he sends for bread twice a week is only introduced in order to explain how it is that he obtained in an area with no arable land.

In a broad way, of course, the scene and the description of the meal accomplish the work of scene-setting and characterization on which the novella hinges. Stifter takes the land surveyor and, by extension, the reader into the home of the priest. The priest, the reader is told, is an object of fascination to his fellow villagers and here we discover why. Not only does he sleep on a board but he uses a Bible as a pillow. He eats only black bread. Most puzzlingly of all, he wears fine linen beneath his cassock, though this latter detail is

less a piece of characterization than the enigma that propels the narrative. By the same token, the scene provides a glimpse into the character of the land surveyor. The land surveyor's tastes are more worldly than those of the priest; he carries meat, cheese and wine with him. Not only that, but he is a man of learning and science who, unlike the priest, who is able to predict the weather based on years and years of steady observation of natural phenomena, sets Nature to work for him by using ether to cool his wine. Nonetheless, there is something in him—the reader is not told what—that feels a strong affinity with the man and that is deeply impressed by his ascetic lifestyle.

And yet, if the passage is meant to give the reader insight into the characters by describing the objects that they possess, as Keller does with Züß's drawer, it is striking just how much Stifter chooses to leave out. We learn that a cold roast is served, but not whether it is, for example beef or pork—a detail Keller would not have failed to supply. John Kabys, toasting his success in Augsburg, drank that region's particular beer and its particular wine; the land-surveyor and the priest, by contrast, drink Biblical water and wine, the one the drink of refreshment, the other the drink of company and joy. Most striking is Stifter's repeated use of non-words like *Stoff* and *Zeug* that stress the bare, non-particular materiality of the object, instead of trying to evoke it by describing its color or its texture. Though the meal is a substantial one, one wouldn't sense that from the prose: the whole passage, it might be said, is no less ascetic than the priest himself. The words are shorn of all but their primary signification and their most distant allegorical connotations; the grammar is forbidden to do anything but declare. Stifter does not allow the ostensible reason for the food being offered, a spirit of gratitude and generosity, to color the description, which sooner communicates to the reader the shame that the land surveyor feels at carrying such

luxury with him in his knapsack. Stifter carefully removes everything that might draw the reader's attention away from the simple fact that the meat, the water, the wine, the fork and the knife are there. As the table is set, the characters recede into the background and the object—mysterious, auratic—moves to the fore.

The effect of this foregrounding of the material is to shift the novella's focus away from the relationship between the two men and from life in the *Kar*, what would be the novella's focus in a more traditional Realist narrative, like, say, Tolstoy's *Cossacks*, and towards the relationship of the men to the physical world around them. The meal itself, the taste of the food and the pleasure it brings, is dispatched two lines: the priest hardly eats, while the land surveyor eats with a pervasive sense of shame in the decadence of his own meal. (Tellingly, the men are brought together by the landscape itself, whose unique character to which the priest teaches the land surveyor, an agent of political and scientific mastery of the natural, to submit himself.) In this respect, Stifter's relationship to the discourse of *Verklärung*, or the poetic intensification of reality, that dominated the discourse of Realism in his time is as ambiguous as Keller's. While Stifter certainly shares the Realists' antipathy towards the fantasias and lofty subject matter of Romanticism, and while, though his contemporaries may have disagreed, his prose style might certainly be described as an attempt to recover the poetic in the prosaic, Stifter is also clearly concerned with the perceptive relationship between the reader and the world that precedes Realist distinctions like "essence" and "appearance," "poetic" and "prosaic." "Kalkstein" is as much a story about learning to see the world and orient oneself in it, as it is about the traumatic experiences of the priest's childhood that have caused him to adopt his ascetic lifestyle.

What is it, then, that Stifter wants his reader to see? What is Realism's proper object? Stifter offers the answer to this question in the famous "Vorrede" to *Bunte Steine* by arguing that literature's fascination with the great has blinded it to wonder of the small. Instead of portraying erupting volcanoes, earthquakes and lightning storms, Stifter holds it as his mission to portray the seemingly insignificant and the ordinary. He regards as great "das Wehen der Luft, das Rieseln des Wassers, das Wachsen der Getreide, das Wogen des Meeres, das Grünen der Erde, das Glänzen des Himmels, das Schimmern der Sterne." Stifter compares these phenomena to the magnetic field all around the earth. On its own, this enormous field which encircles the entire earth cannot be seen. But when the scientist steps out every day to the same spot and records the tiny quiverings, now in this direction, now in that, of the needle on a compass, he gradually becomes aware that of the enormous force all around him, invisible but nonetheless present, which is responsible for even the needle's tiniest motions. Stifter does not simply want the reader to look to the waves on the ocean or the wind whistling through a field of grass. He wants his reader to search for the invisible force that controls them and reveals them in the first place—the *sanfte Gesetz*.<sup>118</sup> Stifter's descriptions are, then, as Martin Heidegger wrote in his 1961 essay on Stifter's "Eisgeschichte," both a way of showing and a way of calling. In representing the small and the insignificant, like the plates carried by the land-surveyor, they demand that the reader change his disposition towards the world and towards himself. The religious dimension of this "call" is not accidental: in his "Vorrede" Stifter styles himself as a priest and his literature as religion, exhorting his reader to take notice of "things" as he passes them, to see them as touched by an awesome force that makes itself in every single existing

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<sup>118</sup> Stifter, 10.

object, no matter how insignificant. In this respect, Stifter must be differentiated sharply from his fellow Realists, for whose poetics the perceivable and representable nature of experience is a fundamental assumption.

Consequently, before the question of style has even entered into the equation, in Stifter's selection of subject matter the question of how one must comport oneself towards the world has already been identified as underpinning the question of how the world is to be most accurately represented. In his reading of "Kalkstein" in his book *Exemplarity and Mediocrity*, Paul Fleming has stressed this ethical side of Stifter's selection both of objects and characters to portray as the key to resolving the tension between Stifter's claim to represent the ordinary, and obviously marginal and unusual nature of characters like the priest, whose extreme asceticism and total unfamiliarity with basic social customs makes him an outsider in the community of the *Kar*. It is not the priest's ordinariness but his fidelity to the ordinary, the care that he lavishes on the few possessions that he has, on Nature, that make him exemplary. In Stifter's view, writes Fleming, the gentle law is less an active principle always in sway than an ideal to be striven for and maintained. His view of literature is that it should offer "models of 'good, simple lives for imitation—all, one could say, in the service of the [gentle] law. Since the supposedly world-maintaining law is itself in need of maintenance, the function of literature vis-à-vis the gentle law is to provide exemplary, everyday heroes who can inspire others to conform to the law."<sup>119</sup> In depicting the priest and telling his story, Stifter enjoins the reader to imitate the behavior of the priest—if not the harshness of the *askesis* to which he subjects himself, then his attentiveness to and respect for nature, the kindness with which he treats the children of the

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<sup>119</sup> Fleming, Paul. *Exemplarity and Mediocrity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009. p 160.

*Kar*, to whom he bequeaths the last of his money when he dies, both of which are possible, and above all his naiveté, the complete lack of awareness of social convention, from which the other two traits spring.

It is striking to what extent an awareness of a Seldywla-like social fabric is lacking in “Kalkstein,” or the other *Bunte Steine* stories. Though the novellas ostensibly take place in the Austrian countryside, in actual fact their setting is the borderland between society and that which lies beyond it. In “Bergkristall,” Gschaid is nestled at the foot of a treacherous mountain that also supplies the village with water. The village in the *Kar* is set in a region of unmappable limestone hills, prone to dangerous flooding in the rainy season. Even “Turmalin,” which takes place in Vienna, quickly changes its setting to the woods at the outskirts of town. Rather than setting his work in the bustling city life that was both the origin and the subject of the Realist novel, Stifter chooses to describe a way of life that would have been utterly alien to the majority of his cultured, educated, city-dwelling readers. And what is true for his choice of subject matter is also true for the mechanics of his prose. Stifter deliberately avoids the use of use of any Realist technique that avails itself of an illusion to a familiar reality shared by the reader and the author. The use, for example, of demonstrative adjectives to make typifying formulations—“he was *one of those* men who”—such as Keller uses in *Der grüne Heinrich* is nowhere to be found in Stifter. Nor does Stifter avail himself of the metonymic use of small, familiar details to connote larger social forces, a technique ascribed by Roland Barthes to Balzac in his essay on the latter’s *Sarrasine*. In the sentence, “Midnight had just sounded from the clock of the Elysée-Bourbon,” Barthes argues, “a metonymy leads from the Elysée-Bourbon to *Wealth*, since the Faubourg St. Honoré [where the Elysée-Bourbon is located] is a wealthy neighborhood.

This wealth is itself connoted: a neighborhood of nouveau riches, the Faubourg-St. Honoré refers by synecdoche where wealth is produced without origins, diabolically.”<sup>120</sup> Stifter’s descriptions of wealth, by contrast, are blunt, direct and ahistorical. Of his grandfather, the priest recalls: “Er bauete auf diesem Grunde eine Werkstätte und ein Häuschen, heirathete ein armes Mädchen, und trieb nun als eigener Herr sein Gewerbe und seine Handelschaft. Er brachte es vorwärts, und starb als ein geachteter bei den Geschäftsleuten angesehener Mann.”<sup>121</sup> Even the presumably everyday objects in his novellas are described as though they are being encountered for the first time. In the opening chapters of *Der Nachsommer*, Stifter includes a lengthy passage in which the protagonist’s father pauses what a novel is: “In manchen Bücher sei zwar nichts erhalten, was geschehen sei oder wie sich manches befinde, sondern was die Menschen sich gedacht haben, was sich hätte zutragen können, oder was sie für Meinungen über irdische und über irdische Dinge hegen.”<sup>122</sup> Stifter simulates reality as experienced by a human being utterly unfamiliar with it. It is no coincidence that the *Bunte Steine* collection was initially conceived as a series of books for children (“Spielerei for junge Herzen,” as he puts it in the collection’s “Vorrede”) with each novella either about a child or told from the perspective of a child. Children are for Stifter the ideal narrators, not yet entangled in the web of assumptions and half-truths that constitutes adult common sense.

The opposite of this purified language is explicitly identified in “Kalkstein” as the irresponsible and frivolous use of language in culture and above all in business. In the death-bed confession of the priest to the land surveyor, the priest reveals to his to his

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<sup>120</sup> Barthes, Roland. *S/Z*. Trans. Richard Miller. Hill and Wang: New York, 1975. p. 21.

<sup>121</sup> Stifter, 100.

<sup>122</sup> Stifter, Adlabert. *Der Nachsommer*. Munich: Goldmann Verlag, 1990. p. 21

lifelong friend that he is in fact the son of a wealthy tanner, and that the reason he lives in such poverty is because of the poor business practice of his older brother, who inherited the business from their father. Here Stifter draws an explicit parallel between each brother's education and the respective courses that their lives follow. The elder brother excels at all of his lessons, particularly the study of Greek and Latin, as well as French and Italian, and at the practice of essay-writing. This study of language is in fact a process of socialization that enables the elder brother to take over the tannery, a bloody trade in which animals are slaughtered for their skin. The priest, on the other hand, fails utterly at his lessons. He is unable to solve his math problems, unable to write clearly and unable to speak the languages he is supposed to speak.<sup>123</sup> He is consequently relegated to the garden, where he learns to admire the peaceful growth of the plant life, which offers sustenance without the loss of life. When the elder brother attempts to expand their business by borrowing money, it is the duplicitous language of business that proves to be his ruin: "Ich weiß es nicht, haben andere Leute meinem Bruder den Glauben untergraben, oder hat der Wechsler selber, weil zwei Handelschaften, die uns bedeutend schuldeten, gefallen waren, und uns um unsern Reichthum brahcten, Mißtrauen geschöpft: er weigerte sich fortan die Wechsel unseres Hauses zu zahlen."<sup>124</sup> The already catacretic use of words like *Glauben* and *Schuld* flowers into the confusion of these "reports" that ruin the credit of a worthy man. "Worldly" language is, in short, a mark of Cain by means of which society brands its members; it is, not accidentally, through an act of language that the priest learns shame for the first time. While playing with Johanna, the daughter of the washerwoman next door—the source of

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<sup>123</sup> In this respect, he closely resembles the protagonist of Grillparzer's *Der arme Spielmann*, a text with which "Kalkstein" has much in common.

<sup>124</sup> *Werke und Briefe*, 116.

his taste for fine linen—Johanna’s mother calls out, “Johanna, schäme dich!”<sup>125</sup> Stifter’s purified language is, like the linen that he wears, meant to be a sort of fresh, white garment that the reader draws over himself to purify himself of the duplicitous language of the world of men.

While the critics and authors among whom the discourse of Realism took place conceived of art as an intensification of reality that separates the essential wheat from the chaff of experience, Stifter’s “purified” prose adds an stringent, ethical dimension to that act of aesthetic cognition in regarding the discarded as tainted, as filth. Insofar as the *Bunte Steine* stories have a theme, it is that of reconciliation after an apocalyptic purification—as of the flood that befell the people of Noah’s time, or the fire that rained down on the cities of the plain. “Granit”, the first story in the collection, begins with the narrator being beaten by his own mother for tracking pitch into the house. The narrator’s grandfather takes the boy out to look at the unspoiled landscape all around them and, in an act reminiscent of the act of creation, has him name each village, each forest, each river, each field as he points to it. The novella’s dramatic peak is the story of a plague that ravaged the landscape generations ago. In “Kalkstein,” the *Kar* is beset by a heavy haze that makes it difficult for the land surveyor to distinguish the landscape. The haze is cleared with a terrifying thunderstorm that rattles the windows of the village, beats down on their roofs and floods the valley, leaving the air clear (“gereinigt”) so that the landscape can shine forth in its full beauty. In “Bergkristall” a deadly blizzard covers the mountain where two children are lost on Christmas Eve in a blanket of snow, bringing together the two villages in the vicinity in a search for them. The destruction of the familiar world and its usual order—above all its

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<sup>125</sup> *Werke Und Briefe*. Vol. 2.2 p. 114.

language—goes hand in hand with a new clarity in men’s relations to one another and to nature. On the white of the page, what has been destroyed is called back into being once again, purified of its sinful associations.

What “Kalkstein” specifically offers us as we consider the function of description in Keller, then, is a model of Realism in which the ethical is primary not as something represented or as something counseled directly to the reader by the author, but rather as a way of being in the world that is demonstrated by the very mechanics of the writing itself. The attentiveness to the small, the ordinary, the everyday, the insignificant as that through which the great and imperceptible acts is enjoined to the reader not propositionally, but through the literary construction of the world of the *Kar*, by the way Stifter populates it with objects and human beings. Fleming is correct in arguing that the priest is held up as an exemplar to the reader, in that his child-like character, his generosity, his unconcern for luxury and social standing, his attentiveness to nature, his simplicity and his plain-spokenness all make a lasting impression on the land surveyor, who serves as a surrogate for the reader. But simply constructing an idealized character is not sufficient—after all, the same character would be an object of pity in the world of George Eliot and a laughing stock in the world of Balzac. The force of his example comes from the way that his world-view and Stifter’s, influence the sympathetic sparseness of the prose, the deliberate avoidance of social connotation, the privileging of the material over the human, which the “Vorrede” casts not as mere literary techniques but as the only way of apprehending reality itself.

## V. “Unbewusstes Weben”

In this final section of this chapter, I would like to take the model of an ethical Realism we discovered in Stifter’s “Kalkstein” and use it to return to Keller and his lengthy, detail-rich, often highly metaphorical descriptive passages. These, I argued, share with Stifter a desire to return the reader’s attention to the material dimension of existence, enjoining to the reader an ethic of joy in and care for the material. I further argued that, by means of their highly metaphorical character, each description in Keller was linked with a way of being in the world, what Keller refers to as a *Lebensart* or *Lebensweise*, such as a desire for order, a sense of rootlessness, chastity, animal desire, etc., become thereby not simply a representative account of a fixed reality but, to use Keller’s parlance, a *Sinnbild*, a symbol with an instructive meaning. Now, with our analysis of Stifter in mind, I would like to conclude this chapter by asking the question of whether this mode of digressive, metaphorical description is *itself* an ethic. If so, how does Keller intend for it to function? And what is its intended effect on the reader? If Stifter wishes to draw the reader’s attention to the *das sanfte Gesetz*, to attune him to that which is everywhere in the world and yet cannot be seen, what does Keller hope for his own descriptions?

Keller undoubtedly shares with Stifter the view that the continuity of essence and appearance in objects as in humans has been disrupted by the onset of crooked speculation and by the increasing absence of “honest” labor, the image of which is to be found in handicraft for both authors. Both authors see their world as one in which the appearance, or *Schein*, to use Keller’s term of honesty, virtuousness, square-dealing, and above all of happiness, no longer accords—indeed, runs sharply counter to—the actual nature, or *Wesen*, of a person or thing. In the *Seldwyla* novellas, these reflections are frequently

pinned on the comedy of mistaken identity, as in the beginning scene of the tellingly titled, “Kleider machen Leute,” in which Wenzel Strapinski accepts a ride in a fancy carriage and is mistaken for a count when he gets out in Goldach, or in the gender confusion of “Frau Regel Amrain und ihr Jüngster,” in which masculine characters of uncertain social position are mistaken for women. More often, the adversarial relationship between appearance and reality is staged by Keller as a pointed criticism of what would today be called “conspicuous consumption,” the compulsive cultivation of the image of wealth through the compulsive purchasing and display of visible markers of success. Rather than turning in an honest day’s work, John Kabys, the striving protagonist of “Der Schmied seines Glücks” turns all of his attention to his appearance—beginning with his name, which he has anglicized—in the belief that success will follow. The action of the novella starts when Kabys notices that to be successful businessman in Seldwyla, one must start a business with two names attached to it. Unable to find a business partner, he decides to marry and hyphenate his last name instead. Having made the acquaintance of a suitable woman, he spends the last of his savings on all sorts of finery, “die Idealausstattung eines Mannes im Glück,” as Keller puts it, in order to convince her father to grant him her hand in marriage:

Diese bestanden in einer vergoldeten Brille, in drei emaillierten Hemdeknöpfen, durch goldene Kettchen unter sich verbunden, in einer langen goldenen Uhrkette, welche eine geblünte Weste überkreuzte, mit allerlei Anhängsel, in einer gewaltigen Busennadel, welche als Miniaturgemälde eine Darstellung der Schlacht on Waterloo enthielt, ferner in drei Perlmutterfäßchen. In den Taschen trug, zog heror und legte er vor sich hin, wenn er sich setzte, ein großes Futterall aus Leder, in welchem eine Zigarrenspitze ruhte, aus Meerschaum geschnitzt, darstellend den aufs Pferd gebundenen Marzeppa;... ferner eine rote Zigarrentasche mit vergoldeterm Schloß, in welcher schöne Zigarren lagen mit kirschrot und weiß getigertem Deckblatt, ein abenteuerlich elegantes Feuerzeug, eine silberne Tabakdose, und eine gestickte Schreibtafel. Auch führte er das komplizierste und zierlichste aller Geldtäschchen mit unendlich geheimnisvollen Abteilung.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> *SW*, Vol. 5, 66.

This passage perfectly echoes that of Züß's drawer, from the listing style of the prose, the attention and care Keller, through Kabys, devotes to each trinket, even the vertiginous sense of the microcosmic, in which an event as cataclysmic and historically significant as the Battle of Waterloo is reduced to a tiny image on the tie pin of an aspiring Swiss business man. But here, the critical edge, which was subtler in "Die drei gerechten Kammacher," is at the fore. Kabys's person is covered with a sort of fool's gold that, the wonder of the passage notwithstanding, is a bald-faced attempt to purchase an image of trustworthiness that ought by rights to be earned, and indeed, Kabys's buffoonery, though it succeeds in the short term, quickly runs aground when, once the father acquiesces, Kabys learns that his hyphenated name will be "Kabys-Kopf," or cabbage head.

