Why Money Talks:

A Study of Changing Notions of Money and Language in Selected Works of German Literature from FORTUNATUS to Dürrenmatt’s DER BESUCH DER ALTEN DAME

PhD Thesis
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Abstract

This project is concerned with the multiple relations between money and language, e.g. abstraction, arbitrary assignment of meaning, ready negotiability and exchangeability, and the way these issues are reflected and reflected upon in some key works of German literature. As mankind went through several transitions from the early modern period to post-modernity, the changes in world view profoundly affected the conceptions of money and language and their importance to human beings as modes of encoding and understanding their world. This thesis seeks to demonstrate how these changing notions are explored in the literature of the times, affecting not only plots and characters, but also impinging on the very language of the texts themselves. By adopting money and language, their interrelation and characteristics as a prism through which to approach literary works, it is argued that these factors are endemic to our nature as social beings, and to the historicity of that nature.

The literary investigation covers Fortunatus, Dil Ulenspiegel, Nathan der Weise, Kabale und Liebe, Peter Schlemihl, Faust II, Soll und Haben, Der grüne Heinrich, Buddenbrooks, Von morgens bis mitternachts and Der Besuch der alten Dame in the light of the contemporary world view and man's role within it, socio-economic developments, monetary practice, and linguistic changes as well as linguistic reflections. This means that each chapter provides a detailed and complex analysis of relevant stylistic techniques and modes of expression; the importance of money and its portrayal for the plot as well as for the characters and the society portrayed; and the way in which these issues are reflected in the language and language usage of the texts.

In historical terms, the project thus moves from the stable view of wealth and the corresponding belief in language as signifying what it names, to the present day, where money has forfeited substance and language has become an arbitrary discourse, and where the two are governed in our consumer world by a shared enterprise of semiotics.
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And last, but not least, thanks go to James Vickers who, for most of this project, provided a shoulder to moan on.
Money and language are something specifically human: man has been called both the articulate and the exchanging mammal. This thesis is concerned with the multiple relations between money and language, e.g. abstraction, arbitrary assignment of meaning, ready negotiability and exchangeability, and the way these issues are reflected and reflected upon in some key works of German literature. As mankind went through several transitions from the early modern period to post-modernity, the changes in world view profoundly affected the conceptions of money and language and their importance to human beings as modes of encoding and understanding their world. This thesis seeks to demonstrate how these changing notions are explored in the literature of the times, affecting not only plots and characters, but also impinging on the very language of the texts themselves. By adopting money and language, their interrelation and characteristics as a prism through which to approach literary works, I hope to show that these factors are endemic to our nature as social beings, and to the historicity of that nature. However, this thesis makes no claim whatsoever to provide an exhaustive overview of all the texts that deal with the issues raised here. Rather, I have confined myself to the detailed analysis of a small corpus of texts. It is my hope that the analyses themselves serve to demonstrate the interpretative centrality of the issues under discussion; and that the texts interlock to form a kind of historical narrative. Moreover, it is interesting to note that of the texts discussed, four (Fortunatus, Peter Schlemihl, Von morgens bis mitternachts, and Der Besuch der alten Dame) conform to a basic pattern: the sudden acquisition of enormous wealth, or the promise thereof. Within the texts, this allows for a detailed examination and portrayal of the power and influence money exerts on society: money emerges as the means to put society, its values and structures, to the test.

I am interested in the changes in the human perception and understanding of the
substance and purpose of money and in the changes in the understanding of the essence and purpose of language that took place over the past 400 years. This thesis sets out to be not only a literary investigation, but also attempts to highlight parallels between the changes in the mode of human thinking, their reflection in money and language, and, in turn, in the literature of the times. Hence, this thesis treats the literary works it discusses as representative and exemplary of the respective periods, identifying them as moments where the issues at stake are particularly resonant.

Although the literary investigation stops with Dürrenmatt’s Der Besuch der alten Dame (the first version of the text dates back to 1956), there are some general remarks about current monetary practice which are not discussed in relation to a more recent work of German literature, but serve to highlight the developments in finance within the broader framework of my argument.
Chapter One: Introduction

Money and Language

The multiple relations between money and language have been an object of intense investigation and speculation over centuries,\(^1\) not least because they are regarded as being inseparable from our nature as human beings: man has been called the articulate as well as the exchanging mammal. The secondary literature on both subjects is extensive; and I shall in the following concentrate on those arguments which bring the two phenomena into reciprocal interrelation. The succeeding chapters will focus on the textual dimension of this intersection. In this introductory chapter I will, then, review a set of generally acknowledged issues about the phenomena of money and language, their interrelation and development, and how these change through the centuries. The way in which this finds reflection in some key literary works of German literature is the theme of the ensuing chapters.

So what is money? It is not only Mr Dombey in Dickens’s *Dombey and Son* who finds this question hard to answer: definitions of what money is may well be as numerous as its users. This, however, lies at the root of money’s all-pervasive role in human life, as we shall see. First of all, at the most basic level of definition, money is a medium of exchange. Yet the step a society makes in moving from a barter economy to a money-based one is considerable, it denotes a willingness on the part of the participants to accept a basically useless substance - money cannot be eaten, or worn, or lived in - in exchange for life’s essentials. It necessitates the ability to abstract as well as a social consensus,

since to sell for money would be a foolish exercise if money could not be reconverted, without loss of value, into something else. This also requires a third authority who will guarantee the value of the currency and provide real goods to spend the money on. Usually this role is played by society or the state: ‘Geld ist eine Anweisung der Gesellschaft.’ In this purely economical function, money in and of itself could well be totally worthless, since it only serves to denote equal proportions of different goods, and indeed Simmel cites numerous examples of peoples that use ‘worthless’ money, e.g. shells [p.118]. Yet for long periods of their history most of the world’s economies dealt with money that was precious in itself, usually gold, silver, and copper; precisely because the leap of faith in exchanging goods for something worthless was too great. Money had to have material value in itself in order to entice people to part with their belongings, let alone to establish international trade.

The reality of this material value underwent profound changes throughout the centuries as views about the nature of money and economics, and indeed the world, completely altered. The period that extends from the literal weighing of ingots to the electronic currency circulation of our days witnessed an ever-increasing abstraction of money to the point where it has become absorbed in an all-pervading flow and circulation of commodities governed by semiology. Before moving on to a more direct comparison of money and language in the context of their contemporary functioning, I would like to

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trace the changes that occurred in the way Western civilization viewed and interpreted its social experience, since this offers a fascinating insight into the understanding of the issues under discussion here. The following account of these changes (pp.9-20) is based on Michel Foucault’s *Les Mots et les choses*.

Foucault argues that the people of the sixteenth century inhabited a world profoundly different from our own, a world full of spirits, magic, superstition and fervent religious beliefs. The picture of our planet and its purpose as well as the role of human beings within it were defined by the teachings of the Church. The world itself was seen as being tightly structured, it was divided according to a classification by means of morphological principles, and to understand these and their interrelation was to understand the world - and to be a magician. Magic was possible because everything was interrelated through the factor of *resemblance*, and it was resemblance which, ‘up to the end of the sixteenth century, [played] the constructive role in the knowledge of Western culture’. How the world functioned and represented itself to mankind could be explained via four types of resemblance – *convenientia, aemulatio, analogy, sympathy* - and the connections and structures of the world were thought to be visible to those who knew how to look for them. These signs were seen as making up what could be called the currency

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5 The theoreticians I quote are twentieth-century thinkers, and I am basing the theoretical issues on their thought because they link money to broader cultural phenomena (e.g. metaphor). The founding father of some of the issues under discussion here is, however, Karl Marx; and it is noteworthy that Marx knew that literature could provide insights into socio-economic matters. However, the more significant ramifications for my thesis emerge later in time, within the thought of the twentieth century – especially in the case of language issues; and this is what is central to my concerns.

A good overview of Marx’s thought on money, economy and literature can be found in S. S. Prawer, *Karl Marx and World Literature*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1976.

6 Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p.17. Throughout this section, all references to this work will be given in bracketed references in the main text.

7 See Foucault, *The Order of Things*, pp.18ff, for further detail.
of the world, a global ‘text’ which explained literally everything [p.26]. As Eco has pointed out, the thought of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was strictly within the hermeneutic tradition, where everything on the globe and the known universe is interlinked on the basis of resemblance. The underlying idea was that signs, whether manmade or natural, resembled their signified, which in turn was cognate with other entities in the material world, so that all the world was interlinked in huge chains, forming a matrix visible for those who could read the signs, and at the core of which lay certain ‘originals’, placed there by God, which human beings could uncover. It was indeed resemblance that constituted the signs themselves, endowed them with their value.

As far as language was concerned, it was believed that it once had been absolutely transparent, not only on the more tangible things it designated, but also on truth, until the disastrous events at Babel. When God imposed different tongues on mankind, truth was dispersed amongst them, each containing a small part; the only way to know the truth was thus to know all the languages of the globe.

The value of language for the sixteenth century lay in the fact that it was the sign of things, and since the truth of all signs was postulated in the belief that they were carrying a Divine message [p.34], language was seen to have a symbolic function in mirroring the divine message inscribed in the world. This was envisioned rather as being analogous to the world than signifying it, e.g. it was believed that the five different ways of writing known to mankind (from left to right and vice versa, from top to bottom and vice versa, or else in spiral patterns) were analogous to “the secrets and mysteries of the world’s frame and the form of the cross, the unity of the heaven’s rotundity and that of the earth, [thus they] are properly denoted and expressed” . So the symbolic function

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was expressed in the very structure of language rather than in individual words per se [p.37]. In accordance with the stratified world view of the time, it was held that behind the language one was reading at any particular time there ran an original text; so the prime task of any reader was to try and interpret the words in front of him in an attempt to unearth what was really present. Although this degree of sophistication was very much restricted to the learned few, the very framing and understanding of Fortunatus relies on the reader’s awareness and willingness to detect an undercurrent, as the next chapter will show. Similarly, many of the pranks in Dil Ulenspiegel rely on the fact that different speakers hear different ‘original texts’ behind their words.

On the other hand, money in the early modern period is very much determined by what it is, namely precious metals. Money not only denoted wealth, as it does nowadays; it could only do so because it itself was wealth. It could only be a fair measure of value because it itself was highly valuable, thus ‘the buying power of money signifies nothing but the marketable value of the metal’ [p.171]. Money itself was a commodity, and economic thought of the sixteenth century was largely concerned with the problems of prices and the best monetary substance, the more so as ‘finance actually overtook trade as the most important component of most urban economies’. It is thus no surprise that the problem of the representation of wealth should be solved straightforwardly by ensuring that money was the token and bearer of what it denoted. Resemblance was actual identification in this case.

The seventeenth century saw a fundamental change in the view of the world, and

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p.37.

beliefs about the nature of language, economy and money altered accordingly. Resemblance was abandoned and representation took its place; instead of looking for similarities, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were searching for difference in order to establish singularity. Attention switched from the thing represented to the mode of representation. This meant that signs themselves no longer were analogous to, or bore the form of what they signified, but rather were perceived as leading a dual existence: "The sign encloses two ideas, one of the thing representing, the other of the thing represented; and its nature consists in exciting the first by means of the second". This contradicts the notion of resemblance, where the sign was valid because its reality correlated closely with the thing it denoted. From then on, representation was the way in which everything, from ideas to natural phenomena, showed their being; signs, since they no longer resembled what they denoted, split irrevocably into a signifier and a signified - a thought not unfamiliar to our own age. Saussure did indeed return to the classical analysis of forms of representation in his linking of concept and image [p.67].

Language, as a system of signs, now had no other purpose or value than that of representing, especially representing thought, since language was now seen as the way in which human thought represented itself; and the notion of its concurrency with God was rejected. Language itself was no longer a substantial phenomenon, the text one was reading was seen as a mere superficiality in the service of the representation of meaning: verbal signs became discourse without intrinsic value (rather than, as in the sixteenth century, being regarded as valuable in their role as the carrier of the divine message), mere tools of the human mind in the search for truth. Discourse was the only remnant of

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11 Logique de Port-Royal, 1ère partie, ch.IV. Cited in Foucault, The Order of Things, pp.63f.
12 This can be clearly discerned in philosophical writings of the time. See, for example, Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan (1651), and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Unvorgreifliche Gedanken, Betreffend die Ausübung und Verbesserung der Teutschen Sprache (1697). Both philosophers argue that money
language since it ‘is merely representation itself represented by verbal signs’ [p.81]. On the other hand, language, or should one say discourse, did gain in importance through the belief that words and knowledge were rigorously interwoven: we can only know what is revealed to us through representation and language is the most effective form of representation.

For the conception of money and wealth the change to representation brings considerable alterations as the analysis of wealth is conducted on the grounds of money and exchange, but value is still based on actual human need (food, clothing, etc.) [p.67]. Throughout the seventeenth century money acquires completely the features of a measuring device - which it is still today - or, to speak in the terms of the day, it becomes a pure sign for the representation of wealth. Although it is still largely made of precious metals, it is no longer the gold content that makes money valuable but the fact that money is a functional exchange token and the sign of wealth. Thus the roles have reversed: now ‘gold is valuable because it is money’ [p.176]. As a consequence exchange becomes of primary importance since it is necessary in order to acquire what is wealth, which is now all things that are ‘objects of desire - that is, [...] those that are marked by “necessity, or utility, or pleasure, or rarity.”’ 13 Two things are noteworthy here. First, that the notion of what constitutes wealth moved from a few objectives such as gold, silver, jewellery and real estate to an abundance of things, many of which are no longer directly linked to objectivity and durability, but to subjective desire and its satisfaction - and thereby to consumption, a notion at the root of any Western economy today. Moreover, this is an early indication of the way in which use value will be ousted in centuries to come in

and language are nothing but operative tools to enhance human knowledge and understanding.

favour of other, more subjective values - pleasure or rarity - and the way in which things obtain an exchange value above their objective use value.\(^4\)

Second, instead of money being wealth in itself, it is that which allows wealth to be represented, whether through an actual purchase or, if not spent, as a store of countless possibilities. This does not mean that money itself was utterly worthless per se - it was made of precious metals after all - but it became ‘real wealth only to exactly the same degree to which it fulfills its representative function: when it replaces commodities, when it enables them to be moved or to wait’ [p.178]. Thus the relations between money and wealth are founded on circulation and exchange, and no longer primarily on the worth of metal. The importance of the all-pervading notion of representation becomes obvious here. Once the belief establishes itself that wealth and value are disincarnate, then money becomes what it is to be ever after: a pledge, a fiction, ‘a material memory, a self-duplicating representation, a deferred exchange’ [p.181]. From the seventeenth through to the twentieth centuries major modifications occurred in the perception of what determined value and wealth, which I shall discuss a little later. Yet these changes affected merely the notion of what constitutes value and wealth; money, as the established representative, continued to function as a calibration of value and wealth.

What is of importance here is that from the seventeenth century onwards money and language are perceived to function according to the same principle, arbitrary representation, and that they begin to look as if they were intrinsically related. At this point it becomes possible to discern similarities between words and coins in that they both are able to store and transmit meaning and perception, that ‘an etymon is like a monetary

\(^4\)Just over a century later, Condillac, in his *Commerce* (1776), declares that the value of a thing is rooted less in itself than in the desire we feel for it. See L. Bauer and H. Matis, *Geburt der Neuzeit: Vom Feudalsystem zur Marktgesellschaft*, München: dtv, 1988, pp.296ff, for further detail.

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inscription effaced by time', and that words are the coins of intellectual exchange. Johann Hamann, writing in 1761, points towards the basis of these similarities when reflecting on the relationship between money and language: 'Beyde stehen in einer näheren Verwandschaft als man muthmaßen sollte. Die Theorie des einen erklärt die Theorie des anderen; sie scheinen daher aus gemeinschaftlichen Gründen zu fließen'.

What Hamann immediately grasped is that money and language are not related because they share the same features, but that they share the same features because they have a common origin: the human mind. It is in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that money and language emerge fully as tools of mankind in its encoding of the world that surrounds it.

In the eighteenth century there were two schools of economic thought, the Physiocrats and the Utilitarians; roughly speaking, the former were largely landowners and the latter merchants and entrepreneurs. The Physiocrats saw the root of all value and wealth in the land and in the superfluity of nature's products per se, they regarded only the soil as being truly productive, creating value and wealth, whereas trade and industry were seen as mere derivatives. The Utilitarians, on the other hand, claimed that agricultural products only became valuable once they had entered the economic cycle and become quantifiable against each other, so that they could become useful - that is, negotiable. In any event, both schools of thought saw wealth as originating from the land since it was the fruits of the soil which either were valuable per se or through exchange. To be wealthy was still largely to be either a landlord or, with the economic form of

15 Shell, The Economy of Literature, p.3.


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mercantilism, to be a merchant or financier, who derived much of their profit from - and in turn invested it into - land. This altered profoundly with the introduction of the theory of labour, which in turn led to a political economy as we still know it. Adam Smith’s *On the Wealth of Nations* (1776) was the first treatise to base value on human labour, the concept of which David Ricardo was to expand and elaborate. The basic shift Smith made was to identify labour as the determining value force, so that wealth derived from human toil and effort. This has the greatest impact on the exchange process, since it is now no longer need that underlies the final determination of the market price, but the units of labour invested in it [p.222]. This is not to say that labour had not been an economic concept before. It can be found in earlier economic writings; but what is crucial is that it has now become the denominator of wealth as, under the impact of the industrial revolution, production takes over from nature as the ultimate supplier of value and wealth. This does not mean that the issue of human needs disappeared out of the economic cycle; of course the products of labour still had to be related to them. Producing something that did not satisfy a human need would in consequence be unmarketable and ultimately mean no remuneration. The crux is that needs no longer solely determined the market price. It is now labour that is measured, remunerated and calculated into the final market price, and wealth and exchange become measurable in terms of, and representative of, units of human labour, related to time and effort.

Smith thought that ‘labour, because it is analysable into days of subsistence, can be used as a unit common to all other merchandise’ [p.254]. With this argument - to the effect that labour has become a currency - he prefigures the notion that labour is the source of all value since it is a productive activity. Value itself has become a product, and the analysis of production has become the crux of economic theory. The way for Ricardo

and Marx was opened, and the idea that wealth was the entity by virtue of which mankind could satisfy all its needs and desires was firmly settled in the social consciousness. The difference between Ricardo and Smith is that for Smith wealth and value represented labour; but for Ricardo labour was the producer of value and wealth so that they could take whatever shape human desires took.

What has happened to money in all of this? It is significant that Foucault hardly deals with it from this point onwards; perhaps because in the nineteenth century it is to be taken for granted. With the industrial revolution wealth could be obtained through the pursuit of personal ambition associated with expanding capital, indeed capital was the key to economic success since it allowed the purchase of labour which in turn, through its productivity, would provide one’s wealth. Money becomes the single dominating force in the nineteenth century, whether social, individual or economic, as the onslaught of commodities, the social upheavals caused by the industrial revolution, and an ever-increasing net of debt and credit change the material reality around man. Of course money has always been an important social element, but in the nineteenth century it positions itself as the most potent force in determining social bonds (replacing custom and birth), and by infiltrating all strata of society. Money was turned into the collective dream of all human beings and the bond between them, whereas more traditional forms of substantial wealth, e.g. property and land, turned out to be an irritant.\(^\text{18}\)

In one sense money’s basic characteristics as established by the seventeenth century did not change; yet it was to become more abstract in its mode of operation as the nineteenth century wore on. The new forms of trade and industry demanded a currency that was fast in its circulation, impersonal (as opposed to the personal banker’s or

\(^{18}\) For a more detailed discussion of these developments, see J. Vernon, *Money and Fiction: Literary Realism in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*, London: Cornell University Press, 1984, pp.20-23 & 40-44.
goldsmith's notes) and encouraged spending rather than hoarding; additionally the nineteenth century found that 'paper money increasingly not only had the power to represent the reality of land and metal but - magically it seemed - could increase it'. The introduction of paper money brought a new kind of encoding into operation, with money becoming a self-sufficient system at the same time, creating a new way of life and society. (This is depicted in Der grüne Heinrich, which, together with Faust II, is one of the most powerful illustrations of the effects of an increasingly speculative reality, the ambiguities it entailed and the confusions it caused.)

For language, the nineteenth century brought a radical change. Attention continued to shift away from representation in and through language: language came to be seen as a self-contained order or system (as Saussure would have it at the beginning of the twentieth century) rather than as a mode of representation. During the last quarter of the eighteenth century there emerged a focus on how languages resembled each other on the basis of their grammar, rather than on what they represented or meant; attention switched from modes of representation to forms of grammatical inflexions: 'languages are no longer contrasted in accordance with what their words designate, but in accordance with the means whereby those words are linked together' [p.236]. In the classical age language had been the mode of knowing, yet in the nineteenth century language itself became an object of knowledge, and philology emerged. From now on, language is seen as a self-constituting system, and languages themselves are perceived as subject to evolutionary principles.

However, this demotion of representation in language was only relevant for the philologists themselves as representational language made a reappearance in the form of literary language. 'Literature is the contestant of philology [...]': it leads language back
from grammar to the naked power of speech, and there it encounters the untamed, imperious being of words' [p.300]. And indeed, the nineteenth century saw a tremendous upsurge in literary production, most notably the realist novel. There is a striking connection between the importance money gains in this century and the emergence of realism in literature. Despite the novel being fictitious, realism was aiming to hold a mirror up to the world, to depict reality as accurately as possible. The value in realism lay in getting it right, in representation, albeit coloured by individuality, as reproduction. The increasing sophistication in replicating originals, as portrayed in the mass production of identical goods or in the invention of photography, set in motion a crisis of total interchangeability and of the de-sacralization of the material and human wholeness, especially in the workplace. The production line meant that no factory worker ever produced anything complete, thus the work process as well as its product lost its wholeness and value to the individual, whether buyer or labourer. Money, in becoming all-pervasive, aided this development through its equalizing effect of remunerating through units of the same, as everything became obtainable via certain amounts of it. Realism tried to achieve two things, on the one hand to portray these developments as faithfully as possible, while on the other, through their very depiction, to warn about and illustrate the spiritual as well as economic effects such a society has on its members (one thinks, for example, of F. R. Leavis’s famous commentary on Dickens’s *Hard Times*[^2]). Thus realism reflects the mood of the century in its tension between the accurate depiction of (an increasingly bleak) reality and of artistic (human) creativity, of processes of (re-)production and representation.

At the root of the profound changes in the nineteenth century lies a total reorganization of the Western mind, what Foucault calls the birth of “man”. Man is no

longer a purely transcendental being, the image of God at the centre of the universe, but also an empirical entity striving to differentiate himself in respect of the world around him. The Age of Idealism, following in the wake of Kant, celebrated man as an empirico-transcendental actuality - a being both rooted in empirical reality and capable of transcending it into experiences of the metaphysical (rather than, as in centuries previous, a being whose eyes and existence were fixed onto the afterlife) - and an individual rather than a part of a specific social class who is yet part of a collective reality. Similarly, realism persistently asks where the individual ends and the world begins. Money and language, through being both individual and collective property, are essential tools for the identification of both, individual and collective reality;\textsuperscript{21} it is thus no surprise that money is one of the most prominent features in the literature of realism, the more so as reality in the nineteenth century became increasingly money-centred. As Vernon has put it, 'Realism occurs when the social world undergoes a gradual erosion by the material, a process historically set in motion by the Industrial Revolution and the forms of money that accompanied it.'\textsuperscript{22}

The twentieth century witnessed an acceleration and deepening of the developments of the nineteenth century. Money grew ever more abstract and acquired the ultimate flexible forms of the cheque and the credit card (where it can represent any amount chosen in order to acquire anything desired and does no longer even have to be physically present in any transaction); and the schism widened between language as an object of knowledge in scientific study and as the mode of being in literature. In literature itself a tension emerged at the turn of the century between naturalist prose and impressionism. Naturalism, with its telegram-like style of discontinuous experience,

\textsuperscript{21} Cf. pp. 25f, 28f, and 163-167 of this thesis.

\textsuperscript{22} Vernon, \textit{Money and Fiction}, p.65.
tended to treat art as an experiment with the world; and language in literature was seen as the imprint of the world on paper. The famous formula of art = nature - x sums up the referential commitment of this view, which was counterbalanced by the self-referential and highly reflexive modes of the impressionists.

A similar development is discernible as far as money is concerned. Money is the referent, the quantifier of amount and value in the economic world, and simultaneously it may well be the one and only thing to generate value at all. As with language and literature, there emerges a situation in which money is the agent of the economic world, imposing itself tangibly on mankind; ultimately it becomes the only maker of a world in which nothing exists but what it underwrites.

It is noteworthy that, whereas the presence of money and its impact is strongly felt in the nineteenth century and accordingly is reflected in its literature, money disappears behind the scenes in the twentieth century - losing much of its immediate presence and being only the facilitator of a socio-economic reality based on the production and flow of commodities. Jean Baudrillard, in his earlier writings, sketches out a mode of life determined by the "language" of commodities, a code within which people define their being through the goods they possess and their attributed qualities and characteristics.\(^{23}\) Objects in consumer society are more than mere washing machines, houses or cars, they are signs in the code of consumption governing the Western world. However, the crucial point is that 'in a commodity the relation of word, image or meaning and referent is broken and restructured so that its force is directed, not to the referent of use value or utility, but to desire' \([p.1]\). As such, reality is now only comprehensible if we approach it

through a linguistic analysis that allows for a deplacement between two different signifieds - the object itself and the desire enticed in or addressed to the consumer - under the roof of one signifier. What is more, Western society has established a system of objects governing its reality, in fact producing or, in Baudrillard's words, simulating it. This means that the world we live in is in fact an unreal one in the sense that we are actually producing reality according to our needs and desires: instead of defining the self against reality, we are now choosing to manipulate, indeed to create reality to suit the self. Although this might be something of an overstated view, there is something of this detectable in Der Besuch der alten Dame, and Baudrillard's analysis is surely accurate when he talks about the effects a world of arbitrary signs has produced:

Everything becomes undecidable. This is the characteristic effect of the domination of the code, which is based everywhere on the principle of neutralization and indifference. This is the generalized brothel of capital: not the brothel of prostitution but the brothel of substitution and interchangeability.\textsuperscript{34}

The metaphor of the world-as-brothel is common to both Dürrenmatt and Baudrillard. Both perceive that money has become absorbed into the flow of commodities to the point where it has passed on its intrinsic features of total exchangeability and negotiability of meaning to the commodity cycle.

Although money may have lost much of its obvious presence and prestige in the twentieth century and may have disappeared underneath the surface, it is still the force driving and shaping our reality. In a dialectical process throughout the twentieth century

\textsuperscript{34} Baudrillard, Selected Writings, p.128.
money has gained a kind of omnipresence, or even omnipotence, through which it has lost much of its immediate presence but operates as the hidden facilitator of consumer society’s instant negotiability of meaning and reality. Social status in our times is no longer determined by an exact amount of money a person has, but by what this money buys: houses, cars, education, etc. Although the influence of the stock exchange and of the world of finance is by no means invisible, the money it trades with surely is, large amounts of currency are transferred invisibly via computers, telephones, faxes, etc. It is by now almost possible to live without cash, purchasing everything from daily shopping to holidays with the credit card. Yet despite its increasing physical absence, money is still the largest influence on and driving force behind the shape consumer society and its values take.

The philosophical - rather than philological - study of language comes into its own in the twentieth century. Saussure’s theories stressed the idea of language as a self-defining system, and in his wake emerged the science of linguistics. Saussure exerted an influence on literature, his concept of language as a syntactical system whose signifiers are by no means underwritten by reality but obtain meaning through the negotiation process within the language system itself, led to a kind of literature in which language can almost be heard listening to itself, as in Joyce and other classic writers of high modernism. Literature began to use language both as medium of representation, being transparent on the world it depicted, and as a language conscious of its function of being a medium, looking at and listening to itself. Realism has by no means disappeared, indeed most of the written works published to this day are largely realistic, but literature now also throws open questions of language and reality, individuality and identity, of language as experience and experiment. Language and literature are now conscious of the tension in language as constitutive of consciousness as well as of it being a mere medium, a
window to the outside world.

As for the burgeoning of modern linguistics, it is important to note that this development ran parallel to the increasing shift and displacement of money and its materiality. Just as linguistics rely on the Saussurean negotiation within the system, so do the phenomena of credit, finance, debt, etc. within the monetary system. Both the linguistic and monetary signifier are meaningless outside the framework of a commonly acknowledged and self-constituting mechanism. In this context Baudrillard's work becomes important. He highlights the intersection of money and language in the twentieth century, with the former having established a system that is ruled according to the principles of the latter. Their relatedness has been recognized and used in the shaping of post-modern man and his society.

After this historical sketch of the growing awareness of the interrelatedness of money and language, it is now timely to look at some of the more contemporary functions of and perceived similarities between money and language. One of the most fascinating aspects of money in its modern guise is that it is basically insubstantial. Yet this very insubstantiality is the precondition for money's ability to rule our lives and be the pivot of our economy and society: only if money is an empty shell into which we can project our needs and desires can it be the 'blood' of the economy and society, reaching every part of it and sustaining it through perpetual circulation. As Simmel pointed out, the introduction of money and its universal validity as a medium of exchange makes it the means to all our ends, so instead of striving to obtain what we desire and need directly, we make the detour via money. The more monetary and materially based a society becomes, the more will money become transformed into being the ultimate end:
This characteristic of money will become ever more prominent the more money’s material reality lies outside itself, since its very emptiness invites its immediate conversion into something meaningful, whether in an actual purchase or in a psychological process. It seems as if the gap between token and value defines the space in which money manifests itself as the ultimate principle of metamorphosis, and in which monetary societies establish in turn their reality.

Thus money’s primary feature is that of representation, a representation that is basically twofold: that of the individual as well as of the wider socio-economic reality. Depending on the degree of successful socialization of the individual, those realities can largely overlap or clash to an extent that can prove destructive. What is more, through this almost individual understanding of the meaning of money it can absorb not only the material realities it represents, but also emotions. Money’s absolute emptiness, mentioned above, makes possible this mixture of the impersonal with the highly

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26As Freud pointed out, money is not an infantile wish (letter to Wilhelm Fliess, 18 January 1898). Part of growing up is to learn to translate one’s desires, needs and wishes into monetary terms.

27Richard Doty (‘Money: How do I know it’s ok?’) understands coins, notes, or any other form of money to be emotionally charged because ‘money addresses a number of psychological demands - the need for power or solidity, for stability, for something upon which we can depend’. In J. DiGaetani (ed), *Money: Lure, Lore, and Literature*, Westport (CT) & London: Greenwood, 1994, pp.41-48. [p.41].
personal. Only a thing utterly devoid of any idiosyncrasy, only something that will obey
whatever use it is put to, allows itself to be totally filled with and governed by the wishes,
feelings, and characteristics of its owner. It is this trait of money that also makes it an
erotic force, endows it with almost libidinal connotations: not in the sense that money can
buy sexual contacts, but in the sense of its complete obedience, that it will do whatever it
is demanded to perform, that it will purchase whatever is desired. It will represent reality
as its owner wants to see it.

The reason behind the close relation between money and language lies in the fact
that they both rely on the human capacity to abstract and metaphorise, to transfer meaning
from one sphere to another. The way in which language denotes meaning is similar to the
way in which money signifies value, especially when one considers the linguistic
phenomena of tropes and the general concept of exchange, whether verbal or economic.28
Saussure makes the latter comparison himself when trying to explain linguistic value (the
signifier as linguistic reality) and the value of it outside the semiological system (the
signified):

To determine what a five-franc piece is worth one must therefore know:
(1) that it can be exchanged for a fixed quantity of a different thing, e.g.
bread; and (2) that it can be compared with a similar value of the same
system, e.g. a one-franc piece, or with coins of another system (a dollar,
etc.). In the same way a word can be exchanged for something dissimilar,
an idea; besides, it can be compared with something of the same nature,
another word.29

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28For a more elaborate discussion of the following, see A. Hoey, 'The Name on the Coin: Metaphor,
29Ferdinand de Saussure, Course in General Linguistics, ed. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, New
This comparison works well since the inscription on the coin has taken over its material reality and turned the coin into a negotiable sign. The metal, like the sound of the word, is secondary to value, which actually resides in the signified, in the word’s or the coin’s negotiability. In a similar way, there are analogies between metaphorization, characteristic of all language and literature, and economic representation and exchange. In the act of metaphorization, a signifier is replaced by another in order to evoke specific reactions or describe something in unusual terms in order to bring a certain meaning across in condensed form. This corresponds with money being the *tertium comparationis*, linking tenor and vehicle in the cycle of commodity exchange as Marx saw it.\(^{39}\) Money becomes a metaphorical exchange in the sense that the transaction is negotiated through simile, a common ground has been accepted for two dissimilar goods which lies outside the personal evaluation of the traders, having become objectified. In these cases, it is need or desire rather than labour that determines the value of things and therefore their prices. It is also worth remembering in this connection that within current and recent theories labour has less and less a role to play; indeed, labour as a modality of value is on the demise. Of course labour as such is still performed day to day, however, money and value have little to do with labour nowadays. Money, value and wealth are not identical; money is merely an agent, a calibration in the determinaton and measurement of the latter two. The problem of how far need can be monetarized is one that has been reverberating through the whole of the Western world in the past two centuries, bringing in its wake the issue of the replacement of values through money - a topic too broad to be tackled here.

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\(^{39}\)See Hoey, ‘The Name on the Coin’, p.34, for more detail.
but parts of which I shall consider when discussing relevant literature.\textsuperscript{31}

The problem of exchange and value in money and language finds further reflection in that they both are violators of difference, agents of equating what is inherently dissimilar. As Marx pointed out, in order for commodities to have use value, they are of different qualities, but as exchange values they merely express different quantities - and consequently do not contain use value.\textsuperscript{32} What money does is to turn different things into the same, or rather, quantifications of the same. The crux of the matter is that goods in our era lead a schizophrenic existence: as specific products, fleshed out with attractive features which, as advertising would have us believe, they are passing on to their owners, on the one hand, and on the other hand they are eroded by exchange values. It is endemic to our very way of thinking that our first question is: how much. Money has brought a common denominator to all commodities.

Nietzsche, strikingly, accuses language of throttling difference, for ‘wir glauben etwas von den Dingen selbst zu wissen, wenn wir von Bäumen, Farben, Schnee und Blumen reden, und besitzen doch nichts als Metaphern der Dinge, die den ursprünglichen Wesenheiten ganz und gar nicht entsprechen’.\textsuperscript{33} By naming, by putting a label on a thing, its uniqueness and individuality become obliterated as it is now based on the common factor of language, of sound and understanding according to the human mind - it becomes a word in the sense in which goods become commodities. As Nietzsche reminds us, it is through language that we make the world accessible to us and search for the truth, yet this search is flawed from the beginning because language does not really name the essence of

\textsuperscript{31}A good summary of the issues concerned can be found in K. C. Köhnke, ‘Die Verdrängung der Werte durchs Geld’, \textit{Universitas}, 45. Jahrgang (1990), 328-333.

\textsuperscript{32}See Hoey, ‘The Name on the Coin’, p.30, for further detail.


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things but is nothing more than a generally accepted set of metaphors which express what man can think and perceive. Thus we can never understand the world as it is, because we can only comprehend ‘die Metamorphose der Welt in den Menschen, er [der Forscher] ringt nach einem Verstehen der Welt als eines menschenartigen Dinges und erkämpft sich besten Falls das Gefühl einer Assimilation’ language only designates the relation of things to human beings. In a similar way, one can argue, man uses money in order to measure, quantify and classify material reality around him according to his own economic principles. This is the more obvious when we consider that the attribution of value to things is a typically human trait: ‘Daß Gegenstände, Gedanken, Geschehnisse wertvoll sind, das ist aus ihrem bloß natürlichem Dasein und Inhalt niemals abzulesen; und ihre Ordnung, den Werten gemäß vollzogen, weicht von der natürlichen aufs weiteste ab.’ Through money, man achieves the same assimilation between objects themselves and in their relation to him as he does with thoughts and things through language. This becomes very clear when one compares counterfeit money to lies. Money is basically counterfeit when it does not originate from the authority endowed by the state to produce it or, in other words, when it is not underwritten by an official gold (or other) guarantee. Still a tangible reality, counterfeit money is yet deprived of the general consensus as to what makes it real. Similarly, lies are the use of genuine words without a reality behind them; like counterfeit money, they only have the appearance of authenticity, the liar has breached the tacit agreement between language users that a certain sound corresponds to a certain phenomenon.

The underlying issue of this comparison takes us straight back to the root of this thesis, namely the problem of how money and language are interrelated agents in the

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34 Ibid, p.84.

35 Simmel, *Philosophie des Geldes*, p.3.
encoding of reality in the human mind. If we were able to transcribe reality exactly, neither counterfeit money nor lies should be possible; yet they seem to function in the space between the signifier and the signified, in the discrepancy between the actual and the human approximation of it. The very fact that mankind invented detectors in order to recognize counterfeit money and lies shows the awareness of possible representations that do not concur with what we generally choose to call reality, that our signs cannot always be relied on. Another reason inherent in the issue of false (linguistic and monetary) currency is the confusion between signifier and signified. It seems as if man has forgotten the original abstraction he made when giving birth to money and language and has come to accept the name for the concept, the signifier for the signified, thus allowing himself to be ruled by his own invention. Much of Nietzsche's lament about human pride in intellect and language and of Baudrillard's pessimistic view of a society happy to accept the simulation for the real are reducible to this crucial point: man's inability to recognize the volatility of an understanding of reality his own mind has created for him.
Chapter Two

Fortunatus and Till Eulenspiegel

The chapbook Fortunatus, first published in Augsburg in 1509 and composed by an anonymous author, is generally believed to have been written after 1481. It was conceived in an age of tremendous change, in the period of the final collapse of feudalism in the early modern period, and it paints an intriguing and detailed picture of the social and economic conditions of its time. It tells the story of a young man, Fortunatus, who has to leave his impoverished, albeit once wealthy, parents in the hope of making his own fortune. After several fruitless attempts to find and hold on to employment, he encounters the juncfraw des glüks who bestows on him a magic seckel, a purse that will never run out of money as long as he or any of his (future) legitimate children are alive. Fortunatus's travels and adventures with the purse, as well as those of his two sons, Ampedo and Andolosia, are the subject of the rest of the book. The topic allows for a detailed portrayal of contemporary attitudes towards money, as well as an insight into the way money was seen to be operating and the influence it had on social life. Fortunatus was written at the end of the mediaeval period, and it is not a story set in the Golden Age of the Arthurian court, of ideal knightly virtues or the pursuit of minne - nor does it bewail the loss of these ideals and qualities. The subject here is money, the emphasis being on cash, and how to deal with it correctly in order to retain and increase one's wealth without endangering one's life or possessions. As will become apparent, one could indeed regard the novel as a practical guide to coping with the socio-economic demands of the time.

This estimation is based on the recommendation of the author to his audience to read the travel accounts of John Mandeville [p.107], which were not published in a German translation until 1481. All references to and quotations from Fortunatus follow the edition of H.-G. Roloff, Stuttgart: Reclam, 1981 and are given in square brackets in the text.
Although I shall discuss the socio-economic conditions when dealing with the specifics of the book, it is important to bear in mind that the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were an era dominated by enormous social, economic and intellectual changes and the tensions emanating from them. *Fortunatus* provides a contemporary prose account of the world that Goethe portrays poetically throughout his *Faust* project, the crumbling and inevitable demise of feudalism in the face of the rising bourgeoisie, its financial power and economic demands. Socio-cultural reality was governed by complementary opposites: feudal attitudes versus emerging bourgeois aspirations, political versus financial power, growing intellectual sophistication within the towns contrasted with the relative backwardness of the countryside, fervent religiosity and yet deep beliefs in magic and the supernatural, sophisticated patterns of trade and finance versus basic agriculture just above the level of subsistence.

*The Quest for Wealth*

The very title of the book leaves the potential reader in little doubt as to the nature of the story he is about to read: he will hear about Fortunatus, the fortunate one. Moreover, the summary given at the beginning of the narration immediately confirms this first impression; we are told about Fortunatus’s acquiring of the seckel and that the story will demonstrate to us how ‘alweg vernufft und weißhait für all schaetz diser welt / zu begeren und zu erwoelen ist’ [p.5]. The question of the value-centre in *Fortunatus* - wisdom or wealth - as well as the issue of money within the narration has been dealt with by an increasing number of critics over the past three decades.\(^1\) Wiemann, in 1970, offered an

\(^1\)In sequence:

analysis of the narrative structure of *Fortunatus* as well as a comprehensive account of the most relevant socio-economic reference points of its historical background. She maintains that wisdom is regarded as preferable to wealth since wisdom provides protection from the changing moods of Fortuna. Raitz, in 1973, recognizes money as the means to social mobility, and suggests that the wisdom concerned here is one of pragmatism, and no longer the traditional wisdom as advocated by the Church. Hence, wealth and wisdom are compatible, and the epitaph emerges as something alien to the novel. Scheuer, writing in 1974, also sees *Fortunatus* as advocating a practical wisdom which would protect the wealth one has accumulated. Kartschoke (1975), apart from registering the growing importance of money in the two centuries preceding the narration and in *Fortunatus* itself, asserts that the plot contradicts its didactic epitaph, and that the novel favours the possession of both, wisdom and wealth. Rohrmann, writing in the same year, does not deal with the wisdom/wealth problematics, but focusses on the plot-producing role money plays in the narrative; he comes to the conclusion that the story depicts an inhumane world in which human dignity and monetary value are inseparable and which accepts every way of making money as permissible. In 1983, Bachorski published his

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Kohlhammer, 1974, pp.99-117;
D. Kartschoke, 'Weisheit oder Reichtum? Zum Volksbuch von Fortunatus und seinen Söhnen', in:
P. Rohrmann, 'The Central Role of Money in the Chapbook *Fortunatus*', *Neophilologus*, 59 (1975), 262-272;
H.-J. Bachorski, *Geld und soziale Identität im *Fortunatus*: Studien zur Bewältigung frühbürgerlicher Widersprüche*, Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1983 (Göppingen Arbeiten zur Germanistik, Nr.375);
S. Wailes, 'Potency in *Fortunatus*', *The German Quarterly*, 59 (1986), 5-18;
H. Kastner, *Fortunatus - Peregrinator mundi: Welterfahrung und Selbstkenntnis im ersten deutschen Prosaroman der Neuzeit*, Freiburg: Rombach, 1990 (Rombach Wissenschaft. Reihe Litterae);
comprehensive study of the role of money in the establishment of individual identity in the early modern period. He maintains that money was paramount to the evolving notions of identity and individuality, and that Fortunatus offers advice to its readers regarding the safe and rational handling of money in order to enjoy its benefits; moreover, he sees the narration as one of the first contemporary pieces of literature which recognizes money as a tool rather than as a force in itself. However Haubrichs, also in 1983, claims that the novel depicts the impossibility of happiness whilst arguing that the wisdom/wealth dialectic works in favour of wisdom; whereas Kremer (1985) argues that questions of how to obtain and safeguard money and honour actually take over those regarding wisdom and wealth. Wailes, in 1986, takes a refreshingly new approach by identifying the plot as power struggles revolving around two strands, money and sexuality, both embodied and intertwined in the seckel. Kästner, four years later, ignores the fulfilled and long life Fortunatus leads, claiming that the epitaph matches the story, so that wisdom is indeed preferable to wealth. In 1991 Van Cleve, within the framework of his book, identifies Fortunatus as the work of a ruthlessly materialistic society which yet has problems with the moral justification of great wealth. He reconciles wisdom to wealth by suggesting that wealth can purchase wisdom, which in turn will protect wealth; whereas Classen (1994) refuses to assign money any importance in the story apart from being a means to an end and an instrument of Fortuna: he regards the story as a mere superficial reflection of everyday contemporary life. Yet the question of whether wisdom is preferable to wealth is of minor importance to my project, as I shall be focussing on the recognition of money as the dynamic force behind the changing world depicted in the story. Suffice it to say at this stage that, in Fortunatus, wisdom and wealth are not to be seen as mutually exclusive; rather, the novel teaches the reader how to respect and accumulate both. In consequence, I agree with Raitz, Scheuer, and Barchorski that the
wisdom propagated is very different from the kind of religious wisdom advocated by the Church or the mystics; it is a practical wisdom of how to become rich and protect one's wealth. The poignant reference at the end of the tale to the convergence of wisdom and wealth in Solomon, who 'der reichest künig der erden wordenn ist' [p.195], confirms that the ultimate aim of the text is to demonstrate to its audience that the ideal is to be rich and wise, and not that they are mutually exclusive. I shall return to this prefatory statement in a later section.

As mentioned above, the core of the novel is the description of a life led in infinite wealth. Yet the form this wealth takes is different from the traditional understanding of what constituted wealth for centuries previously. One of the most socially unsettling factors in the period of Fortunatus was the final consolidation of money, in the shape of coined gold and silver, as the dominant form of wealth, and the consequent social repercussions. Throughout the Middle Ages, wealth was inseparably bound up with real estate and political power. Both were acquired by birth: feudalism and its justification through the doctrine of divine right rested on a social immobility that assigned everybody his place in society at birth. Agriculture was the major economic force, with small towns providing the market places for artisans, peasants and merchants to acquire, often through barter, goods they could not produce themselves. To be wealthy was to be a nobleman, to own real estate, the fruits it bore, and the people who worked the land. Wealth was a tangible, narrowly defined entity: real estate, gold, jewels.

However, within the walls of towns and cities matters developed differently. The establishment and rapid growth of mercantile activities already during the high period of the Middle Ages, the loss of power the nobles suffered when having to grant free status to towns, and the establishment of a money-based economy within the city walls led to a
reversal of the traditional views of power: ‘nicht Land, sondern Reichtum an beweglichen Gütern, vor allem an Geld’ came to affect social rank and influence. The bourgeois class began to emerge. Yet whilst the merchants went on to become the rich patricians of prospering towns, many of the nobility, especially of the lower variety, suffered severe economic decline throughout the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. There were many reasons:

Das Vordringen der Geldwirtschaft, die Notwendigkeit, zur Aufrechterhaltung des Lebensstandards eine zunehmende Zahl sehr teurer Waren am Markt zu kaufen [...], der steigende Preis der Rüstungen und des Ritterlebens [...], die Ausgaben für den Bau von Burgen und “festen Häusern” aus Stein, die außerordentlichen Geldaufwendungen für die Kreuzzüger verarmen den Adel und ruinieren die Ritter.

Adding to these problems were the devastating effects the black death had on the population, notably in the countryside, and thus amongst the serfs of the aristocracy. In Germany, between 1347 and 1383, enormous losses of human life led to the ‘Entstehung von Wüstungen, einer langandauernden Agrarkrise’ - and the subsequent loss of income enjoyed by many of the nobility. At the same time this significant reduction of the population created financial and other space - a chance for gaining wealth, an opportunity grasped by many of the bourgeoisie. Additionally, many of the minor aristocracy were


3Wiemann, Erzählstruktur, p.228.

4In this connection, Bauer and Matis make the interesting point that the psychological and social consequences of the plague - the break-down of social cohesion, even family ties, and the radical egoism required to
deprived of their income when they lost their traditional opportunity of serving in their lord’s army; improvements in the mining of silver and the growth of precious metal imports from the new world led to the enrichment of the Landesherren who could afford to recruit mercenaries, further impoverishing and undermining the status of the lower aristocracy. This social inversion, the decline of an impoverished nobility, the concentration of power and wealth in a few noble houses and the rise of an increasingly wealthy bourgeois class, is one of the underlying tensions dominating the atmosphere of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries - and of Fortunatus.

Many members of the aristocracy whom Fortunatus and Andolosia meet are in trouble, and the narrator himself remarks, at the end of Fortunatus’s first travels, that there are ‘etlichen landen / da vil notiger reitter und stauden schnapper innen sind’ [pp.80f]. Similarly, Fortunatus’s future father-in-law, Graf Nimian, is so poor and powerless that he surrenders to the king of Cyprus’s wishes that one of his daughters be married to Fortunatus, even stressing to the King that ‘dess alles habtt ewch vollen gewalt / an leib und an guott’ [p.84]. It is, however, also typical that his wife has reservations about the marriage, because ‘sy Fortunatus nicht genuog edel gedaucht’ [p.84]; and only when Fortunatus gives her 1000 Ducaten ‘ließ sy den unmuot faren’ [p.90]. Andolosia’s eventual downfall is also at the hands of two impoverished nobles - both of whom are referred to as ‘moerraeuber’ - whose envy of Andolosia’s lavish life-style - without him being a noble - is a clear indication of the social tensions of the times. They are indeed so
overcome by their jealousy that, after having kidnapped and tortured Andolosia, they eventually kill him. Envy of the lower classes' ability to copy or even outshine the noble life-style embodies one of the great social tensions of the time.

At the root of this social strain was as much the displacement of wealth away from the landed gentry and into the hands of non-nobles, as the fact that wealth had began to take on a different shape - as money. Wealth as such had always been a factor in any medieval society, since the feudal system rested on the accumulation of wealth, in the shape of real estate and its yield, entrusted to the nobles and the Church, and the famous noblesse oblige or milte had guaranteed some distribution in times of economic hardship. Part of the feudal structure was the notion of distributive Gerechtigkeit and economic fairness, which not only meant that everybody was entitled to a level of income appropriate to his social standing, but also that the feudal lord had to provide for his subjects, in times of economic crisis, from the store of goods he had built up from the feudal rent. *

Yet money is a form of wealth that is indifferent to one's social rank, and 'Reichtum in ihren Händen [Nichtadligen] ist schon Ausdruck einer verkehrten Welt'. * The awareness that with money something alien and potentially destabilizing was entering feudal society had been sensed very early by many poets of the later mediaeval period: 'in der volkssprachlichen Literatur tauchen Geldklagen in der zweiten Hälfte des 13. Jahrhunderts auf' * and stretch into the modern period. Geldklagen were rhymes, songs, or poems about the perceived destructive influence of money on the behaviour and character of people and on the pressure it put on the social order. Meister Rumelant, Herman

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*See Bauer and Matis, Geburt der Neuzeit, pp.29-35, for more detail.

*Bachorski, Geld und soziale Identität, p.192.

''Ibid, p.194.
Damen, Boppe, Suchenwirt, Vintler, Muskatplüt, and der Teichner all discuss and portray the evil effects the *phenning* is having on society and its members in their eyes. It threatens the integrity of the nobility, dominates even the Emperor, opens the door to social mobility, spoils the human character through greed - to the point where *avaritia* takes over from *superbia* as the main vice a noble man can possess\(^{11}\) and undermines the legal justice system through corruption. All these attributes combine to threaten the social order and thereby the place and purpose of every human being within it; moreover, all of them can be identified in *Fortunatus*, as we shall see. The open treatment of the issue of money and what it can achieve in society for its owner makes *Fortunatus* deeply symptomatic of a new attitude towards money: an acknowledgement of its energy, and a practical guide to dealing with it.

How far money has already subverted the social distinction between the haute bourgeoisie and the nobility is evident from the first page of the novel, where Fortunatus’s father is introduced as ‘ain edler purger / altz herkommen’ [p.5]. The description of a burgher with an adjective usually attributed to the nobility, and the emphasis on Fortunatus’s family tree reveal the extent to which social distinction has already become blurred. The riches left to Theodorus, Fortunatus’s father, are not necessarily money: they are ‘groß hab unnd guot’, and had originally been accumulated in strict obedience to the bourgeois ethos of frugality and hard work [p.5]. But Theodorus turns his back on such bourgeois rectitude; he begins to live beyond his means, with the result that one day he sells ‘ainen zinß / den andren tag versatzt er ain gelegen guot’ [p.7]. By adopting an aristocratic way of life - taking part in tournaments, keeping many servants and horses, and spending much time at the royal court - whilst simultaneously ignoring the fact that his wealth will be exhausted if he continually sells land rather than

\(^{11}\)Kartschoke, *Weisheit oder Reichtum?*, p.228.
living off the income generated by that land. Hence, Theodorus gets himself in the same financial problems as the nobility of his time, a situation further illustrated when Fortunatus first encounters Lüpoldus, the man who is to become his adviser and fellow-traveller. The latter is introduced as ‘ain alter edelman’ and he ‘klagt den herren sein armuot’[p.54]. Indeed he is so poor that he cannot afford to travel back to his native Scotland, a financial situation one would rather expect from a peasant or a poor artisan than from a member of the nobility.

In this connection it is important to note the properties of Fortunatus’s wealth. It is limitless, and it is magical. Magic was a fairly common component in the psychology of everyday life in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, stretching from the simple superstitious practices of the village healer to the learned quest for understanding the universe by uncovering its underlying structures (see chapter one) or by knowing the Cabbala. Under the impact of the Reformation, protestant demonology, with its emphasis on possession and evil spirits, enhanced the tendency of the common people to believe in magic. Yet what is noteworthy about Fortunatus is just how realistic it is. Apart from the magic purse, the hat and the magic apples, all the other ingredients of the text are firmly anchored in physical plausibility and social familiarity. Critics have been at pains to indicate that the magical components have their origin in the Gesta Romanorum and Germanic mythology. But this does not solve our interpretative problem with the text: what use does this otherwise so resolutely down-to-earth text make of magic? Now admittedly it is important to note that contemporary readers would, in all likelihood, have

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13 See Fortunatus, edited by Roloff, pp.228ff.
had no problem with fanciful ingredients. Many of the Volksbücher have magic as an integral part of their story, indeed,

immediately striking the reader of the Volksbuch is the emphasis upon superstitious beliefs. [...] This is particularly true of the interest in magic, the belief in a supernatural force penetrating inanimate objects, the conviction that man's destiny is affected by the constellations [as the juncfraw actually tells Fortunatus] and that spirits hover above man in his sleeping and waking moments [...].

Moreover, because Fortunatus's wealth has a magical source, he himself remains a positive character. Attitudes to wealth were ambivalent in the early modern period, 'for sixteenth-century people, wealth was a malignant force. People got rich only by making others poorer. Only by finding treasure [...] could one become harmlessly rich.' Moreover, the vast majority of the population lacked insight and understanding of financial and economic processes, so


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zwar nicht nur im Sinne moralischer Zweideutigkeit, sondern in abergläubischer Weise, als wäre eine dämonische Macht im Spiel.\textsuperscript{16}

The attitudes Simmel here summarizes on occasion extended even to the educated classes - Martin Luther, for instance, claimed he could not understand how it 'soit gotlich unnd recht zugehen, das bey eynis menschen leben [Jacob Fugger] sollt auff einen hauffenn szo grosse kuniglich gutter bracht werden'.\textsuperscript{17} Lack of understanding led to the mystification, and often also to the demonization, of great wealth. Finance was still frowned upon in the teachings of the Church as potentially evil, since money, as an inorganic thing, cannot possibly regenerate itself. As the quotation from Roper illustrates, wealth was perceived to be limited, not least because the whole world was regarded as fixed and finite in accordance with God's law. Thus, by making measureless wealth the gift of a positive magical force, Fortunatus and his story interlock with popular belief. What is interesting about the tale, as we shall see, is the ways in which and the extent to which it perceives the magic of money as a transformatory social force.

\textit{Fortunatus} may be seen as a portrayal of the rise of the lower orders into the ranks of the nobility, and it is made more than obvious that the means through which this can be achieved is money.\textsuperscript{18} Although Theodorus plays an active part in the life of the royal court of Cyprus [p.7], once he has squandered all his fortune, his place is irrevocably at the

\textsuperscript{16}Simmel, \textit{Philosophie des Geldes}, p.250.

\textsuperscript{17}Martin Luther, 'An den christlichen Adel deutscher Nation', cited in Van Cleve, \textit{The Problem of Wealth}, p.125.

\textsuperscript{18}In this connection the title of the book, with its reference to the goddess Fortuna, reflects on the issue of corruption. Fortuna was held to be indifferent towards the victims of her doings, and because of this indifference she was seen as a corrupter. In a similar sense, Fortunatus corrupts the \textit{Edelheit} of the nobility which cannot be bought. The contemporary audience would have recognized this notion in \textit{Fortunatus}.
bottom of the social order. He and his wife live in abject poverty and are shunned by their former friends, as Theodorus himself laments: '“das mich alle die verlassen haben / mit den ich mein guot so miltigklich getailt hab / den selben byn ich yetz ain unwerder gast”' [pp.7f]. For a member of the bourgeoisie, ‘eer’ and social respect disappear once the wealth is lost, a situation not necessarily applicable to the nobility: a count is still a respected aristocrat, even without wealth.

Thus Fortunatus has to go out into the world in the hope of making his own fortune, and the only way he can start doing this is by becoming a servant, first to a Flemish count, and then to a rich merchant in London. This, it seems, would remain his social position for the rest of his life, since the narrator makes clear at the beginning that Fortunatus is hampered by the education he has received. He has not learned a profession or a craft - which would have stood him in good stead. Instead (and clearly his father is to blame here) he has received a nobleman’s education: ‘unnd kund nichts dann ploß ainen namen schreiben und lesen / doch kund er wol mit dem federspil unnd mit anderem waidwerck das dann auch sein kurzweil was’ [p.7]. Yet that education only prepares a young person for a way of life that can take financial security for granted. But, because of the father’s profligacy, Fortunatus finds himself faced with the worst of both worlds: he is neither an aristocrat, nor a bourgeois with a solid trade. Fortunatus is well aware of his situation and behaves with appropriate servility towards his masters - until, of course, he acquires in the magic purse the means to social mobility.

Money as the means to social mobility, the *phenning* as the breaker of class boundaries, had been frequently dealt with in the *Geldklagen*. One of the most poignant examples is in the second of the collection *Zehn Gedichte auf den Pfennig*:

Although the impoverished nobility still enjoyed respect, in terms of political and social influence they were on the decline if they ran into financial difficulties: Graf Nimian is described as ‘nitt fast mechtig’ [p.83], whereas Fortunatus’s father, before losing all his possessions, is regarded as ‘so reich und maechtig’ [p.6]. Money, then, emerges as the great agency of social upheaval.

At this point it is pertinent to recall the central arguments of Lucien Goldmann’s work on the economic basis of the Enlightenment, since the roots of this economic basis reach back into the middle ages and make themselves increasingly felt at the time of *Fortunatus*. Economic exchange assumes equality between the people involved and is thereby essentially democratic, as the social positions of trader and buyer are irrelevant to the transaction. The only real requirement is that they are both free citizens for the deal to be legal. During the height of feudalism, many transactions had been cancelled or held back because one of the parties had been a serf, who did not have the right to conduct any business without the permission of his lord. Since it is not conducive to business, and thereby to the economy, to delay or cancel deals, special laws, the *jus fori*, were introduced for market days, which abrogated the feudal laws for both the town dwellers.

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and the rural serfs. With the introduction of an extended monetary economy these features came increasingly to the fore because money not only eased the transaction per se, but took out any personal involvement by making the deal immediate and independent of any need, as in the barter economy, to equalize quality and quantity of goods exchanged. Although in a monetary economy bargaining still occurs in the form of haggling over the price, this is a substantially different activity than bargaining in a barter transaction. In a monetary deal goods are sold and measured against a neutral, objective measuring device, whereas a barter transaction necessitates the equation of two inherently different goods, thus inevitably exciting subjectivity and various interests in the two people involved in the deal - the peasant with some grain to spare might not necessarily want or need the pair of shoes the cobbler is offering him in exchange.

Also, by paying with money, social status, or qualms about different faiths - a problem occurring after the Thirty Years War and with the increasing international trade, bringing the West into ever closer contact with the “heathen” world of the Orient - became eradicated since money circulates freely without reference to its original owner. Money, as a form of wealth that is not bound into the feudal structure, but can be obtained by anybody without loss of value or influence, is one of the prime causes of the demise of feudalism by giving its owners an equal status in economic terms. Moreover, ‘das Eindringen der Geldwirtschaft’ is not only ‘ein wesentliches Element bei der Auflösung der Feudalverfassung’, but ‘der Übergang von einer Natural- zur Geldwirtschaft löst einen sich selbst verstärkenden Prozeß aus.’ Once money begins to infiltrate a social structure, this structure will transform itself with increasing speed according to the rules applicable in a monetary economy based on free market principles.

This issue of the equalization brought about by money is at the centre of one of

11Bauer and Matis, Geburt der Neuzeit, pp.121f. [my italics].
the early incidents in *Fortunatus*. When he finally finds his way out of the woods in which he met the *juncfraw*, Fortunatus puts up in an inn two miles from the forest. Wanting to buy some horses, he learns from the landlord that a horsedealer is indeed in the village, and that he is negotiating with the lord of the area (the Waldgraf of Nundragon) over some horses. Fortunatus learns further that the sum of money at issue is 20 Cronen, and boldly declares that "gefallen mir die roß / ich thar sy ee kauffen dann der graff"' [p.48]. Fortunatus, knowing that he has more wealth than anybody can possibly possess, regards himself on par with, indeed superior to the nobleman. Yet he totally overlooks the fact that, firstly, he is infringing on the Count's rights as the lord of the area, and secondly, that this insult will be felt the greater because he is dressed in rags, and obviously not a member of the aristocracy. Fortunatus is duly arrested, and the Count tortures him in order to find out where a ruffian like him can possibly have got the money from, suspecting "er hat daz gelt gestolen / geraubt oder aber ainen ermort" [p.50]. He escapes death only by totally subjecting himself to the Graf, begging for mercy whilst pleading for his life. The Graf takes pity on him and lets him go. Fortunatus never forgets the lessons this incident has taught him: that he will have to bring his appearance into line with his wealth, and that he must not seriously compete with a member of the nobility.

Although the rich patricians of the free towns were in powerful positions and at liberty to display their wealth, as soon as they came into contact with the aristocracy and the feudal structure they had to be careful. Political power by no means depended exclusively on the possession of money, and the feudal structure was still unchallenged: 'autoritäre Gewalt galt als naturgegeben'. However, it was rapidly becoming clear that money in itself was a powerful factor, and could be used not only to enhance one's own standing within society, but also to manipulate political structures. This is best illustrated

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by the contemporary example of Jacob Fugger and his influence on the election of Charles V as the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire in 1519. In a letter to Charles V, he states clearly how dependent the Emperor was on his wealth:

Es ist auch wissentlich und ligt am tag, dass Ew. kays. Mt. die Römisch Cron ausser mein nicht hette erlangen mögen, wie ich dann solches mit Ew. kay. Mt. Commissarien handschriften anzaigen kan. So hab ich auch hierin mein aigen nutz nit angesehen; dann wo Ich von dem hauss Oesterreich absteen und Frankreich för dern hette wollen, wolt ich gross guott und gelt, wie mir dan angeboten worden, erlangt haben. Was aber Ew. kay. Mt. und dem hauss Oesterreich nachtail daraus entstanden were, das haben Ew. kay. Mt. aus hohem Verstandt wol zu erwegen. 23

Although Fugger is not exactly being honest here - he did also make money by backing Charles, since he demanded regalia in return for his immediate financial support - this is a fascinating illustration of the power of money without its owner having direct political influence or representation. The fact that Jacob Fugger was wooed by both parties to further their own ends epitomizes the desperate desire of the nobility to gain the goodwill and financial backing of the rich bourgeoisie.

The power of money rested on various factors in this particular period. As Simmel has pointed out:

der Machtcharakter des Geldes [muß] fast am fühlbarsten, wenigstens am unheimlichsten da hervortreten, wo die Geldwirtschaft noch nicht

vollkommen durchgedrungen und selbstverständlich ist, sondern wo das Geld seine zwingende Macht an Verhältnissen zeigt, die ihm, ihrer eigentlichen Struktur nach, nicht von selbst gehorchen.  

When, as illustrated in *Fortunatus*, non-nobles are able to marry into the ranks of the nobility simply by virtue of their wealth, or when simply everything, be it persons or services that function within the feudal structure, can be bought and sold at a time when this structure is still in place, money’s unsettling power is felt most intensely. This is also one of the recurrent topics of the *Geldklagen*, and the fear and insecurity this alien power brought into society is well captured in Hans Sach’s *Spruchgedicht on die wunderparlich, gut unnd böß eygenschaft des gelts*, where, thirty years after *Fortunatus* had been published, he sums up the political and social effects of money in ‘Gelt brint unrhu, sorg, angst unnd wee’. As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, in feudal times real estate, social class, prestige and chivalric virtues were something exclusively acquired through birth. Yet, as *Fortunatus* shows, these entities are all up for sale. Theodorus purchases his life of leisure amongst the nobility on the grounds of his family’s wealth, and passes aristocratic values and behaviour on to his son by giving him the education of a noble man. Fortunatus reconfirms the family’s place in the aristocracy, he is able to marry Cassandra purely by virtue of his fantastic wealth; he procures real estate, a duchy and the title that comes with it, because, significantly, the owner of it ‘“hat not und muß bar gelt haben”’ [p. 93; my italics]. Moreover, there are frequent references throughout the book to the fact that Fortunatus, through careful and calculated use of his money, earns the

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respect of his fellow men and is held in high regard by the aristocracy and non-nobles alike. He reconciles the nobility to his wealth by spending it lavishly on festivals, without ever taking part himself, and by generally adhering to the place allocated to the rich merchant: he lives a life of leisure, builds churches; and generally divides his attention between his family and his travels, and 'that split focus would have been viewed by the aristocracy as appropriate to a wealthy townsman'.^ He is welcomed by the members of the other social classes for his generosity, be it in the fact that he goes through two wedding ceremonies, one for the nobility and one with 'all burger and burgerin' [p.95], or by being always generous: 'welchen er mit ainem guldin het miigen außrichten dem gab er zwen', which results in the fact that 'mit wem er zu schaffen het / der gewan yn lieb' [p.105].

Yet once the aristocratic way of life can be bought, feudal society is effectively deprived of its very foundations; and, in consequence, the aristocracy desire the very means which are at the root of the socio-economic changes that threaten their position: money. 7 Again, this is clearly illustrated in the Graf from whom Fortunatus buys the duchy: obviously the count has got himself into such financial trouble that he now has to sell his lands. The emblems of power are now obtainable with money; and money itself becomes a means towards power. This is felt by all the nobles in the book, and expressed in the King's desire to marry Fortunatus off in a way that will tie him more closely to the royal household - rather than letting Fortunatus choose a bourgeois woman, which would mean that the King would lose influence over his fantastic wealth. Indeed, the King opens his dialogue with Fortunatus by reminding him that he is still his subject, and should


7 As Goethe deals with this phenomenon to a great extent in Faust II, I shall cover the main points in the chapter on Faust II.
therefore adhere to the King’s wishes - to which Fortunatus readily agrees. The close connection between the court and Fortunatus’s family continues after his death; when Andolosia returns home, he ‘‘ist aber so wol gewoellt von dem künig / [because] dem leuchtt unnd schenckt er was er begeret” ’ [p.183]. The relationship between the rich patrician and the ruler, as Jacob Fugger’s example well illustrates, was symbiotic. The King would protect the wealth of the merchant against the greedy and envious aristocracy, in turn benefit from that wealth, and the bourgeois would surrender his potential power.28

Fortunatus’s modest behaviour and willing subjection to the wishes of his King stand in total contrast to the behaviour of his son Andolosia. Andolosia, born into affluence and treated like a noble, has no understanding of the careful social manoeuvring that secured his father’s place in society, nor does he really comprehend the potential power of money. He takes an equal standing with the nobility for granted because of his vast fortune, an attitude he expresses when he declines the offer to marry, like his father, into the aristocracy; ‘des graffen tochter [...] was nitt hübsch / auch so achtett Andolosia kainerlay reichtumb noch grafschafft wann er was reich und het genuog an seinem seckel’ [pp.130f]. The only time he rues his modest origins is when he falls in love with Agripina, the daughter of the English king. Still, he is so convinced of the status-raising effects of money, that he foolishly believes her promises to sleep with him should he reveal the secret of his wealth to her. Moreover, being naive about money, he displays his wealth to the King of England in such an extravagant manner that the royal family must feel threatened by it. Indeed the King decides that he must Andolosia ‘‘ettwas beweisen / darbey er mercken muoß das er nit so maechtig ist als er maint” ’[p.134]. Thus the King invites himself for dinner at Andolosia’s, yet he also decrees that no wood or other fuel be

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28For a more elaborate treatment of these relationships, see Raitz, Zur Soziogenese, pp.73ff; and Scheuer, ‘Das “Volksbuch” Fortunatus’, pp. 102ff.
sold in the town to Andolosia or his servants: he wants to humiliate Andolosia and remind him of his status by showing him that all his wealth is nowhere near as powerful as an order by the king. Yet Andolosia does not understand the seriousness of the hint; on the contrary, he compounds the insult to the King by burning expensive spices as if they had cost him no more than the cheapest firewood. In the face of such a naive demonstration of wealth and influence, the King has no other choice than to try and deprive Andolosia of his power, which, through Agripina, he accomplishes.

Unlike his father, Andolosia is incapable of learning from his inappropriate conduct. After he has regained the lost purse and the magic hat, he carries on as before. Indeed, he makes the fatal mistake of outdoing the nobles in Famagusta, where his origins are known, and thus his behaviour is inevitably regarded as presumptuous. It is interesting in this connection that Andolosia, who is so concerned with chivalric achievement and decorum, does fall prey to the sin of superbia. Theodorus, an English count who is a guest at the Cypriot Court and who kills Andolosia, describes him accurately when he rejects him in prison: "[...] do du dein geprengk / grossen hochmuot und hochfart tribest vor dem künig und der künigin / und unns alien uneer bewisest? Wo seind nun die schoenen frawen denen du so wol gedienet hast?" [p.189] Andolosia had indeed insulted all the nobles in Famagusta, not only by wearing the most splendid clothes, riding the best horses and having the most servants, but also by beating them at their very own tournament games. Theodorus and Graf Lymosi, the other party to the attack and kidnapping of Andolosia, are guilty of the now more commonplace avaritia: they want him so they can 'yn da peinigen unnd marteren / er mueßt yn gelts genuog geben / das sy mochten so kostlich stat halten als er' [p.184].

What is money in Fortunatus? Money in this novel is in itself precious, a
commodity in the shape of coined gold and silver. Whenever money is mentioned in the novel, it consists either of the one or the other of the two metals. Moreover, when Fortunatus is given the seckel by the fairy, she points out to him that ‘"(in welchem land du ymer bist oder kommest / was dann von guldin in dem land leüfig seind) als offt findestu zehen stuck goldes des selben lands werung’ [p.46]. Interesting here is not only the fact that money is gold, but that obviously all countries, as far as the narrator knows, use coined gold as their currency and means of payment. The narrator also takes care to identify to his readership the value of any foreign currency Fortunatus has to use during his travels. Thus he explains that each Nobel is ‘besser dann drithalber guldin reinisch’ [p.58] and that one Dules is ‘als guot als dreü ortt [3/4] von ainem reinischen guldin’ [p.110]. Money is tangible, solid, and easily transferable from country to country, constituting wealth in the form of gold.

Occasionally wechsel are mentioned in Fortunatus, yet it is made clear that they are a highly personalised form of money, useless to anybody else apart from the person to whom they are made payable. Moreover, they are also useless until cashed, the custom of buying and selling bills of exchange is not yet practiced, nor have they become a means of credit. This becomes clear in the episode in which Fortunatus’s thievish landlord in Constantinople, frustrated at his unsuccessful attempt to get hold of Fortunatus’s money, takes pity on him when he hears that the only valuable thing in the seckel was ‘"ain klains wechssel brieflin [...] / das doch niemand kains pfennings wert nützen mag’’ [p.69]. Knowing that a bill would be worthless to him, he hands the purse back to Fortunatus.

The important point here, however, is the fact that the bill is only valuable to the person

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77 The practice of freely buying and selling bills of exchange begins to occur increasingly in the latter half of the sixteenth century, and is finally consolidated and properly regulated with the efforts of the famous Wisselbank in Amsterdam, other banks dedicated to dealing with bills of exchange, and many goldsmiths in the City of London. See M. North, Das Geld und seine Geschichte: Vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart, München: C. H. Beck, 1994, chapters two and five, for more detail.
whose name it bears, and economically negotiable only once it has been transformed into cash. It is by no means a kind of universally accepted Geldschein, but rather something akin to an early traveller’s cheque. More abstract money as we know it, in the shape of paper or mere numbers on a balance sheet, is still a long way off.

It is indeed the sheer overwhelming presence of cash (Bargeld), that gives money its importance in the novel and in the age it was written. As has already been discussed, wealth had for centuries taken the form of real estate, and the notion that this is still the only solid form of wealth haunts many characters in Fortunatus, although the importance of being able to command cash is one of the central concerns of the book. Especially the nobility adheres to the traditional view that wealth springs from the possession of real estate, despite the fact that social reality is beginning to indicate something very different. Fortunatus himself is acutely aware of the problems his magical wealth poses and the fact that he has no real estate or merchant business to show as a source for it. Whilst he is travelling, this problem remains in the background, since he can simply pretend to be a travelling noble or merchant, and he is also always careful not to overspend. Only once he has reached Venice, the last of the cities he visits before going home to Cyprus, does he feel he can safely spend money, because ‘hye seynd vil reycher leüt / hye tarffestu dich auch lassen mercken das du gelt habest’ , and he provides himself with the finest gems money can buy, splendid clothes and a double set of household items [p.81]. In doing so before returning to Famagusta, where the poverty of his family is well known, he effectively gives his wealth the appearance of being grounded in mercantile activity, veiling its fantastic origin and nature. However, Graf Nimian is still sceptical about the riches of his potential son-in-law because

er hat weder land noch leüt / hatt er dann vil bar gelt gehebt oder noch / so
Knowing of the ease with which cash is spent and that it is insubstantial, Nimian and, especially, his wife remain worried until Fortunatus buys a duchy from an impoverished noble. The irony is obvious: Fortunatus spends 7000 ducats to acquire an estate an aristocrat had to get rid off because it failed to generate sufficient money for his purposes. Hence there is uncertainty as to what constitutes a solid form of wealth - land or money. At one point the uncertainty becomes explicit: ‘ainer sprach / es waer zehentaussent ducaten wert / der ander sprach / “het ich sovil bar gelt ich welte es nit darumb geben”’[p.93]. On the other hand, Fortunatus’s purchase of real estate tallies with prevailing social behaviour at the time. Most successful merchant families did acquire real estate, and not only as visible signs of their financial power and integration into the nobility, but also as a surety should their business ventures collapse. In that case, they would still have enough assets to prevent a life of abject poverty. In Fortunatus’s case, he also gains a respectable justification of his problematic wealth as well as at least some form of security for Cassandra should anything happen to him.

The bourgeois figures in the novel and the nobility have different attitudes to wealth. Whereas the latter regard real estate still as the most solid and desirable source of income and do not fully understand how vast fortunes can be accumulated otherwise, the former delight in the possibilities their ready cash affords them. Thus the English King is baffled where Andolosia’s riches come from since he ‘hat weder land noch leüt’ ’[p.134],

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30 See Bachorski, *Geld und soziale Identität*, pp.147ff, for further detail.
and his next ambition is to find the source of this miraculous wealth: ‘ich main er schöpfe es auß ainem brunnen / wißt ich ainen brunnen da gelt auß zu schoepffen waere/ ich wolt selber auch schoepffen” ’[p.136].

The importance of cash, of disposable income, is not only regularly stressed in the book: it is arguable that the whole novel is dedicated to the depiction of what can be accomplished by it. Every single human interaction is prompted by it, everything that Fortunatus and Andolosia ever do or achieve is based on their command of ready money. This goes far beyond the purchase of love and marriage, of integration into the nobility, of the ability to travel (Lüpolodus stresses that ‘on gelt mag man es nitt wol volbringen’” [p.56]), or even the fact that Fortunatus and Lüpolodus are able to buy their way out of St. Patrick’s purgatory [p.62]. It is also more abstract entities that have become procurable, since Fortunatus effectively buys the wisdom he is lacking when he hires Lüpolodus as his travel companion. Fortunatus seems very much aware of this since, when he and Lüpolodus are lost in the cave, he turns to God ‘wann hye hylfft weder gold noch silber”’[p.62]. Yet it is telling that it is in the end Fortunatus’s wealth that gets him out of the cave. In another incident, when Lüpolodus slays the thievish landlord in Constantinople, Fortunatus is at first seriously worried about their lives, and reproaches himself ‘warumb er nit weßhayt für reichtumb erwelet het’, yet within the same train of thought he remembers what he hired Lüpolodus for and asks him for advice [p.77] - and Lüpolodus provides the solution. In both incidents, Fortunatus’s choice of wealth over wisdom has no detrimental effects, but on both occasions provides the basis for his eventual safety.

Also, when Lüpolodus finally agrees to Fortunatus’s offer of employment, it becomes clear that money can conquer blood ties. At the beginning of their conversation, Lüpolodus says that ‘natürliche liebe zwingt mich wider zu yn [his wife and child] zu
Ironically, once they have actually visited Lüpoldus’s family in Scotland and Fortunatus has given them a generous gift of money, we learn ‘daz weib und kind fast erfrewet wurden / und liessen in dester lieber weg reitten’ [p.58]. The narrator also uses the incident at St. Patrick’s purgatory to throw light on the Church’s attitude towards money. When Fortunatus arrives there, he presents the abbot and his priests with a barrel of wine, with which they are very pleased, since wine is very expensive in this area. This gift also plays a part in Fortunatus’s rescue, as the brethren, when they realize that Fortunatus and Lüpoldus must be lost in the cave, go to the abbot ‘und sagten ym das laid / und besonder umb Fortunato der yn so guoten wein geschenkt hett’ [p.62]. This and the fuss that Fortunatus’s servants make about their master seemingly prompts the abbot to send for the only man who knows the “purgatory”. Yet another motivation is revealed once they have been rescued: the abbot is very happy that the two had been found, ‘wann er forcht es waeren nit mer pilger dahin kommen / dardurch im und seim gotzhauß nutzung abgangen waer’ [p.63].

Remarkably, throughout the text, the narrator abstains from judging the events he describes, apart from uttering such truisms as ‘als man ir noch vil findet / die den leüten das ir nemen wider alle recht’ [p.52], or ‘als noch an aller herren hoeffe beschicht / wer brinngt / wirt bald eingelassen. wer aber haben will / der muß lang vor der thür ston’ [p.102]. Even in the incident quoted above he does not overtly comment on the rather unchristian motives of the abbot, but leaves it up to the reader to pass judgement on this mercenary attitude. Throughout this story of the general venality of the world, the narrator refrains from expressing his own opinions: whether he describes the envy and corruption of the nobility, prostitution, exploitation of the lower classes by the nobility, meanness, thievishness, bribery, or even murder for financial gain, he never becomes
judgmental. This absence of overt didacticism on the part of the narrator is both remarkable and also profoundly revealing. It is worth recalling that a characteristic strand in the *Volksbücher* is their didactic register: ‘often moral views and instructive reflections are interspersed in the stories of the Volksbuch writers.’ However, in *Fortunatus*, the didacticism is limited to the comments on wisdom and wealth at the beginning and end of the book; the tale itself merely depicts what is possible with money. This accords to some degree with the general mood of the era (‘endless moral exhortations were abridged in many Volksbücher that were revisions’; and in the Augsburg reprints of *Fortunatus* the moralizing epilogue is scrapped altogether from 1518 onwards). The narrative voice in *Fortunatus* resolutely abstains from personal opinion, judgment, recommendation. By strewing the story only with the general truisms mentioned above, the narrator leaves the tale itself bereft of own judgment at its very conceptual and referential centre. It seems as if the narrator is aware of the volatile nature of the world he himself inhabits and describes in the text, and that he adopts a kind of waiting game, a provisional mode, making an experiment with a new form of narrative that acknowledges (without taming) the social energy of its time. The notion of transition in society, the awareness that money is one of the root causes of this shift and change (also epitomized in the fact that Frau Saelde, who dispensed chivalric virtues and God’s blessing in medieval literature, has turned into a money donor), and the ambivalence towards the evaluative implications of these issues reverberate through the text. New value structures are not yet in place, and the text seems to be an experiment in describing the - new - nexus of the effectiveness and energy of money, since all incidents in the tale are motivated by it. By abstaining from overtly critizing the explosively emergent values whilst constantly articulating their

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2Ibid.
effects, the narrative not only enshrines the issues of shift, change, and movement, but also recognizes money as a driving force that undermines social and spiritual values: the old certainties of right and wrong are no longer viable, yet there are no new structures of meaning and value as yet in place (the morality of a developed bourgeois culture, which will deal with the phenomena caused by an increasingly monetary based economy, is still to come).

*Fortunatus* expresses, then, no lamentation or call for the return of a golden age before money's infiltration of the socio-economic structure, as there is in the *Geldklagen* or, even more important, in Sebastian Brant's *Narrenschiff*, contemporary with the story of Fortunatus and his sons and a similar huge success. Its central message regarding the foolishness of the world is an attack on changes in social behaviour and structure. Brant still treats money as a force in and of itself, and frequently addresses it as if it was a person: 'o pfening / man duet dir die ere / Du schaffst / daß vil dir günstig sint'.

33 This personification is also a phenomenon typical of the *Geldklagen*: ‘Der pfennink ist ein eren diep’, ‘Der pfening ist zuo allem vnuerdrossen, / Er (zuo) erpricht purg wol verslossen’; or money might even speak itself, as in *Minne und Pfenning*, an allegorical “play” from the middle of the fifteenth century: ‘ich mach wiß und rich, / geweltig, edel und och schoen’.

34 Crucial to this is the perception of money as an independent force, as something alive and malignant. This reflects an incomprehension of - and a representation of - the subversive energy of money, and it expresses the helplessness, frustration and fear felt about the collapse of the feudal system at the hands of what seemed to be an

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33 Sebastian Brant, *Das Narrenschiff*, herausgegeben von F. Zarncke, Leipzig 1854. [chapter 17, ll. 20f].

independent power. *Fortunatus*, however, breaks with this tradition not only by refusing to moralize and scaremonger, but also by portraying money as what it is: an inanimate, characterless medium of exchange invented by human beings, and yet one that is invested with a prodigious dynamic. In *Fortunatus*, it is not money that is morally corrupt. The tale is about what people do with it, what can be achieved through it, but not what money actively does to them or to society.\(^{35}\) This understanding of money begins to infiltrate the literature of the sixteenth century, Hans Sachs, for instance, frequently deals with the problem of how to handle money wisely.\(^{36}\)

*Fortunatus* also looks at strategies of how to handle money in the society at the time. The message to the reader is one of careful social integration and conduct, an almost constant reminder to respect the feudal power structure still in place despite possessing the means that will eventually bring this structure to its knees.

**Money, Early New High German and a New Reality**

As the above discussion has shown, the establishment of a monetary-based economy had profoundly altered the socio-economic structure of Germany at the time *Fortunatus* was written. This inevitably meant the world view of reality for the members of that society underwent a similarly momentous change. At the height of feudalism, society and its members lived in a rigid structure that assigned everybody his or her place and determined ideals, beliefs, and values. Moreover, social and individual identity were synonymous: 'A person was identical with his role in society; he was a peasant, an artisan, a knight, and not an individual who happened to have this or that occupation. The

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\(^{35}\)This ties up neatly with the general assumption that *Fortunatus* was possibly written by a merchant and financier, i.e. somebody who, far from being scared by money, understood the way it functions.

\(^{36}\)For a good overview, see Bachorski, *Geld und soziale Identität*, pp.218 - 233.
social order was conceived as a natural order, and being a definite part of it gave man a feeling of security and of belonging. How much this form of life actually changed, and how far this was attributable to the inroads of money as the basis of economic exchange is clearly visible in the Geldklagen. Of course, it has to be borne in mind that much of this change was restricted to the towns and cities, to the emerging middle classes and to the nobility. For the majority of the rural population, the effects of this social change did not come into play until serfdom was abolished and they could, significantly, buy the land from their former masters. Yet Fortunatus is a revealing illustration of the situation in the higher echelons of society, especially since it clearly portrays the way in which the possession or lack of money determined life at the end of the Middle Ages, and thereby formed (and deformed) reality for those concerned. Coming into money completely alters Fortunatus’s life, not only in the sense that he is able to live in luxury and to afford anything his heart might desire, but also because ultimately his whole identity is built upon his fortune. From the moment he is given the purse, his life becomes inseparable from the power of money, and his role in society will be that of the one who is unbelievably wealthy. When, in the incident in Constaninople, he believes his seckel to be stolen, he faints ‘glied sam er tod waer’; we are told that he is ‘so ganz verwandelt’ [pp.68f]; later he says ‘“wer das guot verliert / der verliert die vernunft” ’ [p.70]. The loss of his money would be identical with the loss of his sanity, and thereby effectively of his selfhood and life. Something similar happens to Andolosia after Agripina has successfully tricked him out of the purse. He immediately has to break up his household in London and return humbly to Famagusta, where he tells Ampedo that the loss ‘“ist mir so ain gross hertzlaid / das ich besorg ich verlier mein leben in ainer kurtzen zeit” ’ [p.145]. His identity is built upon and inseparable from his fortune.

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It is important to notice that even the narrator of *Fortunatus*, along with his characters, frequently refers to money and wealth as ‘hab und guot’, rather than as ‘gelt’. This seems to suggest an almost perennial desire of the Western mind to tie this “dubious” form of economic exchange down to a graspable ground, since the process repeats itself three centuries later. Once coined, precious metals gradually became established as the basis for the rapidly developing Western economies and counted as being just as solid and reliable as once real estate had been - but it took time for the new currency to establish itself. Later, a new system of representing this form of wealth is introduced in the shape of paper money. This generates enormous problems and, for decades, it can only function - and even then the notes were looked upon with great mistrust - if they were 100% guaranteed as interchangeable for gold. I shall return to his aspect in my chapter on *Faust II*.

In the remaining part of this chapter, I want to argue that, parallel to the socio-economic transformations, there was also considerable change and insecurity in the representative systems per se at the time. This affected not only the representation of wealth, but it also impinged on language and religious discourse.

How discredited and destabilized the Church had become on the eve of the Reformation is clearly discernible in *Fortunatus*, and also in another contemporary book, *Dil Ulenspiegel*. In *Ulenspiegel* figures connected with the Church are generally portrayed very negatively, indeed the many vices and moral shortcomings of parish priests make them easy prey for the wandering rogue. There is also criticism of the veneration of relics and the gullibility of the Pope. One of the prime criticisms of parish

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Ein kurzzweilig Lesen von Dil Ulenspiegel, geboren uß dem Land zu Brunßwick. Wie er sein Leben volbracht hatt. 96 seiner Geschichten. Herausgegeben von W. Lindow nach dem ältesten Druck von 1519, Stuttgart: Reclam, 1978. It is reckoned that the text was written around 1500, if not slightly earlier.
clergy is their irreligious, sometimes even blasphemous behaviour. Till’s second employment after leaving home is with a priest, who defecates in his Church in order to win a bet with Till [p.38]. Another priest steals Till’s meal [p.110], and yet another one not only breaks the rule of celibacy with his maid, but also the seal of confession [pp.113ff].

Avarice and venality is another topic; the priest who gives Till his last sacraments is so greedy that he falls for the prankster’s specially prepared money bag and fouls his hands, and Till persuades many parish priests to let him go ahead with his relic scam by offering them half of his earnings [p.93]. This story simultaneously serves as a criticism of the then common practice of Abläshandel as well as of the stupidity of the relic veneration advocated by the Church, since Till promises forgiveness of sins to those who kiss the old skull and donate money. The Pope himself is depicted as easily tricked; for example, he believes Till’s extravagant excuse of turning away from the altar during mass because Till claims that he is ‘‘ein armer grosser Sünder unnd zoch mich des mein Sünd, das ich das nit würdig wär, biß das ich mein Sünd gebichtet hab’’ [p.103]. The Pope falls blindly to Till’s use of poor-sinner-discourse, and the rogue finds himself 100 ducats richer.

In Fortunatus the hypocrisy of the religious establishment is most clearly depicted in the St. Patrick’s purgatory incident, where the prime motivation to save Fortunatus and Lüboldus is the protection of revenue: real concern for the welfare of others is not in evidence, and materialistic interests are cloaked in the name of religion. This is the more striking since the Church throughout the Middle Ages had steadfastly condemned the veneration and pursuit of money and materialistic gain, consoling the poor with the promise of a happier life after death. Merchants constantly had to cope with priestly

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39 His first employment is with a Junckherr, whom the narrator uses to point out the problem of Raubrittertum, since he ‘reit mit Ulenspiegel hin und har in vil Stät und halff rouben, stelen und nemen, als sein Gewonheit waz.’ [p.31].
disfavour until Thomas Aquinas softened the blow by recommending that profits should be used for charitable ends. For the most part, the Church condemned finance outright on the basis of Aristotle's teachings of the natural infertility of money (Politics, I, 10); and it also invoked the New Testament, that it was better to give than to receive (Matthew 5. 40; Luke 6. 30) and that one should lend money without demanding any gain or interest (Luke 6. 34f). Yet at the same time the Church was ruthless in its demand of the tithe, and was happy to fill its coffers with Ablaßbriefen. It was the single most powerful and influential institution at the time. This is evident in Fortunatus not only in the fact that he seemingly tries to ingratiate himself by building a splendid church and providing it with generous endowments, but indeed in the very framing of the novel itself. The didactic statements which uphold wisdom over wealth at the beginning and end of the book aim at placating the reader and the Church by means of an acknowledgement of the Church's official rejection of money and worldly possessions. This has been overlooked by many critics of Fortunatus, and even Bachorski, who gives a splendid analysis of Fortunatus in its historical context, remains puzzled as to why the text, contrary to what it demonstrates, insists on wisdom as the first and best virtue to be acquired. He comes to the conclusion that 'die Abfolge Weisheit, dann Reichtum, versucht, die Proportionen wieder zurechtzurücken; ein Versuch, der dem im Text Geschilderten völlig äußerlich bleiben muß'. However, it is surely also possible to take the moralizing statements as an act of salesmanship and as an attempt to avoid the censure of the Church. Fear of the latter can also help explain the fact that Fortunatus's author chose to remain anonymous. In Oppenheimer's words, 'fear of censorship, imprisonment, and execution led many authors

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40 According to the Church Fathers, Nullus Christianus debet esse mercator, aut si voluerit, projiciatur de ecclesia. Cited in Kartschoke, 'Weisheit oder Reichtum?', pp.236/7.

41 Bachorski, Geld und sociale Identität, p.271.
of the middle ages and the Renaissance to omit their names from their works'. Given the unjudgmental depiction of the power and influence of money and the moral corruption of the religious institutions, it is very likely that the author of *Fortunatus*, just like *Dil Ulenspiegel*'s, preferred the security of anonymity.

Both *Fortunatus* and *Ulenspiegel* highlight the devaluation of the religious discourse a few years before the Reformation, revealing the signs, words, sacraments as hollow; and the people who profess them as motivated by considerations of personal gain, whether financial or other. The Church is in charge of significations, symbols, and metaphors. So once the Church is discredited, metaphorical, sacramental thinking was also called into question as the relationship between between signifier and signified becomes increasingly volatile and renegotiable. This slippage between signifier and signified also reverberates through language, as especially the example of *Ulenspiegel* demonstrates.

Before I comment on the theme of language in *Ulenspiegel*, it will be useful to consider the development of the German language during the period under discussion, not least because it undergoes significant change in its transition from Middle to Early New High German. What is fascinating for my purposes is the extent to which linguistic changes co-incide with the establishment of a monetary based economy, thus suggesting the parallel relationship between these representational systems.

The sixteenth century was one of the most influential periods in the formation of New High German. The Reformation and Luther’s translation of the Bible led to the establishment of the Saxon Chancery language as standard German, and simultaneously

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there were efforts to make German (rather than Latin or French) acceptable as an official language. The Reformation brought an increasing emphasis on "the Word", originally in an attempt to re-establish the Bible as the prime source of religious doctrine (rather than the Pope and his Church), but the great attention paid to words spread to all areas of life. The 'Wort- und Logikbeflissenheit' of the time was 'Ausdruck eines Strebens nach sprachlicher und gedanklicher Genauigkeit'. Luther's and other reformers' efforts at writing in a clear, understandable way in German rather than in Latin had a profound impact on the development of German as both a scholarly and a literary language: 'knappe, umrißhafte gedankliche und sprachliche Eindringlichkeit und Deutlichkeit wurde erobert und geübt', so that 'am Ende des Zeitalters eine neue, plastische Rundung und rhythmische Durchgliederung des Ausdrucks sowie die Beherrschung eines logisch-distinktiven Ausdrucksvermögens errungen [war]. These endeavours paved the way for Opitz, Zesen, and the aspirations of the Sprachgesellschaften towards purity and correctness of the vocabulary, grammatical rules, and unified spelling, which in turn were the foundation stones for the emergence of German as a literary language in the eighteenth century.

The influence and power of the aristocratic courts were waning in the later medieval period - as was the Middle High German literary language as documented in the courtly epics. It is significant that with 'the decline of the courtly society the courtly language gave way once more to the dialects.' The beginning of the Early New High German period coincides with one of the speediest periods of decline of the feudal

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Ibid, p.17.