If we return for a moment to the passage in which Strapinski strolls down the streets of Goldach peering at the *Sinnbilder* on each house, their particular charm lies not in their design, but in the feeling they produce in him, "es sehe hinter jeder Haustüre wirklich so aus, wie die Überschrift angab, so daß er in eine Art moralisches Utopien hineingeraten wäre." Strapinski, being a tailor, is uniquely attuned to the matter of appearance—one might say, of vanity—and his deepest shame is that the poor circumstances of his life do not align with his taste, which he learned from his mother, for fine dress. This fantasy has a critical, enlightening moment. Keller has nothing but scorn for the misleading world of appearances, of playing-acting fostered by the world of business, which furnishes greater and greater rewards onto increasingly absurd confusion, lies and deceptions. The clear, unflinching eye with which Keller regards the world around him is meant to school his reader in spotting these deceptions, and in encouraging the reader to consider just what way of being the objects around him really embody, and thereby encourage. Like Karl

Marx, the critic of commodity fetishism, Keller sees himself as trying to break the spell that the *appearance* of value casts on a society whose life is increasingly subsumed under the profit motive. At the same time, the metaphoric play in the descriptive *Sinnbilder* all throughout *Die Leute von Seldwyla* are, to use the phrase from the above passages, meant to be morally utopian moments that allow the reader to imagine that, instead of providing a hard-edged barrier against their self-understanding and personal conception of happiness, that the objects all around one might instead embody, externally and fixedly, that inchoate self-understanding—that instead of the sharp dissonance Keller’s protagonists encounter between what they feel themselves to be and what they, in the eyes of others, actually are, that these two might actually be one again. The designation of a state of affairs is a utopia contains the implicit admission that this unity can and never will be the case except in a world of literature.

Keller’s sense that the solidity of reality is imperiled is not limited to the treatment of capitalism in *Die Leute von Seldwyla*. If we expand the range of our discussion momentarily to include the reflections on painting in *Der grüne Heinrich*, we see that the clear perception of the world is blocked not only by a misguided cultivation of appearance but by the transitoriness of human life itself. Tolstoy, it is said, wrote in the town square, taking note of all the faces that went by, the different manners of dress he saw, the bits of overheard conversation. By the 1870s, when Keller finished both *Heinrich* and the *Seldwyla* novellas, the provincial way of life, based around handicraft, he described in both works was one that existed largely in the memory of their author—though industrialization was well under way by the end of Keller’s life, there are tellingly few factories to be found in either work. The sense of absence and loss that suffuses the world

of Keller's characters is perhaps most vividly depicted in the scene in *Der grüne Heinrich* in which Heinrich, while keeping watch over the soon-to-die Anna, looks through the window—that most Realist of activities<sup>127</sup>—at the lake that he promised Anna's father he would one day paint and sees the first light of dawn streaking across its surface:

Ich machte das Fenster auf und sah lange auf den See hinaus, dessen waldige Uferhöhen vom Morgenröte beglänzt lagen, indessen der späte Mond noch am Himmel stand und sich ziemlich kräftig im dunklen Wasser spiegelte. Ich sah ihn nach und nach erblichen vor der Sonne, welche nun die gelben Kronen der Bäume vergoldete und einen zarten Schimmer über den erblauenden See warf. Zugleich aber begann die Luft sich wieder zu verhüllen.<sup>128</sup>

The nearness of death fills Heinrich with an awareness of the transitoriness of all things, which is both art's limit, as death is the limit of human endeavor, and its impetus. Likenesses, like the painting of Anna that hangs in her bedchamber, are frequently struck in *Der grüne Heinrich* so as to remind their owner of a loved one now gone; by the same token, the *Sinnbild* as a mode of representation that takes a transitory reality, vanishing even at its coming into being, and joins it to a fixed, unchanging symbol that the author hopes will be legible to future times. In this respect, Züß's drawer and Kabys's cigar case and satchel and Pankraz's mashed potatoes and Vrenchen's gingerbread house have much in common with the objects on the shelves of Frau Margarete's *Trödelkammer*, which is part pawn shop and part mausoleum. In his essay on Keller in *Logis in einem Landhaus*, W.G. Sebald writes that the rusty old weapons and torn-up oil paintings and old-fashioned tables covered in glass dishware and porcelain and figurines made of wood and clay on display in the old woman's shop lead "ein stilles Nachleben. Anders als das forwährend umlaufende Kapital sind diese verdämmernden Dinge aus dem Verkehr gezogen, haben ihren Warencharakter längst abgebußt und sind gewissermaßen schon in die Ewigkeit

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<sup>127</sup> Barthes perceptively notes in *S/Z* that in Realist prose the phrased "I looked" is semantically equivalent to the phrase "I am about to describe."

<sup>128</sup> *SW*. Vol. 3., 373.

eingegangen.”<sup>129</sup> The same may be said of the objects described by Keller, which have been plucked up from the commerce of every day life and are now—such is the hope of the author—frozen in the preterite of literary prose. But the qualifying word “gewissermaßen” in Sebald’s analysis is not to be overlooked here. Beyond the book, life goes on, and the elegiac character of Keller’s describes can only be a way of coming to terms with that loss, of being compensated for it.

## 6. Conclusion

The critics that most perceptively treat the role of description and poetic imagination in Keller’s have been those who are most circumspect in assessing the power of literature to redress reality’s wrongs without, however, overlooking the humor, the wit, and the play at work in Keller’s representation of the everyday. In *Das gedichtete Leben*, his comprehensive study of Keller, Gerhard Kaiser notes that Keller observed the fundamental unity of pessimism and optimism in his own writing well before he had written anything. In a poem from 1843, ten years before his first mature works, Keller wrote: “Unverwüstlich sind die Dichter / Alles wird zum Traum verwoben; / Selbst der nahe Tod wird spielend / Noch mit Schein und Tand umschlungen.”<sup>130</sup> The motif of an idle, unconscious, purposeless weaving to describe the turning of reality into poetic imagery is, so argues Kaiser, one that recurs frequently in Keller, for example in the figures of the two farmers plowing their fields at the beginning of “Romeo und Julia auf dem Dorfe,” each going back and forth, lost in thought, like the shuttle of a loom: “Und war er

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<sup>129</sup> Sebald, W.G. *Logis in einem Landhaus*. Carl Hanser Verlag, 1998. p. 105

<sup>130</sup> *SW*. Vol 1, 143.

webt, das weiss kein Weber!”<sup>131</sup> (We might note here the contrast to Stifter and the image he offers in his “Vorrede” of the naturalist minutely examining the movements of the compass needle.) Unlike Kaspar Locher, who argues that day-dreaming is portrayed by Keller as a narcissistic activity that his characters learn to overcome, Kaiser argues that it is constitutive of Keller’s Realism. Imagining what that existence might be like if it were made whole again is frequently the only productive labor they are able to perform. The act of weaving or spinning, of turning the cotton of experience into the spun flax of symbol and metaphor is for Keller’s characters their sole compensation for a shattered and solitary existence. “Die unverwüstlichen Dichter,” writes Kaiser, “sind schwerfüßige Träumer, die aus einer zerstückelten einsamen Leben den Traum von ganzen Leben wecken, aus dem wiederum ein schmerzliches Erwachen herausreißt”<sup>132</sup> *Die Leute von Seldwyla* is filled with such passages, perhaps none more poignant than the one in which Vrenchen, before killing herself, describes to the woman who has come to haul off her possessions what her life would be like if she were rich, listing off the objects she would lend the neighbors who had never been generous to her: “Ein artiges Halstüchelchen oder rein Restchen Seidenzeug oder ein hübsches altes Band für Eure Röcke oder ein Stück Zeug zu einer neuen Schürze wird gewiß auch zu finden sein, wenn wir meine Kisten und Kasten durchmustern in einer vertrauten Stunde!” As with Stifter, the verisimilitude in these fantasies, that Vrenchen is describing a recognizable way of life, is significant to, but not identical with, its realism. What lends these passages their solidity is not only that they accurately describe Swiss life but that they come from a place of desperation, of hunger

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<sup>131</sup> Kaiser postulates that the image refers to the *Erdgeist* in Goethe’s *Faust*, which describes itself as “ein wissender Weber.”

<sup>132</sup> Kaiser, Gerhard. *Gottfried Keller: Das gedichtete Leben*. Munich: Insel Verlag, 1981.

and toil, charged at once with a joy in the power of imagination—one is reminded of Satan’s defiant pronouncement in *Paradise Lost* that the mind can make a Hell of Heaven and a Heaven of Hell—as well as with the ruefulness that comes with the knowledge that reality cannot be confronted.

I will conclude, then, with the observation that both the socio-critical and the anthropological thrust of description in Keller originate in the view, implicit in the Realist program of Vischer, Ludwig, Schmidt et. Al, that reality on its own is insufficiency, that it needs literary representation to supplement it, to make it whole. After all: of the purpose of art is simply to reproduce “das Reale,” then why does art need to exist at all? The idea of a reality that has been subjected to a process of *Verklärung*, that is the same but somehow different, truer, sharper, more intense, was the Realists answer to this question. Keller’s own answer, which took the form of the descriptive prose we considered in this chapter, was that literature, in offering a glimpse of what a better, more balanced life might look like, offers the reader the courage to face the hardships of thankless work and financial uncertainty, ending in death, as they actually are. Perhaps the single most programmatic line in the *Seldwyla* novellas is the moment when, sitting down to his enormous meal at the inn, Strapinski ceases to struggle against fate and sighs, “Es ist einmal, wie es ist!” Like a good glass of wine proffered to a guest in a time of distress, the poetic description of the world in Keller would give his reader the courage to see things as they are and, with what good cheer he can, accept them.

#### *IV. Ein Öffentliches Schauspiel: The Zeitroman as Ethical Form in Martin Salander*

##### **1. Introduction**

In November 1852 Gottfried Keller published a brief review in the *Blätter für literarische Unterhaltung* of Jeremias Gotthelf's *Zeitgeist und Berner Geist*. The review takes clear-eyed stock of Gotthelf's limitations as a writer; Keller notes his tendency, for example, to draw the Swiss peasants that populate his stories in stark moral colors, either as heroes or villains; but he also praises the intimate, organic connection Gotthelf has with the Swiss people that allows realism to "triumph" in his work. Keller senses that intimate connection above all in Gotthelf's treatment of the political—that he does not avoid it, as he claims in the book's introduction that his friends counseled him to do, but rather places it front and center in each story:

Darin hat er als Bürger wie als Schriftsteller u.s.w. durchaus Recht, denn heute ist Alles Politik und hängt mit ihr zusammen von dem Leder an unserer Schuhsohle bis zum obersten Ziegel am Dache, und der Rauch der aus dem Schornsteine steigt ist Politik and umhängt in verfänglichen Wolken über Hütten und Palästen, treibt hin und her über Städten und Dörfern.<sup>133</sup>

Given Gotthelf's conservative agrarian politics, this programmatic statement is a striking one from the ardently liberal Keller. What distinguishes the Realist era, a time of continent-wide political upheaval, from all other eras before it, Keller argues, is that no representation of it can credibly exclude politics. In Keller's time, fidelity to country and fidelity to reality are one and the same; to discharge the duties of the author is also to discharge the duties of the citizen.

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<sup>133</sup>*SW*, Vol. 7., 100.

To a reader sufficiently impressed by the review to follow Keller's literary output through the remainder of the decade, Keller's assertion of the ubiquity of politics in modern life would have been a puzzling one. To be sure, the young Keller had taken part in Switzerland's national struggles against the Catholic Separatist League, and devoted years of his life to public service as the Secretary to the Canton of Zurich. Keller's work is peppered throughout with approving references to anti-imperial struggles, from the Greeks against the Ottomans, the Shamil's against the Tsar, and Switzerland itself against Napoleon III. Still, politics, as the organization of human beings into institutions of governance is only glancingly touched upon in the work for which Keller is best known. *Der grüne Heinrich* opens, as I have noted, with a poetic sketch of the liberal period of the 1830s and closes with its protagonist's jaundiced reflections on public life; "Frau Regel Amrain und ihr Jüngster" contains an episode that makes comedic light of provincial politics; but apart from these, Swiss citizenship is rarely fore-grounded in Keller's work. This hypothetical reader would have been well justified in placing Keller in the company of other intellectuals from the period—Robert Prutz, Julian Schmidt, Otto Ludwig, Gustav Freytag, Richard Wagner, Friedrich Hebbel, and Franz Grillparzer, to name only the most notable—whose youthful revolutionary beliefs cooled as they matured, and curdled into bitterness when they witnessed the bellicose, materialistic, authoritarian nation that came into existence in 1871.

And yet, a commitment to democracy, to the equality of all citizens before the law *does* lie at the heart of Keller's writing—as its aesthetic program. For Keller, the *Freidenker*, democracy meant self-governance, the abolition of hierarchy, the self-identity of the rulers and the ruled. Democracy in art, for Keller, meant that the art's

sublimity only had substance insofar as it had an organic relationship to the life of “the people”—the lowest and least influential citizens of the nation. Such is the praise Keller lavishes on Shakespeare in the oft-cited opening lines of “Romeo und Julia auf dem Dorfe:”

Diese Geschichte zu erzählen würde eine müßige Nachahmung sein, wenn sie nicht auf einem wirklichen Vorfall beruhte, zum Beweise, wie tief im Menschenleben jede jener Fabeln wurzelt, auf welche die großen alten Werke gebaut sind. Die Zahl solcher Fabeln ist mäßig; aber stets treten sie in neuem Gewande wieder in die Erscheinung und zwingen alsdann die Hand, sie festzuhalten.<sup>134</sup>

For Keller any story, from the simplest fable to the most complex work of Shakespeare, is legitimated not by its excellence but by its rootedness in the life of the people. He insists on the underlying unity of his story and Shakespeare’s, despite the class difference of their subjects; the authenticity of its existence in real life compels the author to capture it. In response to a review of the novella by Berthold Auerbach, who found the recourse to *Romeo and Juliet* too pretentious a means for recounting the double suicide of two destitute farmer children, Keller insisted on the necessary continuity of art and life, material and abstract, rarified and common: “Erstens ist ja das, was wir selbst schreiben, auch auf Papier gedruckt und gehört von dieser Seite zur papiernen Welt, und zweitens ist ja Shakespeare, obgleich gedruckt, doch nur das Leben selbst und keine unlebendige Reminiszenz,” he wrote.<sup>135</sup> Though only a small portion of the German-speaking world can read Shakespeare, Shakespeare only tells of the same life lived by each person, no matter their station. For Keller, whose works are littered with references to Shakespeare, Greek mythology, the Bible, the *Odyssey*, and the works of Goethe and Schiller, this fundamental continuity extends in both directions; the Realist author is not only legitimized by his connection to the life of the people, but he serves, as well, in highlighting that aspect of

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<sup>134</sup> *SW*, Vol. 7, 61.

<sup>135</sup> *SW*, Vol. 7, 167.

classic literature that is most intimately connected to the people. He gives readers access to the Bard's work by expressing it in language more accessible to a less educated reader, by finding that same tragedy not in a distant, far-off place to which that reader might have no access, but in the world he recognizes, the world in which he dwells. The Realist author does not write only *of* democracy, but he writes *democratically*.

The first author to consider rigorously and systematically the relationship between Keller's democratic commitments and the character of his prose is, unsurprisingly, Georg Lukács. In his 1939 reflection on Keller's work, Lukács argues that it is Keller's commitment to true plebeian republicanism—and not simply the advancement of the property-owning middle classes—that distinguishes him from what Lukács refers to as the sterile “bürgerlicher Realismus” of Gustav Freytag, as well as from the reactionary conservatism of the *Dorfgeschichte*. The belief that all of the citizens of a nation ought to be treated with equal dignity manifests in Keller as the demand that the high and sublime be conveyed in terms even those with little schooling can understand: “In this context,” writes Lukács, “Keller proceeds from the profoundly democratic presupposition that everything which is morally good will be understood by the people if it is portrayed with authentic realism... His whole literary activity is placed in the service of such a political and social, moral and emotional strengthening of the people.”<sup>136</sup> The scenes showing both the destitution and the joy of village life in Keller are, then, counter-reactionary, meant to puncture the ideologies of capitalism and state that set the working poor at odds with the upwardly mobile middle classes. In demonstrating the necessary interdependence of the high and low, the ordinary and the extraordinary, in the way he uses alliteration, punning,

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<sup>136</sup> Lukács, Georg. *German Realists in the Nineteenth Century*. “Gottfried Keller”. Trans. Jeremy Gaines and Paul Keast. Ed. Rodney Livingstone. p. 183

and colloquialism to convey complex philosophical concepts, Keller is, in the eyes of Lukács, a political pedagogue. His art instructs his countrymen in the way of a true and lasting democracy. In so doing, Keller takes impersonal historical forces and humanizes them by grounding them firmly in social reality, the realm of character, value, and disposition that in the previous two chapters we have called the ethical, or, as Lukács puts it: “in the relations between human beings, in their psychology, morality and world-view, in their feelings and experiences, thought and action... transforms all actions, even the most isolated ruminations, into social events.”<sup>137</sup>

In Lukács’ view, Keller’s ethical Realism is, above all, a political one. Politics provides the key concept that links the representation of the world in Keller to the cultivation of the self—both, he argues, are a form of political pedagogy. It is to test this hypothesis that I will examine Keller’s final novel, the social novel *Martin Salander*, published in 1886. Of all of Keller’s work, *Martin Salander* is the novel that deals most directly with the social, historical, and political problems of Keller’s day. The novel tells the story of the eponymous schoolteacher-cum-businessman-cum-politician, whose hopes for the Swiss republic are quickly dampened by the widespread corruption and rapacity he encounters, not least in his sons-in-law, the social climbers Isidor and Julian Weidelich, and in his lifelong friend Louis Wohlwend, a confidence man who repeatedly swindles Salander out of his fortune. The novel concludes with the triumph of civic virtue: the Weidelich twins are arrested and tried for the misappropriation of public funds, while Wohlwend is finally thwarted by Salander’s son Arnold. Throughout, *Martin Salander* is packed with references to constitutional reforms, banking crises, mass migration,

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 233.

industrialization, school reform, deforestation, animal conservation, and Darwin's evolutionary theory. It is the most concretely realistic of all of Keller's work, an expansive panorama Swiss of life at the dawn of the *Gründerzeit*, and therefore the text that lays out most explicitly Keller's hopes for and criticisms of the Swiss people and the Swiss republic.

That Keller waited until the end of his career to attempt a *Zeitroman* is, in itself, striking and suggestive for our consideration of his relationship to Realism. The social novel, in which the author seeks to depict a dramatic social change or a particularly pervasive social problem—the rise of industrialization, for example—by dramatizing its effects on the individual, was hardly a new one in 1886. In the German-speaking world, the 1840s and '50s saw a veritable explosion of the genre. A period of nearly fifteen years saw the publication of Karl Gutzkow's *Die Ritter vom Geist* (1850-2), Gotthelf's *Zeitgeist und Berner Geist* (1851), Ludwig Steub's *Deutsche Träume* (1858), Berthold Auerbach's *Auf der Höhe* (1865), and most significantly, Gustav Freytag's *Soll und Haben* (1855), the most successful novel of the German nineteenth century. (This is to say nothing, of course, of the enormous impact of the novels of Sir Walter Scott, Charles Dickens, and Balzac). Broadly, the *Zeitroman* can be characterized as a novel that uses its characters and plot to depicts the effects of dynamic historical changes in the lives of individuals and communities. But for those authors who, like Freytag, the world that they observed around them, the *Zeitroman* contained a predictive element as well; its task was to identify those acorns—the German nation, for example, then only a loose customs union; or industrialization, still laggard and behind in the 1850s, merely a promise held in a few miles of railroad track—and to portray the oaks that they would some day be. “In a dynamic and progressive society reality was, after all, not static,” writes Eric Hobsbawm in a

thumbnail sketch of the period, “Was it not realism to represent, not the necessarily imperfect present, but the better situation to which men aspired and which was already, surely, being created?”<sup>138</sup> Seen in this light, by presenting the ideal historical reality that was just around the corner, the *Zeitroman* became a tool of political pedagogy. It unearthed its latent elements in the present, and strengthening them, charging the reader’s energies, by drawing his attention to them: the *Zeitroman* offered a civic education for a German nation that did not yet exist.