Ibid, p.36.
structure, the mid-fourteenth century. It is also in this period that German becomes influenced by Italian - through the merchants - because ‘im 14. Jh. nimmt sich der Bürger [...] aus dem Italienischen, was sich vorher der Mönch vom Lateinischen geholt hatte’. The Handelssprache also affects the meaning of established vocabulary, so that, for instance, it is in the 14th/15th century that Schuld acquires the additional meaning of ‘zu leistender Geldbetrag’. Clearly, changes in the meaning of vocabulary occur in response to social change; and many of the idioms used in Ulenspiegel seem to be an articulation of the difficulty of expressing a new social reality through old terminology.

The idea of Till as a language critic has received growing attention in the last twenty years. Rusterholz, in his remarkable essay (1977), identifies Dil Ulenspiegel as a narration which is all language-oriented, and he sees in Till a linguistic critic who changes the rules of language usage and thereby draws attention to the historicity of language. Haug, two years later, argues that Ulenspiegel is a study of the emerging notion of the contract. He sees the protagonist as moving in a world determined by money and commodity relations, the rules of which he undermines by adhering too literally to the words of the (oral) contract. Kiesant (1989) takes a marxist view of the narration, maintaining that it shows a society caught between feudalism and the emerging money-

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2 "Ibid, p.97.

3 J. Walker and Wilkie, A Short History, pp.89/90.

4 In sequence:
   M. Aichmayr, Der Symbolgehalt der Eulenspiegelfigur im Kontext der europäischen Narren- und Schelmenliteratur, Göttingen: Kümmerle, 1991 (GAG Nr. 541);
   P. Oppenheimer: see footnote nr. 42.
commodity relations which are causing the portrayed symptoms of social change. Aichmayer, in 1991, sees Till as someone who wants to match language with the reality it transcribes, as a person who is forever searching for the content of truth in language. Oppenheimer, in his introductions to the two recent editions of his translation of *Ulenspiegel* (1991 and 1995), sees in Till a humanist and language philosopher who is acutely aware of the possibilities of language and locates them in the nature of language per se, and who is not only fascinated with the often confusing results of language usage and yet yearning for information that can be trusted, but who is actually posing the question of what do with or about language in order to further truth and human communication. I shall, in the following, concentrate on those issues that bring into focus the issue of the interchange between language and economic development by examining the way in which Till manipulates the spoken word.

Many of Till’s pranks reveal the instability of many metaphors and idioms and are based on the literal meaning of what is being said to him, rather than on its metaphorical implications. This is especially the case in the stories where we see him as the helper in handicraft businesses; terminology specific to the relevant craft is often used without the masters paying any attention to what the words literally say. Thus Till bakes bread dough into *Eulen und Meerkatzen*, rather than into loaves and rolls [p.58], carries a blacksmith’s bellows into the yard instead of working them harder [p.118], cuts a shoemaker’s leather into farm animal shapes because he had been told to cut it ‘“groß und klein, wie der Schweinhirt zu dem Thor üßtreibt” ’ [p.127], spends a whole night throwing sleeves at a jacket because his tailor master had told him to do so (and not told him to sew the sleeves on) [p.142], or glues four planks of wood together instead of making them into a table, because the carpenter had ordered him to ‘“bang die fier Bretter uff daz Kontor uff daz gnauwest zusamen in den Leim”’ [p.176]. Yet he also makes plenty of use of the general
idiomatic application of language outside the handicraft profession: so Till does only half of whatever he is asked to do in a priest's household because the man promised him that 'daz er thun müst, thät er mit halber Arbeit [p.33];" interprets 'umb Geld essen' as meaning that he will be paid for consuming his meal [p.99], oils a whole carriage rather than only its wheels [p.184], and even on his death bed, when his mother comes to visit him and asks for a 'süs Wort' from her dying son, he plays on the Low German meaning of Wort, which can be spice (as in the English suffix '-wort') or word, and tells her 'Liebe Muter, Honig, das ist ein süß Krut' [p.257]. Frau Ulenspiegel's visit to the death bed of her son, however, also accentuates how deeply materialism has come to replace human, in this case even family, bonds. Her last request to her dying offspring is: 'Lieber Sun, gib mir doch etwas von deinem Gut' [p.257]. As van Cleve points out, 'if a mother's feeling for her son has an economic basis, it is only logical that other, less intimate relationships will have profitability as their common goal'. Here Fortunatus and Ulenspiegel converge once more, since time and time again interaction is prompted by money or material gain.

Given Till's relationship to language, it is no surprise then that many people are exasperated by him, like the shoemaker, whose leather he had cut into the wrong shapes, and who yells: 'Du thust nach den Worten, nit nach der Meinung!' [p.128] Till himself is always happy to admit to this, and indeed it is his principal defence against the wrath of those who have been deceived by him. The narrator, like Till himself, comments now and then, tongue in cheek, how poor old Till 'verdienet nit grossen Dank, wiewol er alles daz

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51 Which simply means that his work will not be very hard.

52 After Ulenspiegel, footnote Nr. 9, p.257.

Part of Till's ability to play with language and its relationship to reality has to do with the linguistic habits of the time. How common idiomatic use of language was is evident in _Ulenspiegel_ itself: 'this fact reflects both the author's and the hero's fascination with language'. By employing the images and formulaic sayings in contradiction of their common usage, Till confuses his partners who find themselves helpless in the face of an unusual, suddenly altered situation. Rusterholz regards this behaviour as Till's way to renew language: 'in der alten Sprache redend gegen sie zu handeln und dadurch eine neue Sprache zu entbinden'. His pranks emerge as a sign of the time:

Solche Schwänke entstehen nicht zufällig, sondern sind Ausdruck eines sich wandelnden Weltbildes und einer im Umbruch befindlichen Zeit. Hier zeigt es sich, daß alte und gewohnte Normen ihre Verbindlichkeit verloren haben und neue Maßstäbe noch nicht gesetzt sind.

In the same way as _Fortunatus_ shows money as the agency manipulating the social structure and its values, _Ulenspiegel_ reveals language as a subversive medium. Both _Volksbücher_ register the change of their era, and both protagonists use the power of their

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54 Yet Till also seems to get truly annoyed at the fact that people do not talk straight; in the incident with the tailor he angrily replies to his master's reproaches: '"Das hab der Tüffel den Lon. Pflegen Ihr ein Ding anders zu sagen, dann Ihr das meinen, wie künent Ihr das eben so reimen?"' [p.142]. Or, as Oppenheimer has put it, despite Till's fascination with the nature and consequence of language, there is also a sense that 'he yearns for information that can be trusted'. *Till Eulenspiegel* (1995), p.xxiii.


56 Rusterholz, 'Till Eulenspiegel als Sprachkritiker', p.20.

57 *Ulenspiegel*, Nachwort of the editor, p.295. Similarly in Aichmayr, *Der Symbolgehalt*, who argues that the very occurrence of the rogue in the literature of the times is a sign of the socio-historical changes in the transitional period from the middle ages to the early modern period [p.77].
particular medium to exploit to their advantage the vacuum created. Fortunatus uses money to secure himself a pleasant, affluent life, whereas Till manipulates language and discourse to lead a life of idleness and prank-playing. Both figures are social misfits, so typical for the protagonist of a Volksbuch: both achieve their aims through manipulation and disturbance in society. Just as in Fortunatus all incidents are produced by money, so a great many of episodes in Ulenspiegel are caused by the mis-understanding and re-interpreting of language. This is especially interesting since language was perceived dialectically at the time: it was regarded as endowed with a new power, especially its vernacular form, to make things happen - Luther’s use of German facilitated the enormous impact and spread of the Reformation. Yet language, and metaphorization, was also seen to be in a state of slippage. Thus language can appear as both literally effective and also metaphorically misleading. Till brings both modes into challenging confrontation. Fortunatus, on the other hand, makes use of the new, ultimate metaphor: money, and duly converts it not only into all possible literal entities in the form of possessions, but also, as we have seen, into the intangibility of wisdom, friendship, and love.

The two books taken together offer a revealing insight into the socio-economic conditions at the time they were written and published: Fortunatus explores the possibilities and realities of a life lived in affluence, and Ulenspiegel provides a perspective from the lowest level of the social spectrum. Both can do this very well since both, essentially, play a manipulative role in society and thus are critical spirits. However much Fortunatus endeavours to become an integral part of his society, he is never truly integrated into any of its classes: too wealthy to be a normal bourgeois, but of non-aristocratic birth and thus no real member of the nobility. Till deliberately chooses to
remain on the margins of society, not only by displaying anti-social behaviour, but also by refusing to settle down or to take on board any of the values that are of importance to his fellow men. He has no profession, no possessions, no home, no wife, no religiosity, he has not even a real interest in money. Money, for Till, is simply a medium that is necessary to keep him fed, clothed, and sheltered, but there his interest in it stops. When he has it, he spends it without concern: we learn that Till became rich through the trick with the relic [p.94], but he simply wants to stay in Nuremberg and ‘sein Gelt da verzeren, daz er mit dem Heilthom gewunnen’ [p.95]. His only real motivation in life is to play pranks, and very often his victims suffer material damage in consequence. Till is even prepared to risk his life in order to play pranks. Till can only be a prankster exactly because he refuses to be bound by social rules. This allows him to create instability wherever he goes by playing with values and signs he refuses to recognize, let alone internalize: he himself is like a catalyst, causing reactions without himself ever being affected. By playing games with language and refusing to value money, he reveals their basic nature to his contemporaries: they are both man-made systems of signs without intrinsic value. Fortunatus highlights what money can achieve, what chances of interaction it offers to its owner, demonstrating its dynamizing, prodigal and inexhaustible nature. Ulenspiegel, by attaching no real worth to it, calls it and its greedy owners into question - and also raises the question of who guarantees its value, who underwrites its meaning. Till perceives that language, like money, is essentially not an underwritten currency, but can be manipulated and is, like money, a means of persuasion and barter. In that sense, Fortunatus and Ulenspiegel are witnesses of a society trying to come to terms with altered representative systems of a new social reality.
That Lessing’s last play - or rather, dramatic poem - is not only a theatrical Anti-Goeze in his fight for religious tolerance and humanitarianism, but that it is also informed by and addresses contemporary socio-economic issues, has only been appreciated in the last three decades.

Since the secondary literature on Nathan is vast, I shall restrict myself in the following to those critics who discuss the play and, especially, the central scenes III, 5-7 from a socio-economic or money-based perspective.\(^1\) Arguably the first one to detect the importance

\(^1\)In sequence:

H. Göbel, _Bild und Sprache bei Lessing_, München: Wilhelm Fink, 1971;
H. Schlaifer, _Der Bürger als Held: Sozialgeschichtliche Auflösungen literarischer Widersprüche_, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1973;
M. Shell, _Money, Language and Thought_, pp.156-177;
D. Hill, ‘Lessing: die Sprache der Toleranz’, _Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte_, 64 (1990), 218-246;
M. Morton, ‘“Verum est factum”: Critical Realism and the Discourse of Autonomy’, _The German Quarterly_, 64 (1991), 149-165;
J. Walker, ‘“Der echte Ring vermutlich ging verloren”: Lessing’s Ringparabel and the Contingency of the Enlightenment in _Nathan der Weise_, _Oxford German Studies_, 23 (1994), 45-70;
Nathan’s profession has for his tolerance and judgement was Bizet in 1955, who not only focusses on the historical situation of a ruler reliant on the funds of the bourgeoisie, but also argues that Nathan’s wisdom stems from his dealings as a merchant, i.e. someone who has to be able to tell the true from the fake. Demetz, in 1966, identifies the central role the *Münzvergleich* plays for the understanding of the parable of rings, but misinterprets the parable because he ignores some crucial phrases Nathan utters when reflecting on coins and truth in III, 5: Demetz argues that Nathan sees modern coin as the real essence of truth. Göbel’s comprehensive work of 1971 recognizes “old coin” as referring to gold, i.e. as something inherently valuable, and he equates the old coin with the one ring we know must be genuine, thereby maintaining that the fake ones are a practical replacement for the striving for truth, which is what Lessing always valued more than the possession of truth. Schröder, in 1972, also sees the parable as arguing for a way towards truth - rather than the possession of it - as the ultimate goal of human striving. Schlaffer (1973), pays generally little attention to the parable, but argues that Nathan’s wisdom and tolerance are founded on his activities as a merchant; and Watt, in 1977, maintains that just as the old coin, which corresponds to the original, objective religious truth, has been superseded by new coin (which stands for the subjectivism of religious relativism), so the original ring has been lost and replaced by three copies. A year later, Schlütter claims Nathan teaches Saladin that truth has to be carefully weighed and cannot be simply counted like coins on a table; and Newman, in 1979, argues that Lessing is indeed making the claim that one religion is superior, since we know that one of the rings must be the original one. Shell (1982) claims that Nathan indeed prefers modern coinage as a suitable image for the numismatic and epigraphic character which he (Shell) himself ascribes to truth. In 1984, Lehrer draws attention to the (free market) competition element of the judge’s advice and points out some elements of the protestant work ethic.

detectable in *Nathan*, but fails to elaborate on this and to distinguish between old and new coin in any meaningful way. In the same year, an anthology of critical essays on *Nathan* was published, in which Hernadi identifies the various strands of the protestant work ethic in the play and shows them in their historic relevance; whereas Cases sees in *Nathan* the personification of the sensible and practical egoism of the bourgeois in his growing socio-political importance, and argues that this egoism is the economic base for the ideal of tolerance. Leventhal, in 1988, delivers an impressive analysis of the dialectic of individuality and commonality at work in the parable, as well as highlighting the importance of cultural transmission within a world which allows for a multiplicity of interpretation and meaning. In 1990, Hill argues for the striving for truth as the real message of the parable by maintaining that one religion is indeed the true one, but since we cannot establish which one it is, we must tolerate all three as equal until the true one manifests itself. A year later, Morton discusses *Nathan* with a view to action as being preferable to reflection, claiming that truth is in fact producable through good deeds. In 1993, Allert stresses the parallels between the parable and Lessing’s theory of language, seeing the parable as a manifestation of Lessing’s belief that the meaning of words cannot be fixed but varies every time a word is used according to the circumstances. Walker, in 1994, draws attention to the similarities between new coin and the fake rings on the grounds that it is the belief in their validity that endows them with value, and comes to the conclusion that Lessing suggests that there are, on the one hand, absolute theological truths or, on the other, culturally and therefore contingently embodied truths: the problem is how to connect the two. In the same year, Weidmann focuses not only on the prevailing subject of money in *Minna von Barnhelm* and *Nathan*, but also identifies the message of the parable and the conduct of the characters as embodying the ethos of a new, dynamic concept of economy. I shall suggest in this chapter that *Nathan der Weise* is deeply imbued with questions of the value of money and its role in society, economic exchange,
social and political (power) structures, and the consequent repercussions for the individual. My interpretation of the parable will highlight how Nathan is arguing that relativist and absolute truths can in fact coexist - in fact, how the former can be used in order to pursue the latter. Yet before considering Nathan in detail, it is helpful to establish the context of those particular intellectual and socio-economic conditions which, especially in their interrelation, characterize eighteenth-century Germany.

Germany’s economic development in the eighteenth century lagged behind that of her European neighbours. Her fragmentation into a profusion of small principalities meant not only a hampering of the domestic trade due to many internal tariff barriers, various currency systems, an underdeveloped credit system, bad road conditions and few navigable canals, but it had also prevented Germany from joining other European countries in the colonization of other parts of the world. In the remainder of Western Europe colonization furthered economic development, and capitalistic modes of production began to challenge the older feudal and guild-controlled modes. 'Demgegenüber verlor Deutschland [...] durch die Verlagerung der Handelswege seine vorherige handelspolitische Bedeutung; der Markt schrumpfte, die handwerklich-zünftige und die bäuerlich-feudale Produktionsweise wurden beibehalten und mit ihr das feudalistische Sozialsystem.' Moreover, this not only meant that much of the capital of the old merchant dynasties began to shrink, but also that the transformation of such capital sums into productive ones, in a capitalistic sense, was delayed. This is not to say that Germany did not undergo socio-economic transformation in the eighteenth century; but it was considerably slower than was the case in the rest of Europe. In this connection it is important to stress that the economy gradually became the province of the bourgeoisie, it was they who

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became the owners of the modes of production and inaugurated the division between capital and labour. Hand in hand with the tentatively capitalistic mode of production went the gradual disempowerment of the aristocracy and the strengthening of monarchical and princely power, since 'bei feudalistischer Produktionsweise wirtschaftliche Macht direkt an politische Macht und Rechte über Personen gekoppelt war, während bei kapitalistischer Produktionsweise aus der Verfügung über Produktionsmittel und Kapital keine direkte politische Zwangsgewalt [...] entsteht'. Monarchs were quick to assist the cause of the rich bourgeoisie and protected them against the envious aristocracy, thus securing their share in the increasing wealth of the middle classes whilst simultaneously gaining absolute power through depriving the nobility of their authority and denying the bourgeoisie access to political power. Thus it was in the rulers' economic as well as political interest to further the middle classes, which is why 'enlightened monarchies, particularly in the less advanced states of Europe like Prussia, Austria and Russia, were fulfilling a modern, progressive role which strongly favoured the development of the middle class against the resistance of traditional forms of society'. The nobility found itself in the peculiar situation that their social privileges no longer had any correlation to political or economic power. As Heinz Schlaffer puts it, 'gutmütig gewähren dem Adel die anderen Teile der Gesellschaft den Vorrang an Formeln, Regeln und Idealen, und halten sich lieber ans Reale: Wirtschaft und Politik'.

So, however dependent the monarchy was on the financial power and economic activities of its subjects, the bourgeoisie at large remained cut off from political power. It is out of this particular socio-economic situation of the bourgeoisie that the Enlightenment movement started to develop: the application of reason to religion and society, together with

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3Ibid., p.51.


the demand for freedom and equality, aimed at dissolving the irrational, customary bonds of traditional society in order to allow the bourgeoisie access to political power. Yet in as much as a strong and aggressive Enlightenment in France culminated in the Revolution of 1789, the weaker position of the German bourgeoisie meant that their demands for social equality, freedom, and the right to self-determination fell on deaf ears. In eighteenth-century Germany 'war es communis opinio, daß die Gleichheit in der menschlichen Gesellschaft illusorisch bleiben müsse'. Germany never saw any movement even remotely as powerful and potentially dangerous to the ancien régime as that which toppled the monarchy in France. Moreover, as Schlaffer has pointed out, there were also economic considerations at work which muffled the call for change, because any such change '[hätte] die ökonomische Grundlage, den Eigenbesitz, zerstört'.

One of the most fascinating aspects of Enlightenment thought is the fact that so many of its fundamental categories are analogous to the demands of the market economy. First of all, as the basis of social organisation, Enlightenment thinkers favoured the idea of a contract between every citizen, society, and the state. At the same time the contract, in the sense of two autonomous individuals entering into a binding agreement, is the basis of any and every act of exchange. Central to the contract is the notion that it is obligatory, it can only be rescinded 'if it is proved that the will of either of the parties was not autonomous at the time of the agreement' [Goldmann, p.20]. From this it follows that every individual entering into an

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7 Barner, *Lessing*, p.52. It is here where Lessing's idealistic humanitarian world clashes with the sharp portrayal of the ordeals of the powerless lower middle class in Schiller's *Kabale und Liebe*.

8 Schlaffer, *Der Bürger als Held*, p.139. It is telling in this connection that the French Enlightenment was divided exactly on the grounds of how much, if any, private ownership was to be allowed in an ideal society. They clearly recognized the correlation between wealth and power.

9 The following is based on Goldmann, *Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, pp.20-24.
agreement (whether social or economic) has to be free and equal. Equality and freedom are postulated by the act of exchange, since, as we have seen in the previous chapter, only a free person can conduct business; whereas ‘equality between the parties [is] an essential condition of the contract’ [p.21]. According to Goldmann, social standing or wealth is immaterial to the parties of a transaction, since they face each other only as sellers or buyers of goods, therefore ‘the act of exchange is essentially democratic’ [p.22; italics in the original]. Admittedly, crass discrepancies in wealth diminish this democratism, since the greater the wealth of the buyer, the more the seller will consider what Simmel calls the Superadditum des Geldes, and make himself subservient to the purchaser. In order to keep the rich man and his fortune as his customer, the seller will treat him with great respect, acknowledge him as his superior, even make gifts. ‘Die reine Potentialität, die das Geld darstellt, [...] verdichtet sich zu einer einheitlichen Macht- und Bedeutungsvorstellung, die auch als konkrete Macht und Bedeutung zugunsten des Geldbesitzers wirksam wird’. However, in essence Goldmann is right, since the theoretical equality between parties to a contract is fundamental to its very validity. That this notion of equality is revolutionary in itself within societies still adhering to the strict social stratification carried over from feudal times may help explain the hostility with which many members of the aristocracy viewed this movement, and the violence of the French Revolution with which the desire for equality aired itself.

Other side-effects of the exchange principle are the ideas of universality and of toleration of social and cultural difference, which are in turn pillars of Enlightenment thought. All goods offered are theoretically offered to everybody, independent of personal character, they are made universally available to anyone who can afford them at the stated price. Money, moreover, aids universality by being an ubiquitous means of exchange, and by diminishing the importance of personal links between the parties. Similarly, tolerance is an obvious pre-

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\(^{10}\) Simmel, Philosophie des Geldes, p.216.
condition as well as a consequence of exchange, since ‘exchange entirely disregards the 
religious and moral convictions of the parties’ [p.22]. I shall deal with this particular point in 
greater detail when discussing (the merchant) Nathan’s fervent belief in religious tolerance.

Thus the Enlightenment can be seen as a movement not only intent upon providing the 
vehicle for the political emancipation of the bourgeoisie on humanitarian grounds, but also as 
a means to promote the basis of their potential political power, the free market economy.\(^\text{11}\)
Analogous to this is the rational critique of religion, since economic life is essentially secular.
Religious intolerance would hamper both the domestic economy and the world trade. The free 
market concerns itself with notions of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ only in so far as they express 
themselves in terms of economic viability or not. Moreover, the traditional notion of an 
inscrutable God was unacceptable to the merchants and financiers of the eighteenth century 
(although it remained with the more uneducated masses of the population), since successful 
business cannot build such imponderables into the reckoning.

I have already suggested in the first chapter of this thesis that the seventeenth and 
eighteenth centuries saw a shift in the perception of the world, of money, and of language, as 
systems of representation. Money was no longer pure precious metal and thus no longer 
identical with wealth, but was its representative and had ‘für die eigentlichen Merkantilisten 
bereits eine andere Bedeutung: sie sehen in ihm in erster Linie ein Tauschmittel’.\(^\text{12}\)
Additionally, the definition of the value of money was a perennial issue in the eighteenth 
century, due not only to the many corrupt attempts of rulers to manipulate the coinage,\(^\text{13}\) but

\(^\text{11}\) For a more elaborate treatment of the interrelation between the social theories and ideals of the Enlightenment 
and the political and economic needs of the middle classes see Bauer and Matis, *Geburt der Neuzeit*, 
chapter 23.


\(^\text{13}\) One of the most influential incidents was Friedrich II’s tempering with the Prussian Thaler in order to finance 
his debts from the Seven Year’s War, which not only led to a rapid decline of the Thaler’s value, but also 
sparked concern about the institution of money itself.
also because of the beginning experiments with paper money; one of the most notorious being
John Law's monetary reform in France between 1716 and 1720. Moreover, large imports of
gold and silver from the New World caused a drop in the value of these metals and thus
destabilized the currencies. Richard Gray sums up the effects of these events when he refers
to 'an intense psychological uncertainty concerning matters of money and value, predicated
on the unsettling recognition of the fundamentally abstract nature of money, a substance
whose materiality had hitherto scarcely been called into question'.

Although money had become the basis of the economy by the eighteenth century, its
functional character was not yet fully appreciated, and the traditional notions of wealth as
something tangible and solid still prevailed in the minds of most people who were not
economists or involved in finance. However, money took over from property and real estate
as the supreme representation of wealth per se; and gold was considered especially valuable
because it was the basis of money. Money was both actual wealth (as gold pieces) and it was,
as a publicly guaranteed currency (as coinage denoting the official value by state decree), also
the representation of wealth.

Money and Wisdom

'Weidmann's observation is not only true in the sense that the central message of the play,
contained in the parable of rings, is actually motivated by money; but also in the fact that
Nathan, the title figure, is characterized from the outset by his wealth. The very first time

14R. Gray, 'Buying into Signs; Money and Semiosis in Eighteenth-Century German Language Theory', The
German Quarterly, 69 (1996), 1-14. [p.3].

Nathan appears on stage, he does so in the role of the debt-collecting financier, befitting his
description in the *dramatis personae* as a wealthy Jew. Making the wise and generous
protagonist of the play a rich Jewish merchant and financier not only serves as an obvious
blow to certain Western European prejudices concerning the greedy, money-grabbing Jewish
usurer, but also reflects the rise to power in the eighteenth century of powerful Jewish
financiers. Moreover, it also highlights a change in the perception of the role of those
professions Nathan unites in himself. Being a rich financier no longer had the negative
connotations that had still prevailed in the sixteenth century, during which the ‘search for
profit and wealth was bound to be considered selfishly contrary to the general good and to
concern for others. It was the unchristian life *par excellence*.\(^\text{16}\) However, with the
establishment of a monetary-based and proto-capitalistic economy and the emerging
importance of the individual, as economic agent, things took a different turn. The
Enlightenment idea that public and private interest coincide and that to pursue one’s own
interests would aid the general good, led to a new attitude towards wealth and its owner. To
be a rich burgher now meant that one was an honourable member of society; and with money
and investment as the basis of the economy, the lending and borrowing of money - on interest
- became an integral part of this new economy; indeed, to withhold one’s money from the
market was now regarded as antisocial.\(^\text{17}\) Lessing himself illustrates this in his version of
Aesop’s fable *The Miser*. In Aesop’s original, a miser bewails his bad fortune: somebody has
stolen the treasure he kept buried in his garden and replaced it with a stone. His neighbour
remarks that he would not have made use of his treasure anyway, so the miser should simply
imagine that the stone was his treasure - or, in terms of eighteenth-century thought: that the
stone *represented* his treasure - and then he would not have lost anything. At this point,

\(^{16}\) Goldmann, *Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, p.63.

\(^{17}\) Ibid, p.64.
Lessing adds his own twist: "'Wäre ich auch schon nichts ärmer', erwiderte der Geizhals; "ist ein andrer nicht um so viel reicher? Ein andrer um so viel reicher! Ich möchte rasend werden.'"\(^\text{18}\) Crucial here is not only the insight that wealth is worthless if not put to use, but the notion that to withhold one's money from the market is to make another human being poorer and thus contrary to the common good. The whole logic behind such institutions as banks and building societies is the very concept the miser hates: to let other people make use of one's money, whilst earning interest oneself and still being the rightful owner of the money lent. This is one of the crucial developments in the understanding and handling of finance in the eighteenth century: the traditional loan - on which the Bible forbade interest - was that given to a man struck down by misfortune. This 'was transformed from a loan of money for spending to a loan to finance production. [...] Money was now lent not to the poor to help them through a hard time, but to the rich for use in commercial transactions or investment in manufacture'.\(^\text{19}\) In this sense Nathan's financial activities are actually beneficial to his society.

However, Nathan's attitude to money and lending is as beneficial and generous to others as it is rational and calculated. He is renowned for his generosity - even Daja calls him 'die Großmut selber' \(^\text{[I, 1: l. 55]}\)\(^\text{20}\) - and yet he is very aware of the value and worth of money. When Al-Hafi approaches him with the request to lend money to Saladin and tempts him with 'Zins vom Zins der Zinsen' \(^\text{[I, 3: l. 429]}\), Nathan refuses because he fears that his 'Kapital zu lauter Zinsen wird' \(^\text{[I, 3: l. 430]}\). Once that happened, his wealth would not only be eroded, but also totally dependent on Saladin's ability to repay - and thus potentially lost. Attitude to money is one of the decisive differences between the Sultan and the Jew. Whereas Saladin

\(^\text{18}\) Cited in Weidmann, 'Ökonomie der "Großmuth" ', p.452.

\(^\text{19}\) Goldmann, The Philosophy of the Enlightenment, p.64.

displays a feudal attitude in his ‘Verachtung des leidigen Geldes’,\textsuperscript{21} for Nathan, naturally, it is an integral part of his life. Not only is half his professional career aimed at making money out of money, but he also deliberately employs it in his private life: if nothing else, he regularly bribes Daja into silence about Recha’s origins. As for his other profession, despite being undoubtedly one of the richest and most influential merchants in Jerusalem - ‘Sein Saumtier treibt auf allen Straßen, [...] seine Schiffe liegen/ In allen Häfen’ [II, 3: II. 328ff] - there is still nothing ‘was so klug und emsig/ Er zu erwerben für zu klein nicht achte’ [II, 3: II. 334f]. Nathan’s bourgeois instinct for business, whether great or small, contrasts with Saladin’s lofty and impractical view of money as ‘der Kleinigkeiten kleinste’ [III, 4: I. 229]. Although this is an aristocratic attitude still prevalent even in the eighteenth century, it simultaneously underlines the reasons for the eventual rise to power of the bourgeoisie: just as Saladin finds himself dependent on Nathan’s funds, so many other sovereigns discovered that they desperately needed the money of the rich bourgeoisie.

Additionally, whereas Saladin gives so generously to the beggars that he is left without any money for himself or for the war effort, Nathan is far more cautious. Although, like Saladin, he does give money to the poor, what is given is ‘nicht ganz so viel: doch ganz so gern’[II, 2: I.281]. Nathan knows that the canals into which Saladin’s cash is poured are ‘zu füllen oder zu/ Verstopfen, gleich unmöglich’ [I, 3: II. 416f]; and as a man who earns his living by dealing with money, he is unlikely to fall into the same trap. Moreover, Saladin’s unquestioning generosity is by no means unambiguous. Firstly, the criticism Saladin voices about Al-Hafi’s predecessor also reflects back negatively on the Sultan himself. Saladin dismissed his old treasurer because he actually enquired first about the potential recipient:

\[\ldots\text{nie zufrieden, daß}\]

Although there is undoubtedly something sinister in administering alms in this manner, it seems that this man understood not only the impossibility of Saladin's wish to erase all beggars from his kingdom, but also the problem of giving too generously on too many occasions. The second, far harsher criticism directed at Saladin is that of being inconsistent in his charity and, worse, in his humanity. Recognizing the rhetorical skill with which Saladin persuaded him to become his treasurer, Al-Hafi reveals the Sultan's questionable morality to Nathan:

 [...] Es war nicht Geckerei,
 Bei Hunderttausenden die Menschen drücken,
 Ausmergeln, plündern, martern, würgen; und
 Ein Menschenfreund an einzeln scheinen wollen? [I, 3: ll. 480ff]

Much as Saladin's altruism is praised throughout the play, the fact that he ruthlessly exploits some human beings in order to be over-generous to others casts a dark shadow over him and calls his charity into question. In addition, in the same speech Al-Hafi accuses Saladin of wanting to be like God, with money as the means of having 'des Höchsten immer volle Hand' [I, 3: l. 488].

Although Al-Hafi's judgments have to be taken with a pinch of salt - the Derwisch flees the world when faced with the dilemma of how to reconcile the materialism of worldly life with his humanitarianism, rather than trying to integrate the two - his criticism of Saladin
puts the Sultan in stark opposition to the god-fearing Nathan who gives thoughtfully and without exploiting others. This is not to say Saladin is not the kind, enlightened ruler he is portrayed to be during the rest of the play; it is rather that from this perspective Nathan's superiority becomes clearly visible. Within the first few opening scenes, money is not only established as an integral part of this Enlightenment drama on religious tolerance, but the appreciation of money and the manner of dealing with it figure as a significant component within the technique of characterization. This seems to be a precursor of the central scenes, where an understanding of money's essence and function in the new economy becomes an important issue in the confrontation between Saladin and Nathan, which I shall discuss in due course.

Nathan's wealth is not solely based on finance, but primarily derives from his activities as a merchant. The imperial Geschwisterpaar, although they have little to do with the reality of making money, acknowledge that the conjectures on the origins of Nathan's wealth cannot be true. It is rumoured in Jerusalem that Nathan knows the secret pass-word that will open the doors of the graves, full of gold, of Solomon and David. (It is interesting to reflect that Lessing is here thematizing a public attitude to wealth that still tends to see its origins in magic, as discussed in the previous chapter. Moreover, the convergence of wisdom and wealth in Nathan immediately reminds one of Fortunatus, and this is further strengthened by the suggestion that Nathan may have access to the grave of Solomon, who is held up as the glorious example at the end of Fortunatus.\footnote{Fortunatus, pp.194f.}) This is immediately dismissed by Sittah, not only because it is irrational, but also because Nathan's 'Reichtums Quelle [ist] weit ergiebiger,/Weit unerschöpflicher, als ein Grab/ Voll Mammon' (II, 3: II. 326ff). Saladin immediately replies: 'Denn er handelt; wie ich hörte.' Interesting here is the awareness of a "grave full of money" as basically stagnant, uncreative, dwindling wealth: as a consequence of the
developing capitalistic economy, treasures, like real estate, have lost their allure. Wealth must be dynamic, must grow, and this, essentially, lies in the act of exchange. The dynamic of the new wealth - money - is also expressed and recognized in the double meaning of handeln (to act, perform as well as deal, trade, bargain). significantly, Saladin does not simply refer to Nathan as a Kaufmann, but focuses on his activities. This positive value attributed to the vita activa - a bourgeois value, since even in the eighteenth century the idea of work was foreign to the aristocracy and was regarded as undignified - is the more telling in a drama that deals with the nobility of the mind. It is noteworthy that the medieval Jew behaves and thinks in terms of the protestant work ethic; he remains active as a merchant despite the fact that he is rich enough to retire happily. The fact that Nathan is a tätiger Kaufmann is interesting for a number of other reasons. Firstly, it is arguable that Nathan's wisdom and tolerance is a consequence of his profession: not only because his many travels have brought him into contact with various cultures, religions, and races, but also because the very act of exchange, as outlined above, is based on tolerance. 'Der soziale Tiefsinn der Nathan-Dichtung liegt gerade darin, daß Lessing hier die weise Menschlichkeit und die vita activa eines berufstätigen Bürgers in wechselseitigem Kausalzusammenhang gestaltet.'

Secondly, the eighteenth century regarded the merchant and his activities as beneficial to the cause of humanity. Mr Thorowgood gives his young apprentice Trueman a lecture on these issues in the first scene of the Third Act of George Lillo's The London Merchant; or: The History of George Barnwell (1731):

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23 Etymologically, handeln is a very interesting term. OHG hantalôn ‘to grasp with the hands, touch, feel’ to MHG handeln ‘prepare, perform’. Its meaning of ‘deal, bargain, trade’ was not acquired until the 15th century, when Germany had become one of the most influential trading nations. After: F. Kluge, An Etymological Dictionary of the German Language, Translated from the fourth edition by J. F. Davis, London: George Bell & Sons, 1896, p.134; and Mackensen, Deutsche Etymologie: Ein Leitfaden, p.97.

I wou’d not have you only learn the method of merchandize, and practise it hereafter, merely as a means of getting wealth... See how it is founded in reason, and the nature of things; how it has promoted humanity, as it has opened and yet keeps up an intercourse between nations, far more remote from one another in situation, customs, and religion; promoting the arts, industry, peace, and plenty; by mutual benefits diffusing mutual love from pole to pole.25

The values spelt out above can be equally assigned to Nathan. Nathan’s reason, his desire to see only ever the goodness and humanity in the people he meets, the general promotion of love, peace, and the religious and racial tolerance permeating the whole play seem to make it an illustration of Thorowgood’s words. The Spectator of 19 May 1711 also pays tribute to this view: ‘For these reasons there are not more useful members in a commonwealth than merchants. They knit mankind together in mutual intercourse of good offices, distribute the gifts of nature, find work for the poor, add wealth to the rich, and magnificence to the great.’26 Obviously, this notion of the blessings of world trade and its devotees came to an abrupt end with the international tensions developing in the latter half of the nineteenth century, let alone the First World War. Yet for Lessing and his contemporaries, it seems, international trade appeared to promise global peace, tolerance, and well-being, as represented by the wise merchant of Jerusalem who manages to unite the representatives of quarrelling mankind as one big family.


The central message of *Nathan* lies, as is commonly acknowledged, in Act III, 5-7; where Saladin tries to trick Nathan out of his riches and Nathan in response ponders over the nature of truth (III,6) and then proceeds to tell the famous *Ringparabel*. My discussion of the monologue and the parable of rings will be in two parts. First I will address the central message of these scenes and their role within the play; and secondly I will show how they, in themselves and within the play, bear the signs of the emerging capitalist economy.

Before discussing the intricacies of the *Ringparabel* and the preceding monologue, it is important to pay attention to the framing of these central scenes. Saladin’s unchecked financial practices, we remember, have left him in desperate need of ready cash. After hearing of the wise and rich merchant Nathan, he orders him to court, having worked out a plan with his sister to lay a trap for Nathan should he prove to be unwilling to part with his money. Although this seems to indicate an absolutist attitude of the Sultan, what is actually formulated here is the sovereign’s dependency on the funds of the rich bourgeoisie, and the reluctant admission that money is fast becoming the true agent of power. From an earlier dialogue with Al-Hafi, we learn that Saladin is regularly forced to borrow money from financiers: ‘Denn sie wissen wohl, wie gut ihr Geld in meinen Händen wuchert’ [II, 2: II. 241f]. Lessing would have had plenty of contemporary examples of impoverished rulers in the numerous principalities of Germany. Also, Saladin’s court is no exclusive and protected world for the ruler and the nobility, cut off from the people and sustained by arbitrary decision-making (an issue we shall come back to when drawing comparisons between *Nathan* and *Kabale und Liebe*). Rather, Saladin is a man of enlightened values: ‘gütig, versöhnlich, einsichtig, aufgeklärt, vernünftig, auf Glück und Wohlstand seiner Untertanen bedacht’. Moreover, Saladin is uncomfortable in his awareness of being reliant on Nathan, who will supply him with the basis of his power: money. Before Nathan is due to arrive at court, Saladin curses the fact that he will have to try

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27 Schlaffer, *Der Bürger als Held*, p.105.
to trick the Jew, that he will have to behave out of character. And

Wozu? - Um Geld zu fischen; Geld! [...] 
Zu solchen kleinen Listen wär’ ich endlich 
Gebracht, der Kleinigkeiten kleinste mir 
Zu schaffen? [III, 4: ll. 426ff]

However, Saladin accepts that he is dependent on the money, and agrees with Sittah’s telling reminder that he has no choice.

Another indication of Saladin’s recognition of his situation is his choice of words before formulating the question about which faith Nathan accepts as the true one: ‘Ich heische deinen Unterricht in ganz/ Was anderm; ganz was anderm’ [III, 5: ll. 321ff]. Although it could be argued that Saladin is using the term Unterricht deliberately in order to lull Nathan into a feeling of safety, it seems strange that a sovereign should not merely ask for the opinion of one of his subjects, but actually acknowledge him as his teacher. As the central scenes unfold, it becomes apparent that Saladin does indeed need lessons from Nathan, not only economically, but also as far as wisdom and tolerance are concerned. Both lessons are, of course, interconnected.

It is of particular importance that Saladin’s overture to Nathan is sustained by a two-fold need - a need for truth and a need for money. It is worth remembering that Lessing was fond of talking of truth in monetary terms. But we should be aware of establishing simple equations. Lessing explores both the likeness and the distinction between money and truth,

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as we shall see - and in the process proves himself to be more astute than many of his critics.\textsuperscript{29}

Saladin receives Nathan in his palace, slightly nervous himself about the trap he is about to lay for the rich Jew. Nathan, already aware that Saladin is in need of money, is at first baffled by the Sultan’s demand and tries to avoid an answer by reminding Saladin that he has been brought up a Jew. When Saladin persists, and leaves him alone for a few moments, Nathan, in what is generally known as \textit{der Münzvergleich} (Act III, 6), ponders on the nature of money and truth and Saladin’s underlying motives for his strange request before deciding to tell him the parable of rings.

Peter Demetz comments perceptively that if it were possible ‘die [Münz-]Metaphorik ganz zu lösen, sie böte den Schlüssel zum “Märchen”, [...] ja zu den entscheidensten Gedanken des philosophierenden Dramatikers’.\textsuperscript{30} Demetz is also right to insist on the reciprocal relations between the parable and the monologue. However, he is only partially right in his claim that Nathan sees truth in terms of coins; for he thereby overlooks the distinction Nathan makes between old and new coinage.\textsuperscript{31}

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\[ ...; \text{und er will - Wahrheit. Wahrheit!} \]

\[ \text{Und will sie so, - so bar, so blank, - als ob} \]

\[ \text{Die Wahrheit Münze wäre! - Ja, wenn noch} \]

\[ \text{Uralte Münze, die gewogen ward! -} \]

\[ \text{Das ginge noch! Allein so neue Münze,} \]

\[ \text{Die nur der Stempel macht, die man aufs Brett} \]

\textsuperscript{29}For example: Gobel, \textit{Bild und Sprache}, pp.181ff; Demetz, ‘Lessings \textit{Nathan der Weise}‘, pp.203ff; and Shell, \textit{Money, Language and Thought}, pp.156ff.

\textsuperscript{30}Demetz, ‘Lessings \textit{Nathan der Weise}‘, p.204.

\textsuperscript{31}Ibid.
Nathan is disturbed by Saladin’s attitude to truth since the Sultan, it seems to Nathan, treats truth as if it was like coinage. Nathan’s use of the subjunctive in 1.353 indicates that he does not agree with this perception of truth; but he then goes on to make an important distinction between the two types of coinage, and considers to which type truth may be related. Had the Sultan conceived of truth in terms of old coin (the weight of which determined its value), that would have been permissible: ‘Das ginge noch!’ However, Saladin regards truth as akin to modern coin, the value of which is contingent, bound to social agreement (the coin derives its exchange value merely from the *Stempel* and its recognition by those who trade with it) and hence relative; but this, Nathan decides, cannot be truth: ‘das ist sie doch nun nicht!’ Moreover, the inscription on new coin does not denote “gold content”, i.e. real value, but is rather a measure of exchange value, i.e. something functional. Part of Nathan’s complex dialectic of old and new coinage has to do with the false universality of money which reduces use value to exchange value, regardless of the inherent quality and value of the goods exchanged for it. Truth, however, presupposes notions of true universality, of substantial, inherent value. To equate this universality to modern coinage – which in itself merely embodies universal exchangeability – is to confuse signifier and signified, inherent substance and negotiable value. Nathan realizes he will have to teach Saladin to distinguish between real and attributed value; between signifier (weight) and signified (real value) as an identical object (old coin) and as separated entities (new coin). Having asserted the incompatibility of truth with modern coin, it dawns on Nathan that the whole set-up might be a trap:

[...] Soll’ er auch wohl

Die Wahrheit nicht in Wahrheit fordern? Zwar,
Thus Nathan's next step must be to ascertain whether Saladin really wants truth, and has only formulated his request badly, or whether he is trying to catch him out. Also, the sentence 'die Wahrheit nicht in Wahrheit fordern', basically a financial metaphor relating to means of payment,\textsuperscript{32} foreshadows Nathan's decision to tell his parable in two parts. In the first half (III, 7: 11.395-453) he will offer "truth" in modern currency, in the second (III, 7: 11.476-538) - should Saladin see through this and thus be worthy of more - in old, valuable coin. Nathan lays the seeds for a possible sequel to Boccaccio's story by giving the ring 'die geheime Kraft, vor Gott/ Und Menschen angenehm zu machen, wer/ In dieser Zuversicht ihn trug' (III, 7: 11.399ff). In a clever twist, the tables are turned; Nathan tests Saladin, not vice versa.

This added ingredient to the story in the \textit{Decamerone} plays no part in the first half of Nathan's tale; as in the original, the Jew offers the Sultan the answer to his question by declaring that the three religions are as identical as the three rings. However, while this had been enough to satisfy the Sultan in Boccaccio - and quite rightly so, since the original in the \textit{Decamerone} possesses no particular powers - it is not enough for Lessing's Saladin. He immediately perceives that Nathan is merely purveying 'gängige Wahrheiten' (as opposed to absolute truth)\textsuperscript{33} like \textit{gängige Münze}: 'Die Ringe! - Spiele nicht mit mir!' (III, 7: 1.454) Nathan now knows that he can go further, Saladin has passed the first test: 'Nicht die Kinder bloß, speist man/ Mit Märchen ab' (III, 6: 11.373f); Saladin refuses to be treated like one.

Claiming that the religions he asked Nathan to differentiate are 'doch wohl zu unterscheiden' (III, 7: 1.456), Nathan replies: 'Und nur von Seiten ihrer Gründe nicht./ Denn

\textsuperscript{32} Cf. the German 'Bezahlung in bar/Gold/Naturalien fordern'.

\textsuperscript{33} Bizet, 'Die Weisheit Nathans', p.308.
gründen alle sich nicht auf Geschichte?' [III, 7: II. 458ff] Interesting here is Nathan’s use of *Gründe* in its double meaning of reason and origin. He uses the latter meaning to approach the first serious point behind his story, forcing Saladin to acknowledge that the prime motivation behind everybody adhering to his religion is that of trust and respect for one’s fathers, who were the teachers of one’s faith: ‘Wie kann ich meinen Vätern weniger,/ Als du den deinen glauben? Oder umgekehrt.-’ [III, 7: II. 469f]. Saladin has no option but to agree, and at this precise point Nathan knows he can go on to tell the second part of his story and teach Saladin a lesson on the nature of truth and wisdom. It is indeed noteworthy that it is Nathan who returns to the *Märchen* - Saladin has already yielded to the force of Nathan’s argument regarding the transmission of faith through culture and family: ‘Bei dem Lebendigen! Der Mann hat Recht./ Ich muß verstummen’ [III, 7: II. 475f] - in order to show the ruler where he has gone wrong.