Following Lukács, scholars like Michael Feldt, Richard Ruppel, and Peter Bichsel rightly observe that Keller places this pedagogical aspect of the *Zeitroman* front and center in *Martin Salander*.<sup>139</sup> All three authors stress the educational and aspirational aspect of Salander’s civics. Salander, whose biography tracks quite closely to that of the author himself, is guided in everything he does, as are his fellow Realists, by an ardent idealism, a belief that human beings are perfected by being made to imagine an ideal, that of republican self-rule. Salander eagerly embraces anything and everything as a potential pedagogical tool for perfecting the Swiss citizenry; nature, romantic love, politics. In this, *Martin Salander* is without a doubt his most ethical novel—the novel that most openly embraces that there is a right way to live, and that, rather than simply observing the way that human beings *do* live, asks what can be done to make them live the way they *ought* to. Against these, we must observe that there is virtually nowhere in the world of *Martin Salander* that these pedagogical ambitions succeed; not a single action taken by Salander

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<sup>138</sup> Hobsbawm, Eric. *The Age of Capital*. New York, 1975: Vintage Books. p. 291

<sup>139</sup> Cf. Bichsel, Peter. *Die Totaldemokraten. Aufsätze über die Schweiz*. Suhrkamp, 1998; Feldt, Michael. “Die andere Bildung. Zur Figur des Bourgeois und des Citoyen in Gottfried Kellers Roman *Martin Salander*.” *Wie Alles sich zum Ganzen webt*. Ed. Akio Ogawa, Kazuhiko Tamura, and Dieter Trauden. Stauffenberg, 2010. p. 29-44; Ruppel, Richard. *Gottfried Keller: Poet, Pedagogue, and Humanist*. Peter Lang, 1988.

brings his ideal republic any closer to reality. School, family, nature—every pedagogical tool is ineffective against the decadence and the inertia of mass democracy. Keller's final novel is, at once, his most directly engaged in the Swiss life of his time, the most optimistic about the possibilities for its improvement, and the most pessimistic about what those possibilities might finally yield.

What, then, is *Martin Salander*, as a work of ethical Realism? And given that the very future of the Swiss people is at stake in Keller's portrait of a republic in crisis, what role does he envision for art as a tool of ethical, and therefore, civic pedagogy?

I will consider two answers to this question. The first will be the *topos* of the *Festspiel* in Keller's *oeuvre*, which I will explore in three works: the *Tellfest* from *Der grüne Heinrich*, in which the entirety of Heinrich's native village takes part in a rowdy performance of Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell*; *Das grosse Schillerfest*, which he wrote on the occasion of the centennial celebrations of Friedrich Schiller's birthday in 1859; finally, the wedding of Salander's daughters, Setti and Netti, to the Weidelich twins; at which Salander stages an impromptu comic play intended to reconcile the two political parties in Switzerland. In Keller, the festival—a city-wide celebration whose centerpiece is a play arranged and performed by the townspeople—is held up as both an artistic and political ideal. By abolishing the distinction between art and life, audience and performer, author and reader, the *Volksfest* is the ultimate pedagogical tool: in it democracy is not simply depicted but actually performed and momentarily achieved. But this ideal nonetheless contains, at the same time, a deep ambivalence towards the instructive power of art. It achieves its civic ends only by entirely liquidating its poetic dimension and dissolving into life itself. If the first two works are optimistic, if uncertain, about the power of art to reach

a citizenry to whom the high and the sublime is often remote and illegible, then *Martin Salander* vehemently rejects art as a tool of civic instruction. *Salander* openly despairs of art's instructive possibilities in the age of mass democracy, and breaks firmly and permanently with the idealism on which his earlier work draws. Tellingly, the only successful and enlightening public spectacle in *Salander* is a criminal trial—"ein öffentliches Schauspiel," as the narrator dryly calls it.

The second answer may be found in the emphasis placed by the novel on modes of comportment towards the self and towards the world. In the episodes of Isidor and Julian's courtship with Salander's daughters, and in Martin Salander's own wooing of a Greek beauty named Myrrha Glawicz; Keller offers not only a political critique of artistic beauty but an *ethical* one, as well: namely, that beauty stokes desire, that it causes it to grow and feed on itself, and in so doing, sharpens in him the hunger for what might be, rather than the courageous acceptance of *what is*. In the idealized character of Arnold, Salander's son, and the family's savior, Keller offers a counterweight to the idealism of Salander and Wohlwend; a critical ethic of renunciation that punctures all ideals, and that holds itself apart from the fury of sexual desire, from the greed of acquisition, and finally, in any and all political idealism. To cool desire so as to see the world clearly, and to see the world clearly so as to free oneself of desire, that is Arnold's hope, and it is on that critical note that Keller's final novel, both his most cynical and his most hopeful, leaves his reader.

## **2. *Excelsior!*: *Zeitroman* as Pedagogical Form**

I would like to begin, as in the previous chapters, by examining closely one passage from *Martin Salander*. Here, in the novel's sixth chapter, Martin Salander has just returned

from a second sojourn to Brazil, lasting three years. From afar, he has keenly followed the constitutional battles in Switzerland, which have resulted in the ratification of the direct referendum. As he tours his native city, the fictional Munsterburg—based on Zurich—with his son Arnold in tow, he hopes to see an enlightened citizenry practicing self-rule:

Salander machte mit dem Knaben [Arnold] einen weiten Weg in der Runde um die Stadt; überall hörte man Tanzmusik, welcher junges Volk beiderlei Geschlechts zustrebte. Man sah auch etwa einen Zug Schützen, die mit ihren Gewehren einer letzten Sonntagsübung nachgingen, oder eine Schar Turner mit Stäben auf der Schulter, den Tambour voran. Dazwischen mannigfaches Volk durcheinander wimmelnd, fröhlich oder gleichgültig, einzelne mürrisch und über irgend etwas fluchend; den Hauch und Glanz aber der neuen Zeit, das Wehen des Geistes, den etwas feierlicheren Ernst, den er suchte, konnte er nicht wahrnehmen. Man hörte Singen auf den Gassen und in den Schenkhäusern, es waren die alten Lieder, von denen die Leute, ganz wie ehemals, nur die erste Strophe kannten und etwa die letzte: wenn Einer noch eine mittlere aufbrachte, so lallten die Anderen das Lied ohne Worte mit. Auf einer staubigen Straße balgte sich ein Haufe angetrunkener Jünglinge, als ob es keine edlere Verständigung für junge Bürger gäbe, welche über die Gesetze nachzudenken gewohnt sind, über die sie mitzustimmen haben. Alle hundert Schritte bettelte ein Mann mit einer Ziehharmonika oder einem leeren Rockärmel, während der Arm auf dem Rücken lag. Kurz, es war Alles, wie es vor Altem an einem Herbstsonntag gewesen, und zu gewärtigen, daß später am Tage einige der freiesten Männer nicht mehr auf ihren Füßen würden stehen können.

Salander schüttelte leise den Kopf, indem er sich aufmerksam umsah. Nun, sagte er bei sich selber, alle großen Veränderungen müssen einen Übergang haben und sich einleben. Aber ich hätte geglaubt, schon die Tatsache eines solchen Ereignisses würde Land und Himmel eine andere Physiognomie machen! Am Ende ist es aber und wird wohl sein die angeborne Bescheidenheit des Volkes, seine schlichte Gewöhnung, welche es nicht leicht die anspruchsvollere Toga umwerfen läßt!<sup>140</sup>

This passage introduces early on the motif of music as to describe Switzerland's public life. Everywhere, the residents of Switzerland are in good cheer, find much to celebrate, and yet the music lacks the spirit of a truly binding communal force. Though everyone appreciates the good cheer of the old patriotic songs, nobody can remember their words or their melody, and such a corrosive individualism has set in that no two Swiss citizens can sing in key together. The endless festivity masks not only the lack of a true civic culture in Switzerland, but also the inequality of the nation's newfound fortune, observable in the

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<sup>140</sup> *SW*, Vol. 6, 449.

beggars playing the harmonica on every corner. So unrestrained is the celebration that, as the narrator ruefully observes, later in the day the freest citizens on earth will find it difficult to stand. The reader gains some insight into Martin Salander's tendency to see the best in the Swiss people despite all evidence to the contrary in his speculation that this dismal public culture is due to the Swiss people's natural modesty, and their habituation to the plain and the simple, that refuses to be covered up by the more demanding toga they have donned.

What the reader first notices about this passage is its clever reversal of a familiar motif from Keller's earlier work. In the *Seldwyla* novellas, as in *Der grüne Heinrich*, Keller makes repeated use of the trope of the returning *Weltreisender*—for example, Pankraz returning home after decades abroad, to the astonishment of his mother and sister, with a lion's pelt slung over his shoulder. Keller is able to produce both considerable dramatic impact and a light comic effect by contrasting between the newly-opened global scope of mid-nineteenth century and the sleepy provincialism of his nation; Herr Lee, Heinrich's father, produces a near-magical effect on his fellow countrymen when he returns from an apprenticeship in Germany speaking *Hochdeutsch*. Like Gulliver before the Lilluputians,<sup>141</sup> Salander observes the new developments in his native land with the curious, unfamiliar eyes of a sailor washed up on the shores of a previously undiscovered civilization. Salander's ardent patriotism, together with the expansive, idealist cast of his character, allows the novel to momentarily detach itself from his perspective and take in the entire Swiss people in one sweeping glance. Here, for the first time, the Swiss people

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<sup>141</sup> Another reference is drawn to Odysseus when Salander returns to his bed and finds not an olive tree but his old reliable shoe horn.

enter into the novel's dramatic space altogether, *en masse*, and stand before the reader, offering him a full, panoramic view onto *die neue Zeit*.

How does the new age differ from the one before it? The scholar John B. Lyon stresses the overwhelming sense of displacement that hangs over Salander's encounters with his fellow Munsterburgers upon his return. "Keller begins the novel with a loss of certainty about place," Lyon writes of the book's opening scenes. "A man... searches fruitlessly for the paths to his family's home, for these paths, '*lagen auch weiterhin unter staubigen oder mit hartem Kies beschotterten Fahrstraßen begraben.*' Familiar place is buried for the protagonist; modernism (in the form of gravel-surfaced roads) has relegated it to the realm of memory and excluded it from present experience."<sup>142</sup> The townspeople that Salander encounters evince a distinct discomfort at being identified as Swiss. Two boys mock another for using the German *Mutter*, with its plebian, instead of the French and therefore socially aspirational *Mama*. Their mother, a washerwoman pretentiously dressed in an expensive hat, bristles when Salander mentions the Swiss *Volk*; they are simply *Leute*, she insists, "die Alle das gleiche Recht haben, empor zu kommen!"<sup>143</sup> A large, modern train station—based on the Zurich train station, completed in 1871—is now in the heart of the town. Five chapters later, Salander's stroll through Munsterburg confirms on a broad, sweeping scale the worries that these first episodic impressions have raised in him. A corrosive individualism and decadent love of pleasure have taken hold of the country. Compulsory military duty—an indispensable tool during the mid-nineteenth century for constructing a sense of national identity in fledgling countries—has been

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<sup>142</sup> Lyon, John B. "Allegorical Place in Gottfried Keller's Martin Salander." *Out of Place: German Realism, Displacement and Modernity*.

<sup>143</sup> Keller, 389.

replaced by frivolous shooting contests. Patriotic songs are still sung over a glass of beer, but their substance has been forgotten. Where, thirty years before, the Seldwylers were always “guter Dinge”—what Salander praises as “feierlicher Ernst”—here that cheer has curdled into an idle pursuit of pleasure. Since no one can hear what anyone else is singing, all that can be heard is disharmony and discord. No one in Switzerland can see past the end of his own nose to the common good.

No less noteworthy is the concrete setting of this passage in the *now* of the reader’s present, so often absent from Keller’s other prose work. The novel achieves this sense of presence through its use, from the very beginning, of historical details to anchor the characters and the action. Based on the references to the Munsterburg train station and the constitutional battles alluded to by Salander, a contemporary reader would have had little difficulty identifying the time as the end of the 1860s. From the loose biography of himself and the account of his financial troubles that Salander gives to his friend and ally Möhni Wighart in the second chapter, the reader can infer that Salander was born in the twenties. He would have witnessed as a child the rise to power of the liberal government in 1832, and would therefore have come of age during the era described by Keller in the first two chapters of the revised *Der grüne Heinrich*. In the 1840s, at the height of liberal nationalist sentiment in Switzerland, Salander attended the *Lehrseminar* to become a teacher at a secondary school—the decisive nation-building tool of the nineteenth century republic. Following his account, Salander guaranteed Wohlwend’s disastrous loan in the 1850s, just as Switzerland finds itself in the midst of a period of massive economic growth, and when he is ruined, he goes seeks his fortune abroad, as did hundreds of thousands of other Swiss men and women. And finally the main action of the novel coincides with the banking crises,

bankruptcies, and other famous instances of white-collar crime that dominated Swiss headlines all through the 1860s. Salander's travails are, in effect, those of Switzerland itself; his life registers, like a seismograph, the massive, impersonal forces bringing themselves to bear on what once been a seemingly unchangeable reality of agrarian labor and skilled handicraft. Consequently, Salander eschews the almost anthropological tone of the introduction to the *Die Leute von Seldwyla*, the residents of which isolated, far-flung town were worthy of literary representation as a wrinkle, an exception in the Swiss character. In fashioning itself as a *Zeitroman*, in claiming to describe the present moment in which the novel was composed, the passage above takes on an interpellative power that binds both the author and the reader to the fate of Martin Salander.

To the critics and novelist of the Realist period who shared Keller's liberal democratic politics, the broad historical perspective of the *Zeitroman* was not simply a tendency or technique of Realism. It was the task of the modern novel itself. Why? Because, as Julian Schmidt observes in the third volume of his *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur seit Lessings Tod*, that the straight-forward, naïve representation of times past is no longer possible in an age whose day-to-day reality is so expansive, so multi-faceted, so rapidly shifting as that of the nineteenth century. "Es ist nicht möglich," he writes, "das Leben in seinem beständigen Fluß zu photographieren, und das ist in der Tat das Hauptstreben des modernen Romans. Er steht nicht wie der ältere Erzähler gleichsam in der Mitte zwischen dem Gegenstand und den Zuhörern."<sup>144</sup> Instead, the author seeks to reproduce the strict necessity of life, the underlying laws that make objects visible as they are. Formally, this means the abolition of chance and unlikely occurrence in the

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<sup>144</sup> Schmidt, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur*, Vol. 3, 540.

construction of plot and character, the strict enforcement of believability. It also means a shift of representational emphasis: “[Der Autor] sucht,” continues Schmidt, “den Gegenstand oder vielmehr die Lichtbewegung, in welcher derselber sichtbar wird, wirklich zu geben.”<sup>145</sup> The recourse to the advancements of industry, science, technology, and communications media implied in Schmidt’s reference to optical and technical media—the telescope and microscope are also mentioned in the same chapter alongside photography—is explicitly joined, in his analysis of *Soll und Haben* some pages later, to the advent of parliamentary democracy and the expansion of trade:

Den Dichtern der classischen Zeit konnte man es nicht verargen, wenn sie mit gänzlicher Nichtachtung der sogenannten Philister, das heist des wirklichen Lebens, die Kunst in das Reich der Schatten flüchteten. Harmonische Ausbildung aller Kräfte war nur den bevorzugten Ständen oder den Vagabunden möglich, der Bürger ging in einseitiger Thätigkeit unter und hatte innerhalb der Gesellschaft keine Ehre. Seit der Zeit haben sich die Überzeugungen geändert: durch die allgemeine Wehrpflicht, durch die gymnastischen Übungen, durch die ersten parlamentarischen Versuche, sowie durch den ungeheuren Aufschwung des Handels und der Industrie hat der Bürger Lebensmuth und Selbstgefühl gewonnen.<sup>146</sup>

[...]

Wer in der Gegenwart sich erhalten will muß in der Weise des Bürgerthums auf Erwerb denken, d.h. folgerichtig, mit ausdauerndem Verstand arbeiten. Die bürgerliche Arbeit ist die Grundlage der modernen Gesellschaft, das Gesetz der Volkswirtschaft das Gesetz des modernen Staats.

In order to live in modern society, Schmidt argues, one must live and work like the middle classes—in an orderly, sensible, diligent manner. It is industry and trade that provide the funds that keep the modern state solvent, and, in so doing, guarantee the stability of the lives of its citizens. What follows, then, is that though many experiences of the present exist, they are not all equally *real*; only the middle classes, whose existence consists of grasping, confronting, and transforming reality, have a substantial relation with the laws that the Europe of the nineteenth century. It follows, then, that the middle classes are the

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<sup>145</sup> Schmidt, 540.

<sup>146</sup> Schmidt, 545.

proper subject of the modern novel, whose proper perspective is, once again, that of the middle class.

Schmidt's cultural analysis is of less interest to us for its originality, or lack thereof, than for the representational difficulties it poses to the German Realist. If it is true, as Schmidt claims, that in order to be "realistic" the modern novel must place the travails of individual characters against the background of industrial trade and liberal nationalism; if the affects it must seek to produce in the reader are "Lebensmuth" and "Selbstgefühl", then how can the German-speaking novelist adequately represent these forces when they exist only in embryonic form in his daily life? It is precisely this problem that faces Martin Salander's when he perplexedly observes, in the passage above, that he lives in an *Übergangszeit*—that the surface of reality has not yet caught up with the "real" currents beneath it. The Realist author has, therefore, a second task in addition to the first (discerning the strict necessity beneath the flow of surface reality): he has also to show this reality as it *will* be when these tendencies come to full fruition, as he might predict an acorn will one day grow into a tree. He must construct a single poetic reality, real and ideal, present and future, in a single organic unity. The temporal position and poetic task of the Realist author, as well as its concretely historical terms, are neatly articulated in the introduction to *Soll und Haben* itself:

Nur zu sehr fehlt das Behagen am fremden und eigenen Leben, die Sicherheit fehlt und der frohe Stolz, mit welchem die Schriftsteller anderer Sprachen auf die Vergangenheit und Gegenwart ihres Volkes blicken, im Überfluss aber hat der Deutsche Demütigungen, unerfüllte Wünsche, und eifrigen Zorn... Jetzt ein furchtbarer Krieg ist entbrannt, und mit finsterner Sorge sieht der Deutsche in die Zukunft seines Vaterlandes.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Freytag, Gustav. *Soll Und Haben*. Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1913. p 4.