Nathan starts by establishing those truths that are ascertainable: that each son received a ring from the dying father’s hands, and that each had been promised the original ring by the father on one or more occasions [III, 7: II. 477ff]. The judge, like Nathan earlier, does not dare to differentiate between the rings ‘die/ Der Vater in der Absicht machen ließ,/ Damit sie nicht zu unterscheiden wären’ [III, 7: II.451ff], but instead focuses on the inherent power of the original ring to make its owner pleasing to God and mankind. When this fails to identify the true ring, the judge recommends a way towards establishing which one is the real one: he sends the sons and their offspring on a journey of ‘tausend tausend Jahre’ [III, 7: I. 534], during which they must all strive to bring out the good qualities of the ring, in order to find out which one is genuine. In these circumstances it is also unimportant which ring is the real one, which is why the judge can suggest that ‘Der echte Ring/ Vermutlich ging verloren’ [III, 7: II.509f]. Since the aim is now no longer to establish the “truth” - neither son will be alive then, there is no dispute any longer - the importance lies in the journey per se, in the endeavour to be
pleasing to God and mankind, which is, of course, the real truth Nathan has in mind, a truth which both embraces and transcends the relativist argument. At this point we approach the complexity at the heart of the parable, and Nathan proves himself to be an extraordinary dialectician in his debate with Saladin. On the one hand, he is adept at arguing what one might call the ‘relativist’ case. That is to say: he shows that a person’s religious belief is a matter of upbringing, of socio-cultural conditioning. This notion is, in many respects, a liberationary one in that it serves to challenge, and to demolish dogma. This relativist understanding of religious truth links with new coinage, as Nathan understands it, with arbitrary tokens, whose value is not substantial but contingent, expressed solely by mechanisms of negotiability. But Nathan is not prepared to go fully down the ‘relativist’ road. He also wants to insist that there are knowable values and knowable truths which can allow a universal framework of reference to be created. It is one which registers the wearer of the true ring by virtue of his being pleasing to God and to his fellow human creatures. At this point Lessing dismisses all notions of the incommensurability of divine and human spheres in favour of an ethos of universally recognizable goodness. Within this context, then, relativism does not have the last word; judgment can be passed. Not all aspects of all creeds, all cultures, all communities are equally valuable; some coinage is universal. Here we confront the governing dialectic of Nathan’s argument. Both the liberationary potential of the new (relativist) coinage and the inherent stability of the old (inherently valuable) coinage are acknowledged in a dialectic that informs both the intellectual argument and its central metaphor (which is that of money). Nathan’s comparison of truth to old coin, ‘die gewogen ward’, aims at exactly this: truth is something inherent in God, mankind and its history (as the value of gold is inherent to old coin), it is not

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34This is not to say that there is no original, true religion; as the judge makes clear, his advice also aims at establishing which is the true ring. The crucial point is that it is not necessary to identify it in order to bring about its benefits, which is another example of the possible and fruitful coexistence of the relative and the absolute, which I am now to argue.
simply stamped onto the world for everybody to see (as the value of modern coin is simply stamped on the ingot and thus one can it ‘aufs Brett nur zählen’). The inbuilt value of gold in old coinage thus corresponds to the human characteristics, given to all members of mankind independent of their faith, the judge recommends to the three sons: ‘von Vorurteilen freie Liebe, Sanftmut, herzliche Verträglichkeit, Wohltun, innigste Ergebenheit in Gott’ [III, 7: II. 526-531]. These are the universal values inherent in humanity, its common currency, independent of the way these values might manifest themselves. The way these values are operative might be relative and differ from culture to culture, but their essence is identical in each faith. Indeed, by demonstrating that any particular religious faith is merely an operative, a functional means through which universality may express itself (like modern coinage was a functional signifier of gold in the eigtheenth century), Nathan proves that the relative can be positively employed in the service of the universal - provided that those who implement the relative remember that they are not in the possession of the absolute. However, this explanation as to what constitutes the essence of truth and its attainment is by no means as simple as this solution might suggest. As the value of old coin lies in the weight of the precious metal, which first has to be established by wiegen, so truth can only be found through careful Abwägen, through the journey towards it.

This corresponds exactly to Lessing’s view of truth and how to attain it. Lessing always valued the way to truth more highly than possessing it:

In the end, insight into truth and true value has to be attained, it is not simply given. Nathan demonstrates his wisdom by showing the Sultan the way to truth, never claiming to be in possession of it; and Saladin, having previously been annoyed at Nathan's modesty in this respect - 'Denn sie nur immerdar zu hören, wo/ Man trockene Vernunft erwartet, ekelt' [III.5: II.333f] - now understands Nathan's lesson, shying away from the Jew's invitation to be the wiser judge at the end of the thousand thousand years: 'Ich Staub? Ich Nichts?/ O Gott!' [III.7: II. 540f] Nathan proves to Saladin that wisdom and truth are two separate entities, and that whilst truth may never be found, it is wisdom, the searching for truth, that can be achieved by everybody and thus make the world a better place, as the judge recommends to the three sons: the relativity of religious truth coexists paradoxically with the universality of the quest for truth and goodness.

Where devotion to God goes hand in hand with decency and humanity, the circle can be

Es strebe von euch jeder um die Wette,

Die Kraft des Steins in seinem Ring’ an Tag

Zu legen! komme dieser Kraft mit Sanftmut,

Mit herzlicher Vertraglichkeit, mit Wohltun,

Mit innigster Ergebenheit in Gott

Zu Hülfe! [III. 7: II. 527ff]


36 This is another typical characteristic of Lessing, whose 'Mißtrauen rege (wird), wo immer die Wahrheit als Besitz ausgegeben und verteidigt wird.' Schröder, Lessing, p.28.
squared; relativism and universality can coexist. Again, the links with the coin comparison are worth considering: just as modern coin points to a value that is absent from itself, so the value of the original ring is absent in the court room. Both coin and ring can only function if they are endowed with trust and belief in their functions. In short, the coin comparison, the central message of the parable (the commensurability of the Divine and the human, of the relative and the universal) and the three rings themselves form a complex dialectical matrix in which the function and purpose of any one ingredient can only be understood if considered in its relation to the others.

The foundation of this commensurability of the divine and the human spheres, already negating the absoluteness of the relativist case, is laid as early as in the first act. This occurs in the first interview between the Klosterbruder and the Tempelherr, in which Bonafides relates the Patriarch’s scheme of the Tempelherr betraying Saladin. The Tempelherr, shocked at the Patriarch’s proposal, tells the Klosterbruder that even God or his order ‘Gebieten mir kein Bubenstück!’ [I, 5: l. 685] This contrasts sharply with the dogmatic belief of the Patriarch: ‘Nur, - meint der Patriarch, - sei Bubenstück/ Vor Menschen, nicht auch Bubenstück vor Gott’ [I, 5: l. 686ff]. The dogmatic belief of the Patriarch separates humanity and religion, insists that faith goes beyond morals, thereby segregating what should be a natural unity. Thus he denies the possibility of unanimity between the human and Divine. The Tempelherr’s virulent rejection of this attitude towards God and mankind prefigures Nathan’s argument of the credible coexistence of relative and absolute values. The Tempelherr accepts the relative case in the Patriarch’s argument that Saladin is an enemy of Christianity, and therefore cannot be a Tempelherr’s friend (though he will later, under Nathan’s influence, grow out of this attitude), but he makes it perfectly clear that this is no reason to contravene the inherent laws of human decency: ‘Freund?/ An dem ich bloß nicht will zum Schurken werden;/ Zum undankbaren Schurken?’ [I, 5: l. 691ff] In as much as it is understandable that a Christian and
a Muslim are unlikely to become friends at a time when the two faiths are war-locked, this
does not touch on the universality of certain values of humanity. However, it is up to Nathan
to bring this message home to Saladin. Nathan’s point that the real value of truth lies in the
journey towards it and in the endeavour to find it brings him close to the original meaning of
the words *weise*, which relates to seeking after knowledge.\(^{37}\)

There is, however, another level to Nathan’s parable of rings and his message on the
nature of truth. As discussed above, Nathan’s wisdom is also that of the merchant, of the
financier, and this engagement with economic and monetary issues not only forms his way of
thinking, but also pays tribute to the interrelation of Enlightenment thought and the needs of
the economy. Saladin himself, although he claims that he has ‘mit dem Kaufmann nichts zu
tun’ [III, 5: l. 313], addresses Nathan’s skills as a merchant when elaborating on his request: a
man like Nathan would not simply stick to a faith given to him at birth, but ‘wenn er bleibt,/
Bleibt er aus Einsicht, Gründen, Wahl des Bessern’ [III, 5: II. 331f]. When at the market, or when
considering lending money, Nathan must scrutinize the goods, or the person who wants to
borrow, he must test, think, and make the best choice. Part of this echoes Nathan’s
comparison of the coins, the need to differentiate between the real and its operative proxy, and
to handle each according to its merits, but never to confuse them.

The interplay of different kinds of coinage and different kinds of truth, and the subsequent
parable on the equality of all religions initiates the first lesson Nathan teaches Saladin. It

\(^{37}\) Kluge’s *Etymological Dictionary* [pp. 390 & 398]: *weise* as an adjective had the meaning ‘intelligible,
experienced, acquainted with, wise’ in MHG and OHG *wîs* (also *wise*, *wîs*), yet the primary form of
the word was a verbal adjective from *wissen*, ‘to know, be aware of’ (MHG *wizzen*, OHG *wizzan*). This is a
common Teutonic, and more remotely a primitive Aryan preterite present, based on pre-Teutonic woid, wîd
in Sanskrit *vëda*, ‘I know’. This primitive unreduplicated perfect is based on a root *wid*, which in the
Aryan languages means literally ‘to find’, then ‘to see, recognise’; compare Sanskrit *vid*, ‘to find’, Greek
*îdëîv*, Latin *videre*, ‘to see’, Gothic *witan*, ‘to observe’. The person who is wise is he who, after
searching, has found knowledge.

Although the knowledge of etymology was rather rudimentary in the eighteenth century, Lessing
was famous for his *Wortgrübelei* and his interest in etymology: “Es ist nicht ohne Grund, daß oft, wer das
Wort nur recht versteht, die Sache schon mehr als halb kennt.” (Cited in Schröder, *Sprache und Drama*,
p.56) Whether consciously or unconsciously, it seems that Nathan is the epitome of what *wisdom* entails.
concerns the arrogance and wrongfulness with which the Sultan might be employing his power, as the Muslim head of a Muslim state, against a merchant belonging to a religious minority in order to lay hand on his fortune. The central message goes further, Nathan ‘gibt ihm durch die Parabel zu verstehen, daß wenn jedwedes Geld gut ist, auch jede Religion gut sein muß’.\(^{38}\) One of the central messages is the acceptance of all faiths as equal - and this relates to the notion of money’s equalizing effect. Money intrinsically puts people on par with each other, ‘und unterscheidet sie erst im zweiten Schritt quantifizierend’\(^{39}\) according to the amount that each possesses. In this light, since Saladin is in need of Nathan’s money, Nathan appears not only as equal, but as superior to the Sultan - which corresponds to the philosophical lecture he is giving him as well as to the real situation: Saladin’s dependency on Nathan, or: the dependency of the old power on the new.

By exploiting his mental and financial superiority, Nathan forces Saladin openly to accept tolerance and equality, and to see in him no more than the human being - which Saladin duly understands: ‘Geh! - Geh! - Aber sei mein Freund’ \([\text{III. 7: 1. 544}].\) Saladin does not even admit any more that his real intent had been to ignore the man, by means of pinning him down to his faith, in order to lay hand on his money, and is severely embarrassed when Nathan offers it of his own accord.

Yet it is also the parable of rings as such that shows remarkable parallels to the demands of the market economy. The coin comparison in Nathan’s monologue prefigures one of the most important characteristics of the rings themselves. Modern coins, ‘die nur der Stempel macht’, rely on a social agreement to accept the value stamped on them as their exchange value, rather than the value of any precious metal they might contain: real and attributed value are separated. Practically however, the separation of real and attributed value

\(^{38}\) Cases, ‘Lessings Nathan der Weise’, p.332.

\(^{39}\) Schlaffer, Der Bürger als Held, p.108.
is unimportant: as long as everybody accepts the coins at face value they do not have to be "real". Similarly, the value of the original ring lies exactly in a psychological, attributed value and trust in its power: 'Der Stein [...] hatte die geheime Kraft, vor Gott/ Und Menschen angenehm zu machen, wer/ In dieser Zuversicht ihn trug' [III, 7: ll. 399ff; my italics]. This corresponds to the advice the judge gives the sons about the future treatment of their respective rings:

So glaube jeder sicher seinen Ring
Den echten.- [...] 

Es strebe jeder von euch um die Wette,
Die Kraft des Steins in seinem Ring' an Tag
Zu legen! [III, 7: ll. 518-529]

Since it is basically the behaviour resulting from the trust in the power of the ring that brings out its effects, it does not matter whether the ring as such is genuine or not; it can be made genuine by the way it is viewed and used. This also connects with the logic of the Münzvergleich; in the same way as modern coins are the functional replacement of old, real value coin, so is the striving for truth the functional replacement for the fundamentalist possession of truth. Just as money (i.e. modern, intrinsically worthless coin - or, later, paper) has to be spent in order to obtain the signs of wealth, thereby stimulating the economy, so the striving for truth by the sons will bring threefold peace and harmony to the world (rather than only once through him who knows he possesses the real ring).

Another parallel to the market economy is the idea of free competition between equals. Hernadi has linked the dominance of the one ring to feudalism, albeit recognizing that the
parable as such is already 'a-feudal, da der Ring nicht an den Erstgeborenen [geht]'\textsuperscript{40}. This, however, is of secondary importance, if not an actual premise to the story: the multiple promises of the father, followed by the necessity to make copies of the ring, would not have been possible otherwise. What is important is the equalization of the brothers and the encouragement of competition: 'gewiß;/ Daß er euch alle drei geliebt, und gleich / Geliebt' (III, 7: 521ff), followed by the 'Es strebe jeder von euch um die Wette...'. The bourgeois economy can only flourish where everybody is regarded as equal and has free access to the market, and if this market is governed by the rules of free competition. In turn, the principles of exchange further religious tolerance by seeing nothing but the owner of money or goods in the other party or, in Schlaffer's words, 'das Bildmaterial der Ringparabel führt ihren ideologischen Inhalt: religiöse Toleranz, auf den ökonomischen Ursprung: den Markt, der Toleranz notwendig involviert, zurück'.\textsuperscript{41}

Another economic feature of the judge's advice in the parable is the encouragement of self-interest as a means for the general good. From Hobbes to Smith, many eighteenth-century economists believed that the pursuit of one's personal interests would inevitably be beneficial to all members of society.\textsuperscript{42} In a similar fashion, every brother has to believe his ring to be the real one in order to participate in and guarantee the success of the project. This is connected with another central issue in the play and in the parable: the problem of the "worth" (Wert) of a human being, and it is here especially that Nathan emerges as an (idealistic) product of his time.

One of the central messages of Nathan is, of course, that man's "worth" is

\textsuperscript{40}Hernadi, 'Nathan der Bürger', p.345.

\textsuperscript{41}Schlaffer, Der Bürger als Held, p.109.

independent of any particular faith, but lies in the simple fact ‘ein Mensch zu heißen!’ [II. 5: ll. 525ff] Saladin, Sittah, Recha and Nathan are the most advanced in this belief, with the Tempelherr in second place (as he is tainted from the beginning with a general dislike of the Jews); Daja and the Patriarch are at the opposite end of the scale, inclined to put religion before humanity. The judge in the parable sums up the characteristics which make up the perfect human being: unprejudiced love, gentleness, warm-hearted amicability, being beneficial to others (Wohltun), and profound devotion to God [III. 7: ll. 526ff]. However, it is the effort and achievement in these matters that determine the human worth of a person. On the whole it is only Nathan who achieves this: Saladin and Sittah are willing to ignore their ideals when it comes to money, and the Tempelherr, who might have these ideals but whose temper tends to get in the way, has to be educated first by Nathan and then by Saladin. Yet it is crucial to note that not a single person in this play has been born with these virtues: they are no longer assets acquired by the nobility at birth - an attitude still prevalent in the sixteenth century - but have been brought about by personal achievement. Lessing explicitly insists that they are not obtainable by money: however rich Nathan might be, his humanity primarily stems from the three days, after his whole family had been murdered, during which he had ‘mit Gott auch wohl gerechtet’ [IV, 7: l. 670]. Whereas in Fortunatus wisdom can be effectively bought with money,\(^43\) in Nathan it is dependent on Leistung and thus within the bourgeois value system: in the market economy success and subsequent social standing are determined by effort and achievement, and no longer by birth. This is also a message in the parable: the judge’s recommendation entails considerable efforts by the sons, and the parable ‘verlegt den Blick von Legitimität der Herkunft auf gegenwärtige und zukünftige Verdienste. [...] Nicht die bevorzugte Abstammung zählt, sondern die eigene Leistung im freien Wettbewerb unter

\(^{43}\)As discussed on p.55 of this thesis.
prinzipiell gleichen Brüdern’. Thus, in accordance with the spirit of the Enlightenment, Nathan assesses the worth of men in terms of their attitude towards their fellow human beings, and by the achievement and effort that went into it. In as much as this is typical of the time, the fact that humans are merely judged according to their humanistic “worth” is utopian, as are the characters themselves. Be it the marvellously enlightened absolutist ruler, the wise Jewish merchant, or the noble Tempelherr who is helped to grow out of the narrowness of his faith - not to speak of the ending: Nathan der Weise is a showpiece of Enlightenment concepts, down to the integration of economic logic with humanitarian ideals; old and new truths, old and new currencies can be reconciled.

Another play, written only four years later, addresses the question of the worth of man in the reality of absolutism from a lower stratum of society: Schiller’s Kabale und Liebe. The social settings differentiate the plays from their very opening scenes: whereas we see Nathan returning home to his house with a caravan full of merchandise, greeted by his daughter’s governess, we meet the Millers, modest bourgeois people, in their living room. On both occasions, however, the opening dialogues concern the daughters of the households, Recha and Luise. Recha almost died in the fire that engulfed Nathan’s house during his absence, and Luise’s love for the son of the president of the royal court is the cause of the argument between the Millers. The attitudes towards the heads of state are remarkably different: Saladin is liked and respected by his subjects, keeps an open court, and is set on eliminating all beggars by making them rich. Miller suffers from existential fear of a ruler - who never even appears on stage but lives in a protected world from where he exploits his subjects - and his

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Hernadi, 'Nathan der Bürger', p.345.
aides. Revealingly, in the opening scenes of Lessing’s drama, Nathan hardly refers to money or merchandizing, whereas Miller, a musician, immediately terms Luise’s and Ferdinand’s affair a ‘Handel’, a ‘Kommerz’ [1, 1]. One of the most striking features of this play, which concerns despotism, intolerance, bourgeois and aristocratic values, love and repression, is the monetary terminology pervading it from the outset: Schiller delivers a portrait of a society in which human beings are judged and speak of themselves in terms of monetary “value”.

Issues of money and economy have been rarely discussed in relation to Schiller’s second play. Graham also regards money, monetary metaphors and the theme of possession as central to the self-understanding of the characters, to the circumference of the play and to its core. Janz, in 1976, not only focuses on the social conflicts the play portrays but also recognizes the problematic issues of possession and economic considerations in the triangle of Luise, Ferdinand, and Miller; whereas Wells (1985) criticizes Graham’s view as overinterpretative, claiming that monetary expressions were normal for Schiller. I am much in agreement with Graham, but will also focus in the following on other moments in the tragedy which highlight underlying notions of money, value, and worth.

Perhaps the most surprising is Luise’s view of herself and her love for Ferdinand in terms of monetary value. Returning from mass, Luise states she does not bewail her lot, but that she is content with ‘nur wenig - an ihn denken - das kostet ja nichts’ [I, 3]. Luise is very much aware of the social barriers dividing her and Ferdinand, yet accepts them as a given fact

45 Cf. the opening dialogue between Miller and his wife, where he is concerned that ‘alles Wetter kommt über den Geiger.’ He remains unaffected by his wife’s attempts to calm his worries. [I, 1].


in the same way as she acknowledges that only after death are ‘Menschen nur Menschen’ [I, 3]. She consoles herself with a thought about the afterlife, ‘wenn Gott kommt und die Herzen im Preise steigen. Ich werde dann reich sein. Dort rechnet man Tränen für Triumphe und schöne Gedanken für Ahnen an.’ Striking is not only the simple acceptance of social discrimination, but the monetary terminology for a topic which would seem to express itself either in romantic outpourings or religious yearning. Within the first few scenes, the drama reveals the yardstick by which society assesses the Wert des Menschen: wealth and birth. This is later clearly spelt out by the President himself; although he seeks to appease Ferdinand as part of his ploy, he both praises and disparages Luise in one breath: ‘Ich rechne ihre Tugend für Ahnen und ihre Schönheit für Gold’ [IV, 5].

One of the other major themes running through the play is that of possession, not only of material possessions, but of possessing another human being. This motif is realized most effectively through the juxtaposition of Luise as a property, torn between the claims of ownership by her father and by Ferdinand, and of the mass sale of Landeskinder in the famous Kammerdiener scene. The issue of Tugend also comes into the calibration of possession and its “value”; since sexual virtue equals a state of not yet having been possessed, not yet being owned, and thus not yet being a “possession”. Miller, Ferdinand and Wurm are highly aware of the value of sexual virtue and its implications for the ownership of Luise. Miller is anxious to see the affair between Luise and Ferdinand end precisely because of the disastrous consequences for Luise should Ferdinand possess her outside wedlock. Luise would then be second-hand and unlikely to attract a “new owner” in the shape of a husband: ‘[...] er wird [...] dem Mädel eins hinsetzen und führt sich ab, und das Mädel ist verschimpft auf ihr Leben lang, bleibt sitzen’ [I, 1]. This belief is immediately substantiated by Wurm in the following scene. As Wurm begins to comprehend that Ferdinand is seriously courting Luise, Wurm immediately makes it known that he is only willing to marry a virgin: ‘Sie sehen, daß
meine Absichten auf Mamsell Luisen ernsthaft sind, wenn sie aber von einem adeligen Windbeutel herumgeholt --’ [I, 2] Later he defends this even against Ferdinand’s father, who, interestingly, compares virginity with coinage: ‘Dummer Teufel, was verschlägt es denn Ihm, ob er die Karolin frisch aus der Münze oder vom Bankier bekommt’ [I, 5]. Yet the President confuses the medium of exchange with actual property, which Wurm is unwilling to obtain in a used condition. Ferdinand, in his argument with the President makes the issue explicit when he defends his rejection of Lady Milford on moral grounds: ‘Mit welchem Gesicht soll ich vor den schlechtesten Handwerker treten, der mit seiner Frau wenigstens noch einen ganzen Körper zur Mitgift bekommt?’ [I, 7] Virtue guarantees total possession, and Miller (as her father the rightful “owner” of Luise until marriage) will secure this right over her against Ferdinand later on.

Central to the fatal storyline and to the success of the intrigue is Ferdinand’s idea that Luise is his possession. Perhaps one of the most powerful expressions of this sense of ownership is portrayed in Ferdinand’s outburst after the showdown with the Hofmarschall, where Ferdinand even denies God’s right over his own creation: ‘Richter der Welt! Fordre sie mir nicht ab. Das Mädchen ist mein’ [IV, 4]. However, it is also from his first appearance on stage that this striking feature of their relationship becomes apparent: ‘Du bist meine Luise. Wer sagt dir, daß du noch etwas sein solltest?’ [I, 4]; nonetheless, Luise is something else as well, and that is a daughter. Her love for her father is so strong that she not only refuses to flee with Ferdinand because of him [III, 4], but this love is also so obvious that it becomes a vital part of the intrigue. Wurm, knowing Luise ‘hat nicht mehr als zwei tödliche Seiten, durch welche wir ihr Gewissen bestürmen können - ihren Vater und den Major […] [sie] liebt ihren Vater - bis zur Leidenschaft’ [III, 1], bases much of his scheme on Luise’s predictable desire to get her father out of prison - at all cost. But maybe one of the most astonishing features of Luise and of the play is the fact that Luise regards herself as her father’s property, and phrases
not only her sense of dependency in monetary terms, but also applies them to herself. In the scene in which Ferdinand tries to persuade her to leave the country with him, she reminds him of her duty to her father: ‘Ich habe einen Vater, der kein Vermögen hat als diese einzige Tochter’ [III, 4]. She is the only treasure her father possesses, and with those words she not only rebukes Ferdinand’s claim that she is his treasure which he wants to guard like a dragon his gold [I, 4], but she also accepts herself to be an object, passive, possessed: even grammatically, it is her father who is the subject of the sentence, she is the object.\(^4\) Similarly, Miller eventually persuades her to abstain from suicide through a monetary metaphor: ‘Die Zeit meldet sich allgemach bei mir, wo uns Vatern die Kapitale zustatten kommen, die wir im Herzen unsrer Kinder anlegten - Wirst du mich darum betrügen, Luise? Wirst du dich mit dem Hab und Gut deines Vaters auf und davon machen?’ [V, 1] Yet even more significantly Miller, after having realized his capital in turning Luise away from suicide, abuses his right over his property and sells her off to Ferdinand. It is her very passivity that allows her to be passed like a commodity between Ferdinand and her father, and to be eventually sold by the latter to the former. The play itself depicts the transfer of property rights over Luise from Ferdinand to the father, and back again. When we first meet Luise there can be no doubt she is in Ferdinand’s possession, she has no thought but him: ‘Ah! ich vergaß, daß es außer ihm Menschen gibt.’ [I, 3]. With the misgivings of her father, the mounting pressures and the realization that marrying Ferdinand would ‘die Fugen der Bürgerwelt auseinandertreiben und die allgemeine ewige Ordnung zugrund’ stürzen’ [III, 4], Luise returns to Miller; finally confirming this position by tearing up the letter in which she asks Ferdinand to join her in death [V, 1]. In the following scene, in which Ferdinand appears, Miller ironically defends Luise by warning Ferdinand: ‘Vor deinen Liebkosungen konnt’ ich sie nicht bewahren, aber ich kann es vor deinen Mißhandlungen’ [V, 2]. A few moments later he will seal her fate by ignoring his

he criticizes the practices of the Duke and his father, he eventually offers Miller money as a final desperate attempt to acquire Luise. The fact that Miller accepts it is perhaps the most astonishing twist in the drama.

Before offering Miller the gold, Ferdinand, for the last time, considers his intention of poisoning himself and Luise. Feeling guilty for wanting to deprive Miller of his only treasure - 'rauben den letzten Notpfennig einem Bettler?' [V, 4] - his thoughts turn to his own father. Having established that he is not the only prize his father possesses, and thereby salved his conscience, his next move is to ensure that when he takes Luise from her father, Miller too will have another treasure to replace the one lost. The ensuing conversation between Miller and Ferdinand witnesses the transfer of the rights over Luise from Miller to Ferdinand; and the gold reveals Miller's true attitude to money and the materialism he so despised in his wife in Act I.

A close scrutiny of the dialogue between Ferdinand and Miller reveals that Miller must, in any event, be aware that he is selling Luise. Refusing Ferdinand's offer of payment for music lessons at the beginning of the scene, he then first accepts the money after Ferdinand tells him it is 'für Leben und Sterben' [V, 5]. Ferdinand then gives Miller a lengthy lecture on Luise's mortality, warning Miller that it is unwise to rely on her for everything. Ferdinand again choses the word Vermögen in relation to Luise, at which point his intentions become more clear, since he immediately notices that Miller has not taken the Vermögen that is meant to replace Luise. It is at this exact point, after Ferdinand's concentration on death and the possibility of losing Luise, that we might expect Miller to notice the threat behind Ferdinand's offer. However, he concentrates on the fact that Ferdinand wants to give him the whole purse full of gold, and the violence of his outburst when realizing that all of this gold is meant to be his is an indication of a desire he has so long suppressed: 'Hier liegt ja - oder bin ich verhext - oder - Gott verdamm' mich! Da greif ich ja das bare gelbe leibhafte Gottesgold -- Nein,
premonition and accepting Ferdinand’s money.

Before looking at this scene in more detail, it will prove helpful to remember that the only other scene in which money is materially present is the famous Kammerdiener episode. In this scene, a servant of the Duke appears before Lady Milford to present her with precious jewels. The enormous expense has been met by the sale of citizens to a foreign army: ‘Gestern sind siebentausend Landskinder nach Amerika fort - Die zahlen alles’ [II, 2]. For the Duke his subjects are no more than material possessions, and he sells them in order to exchange them for other possessions, in this case jewellery. The ironic reference to the Duke and his subjects as Landesvater and Landeskinder - unique to this scene in the play - point to the other central father-child configurations of the drama, the President and Ferdinand, and Miller and Luise. Both children acknowledge that they are a form of wealth for their fathers, but whereas Luise knows she is Miller’s only Vermögen, Ferdinand calms his conscience about killing Luise and himself by reminding himself that his father may only have ‘diesen einzigen Sohn - [...] doch nicht den einzigen Reichtum’ [V, 4]. Common to all the father-child relationships in the drama, whether they are actual blood relationships or metaphors for political relationships, is the abuse of the child figure by the father figure in the form of ownership, manipulation, subjection. Central to the realization of this abuse is the conception of the child as a form of wealth, the exchange of this wealth for either power (President) or money (Miller, Duke), and the understanding of the child that being a valuable possession is his/her raison d’être. Interesting in this connection is the fact that all these relationships result in the death of the child figures, and that there seems to be no alternative to this outcome: whether the children openly revolt against being possessed, as is the case with the Landeskinder, whether they decide to trick the father secretly out of his property, as Ferdinand does, or even whether they are subject to the father, like Luise: death seems the inevitable result of the mechanism of possession. This is also the case with Ferdinand’s claim that Luise is his: in the same way as
Satanas! Du sollst mich nicht drankriegen!’ [V. 5] Miller’s violent reaction underlines the internal battle he is fighting, ‘for the glory that is held out to him is sinful and sweet, diabolical and divine, and terrible in this ambiguity’.49 Trying to calm his conscience with a rhetorical question, Miller turns to Ferdinand and inquires whether he might want to seduce him to do something unlawful, ‘denn so viel Geld läßt sich, weiß Gott, nicht mit etwas Gutem verdienen’ [V, 5]. Ferdinand duly comforts him, and the last question Miller poses is that of how he deserves all these riches. It is at this point that Ferdinand spells out that it is for Luise, and Miller accepts: ‘mit dem Geld bezahl ich Ihm, (von Schauern ergriffen hält er inn’) bezahl ich Ihm (nach einer Pause mit Wehmut) den drei Monat langen glücklichen Traum von seiner Tochter’ [V, 5]. Miller does not react to the hesitation in Ferdinand, who is desperately grasping for the right words, knowing that what he does is wrong. Yet it is Miller who, albeit unable to foresee the lethal consequences of the deal, accepts the money as a treasure Luise has earned him. He still does so despite Ferdinand’s telling him that he is about to embark on a journey, and ‘wo ich mich zu setzen gedenke, gelten die Stempel nicht’ [V, 5]. This, however, is a nonsensical comment in relation to gold: wherever he would settle, the high gold content in the coins would be equatable to local currency; but Miller ignores this last clear indication of Ferdinand’s plans. In this connection, it is telling that Ferdinand tends to refer to the contents of the purse as Geld, whereas Miller calls it Gold. Ferdinand sees purely its functional quality as money as he is transacting a business in the purchase of Luise, but Miller is exchanging one treasure for another. What he condemned in his wife in Act I, her willingness to market her daughter and live of the Blutgeld [I, 1], he now does himself by accepting Ferdinand’s blood money. Moreover, as he accused his wife of Tobakschnupfen and wasting money on coffee, he now first focuses on what the money will do for him, then for Luise. In the end, he does what he feared his wife might do: he sells the daughter; although one could cynically remark

that it seems he was more worried that his wife might not be able to negotiate the right price for her. This is an extreme illustration of Eder’s perception of the breakdown of family ties as soon as money enters the family structure - and family home:

Tritt nun ein Äußeres wie “Geld”, das als unnatürlich und scheinhaft begriffen wird, auf den Plan - so wird das Wesen der Familie selbst auch scheinhaft. Der Vater “ist” eben nicht mehr Vater, wenn er bei der Verheiratung seiner Tochter vor allem an die Mitgift denkt.\(^{50}\)

In Miller’s case this is even worse, since he does not worry about Luise’s dowry, but about his own financial gain and future. His sudden greed for money makes him forget his protective role as Luise’s father. As in *Nathan*, it is through money and monetary metaphors that characters are revealed.\(^{51}\)

The issue of possessing another human being is also touched upon in *Nathan der Weise*, albeit with a very different outcome. Already in the first scene it becomes clear that Nathan regards Recha as his possession: ‘Alles, was/ Ich sonst besitze, hat Natur und Glück/ Mir zugeteilt. Dies Eigentum allein/ Dank ich der Tugend’ [I, 1: 11.33ff]. The conflict between the Tempelherr and Nathan arises out of varying views as to whose rightful property Recha is, Nathan’s or the Christians’. In a way, giving up his perceived rights over Recha is the last lesson Nathan has to learn: ‘wenn sie von meinen Händen/ Die Vorsicht wieder fordert, - ich gehorche!’, but: ‘wenn ich das Mädchen noch behalten/ Und einen solchen Eidam mir damit/ Erkaufen könnte!’ [V, 7: 11.698f & 740ff] It is noteworthy that he perceives his daughter not only


\(^{51}\) As argued on pp.82-85 of this chapter.
as a possession, but also as a means to acquire something else, in this case a decent son-in-law. However, not even Nathan can square the circle of possessiveness, he has to give up his rights over Recha to Saladin, who turns out to be her uncle; yet in the idealistic ending of the play, this is secondary as all the main characters are meant to be seen as one large family.

Taken together, the two plays provide a comprehensive illustration of the intellectual as well as the social, political and economic situation of the late eighteenth century. Lessing's play portrays most of the ideals of the Enlightenment: tolerance, humanitarianism, equality, and the power of reason. *Kabale und Liebe*, as a *Sturm und Drang* play, both defends the value of feeling and emotion, but also recognizes how vulnerable they are. We are reminded of the Tempelherr's self-castigation when he realizes what potential dangers his rash temper might pose to Nathan and Recha: 'Was hab ich Querkopf nun gestiftet! - Daß/ Ein einz'ger Funken dieser Leidenschaft/ Doch unsers Hims so viel verbrennen kann!' [V, 3: 11.130ff] The whole *Hofkabale* would have immediately collapsed had Ferdinand just once cared to employ reason, as Luise herself remarks: 'O des frevelhaften Eigensinns! Ehe er sich eine Übereilung gestände, greift er lieber den Himmel an' [V, 7].

Both pay tribute to the increasing role and self-awareness of the bourgeoisie in the last few decades of the eighteenth century. In *Nathan* we find the ruler reliant on the advice and money of the rich merchant, whereas in Schiller's tragedy the reality of absolutism, the exploitation of the bourgeoisie, is portrayed. Yet whereas Nathan shows the virtues of economic awareness and industriousness that became so much part of the bourgeois identity, Schiller focuses on the simultaneously emerging bourgeois values of morality, honour, and piety as conscious counter reactions to an increasingly hedonistic aristocracy. (See the confrontations between Miller and the President [II, 6] and Luise and Lady Milford [IV, 7].) Schlaffer comments on *Nathan*: 'bei fortgeschrittener Selbsterkenntnis des bürgerlichen
Standpunkts tritt der Kaufmann dem König belehrend zur Seite;\textsuperscript{52} moreover, Saladin not only accepts Nathan’s philosophical wisdom, but also learns a lesson in economics. Once Nathan’s money has arrived, Saladin swears to be more careful with his resources from now on, and decides to send most of it to his father’s castle, because

\[\text{[\ldots] Hier} \]
\[Fällt mir es doch nur durch die Finger.- Zwar\]
\[Man wird wohl endlich hart; und nun gewiß\]
\[Soll's Künste kosten, mir viel abzuzwacken. [IV, 3: II. 228ff] \]

Although in the following lines he then retracts, declaring that this shall be his policy only until the tributes from Egypt have come, when these funds eventually do arrive, Saladin initially does not even offer the traditional messenger’s fee [V, 1: II. 9ff]. The messenger’s reaction is interesting: rather than condemning Saladin as mean, he acknowledges that Saladin has finally learnt how to deal with money: ‘So war ich ja der erste,/ Den Saladin mit Worten abzulohnen/ Doch endlich lernte?’ [V, 1: II. 15ff; \textit{my italics}] The Mameluck turns out to be economically more advanced than his royal master.

In \textit{Kabale und Liebe}, a play set in the lower middle class, the economic power of the bourgeois cannot come to the fore, yet bourgeois values are more vigorously articulated than in \textit{Nathan}. Moreover, they are portrayed as superior to the decadence of the court and there is a distinctive class pride that allows the bourgeois characters to despise upward social mobility. This is clearly expressed in Miller’s tirade against his wife’s ambitions and habits above her station in the first scene of Act I, and in his dispute with the President in II,6: ‘- mit Buhlschaften dien ich nicht. Solang der Hof da noch Vorrat hat, kommt die Lieferung nicht

\textsuperscript{52}Schlaffer, \textit{Der Bürger als Held}, p.105.
Language, Money, Metaphor

Perhaps one of the most intriguing aspects about eighteenth-century thought, in this context, are the many analogies drawn between money and language. Leibniz, Lavater, Hamann and Herder - to name only a few - frequently make comparisons between the way money and language function. Moreover, the money they refer to is no longer the minted gold of *Fortunatus* and his age, but it is money as medium of exchange, with a huge discrepancy between the exchange value stamped on it and the value inherent in the metal ingot.

In Germany, the eighteenth century also saw the transformation of German as a language only fit ‘pour les soldats et pour les chevaux’, as Voltaire wrote from Potsdam in 1750,\(^{53}\) to a literary and philosophical language of international repute. The efforts of the *Sprachgesellschaften* and of people like Bodmer, Breitinger, Wolff, Leibniz, and many others - not the least Lessing himself, famous for his clear and yet inspired writings, and for his *Wortgrübelei* in the search for truth - shaped the German language into its modern form. This intense concentration on language furthered the recognition of it as a system of signs, and ‘the

\(^{53}\)Walker and Wilkie, *Short History of the German Language*, p.47.
isomorphism between the function and value of monetary currencies in the proto-capitalistic economy and the function and value of words in the economy of linguistic truth' was explored.\(^4\) It is in accordance with this that Leibniz, one of the first and best known advocates of German, uses as early as 1719\(^5\) an analogy to functionalist money in order to highlight the representational character of words:

\[
\text{Daher braucht man oft die Wort als Ziffern, oder als Rechen-Pfennige, an statt der Bildnisse und Sachen, bis man Stufenweise zum Facit schreitet, und beym Vernunft-Schluß zur Sache selbst gelanget. Woraus erscheinet, wie ein Großes daran gelegen, daß die Worte als Vorbilde und gleichsam als Wechsel-Zeddel des Verstandes wohl gefasset, wohl unterschieden, zulänglich, häufig, leichtfließend und angenehm seyn.}\(^6\)

Interesting is not only the functionalist view of language, but also the recognition that Wechsel-Zeddel ease transactions. This is confirmed in another remark on the benefit of this 'Zeichenkunst', as Leibniz calls it, which he sees as the basis for productive knowledge, for with it 'findet man heut zu Tage Dinge aus, so die Alten nicht erreichen können, und dennoch bestehet die ganze Kunst in nichts, als im Gebrauch wol angebrachter Zeichen'.\(^7\) This recognition of money’s role in the proto-capitalistic economy, its ability to stimulate circulation and thus overall productivity, its comparison to words and to the search for truth

\(^4\)Gray, 'Buying into Signs', p.2.

\(^5\)Although the 'Unvorgreifliche Gedanken' were written in 1697, they were not published until 1719.


\(^7\)Ibid.
highlight much of the condition of Enlightenment thought and the underlying prompting of the bourgeois economy. The analogies between the Enlightenment ideals and the economic necessities outlined at the beginning of this chapter return here on an epistemological level. Linguistic signs help the discovery of truth just as money helps the growth of the economy; and this belief is paramount in the change in the perception of signs. Leibniz comes to the conclusion that the adequacy of linguistic signs to the discovery of truth ‘can no longer be defined in terms of the referentiality between signs and concepts, but can only be gauged by the efficient functioning of the epistemological equation: productivity becomes the sole measure of proper signs’. The theories of language and of monetary economy are both determined by the notion of productivity; which in turn reflects the transformation of the principle of economy that underlies any capitalistic society: from the principle of consumption to that of profit.

The concentration on the functionalism of language in the eighteenth century also expressed itself in the attitude towards metaphor. Since metaphor is essentially the replacement of one signifier by another in order to imply likeness or a certain degree of relation, it invites us to consider the fundamental operations of language and thought. As Hoey suggests, the very idea of metaphor undercuts the simple substitution of signifier for signified. Language per se is inherently metaphorical, always pointing beyond literal sense itself. The attitude to metaphor in the eighteenth century was somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, there was the rejection of the elaborate conceits of the baroque period, and far-fetched comparisons were condemned as lifeless and distasteful. Yet on the other hand, ‘die Metapher mit ihren Nebenbegriffen des Gleichnisses und der Allegorie wurde im 18.

\[\text{productivity}\]

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58 Gray, ‘Buying into Signs’, p.7. [my italics].

59 Bauer and Matis, Geburt der Neuzeit, p.35.

On another level, this mirrors the seventeenth/eighteenth-century attitude towards money: on the one hand the lament about the demise of the solid, commodity currency of gold, on the other the increasing awareness of the economic benefit of a purely functional currency. This coincidence is not surprising, since money and metaphor are intrinsically related. Money forms the *tertium comparationis* of commodity exchange in the same way as the signified forms the *tertium comparationis* of the exchanged signifiers.

Lessing himself called the metaphor his “Erbsünde”, and vigorously defended the use of metaphors even in abstract, theoretical writings: ‘“Ich halte es nicht allein für nützlich, sondern auch für nothwendig, Gründe in Bilder zu kleiden; und alle die Nebenbegriffe, welche die einen oder die andern erwecken, durch Anspielungen zu bezeichnen.”’62 Lessing regarded the metaphor as a natural aid for illustrating and clarifying thought and abstract concepts, as long as the comparison is natural, likely, and ‘ungekünstelt’.63 Moreover, his interest in etymology and his *Wortgrübelei* led him to the point where he recognized the inherent metaphorical nature of language per se: ‘“Der Begriff ist der Mann; das sinnliche Bild des Begriffes ist das Weib; und die Worte sind die Kinder, welche beyde hervorbringen.”’64 Words, as the result of joining concepts and their images, remained for Lessing more than arbitrary signs, they had a revelatory meaning which the poet could uncover.

Part of the beauty of the language in *Nathan* resides in the metaphors made by many of the characters: the parable of rings itself, Nathan’s reminder to the Tempelherr that every good man, like a tree, needs space [II, 5: ll. 492ff], Recha’s likening of her soul to a field into

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61 Schröder, *Sprache und Drama*, p.78.

62 Cited in ibid, p.78.

63 Göbel, *Bild und Sprache*, pp.16f.

64 Cited in Schröder, *Sprache und Drama*, p.81.
which Nathan has sown reason [III. 1: ll. 48ff], or Saladin’s remark on his unconcern for a person’s faith, since it does not matter which bark surrounds a tree [IV. 4: ll. 305ff] - these are only a few examples of the many metaphors in a play which in itself is a spun out tertium comparationis of an ideal human world as one big intercommunicating family.

Interestingly, in the light of the demand on signs to be productive, surprisingly few monetary metaphors in Nathan focus on the issue of productivity, profit, and interest. In the opening scene, in which Daja recounts Recha’s rescue by the Tempelherr, she describes the life of the young man as a profit resulting from Saladin’s mercy: ‘Ohn’ ihn./ Der seinen unvermuteten Gewinst/ Frisch wieder wagte, war es aus mit ihr’ [I, 1: ll. 89ff]. Notable is the fact that the whole phraseology of the sentence is reminiscent of business terminology: his life was an unsuspected profit with which he chose to gamble. When talking to the Tempelherr about Saladin’s mercy in sparing his life, Nathan comments that this gave to him ‘ein doppelt, dreifach Leben’ [II. 7: ll. 562f], echoing the ‘Zins vom Zins der Zinsen’ in the talk with Al-Hafi [I, 3: l. 429]. The greatest metaphor, the coin comparison and the ensuing parable of rings, explores the interplay of the real and the functional, and presents the functional as a means to establish the real. Nathan pays tribute to the way in which modern coin, ‘die man aufs Brett/ Nur zählen darf’ [III.6: ll. 356f], eases transactions, yet it is, in the end, not comparable to the inherent value of old coin. Metaphors may be an aid to thought towards the discovery of truth, but they are not the end in themselves. Modern coin, albeit undoubtedly beneficial to the economy and thus to society, must not be confused with gold.

Nathan der Weise has been called ‘das gesprächigste aller Dramen’, and it is indeed language that is the main carrier of the action. Non-linguistic stimuli to action are almost absent, especially since the events that propel the plot (Recha’s rescue) and the explanation for Nathan’s humanitarianism (the slaughter of his family, the doubt in God, and the adoption

65Ibid. p.248.
of Recha) are explicitly narrated. It is primarily by speaking that Nathan draws the Tempelherr on his side, and it is the narration of the parable of rings that leaves Saladin ashamed of himself and his base desire for Nathan’s money. It is language as medicine that cures Recha’s effusion about the Tempelherr being an angel: ‘Recha! Recha! Es ist Arznei, nicht Gift, was ich dir reiche’ [I, 2: ll. 354f], and it is language that serves as the identification of other human beings. Not only are all the people in the play ranked according to their willingness and ability to hold a genuinely interactive conversation, with Nathan at the top and the Patriarch and Daja at the bottom of the scale, but it is also language which enables Saladin to identify his brother as the father of the Tempelherr:

NATHAN. [...]  
Er sprach am liebsten Persisch...  
SALADIN. Persisch? Persisch?  
Was will ich mehr? - Er ist’s! Er war es! [V, 8: ll.667f]

Although it is Saladin’s need for money that prompts the unfolding of mankind as one large family, it is language, the other medium of exchange, that is the nexus of the understanding and revelation of this inherent relatedness of mankind.

As much as Nathan can be termed a ‘Drama der Verständigung’, Kabale und Liebe is a drama of non-understanding, of non-communication, of not wanting to listen and subsequent misinterpretations. Where Nathan operates to great effect with carefully chosen,  

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67In this connection, it is worth mentioning B. Kieffer’s ‘Tragedy in the Logocentric World: Schiller’s Kabale und Liebe’, German Studies Review, 5 (1982), 205-220, which is a splendid analysis of the play from the angle of Herder’s Über den Ursprung der Sprache. Moreover, Kieffer identifies language as the
meaningful words, *Kabale und Liebe* thrives on lies, on signifiers without signified. Even Luise is aware of the split between words and what they are meant to designate, as in the scene where Wurm forces her to write the letter to the Hofmarschall: she senses ‘diese lichtscheue Botschaft fürchtet das Geräusche der Worte’ ([III, 6]), admits not to understand the term *Kriminalprozeß*, and comments that von Kalb’s name is as alien to her ears as the words in the letter are to her heart ([III, 6]). However, it is Ferdinand who is the most affected by the signifier/signified split, weighing the lies he believes Luise told him against the reality of his love and Luise’s behaviour ([IV, 2]). Ferdinand is unable to decipher meaning behind words - to the point where he cannot tell truth from lies, as the clash with von Kalb shows ([IV, 3]):

**HOFMARSCHALL.** Mon Dieu! Mein Gott! Ich spreche ja - So hören Sie doch nur -

Ihr Vater - Ihr leibeigener Vater -

**FERDINAND** *(grim miger).* Hat seine Tochter an dich verkuppelt? Und wie weit kamst du mit ihr? Ich ermorde dich, oder bekenne!