By discovering veins of patriotism, diligent work, and the abolition of old hierarchies and moribund ways of life in the rock of daily life, Freytag seeks to cultivate precisely that character and those values in the present that will bring about the better world he has envisioned. The verisimilitude of the Realist novel is, therefore, only an intermediary step to its true goal, which is to *intervene* in political history itself. It is for this reason that the poetic idealizations of Realism are real, while those of Romanticism are pure fantasy: “Die poetische Bewältigung [unseres bürgerliches Lebens] wird das Gefühl unsers Volkes mehr anregen und läutern,“ Schmidt writes, „also auch förderlicher sein, als die Treibhaushandlung griechischer und indischer Gewächse.“<sup>148</sup> It is no accident that the *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur* ends not with an aesthetic reflection but a political exhortation to the German people to labor for their freedom. For the liberal-nationalist author, concludes the scholar Hermann Kinder in his analysis of Schmidt and Freytag, “das eigentliche Kunstwerk... ist nicht das ästhetische Werk sondern der humane und nationale Staat.”<sup>149</sup>

*Martin Salander* seizes on this pedagogical aspiration of the *Zeitroman* and places it in the foreground of its poetic treatment of the troubles facing the Switzerland of the *Gründerzeit*. Perhaps the most significant detail of the passage above is that Salander is accompanied by his son Arnold, the future inheritor and guardian of the Swiss republic. Arnold is Salander’s charge; unlike his daughters, he will one day be able to sit on the *Geheimrat*, and it is to him, as well as to the reader, that Salander’s disappointed remarks are addressed. Pedagogy, politics, and fatherhood are for Salander one and the same. So shaken is he by the distracted manner of his sons-in-law Isidor and Julian at the

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<sup>148</sup> Schmidt, 284.

<sup>149</sup> Kinder, 189.

*Geheimrat*—and by the memory of this stroll with Arnold—that he rushes home to inform his wife of his plan for a universal political education in Switzerland. As Salander explains to his bemused spouse, “Nähern sich die jungen Männer ihrem zwanzigsten Lebensjahre,”

etwa im achtzehnten, werden sie staatsbürgerlich eingeschult. Die Verfassungskunde haben sie schon in der Alltagsschule rasch durchgemacht als Knaben; jetzt wird sie in den flüchtigeren Köpfen halb verblaßt sein. Sie wird also nochmals kräftig aufgefrischt und abschließlich sodann der ganze Kreis der Gesetzgebung für das Verständnis geöffnet, kurz ehe sie in den Genuß und die Pflichten der Volksrechte eintreten. Ich dünke, das wären Sachen genug, die Zeit auszufüllen! Schwierig wird es im Anfang wohl sein, gleichmäßig und beharrlich vorzugehen, doch es wird gehen müssen, wenn die Rechte selbst nicht eine Ironie werden sollen! Ich habe noch vergessen, daß nebenher jeder junge Bursche lernen soll, sich einen schlichteren Tisch oder eine Bank zu zimmern, und daß auch hiefür auf eine Einrichtung zu denken ist!<sup>150</sup>

Salander’s proposal is, of course, impracticable. Marie Salander quickly bursts her husband’s bubble by darkly quipping that the law would prove very costly—since the state would need to raise a considerable amount of money to wage wars to capture the slaves to work Switzerland’s farms in these boys’ absence. But Salander’s dream of compulsory civic education, along the lines of what an older American reader might recognize as “civics class,” is nonetheless a crucial moment in Keller’s work because it reverses the relationship between ethics and politics that orients his writing until then. By contrast, in Keller’s 1856 novella from the first *Seldwyla* cycle, “Frau Regel Amrain und ihr Jüngster,” Fritz, the eponymous youngster, enters into provincial politics as one to a lengthy process of socialization that involves affirming his gender identity, discovering and tempering his sexual desire, entering the military and learning to control his patriotic ardor, learning to run a business, and finally marrying and fathering a child of his own. Politics is the final step in this process, a time that comes in a man’s life, described by the narrator as a kind of civic puberty: “Denn die Zeit war nun da, wo Fritz, der Sohn, anfang zu politisiern und

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<sup>150</sup> *SW*, Vol. 6, 567.

damit mehr als durch Andere in die Gemeinschaft seiner Mitbürger gezogen wurde.”<sup>151</sup>

Several lines down the page, Keller brings the point home: “Heute kann man sagen, sei einer so tapfer und... als er wolle, wenn er nicht vermag freisinnig zu sein, so is er kein *ganzer Mann*.” Politics is simply one part of this completeness, this entirety; it is important not because of what it achieves—though Fritz does succeed in keeping the Seldwylers from fleecing their rural neighbors—but as a means of taking the final step out of interiority of the self and the familial home, and into outside world, where happiness dwells.

This theme is frequently echoed in *Martin Salander*, which contains numerous passages praising politics as a sustained engagement with the procedures, limitations and possibilities of the outside world, salubrious to inward, dream-prone natures like that of its protagonist. After one morning at the *Geheimrat*, Keller’s hero marvels at how invigorating it is to follow the debate of learned men: “In sich gekehrt, mit einem Gefühle von Zufriedenheit wie Einer, der den langen Morgen hindurch gearbeitet hat, schritt er dahin, obleich er keine Hand gerührt und kein Wort gesprochen. Lediglich die ununterbrochene Aufmerksamkeit, welche er während fünf Stunden den Verhandlungen gewidmet, gab ihm das Bewußtsein getaner Arbeit.”<sup>152</sup> In Salander’s eyes, politics is itself a good, its achievements secondary. But it may be noted that these observations are inflected by the optimism of its protagonist, whose rosy view of the political process does not always track with the grimmer realities of governance. Enlightening though the practice of politics may be, however, the novel repeatedly shows that a seat on the *Geheimrat* cannot fundamentally improve a man’s character. Salander’s hopes for his future sons-in-law, for example, the frivolous Weidelich twins, are quickly dashed when he sees that rather than follow the

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<sup>151</sup> *SW*. Vol. 4, 185

<sup>152</sup> *SW*. Vol. 7, 552

debate, the two frequently leave assembly early to go hunting. For politics to bring about an effective change in a person's disposition, he must *already* possess the curiosity and capability for practical affairs, the belief in the common good, the active, self-sufficient disposition Schmidt and Freytag hoped the Realist novel would husband in its readers. Salander's own career in politics is launched by the resignation of his friend Kleinpeter, whose avaricious wife and spendthrift sons demand that he misappropriate public funds to pay off their debts; to thwart them, Kleinpeter gives up his seat. "Niemand würde geglaubt haben, daß ein Mensch, welcher im eigenen Hause so elend dastand, das Wohl des Landes beraten und fremde Leute zu regieren sich unterstehen könnte," Kleinpeter complains to Salander. Salander's plea for universal civic education affirms Kleinpeter's complaint: in order to advise the country on how best to run itself, a man must first have his own house in order; and it is to that end that pedagogy and self-cultivation are needed. In this sense, *Martin Salander* reverses the relationship between politics and ethics in Keller's earlier work. In a republic, in which the government and the people are one, the government of the self is a preparation for the government of others. The individual does not take up politics because of its effects on his spirit, rather, he attends to his spirit knowing that a day will come when it will fall to him to lend a hand in ruling his nation.

The scholar Michael Feldt rightly argues, then, that *Martin Salander* shifts the focus that Keller's earlier work placed on *Bildung*, a self-directed cultivation of the self rooted in the arts, the humanities, religion, and nature, to an institutionally structured, pedagogically guided *Edukation*, "[eine] von außen gelenkte Edukation, die nicht segregativ, sondern integrativ orientiert ist. Dabei tritt ein besonderer Aspekt hervor; das

*ex ducere, das Herausführen bzw. das Herausgehen anstelle der Einbildung.*<sup>153</sup> In his article “Die andere Bildung,” Feldt argues that *Martin Salander* can be read as Keller’s attempt to dramatize a resolution to the dualism posited by Wilhelm von Humboldt in his “Königsberger und Litauischer Schulplan,” in which Humboldt conceives of two parallel educations, one for the public self, and one for the private self, one with an eye towards training oneself for a future a career and acquiring those skills that would be useful for the common good, the other a “freie, selbständige Allgemeinbildung”, a free, open, self-determined general education on the other.<sup>154</sup> Feldt reads the figure of Salander as Keller’s answer to the notion of the politically withdrawn, self-cultivated *Bürger*, with this latter term understood here in its narrow sense of a member of the propertied classes. Instead, Salander is struck in the mold of the *citoyen*, or the *Staatsmann*, whose social position brings with it the privilege and the responsibility of participating in public life: “Das Figurenbild des Staatsbürgers war im Umkreis der Französischen Revolution, in die Bürger Aufgaben und Dienste im Gemeinwesen durch Selbstentscheid übernahmen, neu lebendig geworden und hat sich unter dem Begriff des „Citoyen“ als Gegenbegriff zu dem des „Bourgeois“ formiert.”<sup>155</sup> *Edukation*, then, is the process of cultivating *citoyens* and *Staatsmänner*; as a common good it necessarily takes place between people, often within an institutional structure. And because it is intended to draw its subjects into a place in the outside world, the values that inculcates are very much the same as those praised by Julian Schmidt—above all, a sense of daring, a courage for enterprise, the confidence to leave the *terra firma* of the self and to venture out into the untested waters of the world. Feldt

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<sup>153</sup> Feldt, 31.

<sup>154</sup> Feldt, 33.

<sup>155</sup> Feldt, 37.

concludes by drawing a connection between Salander's civic virtue, and the doggedness with which he pursues his fortune in Brazil despite suffering from fever and being robbed of his possessions. The tirelessness with which Keller's protagonist conceives and executes projects for the betterment of the Swiss people, the courage, fearlessness, and determination with which he pursues his fortunes in a lawless, uncultivated place like Brazil are, according to Feldt, Keller's way of transposing Kant's famous dictum of Enlightenment: *Saper aude*, or, Dare to know!, into a realm of action that seeks to enrich the well-being of the public.<sup>156</sup>

As the next section will show, I do not share Feldt's largely uncritical perspective of Martin Salander as a protagonist; nor does Feldt account for the fact that Salander's "Lehrhaftigkeit," his refusal to set down the mantle of teacher and instructor in even the most inappropriate situations, is repeatedly deflated through the book. What I wish to add to Feldt's reading is a closer consideration of the relationship between the novel's social Realism, its careful anchoring of its plot, its central conflicts, and the biographies of its protagonists in the recognizable world of the *Gründerzeit*, its panorama of an industrialized Switzerland awash with capital, populated by white collar criminals, corrupt politicians, and riven with political strife, and the question of what role art might play in the *Edukation* described by Feldt, a collective process of learning by which individuals become virtuous citizens, and by means of which the nation itself emerges as a subject of cultivation and improvement. That much can be seen in the teacherly eye with which Salander regards his

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<sup>156</sup> A similar argument is made by Thomas Binder, who has argued for the central role of what he calls "Experimentfreude" in Keller's civics. Binder stresses, however, the way that this joy is both encouraged and limited by its opposite, obligation, or *Pflichtgefühl*. Cf. Binder, Thomas. "Zwischen Experimentfreude und Pflichtgefühl." *Gottfried Keller: Romane und Erzählungen*. Ed. Walter Morgenthaler. Stuttgart, 2007. pp. 154-171.

countrymen in the passage above; not like the narrator of the *Seldwyla* novellas, who takes the Seldwylers as they are, but rather as a group of misbehaving children who must be somehow taught to recognize and to exercise the remarkable responsibility and privilege that they have seized for themselves with the ratification of the constitution. Salander returns from the walk feeling depressed, dispirited, and murky, and more determined than ever to change them.<sup>157</sup> The novel's central question remains the one that devils him throughout the book: what can be done to turn the purely political connection between citizens into a real and legitimate bond for which each person feels responsible, and what role does art, as a representation of the world shared in common by these citizens, play?

### 3. “Jeder Mensch hat einen Ölgötzen...”: The Failures of Pedagogy

*Martin Salander* would seem, then, to indicate that, after decades of public life the commitment to radical democracy and political pedagogy that Lukács sees as the *rote Faden* running through his work only deepened—that, in choosing a *Zeitroman* as the form for his last work, Keller hoped to consider not only the social consequences of different modes of comportment towards the world and towards the self, but also to ask how, given the dire state of the Swiss republic, character can be better molded to serve it. The particular interpretative problem posed by *Martin Salander* is that, in his novel of political pedagogy, the novel does not contain a single example of successful instruction or education, of character successfully shaped by an institution, course of study, or even friendly counsel. Rather, many of the narrative strands around the protagonist, his wife, and his son end in

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<sup>157</sup> “Trotz der Täuschung, die ihm auf seinem Sonntagsspaziergang ins Volk so trübselig, zerflossen war, mußte er die Augen doch wieder auf die öffentlichen Dinge richten und sich näher mit ihnen vertraut machen, wie sich nun darstellen.” *SW*, Vol. 6, 578.

dashed hopes and ruined lives. Just as *Der grüne Heinrich* is a *Bildungsroman* in which no *Bildung* takes place, so too is *Martin Salander* a novel of civic education that considers, instance by instance, the failures and limitations of political education.

The first and most substantial failure of Martin Salander's civic ideal is its insufficient attentiveness to the material reality on which the enterprise, full realized, would rest. Throughout the novel, the chief mouthpiece of this critique is Salander's level-headed, long-suffering wife, Marie. Like Judith, Marie serves as a skeptical, often darkly comic foil to Salander's overheated patriotism and over-ambitious planmaking. The reader first encounters her as a Penelope awaiting the return of her Odysseus from Brazil; during her husband's absence, Marie has become the proprietress of a *Gastwirtschaft* frequented by well-off customers lazy about settling their bill. After watching gluttonous customers snatch away the dinner she has hidden away for her starving children, she gives expression to her feelings about the thankless toil she must perform every day in a fairy tale she tells her children to distract them from their hunger pangs. Marie's *Märchen* tells the tale of a race of little *Erdmänner* and *Erdweiber* who stage enormous feasts in the banquet hall of their mountain home, where they eat rice pudding with raisins, bratwurst, skylark and pork, and drink Muscat wine from fresh peaches, surrounded with gold and jewels. Who cleans up after this feast? In Marie's telling, "Ein einziges lediges Weiblein, das allerjüngste von etwa zweihundert Jahren... ist noch da geblieben,

Es hat die Pflicht, das ganze Geschirr zu reinigen, trocken zu reiben, und in eine eiserne Truhe zu verschließen, die sie an der Stelle, wo der Regenbogen stand, in den Boden vergräbt. Hierbei helfen ihr die zehn Ritter, die mittlerweile draußen noch zurückgeblieben sind und ihre Pfirsichbowlen ausgeschlafen haben... Was tut aber nun das letzte Weiblein? Es nimmt das Säcklein, worin sein eigenes Goldschüsselchen gewesen, auf den Rücken, einen Stecken zur Hand, and und wandert seelenallein in die Ferne...<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> *SW*, Vol. 6, 415.

Marie's fairy-tale brings to light a very different kind of labor than that championed by the liberal *Zeitroman*. Proper patriotic labor—the “Arbeit” to which Schmidt enjoins the German nation to take up so that they can earn their freedom—has, of course, two distinct characteristics: it is industrial and it is male. The protagonist of *Soll und Haben*, Anton Wollfahrt delivers a paean to the German's superiority over the Slav by sketching in sweeping poetic terms the network of industry, labor, credit and debit that suborns the latter to the former: “Wir bauen die Maschinen, wodurch sie ihre Spiritusfässer füllen,” he exclaims. “Auf deutschem Kredit und deutschem Vertrauen beruht die Geltung, welche ihre Pfandbriefe und ihre Güter bis jetzt gehabt haben.”<sup>159</sup> What is here described is the “Aufschwung des Handels” celebrated by Schmidt as the cradle of *das Wirkliche* in the modern novel. Like the forces of liberalism to which the *Zeitroman* gives aesthetic expression, industrial labor is turned towards the future, clearing away out-dated traditions, uniting regions all over the globe towards a common purpose, always growing, multiplying—at least from the perspective of the capitalist, if not the laborer. In *Martin Salander*, by contrast, the details of Martin Salander's enterprise and endeavors in Brazil are hardly mentioned. Over the broad, macro-economic sense of *Wirtschaft*—the outlay of capital, the extraction of surplus value—Keller valorizes the distinctly female work of the household, the labor that produces no value, but without which no life could subsist. It is in the household and not at the desk of the loan officer or the factory manager that the intimate bonds that produce national feeling are forged—the bonds that provide that sense of place and home that the nation claims to substantiate in its parliament, its laws, its flags, its holidays. Fifty years before Brecht's “Fragen eines lesenden Arbeiters”--“Cäser schlug

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<sup>159</sup> *Soll und Haben*, Vol. 2, 93.

die Gallier / Hatte er nicht wenigstens einen Koch bei sich?“—Marie asks who will sweep the floor and dust the chalkboard in Salander’s civic school: “Wer soll denn den ärmeren Bauern die Feldarbeit verrichten helfen, wer die Jünglinge ernähren? Oder wollt Ihr diese besolden, bis sie zwanzig Jahre alt sind und dann Alles verstehen, nur nicht zu arbeiten, den gezimmerten Tisch und die Bank ausgenommen?”<sup>160</sup>

This disparity in the representation of labor in the anti-aristocratic, nationalist Realist novel is accompanied by another disparity, hinted at by the note of unfulfilled desire struck by the end of Marie’s fairy-tale ends—the uneven division of affective labor in the Salander marriage. In her book *Gottfried Keller: Frauenbild und Frauengestalten*, Caroline von Loewenich points out the extent to which Salander’s political and financial enterprises demand his wife’s renunciation not only of her material security, but of the opportunity to give expression to her own emotional life. When, during a walk through the forest, Marie gently rebuffs Salander’s annoyance at the fact that his children are ignorant of the names of trees and birds by pointing out that they are no less lovely for being unknown. Salander retorts by calling her a “Jesuitin, Verkünderin der ‘Mysterien’”; she is an enemy of “Kennenlernen,” her way is too “gefühlsmäßig.”<sup>161</sup> As Loewenich writes, “Salander sorgt immer dafür, dass seine Frau zu einem Verhalten findet, in dem ihre Gefühle ausgeschlossen bleiben, und das den gesellschaftlichen Regeln entspricht. ‘Ihm selbst soll dies ermöglichen, sich dem unkontrollierten Bereich ‘Gefühl’ zu entziehen und Distanz zu wahren.”<sup>162</sup> The emotion with which Salander sketches pedagogical plans for the children and for Switzerland is held back from his wife, while, apart from her rueful fairytale Marie

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<sup>160</sup> *SW*. Vol. 6, 561

<sup>161</sup> *SW*. Vol. 6, 436.

<sup>162</sup> von Loewenich, Caroline. *Gottfried Keller: Frauenbild und Frauengestalten im erzählerischen Werk*. Würzburg: Königshausen u. Neumann, 200. 224.

has no such realm into which to project her desires, excluded as she is from the realm of politics. The same dynamic, in which Marie serves to remind Salander of those whose high-flown plans would harm, inheres in all of the novel's major episodes, from his sojourn to Brazil, to his encouragement of his daughters' marriage to the Weidelich twins, his hopes of reuniting Switzerland's two political parties at his daughters' wedding, and his infatuation with Myrrha Glawicz. In each of these, Salander's optimism lifts him into the realm of the ideal—understandable in a man who crossed the Atlantic Ocean to seek his fortune in a foreign land—while it falls to Marie to bring him back to earth, by reminding him of the labor, both material and emotional, that his fantasies exact, until, at the novel's end, he finally submits wholly to his wife's superior emotional wisdom and the story ends.

Marie is not the only voice in the novel reminding the reader of the cost, the labor, the difficulty, and the ultimate limits of civic pedagogy. These, too, are the themes of the novel's climactic setpiece, the trial of Isidor and Julian for corruption and the misappropriation of funds. The trial of the two boys serves a crucial thematic function; since the twins are never portrayed as anything less than lazy, greedy brutes, and since their guilt is established from the very beginning, there is little suspense for the reader as to the outcome. Since the guilt of the young men is established in advance, it is not Isidor and Julian but education *itself* that is put on trial in the speeches of the prosecution and the defense: in the trial's opening statements, Isidor and Julian's defender argues that his clients' failures, and all of the failures of Switzerland, can be blamed "an die beklagenswerte Mangelhaftigkeit des öffentlichen Unterrichts, der Volkserziehung, der alles Unglück beizumessen sei."<sup>163</sup> To this argument in bad faith, the prosecutor issues a

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<sup>163</sup> *SW*, Vol. 6, 668.

full-throated defense of the measures taken by the Swiss government to insure the civic virtue of its people: “Viele Millionen haben wir in fünfzig Jahren dafür geopfert,” he insists

seit Jahrzehnten rühmen wir uns, daß die Ausgaben für unser Unterrichtswesen den obersten Posten in der Staatsrechnung bilden!... Und zur Erziehung des Volkes werden täglich neue Anforderungen gestellt, und alle werden erwogen und dass irgend Mögliche berücksichtigt, wenn es nicht geradezu verkehrt ist!<sup>164</sup>

Though the prosecutor’s full-throated endorsement of education is launched at Isidor and Julian, it is, in effect, a belated rejoinder to Salander’s high-flown plans. Simply, education is not a method or a practice, fixed and unchanging, by means of which a population is transformed into a national citizenry. As a population grows in size, as the conditions, needs, and wants of the individuals who comprise it become more and more varied, the ability of a government to mold a nation’s character weakens proportionally; an adequate educational system is itself an institution that, like railroads, factories, and laws, must be created by compromise, that must be constantly revised and reconsidered. The prosecutor’s picture of the vast sums of money budgeted for education suggests just how unwieldy such an undertaking would have been, and just how different the problem of education stood for a Switzerland approaching the twentieth century and the age of mass democracy than it did for the Switzerland of the 1830s, when the *Lehrseminar* was established. No institution (the prosecutor) no matter how well-designed, can guarantee the civic virtue of nearly three million people.

But even if such an institution *did* exist, the transparent falsity of the defender’s argument, which, as the narrator notes with disgust, elicits smug grins from Isidor and Julian, throws light on the cracks in Salander’s individual and state, and the responsibility of the latter for the moral character of its citizenry. In effect, the public defender’s argument

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

only echoes Salander's chagrin at the debased character of his fellow citizens as he strolls through Münsterburg in the passage with which I opened this chapter. Salander, too, places the blame for his nation's condition on the cursory, superficial character of the classes in *Verfassungskunde*. In Salander's dream, the state mints citizens like coins: institutions are constructed so as to be bred with a love of civic virtue, then, as adults, will devote themselves to statecraft, ideally after distinguishing themselves in some private, though publicly useful, career. And yet, as the narrator's disgust for Isidor and Julian's shirking of their own accountability makes abundantly clear, the conscience—as well as the court, as its institutional representative—revolts at the suggestion that it is the state, or the times, and not the individual who is responsible for his own misdeeds. National feeling, moral guidance, *Lebensgefühl* and *Selbstmuth*—the self-confidence and courage that necessary for all ambitious civic enterprise—cannot be publicly taught precisely because they are individual, they grow in the soil of trial, reflection, and experience, and cannot be written on a blackboard; it follows, conversely, that the state cannot be blamed for their absence. Isidor and Julian's quick attainment of outward success spared them these experiences, and indeed, even after the trial, both remained unchanged by the civic discipline that has been handed down to them. One brother escapes across the Atlantic, while another complains about the quality of his accommodations in jail. The Salander sisters correctly observe that the brothers have no soul—no inner life that can grow and be cultivated into maturity, whether personal or civic.

Where, then, does *Volkserziehung* take place, if not in school? The answer, according to the prosecutor, is the family home: “Denn ich glaube, das Haus des ungelahrten Landmannes kann noch heute, wie zu allen Zeiten, eine Schule der Ehrlichkeit

und Pflichttreue sein!”<sup>165</sup> If all people are truly equal, and if all institutions are only the representative of the people themselves, then it follows that the peasant learns the virtues of honesty and fidelity to duty, those traits of character that allow the citizen to face up to consequences of that which he endeavors with his feeling for life and self-confidence—as much at home as he does in school. And yet, the family evinces no more success in inculcating civic virtue into the hearts of its citizens than does the school—least of all the Weidelich family, which is hardly the picture of a “Schule der Ehrlichkeit und Pflichttreue.” Rather, in Keller’s telling, Isidor and Julian’s corruption is the consequence of their mother’s taste for luxury and her desire for social status. To be sure, the narrator takes pains to distinguish Amalia Weidelich’s earnest desire for advancement from the corruption and indolence of her sons; she is the hard-working proprietress of a successful laundry, and is sincerely overjoyed by her connection to the upwardly mobile Salanders. Nonetheless, the boys are encouraged and supported in all of their disastrous decisions—to start a career in politics, to marry the Salander daughters—by their mother, who spies an opportunity for advancement in both cases. And while, like the prosecutor, Keller hesitates to place the blame for the children’s behavior at the feet of their parents—indeed, Marie Salander scoffs when their father worries that the family’s troubles are all due to a thieving great-grandparent whose genes have been passed down—the family’s story is nonetheless, as Christa Grimm observes in her essay “Zwischen Illusion und Ideal,” a tragic one by Keller: the sins of one generation are paid for by the next. This tragic theme is brought home by the two details by which Amalia Weidelich is characterized at the novel’s start: the incongruously luxurious hat, which she wears over her smock, and which, at the

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<sup>165</sup> *SW*. Vol. 6, 669.

novel's end, is swept into the river; and her mastery of the social indicators of speech, which is taken away from her when she suffers a stroke upon learning her sons' fate and is rendered catatonic. "Die neue Sprachwelt soll den Übergang in die neue Sozialwelt unterstützen; dass die spätere Erfolglosigkeit das konstruierte Bewusstsein und damit die Sprache beschädigt, lässt Keller deutlich werden... was sie früher als Stärke auslegte, ist ihr abhanden gekommen."<sup>166</sup> Far from being a school of "Ehrlichkeit," the Weidelich family's upward aspirations are indeed, compounded as failures, in the egocentrism, mendacity, greed, and carelessness of the next generation.

What *Martin Salander* depicts is not the family's legitimacy as a pedagogical tool, but rather the crisis of political paternity described by Reinhart Koselleck in his *Begriffsgeschichten*. In his entry for "Patriotismus," Koselleck describes this crisis of republican fatherhood as a double bind:

[...] Der Patriot, der in der Gewißheit seiner Vaterlandsliebe handelt, tritt in Konkurrenz zu dem <<Vater>> dieses Landes, dem *pater patriae*, dem Landesherrn. [...] Nicht mehr der Monarch ist, wie bisher der Wohltäter; aus der patriotischen Perspektive ist ein solcher Wohltäter Despot. Das Vaterland wird gleichsam entvatert. Statt dessen tritt es als ein neues, kollektives Handlungsobjekt auf, das Vaterland wird selbst zum gemeinen Wohltäter, im Klartext: zur Republik.<sup>167</sup>

For Koselleck, the figure of the father as *Wohltäter*, who provides for his children both materially, spiritually, and civically exists only in a society in which both power and property are transferred from father to son. The father is a benevolent dictator, and vice versa—one might think here of such self-styled German fathers as Carl-Eugen of Württemberg, or Kaiser Wilhelm I. But, Koselleck continues, in the familial imaginary of the republic the collective subjectivity of the nation itself is father; the biological father

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<sup>166</sup> Grimm, Christa. "Zwischen Ideal und Illusion." *Familien Bilder als Zeitbilder*. Ed. Beatrice Sandberg. Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2010. 90-91.

<sup>167</sup> Koselleck, Reinhart. *Begriffsgeschichten*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2006. p. 221

merely stand-in. (By way of illustrative example, we might consider here the scene described by Rousseau in the “Letter to D’Alambert on the Theatre” in which his father points to a celebrating regiment from St. Gervais and enjoins his son to love his country: “‘Jean-Jacques,’ he said to me, ‘love your country. Do you see these good Genevans? They are all friends, they are all brothers... You are a Genevan; one day you will see other peoples, but even if you should travel as much as your father, you will not find their likes.’”<sup>168</sup>) The total power that the father wields within the private space of his home is directly at odds with the view of a republic that every individual is free to dispose of his own destiny; that, to properly exercise one’s civic virtue, one must be the sole author of one’s thoughts, deeds and wants. As a republican father concerned with his family’s civic virtue, Martin Salander consequently finds himself doing either too much or too little. When he wishes to do good for his family, his idealism is not without its tyrannical side, as when he strikes upon the idea of turning his daughter’s wedding into a pretext for reuniting Switzerland’s two warring civil parties. This decision, which is made without the consultation of his wife or his daughters, leaves the daughters “im düsteren Sinn... ihre Augen waren sogar voll Wasser.”<sup>169</sup> By the same token, Salander’s adventures render him absent for his children’s entire adolescence, leaving his family not only “entvaterter” but destitute. Caroline von Loewenich rightly notes that the poverty into which his family is thrown effectively neutralizes his patriotic preaching by creating a deficit of pleasure and fulfillment in the Salander home, sending the Salander daughters into the arms of the flamboyant, decidedly unpatriotic Weidelichs: “Das schmerzliche Gefühl des Defizits, das

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<sup>168</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Politics and Art: Letter to D’Alambert on the Theater*. Trans. Allan Bloom. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968. n. 125.

<sup>169</sup> *SW*. Vol 6, 530.

diese Isolation bei ihnen weckt, scheinen sie kompensieren zu wollen, wenn sie Ehemänner wählen, die sich die neue Wertigkeit zueigen gemacht haben, und damit ihre eigene gesellschaftliche Einbindung, und die ihrer Frauen, zu garantieren scheinen.”<sup>170</sup> Far from serving as an effective pedagogical environment, in *Martin Salander* parents’ deficiencies are not corrected in children, but only compounded. It is no accident that, at least in the narrative space of the novel, none of the children in *Martin Salander* express a desire to have children of their own.

Is *Martin Salander* then a novel of liberal democratic disappointment? Certainly the time of its publication, 1886, two years before Keller’s death was a time that hardly shared the eponymous character’s buoyant optimism. The boom of the fifties had ended in a worldwide depression. Schmidt and Freytag observed the Austro-Prussian and Franco-Prussian wars with dismay, and later evinced disgust at the martial, materialistic German nation that came into existence in 1871, ruled not by the capable, diligent bourgeois but by the Prussian aristocracy; while the optimistic depiction of capitalism and democracy in *Soll und Haben* gave way to the grimmer depictions of industry’s victims in the naturalist novel. Keller, too, writes in an age when the claims of idealism, writ large and writ small, seem to have been voided. What distinguishes his novel, however, is the absence of idealism’s opposite—reality. Idealist though he is, Martin Salander has an excellent grasp of his world’s realities; he is, by any measure of Swiss life, a success—a wealthy businessman, politician and father. *Martin Salander* does not stage a conflict between the world as it ought to be and the world as it is, between personal authenticity and social demands, so much as it explores question of how one must comport oneself towards that reality.

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<sup>170</sup> von Loewneich, 227.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the slippery figure of Salander's antagonist and life-long friend, the confidence man Louis Wohlwend. At first glance, Wohlwend is the illness of Swiss society seen by Salander during his stroll through Münsterburg, or that he gleans at a barbershop, when a fellow customer observes that, during his shave, he saw four men walk by who have a relative in prison. (He might have seen more, he supposes, were it not for the position of the chair.) Wohlwend, we learn, is one of those Swiss whose desire to be perceived as an ardent patriot and lover of art causes him to sing patriotic songs out of tune and to recite Schiller poems on the wrong syllable. This combination of tone-deaf inattentiveness and over-eager shortsightedness cause him to borrow irresponsibly; when he is ruined, however, as his name suggests, he turns the situation to his advantage and simply takes on another guise, with no regard for the ruined lives and fortunes he leaves in his wake. Throughout the novel, Wohlwend takes on a wide variety of *personae*—patriot, lover of nature, teacher, international banker, and religious zealot. This fluidity of identities is only the natural consequence of the split between *Schein* and *Sein* I examined in the previous chapter on *Die Leute von Seldwyla*; indeed, Wohlwend finds good company among the other grifters in Keller's novella cycle, like John Kabys and Viggi Störtler—men restless in their provincial identities who take advantage of the changing times to try on new ones. Judith's rueful observation, following Heinrich's falling out with his painting teacher Römer, that they live in an age when men kill one another with words and paper instead of with daggers might be directed at the shyster Wohlwend, whose mastery of banking procedure allows him to rob Salander of his livelihood repeatedly without ever speaking an ill word against him.

And yet, Wohlwend is not simply the novel's villain. As each character in the novel observes, Wohlwend and Salander are united by an inexplicable bond that fuses one to the other even as their respective paths lead them all over the world. Wohlwend's confidence schemes are not of the sort that mask his identity, like that of the three card monte dealer who changes locations when he has been discovered. Instead, Wohlwend's repeated fleecing of Salander depends on the deep affinity and lifelong friendship between the two men. Like Salander, Wohlwend is a social climber from a provincial agrarian family. Both men attend the *Lehrseminar*, where they meet, both are ardent patriots, both try their hands at business, and when both men's fortunes are ruined—Salander's as a result of Wohlwend's—they try their luck abroad. Having made his fortune in Brazil, Salander wires his savings to Switzerland *via* the dubious Atlantische Uferbank, only to discover that Louis Wohlwend is partner in the operation and his fortune is lost again. (He might have guessed Wohlwend's involvement from the fact that the name of other partner, Schadenmüller, is the perfect inverse of his swindler's.) Shaken and pale as he realizes he has been scammed again, Salander finally realizes the obvious: "Es scheint, daß jeder Mensch einen Ölgötzen hat, der allerorts wieder dasteht und ihm entgegenglotzt." Wohlwend is trickster and confidence man, but he is also Salander's *Doppelgänger*, his shadow self, his William Wilson. That double extends beyond the coincidences that draw the two together into their very modes of comporting themselves towards the world. When Salander is expounding the salubrious and instructive character of nature to his family, he is shocked when the path turns and he discovers Louis Wohlwend, ankle deep in a stream where he is fishing for crabs, praising nature in precisely the same terms. Wohlwend complains that, because Salander has ruined his reputation, he cannot do business or show

his face around Münsterburg; he calls himself a victim of *Verkehr*, of the *Kampf ums Dasein*—a turn of phrase by means of which the structural inequalities of capitalism are explained as a natural condition—and longs, like Salander, for something beyond it: “Wo sollte ich am heutigen Tage mich hinflüchten, als an den Busen der Mutter Natur? [...] Du weißt, Freund Martin, daß ich von jeher einem edeln Idealismus gehuldigt; der kommt mir nun zu Gut und läßt mich an so idyllischen Gegenständen Trost suchen, wie sie sich hier darbieten!”<sup>171</sup> Wohlwend, like Salander, is an optimist—he prefers to see what *might be* rather than what is, and it is precisely that, like Salander, allows him to slip off one identity and put on another, and consistently to escape ruin and turn it to his good fortune.

It is precisely this longing for something *more*, something different, something unseen, something ideal—whether the total trusting friendship that he uses to convince Salander to undersign his loan, or the unheard-of return on investment he promises his customers at the Atlantische Ufer bank—that is the lure in Wohlwend’s confidence schemes, just as it is the motive mechanism for all of Salander’s plans for Switzerland’s betterment. The two finally perfectly mirror one another when Wohlwend resurfaces after Salander’s second return in the guise of a priest soliciting funds for a *Gottestaat der Neuzeit*. Wohlwend’s plan “sich dem Vaterlande noch nützlich [zu] machen,”<sup>172</sup> is to submit the Swiss government and its courts to a religious authority, a synod that would preside over all major legislative and judicial decisions. As befits a tolerant republic, the specific theological doctrine of this religious authority is immaterial: “Seiner weitgehenden Duldsamkeit sei es rein gleichgültig, welcher Gottesbegriff zu Grunde gelegt werde, ob der persönlich überweltliche oder der allsächlich innerweltliche, der dreieinige oder der

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<sup>171</sup> *SW*, Vol. 6, 437.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 676.

unbedingt einfachste, ihm komme es nur auf die Idealität des Gedankens an.” Like Salander’s civic education, Wohlwend’s *Gottestaat* hopes to place the mundane, everyday business of politics under the aegis of a higher authority, an ideal. And in Keller’s eyes, the two plans are equally insubstantial. Both are dreams not of the man of affairs, but of the schoolchild, speaking in high-flown words he hardly understands. “Sobald er [Wohlwend] sein Wort von dem ewigen Idealism ausgestoßen habe, auf dem Boden seines Schulsackes angelangt und dieser kleiner sei, als derjenige frisch konfirmerter Kinder. Und seine ehemalige Schulmethode, Anderen erst abzufragen, was er mit Vorteil sagen könne, ließ ihn jetzt ganz im Stich.”<sup>173</sup> It is only by inflating their activities and their ambitions, by speaking them in iambs, as Salander accuses Wohlwend of doing, that both men can overcome the nagging insufficiency at the heart of their respective lives and of the age, the sense that something is lacking, that what one has is never enough.

Keller never entirely lets on whether Wohlwend is aware of the crookedness of his own schemes; like Salander, he is a true believer, blind to those his schemes invariably harm. And he is able to repeatedly fleece Salander by forcing his friend to choose between his money and the optimism that girds his very existence, knowing full well that Salander must give up the former because he cannot give up the latter. *Martin Salander* cannot be called a novel of disillusionment because Wohlwend’s *Wirtschaftskriminalität* is not so much a rude check on Salander’s civic idealism so much as it is its inverse. To be sure, as the novel’s protagonist, Salander possesses virtues that Wohlwend, its villain, entirely lacks. Unlike his friend, Salander is a capable businessman, a sincere patriot, a true appreciator of art; he has a rewarding family life and displays charity again and again towards friends

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 678

and acquaintances. And yet, Wohlwend and Salander are inseparably linked because both see the world through the idealizing eyes of the poetic Realist. Neither man can be satisfied with the world as it is, with what they have, or with who they are. Having come of age in a time of flux and change, a time of ideals, both men are unable to distinguish their personal wants from the higher purpose they claim to be seeking. And it is precisely the no longer political, now *ethical* question of how these wants, these desires can be trained, controlled, and curbed that the novel devotes its pedagogical attention.

#### **4. “Ein öffentliches Schauspiel”: *Festspiel* as Artistic Ideal and Critique of Art**

In summary, *Martin Salander* offers two, seemingly contradictory analyses of the political situation of Switzerland in Keller’s time. On the one hand, Keller’s novel depicts the *Gründerzeit* as a time in which republican self-rule has been achieved by the Swiss people, albeit at the cost of their civic spirit. The sense of national feeling and duty among the Swiss has deteriorated to the point that the only way to save the nation from the idleness and corruption to which it has fallen is to somehow mold the people’s character, to make them recognize the privilege of being able to participate in government as free and autonomous citizens. On the other hand, as I have demonstrated in the last section, Keller’s novel dramatizes the failure of one form of pedagogy, one form of instruction, after another. Given this skeptical treatment of education, what, role, then does Keller envision for the artistic representation of reality in his nation’s present situation? How ought the world be depicted to cultivate the sense of national connection and common purpose so little in evidence in the Switzerland of *Martin Salander*? The likeliest answer, I will argue, is to be found first in a consideration of the national celebration, or the *Festspiel*, a motif

that recurs throughout Keller's work as an attempt to envision an art that might be a vehicle of political engagement for its viewers as well as its creators; and second in the figure of Friedrich Schiller, the author who recurs in Keller's novel as the political poet *par excellence*.