**HOFMARSCHALL.** Sie rasen. Sie hören nicht. Ich sah sie nie. Ich kenne sie nicht.

Ich weiß gar nichts von ihr. [IV, 3]

Ferdinand misinterprets ‘Ihr Vater’ as ‘ihr Vater’, and he is simply convinced that the Hofmarschall is denying Luise to save his own skin. Unable to solve anything through language, he resorts to *buying* Luise in order to exact revenge.\(^{68}\)

Where *Nathan* is informed by the ideals of the Enlightenment, underpinned by the main action carrier of the play, as the means with which characters compose their own reality, and most importantly here, calls *Kabale und Liebe* a tragedy of language.

\(^{68}\) That Ferdinand and Luise are also generally aware of the gap between signifier and signified comes to the fore in their desire to find a "Sprache des Herzens", a perfected form of language in which every signifier is both fully understood and completely appropriate to its corresponding signified, allowing for total communication between two minds’. Kieffer, *Tragedy in the Logocentric World*, p.214.
contemporary economic developments, Kabale und Liebe reflects on the vulnerability of the bourgeoisie in the face of absolutism and the all-pervading desire for wealth. As discussed above, the issue of possession pervades the play from the outset, and money and exchange recur as metaphors throughout Kabale und Liebe. From the opening scenes to the tragic end, most human interactions are expressed through financial terminology. The love of Ferdinand and Luise is a ‘Kommerz’ [I, 1], Wurm has been ‘in die Welt Gottes hineingeschachert’ [I, 2], Luise is like gold [I, 4], virginity is like a new coin [I, 5], Lady Milford sold her honour to the Duke [II, 1], the Duke can ‘Handlungen münzen wie seine Dreier’ [II, 3], a child’s duty to his parents is a ‘Schuldbrief’ [II, 6], the Duke has broken the contract with Lady Milford to make his country happy [IV, 9]^⁶⁹ - the examples are legion.

Monetary metaphors are in almost every scene of this drama, reflecting the mental state of a society shortly before the onset of the industrial revolution, but already with a proto-capitalistic system which measures the value of people and their actions not by any human yardstick, but by money and profit. Eder also sees the motive of money as typical for eighteenth-century German bourgeois drama, and locates its reason in the fact that the German middle classes become increasingly aware that the only way to gain access to political power in the long run must be on the grounds of their economic power. ‘Damit würde aus sozialhistorischer Sicht erklärlch, weshalb das Motiv des “Geldes” in den bürgerlichen Schauspielen der Zeit dermaßen konstant auftritt.’^⁷⁰

Another significant sign of the times in both plays is the distinction made between functionalist money and gold coinage. Analogous to the awareness that language is a system of signifiers denoting a signified is the ambiguity inherent in the capitalist economy based on a system of value tokens rather than on actual gold. In the course of the nineteenth century

^⁶⁹ This idea of a “Vertrag” quite obviously reminds one of Rousseau’s Du Contrat Social.

the process begins to accelerate dramatically once coins become increasingly functional: the next two chapters will examine the impact of the industrial revolution and the explosion of finance in the nineteenth century.
Faust II

Faust II may well be called Goethe’s most controversial work. Published shortly after his death, in a literary era caught between late Romanticism and the first stirrings of Jungdeutschland, it suffered a very harsh reception, marked by a profound lack of understanding of Goethe’s intentions and the form of expression he had chosen. Goethe himself expected nothing else:

Ganz ohne Frage würd’ es mir unendliche Freude machen, meinen werten, durchaus dankbar anerkannten, weitverteilten Freunden auch bei Lebzeiten diese sehr ernsten Scherze zu widmen, mitzuteilen und ihre Erwiderung zu vernehmen. Der Tag aber ist wirklich so absurd und konfus, daß ich mich überzeuge, meine redlichen, lange verfolgten Bemühungen um dieses seltsame Gebäu würden schlecht belohnt und an den Strand getrieben wie ein Wrack in Trümmern daliegen und von dem Düenschutt der Stunden zunächst überschüttet werden.¹

What most of the critics did not see, or did not want to see, was the fact that the sequel to Faust I was no longer the intense poetical portrayal of an individual striving for knowledge and understanding of the world, but rather an encyclopedic attempt at describing the development of humanity from Antiquity through to Goethe’s own days, and projecting into the future. Moreover, Faust II is the Divine Comedy of the Modern Age; Goethe takes it upon himself to depict the transition from one stage of mankind’s development to another and to explore the

implications of such transitions. The “serious jokes” mentioned in the above quotation not only make it clear that irony is a property of *Faust II*, but Goethe also uses it to great effect when depicting transitional phases in the development of mankind and the resultant inevitability of clashing worlds. Much of the fun Mephisto makes of the court and the Emperor in Act I derives from their unawareness that the devil’s changes and suggestions they so willingly embrace, especially the paper money, are phenomena that belong to an age to come, and can therefore only be destructive of their feudal world. The *Mummenschanz* itself serves not only as a means to comment upon current and possible future economic and social developments, but also as a background to, a kind of bridge between, the Renaissance and modern consumerism. As will be discussed later, the intertwining of typical Renaissance carneval motives with modern economic theories and the resulting consumer society is particularly rich in ironic moments and notions. Moreover, Goethe mingles time frames and sacrifices consistency as he passes through various eras of humanity, many incidents of which serve a satirical course. The most poignant may be Act III, which has many ironic moments in its portrayal of the clash of Antiquity and the later Middle Ages.

In his analysis of the destruction of feudalism and the rise of the bourgeoisie Goethe singles out three main factors. Firstly, the advances made in the sciences, which led not only to a new world view as the Ptolemaic system collapsed and the doctrine of a divinely appointed creation was increasingly called into question, but also to the increased control man gained over nature thanks to the technological progress being made during the industrial revolution. Mankind’s growing power over nature is very much a theme of the *Mummenschanz*, and it culminates in Act II with the actual creation of a human being in a laboratory, and in Act V in Faust’s project to reclaim land from the sea. The second factor Goethe identifies is the growth of individualism, (helped by money, as we shall see, and very much a theme of Act I), which
challenged the traditional structures of feudal society and forms of social cohesion, and was both fuelled by and contributed to the industrial revolution. He also addresses the dialectical tension in this notion, since individualism also produced deprivation and conformity in the (working-class) masses, which he portrays in the army of halfdead creatures (*Lemuren*) at the end of Act V, and in some scenes in Act I, as will be discussed. Goethe was acutely aware of these victims of change who remained, bewildered and witless, in the background as the industrial revolution gathered pace. The painful image of the 'Aus Bändern, Sehnen und Gebin/ geflickte(n) Halbnaturen' [ll. 11513f] is one of the most compelling and telling in the drama. Part of the anonymous workforce Faust has ordered Mephisto to obtain ‘durch Genuß und Strenge,/ Bezahle, locke, presse bei!’ [ll. 11553ff], they are shovelling away incomprehendingly, sacrificed to their masters’ need for maximum profit. The third strand in Goethe’s diagnosis of modernity is his perception of the upsurge of secular thinking, which led to a loss of authority not only for the Church, but also for the feudal system, since its structure relied on an assumption of divine validation.

For my purposes Act I is all-important because Goethe there portrays the creation of paper money as the engine of a new money-based economy, in which a speculative ethos comes to the fore. Scholars have paid considerable attention to the themes of (paper) money and economy in Act I.Already in 1947 Georg Lukács identified Mephisto’s paper money as an

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2 In sequence:
instrument of capitalism which will accelerate the decline of feudalism; whereas Emrich, ten
years later, denies that the paper money has any real consequence, but claims that Mephisto is
advocating a theory of labour as cure for the Reich's problems. Staiger (1959) sees the liquid
gold of the Mummenschanz as the Philosopher's Stone and focuses on gold's corrupting
influence as mentioned by the Gnomes (ll. 5856ff); yet it is Metscher in 1976 who first draws
attention to the fact that Act I depicts the bourgeoisie as the now dominant socio-economic
force. Schlaffer's work of 1981 remains an authoritative analysis of the whole of Faust II as an
allegory of the socio-economic changes and developments of the nineteenth century; and
Mahl's detailed compilation of Goethe's economic knowledge (1982) confirms how aware
Goethe was of the economic foundations of modern culture. Binswanger, in 1985, sees the
work as depicting the economic developments of the nineteenth century in terms of the
alchemical process; whereas Kaiser, five years later, regards the paper money as a symbol for
nature's resources harnessed in the service of capitalist production. Geißler (1991) insists that
the paper money is the embodiment of the worthlessness of an abstract and artificial value
system; and Kaiser, in 1994, sees the whole of Faust II as a portrayal of what happens if the
world is turned into capital, and he regards the paper money, together with the masquerade, as
a demonstration of the illusions and Illusionierbarkeit of mankind. Harnacher, in the same year,
offers an interesting interpretation of Act I by drawing parallels between the productive forces

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(Europäische Hochschulschriften: Reihe 1, Deutsche Sprache und Literatur, Bd 547);
H. C. Binswanger, Geld und Magie: Deutung und Kritik der modernen Wirtschaft anhand von Goethes
"Faust", Stuttgart: Weitbrecht/Thienemann, 1985;
München: Wilhelm Fink, 1990, pp.45-59;
R. Geißler, ‘Grillparzers Goldenes Vließ und Goethe’s Faust als Kritik neuzeitlicher Geschichte’,
Rombach, 1994 (Reihe: Rombach aktuell);
P. Michelsen, 'Der Rat des Narren: Die Staatsratsszene in Goethe's Faust II', Jahrbuch des Freien
Deutschen Hochstifts, 1996, 84-129;
N. Vazsonyi, 'Searching for "The Order of Things": Does Goethe's Faust II suffer from the "Fatal
in both language and money in the establishment of simulacra, but makes the mistake of ignoring the disastrous consequences the bills have later in the play. Michelsen (1996) sees in Act I a demonstration of the Narrheit at work in a greedy and declining feudal court which blindly believes the promises of easy money; and Vazsonyi, also in 1996, takes a refreshingly new look at Faust II in the light of Hayek's theory of the fatal conceit and Foucault's The Order of Things, suggesting that Goethe deliberately composed a work which defies definitive interpretation because he foresaw the thought of post-modernism. Koepnick (1998), however, argues that Faust II depicts the possibility of resurrecting mythological meaning if the old is translated into a new language befitting the condition of the modern age, and he sees the response given to the paper money as an illustration of what happens when signifier and signified are confused in this act of translation.

Goethe had a deep interest in and knowledge of the economic theories and practices at the onset of the industrial revolution as it was beginning to impinge on Germany. In fact, Goethe was acquainted with all the economic teachings that had emerged throughout his lifetime, notably the physiocratic theories, Smith, Ricardo and the teachings of Saint-Simon. It is difficult to establish Goethe's exact position in this field, but he was renowned for his concern for the poor, especially as far as questions of taxation were concerned, and for his criticism of too liberal economic theories that were meant to work by themselves, yet would inevitably lead to the weaker being exploited by the stronger. Although it was only in his later life (after 1814) that he explicitly renounced those liberal theories and turned to 'jenen Lehren, die das Gemeinwohl zum Zentrum wirtschaftlichen Handelns machten und staatliche Eingriffe zugunsten von mehr Gerechtigkeit und Humanität in das Wirtschaftsleben forderten', he had

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3 See Mahl, Goethes ökonomisches Wissen, for details.

4 Ibid., p.120.
always favoured fair taxation for the poor. When, as young man, he took over the post of economics minister at the Weimar Court, he not only tried to abolish the right of the tax collectors to live in the debtor's house - at the latter's expense - but also appealed to Karl August, Duke of Weimar, to be lenient with his subjects on the question of taxation:

Bei denen ohne Frage überspannten Abgaben der Unterthanen ist ihnen die möglichsste Nachsicht zu gönnen. Es giebt Zeiten im Jahre wo der Bauer nichts hat wo man ihm also eine Frist geben muss. Es sind Umstände in die man versetzt wird durch Krankheit und Unglücksfälle der Seinigen wo man ihn gleichfalls nicht hart halten kann. [...] [Steuer-]Reste sind also bei guter Aufsicht der Einnehmer und bei dem besten Willen der Unterthanen doch unvermeidlich.⁴

Throughout his life, Goethe was concerned with the welfare of the poor, and in many of the scenes in Faust II, most notably in the carneval and in Act V, we see him counting the human cost of feudalism as well as of modernity.

Yet most of all, Goethe saw with an amazing clarity where the developments of his age were leading, both in social as well as in economic terms. He recognized his time was entering a new epoch; and Faust II deals as much with the demise of feudalism as it does with the rise of the bourgeois economy and society and the consequences this will have. In a time of confusion, his work stands out as a hybrid being, depicting the end of an epoch and identifying contemporary tendencies and theories, projecting the direction they may take. My reading of

Faust II will take into account the special position it holds whilst examining, and using as a focus, the issues of money and the particular language and style Goethe chose for the portrayal of his ideas. My investigation will focus on three major topic areas: the decline of feudalism, the inroads of modernity, and the predictions Goethe made for the future. Central to all three concerns is the role of paper money as the symbol for modern speculative economics.

Goethe’s consideration of money as an economic and social force has to be seen under a twofold aspect: firstly, the power and importance money per se gains in the capitalist economy, and secondly, his criticism of this process and especially of its palpable manifestation, paper money.6

The Old World Order in Disarray

The court Mephisto enters suffers from two interrelated misfortunes, a lack of funds and an incompetent but extravagant ruler. This is hinted at from the beginning, first of all in the Emperor’s bewilderment as to why his realm is in trouble, this is a Rätsel for him with which his courtiers seem to plague him just as Mephisto is being puzzling with his first speech [ll.4743-4750]. The devil appears here for the first time in Faust II, and Goethe takes this opportunity for the first collision of two stages in the development of mankind. Posing riddles was part of the traditional role of a court jester, yet whereas Mephisto fulfills this demand and will also offer to solve the other riddle - the chaos the empire is in - he does so by introducing a medium alien to feudal society, paper money, thereby perpetuating its downfall rather than saving it from disaster. Part of the irony of this scene is that the court, despite some premonitions, remains blind to what the devil is implying. Starting each of his questions either with Was or Wen, it soon becomes apparent that he tells the court they are dealing with the devil who will “cure”

6 As Lukács has pointed out, paper money is the ‘Symbol der Geldherrschaft’. Lukács, Goethe und seine Zeit, p.162.
their sorrows with easy money. Yet it is impossible for these people and their medieval frame of mind to understand what Mephisto is getting at. Moreover, by temporarily relieving the realm of its problems through economic means, Mephistopheles undergoes a transformation from court jester to economic magician, by suggesting and implementing, as we will see, a form of alchemy to produce wealth.

In the light of the carnaval season approaching, the Emperor is rather unwilling to be told about the state his country is in, and he only listens 'weil ihr meint, es ging' nicht anders an' [l. 4770; my italics]. The picture his Chancellor paints is grim: law and order have been turned upside down, corruption is rife, and neither possession nor life is safe from the hands of robbers. The only person who could help is the Emperor, only he can provide 'Gerechtigkeit! - [...] Es liegt an ihm, dem Volk es zu gewähren' [ll. 4775ff] but, as we have already seen, the monarch neither understands nor cares about the situation. Although it is not until the speech of the army commander that the lack of money is outspokenly made another factor responsible for the chaos (since the soldiers now plunder in order to obtain material rewards [ll. 4825ff]), the Chancellor has already implied that the court’s wasteful practices have added to the destitution: ‘Wenn alle schädigen, alle leiden,/ Geht selbst die Majestät zu Raub’ [ll. 4810f].

What Schiller depicted so dramatically in Kabale und Liebe, the wastefulness of the courts at the expense of the longsuffering people, the indifference of the rulers to the lot of their subjects, Goethe condenses into the speeches of the courtiers. The Emperor is portrayed as one of those many rulers whom economic theorists from Quesnay to Gülch had warned against simply increasing taxes in order to meet their spiralling costs at court. François Quesnay, the father of the physiocratic economic theory, saw it as a ruler’s prime task to further the welfare of his people and agricultural production, since he viewed nature as the only truly productive

7 Cf. the previous chapter of this thesis.
force. Moreover, he asked the rulers to exempt the peasants from tax, and to tax only those who belonged to the “sterile” classes, e.g. craftsmen, doctors, traders, estate owners. Peasants should keep whatever was needed for the upkeep of the land, the crop, and the animals, and their own needs, and should hand over their surpluses. Even the more liberal Adam Smith, when discussing the industrialization of a country, was concerned with the working poor, and the theorists around Saint-Simon favoured a system approximating to socialism. Most German economic theorists, from Schlettwein, Schlosser, Möser to Büsch, Sartorius and Güllich, followed either the line of the physiocrats or that of Smith, in the latter case with an increasing tendency to warn about too liberal an economy. Yet what all theorists shared was a concern that many rulers simply imposed taxes and spent the resulting revenue without any regard for the economic need of the country and its people, wasting the money on personal pleasure rather than investing in roads and canals to facilitate trade and the distribution of food and produce.8

Some of the reasons why this care for economic and social needs was difficult to achieve for many sovereigns are addressed by the Schatzmeister [II. 4831-4851]: the mutual assistance between rulers is on the decline, the vassals of the Reich no longer feel under any obligation towards their lord but want to be independent, most of the (money-raising) powers have been taken away from the court: as a result everybody looks after their own interests and the monarch is in financial problems. However, to force any contributions from the aristocracy was a risky business, since the sovereigns relied on their political goodwill to stay in power. Furthermore - and this exacerbated the financial burden - most monarchs felt the necessity to retain their most influential vassals at court in order to keep a watchful eye on them. This meant they had to receive board and lodgings adequate to their position, moreover, they also expected to be entertained. Additionally, in order to keep them busy and contented, aristocrats were

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usually paid tax-free salaries, and they held influential administrative posts. Thus effectively it was only the peasants and working people who could be taxed and forced to deliver their contributions; so it is no surprise to hear the Marschalk declaring that food was still plentiful as ‘Die Deputate, sichre Renten/ Sie gehen noch so ziemlich ein’ [ll. 4859f]. Yet the court still lives beyond its financial means, and this has forced the ruler to borrow money. In summary, then, Goethe depicts the decline of feudalism as due to the increasing profligacy of the court.

In this context Mephisto’s analysis that the root of the Emperor’s problems is money turns out to be a devilish one, and the suggestions he makes to cure it will be even more demonic, since the Emperor’s lack of money is largely due to a lack of authority and power. The introduction of paper money inevitably brings chaos as paper totally relies on the trust of its users, which in turn is based on the trust in the issuing authority’s strength. Yet Mephisto does not even attempt to recommend a political change, but instead bases his advice on a law that is centuries old. His idea to unearth the hidden treasures that had been buried ‘in jenen Schreckensläufen,/ Wo Menschenfluten Land und Volk ersäuften’ [ll.4931f], is not as bizarre as often thought. On the contrary, Adam Smith points out that

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\text{treasure-trove was in those times [feudalism] considered as no contemptible part of the revenue of the greatest sovereigns in Europe. It consisted in such treasure as was found concealed in the earth, and to which no particular person could prove any right.}^9
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There can be no doubt that Goethe knew this law, if not through his post as economics minister at the court in Weimar, then surely through his knowledge of Smith as given in the shortened

version by Sartorius, or through conversation with Sartorius, with whom he enjoyed a close friendship. So as such the devil’s suggestion is not out of tune with real practices at the time, as the Schatzmeister confirms. However, the Chancellor’s suspicion that there is something wrong with Mephisto’s advice [ll. 4941f] is immediately substantiated by the words the devil puts into the mouth of the Astrologer [ll. 4955-4970]. He gives a brief summary of the alchemical process, disguised in a commentary on the planets, as it was believed that there were planet-metal analogies. The alchemists thought that gold was a component of every metal, and the aim of alchemy was to let this gold in the metal grow. Mephisto is thus implying that one can convert buried treasures into riches just as alchemy can transform metals into gold. Thereby the introduction of paper money is legitimated: since it is alchemy’s ultimate goal to produce wealth, it does not matter which worthless substance is transformed into a valuable one - it could equally well be the transmutation of paper into money. Similarly, it becomes possible to interpret an economy based on industrialization and speculation, with its large profits for entrepreneurs and financiers, as a new form of alchemy, since it is part of the idea behind alchemy to create wealth without having to make the effort of earning it. Both economy and alchemy then appear as related forms of magic, and Mephisto turns from alchemist to economic magician with his suggestion to produce limitless wealth by turning the gold hidden in the ground into paper money.

The German words for gold and money - Gold and Geld - throw an interesting light on their relation here: all it takes to produce the one from the other is the change of a single vowel. Although this appears to suggest that the terms are cognates, this is by no means the case, yet

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10 Binswanger, Geld und Magie, p.19.
12 NHG Geld (‘money, coin, cash’) is derived from MHG and OHG gîlt (‘recompense, revenue, income, money), and the noun to the MHG verb gelten and OHG gîltan (‘to repay, cost, requite, compensate’), which are cognate to AS gildan and, from there, to E to yield. NHG Gold (‘gold’), however, is from
their seeming relatedness underlines the way they are perceived to be similar as far as their practical usage, as a means of exchange, is concerned. However, when Gold becomes Geld it is basically alchemy in reverse - turning a precious substance into a cheap one. Instead of making use of the gold gained, it is stored away, remaining elusive in the background of most economic transactions, whereas its materially far less valuable representative - paper or cheap coinage - is used to negotiate not only the value of the gold, but basically (economic) reality as such. The ease with which money and gold are confused not only baffles the Emperor, as will be discussed, but it is also a phenomenon typical of the nineteenth century, reflected in the many speculative bubbles and bursts that haunted it, and, more poetically, in Thomas Love Peacock’s Paper Money Lyrics (1837), a collection of poems devoted to the evils and disarrays caused by the very confusion of paper money and real wealth.

In Faust II the paper money will at first fulfill the exact same functions of gold coins, it will bring ‘Paläste, Gärten, Brüstlein, rote Wangen’ [l. 4968], as we shall see. In the meantime, Mephisto’s promises are recognized as Chymisterei [l. 4974], another word for alchemy, and the Emperor as well as the courtiers remain sceptical even after the devil has described the treasures in great detail. Knowing that ‘Hat etwas Wert, es muß zu Tage kommen’ [l. 5034], the Emperor orders Mephisto to unearth the promised hidden riches, yet the devil’s reply is more than ambiguous:

Nimm Hack’ und Spaten, grabe selber,

Die Bauernarbeit macht dich groß,

Und eine Herde goldner Kälber,

MHG golt(d), OHG gold, which is a basic IE word with a very different meaning: ‘The primary sense of the root ghel, of which Gold is a participle derivative, is “to be yellow”; akin to Sanskrit hiranya, ‘gold’, from hari, ‘gold yellow’ [...]’ Kluge, An Etymological Dictionary of the German Language, pp.112 & 122.
There is an obvious meaning in his words in the sense of finding real treasure through digging, most notably precious stones and gold which can be fashioned into jewellery: ‘Kannst du dich selbst, wirst die Geliebte schmücken’ [l. 5044]. However, the mentioning of the Golden Calf immediately overshadows the devil’s words and points towards the problematic issues inherent in his suggestion. The gold of the calf echoes the hidden gold on which the paper money is to be secured, and thus highlights the wrongness of the paper money through the idol. By bringing the illusive gold behind the notes into connection with the Golden Calf, Mephisto actually implies that the paper money will bring no good. Yet there is, as so often with Mephisto, also another serious message in his words. His recommendation to the Emperor also entails the sound advice that actual work is the way to acquire wealth, and the fact that he refers to it as Bauernarbeit betrays him as a Physiocrat.¹³ The Physiocrats viewed nature and her products as the only real wealth a country produces, and consequently the peasants were seen to hold the most important position in society, since it was they who were responsible for the crops. Quesney calls them the only productive class, who let ‘durch die Kultur des Gebietes die Reichtümer der Nation jährlich wieder entstehen’.¹⁴

Yet the Emperor’s impatient ‘Nur gleich, nur gleich! Wie lange soll es währen!’ [l.5047] gives Mephisto the go-ahead to begin his satanic games, suggesting the start of the Mummenschanz during which the Emperor will sign orders to produce the disastrous paper money. At the end of this scene Mephistopheles comments on the court’s silliness in blindly believing his promises of unearned riches:

¹³Hamacher, in ‘Faust, Geld’, p. 142, goes even further and suggests that Mephisto is actually retelling Aesop’s fable of the farmer and his three sons here and in ll. 5007ff.

¹⁴F. Quesney, Allgemeine Grundsätze der wirtschaftlichen Regierung eines ackerbauteibenden Reiches, cited in Mahl, Goethes ökonomisches Wissen, p.145. [my italics].
Wie sich Verdienst und Glück verketten,
Das fällt den Toren niemals ein.
Wenn sie den Stein der Weisen hätten,
Der Weise mangelte dem Stein. [II. 506ff]

Verdienst here is of course meant in its double meaning of achievement, effort, and profit. Mephisto indicates why the paper money experiment will fail, and the Mummenschanz supplies further illustration in its prefiguration of the consequences and necessities of the industrial revolution; with which I will deal in a later section. Mephisto rounds off the alchemy connotations by mentioning the Philosopher’s Stone which, if paper money is to be the new form of wealth, must be production and economic activity (Verdienst). Goethe knew about the necessary alliance between money and increased production through his study of Johann Georg Büsch’s *Abhandlung von dem Geldsumlauf in anhaltender Rücksicht auf die Staatswirtschaft und Handlung*, who warned against confusing the productive effects of money with its own sterile character.\(^{15}\) Money (as opposed to gold), since it is not worth anything in itself, requires work and production to provide the signs of wealth for which it can be exchanged: which is exactly what the Emperor is unwilling to instigate, and what none of the people receiving the paper money understands, as we shall see.

So what exactly is the paper money created at Mephistopheles’s instigation? The writing on the notes reads:

Zu wissen sei es jedem, der’s begehrt:

Der Zettel hier ist tausend Kronen wert.
Ihm liegt gesichert, als gewisses Pfand,
Unzahl vergrabnen Guts im Kaiserland.
Nun ist gesorgt, damit der reiche Schatz,
Sogleich gehoben, diene zum Ersatz. [ll. 6057ff]

The most immediate shortfall of those notes lies of course in the dubious nature of their security. Although, as mentioned above, treasures were a recognized and important source of income for the rulers throughout feudalism, it is impossible to secure money on something that has not yet been discovered, let alone unearthed. This is the best illustration of the notion that paper money is 'ein Wechsel auf eine noch nicht vollbrachte Leistung';¹⁶ and since the work will not be forthcoming, disaster is looming. Moreover, these words illustrate the *Schein - Sein* problem of the money. Although the *Zettel* are a tangible reality that will go on to circulate, the gold mentioned to secure it is by no means a given certainty; and the German term *Geldschein* is useful to illustrate some of the major points here. First of all, it is necessary to look at the *Mummenschanz* and the gold which Faust brings on for the Emperor and people to see [ll.5709ff]. Excited by the many riches contained in the chest, the audience wants to capture it, yet the *Herold* tries to hold them back and bring them to their senses by pointing out that the gold is nothing but 'ein artiger Schein' [l. 5733]. This *Schein* of the gold is transformed into Mephisto’s *Geldschein*, yet like the gold in the carnival, the paper is only *scheinbar* money as it is secured on unspecified treasures.

With the bills secured on putative treasures in the ground, Mephisto’s paper money emerges as a hybrid between John Law’s fateful notes issued in Scotland and the paper money

¹⁶Staiger, Goethe, p.284.
experiments of the Bank of England at the turn of the eighteenth century. Like Mephisto, Law had proclaimed that 'the industry of Scotland languished for the want of money to employ it'. Law's paper money had also been secured on the total value of real estate (similar to the German Rentenmark issued after the hyperinflation in 1923), and the main problem leading to the collapse of the system was Law's conviction that it should be possible to increase the paper money to almost any amount, matching the uncontrolled issue of Mephisto's notes [11.607ff]. On the other hand, by making the notes a symbol for gold, the devil's bills acquire features of the English paper money issued in the 1790s.

The Bank of England circulated paper money secured on its gold reserves to a total value of £12 million in the years 1793-1795, gradually reducing the amount to £3.6 million by 12 February 1797, the last date the notes were redeemable. The experiment per se was quite successful, but the biggest problem the bank faced was the actual payment should all holders of notes choose to exchange them. As Sartorius points out, the measures taken in order to avoid the collapse of the bank and any damage to the economy - and the fact that they were successful - were unique at the time, yet they are relevant here since they appear in different shapes in Faust II. As outlined in chapter one, the belief in the value and exchangeability of money is the precondition for it to be accepted as a universal form of payment: this is even more so the case with paper money, since paper as such is a relatively worthless commodity. The English Parliament made a first step towards forcing the public to accept paper money as legal tender.

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(which it is now in most countries) and 'autorisirte die Bank, ihre baaren Zahlungen einzustellen'.\textsuperscript{20} There is evidence to suggest that people not directly employed in the banking or trade sector tended to reduce the face value of the notes.\textsuperscript{21} But the bank's authority was heeded by the traders and merchant bankers of the City who continued to accept the notes without any diminution of their face value. It was they who, by accepting the symbol of gold for the real metal, instilled the trust and belief into notes that were no longer convertible, but were merely tokens of a gold that was now elusive - like the treasures Mephisto evokes to secure his paper money. This vital trust in what is now no more than words and numbers is exactly what the Emperor himself cannot believe when he hears about the overwhelming success the paper money has had:

Und meinen Leuten gilt's für gutes Gold?

Dem Heer, dem Hofe gnügt's zu vollem Sold?

So sehr mich's wundert, muß ich's gelten lassen. [II. 6083ff]

Yet it is exactly this belief in the validity of paper money without which it cannot exist and function – since paper money, contrary to coined precious metal, is worthless in itself - just as paper money, much more than metal currency, requires circulation in order to obtain value. Since notes in themselves are worth nothing, they have to be exchanged in order to take on the shape of what is considered to be wealth. Unlike gold coins, which can actually store value, paper money is unsuitable for hording - there is no miser in nineteenth literature who collects notes - but instead relies on and encourages spending, as the Marschalk's words illustrate:

\textsuperscript{20}Ibid. p.529.

\textsuperscript{21}This also echos in the words of the Marschalk on the morning after the creation of the notes: 'Man honoriert daselbst ein jedes Blatt/ Durch Gold und Silber, freilich mit Rabatt.' [II. 6089ff].
Goethe's sophisticated use of the German language in *Gold* and *gelen* underlines the confusion that is about to embrace the empire: the people accept the notes as their *Sold* because they take them to be real gold. They do not realize that *Geld* derives from *gelen*, rather than from *Gold,* and that it can only act like gold (here in the sense of means of exchange) successfully if it is specifically agreed that the paper will be legal tender; the Emperor's people may fulfill the requirements of trusting in and spending the notes, but they make the fatal mistake of confusing symbol and symbolized. They treat the bills as a new form of wealth, rather than recognizing them to be a new means with which to acquire and generate wealth. The uses the notes are put to in *Faust II* are largely sterile, as the speeches of the *Marschalk* and Mephisto illustrate: people merely consume, be it in the form of food, clothes, or entertainment [ll. 6088-6102] - without in the process enabling any productivity of their own. The Emperor himself, albeit commenting on the fact that the money does not change the character of those who receive it, expresses his surprise at the idleness of the recipients: ‘Ich hoffte Lust und Mut zu neuen Taten;/ Doch wer euch kennt, der wird euch leicht erraten’ [ll. 6151f]. It is at this point that, as Mephisto himself calls it later, the paper money truly becomes ‘falscher Reichtum’ [l.10245]. The only one to treat it correctly is the Jester, who decides to convert it into real estate, and thereby into something productive, since the Physiocratic theory regarded the agrarian economy as a truly productive force.\(^{23}\)

Another interesting feature of the notes is that they are all identical copies of one original - ‘Durch Tausendkünstler schnell vertausendfacht’ [l. 6072]: ‘die virtuell grenzenlose numerische Progression der Assignaten, weit entfernt, ein Inkrement an materiellem Reichtum

\(^{22}\)Cf. footnote no. 12.

zu repräsentieren, verdankt sich bloß dem immer gleichen Stempeldruck und also der Reproduktion nicht etwa einer Sache, sondern des Schemas der Reproduzierbarkeit selbst.\textsuperscript{24}

To pursue the ramifications of Hamacher's argument: Goethe is here depicting one of the key issues raised as a consequence of nineteenth-century mass production: the absence of the original, the onset of simulacra, which I will discuss further in the next chapter. Moreover, by portraying this through money, Goethe seems to hint that the driving force of nineteenth-century society - we remember from Chapter One that the nineteenth century is the century of money - is a questionable copy (paper money) of a dubious original (assumed natural resources or treasures in the ground).

To sum up, the notes in \textit{Faust II} are an especially volatile form of paper money. In the case of Mephisto's bills the connection between symbol and commodity has become illusory, since there is no material reality behind the notes. It is interesting in this connection to draw attention to the fact that Mephisto calls the paper money 'das Papiergespenst der Gulden' [I.6198]. Goethe used the word \textit{Gespenst}, ever since his studies into colours, for phenomena that have diminished reality: 'Was Goethe's Optik "Gespenst" nennt dagegen, ist weder handgreiflich noch ein Ding [...]. Gemessen an dem Realitätsbegriff der vorwiegend vom Tastsinn bestimmten Dingwelt ist es "Täuschung" [...] oder "Scheinbild" [...]'.\textsuperscript{25} This is the exact essence of Mephisto's paper notes, they are no more than a \textit{Scheinbild} because they have no other than a visible reality. As soon as they are touched by physical reality, they turn out to be a mirage.

Yet the most interesting consequence of the \textit{Papiergespenst} is the alteration of the perception of reality it causes in its users. It must never be forgotten that paper money is a force

\textsuperscript{24}Hamacher, 'Faust, Geld', p.170.

in and of Capitalism as it takes hold of the nineteenth century. Part of this development was an unprecedented shift in the perception of material as well as immaterial reality as something purchasable, negotiable, immediately obtainable. Reality became subject to a new kind of encoding in which nothing was impossible as long as there was money, and the seemingly magic powers of paper money to not only represent wealth but also to increase it, lead to a giddy exhilaration of a shaky social and economic world of booms and busts, of speculative bubbles. The Emperor’s sense of reality is immediately affected by the possibilities paper money appears to afford, and since Mephisto has done the seemingly inconceivable in saving his country, he now demands another impossibility by wishing to see Helen and Paris. By bringing Helen and the paper money into juxtaposition in the devil’s words [ll. 6197f], Goethe not only immediately classifies her as a Gespenst, but also reinforces the basic insubstantiality of the notes. Helen and the bills start, as it were, commentating on each other: Helen is a mirage that cannot be transferred into physical reality, as is proved when Faust tries to prevent Paris from kidnapping her, and just as Helen disappears into thin air at point of physical contact, so does the value of the bank notes. (However, this comparison only works in Act I; the Helen of Act III fulfils a valuable role in the symbolic merging of Antiquity and Northern Europe (an idea the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were particularly fond of). Yet in Act I she is a mere mirage conjured up for the entertainment of a decadent court. Moreover, before she can reappear in tangible physical form in Act III, Faust has to subject himself to the creative demands of the Klassische Walpurgisnacht - yet nobody performs the work necessary to underwrite the paper notes.)

26 One of the most ironic impressions of this kind of ‘new reality’ is given in Adelbert von Chamisso’s Peter Schlemihls wundersame Geschichte (1814), where the rich do not even so much as blink at the physical impossibilities provided instantaneously by the devil, because they have got used to the immediately available. Cf. pp.225ff of this thesis.

27 See Vernon, Money and Fiction, p.25, for further detail.
Money not only alters the perception of reality, but also erodes and changes it per se. The emancipation of the bourgeoisie was finally accomplished during the course of the nineteenth century, and its greatest means towards this end had been money. With the traditional forms of wealth in the shape of real estate and gold having been slowly eroded throughout the preceding two centuries by an ever increasing international trade and the industrial revolution, the often impoverished aristocracy found that the “nouveaux riches” were more than willing to trade their money for marriage and social position. Yet money reaches even deeper in its role in the demise of feudalism: as soon as the vassal was allowed to replace his payments in kind and the labour for his feudal lord by making a monetary payment, a weakening process of the bond between lord and vassal was inaugurated that not only abolished feudal society, but ultimately led to money becoming the principal form of social classification, supplanting traditions, social bonds and customs. This process is described by the speeches of the courtiers before the carnival. Thus Mephisto’s conclusion that the Reich is lacking money has another demonic touch to it. Money is alien and destructive to feudal society, and by introducing paper money, the agency of capitalism, the symbol of monetary rule, he is further injecting an expectation of increased and altered forms of production that is totally hostile to the consciousness of the time.

It is noteworthy that, when the Jester decides to buy real estate with the paper money, he thereby acquires the means to become a ‘gestrenge(r) Herr’ [ll. 6170], the title given to a feudal lord by his serfs. The full destructive effects become apparent only in Act IV, and it is there where Mephisto offers a similar analysis of the reasons for the chaos: ‘Ein jeder konnte, jeder wollte gelten./ Der Kleinste selbst, er galt für voll’ [ll. 10275f]. Yet it is not only the social

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28 See ibid, pp. 46f, for further detail.
29 Simmel discusses this in detail in his *Philosophie des Geldes*, pp.299ff.
order that is thrown into upheaval and practically turned upside down, this also applies to all other spheres of human life, and the *Mummenschanz* provides an illustration of this. Many of the masks in the *Mummenschanz* can be deciphered as nineteenth-century concepts and phenomena infiltrating feudal society. The *Gärnerinnen* are the first to appear after the introductory words of the *Herold*, and their words and goods set the mood of the carnvval. Despite their being part of a profession working exclusively with nature and her products, none of their flowers are in fact natural:

Tragen wir in braunen Locken
Mancher heitern Blume Zier;
Seidenfäden, Seidenflocken
Spielen ihre Rolle hier. [ll. 5092ff]

The stark contrast of young women who should be devoted to nature, but are wearing artificial flower imitations is further re-inforced in that they do not view this as strange, but stress they think it commendable, ‘Lobenswürdig ganz und gar,/ Unsere Blumen, glänzend künstlich,/ Blühen fort das ganze Jahr’ [ll. 5097ff]. It has become desirable to produce an image of nature artificially rather than to experience nature herself, a notion we will encounter again in *Der grüne Heinrich*. Indeed they feel their own nature is closer to this image than to nature per se: ‘Denn das Naturell der Frauen/ Ist so nah mit Kunst verwandt’ [ll. 5106ff]. Their uncharacteristic outfit and attitude suggests to the reader that what he or she is witnessing here is the onset of the production of simulacra, of the imitation that is not only to stand in for the real, but is

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30 Schlaffer's *Faust Zweiter Teil* offers an excellent analysis of these issues and has been a source of invaluable inspiration for the following discussion of the *Mummenschanz.*
actually to be considered more laudable and better than the authentic. These artificial flowers are infinitely and immediately available, they will not wither and wilt, they will not even need watering. In a clever twist, Goethe has his flower maids move from the pastoral convention into the modern replication of nature, making the carnivale an interface of Renaissance images and modern consumerism. In this light, it is crucial to note that the aim of the Gärtnerninnen, like that of the Gärtnere, is to sell their products, and their fake pastoral packaging which is clearly meant to entice the buyers: it is at this point that the human being becomes subservient to the commodity, instead of vice versa. This is not only depicted in the competitive behaviour between the Gardeners themselves, but particularly in the use of eroticism in order to lure customers [esp. ll. 5104-5115]. It is through the employment of eroticism especially that it becomes clear that the human being has to serve the good in the name of profit - a kind of advertising the twentieth century is all too familiar with. This process of perverting the natural order of things finds its culmination in the ensuing speech of the mother. She treats her daughter like a bargain offer to be got rid of as soon as possible, encouraging her to prostitute herself in the hope that some “buyer” might be found who will marry her. The daughter indeed appears in the form of merchandise like the flowers and fruits - with the vital difference that, whereas the goods are given a voice, she remains silent. The roles have been inverted, under the principle of money it is the commodity that acquires anthropomorphic features, that develops metaphysical sophistications, whereas the human being becomes degraded to being a servant of money. As Marx says, money, production and commodification lead to an upside-down world, and the

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31Bauer and Matis emphasize this altered attitude towards nature and her products: ‘Da der Mensch nur von solchen Dingen sicher wissen kann, die er herstellt, wird das durch Kunst Seiende, das vom Menschen Hergestellte und Erzeugte, dem von Natur aus Seienden vorgezogen.’ Geburt der Neuzeit, p.381. [Italics in the original].

32Cf. Schlaffer, Faust Zweiter Teil, p.53.

33See ibid, p.54, for further detail.
very goods of the Gardeners provide proof. The remarkable thing about the fruits of the
*Gärtners* is that their very materiality is an impossibility: 'Alles ist zugleich zu finden:/
Knospe, Blätter, Blume, Frucht' [ll.5176]. Although Goethe is linking up with a theme in
the original Faust legend here - where Faust supplies unseasonal and foreign fruit - it
simultaneously serves to underline the notion that money makes everything possible, bridges
distance and even dissolves the seasons. Through international trade it has effectively
become possible to obtain goods that are unseasonal and/or foreign to one's own
country and climate as long as one has the money to pay for them; moreover, through this
the seasons become abolished as any agricultural product is now instantly available - not
only through imports, but also through technical inventions like the hot house. It is in
this sense that the above quotation has to be understood; by conquering nature's rhythms
money masters the impossible in that every stage in a plant's seasonal life can be
telescoped into instant availability and be independent of the time of year. In other
words, its crop is always obtainable. The instantaneous availability of anything that is
desired is also reflected in the Jester's words 'Heut abend wieg' ich mich im Grundbesitz!'
[l. 6171; my italics]) That Goethe should have chosen a pageant as the mode of
expression of these issues is appropriate: carnavals are a time of freedom and licence, a
celebratory locus for display and consumption, a present enactment of the talents and
values operative in a society. (Keller, in his novel *Der grüne Heinrich*, also works to
great effect with these notions of public display, contrasting the aestheticism, and often
superficiality, of the artists' community in Munich with the simpler, but proud and honest
self-expression of a village's re-enactment of Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell.*) There is, then,
a strong sense of euphoria in Act I of *Faust II*, and of ready availability: using the
emphasis of display and consumption inherent in the pageant, Goethe links the court's
*Mummenschanz* with its modern equivalents:

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34 Simmel provides a fascinating and very detailed analysis of many other time/space conquests in the last chapter of his *Philosophie des Geldes.*
advertising, shopping, consumption.\textsuperscript{35}

The distorting influence of money is further illustrated in the \textit{Parzen}: Atropos who, according to the legend, is in charge of severing the thread of life now spins it; Klotho, instead of holding the distaff, is in charge of the scissors; and Lachesis, who should spin the thread, is actually holding the distaff [ll. 5305-5344]. Moreover, the \textit{Parzen} were renowned for their ruthlessness in deciding over the amount of time somebody was allowed to live until they would cut the thread of life, yet Klotho makes the point that she is unwilling to do so: ‘Heute mich im Zaum zu halten,/ Schere steckt im Futteral’ [ll. 5327f]. Effectively this means that the Fates no longer have the power to rule but that some other deity has taken over from them; and the goddess in question is Victoria. Klotho says that she has been endowed with the scissors because Atropos had got it wrong many times before and cut off the ‘Hoffnung herrlichster Gewinnie’ [l. 5323]; \textit{Gewinn}, however, is the prime characteristic of Victoria [ll.5450ff]. Traditionally Victoria is the goddess of victory in war, yet in capitalism she becomes the ‘Allegorie des kommerziellen “Gewinns”’.\textsuperscript{36} By cutting off profit (\textit{Gewinnie}), Atropos has contravened the quintessential canon of the bourgeois economy, the new ruling force. So now even the gods are subject to money, and consequently, to put it in business terms, Atropos is forced to accept a different job. The fact that now the bourgeois forces are in control is also depicted in the \textit{Mummenschanz} in the configuration of the elephant, led by \textit{Klugheit} under the auspices of Victoria. Victoria is also the ‘Göttin aller Tätigkeiten’ [l. 5456], thus uniting physical and mental work in its desired result, namely profit. Moreover, she also believes herself to be an \textit{Aar}, claiming the imperial insignia and ownership of country and people [ll.5462ff]. The conquest

\textsuperscript{35} Koepnick’s analysis (‘Simulating Simulation’) of the \textit{Mummenschanz}’s antique topics and masquerades as a typical feature of the nineteenth century offers an interesting perspective here. Koepnick maintains that many nineteenth-century artefacts were given an antique form in order to camouflage the fact that the production of commodities had become the new nexus of society and the economy.

\textsuperscript{36} Schlaffer, \textit{Faust Zweiter Teil}, p.90.
is confirmed by Faust who, in the role of Plutus, the god of wealth, controls the chaos that erupts during the carneval, taking over from the Herold, the feudal figure that should be in charge [ll. 5759ff].

With Plutus being the new sovereign, money’s seizure of power is complete and can be depicted in its final outcome, the invention of paper money. The Emperor’s powerlessness is clearly stated: not only by the fact that he burns himself with the gold that Faust brings into the carneval and that he loses control over the Mumenschanz, but also when it emerges that the paper money had been produced without his knowledge: ‘Ich ahne Frevel, ungeheuren Trug!/ Wer fälschte hier des Kaisers Namenszug?’ [ll. 6063f] In order to underline the impotence of the Emperor, Mephisto gives his ironic speech between these two scenes, making the Emperor believe that even the elements would submit to his might [ll. 6003ff].

Act IV of the drama depicts the historical power struggle of the bourgeoisie - the age of revolutions and the short-lived Restoration - and the theme of Act V is the portrayal of the effects that flow from their victory.

Mephisto’s narration of the fall of the angels on the Hochgebirg, often taken to be one of Goethe’s contributions to the contemporary Neptunism - Vulcanism controversy, is largely a parable of current political events. He tells of the fallen angels, who, in hell, found themselves ‘bei allzugroßer Hellung/ In sehr gedrängter, unbequemer Stellung’ [ll.10079f], and therefore start to break out of their prison, and in doing so turn the earth upside down:

Was ehmals Grund war, ist nun Gipfel.
Sie gründen auch hierauf die rechten Lehren,
Das Unterste ins Oberste zu kehren.
Doch wir entrannen knechtisch-heisser Gruft
Ins Ubermaess der Herrschaft freier Luft.

Ein offenbar Geheimnis, wohl verwahrt,
Und wird nur spat den Volkern offenbart. (Ephes. 6.12)

[ll. 1008ff]

As Manfred Birk has pointed out, this account of the fallen angels is a metaphor for the ongoing conflict and suppression within society and the state, yet also already a commentary from Goethe that revolutions are related to the Evil.

What, at the level of foreground statement, strikes us as a theologically defined lament for the depravity of the modern world reveals itself, on closer inspection, to be a consequence of the innovations of modern economic praxis. At the heart of the specific rebellion which is here invoked is the chaos caused by paper money. The situation in general however is symptomatic of the bourgeoisie’s coming to power through wealth; Faust, as the middle-class figure, now declares as his aims: ‘Herrschaft gewinn’ ich, Eigentum!’ [l. 10187] This is no surprise, since the aim of any violent upheaval usually stems from the ‘Bemuhlen/ Zu seinem Vorteil etwas auszuziehen’ [ll. 10236f].

Moreover, the contrast made between the terms Herr [l. 10075] and knechtisch-heisser Gruft introduces the relationship Faust, as the bourgeois entrepreneur in Act V, has with his work force: ‘Des Herren Wort, es gibt allein Gewicht./ Vom Lager auf, ihr Knechte! Mann ftir Mann!’ [ll. 11502f] By referring to the Ubermaess der Herrschaft, Goethe already implies that any

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38 Goethe’s hostility towards revolutions and violent coup d’états is well known, and he was also sceptical about the idea of a bourgeois democracy. H. Hamm, ‘Julirevolution, Saint-Simonismus und Goethes abschliessende Arbeit am Faust’, in Keller (ed), Aufsatze zu Goethes “Faust II”, pp.267 - 277. (p.274).
revolutionary change in the power structures of a state will lead inevitably to a new form of repression and abuse of power, as we witness in Faust himself in the last Act.

The problem of money acts like a foil to Act IV; it is the immediate cause of the raging civil war, it is a key force in the general historical development, and it is the animating agency behind the Restoration which follows the period of social upheaval. Everywhere, behind all manner of political currents and counter-currents, money is the prime mover.

The Emperor does not as such sell the offices he (re-)bestows on his vassals, he rather seems to use the posts as a means to bribe them into loyalty. Having pointed out their responsibilities to the new Erzkämmerer, -marschall, -schenk, and -truchsess, he then honours them by lifting them onto a par with himself:

\[
\text{Dann Steuer, Zins und Beth', Lehn und Geleit und Zoll,} \\
\text{Berg-, Salz- und Münzregal euch angehören soll.} \\
\text{Denn meine Dankbarkeit vollgültig zu erproben,} \\
\text{Hab ich euch ganz zunächst der Majestät erhoben. \[ll. 10947ff\]}
\]

All these powers are essentially money-raising tactics deriving from a feudal past. The ensuing demands by the Bishop, which are granted because of the enlisting of evil forces in Mephisto, leave the Emperor almost helpless, both in political as well as in financial matters. Not only does the Emperor try to reverse the course of time by re-introducing a feudal structure, he also immediately finds himself in the same powerless and dependent position he was in at the beginning of Act I. It is inevitable that this form of society will break down again under the impact of the industrial age, and it is telling that just as Faust’s acquiring of the coastal territories is not depicted, there is no further mention of the Emperor and his realm in Act V.
either. There is no significant place for a feudal monarch in an industrialized, monetarized, bourgeois economy.

The first figures we encounter at the beginning of Act V are members of the old world: the Wanderer, Philemon and Baucis. The young man, once saved by Philemon from the sea, is dumbfounded at the sight of Faust's new land, and even refuses food until he has found out about this miracle. Baucis's narration of the events that have taken place there, however, reveal the incidents as phenomena typical of the industrial revolution - technical "Vervielfachung von Arbeitskraft und Verkürzung von Arbeitszeit" - combined with human hardship and suffering:

Wo die Flämmchen nächtig schwärmen,
Stand ein Damm am andern Tag.
Menschenopfer mußten bluten,
Nachts erscholl des Jammers Qual;
Meerab flossen Feuergluten,
Morgens war es ein Kanal. [ll. 11125ff]

It is only logical that for this old couple these occurrences seem like magic, and to a certain degree technology is magic, since part of the desire to be a magician is the aspiration to rule over, control and accelerate nature - which is exactly what Faust has achieved. Yet their incomprehension will be fatal, they have not understood the extent to which the times have changed, which is so touchingly portrayed in their wish to '[...] läuten, knieen, beten,/ Und dem alten Gott vertraun!' [ll. 11141ff] The new god, however, is Plutus-Mammon, and his Vicar on

39 Schlaffer, Faust Zweiter Teil, p.130.
Earth is no longer a priest, but the entrepreneur and the merchant.

Faust, when we first encounter him in the last Act, is a rich merchant as well as ruler over his newly acquired domain. The theme of the rise of the bourgeoisie and its capital finds its final expression here with Faust being not only the sovereign of the land reclaimed from the sea, but also speaking of his ‘Weltbesitz’ [I. 11242]. Capitalism has taken over from feudalism, money has taken over from the feudal social structure, and the Bürger now holds political as well as economic power. However, the new rulers turn out to be no better, no more, indeed arguably less, humane than their aristocratic predecessors. This is shown not only in the death of Philemon and Baucis, but also in the plight of Faust’s work force as told by the old woman, and in the cruelty with which he urges Mephisto to get him workers ‘Meng’ auf Menge./ Ermuntere durch Genuß und Strenge./ Bezahle, locke, presse bei!’ [II.11552ff], so that he himself can see his dream fulfilled. Mephisto describes the Lemuren as being stitched together ‘Aus Bândern, Sehnen und Gebein’ [I. 11513]; the image evoked is one of mechanical emphasis, these parts of the body are responsible for physical work. This is how the entrepreneur perceives his work force - as dehumanized components within a productive machine.

How drastic the changes affecting society and its members are can also be seen in a minor, yet telling inversion of priorities in the mode of human thinking. In Act II, Homunculus, omniscient in all matters human, advises Wagner (who is not allowed to join Faust, Mephisto, and Homunculus in the Klassische Walpurgisnacht) to stay at home and collect all important elements of life and put them together carefully. Yet Homunculus urges him, whilst doing this, to reflect: ‘Das Was bedenke, mehr bedenke Wie’ [I. 6992; emphasis in the original]. On the other hand, in Act V Mephisto makes it clear that ‘Man fragt ums Was, und nicht ums Wie’ [I. 11185; emphasis in the original]. The materialism and greed of the Modern Age values only the outcome, the matter, as long as it is profitable, but not the manner in which it is achieved. In the latter
case, it is not even important whether the means to acquire the profit are actually legal. The desire to own has overruled the desire to know, and understand - even in Faust himself.

Yet Faust’s enjoyment of his wealth and power is disturbed because:

Mein Hochbesitz, er ist nicht rein,

Der Lindenbaum, die braune Baute,

Das morsche Kirchlein ist nicht mein. [ll. 11156ff]

Faust, who owns everything and lives in a palace, is plagued by the fact that the meagre possessions of the old couple are not his, indeed he claims that in his wealth he can feel what he is lacking [ll. 11252]. Eaten up by greed, envy and his ‘allgewaltigen Willens Kür’ [ll. 11255], he orders Mephisto to move them forcefully to a plot of land which he finds suitable for them. The devil’s cynical term of ‘kolonisieren’ [ll. 11274] for what will amount to the cruel slaughter of the old people ties up directly to Mephisto’s earlier observation that ‘Krieg, Handel und Piraterie,/ Dreieinig sind sie, nicht zu trennen’ [ll. 11187f]. The verb ‘to colonize’ was used not only to denote migration to a different country with a view to establishing trade with one’s home country, but also to justify the exploitation of the foreign country’s natural reserves and mines, and the enslaving of its natives: exactly what Mephisto means by the word.40 Already Adam Smith had bewailed the trinity of war, trade and piracy,41 and Güllich, whose two-volume Geschichtliche Darstellung des Handels, der Gewerbe und des Ackerbaus der bedeutendsten Staaten unserer Zeit Goethe owned, cites the Spanish War of Succession as an example of their close connection: ‘Der Krieg, welcher zwischen den vereinigten Niederlanden einerseits und

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40 Mahl, Goethes ökonomisches Wissen, p.391.

41 Ibid, p.338.
Many of the results of the rule of money have been shown above, yet there are further implications which contribute to the overall import of *Faust*. First of all, Goethe frequently addresses the general characteristics and effects of money as such throughout the tragedy. Indeed in his very first monologue Faust complains: ‘Auch hab' ich weder Gut noch Geld,/ Noch Ehr' und Herrlichkeit der Welt’ [ll. 374f] in explanation of his frustration. Through money he could at least obtain some compensation for his sufferings (since money would allow him to acquire whatever he choses), yet even this is denied to him. However, the relation between money and (questionable) knowledge is already introduced, and Goethe elaborates on this theme later on, casting a dubious light on the academics who merely teach for financial gain. In his pledge to Mephisto, whom he thinks to be Faust, the Student immediately stresses that he comes with ‘leidlichem Geld’ [l. 1877], expecting that this will be the most effective attempt to persuade the man to teach him. In the *Urfaust* this is even more prominent, with the devil devoting not only a whole speech to the cost of studying [ll. 309ff], but stressing that it is the Student’s responsibility ‘redlich zu allen Malen/ Wirt, Schneider und Professor [zu] zahlen’[ll.323f].

Arguably the most famous words concerning money in *Faust I* are those regarding the

\[\text{Cited in ibid, p.480.}\]
ability of money to erase - or add to - the qualities of its owner:

Was Henker! freilich Händ' und Füße
Und Kopf und H--., die sind dein;
Doch alles, was ich frisch genieße,
Ist das drum weniger mein?
Wenn ich sechs Hengste zahlen kann,
Sind ihre Krâfte nicht die meine?
Ich renne zu und bin ein rechter Mann,
Als hätt' ich vierundzwanzig Beine. [ll. 1820ff]

Money's remarkable power to acquire not only goods but also characteristics and abilities for its owner was also recognized by Karl Marx, who interpreted the above very acutely: 'Was durch das Geld für mich ist, was ich zahlen, d.h., was das Geld kaufen kann, das bin ich, der Besitzer des Geldes selbst. [...] Die Eigenschaften des Geldes sind meine - seines Besitzers - Eigenschaften und Wesenskräfte. Das was ich bin und vermag, ist also keineswegs durch meine Individualität bestimmt.' The use of the German word vermag is telling here. The infinitive, vermögen, means to be able or to be capable of doing something; whereas the noun, Vermögen, denotes ability as well as wealth in all its forms. While the natural order of things would be that he who is highly capable will acquire a Vermögen, this is now inverted: wealth (Vermögen) determines what an individual is able to do (vermag). It is this distortion of nature and human essence that Marx most heavily criticised. The implications for society and the individual are

hard to overestimate, it is no longer only goods that can be acquired, but a whole array of human attributes from physical attractiveness to abstract notions like education or sophistication.

It is also in *Faust I* that the words of the Gnomes during the carnival find their most tragic illustration. They comment that the gold they mine is used for evil purposes: *kuppeln, stehlen, Mord* [ll. 5857 & 5859]; and that he who ‘die drei Gebot’ veracht’t./ Sich auch nichts aus den andern macht’ [ll.5860]. Mephisto’s words pay tribute to the Gnomes observations, he knows that the weaker sex is very effectively lured into sin by gold and jewels: ‘Ich tat Euch Sächelchen hinein,/ Ume eine andre zu gewinnen’ [ll.2735]. Gretchen’s reaction pays tribute to his words, after her mother handed the casket to the priest, she thinks about it, but ‘Noch mehr an den, der’s ihr gebracht’ [ll.2852]. Softened up by these treasures, those that follow, her own fascination with Faust, and Marthe Schwerdtlein’s questionable morality, Faust receives a warmer welcome than in his first encounter with Gretchen.

Money - whether in the form of minted gold or not - and sexuality belong together for the devil. The *Walpurgisnacht* with all its emphasis on sexuality is held on the *Brocken*, in which ‘der Mammon glüht’ [l. 3915]; yet it is in one of the earlier drafts that Goethe spells it out. In No 50 of the Paralipomena (Weimarer Ausgabe), Satan appears in person and preaches his own sermon on the subject of money, in the shape of gold, and sexuality, declaring in savagely reductive terms that nothing is more important for every human creature than wealth and the genitalia of the opposite sex. Yet more important is the confirmation he receives by the choir, since they declare his words to be ‘die Spur/ Des ewigen Lebens,/ Der tiefsten Natur.’ Less drastic are the occurrences in *Faust II*: Mephisto promises that the new riches will bring ‘Paläste, Gärten, Bristlein, rote Wangen’ [l. 4968], and in due course the mother prostitutes her daughter during the *Mummenschanz*, whereas Faust obtains palaces and gardens in Act V.

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What Goethe recognized was the intrinsic psychological likeness of money and sexuality: money exists in the nexus of desire and its achievability; in a money-based society, it is the very means to bring desire to fulfilment, and is, in this sense, erotically charged.

Maybe the most complex of Goethe’s observations on the nature and effect of money is its dialectic of encouraging activity and yet being the reason why man stops striving - thus touching the very nerve of the tragedy:

Verflucht sei Mammon, wenn mit Schätzen
Er uns zu kühnen Taten regt,
Wenn er zu mäßigem Ergetzen
Die Polster uns zurechtelegt! [ll. 1599ff]

Money has an inbuilt dialectic of both dynamizing and weakening the will to live, of encouraging activity in order to gain wealth as well as draining energy away and tempting to sloth (which, we remember, is one of the Seven Deadly Sins). Of course, the kind of idleness Faust mentions is still to be found today in the life of leisure which abundant wealth can afford. Yet there is another - and very different - kind of sloth money can create in the modern world. It has to do with the all-pervasive lack of a real sense of achievement once something has been accomplished. Since everything is instantly available - and en masse at that - an erosion of value has taken place in modern culture that not only devalues everything touched by money, but which also leads to a radical perception that nothing really matters any more. Whatever one might strive for, somebody, if not countless others have already been there before. Yet on the other hand, the temptation of gaining the means to the fulfilment of deepest desires inevitably
ensures that money prompts endeavour and enterprise. Goethe recognized this dialectic inherent in money, and exploits it to great effect in the Faust drama, which is concerned to explore the condition, history and future of mankind.

This dialectic is further elaborated in Act I and united in the figure of Plutus-Faust. On the one hand Plutus ‘hat nichts weiter zu erstreben’ [l. 5556]; streben is the crucial word for Faust’s (and mankind’s) life and ultimate redemption, hence money can destroy the human soul by dissolving the most important trait. On the other hand money accumulates and accelerates experience, dissolves social frontiers and differences, turns old notions and traditions upside down, and speeds up exchange and production. This is even more so the case with paper money since it can only realise its value if it is in circulation, thus further encouraging the economic cycle and perpetuating its effects. These vitalizing forces of money are described by the Schatzmeister and the Marschalk, they point out ‘Wie alles lebt und lustgenießend wimmelt’ [l.6078], and the Marschalk especially describes in great detail the way in which the notes revived the economy - if only briefly [ll. 6085-6096]. Moreover, he also stresses the ease with which paper money is spent: he calls the notes ‘die Flüchtigen’; they have already dispersed throughout the country despite having only been produced the night before, while Mephisto points out the convenience of carrying paper instead of gold, which further eases and encourages spending [ll.6097-6110 & 6119-6128].

It is this dialectic that makes money the ideal Faustian medium. Much of Faust’s frustration as a scholar stems from a feeling of isolation from the world and from an impatience with traditional forms of knowledge and life which seem to block his ambitions and prevent him from striving and activity. Faust seeks the maximum experiential intensity, and Mephisto is meant to help him in the accumulation of this experience and the acceleration of life that this requires: as the devil himself says, ‘Die Zeit ist kurz, die Kunst ist lang’ [l. 1787]. It is already
mentioned at this point that one of the aids in Faust’s prospective attempt to widen his own self into that of the whole of humanity will be money, since money has the ability to buy character traits [ll. 1824ff], experience, and make things happen. The actual creation of the paper money in the second part thus comes as the fulfilment of an earlier promise as well as being the logical and adequate attribute of Faust: energizing, accelerating, transforming, equalizing. It culminates in the total transformation of society depicted in Act V, where Faust, in the figure of the modern entrepreneur, governs a community dependent on daily activity in order to survive. Moreover, the Emperor is no longer even mentioned as bourgeois economic principles rule the life of society and the individual. Yet money’s dialectic remains: although the community leads an active life, its members are Knechte to Faust, whose word, as the capitalistic ruler, is the only one that counts [ll. 11502ff]. Mephisto calling them inhuman ‘Lemuren,/ [...] Geflickte Halbnaturen’ [ll. 11512ff], indicates clearly that the workforce has been stripped of its humanity in the service of money and profit.

It is the energy of money as well as its dialectical nature that makes it Faustian. Through its self-contradictory nature, it encapsulates the paradox of mankind which Faust openly expresses during the Osterspaziergang, in the famous speech on his two souls [ll. 1110ff]. Faust being the exemplary individual uniting this paradox in him, it is only logical that it should be he who, in the mask of Plutus and with the aid of the devil, creates the symbol of money’s power over mankind. It is also these “two souls” of money that explain why Mephisto is eager to see the notes established. As part of the power that wills forever evil and yet creates the good, money’s ability to destroy as well as further human nature through activity and striving makes it an ideal tool for his intentions.
The Linguistic Repercussions

Just as *Faust II* differs thematically and conceptually from the first part of the tragedy, so it also does in its linguistic mode. The intense poetical language of the first part, its many variations in the characterization of the individuals, the very beauty of its rhythms, rhymes, and emotionality gives way to a more elaborate, descriptive, often abstract and conceptual language. This has as much to do with the topics and themes dealt with in *Faust II* as with the modes Goethe chose for their portrayal; first and foremost the allegory.

Allegories were regarded with growing hostility during the course of the nineteenth century as being artificial tropes which, albeit full of meaning, lacked poetical life and addressed themselves merely to discursive knowledge rather than conveying meaning through intuition. However, what many of Goethe’s critics failed to recognize was that the allegorical form of *Faust II* in itself is already an acknowledgement of the condition of the nineteenth century, ‘da der Gedankengehalt, die Aufdeckung gesellschaftlich-geschichtlicher und naturphilosophischer Zusammenhänge die sinnliche Einheit der Formen und Gestalten sprengt.’^45^ What Lukács only hints at, Schlaffer convincingly elaborates:^46^ allegory’s tendency to construct an unnatural, arbitrary link between its form and content makes it an ideal medium to reflect the by now unnatural state of society, whose objects and interrelations are being produced artificially. Moreover, the abstraction inherent in the allegory correlates with the abstractions gaining hold of the nineteenth century; similarly, allegorizing can be an adequate mode to express the growing loss of individuality and the tendency for individuals to become *Charaktermasken* of their socio-economically manufactured position. Lastly, from a literary-aesthetic standpoint, allegory’s tendency to make the aesthetic *Schein* explicit through conceptual insight causes the


destruction of the unity and totality of the literary work, thus making the reader aware of the operation of socio-cultural forces of production.

In accordance with these characteristics of the allegory, Goethe’s language is not only allegorical, but overtly articulate in the sense that most of the allegories name and explain themselves, and that many of the events are actually narrated as they take place on stage. This is especially prominent in the Mummenschanz, where the words are exclusively deployed in the service of explicating an already overtly explained image. This means Goethe not only underlines the differences between symbols and allegories, but also lets his readership witness the process of production of meaning. It is one of the prime attributes of the symbol that it does not have extensively to explain itself, or be explained, since the shape of its sheer physical being embodies the additional layer of meaning. Yet in a way parallel to the artificial assignment of meaning in the allegory, the modern age increasingly attaches variable patterns of moral and social value to money and materialism, as Goethe shows in the Mummenschanz and in Act V.47 Furthermore it is characteristic of allegories that they ‘das Interesse an der Darstellung selbst zerstören und den Geist gleichsam in sich selbst zurücktreiben und seinen Augen das, was wirklich dargestellt ist, entziehen.’48 By forcing the mind to go back into itself to search for the understanding or seek explanation of the allegory concerned, the allegory also forces its viewer to withdraw his mind from the depicted reality, since this is now no more than a sign, the meaning of which has to be deciphered explicitly, rather than intuitively as with a symbol. Moreover, this also makes the viewer, or reader, aware that the meaning of allegories are actually manufactured; and by moulding nineteenth-century phenomena into self-pronouncing allegories, Goethe displays the process of socio-economic meaning-making.

47 This phenomenon is also overtly expressed in Keller’s Der grüne Heinrich, where Heinrich’s character is frequently judged to be morally inferior because he cannot handle money in the socio-economically expected way, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

This partly explains the high degree of abstraction in the language of the play, since it underlines the discursivity of the notions and ideas portrayed. This becomes especially clear in the description of Arcadia in Act III; where one would expect poetical language, Goethe sounds rather stilted:

Alt-Wälder sind's! Die Eiche starret mächtig,
Und eigensinnig zackt sich Ast an Ast;
Der Ahorn mild, von süßem Saft trächtig,
Steigt rein empor und spielt mit seiner Last. [Il. 9542ff]

The portrayal of the idyll Faust and Helen are about to enter is, as has often been mentioned, part of the pastiche of classical writing that characterises much of Acts II and III in Faust II. Not only is the praise of Arcadia an attribute of classical poetry ever since Vergil's bucolica, Goethe also preserves the traditional link of the Arcadia motif with that of the Golden Age [Il.9514-9561] (one thinks also of Torquato Tasso). Moreover, the language itself is deliberately classizing in its pre-modern fondness for the general, the typical. The use of the definite article ('Die Eiche', 'Der Ahorn') denotes not an individual tree but is, rather, a generic term. In consequence, we are not allowed to perceive old forests with individual, irregular trees, but are forced to see an example which one would expect in a botanical text book. There are two possible reasons for this, given the general topic of the play. Firstly, in an allusion to the mass production of natural images shown during the pageant, Goethe re-inforces the notion that we have come to view nature in stereotypes rather than in its irregularity and idiosyncrasy, indeed even potential deformation and ugliness. Secondly, it seems to divert our thought towards the practical qualities of these trees, and thereby to their value as tradeable commodities. The
abstraction then turns into the abstraction of commodification, and their meaning becomes negotiable as to what they can be used for and, more importantly, how much money they can raise.

Parallel to these effects, but still toying with the potential of our imagination, Goethe uses a few lines later the collective name Obst. Instead of grasping the opportunity for a poetical description of red apples and yellow pears, he choses to reduce them to the collective, widening it to the even broader word Speise [l. 9548]. Goethe's language here leaves it up to the reader to imagine what kind of fruit is being talked about, thus suspending the reader's imagination between limitation and free flow.

It is important to remember that Goethe, born at a time when the humane Enlightenment flourished in Germany, witnessed its decline and the actual reversal of its values in practical terms as the industrial revolution gathered pace. In this light it is scarcely surprising that his attitude and awareness of language matches the shift its perception underwent from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century. As has already been mentioned in Chapter One, language during the Enlightenment was regarded as a mere representative tool that made a rational, commonly shared and understood articulation of the world possible. Therefore all members of a language community are able to make rational use of it in rational, "enlightened" discussions. Yet on the other hand language was also increasingly regarded as expressing unique and individual experiences, and as acknowledging personal experiences of reality which, in the end, are unique to the individual. This culminated in the early nineteenth century in Humboldt's investigations into language relativity, he claims that language in itself is a relative tool and that different language communities experience reality differently because of their language. This

49 After Schlaffer, Faust Zweiter Teil, p.136.
dialectic is inherent in language: language is as much universalizing as it is particularizing; for
the process of purveying meaning, language relies as much on inclusion as on exclusion of
meaning. The dialectic between language as a universal as well as an individual form of
expression was strongly felt in the eighteenth century; and Goethe addresses this dialectic of
language throughout Faust. The generality of the language in the second part of the drama,
especially in its lack of personality and characterization when the various figures speak, stands
in stark contrast to the tradition of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of individuating the
characters in a drama through their language. Yet this becomes more understandable when one
considers the degree of subjectivity this allows, especially in the light of Mephisto’s words in the
Paralipomena No 15: ‘Was uns zerspaltet ist die Wirklichkeit/ Doch was uns einigt das sind
Worte.’ Clearly hinting that reality particularizes and words unite, we can hear Goethe
listening to both strands of the dialectic throughout the tragedy, perceiving the shift that
language undergoes in the nineteenth century.

Friedrich Nietzsche, forty years later, argues in a similar way for the differences in
reality perception and the role language plays in this in his Ueber Wahrheit und Lüge im
aussermoralischen Sinne:

Jedes Wort wird sofort dadurch Begriff, dass es eben nicht für das einmalige
ganz und gar individualisirte Unerlebniss, dem es sein Entstehen verdankt, etwa
als Erinnerung dienen soll, sondern zugleich für zahllose, mehr oder weniger
ähnliche, das heisst streng genommen niemals gleiche, also auf lauter ungleiche
Fälle passen muss. Jeder Begriff entsteht durch Gleichsetzen des
Nichtgleichen.51
There is a similar tension between words and concepts highlighted by Mephistopheles in his talk with the Student in *Faust I*:

**Mephisto:** Im ganzen - haltet Euch an Worte!
Dann geht Ihr durch die sichre Pforte
Zum Tempel der Gewißheit ein.

**Schüler:** Doch ein Begriff muß bei dem Worte sein.

**Mephisto:** Schon gut! Nur muß man sich nicht allzu ängstlich quälen;
Denn eben wo Begriffe fehlen,
Da stellt ein Wort zur rechten Zeit sich ein.
Mit Worten läßt sich trefflich streiten,
Mit Worten ein System bereiten,
An Worte läßt sich trefflich glauben,
Von einem Wort läßt sich kein Jota rauben. [II. 1990ff]

By separating words and concepts the devil not only disorients and confuses the student, but also reveals the way in which humanity employs language in order to understand reality and, as he points out to the the young man earlier, to speculate about the metaphysics behind it (since it is the aim of metaphysics to see ‘Was in des Menschen Hirn nicht paßt/ Für was drein geht und nicht drein geht,/ Ein prächtig Wort zu Diensten steht’ [II. 1951ff]). Language is used for creating the philosophical systems man has established in his attempt to understand the world, and the crucial point is that words are arbitrary rather than necessary. This is part of Faust’s plight at the
beginning of the drama, where he admits to have given himself up to magic in the hope of finding many a secret, so

Daß ich nicht mehr mit sauern Schweiß
Zu sagen brauche, was ich nicht weiß.

[...]

Schau' alle Wirkenskraft und Samen,
Und tu' nicht mehr in Worten kramen. [ll. 380ff]

It is also why the devil recommends sticking to words rather than trying to fathom meaning; words are human entities, they can be discussed and disputed just as the system they create can be contested amongst the participants. However, much of what these words are about, if anything, is beyond the comprehension of mankind, and Mephisto proves his cynicism by advising the student to stay within the bounds of what unites men, and not to bother with understanding concepts, or reality. Words, according to the devil, are “safe”, and they are so exactly because their ability to transcribe reality is limited to the human understanding of it. As long as men are contented to define the secrets of the universe in words, as Wagner is happy to do in Faust I, they will be spared the frustration that fuels Faust.

Faust himself knows about the dubious truth value words have, which is not only apparent from the quotation above, but also behind some of the most famous lines in Faust:

Ich habe keinen Namen
Dafür! Gefühl ist alles;
Name ist Schall und Rauch,
Faust is adamant in his conviction that feelings and concepts are ineffable (cf. much of his opening monologue, and especially ll. 3059-66 and ll. 1305-9), and indeed argues ‘Und wenn’s euch Ernst ist, was zu sagen,/ Ist’s nötig, Worten nachzujagen?’ [ll. 552f] Ironically, when he does attempt to utter his feelings to Gretchen, words do in fact fail him. Using language, the means that should unite mankind, in a devious way - by designating intensity as eternity [ll. 3059-3066 & 3188-3194] - he bridges the gap between Gretchen’s and his perception of reality, and seals her fate. However, by having Faust employ words according to his own understanding, Goethe highlights another side of the issue: language is fuelled by both public and private imperatives.

These characteristics of language, its possibilities to be objective as well as allowing for personal, subjective usage, are shared by money. On the one hand, money is an objective means of equating the different, of translating an almost infinite number of things into a generally accepted and understood validation system. Furthermore, it is anti-subjective in the sense that it is not marked by individual usage, but circulates without a trace left on it by the people who owned it. Yet on the other hand, money allows for total individual negotiation: it can be spent at the time and place its owner chooses for whatever purchase or service he desires. Through these features, it can facilitate personal expression (in terms of the particular purchase the buyer makes), or it can be hoarded, as reserves of unspent potential - the possibilities are countless. Thus, through the forms and usage of language and money, Goethe articulates the central issues of Faust II.

At times Goethe’s language also feels as though it is on display, as if it is dressed up, often obviously uncomfortable, stilted and unnatural. It is what Friedrich Theodor Vischer
called 'jene Bisam- und Moschussprache'\textsuperscript{52} which he perceived to be full of Goethe's 'senile Sprachschnörkel',\textsuperscript{53} yet Vischer did not comprehend that the particular style Goethe used was part of his artistic intention. The very oversaturation of the language, especially during the Mummenschanz, Acts II and III, combined with strange morphological forms such as 'zweighaft, wurzelauf', or the questionable use of the superlative as in 'einzigste Geschichte', ('einzig' as such is already the superlative form) highlights the artificiality of the world described, and stresses the display, the marketing which is so much part of it. Similarly, whole tracts of the play, like the culture it speaks of, feel "manufactured": from the obvious example of the Mummenschanz to the synthetic Act III with its artificial union of Helen (as a symbol for Antiquity) and Faust (as the northern European late Middle Ages), and further into Acts IV and V with its mixing of Mephisto's Drei Gewaltigen (who are biblical figures) and Greek mythology (in Philemon and Baucis) with nineteenth-century socio-economic reality. Goethe skilfully adapts the language of the play to the particular themes it explores.

How closely Goethe saw language related to the nature of man is visible in the Homunculus-episode in Wagner's laboratory. When Mephisto enters the laboratory, Wagner is busy with his apparatuses, and he quietly tells the devil 'Es wird ein Mensch gemacht' [I. 6835]. With mankind’s increasing capacity in the nineteenth century to understand and control nature through science and technology, Wagner is about to penetrate her deepest secret, the making of (human) life - a topic Mary Shelley had explored a few years earlier in her Frankenstein. Homunculus is created, yet he needs to be protected from materiality. The crucial point is that one can see:


\footnotesize{53} F. Th. Vischer, Göthe's Faust: Neue Beiträge zur Kritik des Gedichts (1875), and Verteidigung meiner Schrift 'Göthe's Faust' (1881), edited by H. Falkenheim, Stuttgart 1921, p.128.
Ein artig Männlein sich gebärden.
Was wollen wir, was will die Welt nun mehr?
Denn das Geheimnis liegt am Tage.
Gebt diesem Laute nur Gehör,
Er wird zur Stimme, wird zur Sprache. [ll. 687ff]

Not only has the secret of creation been uncovered, but the little creature, this embodiment of humanity, ‘wird zur Sprache’: language is part of the quintessence of mankind.

Goethe also pays tribute to the relatedness of the two great human systems of representation, money and language. When Faust (as Plutus) and Mephisto (as Avaritia) arrive at the Mummenschanz in a dragon-drawn carriage, this is steered by the young Knabe Wagenlenker, the allegory of Poetry. The young man describes himself:

Bin die Verschwendung, bin die Poesie;
Bin der Poet, der sich vollendet,
Wenn er sein eigenst Gut verschwendet.
Auch ich bin unermesslich reich
Und schätze mich dem Plutus gleich [ll. 5573ff]

A comparative look at Plutus confirms the claims of the boy, the deity’s ‘reine Lust zu geben/ Ist größer als Besitz und Glück’ [ll. 5558ff]. The juxtaposition of wealth and poetry seems strange at first sight. Yet this scene almost immediately precedes the creation of the paper money, hence it relates to the kind of wealth that Plutus is about to supply, namely a fictive one; or rather, one
that requires the total trust of its users that it is real without being put to the test. Similarly, the goods Knabe Wagenlenker dispenses turn out to be unable to survive the touch of reality. Throwing his riches, in the shape of jewels, into the crowd, they transform themselves, on contact, into insects: ‘Was einer noch so emsig griffe,/ Des hat er wirklich schlechten Lohn./ Die Gabe flattert ihm davon’, the Herold comments [ll.5595ff] (Similarly the paper notes disperse as quickly as if they could fly [ll. 6086ff].) The crowd is enraged, and Plutus has to come to the aid of the boy and re-inforce the bond mentioned by the boy earlier: ‘Wenn’s nötig ist, daß ich dir Zeugnis leiste,/ So sag’ ich gern: Bist Geist von meinem Geiste’ [ll. 5622ff]. However, Plutus’s casket of gold, the dubious security of the paper money, turns out to be of exactly the same nature as the gifts of the boy. The Herold scolds the Knabe, saying: ‘Wie doch der Schelm so viel verheiBt/ Und nur verleiht, was golden gleißt!’ [ll. 5604ff] Likewise, the gold of Plutus only gleißt like real gold (just as the Geldscheine are only scheinbar money); when the Emperor bends over to inspect the contents of the casket, his beard falls into it, and at that moment the gold turns into flames which almost devour the Kaiser and the whole court - an early illustration of the destructive effect the paper money will have.54

By associating poetic language and paper money, Goethe highlights their similarities. They are both semiotic systems that rely on the tacit agreement of their users to understand and treat them as such, to trust that the representation is as good as the real. It is impossible “to touch” language, and thereby poetry, it is impossible for any reader of or listener to poetry or speech to know exactly the individuality that is being transcribed, but he has to rely on his own experiences and their relatedness to the poet’s. One needs to use one’s imagination to comprehend language and poetry, to grasp that the limitless “dispensation” (Verschwendung) in

54 Hamacher (‘Faust, Geld’) on the other hand sees the affinity between poetry and wealth (in the form of credit) in their shared attributes of Schein, whether aesthetic or material, and that the modern economy defines its sphere of ‘ökonomischer Kommunikation als Zirkulationssphäre nicht der Sachen, sondern des Scheins’. [p.157].
the use of this system of signs leads to it building its own world that cannot be equated with the material one, as Plutus tells the boy:

Bist frei und frank, nun frisch zu deiner Sphäre!
Hier ist sie nicht! [...
[...
Dorthin, wo Schönes, Gutes nur gefällt,
Zur Einsamkeit! - Da schaffe deine Welt. [ll. 5690ff]

The paper money requires similar limitless dispensation, in the form of investment and circulation, to be able to function properly and erect the new world of commerce and speculation that will provide the modern forms of wealth. This needs imagination and understanding, as poetry and language do, and the trust of the users that these signs of potential wealth are as valuable as real gold. This is what Faust alludes to when he gives the Emperor a lecture on the nature of the notes:

[...] Der weiteste Gedanke
Ist solchen Reichtums kümmerlichste Schranke;
Die Phantasie, in ihrem höchsten Flug
Sie strengt sich an und tut sich nie genug.
Doch fassen Geister, würdig, tief zu schauen,
Zum Grenzenlosen grenzenlos Vertrauen. [ll. 6113ff]

As Knabe Wagenlenker pointed out, the poet can only achieve fulfilment and perfection if he
dispenses his very own good, his inner self, i.e. if his poetic dissemination knows no bounds. Words, moreover, can be spent without limits, there is no maximum amount that can be produced; likewise, paper money is 'das Grenzenlose'. Paper money not only has no limits within itself - it can take on any shape for which it is exchanged - but it is also produced limitless in Act I. Furthermore, in order to bring about the economic production that will provide the forms of wealth for which it can be exchanged, paper money, as discussed above, needs to be constantly exchanged and negotiated. The other important feature they share is that they both demand the limitless trust of their users, and the recognition that they are artificial semiotic systems. However, in the same way as most people fail to understand the nature of language and poetry (Knabe Wagenlenker complains that the little flame he has sprayed into the crowd fails to inspire: 'Doch vielen, eh’ man’s noch erkannt./ Verlischt es, traurig ausgebrannt’ [II. 5638f]), they also fail, as discussed above, to understand the nature of the paper money. They treat poetry and its language as if it was something fixed, trying to hold onto it as Mephisto advised the student to do, and they take the paper money to be real wealth - on both occasions they confuse the means with the end. Most of the figures in part two of the drama are still mentally locked in the times when signs were seen to possess a direct link to what they signified, and the characters are unable to cope with that link being severed for the sake of limitless economic production and profit.

It was probably Goethe’s almost unique range of perception in respect of nineteenth-century tendencies and developments, unshared by most of his contemporaries and wrapped in a form they found unpalatable, that led to the hostile reception of Faust II. Yet his analysis and description of where economy and society were heading, that is towards a world in which semiotics and fictions dominate the way reality is perceived and produced, has turned out to be extraordinarily prescient.
Arguably no German novel of the nineteenth century equals the psychological intensity with which Keller’s *Der grüne Heinrich* (first version completed in 1855, second version completed in 1880) explores the enormous tensions Western societies experienced throughout the nineteenth century as capitalist economics developed. As we shall see, Keller’s novel pays tribute to the dialectical interplay of socio-economic forces, weighing the erosion of traditional value systems against the greater personal freedom this afforded, the dynamic and energetic features of the new socio-economic reality against the more negative consequences for Western societies, and the criticism of money’s negative powers against its creation of work and wealth, and the way this affected the individual. *Der grüne Heinrich* can easily be seen as an illustration of the effects Goethe’s general observations in *Faust II* had on the individual. Moreover, money is central to both the narrative and its protagonist, providing a vital link between Heinrich and the world he inhabits - however problematic this link may be.

*Der grüne Heinrich* also explores the role and place of art and the artist in this new society, focusing on the problem of the imaginative and the social (or institutional) - not only on their collision, but also on their interrelation and interdependence. The novel acknowledges that art began to become a commodity during the time of the industrial revolution, as illustrated by the art factory of Habersaat, the entrepreneur who mass-produces cheap landscape prints without any artistry in them. Habersaat functions as the counterpart to the over-imaginative Heinrich who, despite all his Romantic aspiration in the field of pictorial art, is quite simply not talented; yet Keller never takes sides but simply depicts art, artist, society, the imaginary and the replicative in their
interrelationship. Through this juxtaposition he achieves a complex depiction of the way in which worthless art can be socially acceptable, whereas he simultaneously refuses to defend the Romantic artist misunderstood by society. Keller saw with extraordinary clarity that, in modern bourgeois society, art could not detach itself from the marketplace.

In my discussion of Keller's great novel, I shall at first focus on the way money, the economy, and changing notions of work are portrayed in society in general, and on its importance for Heinrich as a socio-economic factor. Although the role of money in Heinrich's life has been dealt with by critics, the terms of the discussion have largely been restricted to the issue of *Schuld* and *Schulden*, and are often tackled from a psycho-analytical perspective.¹ Muschg's *Gottfried Keller* (1977) remains one of the most authoritative voices on this subject, and his comprehensive study of Keller's life and work (especially *Der grüne Heinrich*) also emphasizes Keller's disturbed relationship to women and the undercurrent of melancholy which dominates his personality. Kaiser's *Das gedichtete Leben* (1981) is also heavily indebted to psycho-analysis, but deals with all aspects of Keller's biography and suggests that his art often functioned as a compensation for a failed life. A year later, the same author argues in an important essay that money becomes the new basis for socio-economic relationships in the nineteenth century, and stresses that Keller repeatedly explores the incompatibility of morality and economic success. In 1983 Hörisch argues in his *Gott, Geld und Glück* that the principle of exchange takes precedence over all other relationships in the nineteenth century.

¹In sequence:

thereby obliterating personal identity and culture because money carries all before it.

In my study, however, I want to argue that Heinrich’s life is determined by his misunderstanding of the nature and importance of money (and language) in the time and society he lives in.

*Money and Heinrich in Society and the Economy*

Keller was consistently aware of the significance of money as a socio-economic force, and Heinrich’s story can easily be read as the growing realization of its importance. Indeed, money is part of the very texture of Heinrich’s life and its narrative. In what follows, I shall at first give some examples of the more obvious role money plays in this work before examining money’s importance in Heinrich’s life in greater detail.

Generally, I will be referring to the first version of *Der grüne Heinrich*, which, I find, provides not only a maturer philosophy and a more logical conclusion than the second version, but also because it handles monetary matters, especially the *Schuld und Schulden* dialectic, more sharply than its successor. However, I shall also be drawing on the second version when this becomes necessary in order to illustrate certain points - often in terms of the changes the narrative underwent, many of which I view as analogous to the socio-economic developments which occurred during the twenty years separating the first from the second version.

Money as a social factor is something Heinrich becomes aware of at an early age

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1 Keller returns time and again to the themes of money and economy within nineteenth-century society (e.g. *Die Leute von Seldwyla* (I & II, 1856 & 1874), *Züricher Novellen* (1876), and *Martin Salander* (1886). Although *Martin Salander* seems an obvious choice for this thesis, I decided against it because it is, in comparison to *Der grüne Heinrich*, far more simplistic in its approach to the subject of (speculative) economics and the role of money in the nineteenth century. *Martin Salander* tackles the issues under discussion here in a strident, almost despairing voice, rather than delivering anything comparable to the thoughtful analyses Keller engages in during parts of *Der grüne Heinrich*, as will be discussed.
in the ‘tausend Verlegenheiten und schiefe Stellungen’ which, on account of his mother’s frugality, he is forced into in his new school. Frau Lee makes the many clothes and fabrics Heinrich’s father left, all of which are green, into garments for her son:


Heinrich’s identity is, from an early age onwards, inseparable from the absence of money. The feeling of being a social outcast due to lack of funds causes him to commit his first serious offence against his mother by stealing money out of the box containing coins saved for his later apprenticeship. The squandering of almost the entire savings during the course of a summer is not only an overreaction to the excessive thrift of his mother in his enjoyment of ‘die Verschwendung an sich’ [p.175], but also the desperate attempt of a loner to buy his way into society. Although he realizes that the other youngsters ‘sich sonderbar gemessen gegen mich betrugen und nur warmer wurden, wenn ich wieder ein Geldstück auf die Straße brachte, daneben aber sich anderweitig über mich zu besprechen schienen’ [p.176], the temptation to enjoy even these brief spells of

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2. The first time he steals from the *Schatzkästchen* does not really count, as Heinrich himself realizes, since that occasion had been ‘die Folge eines äußeren Zwanges’ (with which I shall deal later), whereas this time it is done ‘freiwillig und vorsätzlich; ich tat etwas, wovon ich wußte, daß es die Mutter nie zugeben würde’ [pp.167ff].
communal belonging proves to be irresistible to Heinrich. According to John Vernon, this
is a typical phenomenon in nineteenth-century realism: spendthrifts attract throngs of
people and create an artificial joviality through their purchase of social energy and
companionship, whilst very often they themselves ‘are outcasts or misfits’.\textsuperscript{5} Ironically,
Heinrich’s use of this money further emphasises his situation as an outsider:
‘Gegenstände, welche Knaben sonst vertauschen, kaufte ich nur mit baren Geldern’ [p.175].
His handling of the very agency by which he attempts to find a place in society betrays
him immediately and arouses the suspicions of his comrades. Yet they let him have his
brief triumphs; and money makes Heinrich self-confident and turns him from the ‘stillen
und blöden Fernsteher’ into ‘ein(en) laute(n) Tonangeber’ [p.173]. This is one of his
characteristics that will accompany him through to his adult years, and it is drawn to our
attention again during his time at Munich [p.720]. The image of Heinrich squandering his
future is a powerful one, and fits in with his later disposition to live on borrowed money
and borrowed time, constantly deferring the moment when he has to face up to the fact
that he will never be an artist and therefore has to start earning money from other sources.

Throughout the novel Keller comments upon money’s social functions, be it in
the rifts it causes, as reflected in Erikson’s shyness towards Rosalie since she is so rich;
or in its capacity as social glue, depicted very strikingly in the Hulda episode of the
second version. Yet maybe the most powerful observation made in this connection is the
self-perpetuation of the class system through money that Heinrich experiences as a young
adolescent, during his RE lessons:

Wir waren Jünglinge, wie man uns nannte, aus allen Ständen; am oberen

Ende, wo einige trübe Kerzen brannten, die Vornehmen und Studierenden,

\textsuperscript{5}Vernon, \textit{Money and Fiction}, p.37.
Linguistically interesting is the use of *gemacht* rather than of *ergeben*, which would be expected here. This seems to stress that money is the agent behind this process of segregation, which in turn enforces the general message of the passage: in nineteenth-century Switzerland money becomes the denominator and guardian of the class system.

Money is also one of the determinants for the differences between urban and rural life and its respective dwellers in the mid-nineteenth century. Throughout the novel the village is seen as a place where money has little real significance since it is not an essential for life; the villagers all live off the land and seem to know the gain in both the quality and quantity of the food that this brings: 'mit Wohlwollen überhauften mich die Verwandten und betrachteten mich, wie jeden Städter, der nicht Zinsherr ist, als einen Hungerschlucker' [p.223]. Also, village life is not only significantly more communal, it seems to form on the whole a little world in itself, healthier than that of the town. The villagers are generally depicted as secure individuals, whose attitude towards money is as simple as their mode of thinking: with money one buys all the little, often luxurious items, that are uncommon in the rural economy but signify something special. This can be 'ein ungenießbares Bonbon von Stärkemehl [...] , weil es die Form eines Herzens hat und ein hübscher Spruch darauf steht', or 'einfaches Weißbrot; hier holt er sich nur wieder zurück, was er selbst hervorgebracht hat' [p.223]. The purchase of these two things sums up the villager's outlook and his role in the economic cycle: the purchase of the basically useless sweet shows him to be a character who will allow himself the occasional
(and sentimental) luxury, the purchase of the bread stresses that he is still aware of the central position he holds in society. The crucial difference is that the country dweller is closer to the nature of human life than the town inhabitant could ever be; and on one occasion there is sharp criticism of the urban way of life. Reflecting on the professional lives of people, the narrator gives his assessment of the phenomena of work and money and their impact on humanity in the nineteenth century:


This passage is crucial not only for the way Keller juxtaposes urban and rural life styles, but also for the contrast it establishes between basic economics (the conversion of nature into food) and the abstraction of modern culture. A brief look at the vocabulary used
clarifies this point: modern culture is an abstraction removed from nature, in which the people themselves become equally removed from it. In the rural economy, however, each member and his labour has an undeniable, unarguable, real and secure purpose. Moreover, the abstractions occurring in those higher spheres of modern culture turn the various notions of work and productivity topsy-turvy, as Keller goes on to elaborate two pages later with the *Revalenta arabica*. Significantly, Keller uses the word *verkehrt* here, which not only means that things become turned upside down, but also denotes that something is profoundly wrong. This also touches upon the subject of art, since the crux of culture is not only technical and economic development, but art as well. Artists are not proof against the abstraction of modern life; but art is a vital part of every society. Thus this passage interlinks the artistic themes of the novel - imagination, fiction, creativity - with the socio-economic issues of artificiality, unreality and productivity. I shall return to these issues later when discussing the *Revalenta* section.