In his essay, "Performing Swiss Heimat," Richard Ruppel describes the *Fest-* or *Feierspiel* as a civic festival celebrating a public or historical holiday, used by the liberal Swiss government of the 1830s to produce a sense of national unity in a country that was as yet a patchwork of people, languages, and cultural histories. "Eine gemeinsame Herkunft mußte erst noch erzeugt werden, die noch stärker war als die individuelle kulturelle Herkunft der vier Sprachgruppen," writes Ruppel. Das Bundesfeierspiel wurde von den Schweizer Behörden als ein Mittel betrachtet, wodurch die Bundesregierung die Traditionen einer gemeinsamen Herkunft erzeugen und dadurch diese ersehnte politische Einheit in einem Vielvölkerstaat fördern könnte."<sup>174</sup> In the second version of *Der grüne Heinrich*, Keller's protagonist vividly recalls one such celebration as among the happiest days of his childhood, devoting multiple chapters to the description of all the day's events—a striking and suggestive choice, given that politics plays a considerably smaller role in Keller's *Bildungsroman* than it does in *Martin Salander*, a point I will return to shortly. For Heinrich, the day-long performance is the setting of his first and most ardent patriotic feelings, his first kiss with his cousin Anna, his first glimpse into Swiss politics, and his first sexual encounter with the widow Judith. The choice of play, Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell*, is, Ruppel argues, hardly accidental. Schiller's late play of the struggle of the Swiss cantons against tyranny dramatizes a crucial scene from historical mythology, the oath on

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<sup>174</sup> Ruppel, Richard. "Performing Swiss Heimat." *Schweiz Schreiben*. ed. Jürgen Barkhoff, Valirie Hefferman. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010. p. 159

the Rütli, when the leaders and luminaries of the individual cantons vowed to put aside their differences and unite against foreign tyranny. The remembering and repetition of this scene from the distant past is intended not only to entertain or to provide pleasure, but also to bind the emotions roused in the viewers by the novel's protagonists to the Swiss nation itself, to dramatize the creation of a people *to* a people in the midst of self-creation.

In his own colorful recollections of the *Tellfest*, Heinrich finds the civic value of the *Festspiel* not in the content of the play but in the sense of common purpose that the performance of *Tell* engenders in the town. Heinrich recalls not an event orchestrated by the government or by the town elders, but put on by and for the townspeople:

Weitaus der größere Teil der spielenden Schar sollte als Hirten, Bauern, Fischer, Jäger das Volk darstellen und in seiner Masse von Schauplatz zu Schauplatz ziehen, wo die Handlung vor sich ging, getragen durch solche, welche sich zu einem kühnen Auftreten für berufen hielten. In den Reihen des Volkes nahmen auch junge Mädchen teil, sich höchstens in den gemeinschaftlichen Gesängen äußernd, während die handelnden Frauenrollen Jünglingen übertragen waren. Der Schauplatz der eigentlichen Handlung war auf alle Ortschaften verteilt, je nach ihrer Eigentümlichkeit, so daß durch ein festliches Hin- und Herwogen der kostümierten Menge und der Zuschauermassen bedingt wurde.<sup>175</sup>

Every towns person has a role in the play, if not as an actor, then as a costumed extra. Some of the props are taken from the town's cabinet of curiosities, no longer *curios* behind glass but once again living objects in the hands of the people. In its turn the action of the play is woven into the town's daily life. The scenes are broken up and switched around, depending on the ease of access to the various settings; the townspeople break off to go about their business as needed—the actor playing Tell stops, for a moment, to see to the sale of one of his pigs. Schiller's name is printed on the play's title page, but it is the townspeople who that day become not only the audience and the performers, but the ostensible authors of the work as well, since the script is taken from a slightly bowdlerized version of *Wilhelm Tell*

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<sup>175</sup> *SW*, Vol. 3, 370.

used by the public school. “Das [Schul]buch ist den Leuten sehr geläufig,” says Heinrich, in defense of this decision, “denn es drückt auf eine wunderbare Weise ihre Gesinnung und alles aus, was sie durchaus für wahr halten; wie denn selten ein Sterblicher es übel aufnehmen wird, wenn man ihn dichterisch ein wenig oder gar stark idealisiert.”<sup>176</sup> The language itself, and the style of recitation, conforms not to that of the the meeting house, picking up the music of everyday speech: “Die Rolle wurden nicht theatralisch und mit Gebärdenspiel gesprochen, sondern mehr wie die Reden in einer Volksversammlung, laut, eintönig, und etwas singend, da es doch Verse waren.”<sup>177</sup> In Heinrich’s lively, detail-rich narration the play leaps off the stage and out into life itself; art’s privileged position over life is overthrown, together with the tyrant Gessler.

The language with Heinrich describes his first taste of public art closely evokes another celebration of the folk festival, the “Letter to D’Alambert on the Theater in Geneva,” written by Keller’s countryman, Jean-Jacques Rousseau in 1758 nearly a hundred years before the first version of *Der grüne Heinrich*. In his polemic against the theater, Rousseau praises this tumult, this breaking-through of the representational medium—the stage—as the folk festival’s defining characteristic, the crucial structural feature that qualifies it uniquely to invigorate the public’s civic feeling. “Let us not adopt these exclusive entertainments which close up a small number of people in melancholy fashion in a gloomy cavern,” Rousseau writes, “which give them only prisons, lances, soldiers, and afflicting messages of inequality to see [...] It is the open air, under the sky, that you ought to gather and give yourselves to the sweet sentiment of your happiness.”<sup>178</sup> Here Rousseau

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Politics and Art: Letter to D’Alambert on the Theater*. Trans. Allan Bloom. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968. p 125.

slyly interpolates an iconic image from another foundational text of civic pedagogy, Plato's *Republic*. The cave of miserable, entrapped prisoners by means of which Socrates illustrates ignorance to Glaucon is, in Rousseau's conception, only the forerunner of the modern theater. Since its viewers had no hand in conceiving or bringing to life what is on stage, the contents of the play are wholly illusory—the compact between the performers and the audience only another variety of self-imposed ignorance and inaction. The festival, by contrast, draws the audience into the clear light of day. By dispensing with theatrical effects entirely, it transforms observers into participants:

But what then will be the objects of these entertainments? What will be shown in them? Nothing, if you please. With liberty, wherever abundance reigns, well-being also reigns. Plant a stake crowned with flowers in the middle of a square; gather the people together there, and you will have a festival. Do better yet; let the spectators become an entertainment to themselves; make them actors themselves; do it so that each sees and loves himself in the others so that all will be better united.<sup>179</sup>

Where the rest of Rousseau's anti-theatrical pamphlet closely analyzes the workings of specific artworks—Cremillon, Voltaire, and Moliere, among others—the only positive example is a childhood memory very much like Heinrich's. In a footnote, Rousseau describes not sitting in the audience of a play or standing before a painting, but rather his recollection of watching with his father the spontaneous celebration of an arriving regiment from St. Gervais. The event simply occurs of the people's own volition; it has no prompting, no script, no versification, it is the work of no author, and it has no afterlife once it has ended. Though the "Letter" cannot be taken for the whole of Rousseau's highly complex aesthetics, the text's premise remains that, if the author's desired effect is to promote civic virtue, than all of the tools in the dramatic toolbox, plot, versification, rising

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 126.

action, climax, denouement, form and content, are ineffective. Drama depicts only depicts the passions, which are the enemies of civic virtue. As Rousseau observes,

[...] A man without passions or who always mastered them could not attract anyone.” And it has already been observed that a Stoic in tragedy would be an insufferable figure. In comedy, he would at most cause laughter.

Let no one then attribute to the theater the power to change sentiments or manners, which it can only follow and embellish. An author who would brave the general taste would soon write for himself alone.

For Rousseau as for the young Heinrich, the joy that binds the community together comes not from any one aesthetic practice or another, but from the rejection of the authority of the artist, and of aesthetic mastery entirely. The townspeople come together to celebrate themselves by tearing up the aesthetic rule-book entirely. And so for the young Heinrich, as for the young Rousseau, the recollection of these joyful festivals will grow, in their adult lives, into a powerful, nagging ambivalence, never resolved, about the ultimate value not only of their own artistic attempts, but of the value of artistic endeavor itself. In *Der grüne Heinrich*, the *Tellfest* is less a programmatic celebration of the festival as legitimate public art than a crucial moment in the dramatic narrative representation of the development of Heinrich’s highly conflicted relationship with art.

Seen from this perspective, it is clear that what Heinrich cherishes in the figure of Schiller, to whom he returns again and again throughout the novel, is not the poetic force of his language, the dramatic impact of his works, or the thoughtful complexity of his aesthetic writings but in its adaptability to all levels of literacy and cultural understanding. It is precisely this aspect of Schiller’s work that Heinrich praises in his recollections of the circle of artisans and laborers organized by his father to perform and celebrate the poet’s works:

Wenn sie auch Schiller auf die Höhen seiner philosophischen Arbeiten nicht folgen vermochten, so erbauten sie sich um so mehr an seinen geschichtlichen Werken, und von

diesem Standpunkte aus ergriffen sie auch seine Dichtungen, welche sie auf diese Weise ganz praktisch nachfühlten und genossen, ohne auf die künstlerische Rechenschaft, die jener Große sich selber gab, weiter eingehen zu können.<sup>180</sup>

So powerful is Schiller's connection with the community of German-speaking readers that any person can enter into it with his particular experience and knowledge—even the illiterate. Keller would return to this theme again in “Die große Schillerfest,” a poem inspired by the celebrations of Schiller's hundredth birthday from Hamburg to Bern in 1859, twenty-five years before *Martin Salander*, with none of the experience of public life that inspired his final novel. As Peter Uwe Hohendahl describes the event in his study *Literarische Kultur im Zeitalter des Liberalismus*, these festivals occasioned not only the publication of essays, poems, published lectures and addresses, such as the poem Keller wrote and read aloud at the proceedings in Bern—but also of all manner of *Festspiele*,

ceremonies, processions, festivities in schools, universities, churches, and synagogues, which formed the background for the countless speeches in which the German bourgeoisie—and to some extent the working class—affirmed that, more than anyone else, Schiller had voiced the longings and aspirations of the German nation; that he could consequently be regarded as their *spiritual leader* on the road to national unity.<sup>181</sup>

The cause of national unity allowed for the age of liberal Realism to rehabilitate the Idealist Schiller; his abstract pleas for a universal humanity could now be grounded in the “actuality” of a nation. Something of the flavor of this argument can be gleaned from the “Prolog zur Schillerfeier,” which Keller read publicly at the festivities in Bern, in which Theodor Vischer also participated, and which praises the beauty of Schiller's work not as mere aesthetic pleasure, but as a champion of freedom. The poem is striking above all for the total absence of any of the distinguishing features of Keller's writing, which he replaces with familiar aesthetic and political tropes of liberal Realism. He praises Schiller's poetry

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<sup>180</sup> *SW*. Vol. 3, 24.

<sup>181</sup> Hohendahl, Peter Uwe, *Building A National Literature*. Trans. Renate Baron Franciscono. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989. p. 179-180.

the “Vollkraft und Ebenmass [...]” it lends the thought of its readers, the “hohes Ziel” it envisions that is no mere abstract, but an active force stimulating the Swiss to excellence by connecting the “Eigenart’ge and Besondere” of the Swiss experience to the universal experience of humanity.<sup>182</sup>

In contrast to this celebration of beauty as the champion of civic vigor and national unity, “Das grosse Schillerfest” finds Schiller’s virtue elsewhere. The poem, which was added as an *Abgesang* to Keller’s unpublished *Apotheker von Chamouny* in 1859, and did not see release until 1884, opens not with a stirring historical reflection on the portent of the occasion—in the “Prolog”, the image of Schiller’s mother holding the destined child to her breast—but with a destitute woman in tears, heavy with child, searching a forest for dry fire wood, her clothes and feet torn by brambles. Walking along the forest path, she encounters another woman, of a familiar type in Keller’s *oeuvre*, “Groß und stark und schwangern Leibes; / Schwere Hölzer auf dem Haupte.” The Amazonian woman asks her downtrodden companion what is troubling her; the latter replies that her husband was recently killed felling wood, while she herself is struggling to provide for her children. She feels herself reduced by her circumstances to a state of near-savagery:

Leben soll zu Leben kommen  
Und das drängt sich und das mengt sich,  
Und das Herz ist krank zum Tode!

Wie ein Tier auf wilder Heide  
Schein’ ich mir, das ohne Gott,  
Ohne Gott und ohne Sterne  
Hungernd irrt und sich vermehrt!<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Not a few critics of the decades following Keller’s death, most prominently the Swiss Germanist Julius Stifel, argued that the “Prolog” is actually the most authentic expression of Swiss nationalism in all of Keller’s work. De Vincenti, Andrea and Grube, Norbert. “Masters of Republicanism?” *Schooling and the Making of Citizens in the Long Nineteenth Century*. Ed. Daniel Tröhler, Thomas S. Popkewity, David F. Labaree. New York: Routledge, 2011. p. 295.

<sup>183</sup> *SW*. Vol. 1, 377

The statement provides a stark counterpoint to the silent, dignified motherhood of the “Prolog zur Schillerfeier,”<sup>184</sup> significant only in that, aided by the nursemaid poetry, it nurtures the Swiss nation to manhood. “Die grosse Schillerfeier” turns its attention not to higher ideals but with the needs of base animal existence; instead of verses praising Swiss wheels speeding over land and sea, Swiss goods on the ocean, the latter poem describes the material struggle for sustenance. This cry, in turn, is met not with a high poetic pronouncement, but a burst of vernacular German: “Hei! Was ficht dich an, du Blöde!” replies the poor woman’s cheerful interlocutor. “... Lustig bau’n wir uns’re Wölbung, / Lustig in das Reich hinaus.”<sup>185</sup> Her husband, she explains, is unfortunately, alive, though she drove him from their home for eating their children’s food; her children batter her and bite her, still she is cheerful, and celebrates each day of life. At first, these encouraging words have no effect. But then, suddenly, the clouds part, and both women witness a great crowd passing by in the valley below:

Lang hinwallende Bürgerzüge  
Sah man schimmernd sich d’rin bewegen  
Und es wehte die fliegende Seide  
Reichgebildeter Banner voran.

„Freude, schöner Götterfunken!“  
Hallte herüber der klingende Sturm;  
War kein Kirchenlied und kein Kriegslied;  
doch die Glocken schallten vom Turm.

Neither woman is familiar with the lines of poetry recited by the crowd, or with the person whom the celebration is meant to commemorate. But both women are strengthened by the sight of people joined not by the institutions of church, army, or nation, but by the

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

*Menschenbund* of common humanity of the “Ode an die Freude.”<sup>186</sup> If the Realists grounded Schiller’s universal humanity by attaching it to the aspirations of the German and Swiss nations, then Keller goes one step further: his Schiller is shorn not only of the abstraction of nationhood, but of art itself, and grounded directly in the simplest, most ordinary human life. Schiller’s connection to German-speaking people is so profound that any human being can grasp his meaning without having read him. Whenever a human being recognizes her own dignity, whenever a human being extends this dignity to another, she accesses directly the meaning of his work. The poem closes, accordingly, not with an evocation of the nation or the heights that it will reach, but with an invitation to household meal, served by a destitute mother to her new friend and their swarming children: “Brot und Wein hab’ ich im Hause, / Nüsse für die junge Brut; und beim frohen Mütterschmause / Fassen wir einen guten Mut.”<sup>187</sup> The peak of Schiller’s achievement is that he has so thoroughly expressed and transformed the life of his nation, so totally fused a poetic and political ideal to the reality of the German world that the reading of his work is all but superfluous.

Twenty-five years later, one of the most striking aspects of *Martin Salander* is the bitterness with which it revisits the younger Keller’s more idealistic treatment of Schiller and the *Festspiel*. So frequently is Schiller mentioned in the novel that he is, in a sense, a character, a fixture of Martin Salander’s Switzerland who is constantly praised, read, invoked, and misunderstood. In the second chapter, for example the reader learns that Wohlwend and Salander both belonged the same society devoted to the recitation of Schiller’s poetry. It is during a reading of “Die Bürgschaft,” Schiller’s poem celebrating

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 378.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 379.

the Greek ideal of friendship as self-sacrifice, that Wohlwend convinces Salander to stand as co-signer, or *Bürgschaft*, on the loan on which Wohlwend quickly defaults. Later, when Wohlwend shows Salander his prospectus for the *Gottesstaat*, Salander reminds him of the figure of the Grand Inquisitor at the end of *Don Karlos*. In vain—Wohlwend has never read the play. At Marie's *Gastwirtschaft*, a professor orders an expensive bottle of wine from Marie and, in sight of her starving family, grandiloquently describes its effect as a Schiller producing prickling effects on the stage of his tongue. Evidently, over time, Schiller's name has simply become cultural capital, another superficial adornment, for an increasingly materialistic, valueless society.

Keller's most cutting reevaluation of Schiller's political idealism and of the *Festspiel* as a kind of civic art comes, however, in the novel's eleventh chapter, during the wedding between the Salander daughters and the Weidelich sons. Incensed by a letter from his son Arnold, who, studying abroad in England, scoffs at the idea of progress Salander so cherishes, Salander vows to turn his daughters' wedding into a celebration of progress, political unity and national feeling. The outing begins not out in nature, as his daughters would have liked, but at the Münsterburg train station, the symbol of the progressing and growing Swiss state that Salander had found so bewildering at the novel's beginning. There, by train, the wedding party arrives at the festivities, where the usual accoutrements of the wedding have either been given a patriotic undertone, or conversely, where patriotic elements have been made to fit the wedding, with mixed success. A pastor "verlas [...] ein eigens verfaßtes Gebet, welches den kirchlichen Sinn und die Rechte, des freien Denkens gleichmäßig vertrat," while a military marching band plays the *Overture* to Rossini's *Wilhelm Tell*, played at such an unobtrusive volume and tempo that, instead of bringing the

crowd together into one celebrating people, “die tafelnden Völker weder im Essen, noch im gemütlichen Gemurmeln der einzelnen Nachbargruppen beirrt wurden.”<sup>188</sup> The same discordant singing that annoyed Salander so during his walk through Münsterburg with Arnold can be heard all through his wedding. Two choruses of schoolchildren greet the guests, each guided by its own schoolmaster “mit gelber Stimpfpeife angeführt, die ihm zugleich als Taktstock diente. Takt im weiteren Sinne besaßen sie nicht genug, denn statt sich als *ein* Chor zusammenzutun, hatten sie sich aufgestellt, als ob sie gegen einander das bekannte Pintschgauer Wallfahrtslied singen wollten.”<sup>189</sup> Because of the celebratory mood the guests do not notice the disharmony, and those who do tolerate it. Later, Salander is irritated by the forced beauty and insistence on the harmonious whole of the pastor’s speech praising the Weidelichs and the Salanders, though he knows neither family particularly well. The pastor’s obsequious toast makes Salander’s sparer, more accurate well-wishes seem surly by comparison. Afterwards, when Salander confronts the pastor, the latter excuses himself by saying that he is simply following the laws of rhetoric. “Ein Volksredener muß immer ein Ganzes bieten, das sozusagen künstlerisch abgerundet ist,” he advises Salander. “Wer sich in Gefahr begibt, kommt darin um, das müssen Sie nicht vergessen!” The Weidelichs, for their part, are quite pleased. “Schön haben Sie’s gemacht, Herr Pfarrer; wenn ich so reden könnte!” Amalia Weidelich exclaims.<sup>190</sup> Rather than bringing about the admiration for civic virtue in the guests that Salander had hoped for, the wedding succeeds only in flattering their gaudy tastes.