It is essential to Keller's diagnosis of modernity that he insists on the link between an abstract urban life style and a monetary-based society. In that society people purchase life's necessities, rather than cultivating the land for food or working as a craftsman (thus producing tradeable goods). A flourishing money-based economy lay not only at the roots of the revival of the cities during the late middle ages and the Renaissance, but it was also, together with the progress made in agriculture, the precondition for the industrial revolution.

Although Keller laments that the terms of the significance of work have become distorted, the *meaning* of work itself in this passage is relatively simple; it is the literal Broterwerb by working the land and the feeling of self-worth that stems from it. This links with Marx's view that the true essence of human life consists of the material

\[\text{See pp.184ff of this thesis.}\]
exchange between man and nature. Keller strikingly describes the alienation of modern culture in the section preceding Heinrich’s first attempt at earning his own money by selling a painting. He contrasts the generality of mankind’s basic need for food with the unreality that threatens the person who enters the commercial world:

So fest und allgemein wie das Naturgesetz selber sollen wir unser Dasein durch das nähren, was wir sind und bedeuten, und das mit Ehren sein, was uns nährt. [...] Weit entfernt, sein wahres Wesen hervorkehren zu dürfen und dieses einfach wirken zu lassen, soll er tausend kleine Künste und Fähigkeiten lügen oder gewaltsam erwerben, welche zu allem, was er sonst ist, treibt und gelernt hat, sich vollkommen unsinnig und zweckwidrig verhalten. [pp.708f]

In order to make a living in this artificial world, people not only have to sell their labour, which in itself is alienating, they also have to deny their true being, even violently suppress it. Keller calls this absurd and counterproductive, describing with great force the process at the root of the inhumanity of capitalism, the necessity of segregating one’s being into a marketable, public part and a private one. This means not only that the employee has to do violence to himself in order to do the job, but Keller also draws to our attention how unnatural and potentially dangerous this is: ‘Die Natur selbst aber weist nicht auf ein solches Doppelleben, und wenn diese Entsagung, die Spaltung des Wesens eines Menschen allgemein gültig sein sollte, so würde sie die Welt mit Schmerz und Elend erfüllen.’ [ibid.] In this context it is also significant that Heinrich is a landscape

painter. Landscape painting did not emerge until the onset of the modern period, and it has to do with modern man's alienation from the natural world. This is not to say that landscapes did not figure in previous times. Many Renaissance paintings, for instance, depicting biblical scenes, or the mythological pictures of the neo-classical period have breathtakingly beautiful landscapes. The crucial point however is that the nature depicted is only the background for the motif chosen. Pictorial art exclusively devoted to the natural world in its own right emerges with the age of Romanticism when an acute sense of loss of the natural makes itself felt. The artistic depiction of nature in and of itself is a phenomenon of modernity and this issue can be heard in Heinrich's explanation of the purpose of landscape painting to Anna's father: 'in den Städten, in den Häusern der Vornehmen, da hängen schöne glänzende Gemälde, welche meistens stille grüne Wildnisse vorstellen, so reizend und trefflich gemalt, als sähe man in Gottes freie Natur, und die eingeschlossenen, gefangenen Menschen erfrischen ihre Augen an den unschuldigen Bildern und nähren diejenigen reichlich, welche sie zustande bringen!'

Life in town not only necessitates a split in one's personality, it also removes one from nature, and it is telling that Heinrich sees the artist as the bringer of nature to the townspeople. Pictorial art - and the artist as well as his customer - lead a dialectical existence between being the product of the separation from nature and the desperate attempt to regain paradise lost.

It is thus no surprise that it is in the countryside where these distortions of humanity are held in check: the times Heinrich spends in the village are the most

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8 Simmel, Philosophie des Geldes, pp.543f.

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peaceful of his life; but although this is partly due to the fact that he is usually on holiday there, it is also because this is a refuge from his town life, which is largely overshadowed by money matters. The only time money is a serious topic in the village scenes is in the argument errupting between the landlord, the Tell actor, and a timber trader, which simultaneously shows the possibility of a beginning infiltration of modern economy into the rural community. Both parties are fierce in defending their own interests, yet the reader is made aware of the very different situations they are in, juxtaposing traditional and modern life styles. "Tell", as we may call him, has followed his family's traditional business, 'er saß in dem Hause seiner Väter; es war seit alten Zeiten immer ein Gasthaus gewesen' [p.414], he has only recently had it decorated with paintings of Swiss history, and he also runs a modest wine trade. His views on money and wealth are moderate; a free citizen's obligation is to earn a secure income, yet not more than necessary, and then to enjoy the fruits of his work in peace and to fulfil his communal responsibilities. With his whole being rooted deeply in traditions, the thought of abandoning his forefathers' home for the sake of a thoroughfare and increased earnings goes against his very beliefs.

The timber trader, on the other hand, although having lived in his house 'seit langer Zeit' [ibid], does not seem to live in family property, and his attachment to his possessions is governed by their monetary value. Not only does he not feel any sense of house pride, in the way that Tell does, but all his assets have no fixed or traditional worth to him: 'es lag ein großer Reichtum darin, aber dieser änderte täglich seine äußere Gestalt; selbst die Dächer von den Gebäuden verkaufte der Mann manchmal, wenn sich günstige Gelegenheit bot' [ibid]. This permanent change of the forms of his riches is the outcome of the only constant in his life, money; yet, since money bears at its core the

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10 His house looks 'mehr wie eine Arbeiterhütte als wie ein Herrenhaus', p.414.
principle of metamorphosis - it can take on any shape or form in the act of exchange - the material shape of his wealth has become contingent. The image of this continuous shifting and changing of home and business is compelling as an illustration of the upheaval that the socio-economic flexibility and negotiability brought to the nineteenth century through a money-based economy and the modern understanding of wealth as being, essentially, money. Since money was the dominating economic force throughout the nineteenth century, it is hardly surprising that the timber trader gets his way in the end. Traditions inevitably lose out when greater material benefits are in prospect.

The most comprehensive of Keller’s ponderings on the nature of money and capitalism, economy and work is the section on the phenomena of the Revalenta arabica and the infiltration of its volatility into all areas of society.

The trade in Revalenta arabica, a simple flour made from beans, is enormous: ‘Hunderttausende, vielleicht Millionen werden dadurch in Bewegung gesetzt und gewonnen’ [p.705], and yet the uncanny thing about it is that it is basically a nothing, a total swindle. What is more, people generally agree that it is a cheat, but there is one decisive difference: ‘Betrug und Schwindel nennt man sonst, was gewinnen soll ohne Arbeit und Mühe, gegründet auf eine Vorspiegelung oder Täuschung. Niemand wird aber sagen können, daß das Revalentageschäft ohne Arbeit betrieben werde; [...] es ist, [...] eine wirkliche Arbeit entstanden’ [ibid.]. What, however, is wirkliche Arbeit in Keller’s view? The answer he gives in the following passage seems at first ambiguous, if not even tongue-in-cheek. Hundreds of people gain a living from the Revalenta industry, from those who participate in its production and distribution to the printers of the advertisements. This, we are told, is real work: physical, honest, productive - however doubtful the use value of the end product is. Here we have a paradigm of money’s ability to create a totally unreal and yet operative phenomenon, a something out of nothing, a
fictional currency that manages to create something tangible that gives a living to people, but which is facilitated solely through the basically empty, equally deceptive and abstract device of money. Money is behind the demise of use value, since it is the exchange value of the bean flour that creates its worth and gives real work to people; indeed in this case it has totally replaced use value since the bean flour is, in material terms, useless.

As far as the work of the Revalentamänner themselves is concerned, its authenticity is called into question too:

Diese selbst, das Ganze beherrschend, nennen ihre Tätigkeit gewiß nicht minder Arbeit, wenn sie aus ihrem Komptoir kommen, als ein Rothschild die seinige. [...] und doch ist das Ganze ein skandalöser Schwindel und sein Kern eine hohle Nuß, indem die Hauptsache, der vorgegebene Zweck, die Eigenschaft des Gegenstandes dieser ganzen Tätigkeit eine offenkundige Täuschung ist, und dessen ungeachtet doch wieder der Chef dieser ungeheuren Blase der Zeit in seiner Umgebung so geachtet und geschätzt, wie jeder andere Geschäftsmann. [p.706]

Keller’s subtle use of language quickly establishes essential differences between Tätigkeit, which can mean activity, occupation, job, or work, and Arbeit. Much as the Revalentamänner might like to call their activities work, the fact that at its root it is a swindle makes their claim void and reveals it to be a mere empty bubble born out of the peculiar (economic) situation of the times. The distinction between the Revalentamänner and their employees consists of the simple fact that the latter actually do produce something, whereas the former are almost parasitic inventors living off a total scam.

However, Keller also criticizes those who live off the conceivably even more
immaterial substance of money. The reference to the Rothschilds, albeit in passing, can be interpreted in the same terms; just as the inventors of the bean flour cannot call their doings work, neither can the Rothschilds, although they both make that claim. ‘Die seinige’ can mean either, Tätigheit or Arbeit; and given the fact that a substantial part of the Rothschild fortune was also acquired by trickery, it becomes clear that Keller also calls the Rothschilds’ occupation a Tätigkeit. Thus both, the Revalentamänner and the Rothschilds deal with an intangible matter which enters into reality, creates real assets and even real work, yet this is intrinsically based on deception and public blindness together with the social agreement to accept this illusion and abstraction for real. As such, the Revalenta business is comparable to Mephisto’s paper money: both are ‘eine wirtschaftliche Schöpfung aus dem Nichts.’

For Keller, real work leads to a real product, and part of the confusion that allows the bean flour hoax to continue is the obscure mixture of the real (work) and the essentially unreal (product). Keller finds this typical of the time he lives in, money/Revalenta has infiltrated society down to its most unlikely areas:

Es wird Revalenta arabica gemacht in Kunst und Wissenschaft, in Theologie und Politik, in Philosophie und bürgerlicher Ehre aller Art, nur mit dem Unterschied, daß es nicht immer unschädliches Bohnenmehl ist, aber immer mit der gleichen rätselhaften Vermischung von Arbeit und Täuschung, innerer Leerheit und äußerem Erfolg, Unsinn und weisem Betriebe, von Zwecklosigkeit und stattlich ausgebreitetem Gelingen [...].

[p.706]

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11Nathan Meyer Rothschild made a financial scoop by his advance knowledge of the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo.

The very quintessence of money, its *Scheinrealität*, the acceptance of a token for the real to the point where the real has been forgotten and the token, despite being a mere representation, has acquired its reality, has become part and parcel not only of nineteenth-century economics, but also of the very make-up and substance of nineteenth-century society. And yet the phenomenon cannot simply be condemned since it does afford not only real work, and thereby a living for many an honest worker, but also because it is endemic to the socio-economic developments. Keller recognizes money’s tremendous power to generate general wealth and prosperity through the very way it functions, through touching everybody in a society and drawing them into its economic purview, its capability to energize hitherto dormant human abilities and propel forward human cultural and technological advances - even when it reaches a point where the formerly “securely” defined terms of work and tangible product become confused or take on a new dimension. It is also significant that Keller is not the only nineteenth-century writer astonished by the uncanny concoction of real and fictional, product and money, shamble and profit. Dickens and Balzac both explore occurrences similar to the *Revalenta arabica*, in the dust heaps that generate prosperity in *Our Mutual Friend* or in the cheap, but potentially hugely profitable, paper produced from vegetable pulp in *Illusions perdues*.

Money as an economic factor is to have an immense impact on Heinrich’s life, largely through his inability to grasp it as such - which is the more tragic since ‘der grüne Heinrich wie kaum eine zweite Romangestalt des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts im Bann des Geldfetischs (steht)’. Keller’s observations of the economic developments and forces of the nineteenth century underpin the story of Heinrich; moreover, there are some changes between the first and second versions that illustrate the ongoing progress of money in becoming the basis of all economic activity as the century advances.

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13 Hörisch, *Gott, Geld und Glück*, p.112.
Probably due to the absence of a father, the young Heinrich remains blissfully unaware of the origins of money in a family household. His mother lives off a small income by renting out rooms, but this situation prevents Heinrich from realizing that money actually has to be earned; all he does know and experience day-to-day is that it is not to be wasted, but it is always there. This is at the root of one of the problems Heinrich has with money, namely that he does not know its worth, its economic reality, until he is forced to experience this by selling his labour to the owner of the junk shop. Only then does he spend his money 'bedächtig und vorsichtig [...] als einer, der weiß, woher es kommt'.

The way he manages to survive up until this point is by totally evading (economic) reality, spending his mother's savings, accumulating debts, and finally selling all his possessions. The issues of the connection between his debts and his guilt towards his mother will be dealt with in a later section. Essentially, Heinrich lives a life of idleness. Socially, he lives above his station, his life style being usually only affordable by sons of wealthy parents. This is only possible because the money he receives allows him this retreat into a fantasy world in which he can dream that he will one day be a famous painter. Like the Revalentamänner he thinks himself a working man, yet this is a swindle in exactly the same way since Heinrich, as an artist, is quite simply no good. He is no artist, and therefore his paintings are as devoid of meaning and value as is the bean flour. The only decent studies Heinrich seems able to produce are copies of other artists' work: 'Rasch kopierte ich die Blätter, die Römer mir mitgab, [...] und als ich sie

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14 Heinrich's other views of and attitudes towards money will be dealt with in a later section.

15 Second version, p.683.

16 This remoteness from reality is also reflected in his paintings, in 'seine(r) blasse(n) trauhafte(n) Malerei'. [p.713].
ihm brachte, sagte er: "Das geht ja vortrefflich, ganz gut!" [p.467]. What is more, once he has perfected the art of copying, he finds original work costs him 'die größte Beharrlichkeit und Mühe, ein nur zum zehnten Teile so anständiges Blatt zu wege zu bringen, als meine Kopien waren' [p.474]. In Munich, he cannot sell his paintings to anyone who is in the art business, and he receives only a pittance from a junk dealer. This episode in itself, in which Heinrich's work painfully clashes with demand and taste, together with Habersaat's mass production of landscapes, raise the question of art as commodity.

Theoretically, art resists total commodification because 'an ihr scheitern die Begriffe der politischen Ökonomie; Kunst bewahrt noch ihre Autonomie selbst wenn sie zur Ware wird, eben da sie eine gebrauchswertfremde Zwecklosigkeit besitzt, jedoch keineswegs grundlos ist'. This, however, is not true of Heinrich's art; had he managed to sell his paintings as art to an acknowledged art dealer, Hörisch's statement would be accurate, but Heinrich's paintings end up as part of Schmalhöfer's 'erbärmlichen Kram von allerlei Schnickschnack' [p.732]. The scene is even more powerful in the second version, where Heinrich first sells his flute to Schmalhöfer before finally offering his works as basically the same kind of merchandise as the instrument. Heinrich seems to know this instinctively, and defers the moment of selling his paintings as long as possible, disposing of anything tradeable before putting himself on the market, first in the form of his works, later of his labour. Heinrich learns now that art is divisible into days of subsistence, that weeks of youthful painting and self-expression are worth no more than enough to survive for a couple of days: he and his work are finally subject to the laws of economic reality, *viz. money*.

Habersaat's art factory touches on a different aspect of art commodification,

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namely that of mass production. A successful business man, Habersaat markets cheap reproductions of famous Swiss landscapes. There is never any talk of self-expression or creativity in his works; in a sense, he is the forerunner of photography - “taking” pictures and making hundreds of identical copies. He literally manufactures art for the taste of the people; no originals required, his products are the epitome of nineteenth-century industrial developments: cheap, instantly available, interchangeable, and with huge profits for the entrepreneur in charge. Indeed, Habersaat engages in one of the most despicable practices of early capitalism, child labour: ‘So begriff er vollständig das Wesen heutiger Industrie, deren Erzeugnisse umso wertvoller und begehrenswerter zu sein scheinen für die Käufer, je mehr schlau entwendetes Kinderleben darin aufgegangen ist’ [p.299]. Art has no longer necessarily to do with artistry, it is about making money through pleasing the popular taste. Heinrich, however, does not learn this lesson, and it forms part of his ruin. It is also here that Heinrich’s words to Anna’s father regarding the landscape paintings in the houses of the rich find their corroboration. Habersaat’s factory is the grotesque ultimate outcome of pictorial art, the transformation of nature via work not only into a painting, but into picture and commodity, reproduced over and over. The pictorial worship of nature whereby art becomes a surrogate for reality proves to be at the centre of popular taste in a century haunted by urbanisation and industrialization.

In the same way in which Heinrich’s paintings turn into commodities, he himself is forced to transform work into wage labour. From producing whole paintings, he finds himself painting flagpoles, and it is significant that Heinrich is on piece rate rather than being paid by the hour. Schmalhöfer soon realizes that Heinrich is selling his last resources and he also seems acutely aware of Heinrich’s inborn pride, which he appears determined to curb. Knowing that the impersonality of money would allow Heinrich to conceal his dire situation from himself and from others (he could spend Schmalhöfer’s
coins without giving away from where and why he got them), Schmalhöfer forces him to acknowledge his poverty in front of the world. In the first version he forces him to walk across the market carrying a huge painting, in the second he opens the window just as Heinrich is humbly eating from his table, ‘wegen der Wärme, wie er sagte, im Grunde aber, um meinen Bettlerstolz zu zähmen und mich den Vorübergehenden zu zeigen’. It is in this connection that Schmalhöfer pays Heinrich per flagpole. He is the only one in the junk dealer’s shop who does not receive hourly wages, as Hulda points out. Yet although Hulda is impressed and envious of Heinrich’s higher earnings, it is piece rate that is the crueller and more exploitative of the two kinds of payment. Piece rate remunerates solely the exact effort of the labourer, thus completely objectifying and severing his working power and its produce from his personality. It does not allow for the human need for breaks, human mistakes or simply a bad day, and so ‘erscheint der Stundenlohn menschenwürdiger, [...] trotzdem (oder hier vielmehr: weil) der Mensch als ganzer in das Arbeitsverhältnis eintritt und so die Unbarmherzigkeit des rein objektiven Maßstabes gemildert wird’.  

Schmalhöfer’s determination to teach Heinrich the reality behind money and integrate him into the economic process appears to be behind his decision to pay Heinrich at piece rate. Schmalhöfer gets annoyed when he realizes that Heinrich is an able flagpole painter, declaring ‘es sei nicht die Meinung gewesen, daß ich so viel an dem Zeug verdienen solle!’ Quite clearly Schmalhöfer’s intentions had been aimed at giving Heinrich a taste of what earning one’s living is all about rather than allowing Heinrich to make money quickly and with relative ease. Yet the fact that Heinrich stands up for

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18Second version, p.703.

19Simmel, _Philosophie des Geldes_, p.367.

20Second version, p.709.
himself and insists on his agreed share is a sign of Heinrich’s progress in money matters since he had always been demure and fearful when selling his paintings to Schmalhöfer, although they required far more complex work than the flagpoles. For the first time in his life, Heinrich receives money he has rightfully and accountably earned, and this is why he feels himself ‘auf ganz sicherem Grunde’ against the dealer.

The Troubled Issue of Schuld(en)

The theme of debt is a prominent one in the literature of the last century, fuelled by the establishment of credit as one of the major forces in a capital-based economy. Debts are the means through which reality can be excluded for a certain time and be moulded into what the debtor wants it to be, and Heinrich makes ample use of this; moreover, they are also ‘a means of binding the future to the past and of literally living on borrowed time.’

And it is with an acute sense of unease that we watch Heinrich getting ever more entangled in a web of debt, knowing that the future is closing in on him. One of the most striking traits in Heinrich’s dealings with money is the uncanny mixture of Schuld and Schulden that runs through the novel. Heinrich’s proneness to accumulate debts is a feature he develops very early in his life, his ability to cope with them growing as he does.

When Heinrich plunders the Schatzkästchen, he can be no older than in his early teens. We know he is trying to buy himself into the community of the local youngsters, and it is here that he seriously clashes with his mother for the first time. He is actively and deliberately cheating on his mother, but he is also impoverishing himself, since the money was intended to finance his apprenticeship. (This is typical of Heinrich’s use of

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21 Vernon, Money and Fiction, p.110.
money: when he borrows in Munich it will once again be in order to betray himself, albeit this time with rather more tragic consequences for himself and his mother.) Furthermore, Heinrich’s guilt is immediately substantiated by the fact that his mother actually does give him the pocket money he had feared to be denied; worse still, the amount is ‘höchst anständig und vollkommen hinreichend und selbst für unvorhergesehene Fälle berechnet’ [p.168]. From Heinrich’s first significant contact with money to his last ones, the situations are marked by guilt, usually in respect of his mother. One of the reasons behind this is the mother’s identity, her Lebensnerv, which consists of two strands, ‘einstellt das kindliche blinde Vertrauen ihrer religiösen Rechtlichkeit, andernteils ihre ebenso religiöse Sparsamkeit und unwandelbare Lebensfrage [...] jedes Guldenstück war ihr beinahe ein heiliges Symbolum des Schicksals’ [p.181]. The mother’s close identification with money makes every “crime” against money a crime against her and her deferential attitude towards it, and since Heinrich is very much aware of what he is doing, he cannot be exonerated. Moreover, not only does Heinrich waste money, he also amasses debts with Meierlein, thus compounding the extent of his transgression. The “debts” he runs up with Meierlein, who has such an economically integrated view of the realities of money and debts ‘daß sein Büchlein eine ordentliche Bedeutung und Gültigkeit hätte vor jedem Geschäftsmann’ [p.178], give him a first impression of the social stigma attached to the defaulting debtor as well as feelings of guilt and uneasiness. Yet despite Heinrich’s careless squandering of the savings, he seems to have a premonition of money’s potential power. When the young

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22 For the best extensive, albeit psycho-analytical treatments of the question of money and identity, see Hörisch, Gott, Geld und Glück, Kaiser, Das gedichtete Leben, Muschg, Gottfried Keller. However, Hörisch does not consider the mother’s identity and money in his otherwise remarkable investigation, and Kaiser does so only briefly. Muschg also delivers an excellent psycho-analytical profile of the mother.

boy puts his hand into the box he notices that the coins made 'ein leises Silbergeräusch, in dessen klangvoller Reinheit jedoch eine gewisse Gewalt lag, die mich schaudern machte' [p.167]. This description not only prefigures the outbreak of physical violence between Heinrich and Meierlein at the end of the summer when Heinrich is unable to pay his debts to the other boy, but also addresses one of money's most important features, namely that of its power due to its own uncontaminated condition. Money exudes the greatest power before it is spent, as a store of countless possibilities at the disposal of its owner. And it is this which makes Heinrich popular when he turns up with another sum of money. Equally, it is this power that Heinrich feels to be his own and which helps him on occasion to overcome his usual shyness and quietness, and which gives Meierlein his hold over the guilt-ridden Heinrich until it finally erupts in the violence between the two boys.

For the next two years Heinrich stays well away from all monetary matters, aided by many visits to the village of his relatives, until he discovers that he can obtain things without paying for them on the spot. Although Frau Lee hopes to cure those habits 'wenn sie mich die Unbequemlichkeit eine Zeitlang fühlen ließe' [p.324], due to her eventual payment of the outstanding bills, the discomfort of being hounded by creditors is in the end always kept at bay. Heinrich's feelings of guilt and uneasiness have no profound consequences for his attitude towards and understanding of money and debt.

On the contrary, the tables are turned when Heinrich decides brutally to reclaim the money his mother lent to Römer, yet this time the boy becomes guilty because he recovers debts in morally problematic circumstances. Heinrich had continued to benefit from Römer's knowledge and experience even after the agreed and remunerated four months of instruction were over, 'deswegen hätten wir das Geld füglich als eine wohlangewandte Entschädigung ansehen müssen' [pp.505f]. Furthermore, the paranoid
artist ends up in a lunatic asylum, from where he sends Heinrich a letter cursing him for his meanness. For the first time Heinrich’s misjudgement of the realities of money and debt have dire consequences, and Judith is right when she asks: ‘“Weißt du wohl, Heinrich, daß du allbereits ein Menschenleben auf deiner grünen Seele hast?”’ [p.514] In the first version of the novel, Römer’s mental death is followed by the mother’s and Heinrich’s own physical death; in the second, it is only the mother who dies, whereas Römer’s condition is matched by Heinrich’s spiritual deadness at the end.

The mental torment Heinrich suffers after receiving the artist’s letter is brilliantly portrayed in Heinrich’s handling of the note:

Den unheimlichen Brief wagte ich nicht zu verbrennen und fürchtete mich, ihn aufzubewahren; bald begrub ich ihn unter entlegenem Gerümpel, bald zog ich ihn hervor und legte ihn zu meinen liebsten Papieren, und noch jetzt, sooft ich ihn finde, verändere ich seinen Ort und bringe ihn anderswohin, so daß er auf steter Wanderschaft ist. [p.509]

However hard Heinrich may try, this inverted Schuldschein, in which Römer’s repayment of a questionable debt is transformed into Heinrich’s guilt, the written testimony of his social and human failure in monetary affairs, will accompany him to his own end. The fate he brings upon Römer prefigures what he will incur for himself, be it the physical end in the first version or the mental one in the second.

Despite the difficulties that befall Heinrich, his real downward path does not begin until his time in Munich. Up to that point he is subject to his mother’s strict regime, yet in the first version the reader is immediately made aware of the potential problems Heinrich will encounter when left to his own devices. His mother’s exasperated ‘“Das ist
wieder der Hans Obenhinaus! [...] Bedienung! ich sage dir, lasse dich lieber nicht bedienen, wenn du dich dadurch billiger einrichten kannst” ' [p.20] in response to Heinrich’s declaration that he will never again clean his own clothes, reveals that Heinrich’s attitude towards money and personal comfort seems to be anchored in a long history of conflict with his mother. Heinrich remains in his mother’s debt for all his life, especially in the first version. When he sets out for Munich in the earlier version, there was, since he had squandered the contents of the money-box, ‘zu seinem Eintritt in die Welt die mäßige Barsumme bestimmt, welche seine Mutter während ihres Witwenstandes, trotz ihrer beschränkten Verhältnisse und ungeachtet sie zu gleicher Zeit einen Sohn erzog, doch unbemerkt erspart hatte’ [p.699]. In the second version, on the other hand, the period up until he is meant to stand on his own feet is provided for by the Pergamentlein his father had chosen as an investment for him. Thus, in the earlier version, Heinrich’s trip to Munich and his stay there is something which he totally owes to his mother, making his failure to secure himself an income after the first year already an offence against her self-sacrifice. He stays indebted to his mother until he finally takes up work with Schmalhöfer, and it is the money he undeservedly keeps receiving from her that allows him to sustain his misconception of himself as an artist, simultaneously perpetuating the downfall of his mother. Yet some measure of blame also attaches to the mother. If his mother had followed the advice she had been given by many of her late husband’s friends, namely to put Heinrich to work as soon as possible, a situation in which he could both exploit her and undermine his own life, would not have arisen. In the second version, however, the mother admits the mistakes she made in Heinrich’s upbringing and she asks herself whether it is she whom ‘die Verschuldung trifft’24 for

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24 Second version, p.881.
Heinrich's erring life. Interesting is the use of *Verschuldung* instead of *Schuld*, so that it is possible to read the mother's acknowledgement that she is to blame as embracing her part in his fecklessness. As is the case with her son, guilt and money are closely intertwined, her protectiveness of her son's wishes having led to her supporting him unreasonably with her money.

In Munich, Heinrich's first attempt at facing reality proves such a disaster that he immediately withdraws again and, having a premonition of the artistic failure that awaits him, takes refuge in an equally removed venture of eclectic, aimless study at university. He sustains himself by making debts, yet despite his attempts to educate himself and his philosophic ponderings on human free will and the nature of humanity, he never achieves insight into the difference between positive and negative debts (or at least he does so only nominally in the second version). The reflections on the different categories of debt have much harsher implications in the first version of the novel, whereas in the second they underline the contradiction between Heinrich's flattering image of himself and reality. The actual text of the thoughts is identical in both versions, with a heavy emphasis placed on the notion that he who borrows without real need is '“nicht sowohl ein Leichtsinniger als vielmehr eine niedrige Seele, die ich im Verdachte eines schmutzigen Eigennutzes habe” ' [p.716]. However, bad luck can strike everyone and thus borrowing driven by genuine need is acceptable, providing that repayment is swift and without attempts at cheating the lender. Yet as far as Heinrich is concerned, the narrator makes it clear in the first version that Heinrich does not belong to the category of responsible debtors because, 'da er vor allem Muße brauchte, so war er sein eigener Mäzen und machte Schulden' [p.717]. Heinrich makes debts 'zum Vergnügen', he needs time for his 'studies', in other words, he belongs to those who borrow out of self-interest which, in his case, means the idle retreat into his own world and the preservation of a distorted self-image. This use of
borrowed money is in stark contrast to the applications Heinrich’s father put his credit to: old Lee not only enjoyed credit because he worked ‘vom Morgen bis zum Abend’ [p.66] (unlike Heinrich), he also permanently re-invested, making the money work as hard he himself did. Moreover, he employs money towards self-fulfilment, through the credit extended to him he tries to realize his dreams and ambitions, whereas his son does the opposite by creating his own reality and effectively running away from himself. Using money in order not only to sustain himself and his family but also for the general good, since ‘Geld für ihn nur Wert hatte, wenn etwas damit ausgerichtet oder geholfen wurde’ [p.67], Lee handles and utilizes money in such a way that the high degree of integration into the socio-economic reality of his time becomes visible, highlighting his participation in the shaping of communal life. However, the second version seems to underplay some of the bitter connotations of Heinrich’s failure by stressing his self-deception rather than his failure.

Due to his financial support Heinrich finds himself in a peculiar situation in Munich, somewhat caught in the middle between the rich Ferdinand, who has as much money at his disposal as he wishes, and Erikson, who lives from his paintings. Yet Heinrich is neither rich enough to live the life he does in Munich, nor does he have Erikson’s talent to produce pictures that are easy to sell. Stuck in an impossible position, unable to sell any pictures, unwilling to work, he finds himself in debt, and it is again and again his mother who gets him out of trouble.

Keller’s beautiful observation of humanity (the chapter entitled Lebensarten in the second version) juxtaposes Heinrich’s idleness and self-deception with his mother’s asceticism: whilst Heinrich fails in art, Frau Lee has mastered ‘die Kunst, von nichts zu leben’ [p.699] in order to support her son if need be. The money she has managed to save is inseparable from her own deprived existence. Heinrich’s acceptance of this sacrifice as
a matter of course, and the cheeky, albeit very apt, description of her as a money-box in
the second version, not only underlines his unawareness of money's worth, but also
reveals his egocentrism and inability even to reflect on the life of others. Yet it is also
impossible not to comment on the mother's own part in her eventual ruin. Having made
saving money for her son the only objective in her life, she goes on to internalize totally
her meanness towards herself. Denying herself not only decent food but also social
contacts 'um alle Ausgaben zu vermeiden' [p.701], she is unable to assert her autonomy
and lets her life be ruled by the potential need of her offspring. Although Heinrich is now
far away and meant to look after himself, she still makes him the pivot of her existence,
refusing to take responsibility for her own life and using Heinrich as an excuse for doing
so. Muschg observes that the mother lives outside the 'wirtschaftliche Realität [...] durch
magische Sparsamkeit' even before Heinrich's stay at Munich, and this tendency peaks
in her withdrawal even from social life. What is more, she gains an almost masochistic
enjoyment out of her self-denial and the ensuing emptiness of her life. Apart from
Sundays she eats nothing but a meagre soup and some, usually stonehard, rough bread,
but 'dasselbe vergnüglich und zufrieden bewältigend, schwelgte sie ordentlich in ihrer
freiwilligen Aszese' [ibid]. It is, however, Heinrich's suggestion to mortgage the house in
order to protect his dreams and easy life style that leads to the ultimate climax of his guilt
and betrayal, since it is this ill-fated loan that brings about the mother's spiritual as well
as physical ruin.

Keller also addresses the influence money, and especially debt, has on time. To
live on borrowed money is not only to live on borrowed time, but money is also a way of
calibrating time. Not only is the idea of credit and debt inconceivable without a calendar,
especially when interest is being charged, but by living in the present with the means of

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15Gottfried Keller, p.158.
the future, that future becomes mortgaged. The debtor knows the milestones of his life in advance, and much of his time will be taken up by trying to find money to repay the creditor. Borrowed money penetrates into the future and binds it to the present (or the past); and Heinrich himself comes to realize another bizarre effect borrowed money exerts on time, which is ‘die nachträgliche Bezahlung eines schon genossenen und vergangenen Stück Lebens, eine unerbittliche und kühle Ausgleichung, gleichviel ob die gelebten Tage, [...] etwas getauft haben oder nicht’ [p.719]. This experience is, of course, one that is only made by debtors who actually repay; and Heinrich’s ordeal is muted by the fact that it is not his own money/time that is used to balance out the amount of time he has spent on credit. Keller points this out when he draws our attention to the ‘zweijährige Ersparnis der Mutter’ [ibid], enmeshing time and money. It is the mother’s past that repays the son’s, simultaneously assisting Heinrich in the deferral of his future and increasing his Schulden by adding further Schuld.

Yet Heinrich also experiences ready money’s calibration of time, after he has received the mother’s savings and paid his debts, he looks at the small amount left and realizes ‘daß ich höchstens ein Vierteljahr daran zu leben hatte’.[26] In the same way as he comes to equate money with food, he also learns to regard it as a kind of clock, measuring how many days of subsistence it will afford him. The peculiar psychological effect that time will go the faster as the money dwindles also comes to haunt him: ‘Neben der Vorsicht, die ich an die Arbeit verwandte, beschäftigte mich das Abwägen der fliehenden Zeit mit der täglichen Abnahme meines Barvorrates.’[27] Much of the tense atmosphere in the novel is affected by money and time - one thinks of Heinrich’s squandering of the contents of the money-box and his debts to Meierlein, of the periods


he waits for the creditors to appear and tell his mother of his cashless purchases, and especially of those debt-ridden years in Munich, where we watch him with a growing sense of unease at his deferral of a future that is nevertheless approaching relentlessly.

The interlacing of money and guilt in Heinrich's life also draws in Joseph Schmalhöfer. Despite the harsh lessons the junk dealer teaches the young man, he is so fond of him that he makes Heinrich his heir. However, the inheritance is doubly marred as a result of Heinrich's neglect of his fellow human beings; in both versions Schmalhöfer's letter to Heinrich tells of his disappointment that Heinrich has cruelly left him. Moreover, it is this legacy of the old man which finally convinces the mother in the later version that Heinrich had got himself into serious trouble because the police had come looking for him; her subsequent desperation and anguish about her useless son give her the final push towards the grave. Thus even when Heinrich obtains money in a rightful way, it is laden with guilt and indebtedness. Throughout the novel, Heinrich is only happy and content whilst spending other people's money, an attitude totally in opposition to his mother's. Whenever the relationship to her is untroubled, he himself suffers from isolation and unhappiness because he cannot be part of the community without money, the only exceptions being his sojourns at the village. The other time when he is not plagued by monetary worries, during his stay at the castle of the Graf, his mother falls terminally ill, and when he returns home a rich man, his mother is already dead or, as in the second version, near to death. One of the reasons behind this is his refusal to see money in the way she does, another that 'für Keller in der Tradition der

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28 As to the nature of the inheritance, the changes between the first and the second version highlight the developments in finance that took place in the two decades between them. In the first version, the inheritance bears the image of a treasure: 'Man hatte aber in einem alten silbernen Becher von mächtiger Größe, der mit einem Deckel versehen war, einen ganzen Schatz in Gold und öffentlichen Papieren vorgefunden [...] ' [pp.876f]. In the second version however, the inheritance first appears exclusively in the shape of 'öffentliche Schuldtitle' which are then turned into 'bare(s) Geld, Forderungen und Wechsel' [p.864] - in short, it takes the shape of most financial devices of the time but, notably, no longer of gold.
protestantischen Ethik “Verschuldung” und “Schulden”, moralische Inferiorität und ökonomische Defizienz wie auch deren Gegenbegriffe engstens miteinander verschränkt (sind)\footnote{Kaiser, ‘Ökonomische Thematik und Gattungsanleihen’, p.449.}

Thus Heinrich’s relationship to money and to his mother is determined by the constant interplay of Schulden and Schuld, and it is typical of his egoism that, until he learns of the mother’s death, he is unapologetic towards her whilst wallowing in the realization of his guilt. When he receives a reproachful yet caring letter from her during his last few days in Munich, he is unable to face up to his failure in an open admission to her,

dagegen folgte dem ersten Schmerz über den rührenden Brief ein begieriges Aufsichladen einer verhängnisvollen Verschuldung, indem er sein ganzes Leben und sein Schicksal sich als seine Schuld beimaß und sich darin gefiel, [...] diese Schuld als ein köstliches Gut und Schoßkind zu hätscheln, ohne welches ihm das Elend unerträglich gewesen wäre. [p.784]

This reaction matches his mother’s masochistic enjoyment of her asceticism, and the passage is equally remarkable in its intermingling of monetary and psychological matters. Having realized his failure, Heinrich engages in a fatalistic process in order to negotiate his guilt. In order to cope with it, he expands his Verschuldung (both monetary and morally) into a great disastrous destiny that engulfs the whole of his life. In the same way in which he previously did not care at all about what he did to his mother, he now does the exact opposite, thereby trying out the various strategies human beings use to cope
with their guilt: either by trying to ignore (or diminish) it in order to feel normal, or by making it so big that really nothing can be done about it apart from hoping for (and expecting!) the other person's forgiveness. The superficiality of the recognition of his guilt is not only disclosed by Heinrich's subsequent prolonged stay at the Graf's castle, but also in his inability to foresee or cope with the ultimate result of his failure - the mother's death.

As has become apparent, Heinrich's and his mother's lives are dominated by problems of money, debt and guilt; and this applies to both versions of the novel. In the first version, there is no doubt that it is Heinrich - with his repeated failure to stand on his own feet and with his permanent debts - who pushes his mother to the grave. When the people to whom she mortgaged the house hear that it was for Heinrich that she had raised the money, 'hielt man sie um dieser Handlung willen für leichsinnig und unzuverlässig und kündigte ihr die Summe' [p.892]. The absence of her son, his apparent uncaring attitude towards her, his debts with which he finally deprives her of her own home - all these factors combine to bring about her terminal illness. And the crucial point is that they are all due to Heinrich himself. In the second version, however, there are several incidents, not connected with Heinrich, which also play a decisive role in her demise. When Heinrich decides to ask his mother to raise money on the house, we are told that Frau Lee is in financial trouble anyway because two of her tenants, the alcoholic Eichmeister and the civil servant, had defaulted on their rent. It is also suggested that, had it not been for her loneliness due to the deaths of many relatives, she might not have taken out the mortgage: 'allein die Einsamkeit vergrößerte ihren Schrecken, und um nur wieder in Bewegung zu kommen und das Lebendige zu spüren, erfüllte sie mein
Moreover, when it comes to her losing her home, this is not due to the bad opinion of the creditors but to their avarice, ‘denn es bestand eben die Absicht, sie vom Hause zu bringen, und es steckten Gewinnlustige hinter der Sache [...].’

Heinrich’s part in the downfall of his mother is therefore reduced by significant factors, his mother has been losing money to tenants, she is weakened through personal losses, becomes the victim of money speculators and also acknowledges her blame in having been too indulgent with her son. This is not to say that Heinrich bears no guilt; it had been his idea to mortgage the house in the first place, which is of course the root of the problem. Heinrich is aware of this when he explains that the external influences did not ease his guilt, he knows he is the ultimate cause of his mother’s death, but to the reader of both versions it is clear that the considerable redistribution of objective guilt and blame lessens Heinrich’s individual blameworthiness in the second version of the novel. Indeed Keller himself had intended this since it offered him a chance to highlight the general cruelty and disregard for humanity that the increasing cupidity of nineteenth-century society brought in its wake. In 1850 he writes to Vieweg, regarding the question of guilt and blame in the forthcoming novel, that ‘im gegebenen Falle aber liegt sie [die Schuld] größtenteils im Charakter und des besonderen Geschicke des Helden und bedingt hierdurch eine mehr ethische Bedeutung des Romans’. Contrary to this he writes to Petersen in 1881 after the rewriting of the book: ‘Eine eigentliche Verschuldung [...] trifft den Sohn doch nicht, da es sich um die Erfüllung eines Erziehungs- und Entwicklungs geschicktes handelt, an welchem niemand schuld ist oder alle.’

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30 Second version, p.688.


longer the single failure of Heinrich, but also the developments of the time which lead to
Frau Lee's end; and they are also the reason why Heinrich can carry on living afterwards.
No feeling human being could have borne the guilt Heinrich amasses in the first version,
and consequently Heinrich is destroyed by it; whereas the alleviation of his guilt in the
final version allows him to live, albeit in a numb mental state.

Money and Language - Life and Reality

A feature money shares with language is, as we have had occasion already to note, that
they both are agents of intersubjectivity; it is no use to have money without anything to
spend it on and it is equally useless to learn to speak if there is nobody to communicate
with. Heinrich is unskilled at handling both money and language - a limitation that, as
critics have often noted, derives from his fatherless youth,\(^{33}\) which meant that he never
had the chance to be initiated into the male world which he would later have to join.
Indeed, it is arguable that Heinrich, for a long time, is not forced to recognize a resistant
external world. At bottom, his problems with both money and language, and
consequently with life and reality, stem from a perception that money and language are
systems of representation, abstractions to which he finds no access.

From very early on Heinrich registers the discrepancy between the sound of
words and their meaning. Instead of grasping that mountains are tangible objects, they
remain as indistinct for Heinrich as the clouds in the sky, and what he actually identifies
with both, mountains and clouds, are ‘Achtung und Neugierde’ [p.78]. These being
feelings applicable to various other matters, he proceeds to call human beings and church
towers by the same names if they trigger the same feelings in him, and this is only

\(^{33}\text{For example: 'keiner vermittelte ihm die Gesetzgebung der Sprache und die ersten Gesetze der Wahrheit}
[...]	ext{ihm mangelt die Einsicht in den Mangel des sprachlichen Kontrastes von Wahrheit und}
Lüge'. Hörisch, Gott, Geld und Glück, p.148; see also Kaiser, Das gedichtete Leben, pp.39ff.\}
possible because names are ‘ein leerer Schall für mich’ [ibid]. His early attitude to God
appears in a similar light, Heinrich is unable to accept the signified his mother offers to
him for the signifier Gott, namely some ineffable divinity. Consequently he reaches for a
more tangible explanation, so that his idea of God moves from that of a weathercock to a
tiger; and it sounds almost like a concession to God that ‘Er auch eine unbestimmte Rolle
der Anwesenheit in den kleinen Kindergebeten (spielte), welche ich mit vielem
Vergnügen herzusagen wußte’ [ibid]. Heinrich simply loves to pray because he enjoys the
sound of his own voice and he likes to toy with words, which seems to turn the medium
of communicating with the Deity into a word game that he plays ‘mit großer
Meisterschaft und vielen Variationen’ [p.79]. There is no real presence for him behind the
sounds he utters: God is for him merely a linguistic entity.

The first time Heinrich is confronted with written language, the gap between
signifier and signified widens. Being presented with a “P”, Heinrich feels his sense of
humour tickled by its shape and, instead of recognizing it as a letter, takes it to represent
a word, or rather, a definite object. Heinrich’s understanding of sound and meaning is
original and arbitrary, for him this must be the mysterious Pumpernickel he has heard of,
although he has no notion as to what this strange word actually designates. The mysteries
of language remain closed to him, he can neither recognize a part of a word nor does he
understand the name he actually utters, he simply equates a strange figure with an equally
alien concept. The consequence of his act of spontaneous human denomination is harsh;
Heinrich receives a violent hiding from the teacher, who cannot understand the six-year-
old’s impulsive creation of language. The next time Heinrich experiences the power of
speech is a year later, again prompted by words ‘deren Bedeutung mir unbekannt war’
[p.123]. Being interrogated about the source of some rude words he utters, Heinrich
invents a story so convincing that the boys he accuses of having tortured him receive the
hardest punishments possible. The crucial point here is the amalgamation of Heinrich's fabrication and the tangible effects this has on the other boys: '[...] ich fühlte eher noch eine Befriedigung in mir, daß die poetische Gerechtigkeit meine Erfindung so schön und sichtbarlich abrundete, daß etwas Auffallendes geschah, gehandelt und gelitten wurde, und das infolge meines schöpferischen Wortes' [p.125]. For the first time in his life, the abstraction of language shows itself to be effective in the practical world; language has a consequence he can see, and Heinrich gets the feeling that he has finally uncovered the secret relationship between sound and meaning that was so painful to him at his first day at school. He will labour under this misapprehension for years to come.

Heinrich generally does not cherish going to school until he is old enough to comprehend the interrelatedness of most subjects, and the only subject he really enjoys is German, because 'das einzige Element, in dem ich sicher lebte wie in der Lebensluft, war die Sprache' [p.192]. This immediately draws attention to an all-embracing importance of language in his life; moreover, it is also telling that Heinrich can easily manoeuvre himself through foreign languages without being found out. In other words, it does not matter with which signifiers he has to deal since they all represent what is not inherently within them, so he relies on their sound and its affinity to his mother tongue. He is simply good at imitating - a characteristic that also dominates his ability as a painter, as discussed earlier in this chapter. It will remain Heinrich's characteristic that he never quite grasps the relation between signifier and signified, that the reality behind words tends to escape him: 'Der Grüne-Heinrich-Roman ist die Darstellung einer Entwicklung, in der ein sprachliches Ausdrucksvermögen sich seine angemessene Beziehung zu den Gegenständen sucht.'

We remember that the language he chooses in his school essays is by no means

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34Szemkus, Gesellschaftlicher Wandel, p.13.
his own but very often the imitation of 'Stilkünste und Wendungen [...] aus gelesenen Büchern' [p.193]. The fact that he cannot always find his own words in order to voice his views throws an ambiguous light on his bragging about his language capabilities. It suggests that, as is later the case with his copying of Römer's paintings, far from being able to perceive and encode for himself, he is dependent on someone else to give him the tools with which to see and understand the world and, more importantly, this means that his own understanding of the world is, from the beginning, influenced by other people's understanding or interpretation. Thus, when he claims that he could not understand why his classmates found it so difficult to express themselves, he gives away the root of his easiness with language, namely that he does not struggle for his own words, as they do, but relies on somebody else's. This is further substantiated by the contents of many of his compositions. When he has to write about Wilhelm Tell, he simply transforms Schiller's drama into prose; yet when asked to write about ficticious events, he gets so carried away that he knows he cannot hand the essays in.