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<sup>188</sup> *SW*, Vol. 6., 535.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 533.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 539.

The centerpiece of the festivities is a political satire written by Salander in hopes of re-uniting the conservative Alt-Liberalen with the more radical Demokraten. (Keller himself belonged to the latter party.) The play represents each party as a comic figure, the Alt-Liberals in the frock coat and high *Vatermörder* collar of the early 1830s, the latter, “die reine Demokratie, das heißt Volksherrschaft” as a peasant woman, like the pair in “Das grosse Schillerfeier.” The Alt-Liberal, who, to Salander’s embarrassment, cuts a far nastier, far less conciliatory figure than he intended as he wrote it, has heard that there is a democratic wedding, and he intends to woo democracy, “obgleich ihm sonst die Demokratie von Weitem lieber als von Nahem sei.”<sup>191</sup> The comedy continues as he begins to make lusty advances to Democracy, taking and twisting her pronouncements to his own ends. Finally, seeing that they are getting nowhere, they declare a truce and dance in the spirit of the festivities so vigorously that the buttoned-up costume of Alt-Liberalism bursts open, his collar falling off and the tails of his frockcoat flying in the air, in the spirit of true democracy. The play is a success—except, of course, among the Alt-Liberals it is supposed to reach, who either do not understand it, or are insulted to have been so skewered at a wedding. Feeling that he has failed as a host, Salander finds himself compelled to give an explanatory speech explaining his intentions, “die reinere Idee, welche er in der Sache ursprünglich gesehen,” and it is only once their feelings have been salved, and the satire of the play defanged, that the guests of the other party are placated. The good mood is quickly soured, however, by the arrival of two tramps, in search of merriment and free-food, wearing powdered wigs, tow beards, and fake noses. Deciding that they will have an easier time mixing into the festivities unnoticed if they split up among the two wedding parties,

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 542.

they decide to throw dice to see who will get which—inadvertently revealing the means by which Isidor and Julian chose their respective political parties. Here Keller offers another possible kind of civic art: one that rejects the values of “Harmonie und Versöhnung” vaunted by Vischer. Instead of presenting a mythology to serve as a maypole for the people, it tells them unwelcome truths, is unyielding in forcing them to recognize their own faults, and that must therefore risk only reinforcing the partisanship among the people, and must recognize that it itself may be resented and rejected by the very people it is trying to improve. Tellingly, the only enlightening public spectacle that takes place in the novel is the trial of Isidor and Julian—“ein öffentliches Schauspiel”, as the narrator approvingly calls it.

It is quite tempting, then, to conclude that, as Keller’s final novel, *Martin Salander* represents a gradual turning away on the author’s part from the idealized figure of Schiller, and from the hopes for a civic art Keller held as a young author of patriotic lyric poetry. But it must be noted that the skepticism of art’s civic powers was already present both at the depiction of the *Tellfest* in both versions of *Der grüne Heinrich*, as well as in his poetic tributes to *Schillerfeier*. The *Festspiel* is only able to strengthen its citizens in the belief that a better republic is possible because somewhere in Swiss life this republic already exists, however buried; but this belief remains exactly that—a belief. There are, after all, scenes of civic discord at the *Tellfest*, and the peasant women of “Die grosse Schillerfeier” are no less destitute than they were at the poem’s start. All that they have been given is the strength to persevere. Schiller, the greatest of political dramatists in Keller’s eyes, did not transform the German-speaking world into a utopia. No artist can, as Salander realizes at the novel’s end.

## V. “Ein kritischer Gesell”: Politics as Ethic of Renunciation

What position, then, does *Martin Salander* aspire to convey to its readers? Does its highly skeptical and ambivalent view of art’s capabilities for inculcating civic virtue in its readers mean that it is a work of political and ethical quietism? Is it merely a satire, in keeping with Keller’s remarks to Berthold Auerbach that poetry cannot be made to serve politics, but must be a *Blumengarten* and *Erholungsplatz*, a refuge away from the demands and disappointments of political partisanship?<sup>192</sup> And given the central place that Keller offers the political in his last work, what is the novel’s relationship to the various ethical dispositions, characters, and values that his work explores? How can we finally understand this turn towards the question of politics and civic education in Keller’s final novel in light of with his skepticism of political pedagogy, and the ethical emphasis throughout his *oeuvre*?

*Martin Salander* does not offer a direct, programmatic answer to these questions. Keller’s last work does not treat extensively of art or writing. But an answer can be found in the book’s treatment of a concept adjacent to art—beauty. Where, in *Der grüne Heinrich*, beauty had, by virtue of its intimate relationship with nature, an edifying effect on the young Heinrich, *Martin Salander* rejects out of hand the pleasure afforded by the beautiful. That hostility is first made explicit during the Weidelich twins’s courtship of Setti and Netti, the Salander daughters. One evening, Martin Salander follows his daughters to a secret rendezvous with the Weidelich twins in the moonlight by a fountain, with a classical motif. The waterwork “ein altes in Sandstein gearbeitetes und verwittertes Brunnenwerk

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<sup>192</sup> SW, Vol. 7, 653.

mit Delphinen und Tritonen umflüstert. Vor dem Brunnen dehnte sich ein geräumiger Rundplatz, von mächtigen Akazien umstanden, und da die Bäume noch unbelaubt waren, schien der Vollmond unverhindert auf den Platz, wie auf die Alleewege, die in in denselben mündeten.”<sup>193</sup> The watery scenery that serves as backdrop to the four youths’ midnight assignation, which echoes not only the classicism of Goethe and Schiller, but also the fascination with the ruins of antiquity in the Romanticism of Tieck and Eichendorff, suggests that belying the fixed, idealized forms of the fountain is a slipperiness, a lack of fixity, a loss of form, that is confirmed when Salander spies his otherwise unremarkable daughters with the Weidelich boys: “Sie erschienen ihm wie zwei dämonische Verkörperungen einer und derselben Wahn-Idee, von welcher die unglücklichen [Jungs] besessen waren.”<sup>194</sup> Salander is instantly struck by the complete control that this demonic quality grants his daughters over the Weidelich boys, who attempt nothing improper and who are quickly dissuaded by the girls from dropping their schooling and politics careers to run away with them. Though Salander sweeps in to stop the proceedings—again acting as a force of deprivation in his daughters’ lives—he leaves that their demonic beauty might have a tempering, socializing effect on the boys’ characters: “Die Kinder scheinen eine merkwürdige Gewalt über die Bengel zu haben!” he reports to his wife. The opposite proves true. Unlike the intimate relationship that beauty had with nature, and the tempering effects of its’ balance and regularity, in detaching the viewer’s glance away from the essence of things and towards a dazzling surface, beauty stokes desire and detaches the self both from reality and from itself: at the height of their passions, when neither Setti nor Netti, nor Isidor nor Julian can identify any of the others.

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<sup>193</sup> *SW*, Vol. 6, 483.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*

Unsurprisingly, Salander's tendency to displace his desires into the realm of the ideal leaves him highly susceptible to the dazzling effects of beauty. This weakness is most apparent in Salander's hopeless love affair with the Thessalonian-born sister-in-law of the resurfaced Louis Wohlwend, the bait in his final scam. Upon his return from Hungary, Wohlwend decides to "cool" Salander by having his old friend fall in love with his sister-in-law, Myrrha Glawicz, whose beautifully shaped head recalls the classical bust often found in the bourgeois home, the plaster copy of the Juno Ludovisi in Goethe's parlor come to life: "[Salander] sah ein Paar leuchtende Augen, die sich ihm wie in gleichgültiger Trauer zuwendeten, aus dem dunklen Haarknoten eine tadellose Stirn- und Nasenlinie sich niedersenekn und unter dem schwellenden Munde das schönste Kinn sich runden, alles wie nach dem Rezept für altgriechische Frauenköpfe."<sup>195</sup> The young Myrrha, whose namesake in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* carries on an affair with her father, is instantly recognizable as a muse: a beauty who inspires poetic feeling, but is herself unable to speak. This link to art is explicitly several chapters later, when Salander accompanies the mute Myrrha on a walk and hears her praised by a passing artist: "...Welch ein einfacher Rhythmus, ohne allen Aufwand, man weiß kaum, wo es steckt, Form und Bewegung in Eines gegossen!" he gushes, availing himself of the vocabulary of Winckelmann.<sup>196</sup> The praise has not an edifying, but rather an overwhelming, narcotizing effect on Salander: "Die Worte des Künstlers und Kenners bewirkten eine seltsame Aufregung im inner und äußern Martin; sie machten sein Herz klopfen und seine Augen glänzen, während sie zugleich seine Schritte lähmten, daß er sich auf eine im Gehölze befindliche Bank niederlassen mußte."<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 595

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 615.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 615

The pleasure and desire awakened by beauty are heady, intense, they cause the characters in Martin Salander to go head over heels; but what they do not do is invigorate or energize. Vigor and energy come, in Keller's world, from a confrontation with reality; the desire quickened by dazzling surfaces leads, by a contrast, to complete paralysis. As Salander is increasingly overcome by his feelings, as the pleasure is accompanied by shame at his own ridiculousness in desiring a woman so much younger than he, and as the shame isolates him from his wife and from his civic responsibilities, the pleasure evinced by the beautiful is linked by the text to a humiliating, almost masochistic sense of resignation. Beauty proves a pedagogical failure not simply because, as Rousseau argues, the rules of art distort the messages of civic virtue, but because, as *Martin Salander* demonstrates again and again with its protagonist, beauty itself and the love of beauty only dazzles, only stokes a desire that paralyzes as it grows and grows.

Why, then, is Salander's son, Arnold, so easily able to resist Myrrha's charms when Wohlwend discovers that his friend's son has papers incriminating him and tries to have his sister-in-law seduce him? Partly because, like his mother, Arnold sees the unprocessed material reality beneath all idealizations. "Sie [...]mich sogar ein bißchen, weil sie jedenfalls kurz vorher Wurst gegessen hat, wie ich an ihrem Hauche spürte!" he complains, when Salander gathers the nerve to ask his son what he thought of the beautiful foreigners. "Wäre etwas Senf da gewesen, so hätte ich ihn dazu genossen!"<sup>198</sup> In this, Arnold resembles his mother, who smiles approvingly when Salander, taken aback by the remark, exclaims, "Ja, er ist ein kritischer Gesell!"<sup>199</sup> But Arnold's disposition is not merely an attunement to the overworked labor that she herself performs. Rather, the sexual and

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 693.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

romantic continence practiced by Salander's son extends to a critical rejection of all idealism, all progress, indeed, all exuberance, all excess of energy, as he describes to his father in a letter from England, recalling a conversation he had had with the visiting father of a fellow Swiss classmate—a surrogate father—after their studies. According to this wise man, whom Arnold quotes at length, “Der Fortschritt sei

nur ein blindes Hasten nach dem Ende hin und gleiche einem Laufkäfer, der über eine runde Tischplatte wegrenne und am Rande angelangt, auf den Boden falle, oder höchstens dem Rande entlang im Kreise herumlaufe, wenn er nicht vorziehe, umzukehren und zurückzurennen, wo er dann auf der entgegengesetzten Seite wieder an den Rand komme. Es sei ein Naturgesetz, daß alles Leben, je rastloser es gelebt werde, um so schneller sich auslebe und ein Ende nehme.<sup>200</sup>

The speech that Arnold quotes so approvingly is a direct rejection not only of his father's political views, but of the orientation of the elder Salander's entire being. There is, to begin with, the critique of progress that Arnold cites, that uses the image, familiar in English Romanticism, of progress as a blind rushing akin to that of a chariot led by a blind horseman.<sup>201</sup> Arnold's speech does not reject progress in romantic or nostalgic terms. There is no longing for a lost unity, continuity, or regularity of life. Instead, the young man rebuts modernity in starkly modern terms, using the biological, scientific, quasi-Darwinian terms of “life” and “natural energies” with whose worldview, Arnold feels himself completely and totally at home. Rather than representing progress as a striving for the higher, the ideal, the beyond, as do Salander and Wohlwend, Arnold represents the persistent longing for forward movement as base and animal, biological, a pre-social urge like that of the insect skittering across the table that must be restrained, and brought into measure—that must be

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 525.

<sup>201</sup> For example, in Shelley's unfinished “The Triumph of Life”: “All the four faces of that charioteer / Had their eyes banded ... little profit brings / Speed in the van & blindness in the rear, / Nor then avail the beams that quench the Sun / Or that his banded eyes could pierce the sphere / Of all that is, has been, or will be done.” Shelley, Percy Bysshe. *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*. London. W. W. Norton, 2002. p. 216.

socialized. In this light Arnold's view of his father's desire for civic progress echoes those instances of unrestrained *id* and animal instinct that recur throughout *Die Leute von Seldwyla*—the wild-maned lion that Pankraz stares down in order to shake himself free of his own moperly, or the wild-haired Vreeli and the patch of uncultivated land in *Romeo und Julia auf dem Dorfe*. The contrast between Salander and his son is thus explicitly *not* between idealism and pragmatism, but rather between two *Lebensarten*: one a cultivation of desire, the other its disciplining and containment.

For Arnold, this self-discipline manifests as a negative ethic of refusal and renunciation. Keller takes pains, however, to distinguish this renunciation from that of Anna in *Der grüne Heinrich*. Where, for Heinrich, his relationship with Anna and the physical renunciation that it demanded caused those unexpressed emotions and sexual energies to be expressed in an Christian idealism—in the ideal of art, to which Heinrich vows to commit himself ardently, as the repository of the sensual pleasure they refuse to feel, and in his hope, when Anna is sick, that if he keeps himself completely pure there will be a beyond where he may join her—in the character of Arnold, desire is not sublimated; it is itself renounced. Hence Arnold's refusal to participate not only in his father's business, but in any profit-producing enterprise at all, He responds to his father's pleas by vowing to control his caprice, his will: "Das wäre nicht mein Standpunkt," he replies coolly. "Ich möchte nicht Geldmacher für zukünftige Dinge sein, die ich nicht billigen kann. Ich werde vielmehr die Willkür bestreiten, so lang ich es vermag; siegt sie, wohl und gut so füge ich mich gelassen, dann ist es mir aber auch gleichgültig, ob sie uns zwei oder zehn Millionen nehmen."<sup>202</sup> Here, at the end, the vocabulary of the learned Arnold switches from the

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 537.

learned to the beatific—“gelassen”, “gleichgültig,”—into a form of quietism, a fixing and coming to terms with the world that goes hand in hand with a perfect serenity, a suspension of the inclination to intervene or to act. When the time comes for Arnold, as it did for Fritz, to enter into an awareness of public life, Salander presses him to begin visiting the political clubs, observing votes, and listening to lectures explaining laws—Arnold refuses once more. He vows to remain informed, which he considers part and parcel of “die Erfüllung seiner Bürgerpflichten.” It is “Mitwirken” that he will not do:

Das sogenannte Mitwirken wolle er an sich kommen lassen, wenn es einst sein müsse, bis dahin aber das faktische Geschehn beobachten und die Früchte desselben betrachten; an ihnen werde er auch die Personen erkennen, die sie hervorbringen, besser als aus ihren Reden, und die Parteien hinwieder an diesen Personen, sowie an den Zeitungsartikeln, die sie schreiben. Die hergebrachten Einflüsse möge er nicht auf sich wirken lassen und gehe deshalb auch nicht hin, wo sie ausgewechselt werden; nur so fühle er sich frei und einst im Stande, Jedem zu sagen, was er für wahr halte.<sup>203</sup>

Arnold’s profession of political faith places the discourse of parliamentary—the discussion of politics, the weighing of issues, the representation of viewpoints, and the attempts to win over the public—under the same head as beauty and its dubious pleasures. In Arnold’s view political speech has no contact with reality; it is only the circulation of misleading narratives that manipulate the desires of the populace. Politics, then, leads not to understanding or to change but only to the same dizzying loss of self experienced by Martin Salander in the company of Myrrha Galwicz. In the place of speechifying, promise-making and opinion-having, Arnold submits a politics of ethical Realism: the renunciation of images, illusions, ideals, and of action as well. Arnold vows to limit his attention only to what is factual, and claims for himself on the ability to freely pronounce what he holds to be true—and then only when prompted. He cultivates in himself and only in himself the

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 694.

freedom from influence without which the citizen cannot be truly autonomous. For fear of misusing that freedom, he promises never to exercise it.

It is with the idealized figure of Arnold and his critical, one might say, Stoic, Realism that the novel closes. Wohlwend is routed, the Weidelich twins crimes' brought to light, the Salander daughters safely divorced, their reputations and fortunes intact, Marie's emotional wisdom finally acknowledged, and the Swiss republic safely in the hands of Arnold and his young friends. The novel's final scene is a dinner at which these representatives of the new generation invite Salander to dinner, where, as an *eminence grise*, he is the guest of honor; after much food and wine, to demonstrate that Arnold's continence is not morbidity or joylessness, there is at last harmonious singing. Salander is able to go to sleep—to die—knowing that Switzerland will always find stewards among the civically virtuous. In the character of Arnold Keller offers a golden mean between withdrawing from the world and succumbing to its folly. The end of *Martin Salander* advances the hope that a representation of the world free of distortions, however well-meaning these might be, will teach the reader patience and acceptance with the world as it is, to be content to do what is needed and no more, to take satisfaction in the existing, no matter how little appeal it may hold. That Arnold remains free of his father's pedagogical schemes suggests that this discipline can come only from the self, not from another—though it would not be quite correct to say that, at the end of his life, Keller returned to the notion of *Bildung* with which his literary career began. *Bildung* is growth, change, development, the expansion of a point of view. Arnold practices the opposite: a negative ethics of fidelity. For him, the realm of action has irretrievably corrupted; in an era of constant upheaval and change he serves by standing still, as Milton has it in his sonnet.

## VI. Conclusion

*Martin Salander* leaves us with a different interpretative quandary than do *Der grüne Heinrich* and *Die Leute von Seldwyla*. *Martin Salander* is at once more realistic than these works, packed as it is with details anchoring its action in the recent past of Keller's time, and at the same time, more direct in posing the ethical question implied in the other two: namely, how should a person live? These two aspects of *Martin Salander* are, as I have attempted to demonstrate, closely connected. The *Zeitroman* was, with the strong Idealist roots and liberal national politics that informed it in the German context, already a pedagogical form—by making his protagonist a schoolteacher, obsessed with saving his nation from widespread corruption and criminality, rescuing it from the mercy of capitalism's booms and busts, Keller only made it explicitly so. The structure of *Martin Salander* is an episodic consideration of pedagogical modes, whether art, civics, family, love, politics, or nature, each investigated as to its ability to produce not only happy human beings, but responsible citizens as well. "Das ist kein Roman," was the reaction of his wife reported by Paul Heyse to Keller upon the book's publication. "Das ist ein Erbauungsbuch!"<sup>204</sup>

Each of these pedagogical attempts proves, for its own reasons, a failure. In this, Keller's final novel is the most cynical of Keller's works. The gentle irony of Keller's earlier work ensured that each experience, however negative, at least contained within itself a kernel of truth, some valuable bit of instruction about the world. In *Martin Salander*, folly compounds into further folly; corruption begets further corruption until every character in the novel, the author, the reader, all of Switzerland—indeed, the entire age—has been

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 1095.

implicated. Error in *Martin Salander* is root and branch; the more so because every single effort to correct those errors is born of error itself. Nowhere is this clearer than in the novel's persistent use of the motif of twinning to blur the distinction between presumptive opposites: between, Salander the hero and Wohlwend the confidence man; between Isidor, the Liberal, and Julian, the Democrat; and between the corrupt, social climbing Weidelich boys and the polite, well-heeled Salander girls. The novel rejects all idealism, all imagination, all deviation away from reality, however well-intentioned, as wrong-headed, a view that it advances not only in its plot and themes, but in its sparse, pared-down style, shorn of the descriptive arabesques and playful humor that makes Keller's earlier writing so pleasurable and distinctive.

*Martin Salander* attempts to resolve the difference between its hope for a steady instructive hand on the rudder of the Swiss republic and its rejection of all pedagogy by holding up the example of Arnold Salander. A person of decency and common sense, ability and capability, driven by a sense of duty, Arnold emerges as the novel's ideal, who wisely avoids the romantic, financial, and political errors into which the rest of the novel's characters' fall. That Arnold is so transparently an ideal renders his character rather flimsy—he is missing the longing, her defiance, the rueful acknowledgment of life's losses that give Keller's other ideal, Judith, human depth. But he is nonetheless a way not only for Keller to return the political and social questions animating his novel to the ethical questions that run through his work, but finally to offer a concrete, dramatized answer to the question of how a person should be, and to construct a literary style that might steer his readers to that balanced, fully autonomous way of being. In Arnold Keller advances the notion that the freedom and autonomy necessary that each citizen must cultivate in order

to fix Switzerland's social fabric demands the exercise of an active attention to the factual, to the material, to that which is actually taking place; to be witness and custodian to the world exactly as it is. Though the more tragic and more foolish character of Martin Salander is treated with great sympathy, Arnold offers a way forward for the world of German letters. He represents Keller's desire for a realism of fixity and clarity over the seductiveness of beauty and the frivolity of poetic play—he represents, then, the end of the era of poetic Realism.

And yet, here too, Keller evinces a hesitation to guide the reader. Arnold's behavior is, after all, ultimately characterized not by what he *does*, but by what he does not do—he does not work to produce profit, he does not participate in politics, he does not consort with women. In his letter to his father, Arnold rejects as foolish and short-sighted the desire of one generation to instill values in the next. Sons repeat their fathers oaths, he says, with far too much enthusiasm, expanding and distorting their meaning until they have no relation whatsoever to the reality that give them rise. Arnold wants nothing except to not want; the freedom that he earns for himself is a sterile one that produces nothing and is thus hardly suited to serve as the basis for an artistic program. Keller expressed as much to his friends: “Es ist nicht schön! Es ist nicht schön!” he complained to Adolf Frey after the book's publication. “Es gibt zu wenig Poesie darin!”<sup>205</sup> *Martin Salander* therefore finds itself in the strange and ultimately unresolvable position of carefully diagnosing a host of social ills for which it conceives a cure that it does not ultimately prescribe. It is telling that it is the foolish Salander father, and not the practical son, who is the novel's protagonist. The political hopes of the character for progress, for equality, for the rule of the people and

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

immediacy of human relations—and the poetic imagination of his author are one and the same. It is with resignation, neither resentful nor wholly serene, that the novel, and with it, Keller's project ends.

## V. CONCLUSION

I would like to close with some observations on what, in these three chapters, I have been referring to as Keller's "ethical Realism." To be an ethical Realist, in the sense that I have designated for Keller does not mean simply to thematize or to foreground the question of how to live, of how one should be, of how one should dispose oneself towards reality, to do so within a text whose characters and setting plausibly resemble the author's biographical world. This condition is a necessary one, and Keller does do exactly this, as numerous scholars from Keller's lifetime to the present have ably demonstrated. But, were we to regard him in this light, there would be little to differentiate him from contemporaries like Tolstoy or Eliot, of whom it might also be said that the question of how to live is the impetus driving the dramatic conflict in their novels. It has been my argument throughout that the scope of the question of ethics in Keller becomes fully apparent only when it is considered in light of his Keller's close conceptual relationship to the categories and techniques of the German Realist movement. These authors, I argued, perceived a direct relationship between a work's formal construction—in the "harmonious" construction of characters, the plausible and necessary unfolding of the plot, the fixing of perspective for description—and an actual harmony between individuals and the world. The poetry of the work of poetic Realism proves that better human relations are possible, and its Realism proves that they are possible in this world. Keller's ethical Realism, therefore, is one of its formal elements—the construction of characters, the development of plot, the breakdown of chapters, the development of symbolic themes and metaphorical language, the description of physical environments—all these are given shape by the question of how a person should be, of how one should live. I have attempted to stress that for Keller this

question is not simply one of enforcing a preferred behavior over another, as is abundantly clear from his sharply worded criticisms of the moralism in Gotthelf's work (to cite just one quote in his critical writings), but rather of examining, and dramatizing the examination of, the processes of socialization and modes of labor that bind one to something called *Wirklichkeit* in the first place. Keller's sense of a *Lebensart* extends well past one's behavior into one's understanding, into one's disposition. It is the plurality of these *Lebensarten*, and the conflicts between them to which that plurality gives rise, that provides Keller's work not only with its dramatic thrust, but with its most fundamental formal elements. And so while it may credibly be argued, as have a century of Keller scholars, that Keller's work advance a philosophy of skepticism and of liberation, championing the individual's right to fashion an ethics for himself, it must also be said these convictions are presented amid considerable skepticism about art's power, and much hesitation about its right, to enjoin to the reader to live his life one way or the other.

Far from being hobbled by this skepticism or this indecision, Keller's work offers the contemporary scholar of Realism not only a critique of the poetic Realism of his time, but also a powerful concept for considering the relationship between Realism and reality, a concept that sidesteps the debates of past decades regarding mimetic and semiotic approaches, and turns instead to the relationship between the work's interior formal structure, its verisimilitude, and its approach to the question of how one ought to live. In so doing, Keller's work draws heavily on the literary tradition of the example, which may be observed in the form of the anecdote, as well as in the aphorism. These forms have always remained at the margins of scholarly debates on Realism, which, at least in the German context, focus primarily on the novel, the novella, and, to a lesser extent, on drama;

as modes of writing that observe experience and seek to offer counsel to their reader, that overlay the oral tradition of storytelling with the written one, and that ask to be judged not only by the beauty of their formulation but by their insight and their accuracy, they would be indispensable to a study of Realism from an ethical perspective. Seen in this light, Keller's closest literary relations would not be his fellow Realists, nor even progenitors like Charles Dickens, but a stranger, more motley assortment of authors and works that have always sat strangely in the canon of Realism—Melville's *Confidence-Man*, Hebel's *Schatzkastlein*, or Kleist's *Polzeiberichte*, to take just three examples exclusively from the nineteenth century.

I stress here the flexibility of the concept of ethical Realism because, as I have attempted to demonstrate, the treatment of ethics, the ethical, and the representation of these two, varies greatly between *Der grüne Heinrich*, *Die Leute von Seldwyla*, and *Martin Salander*. The goals of each work, and the formal constraints that result from these goals, produce three very literary approaches to the question of how one ought to live. This question is most obviously manifest in *Der grüne Heinrich*, which, in adopting the form of the *Bildungsroman* to track the development of a young man into manhood—however jagged and erratic that development may be—loads the description of the world and the people in it with existential possibility. Each person, each detail, represents a possible *Lebensart*. That, and not the changed ending, is the crucial difference between the second *Fassung* and the first one: in switching between first and third person perspective, the latter divides the labor of describing the world and deciding how to exist in it between the narrator and Heinrich, a division that the second *Fassung* abandons. Keller's novel offers a panorama of the shopkeepers and master craftsmen that made up Switzerland's *petit*

*bourgeoisie* in the nineteenth century. But the flatness of each character as perceived by Heinrich, the unity between their character, their outward appearance, their work, and the manner in which they die is a perspectival effect created by the fact that they are seen with Heinrich's eyes, the sense that he, and the reader, can develop in any number of possibly contradictory ways. The novel is as much compendium as it is *Bildungsroman*: Keller's reluctant to enjoin one way of being over the other is an aesthetic choice as much as it is an ethical one, given the novel breadth and dramatic weight.

The third person perspective of the *Leute von Seldwyla* novellas creates a very different work from *Der grüne Heinrich*, despite the thematic continuity between the two. The third person perspective of the former subjects the protagonists of each novel to the same flattening, the same unity of inward desire and outward appearance that marked the supporting characters in *Der grüne Heinrich*; as a result, none of the novella's protagonists possesses quite the same freedom of self-determination that Heinrich does. Instead the central role played here by the setting of the stories, the so-called *Kreditparadies* of Seldwyla, where no one has work and where everyone is always "guter Dinge," directly ties ethics to the production and reproduction of material existence, and places all ethical considerations within the parameters of a materialist anthropology. Work, as the means by which an individual secures a wage and the means by which he transforms raw materials into usable objects, is the key *Lebensart*, the key disposition towards reality, in the *Seldwyla* novellas. It is also the key image for the artistic transformation of reality into meaning-laden symbols, charged with the pleasure that has been withheld in the workshop. This limitation of the scope of Keller's ethical considerations brings with it, as compensation, a broadening of the concept of *Verklärung* from an artistic process,

practiced by artists in preparation for the making of paintings, novels and poems, to a faculty inherent in every human being, even those who “produce” nothing. To poeticize is to engage in an intimate congress with the material world and to produce meaning, as a worker does, free of the constraints of wage-labor, free of the worry of what will sell and who will buy. As in *Der grüne Heinrich*, the pessimism and optimism of Keller’s worldview, whether it is regarding the power of the individual to recognize and claim his own happiness, or art’s ability to counsel its readers, are impossible to extricate from one another.

It is the last of these three works, *Martin Salander*, written with the likely awareness that it would be Keller’s last work, that attempts to resolve some of these ambiguities and contradictions by bringing them to the fore. For this reason, *Martin Salander* is both the most realistic of Keller’s work, and the most ethical: realistic in the sense of being concretely grounded in the historical Switzerland of the 1870s, when Keller began work on the novel, with references to industrialization, public schools, banking crises, and environmental disaster, and rendered in the pared-down, dialogue-heavy style of Zola; ethical, in the sense, that the theme of pedagogy, around which the novel’s political plot is threaded, explicitly asks the question of how political and personal character is formed, and what role the poetic beautification of reality might play in that formation. And unlike the previous two, *Martin Salander* attempts to envision a resolution to the intractable ambivalence animating Keller’s work—in the character of Arnold Salander, the abstemious son of the novel’s lofty-minded protagonist who prides himself on the highly critical and restrained manner with which he considers not only his father’s ideals, but *all* deviation from the bare facts of material reality, whether by extracting surplus value from

the family business, engaging in high-flown material speech, or succumbing to what the narrator refers to as the “demonic” power of beauty. The eventual resolution of the conflict between father and son, which is revealed to be the story’s primary narrative thread, is the more striking for the traditionalism of the conception of ethics on which it draws. For Arnold, as for the Stoa, the attentive observation of and reconciliation with reality is a practice by means of which desire, the cause of all suffering and error, is curbed. These stylistic steps on the part of the late Keller towards realism and towards ethics go hand in hand, however, with an openly critical repudiation of poetic Realism, *Verklärung*, and the classical inheritance that Realism took on from Idealism and Romanticism. These are now treated as a distortion, a dazzling illusion that blinds its viewers, as well as its authors, to material reality, with disastrous consequences. Rejected now as inimical to personal growth and political stability, the *Verklärung* of reality is allowed, particularly in the character of Marie Salander, the vastly diminished role of survival mechanism by means of which poverty and unwelcome news, are sugar-coated.

To say that Keller’s later work takes a more jaundiced view of art and its relationship to ethics or to politics than does the writing he undertook in the 1850s would not be exactly right, however. In retrospective view, the same skepticism regarding the perfectibility of the individual and the republic, and by extension the role that the poetic transformation of reality is prevalent in all three works. The ideal of a “natural” art, an art that faithfully grasps and represents in clarified form the harmony and balance underlying nature, and in so doing imparts something of that harmony and balance to its creator and its viewer, leads Heinrich from folly to folly. The enlightening power of Goethe, Schiller and Jean Paul are extolled without reservation in *Der grüne Heinrich*. But the novel is no

less reserved in depicting the personal realities that muddy art's message, not least among them the ideal-corroding effects of poverty—that art reaches its audience first and foremost as a commodity for purchase, that those most in need of its salubrious, healing effects can least afford, is dramatized with equal parts humor and pathos in the scene, to pick just one, with the bookseller hawking Goethe's collected works. Nor does it shy away from the central ethical conflict of the Realist period, a conflict that, though handled frequently in the criticism and theoretical writing of the period, is rarely tackled in the literature itself: if art's sole value is in its fidelity to reality, then why should art exist at all? Heinrich's experiences with the theater, both in a local production of *Faust* and in the *Tellfest* that is the centerpiece of the novel's second volume, offer a possible way out of this quandary by imagining art and life becoming one. But, as I have argued, the reverse side of this ideal, which recurs again and again in Keller's work, is a profound skepticism of the artistic process. It reveals the worry that, by making his subject beautiful, the artist is not only falsifying it, but, what is worse, failing in his duty to show his public things as they actually are. Sure enough, Heinrich's artistic adventure brings out both the best and the worst parts of his personality. It deepens his narcissism, his tendency to embellish, and his wastefulness; but it also the powerful sense of obligation he feels towards his family to unearth and preserve the dignity that he senses in their way of life. And the same uneasiness about art is at work in the focus on handicraft and labor in the *Leute von Seldwyla* cycle, which seeks, across all ten novellas, to ground poetic imagination by recovering in it the dignity and the closeness to the physical world that comes with labor, while redeeming labor by granting it the freedom of a self-directed poetic imagination. Here the guiding artistic light is Shakespeare, whom the narrator praises not as the taboo-breaking genius of

the *Sturm und Drang* period, but as an observer of human fates and human characters. Shakespeare's genius is therefore not his own; rather, the genius of his works is the genius of life itself, the original storyteller, from whom all other storytellers crib and cite.

I have attempted to demonstrate that, from a narrative standpoint, *Der grüne Heinrich* and *Die Leute von Seldwyla* weave together in myriad ways this skepticism and this idealism towards *Poesie*. By contrast, *Martin Salander* stands out as that work of Keller that gives up exploring the tensions of the poetic Realist project and rejects its aesthetics as well as its politics. As I have argued in the third chapter of this dissertation, the political plot in *Martin Salander* is added not simply for verisimilitude, but as an explicit confrontation with the liberal, democratic dimension of Realist movement, which saw in poetic idealization a tool of civic pedagogy, a bellows for the flames of *Volksgemeinschaft* and national pride. Just as Schmidt, Freytag, Vischer, and Keller himself held that *Verklärung* cleared away the chaff of empirical reality and extracted the essences of things, so too would it portray the bonds that tied the German (or the Swiss) people together, buried beneath the surface of regional difference and class conflict, and offer up a portrait of the national character as it is, and as it might be, and thereby solidify them. Such was the hope of the young Keller, the patriotic poet, as well as the mature Keller who took the stage at the Schiller's centenary in Bern in 1859. The late Keller attacks the notion that reality as it is somehow insufficient or incomplete, or that beautifying it have some instructive purpose. As I argued, *Martin Salander* draws a critical parallel between the high-spun poetic and political aspirations of Keller's eponymous protagonist; the avaricious, social-climbing Weidelich twins; and the novel's antagonist, the swindler, confidence-man, Louis Wohlwend. Through the latter character, who fashions himself as

a patriot, a lover of poetry and nature, and the prophet of a religious state, Keller advances the notion that poetic Realism is only another confidence scheme whose idealizations are no realer than the holdings of the Atlantische Uferbank, of which Wohlwend is chief officer—that to pass off what ought to be as though it actually exists is nothing more than a swindle on reality itself. Over the course of the novel, Martin Salander is disabused of his restless imagination, his poetic visions of the Swiss people and their civic virtue, of the money to be in the New World, of the salubrious effects of the political process on the character of those who participate in it; before he turns out the light to go to sleep one final time, he finds himself content with what is, instead of yearning for what might be.

I closed my third chapter by considering Arnold Salander, the counter-model offered by Keller to Salander's tireless idealism. In *Salander fils* Keller considers that theme with which the late Goethe returned again and again—renunciation. Insofar as Arnold embodies an ethics, it is a negative one: he refuses to extract surplus value from the family business; he resists the charms of Louis Wohlwend's beautiful but slow-witted sister-in-law; and, the greatest rebuff to his father, refuses to participate in politics. His is an ethics of continence, of refusal to demand *what might be* in addition to *what is*. Perhaps most striking about his character, then, is that he dovetails so closely with the literary movement that Keller and his fellow poetic Realists might, thirty years previously, have rejected as “naturalism”—the writing of Flaubert, Zola, and later Ibsen; declarative in style, frank in its portrayal of personal failures and social ills, firm in its refusals to see ideals as anything more substantial than wisps of imagination. Keller's letters and critical writing show that he bristled at these authors' cynicism, and I do not mean to argue here that, had Keller lived another decade, he might have written a novel peopled with the courtesans and

social strivers he disdained in Zola. Nonetheless, the late Keller is virtually alone among the authors of poetic Realism in giving serious consideration to how its aesthetics and its politics might be reformed; and his consideration of the French novel at the end of his life suggests that, though he rejected its cynicism, he recognized in it an authentic care for the material basis of social and individual life. In the last years of his life, Keller toyed with the idea of a sequel to *Martin Salander* following the further adventures of Arnold, in which Keller might have continued his attempt to detach that care for man's material well-being from the *blasé* attitude that the French authors in their turn attempted to pass off as "just the way things are," and to transform it into a livable *Lebensart* that might be the basis not only of a truthful literature for the close of nineteenth century, but also a basis for responsible family life, private enterprise and citizenship, as well as a tool for unmasking mendacious political ideologies.

That this book was never written cannot be attributed exclusively to Keller's death two years later. As I have attempted to demonstrate throughout this dissertation, a "critical" Realism in which the tensions, contradictions and, most significantly, the aspirations, both political and aesthetic, of poetic Realism would have meant the end of Keller's project. Noble though the character of Arnold Salander might be the author's point of identification is unmistakable with the foolish visions and plans of his father. Arnold, I observed, is unswerving in his fidelity to reality, he refuses to be taken in, he risks nothing, but for that very reason he does not produce anything either. The capacity for poetic imagination in its wisdom and its folly is the motive mechanism of Keller's work; the variety of human *Lebensarten* its substance. A novel in which the precarious balance between reality and ideal has been settled for the former, and in which the question, for example, of how much

skepticism is liberating and how much corrosive, or of how much pleasure is gluttonous and how joyful, affirmative, of whether to mourn the passage of things or cherish them the more deeply for their transience, of how to work so that one learns the boons of diligence and productivity but not the yoke of a master, has found an answer would no longer be a novel by Keller. In the character of Arnold the desire that moves not only the bodies but the minds of Keller's protagonists has been entirely bridled, and their political aspirations for a truly representative democracy that challenges its participants to set aside their inwardness and their selfishness and participate as members of a community have been limited to a mere administration or management. As a student of history, he looks not forward, but backward, as so many of Keller's contemporaries, from Meyer to Stifter to Freytag, were inclined to do; in him, there is nothing left to imagine, and therefore nothing left to write. Critical though Keller's novels and novellas were of the poetic Realist project, they were nonetheless inextricably woven together with its conceptual language and its sense of purpose, its hopes and its disappointments. As those authors aged, and their sense of purpose dimmed, so too did Keller's. By finally rejecting poetic abstraction on ethical grounds, and by attempt to answer at last the question of what art could finally *do* for its reader, Keller severed the last links between himself and the movement, and in so doing, he closed his life with a critical glance, equal parts forgiving and unsparing, on his work.

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