There is also the problem that whenever Heinrich is asked to make use of his command of language, it fails him. Although he is the one who has least to do with the incident at the former teacher's home, his comrades make him their scapegoat and he is unable to defend himself or even to simply put the situation into his own words. Moreover, he is renowned at school for his habit 'den Vorwürfen, Ermahnungen und Strafen bei vorkommenden Fällen ein unwandelbares Schweigen entgegenzusetzen' [pp.205f], thus infuriating many teachers. Whenever he is in difficulty, Heinrich's self-acclaimed eloquence subsides, not only at school but also with his mother (he falls silent every time he is in debt) and with Dortchen: once he has fallen in love with her, he is unable to communicate with her any longer. This is all the more intriguing since the narrator Heinrich, in both versions, is indeed very articulate and does by no means
correspond to the monosyllabic young man he portrays in his writings. Similarly, Heinrich is also very chatty when he feels himself liked and understood, as with the Graf or Anna's father. The reason behind this has to do with his problematic intersubjectivity. Heinrich seems to sense whether people share his views or not; and if they do, communication becomes possible. Similarly, when writing, once he is left to his own understanding and handling of language without having to consider its compatibility with that of other human beings, then he is happy to produce masses of signifiers, play with language and let his imagination run riot. Yet when requested to harmonize with society he realizes that his words are not those of the community, that the signifiers he produces are without signified for others, that he will fail in communicating as he fails in painting.

Heinrich's guilt also precipitates itself linguistically. When he steals from the box, the effects are those of unusual eloquence, yet this is also accompanied by the guilt he feels for tampering with his mother's life-line. This guilt, in turn, shows itself in an uncommon silence between them after Frau Lee has found out about the contents of the box, and Heinrich remains in the house 'gründlich still und traurig' [p.181]. When he amasses debts in Munich, his linguistic ability matches the degrees of hopefulness or guilt within him. Throughout the first year he lives on borrowed money in Munich he is still in contact with his mother, though they both avoid the subject of debts, his mother because of an almost childish belief that things that are not mentioned are unlikely to happen, and Heinrich himself because he is still wrapped in his dream world in which he will be self-sufficient eventually. It is only when the credit he enjoyed is to be repaid that he becomes insecure and his letters scarce and monosyllabic, and it is lucky that Frau Lee guesses correctly the source of his unusual quietness, relieving her son of his debts and thereby also liberating him from guilt and being tongue-tied. This process is to be repeated, albeit with far-reaching consequences, when Heinrich is at the end of his credit the second time.
round. This time things are made worse through his studies at university, which mean that he is now already spending money during the day in the public houses of Munich. A fascinating aspect is that Keller here mentions directly the fact that Heinrich is not only more eloquent with money in his pocket, but that he is actively creating an artificial world through language (facilitated by money, as outlined in the first section of this chapter):

[...] da er sich unterrichtete und zugleich deutsche Luft atmete, so war es erklärl ich, daß er in seiner rhetorischen Welt ein Weiser und Gerechter, ein geachteter Tonangeber war, äußerst Weises und Gerechtes dachte und sprach, ohne im mindesten etwas Gerechtes wirklich zu tun, d.h. für Gegenwart und Zukunft tätig einzustehen. [p.723; my italics].

Whereas the loans enable him to be the foundation of this unreal world, language provides the tools with which to build it in detail. Yet far from being wise or just, he is uncaring enough to draw his mother into his rhetorical world; in the face of his pressing debts it is he who this time breaks the silence that has developed, and the way he uses language is described in more detail in the second version. Heinrich realizes that her savings could not be much in the short period of time that has passed since he received the fruits of her self-denial:

ich wollte daher gründlich zu Werke gehen und schlug ihr in einem Briefe, worin ich mich noch leichter stellte, als mir zumute war, die Erhebung eines Anleihens auf das Haus vor. Das sei, meinte ich, eine unverfängliche Sache, welche nach gefundenem Glücksanfang durch meinen Fleiß ebenso
Heinrich’s casual way with meaningless signifiers makes it easy for him to conjure up a situation which is as far from the truth as it could be, and it is lethal for his mother to believe in the empty signs he throws on paper. Heinrich at this point knows full well that he is barred from earning his own bread, and the reference to his diligence and industriousness is nothing but an outright lie, especially since he has given up painting altogether. In an entirely irresponsible fashion he relies on the mother’s gullibility and draws her into a world that does not exist, but which he is desperate to protect in order to avoid social reality. The use he makes of the money left over after the repayment of his debts confirms this, he is led to ponder over his life so far, but instead of taking himself to task, he forgets the ‘kritischen Zweck und überließ mich der bloß beschaulichen Erinnerung an alles, was mir ehemal Lust oder Unlust erweckt hatte; [...] ich schrieb [...] wie einer, der während schöner Frühlingswochen in seinem Gartensaal sitzt, ein Glas Landwein zur Rechten und einen Strauß junger Feldblumen zur Linken.’^ He can do this because the rest of the money allows him to be idle for a few weeks, so far from trying to enter into the world he withdraws further into his own, tracing its origins and development whilst still remaining blind to the direness of his financial situation and the problematic issues of his linguistic constructions. He takes refuge in his imagination and memories, but the words on the paper are only the distorted interpretations of a life led largely in the desire to avoid facing the outside world. Heinrich had been unable to express himself in a socially adequate manner through his paintings, but now he finally finds a way in language. It is, however, typical of him to live again in his old world, now

35Second version, p.687.

36Second version, p.689.
present in the form of signs, being caught between his current inability to face up to himself and his younger world, between memory and fantasy. It is now only language through which he can try to mediate between himself and the world, but the shape this mediation takes underlines his position as an outsider. The outcome of this exercise in self-indulgence, in its interplay of money, language, life and reality, is one of the most beautiful images in the second version: the bookbinder’s mistake of using silk instead of linen to bind the story results in Heinrich being utterly broke: his own life brings about his final financial ruin.

Maybe the only person who recognizes Heinrich’s empty language is Ferdinand, who in the first version finds a tragic end at the hands of Heinrich. In the dispute that develops between them after the Künstlerfest, Ferdinand tells Heinrich he has seen through him:

Du aber schäme dich ebenfalls, als solch ein zierlich entworfenes, aber noch leeres Schema in der Welt umherzulaufen, wie ein Schatten ohne Körper! Suche, daß du endlich einen Inhalt, eine solide Füllung bekommst, anstatt anderen mit deinem Wortgeklingel beschwerlich zu fallen! [p.637]

Ferdinand has realized that Heinrich’s words are empty sounds without something tangible behind them. They might have a ring to them, but in the end they are only the shadows of words, in the same way as Heinrich is only the shadow of an artist and of a grown-up person aware of his own responsibilities and autonomy.

In the first version, Heinrich is in the end silenced for good, in the second he turns into a monosyllabic civil servant, devoid of any vitality. In both versions, the message
remains the same, Heinrich is not only crushed by the guilt he feels for his mother's death, but he has finally come to realize his inadequacy before the claims of reality. It is significant that in spite of his money and position in the second version he stays at the edge of the community, there is no more eloquence and socializing despite the fact that he is now rich as never before; the eventual realization of his basic incompatibility silences him.

Language is also vitally implicated in Heinrich's dealings with money. There are several incidents in which money and language actively serve the construction of an imaginary world. One of the earliest takes place in Heinrich's childhood. He and a friend become drawn into a world of fiction, yet at one point there is a forced attempt to bring their world of make-believe in line with reality. Interestingly, this is done through money: the friend persuades Heinrich to steal money from his box in order to buy some jewellery for Heinrich's imagined lover (the image of whom is based upon a young lady living in the neighbourhood) and present it to the young woman in question. Although child's play, Heinrich becomes caught up in a situation in which fantasy and reality strangely intertwine, and in which money is used to uphold a fantasy world.

Throughout his adolescence, Heinrich leads a sheltered and spoilt existence, even after his expulsion from school his mother does not insist upon Heinrich starting an apprenticeship, but allows her son to withdraw into an abstract world of art he is not talented for. At the very end of the Jugendgeschichte, Heinrich suddenly becomes aware this; unfortunately, however, this realization changes very little:

Ich sah, daß alle anderen jungen Leute, die zum ersten Mal hier erschienen, als Handwerker, Kaufleute oder Studierende entweder schon selbständig oder durch ihre Väter oder durch einen bestimmten, nahe
gesteckten Zweck mit der öffentlichen Wohlfahrt in einem klaren und
sicheren Zusammenhang standen; und wenn selbst diese Jünglinge sich
höchst bescheiden und still verhielten bei der Ausübung ihres Rechtes, so
mußte ich dies noch weit mehr tun [...]. Bis jetzt war durch mich noch
nicht ein Bissen Brot in die Welt gekommen, und mein bisheriges Treiben
hatte mich weit von dem betriebsamen Verkehr abgeführt [...]. [p.544]

The absence of a father and the mother’s willingness to let her son have his way enable
Heinrich to spend the rest of his money in a way that leads him further away from the
world his contemporaries are forced to enter as a matter of course. In the same way as he
once tries to buy his way into society, he then uses money to maintain himself outside it,
sharing instead a world of fantasy and art with another social outcast.

Indeed, Römer is another person who uses money in order to maintain his own
world, the paranoid artist imagines himself to be ‘der verborgene Mittelpunkt aller
Weltregierung, [und] zugleich das Opfer unerhörter Tyranneien und Mißhandlungen’
[p.496]. Römer’s narrations of his importance, the fictitious world he erects around him
and which he tries to cement by disappearing from time to time in the hope that Heinrich
will believe his stories, annoy the young boy to the point where he demands his mother’s
loan back in words that destroy Römer. It is only later that Heinrich realizes that Römer
led a life in abject poverty, ‘daß er nie etwas Warmes genossen, sondern sich heimlich
mit Brot und Käse ernährte, und seine größte Ausgabe bestand in der Unterhaltung seiner
feinen Wäsche und Handschuhe’ [p.504]. Like Heinrich, he had invented his own world,
and in order for it to be at least superficially recognized, he spent all his money on an
impeccable outfit that gave him the appearance of a banished aristocrat.

In the second version, Heinrich’s ponderous reflections are absent and replaced by
a much lighter and confident remark that 'es galt, jenen Weg in die weite Welt anzutreten, nach welcher so viele tausend Jünglinge täglich ausfahren, von denen so mancher nicht wiederkommt'.\textsuperscript{37} Heinrich's period in Munich up to the time when he first gets himself into debt, is financed by the \textit{Pergamentlein} his father had chosen as an investment for him. But even before we hear about how cleverly Heinrich manages to use his language capacities in order to obtain the money, we learn that the whole affair will ultimately be to Heinrich's detriment. A similar incident had occurred years before, and the young man, an aspiring artist like Heinrich himself, had squandered all his possessions and now leads a pitiable life, eating snakes in order to survive. In a scene laden with prefigurative meaning, this creature sidles up to Heinrich. The physical closeness points forward to what Heinrich will become. Even more uncanny is the way in which Heinrich persuades the village elders to give him the money, simultaneously sketching out his own fate, after the snake eater has been disposed of. A little shy and a little upset, Heinrich manages 'einige Prahlereien', declaring that nowadays art and craft have diverged in their ways, and that the only way to become a successful painter these days was to go to a renowned city. There, with all the possibilities for self-improvement, it will be easy to paint pictures which will open

\begin{quote}
die Pforte des Wohlergehens für die Zukunft. An dieser Pforte sinke nieder und gehe unter, wer nicht berufen sei, die ehre Flamme des Genius nicht in sich trage, wie zum Beispiel der arme Schlangenspeiser, der vorhin da gesehen worden. Die andern aber schreiten kühn hindurch und gelangen rasch zu Wohlstand und Ehre [...].\textsuperscript{38}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{37}Second version, p.468.

\textsuperscript{38}Ibid, p.474.
Heinrich hopes and persuades the village elders that his inheritance will provide for him until he has achieved wealth and honour, however, he can only live with this illusion as long as he is given credit. Reality finally encroaches on him as brutally as on the snake man, who continues in his artificial world until 'Gut und Eltern verschwunden waren'.

Words and money interlock, yet because Heinrich cannot grasp either of them correctly, reality eventually makes its appearance through the very absence of money.

In much of the literature of the nineteenth century, money not only serves as the facilitator of false images and individual worlds, but also ultimately as the agent of disillusionment, usually by virtue of its absence. In *Vanity Fair*, *Madame Bovary*, *Great Expectations*, *Little Dorrit*, to name only a few, reality enters and strips the characters of their illusions as soon as money has departed from them. Heinrich is no exception: the three days he spends without a meal shake his world in its very foundation and for the first time in his life he prays to God for food rather than for some moral justice. The absence of money confronts Heinrich with utterly basic needs and is as such a preparation for him to be willing to accept Schmalhöfer's job once he has run out of possessions to sell. First and second versions differ in Heinrich's attitude towards the money he receives for the flute (or, in the first version, a book); in the second he hardly registers the coins as money, but immediately converts them into food: 'Auf der Straße besah ich die beiden Münzen genauer, um mich nochmals zu versichern, daß ich wirklich die Macht in der Hand halte, den Hunger zu stillen'. Heinrich's experience of real hunger was enough not only to teach him the realities of life, but he has also become part of the truly poor, for

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39 Ibid, p.469.
40 Second version, p.697.
whom 'Geld oft nicht mehr “Geld” (ist), sondern bereits Brot, Kleidung, etc.’* Money’s unique ability to turn into anything desired in the mind of its owner is something poor people never experience, because their little money is already converted into the basics that will keep them alive. This sobering experience is enhanced through meeting the girl Hulda, where Heinrich sees for the first time that work can be a happily integrated part of one’s life, and what is more, that it is everybody’s duty. Not only has Hulda maintained herself since she was twelve, but she also quite simply declares that whoever does not work, need not expect to eat. The time with Hulda is a lesson for Heinrich and it is reinforced through the meeting with the compatriot and through his dreams. It is the realization of his own failure that eventually persuades him to return home. In the first version, however, it is the period after his work at Schmalhöfer’s, the sheer poverty in which he subsists, that finally teaches him the truth about himself. He begins to have feelings of guilt towards his mother, especially after the talk with the Swiss craftsman. Society in its harsh judgements proves to be indifferent to Heinrich’s knowledge, good will and aspirations, but teaches him the simple equation of Habenichts = Taugenichts: ‘So zog er mit seinem leeren Koffer, [...] in eine neue Wohnung und erlebte es zum ersten Male, von unbekannten Leuten gleich als Habenichts ohne Höflichkeit und mit Mißtrauen empfangen und angesehen zu werden, als sie seine Nichthabe bemerkten’ [pp.750f]. The equation of moral inferiority and economic weakness may be termed the dark side of the Protestant work ethic; and this passage is an apt illustration of Bauer and Matis’s observation of the economic principle coming to dominate all forms of social interactions and beliefs: ‘die Wirtschaft setzt alsbald an, alle anderen Lebensbereiche zu überwuchern und zu “ökonomisieren”, das Marktprinzip wird zum ausschlaggebenden

Prinzip für die meisten Menschen.\textsuperscript{42} This event in Heinrich’s life is totally absent in the second version, where it is Hulda who teaches him the necessity to work and earn one’s own money in order to be independent and respected by society. However, the crucial point is that in both versions it is money which first allows the individual world to be constructed and then serves as the backdoor through which reality finally enters and destroys the fabrication.

Moreover, it is possible to argue that in \textit{Der grüne Heinrich} money not only serves as a reality principle, but indeed as one of the major constituents of life. In the first version, this is already hinted at in the chapters preceding Heinrich’s \textit{Jugendgeschichte}; it is of importance to note that from the first time Heinrich and his mother are introduced, in the scene where they pack Heinrich’s suitcase in the first version, the narrative focuses on the scarcity of money in their lives. Furthermore, the reader is left in no doubt as to what money equals in this novel, since it is drawn to our attention that all that Heinrich has to spend is ‘seines und seiner Mutter Leben’ [p.28]. By possessing her money, he possesses her life, her \textit{Lebensnerv}, and it is in strict consequence with this that when he wastes it in Munich and continues to drain her even further through the mortgage, she should vanish herself.

The identity of money and life is further elaborated in the figures of Margaret and her husband. His sudden demand of his share of her money not only destroys the quality of their lives - hardly any scene in the novel is more dreadful than the two old people sitting in their beds abusing each other at the top of their voices - but his survival after her death is directly linked to the rest of his money: ‘Er lebte noch drei Jahre und starb gerade an dem Tage, wo das letzte Goldstück gewechselt werden mußte’ [p.121].

\textsuperscript{42}Geburt der Neuzeit, p.216.
Similarly, the troubled issue of money not only destroys Heinrich's friendship with Meierlein, but Meierlein himself eventually dies because of his strong attachment to money and his thrift. His father had bought a house in need of restoration, and Meierlein is helping out during every minute he can spare in order to keep the cost down. One day an old windvane has to be taken down, and 'der Unglückliche, [...] wollte die Kosten sparen und während der Mittagsstunde die Fahne in aller Stille abnehmen, hatte sich auf das steile hohe Dach hinausbegeben, stürzte herab und lag in diesem Augenblicke zerschmettert und tot auf dem Pflaster' [p.191].

The life and lot of Römer is another prime example of money's omnipresence in life. Poverty and debts have always made life hard for him, and when Heinrich reclaims his mother's loan from him, his life, in real terms, is over and he is left to exist in a lunatic asylum. His artistic work is another instance for money's ability to concur with the essence of being, it is significant that he stops Heinrich copying all his works because 'dieselben seien sein einziges Vermögen' [p.471]. Vermögen establishes the binary nature of his paintings, they are his ability, the fruits of his life, and also the only valuables he possesses: the two are identical.

Judith's exasperation with social norms in reaction to Heinrich's mental killing of Römer because of money shows her to have understood the interdependence of money and life, eradicating all humanity, in the society of her times. Yet what Heinrich did to Römer is an experience he himself will go through in Munich, and Judith's words sound like a prediction of his own fate: 'Es ist so natürlich, den Lohn seiner Arbeit zu seiner Ernährung zu verwenden; aber da heißt es: gib erst zurück, wenn du geborgt hast, und dann verhungere!' [p.514] Heinrich undergoes this with the wages he gets from Schmalhöfer, having to pay his landlady, he finds himself 'beinahe des ganzen Ergebnisses seiner Spirallinie beraubt' [p.749].
Frau Lee's identification with money has already been discussed, but it is noteworthy that after Heinrich's departure for Munich she makes saving money the prime aim of her existence. The desire to save money for Heinrich totally dictates her life, in his absence, her money is the only medium with which she sustains contact between his life and hers. The amalgamation of money and life finds its final expression during Heinrich's stay with the Graf; after the Graf has paid Heinrich for his pictures he bought from Schmalhöfer, Heinrich draws a parallel between money and the swords of old, with which one had to protect one's life and realize one's ambitions and plans. The Graf goes further and equates money with freedom, thereby implying that money can serve the truly human qualities of life. Yet money has not only taken over the role as a means to defend one's life and honour, it has replaced all feudal ties, and has become the principle of social classification.

As the above examples have shown, Keller's perception of the interplay of money and life entails much more than the kind of truism that you have to work and earn your living. So many of the examples are highly negative in their sharp criticism of a society in which money determines not only the way people live, but whether they have a right to be alive in the first place. In the nineteenth century money has taken over the divine birth right given to man, the simple right to exist and be respected as a human being, as the image of God, unrelated to the monetary achievement of the individual but rather based on moral conduct and inherent goodness. By denouncing the artificial life money has given birth to and by illustrating the devastation it creates, Keller reminds us of the fact that before a monetary economy was introduced, people existed in greater proximity to nature - and to each other - and that in this form of society the brutalizing poverty of urban life was unknown. It is only with the commodification of nature's product and the

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*As discussed on pp.178ff of this thesis.*
introduction of money that considerable gaps can develop, and Simmel cites nineteenth-century rural Russia as an example where ‘die wenig geldwirtschaftlich entwickelten Bezirke daselbst keine persönliche Armut kennten’, which still holds true with many primitive peoples of the third world today.

Still, Keller strikes a balance in the portrayal of what money and commodification have brought to mankind. Although money and the rise of the bourgeoisie abolished the feudal class system, it still caused the modern class system to be established, in which money itself is the most powerful denominating factor. Yet this was also a greatly liberating influence, not only in the sense that the end of feudalism was also the end of serfdom, but also in terms of individual choice of life style and profession. The fact that now money was a family’s main livelihood (as opposed to the fruits of the land) meant that the members of a family were relatively free to choose their profession, at least within a certain range of what was deemed to be affordable or acceptable to the social standing. And Heinrich is, after all, free to leave and enter a different world in order to take up a profession that has no history in his family. Thus money is shown as the agent of liberation on the one hand, whilst on the other it becomes the trap Heinrich falls into, the means that shows his social inadequacy as well as that which defines him a social failure. This is also true for the juxtaposition of rural versus urban life styles. Whilst the villagers are seen to be less negatively affected by the modern world, they are also, generally speaking, less educated and mentally free, knowing only one way of life. The people of the town, in Munich much more than in Heinrich’s home town, albeit weighed down by the pressures of earning money and often having an unsatisfying job, are also more sophisticated and more accepting of individual idiosyncracies - demonstrated very

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45 For a fascinating and detailed treatment of this subject see Simmel, *Philosophie des Geldes*, chapter four.
clearly in the different attitudes to art. Whereas Munich is an arts-oriented town with thriving artist communities, Römer, as the only artist in Heinrich’s community, is an outcast, and all artists are regarded with suspicion and a lack of understanding, as Frau Lee finds out when seeking advice about Heinrich’s future [pp.259ff]. The people in the village might be friendlier in their response to Heinrich’s choice of profession, but they are equally unable to comprehend art as anything more than painting pretty pictures.

To sum up, it is important to recall that the two Heinrichs, the narrative voice (this applies especially to the second version) and the experiencing character, are not entirely congruent. This does not only become apparent in the way they handle language - the Heinrich struggling for the right words is in contrast to the very eloquent narrator - but the more so in their understanding of the broader issues under discussion. Whereas the character Heinrich dabbles throughout the novel, experimenting with various activities, the narrator is by no means a dilettante or a self-doubting spirit. Far from being dazzled by the transformation of an agrarian and artisan community into a speculative and capitalist society, the narrative voice reflects on the values that are still available, negotiable and believable. This incongruity is, by nature of the narrative structure, much stronger in the second version and thus it gains a special appeal. It sharpens drastically the discrepancy between the narrator who actually possesses insight into his personal failure to a very high degree as well as into the transformations of the nineteenth century, and the character’s inability to restart his life, resigning himself to a kind of Chekovian boredom. The changes also highlight the developments that took place between the 1850s and 1870s, the increasing tensions between the rapid developments towards a new society and the individual’s struggle to keep up with them.

Heinrich’s story, that of the character, is that of a young man losing himself in the
ever increasing abstraction of the last century, in the interplay of monetary and linguistic
signs that come to dominate Western society in the mid-nineteenth century, and to which
he can find no access: 'wo Faust das gesellschaftlich-ökonomische Grundmuster der
Moderne exponiert, durchirrt der grüne Heinrich deren Labyrinthe.' The only alternative
he has, and indeed makes use of, is to create his own surrogate world. And for that act of
evasion he pays dearly.

44Kaiser, 'Grüne Heinriche', p.49.
Excursus:

From Romanticism to Naturalism

Before going on to twentieth-century developments, I would like to discuss briefly some issues raised by three works which capture some of the moods and attitudes towards increasingly speculative economics and its monetary basis at the beginning, the middle, and the end of the nineteenth century: Chamisso's *Peter Schlemihls wundersame Geschichte* (1814), Freytag's *Soll und Haben* (1855), and Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks* (1901). As their publication dates show, these texts span the nineteenth century. Moreover, as we shall see, they all in their different ways engage with the paradoxical issue of money's ability to displace and acquire substance in a modern economy. In part for reasons of space, in part because the texts in question are particularly well-known, the following discussion of these three texts is rather brief in comparison to the main chapters. The purpose of this excursus is to offer a glimpse of these works in the context of this thesis and of nineteenth-century socio-economic developments and attitudes at large. It also serves to highlight changing perceptions of speculative economics and money within society - hence, it exclusively deals with money. This excursus excludes, for reasons of space, a discussion from the angle of language, and it makes no claim whatsoever to be a full chapter in its own right.

*Peter Schlemihl* never deals directly with any economic matters, it simply concentrates on depicting the psychological effects a money-based economy - and society - has on its members. The very beginning of the story plunges us into a society in which human beings are assessed and treated according to their wealth. Having just arrived in a
port, Peter seeks accommodation in a humble hotel, where the porter, having scrutinized him, allocates him a room under the roof, i.e. in the cheapest part of the house. We then follow the protagonist to the house of Thomas John, a very rich man from whom Peter hopes for some assistance in the future. Peter’s own desire to become rich is expressed in his wholehearted support for Herrn John’s view that ‘“Wer nicht Herr ist wenigstens einer Million, [...] der ist [...] ein Schuft!”’ [p.18] This equation of moral value and financial power sets the tone for the rest of the story; indeed, as we shall see, the story is an assessment of the interaction between various human value scales - the moral, the social, and the monetary - and of the way in which meaning is generated within them. Peter then joins a party of obviously very rich people and becomes witness to some extraordinary events: no matter how impossible the task may be, a grey, elderly man produces every single item desired from his small pockets: a telescope, a carpet, a tent - even three horses. Yet even more surprising is the fact that nobody, apart from Peter, seems to find this strange, indeed, the man in grey is not even noticed and will not be remembered, as Peter’s servant Bendel is to find out later. As Martin Swales has pointed out, this is a fine portrayal of a wealthy society used to having every wish - whether physically possible or impossible - granted instantaneously, because money exists to overcome any possible obstacles. Once in possession of unlimited wealth, Peter, although shuddering at the things he has seen at Herr John’s, employs the same logic. Handing Bendel money and jewellery, he says to him ‘“dieses ebnet viele Wege und macht vieles leicht, was unmöglich schien [...]”’ [p.28]. Money in the world of the story has magical powers, not only in that it grants the impossible, but also, and even more importantly, in that it does away with any notion of resistant “reality”. Peter Schlemihl is a remarkable

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exploration of the idea that reality, to the moneyed classes, is what they want it to be; money turns “objective reality” into something totally malleable, something that will obey the whims and wishes of the rich. At the root of this phenomenon lies the perception that absolutely everything can become exchangeable for money - Peter sells his shadow for a bottomless purse - and that thereby categories of the tangible and intangible are scrambled. This leaves money, in itself an abstraction, as the one inalienable fact of life. However, money is not the only set of values dominating Chamisso’s remarkable story; money interrelates with social and moral value scales. When Peter sells his shadow to the devil, he believes he is selling something without demonstrable physical value or benefit: a shadow is worthless in economic terms. Yet Peter misjudges the real value of a shadow in his society, not for nothing does the devil call it *unschatzbar*: although it is a worthless thing in itself, the lack of a shadow is of the greatest importance in the company of other human beings. It is, indeed, priceless, for as soon as Peter reaches the town, he has problems: ‘ “Ordentliche Leute pflegten ihren Schatten mit sich zu nehmen, wenn sie in der Sonne gingen” ’ [p.24]. Peter soon realizes that he is effectively excluded from society without a shadow, since the absence of a shadow is deemed to be the sign of social unacceptability, of something subhuman: it acquires a reified form of social and moral value, a piece of equipment that acceptable people are meant to have. In an ironic twist, Peter sold his shadow - which he thought worthless in society, yet the absence of which excludes him - for something that is only of value within society, since it is society that provides the goods and services for which money is to be exchanged. Although he now has at his disposal far more than the million of Herr John, he is an outcast as soon as his shadowlessness is discovered.

*Peter Schlemihl* exposes the processes of negotiation at the heart of all human values: value and, by extension, meaning, is assigned, attributed - not intrinsic. Shadow
and money gain their meaning and value only from and within society, and Peter learns
the lesson of the real value of what is deemed *unschätzbare*. When the devil offers him
another deal, namely the restoration of his shadow in exchange for his soul (the value and
materiality of which, as the devil cleverly points out, cannot be established), Peter flatly
refuses.

Yet, interestingly, *Peter Schlemihl* makes no overt judgement on the nature of the
society it depicts; rather, the story seems concerned to register the attitudes towards
money and its workings. Although there is judgement and criticism of Peter and society,
this is not the main point of the story, which seems to focus on an attempt at portraying
the processes and functions of money. In the end, there is a degree of implied
condemnation of the characters, yet the story’s main purpose seems to be an
understanding of the confusion occurring when money absorbs all other values. As such,
the story might be read as a warning not to lose one’s humanity (the shadow is seen as an
attribute of human existence) in an increasingly monetaristic society.

Gustav Freytag’s *Soll und Haben*, although written over forty years later and in a
time where speculative economics had already become the norm, takes a far more
judgmental approach to these issues. Freytag’s astonishingly successful work attempts to
simplify the complexity of the economic developments and situation at the middle of the
nineteenth century by dividing trade, industry and, above all, finance, into good and bad,
by which is meant solid on the one hand and speculative on the other.¹ At the same time
the book sings the praises of the bourgeois virtues of hard work and honesty, and
compares them to the laziness, greed and deceit Freytag attributes to Jews and Poles.

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¹ Jeremias Gotthelf takes a similar approach in his *Geld und Geist* (1843/44), except that the schematism of this
work is lightened by Gotthelf’s vibrant and detailed writing. However, in the light of the success of
*Soll und Haben*, I decided to discuss Freytag’s rather than Gotthelf’s work.
The main vehicle for the portrayal of bad monetary practices and avarice are Jews. Already in the second chapter, which follows Anton Wohlfart, the protagonist, and Veitel Itzig, his negative counterpart, on their journey into the provincial capital of Breslau, Freytag makes it perfectly clear that the fortunes of wealthy Jews are built upon shady activities. Veitel tells Anton about a secret recipe with which one can become rich by compromising the traditionally wealthy classes, and "wer das Geheimnis hat, wird ein großer Mann, wie der Rothschild, wenn er lange genug am Leben bleibt." Yet Anton's reply - "wenn er nicht vorher festgesetzt wird" - immediately substantiates the negative - if not criminal - connotations of Veitel's words, as well as casting a dubious light onto the wealth of the Rothschilds. The stark contrast Freytag establishes at the outset between Anton and Veitel is extended to the whole of the business community and their different professional ethics, including Anton's and Veitel's masters. Whereas Schröter's is a well-known and respected establishment, Ehrental is only the best "von dieser Klasse von Geschäftsleuten"; and whilst we see Anton exchanging polite words with his boss on arrival, without a single mention of remuneration, Ehrental and Veitel immediately start bargaining over Veitel's wages. The starkest contrast between Ehrental and Schröter is the way they conduct business. Schröter has all his goods 'mit eigenem Gelde gekauft' and bears any potential risks on his own shoulders. Ehrental, on the other hand, is more than happy not only to speculate, but also to do so with somebody else's money. In a memorable passage he persuades Baron Rothsattel to lend him 10 000 Taler, as his own money is tied up, in order to strike a deal from which he stands to make a profit of four thousand. Moreover, the deal is designed to trick creditors out of their rights, so that the overriding message is very simple indeed: speculative economics are not only bad,

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they are actually to the detriment of honest people. The comparisons made between Schröter and Ehrental, Anton and Veitel, and the Germans and the Jews (or the Poles) are too many to discuss in detail here, since the core of the novel - the praise of German bourgeois culture - and the narrative scheme rest on this very contrast. Suffice it to say that the Germans are honest, hard-working, and abhor any form of speculation or even shady dealing, whereas the Jews are mean, greedy, and love making money without work; and the Poles are lazy and uncultured. However, Freytag also ponders on the change in economic practice during the nineteenth century without laying blame on any particular ethnic group. When describing Schröter's business, he calls it

ein Warengehschaft, wie sie jetzt immer seltener werden, jetzt, wo Eisenbahnen und Telegraphen See und Inland verbinden, wo jeder Kaufmann aus den Seestädten durch seine Agenten die Waren tief im Lande verkaufen läßt, fast bevor sie im Hafen angelangt sind [...]. [...] Denn damals war die See weit entfernt, die Konjunkturen waren seltener und größer, so mußte auch der Blick des Kaufmanns weiter, seine Spekulation selbständigemer sein. Die Bedeutung einer Handlung beruhte damals auf den Massen der Waren, welche sie mit eigenem Gelde gekauft hatte und auf eigene Gefahr vorrätig hielt. [pp.51f]

Although there seems to be no obvious criticism of the new times, the description asserts the solidity of the old, and praises the merchant as someone who had to be far-sighted and self-reliant. By implication, the merchants of the present times are less brave, less willing to take risks (and may be unable to do so) and, most importantly, they do not have to pay for all the goods out of their own pocket, thereby passing responsibility to the purchaser.
The fruits of the industrial revolution - rapid communication and diminishing of distance through the invention of the steam engine and the telegraph - have therefore, according to Freytag, set in motion developments that have undermined the solidity and, potentially, the integrity of the merchant enterprise and the society in which it exists.

Freytag criticises the industrial revolution more openly at another point in the book and offsets his criticism by praising agriculture. Agriculture, we learn, is the most noble of all forms of industry, close to nature and to God, thus nurturing the human psyche, rewarding physical efforts, and stimulating the local economy [pp.361f]. However,

Striking is the demonization of modern industry, as if it was a form of black magic which, in due course, will come to haunt the man who conjured it up, like a devil to whom he has sold his soul. Freytag seems to be unable to find anything positive in the modern economic forces, to register their complex dialectic. Unlike Keller who, in his section on the Revalenta arabica, also acknowledges the positive effects of modern industry and its speculative elements, Freytag oversimplifies the matter by declaring it all unnatural, and hence evil. Furthermore, Freytag merely sees the corrupting factors in modern industry, thus his description of the proletariat lacks any form of differentiation: the simple

\footnote{See pp.184ff. of this thesis.}
equation of dirty with dishonest is astonishing in its crudity.

Similarly, all those engaging in speculation are depicted as evil and greedy. Mention has already been made of Ehrental, but there are also the Americans and Veitel Itzig himself. Unlike Anton, Veitel is driven by a desire to become rich without working hard (whereas Anton seems to be happy merely to work hard), and subsequently becomes a savage character, who even takes lessons on how to deceive people in financial contracts. Veitel becomes the embodiment of all negative principles of the modern age: speculative capitalism, avarice, exploitation, and prosaic ambition. The Americans, who engage in vast land speculations, are simply characterized as ‘Räuber und Mörder’ in a letter written by Anton’s friend Fink, who adds ‘wenn Du einen Kehlabschneider brauchst, wende Dich nur an mich. [...] Wie das Felsstück in der Schneemasse, so stecke ich, von allen Seiten eingeengt, in der eisigen Kälte der furchtbarsten Spekulationen, welche je großartiger Wuchersinn ausgedacht hat’ (p.384).

The only way Freytag seems to be able to reconcile himself to modern economics is when they are sanctified by the house of Schröter. In the continuation of the quotation above describing his business, there is mention that Schröter even keeps much of his stock in his own home, and so his house is not only filled with that minimal, and therefore acceptable speculation necessary within the prevailing economy; it is also a portrait of solidity and honesty, and yet of success, in the interweaving of family and business life. It seems as if Freytag was desperately trying to exorcise the dangers he was discussing, to simplify the great complexities of mid-nineteenth century economics, and the only way he could do so was by keeping things under control in the solid domestic realm of Schröter’s house, by integrating some part of the modern with the best of the old. One can sense on

almost every page of this book the revulsion Freytag felt towards the modern age, and his simplified views no doubt contributed to his popularity as one of the most successful German writers in the nineteenth century.

Thomas Mann’s *Buddenbrooks*, published in 1901, is clearly a product of the nineteenth century, both in the realistic style it is written as well as in its subject, the decline of a merchant family during the course of the nineteenth century. Although one can argue that Mann’s psychological and philosophical approach is more attuned to twentieth-century developments, the novel is, at its core, clearly realistic fiction in the mode of Theodor Fontane.7

Despite the author’s claim that he only inadvertently addressed social and political matters,8 the novel registers the socio-economic shifts and changes of the nineteenth century, as well as the ensuing alterations in social, economic, and political values. Although Johann Buddenbrook the older is, in all kinds of ways, the image of a solidly *bürgertich* merchant - enlightened and yet unscathed by reflections on himself and life - at the beginning of the novel (in 1835), there is already talk of the changing priorities in education and profession, as the old Buddenbrook disapprovingly remarks: ‘Da schießen nun die gewerblichen Anstalten und die technischen Anstalten und die Handelsschulen aus der Erde, und das Gymnasium und die klassische Bildung sind plötzlich Bêtisen, und alle Welt denkt an nichts als Bergwerke ... und Industrie ... und Geldverdienen ...’9 Buddenbrook senior is uncomfortable with these developments,

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7Swales, *Epochenbuch Realismus*, pp.177f.


since they seem to threaten the integrity of his class: and in fact, in the course of the
nineteenth century, the industrial bourgeoisie will supersede the traditional patrician
families, who tended to be merchants. Indeed, Buddenbrook’s grandson Thomas attends
the *realwissenschaftliche Abteilung* of the Old School, since he is meant to become a
merchant like his forefathers, whereas the younger Christian attends the local grammar
school - his own family is making the necessary adjustments. Thomas, however, will be
torn in later life between the increasingly speculative nature of the nineteenth-century
economy, and his own preference for solidity in business. Yet when Thomas begins to
take over the business he is, as a young man, enthusiastic for the new ways of making
money:

> Hie und da ward etwas gewagt, hie und da ward der Kredit des Hauses, der
> unter dem früheren regime eigentlich bloß ein Begriff, eine Theorie, ein
> Luxus gewesen war, mit Selbstbewuβtsein angespannt und ausgenützt...
> Die Herren an der Börse nickten einander zu. “Buddenbrook will mit avec
> Geld verdienen”, sagten sie. [p.226]

In his younger years, Thomas is willing to realize the credit of the firm at the stock
exchange, and what is more, he obviously takes delight in carefully controlled
speculation. Yet at the same time, he invests his deals with his own personality, as if to
ascribe to them a kind of solidity, and he ponders ‘ „aber das kommt leider aus der Mode,
dies persönliche Eingreifen des Kaufmannes... Die Zeit schreitet fort, aber sie läßt, wie
mich dünkt, das Beste zurück... Der Verkehr erleichtert sich immer mehr, die Kurse sind
immer schneller bekannt... Das Risiko verringert sich und mit ihm auch der Profit...” ’
[p.227]. There is almost a kind of disappointment here in him that the risks are becoming
smaller at the same rate as distance is diminished by new inventions, that there is less room for personal initiative and creativity. For all the pessimistic tone of the closing sections of Buddenbrooks, the novel is genuinely concerned to understand socio-economic changes - and not just to bewail them as Freytag does.

Increasingly, as he grows older, Thomas becomes doubtful about the spiralling desubstantialization and speculation which seem to him to characterize the modern world, and he feels the gap widening between these phenomena and his own beliefs in solidity in business. Nowhere does this become more obvious than in the chapters dealing with the purchase of the Pöppenrade harvest and in the differences existing between himself and his principal rival, Hermann Hagenström.

From the beginning, the Hagenströms are perceived by the Buddenbrooks as upstarts, but as very successful ones. They do not belong to the traditionally rich and influential families of Lübeck, they are not tied down by tradition; on the contrary they embody, to a certain extent, adaptability and modernity. The contrast between the two families is established early, in a letter to his son Thomas, Johann Buddenbrook not only cites the family motto - ‘“Mein Sohn, sey mit Lust bey den Geschäften am Tage, abermache nur solche, daß wir bey Nacht ruhig schlafen können!”’ - but also stresses that he intends to adhere to this motto ‘bis an mein Lebensende, obgleich man ja hie und da in Zweifel geraten kann angesichts von Leuten, die ohne solche Prinzipien scheinbar besser fahren. Ich denke an “Strunk & Hagenström”, die eminent im Wachsen begriffen sind, während unsere Angelegenheiten einen allzu ruhigen Gang gehen’ [p.147]. Many years later, the contrast between Thomas and Hermann is formulated in terms of the contrast between money and tradition:

Das Neuartige und damit Reizvolle seiner Persönlichkeit, das, was ihn
Thus Hermann and Thomas are set off against each other as embodying the principles of two eras: Hermann is the quick-witted, speculative entrepreneur; whereas Thomas stands for a century of tradition, of old-fashioned mercantile values that are unwilling to separate from the substantial commodities that underwrite the currency. It is important to note that Thomas is no simple reactionary. He is a supporter of the Zollverein, of improvements in communication and transport, in civic amenities (gas street lighting, for example). He is, then, not averse to change. But the new economic tendencies find him vulnerable and helpless because, in his perception, they threaten to displace and dismantle all manner of cherished values and assumptions.

The clearest depiction of the changing times and their requirements is in Thomas's almost painful ponderings on the Pöppenrade harvest. Whereas he initially, in the spirit of the family motto, rejects Tony's suggestion of buying the harvest on the stalk, he agonizes over it and its implications as soon as Tony has left the room. Not only do his thoughts revolve around whether his forefathers would have struck the deal and the knowledge that Hagenström would not even think twice about it, but he also reflects on
the increasing brutality in business life per se - a development that seems almost physically to hurt his sense of decency and desire for the solid and trustworthy. He consoles himself by regarding the risks involved in such a transaction as sufficient expression of any moral scruples. Moreover, he begins to invest the deal with his own personality, thus attempting to give it an air of increased solidity and decency: 'In der Tat, das Persönliche war hier das Entscheidende. Es war kein gewöhnliches Geschäft, das man kühl und in den üblichen Formen erledigt. [...] Ach nein, Hermann Hagenström wäre wohl kaum der Mann dafür gewesen!...' [p.403] The fact that he loses his money in the deal - the harvest is destroyed by hail, ironically on the day of the centenary celebrations of the family firm - also imparts another (modern) meaning to the family motto: now it is less the lack of moral soundness of a deal which might rob one of a good night's sleep, than it is the dangers of sudden financial disaster as a consequence of speculation.

Although Jochen Vogt is right when he refuses to acknowledge the Pöppenrade deal as an adequate representation of the new, speculative economy - since its outcome is depended on natural rather than economic or money market forces\textsuperscript{10} - his reservations are at least part met by Martin Swales's insistence on the symbolic significance of the deal: 'But Thomas, as he agonizes, has no doubt about the symbolic value of the harvest deal. And once he invests the deal with this kind of significance, then the risk to him, to his sense of values, to his way of life, is real.'\textsuperscript{11} The Pöppenrade deal goes against Thomas's innate sense of business practice, both because it means the exploitation of a desperate human being and because of the financial uncertainties involved. Yet, in the context of our concerns here, it is interesting to note that Thomas, although modern economic


practices are foreign to him, does not pass judgement on the practices per se or on those who engage in them. He accepts the new way of making money as a given reality, however unpleasant it may be to him personally. This also becomes obvious when he explains the practice of “usance” to his mother when the husband of his niece stands accused of it.

In terms that recall his reflections on the Poppenrade deal, Thomas expresses here an acute sense of unease about current business practices, practices that are, strictly speaking, against morality and the law - yet they are totally acceptable and widely practised. As with the harvest deal, Thomas feels the gap widening between the personal integrity of the business man and the demands of an increasingly speculative economy in which money generates money - but he is reluctant to condemn. In the end Weinschenk is found guilty, yet implicitly the whole of the business community stands accused not only of similar malpractice, but also of hypocrisy in these matters. Thomas personally feels and suffers from the change in values, whether social or economic, that occur during his life.
time as a merchant. The complaint of his grandfather regarding the prevalent drive for money-making, uttered over thirty years earlier, becomes a painful reality in his own life.

Money permeates *Buddenbrooks* in the same way as *Schuld und Schulden* permeate *Der grüne Heinrich:*¹² it is omnipresent; and, interestingly, the novel also registers the simultaneous de-substantialization of money and the increasing tendency towards high-risk speculation.

In the days of Johann Buddenbrook senior, money is synonymous with the grain sacks that are constantly passing in and out of the house. In other words, money cannot be separated from what it buys; it has - psychologically speaking - substance. Thomas, however, by buying something that does not yet exist - the harvest in Pöppenrade - severs the links between money and commodity. As such, the money is now de-substantialized, and that tendency leads to the free and dynamic circulation of money as a speculative entity. And it is exactly this need for money to be circulating in order to make more money which Thomas recognizes when trying to explain to Tony the necessity of selling the house in the Mengstraße. He calls the house '‘totes Kapital’', and acknowledges the need to convert some of the dead capital the Buddenbrooks possess into liquidity: '‘Ach, Tony, wir haben Grundstücke genug, wir haben zu viel davon! [...] Der Wert der Grundstücke steht ja kaum noch in einem Verhältnis zu dem beweglichen Kapital!’’ [pp.496f]. Interesting is the emphasis on movable capital, and the criticism of real estate as relatively useless for business practices - a view that, in its historical accuracy, exposes Freytag’s praise of real estate and agriculture as the basis of all economic development and prosperity as wishful thinking. The need to invest money, to let it work in order to create more money, is spelt out even more clearly after the sale of the house in the Mengstraße. Thomas is a man of more than 600 000 Kurantmark, his capital

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¹² As argued in the *Schuld und Schulden* section in the previous chapter, pp.192ff of this thesis.
aber lag brach seit langen Jahren, [...] und jetzt, in einer Zeit, da alles sich frisch und siegesfroh regte, da seit dem Eintritt der Stadt in den Zollverein kleine Krämergeschäfte imstande waren, sich binnen weniger Jahre zu angesehenen Großhandlungen zu entwickeln, jetzt ruhte die Firma "Johann Buddenbrook", ohne irgendeinen Vorteil aus den Errungenschaften der Zeit zu ziehen [...].[p.519]

Not only has the long-awaited membership in the Zollverein failed to stimulate his business activities, but, even more significantly, even the boom of the Gründerzeit passes Thomas by. The family firm makes money by the penny through morally sound, unspeculative trading in a time where large fortunes were made by energetic speculations at the stock exchange: yet we are told 'daß Thomas Buddenbrook an der Börse eigentlich nur noch dekorativ wirke' [p.520]. Hence he really is out of touch with prevailing business practice and thus doomed to failure; and it is telling that his feelings of inadequacy and exhaustion become manifest in an inability to cope with the demands of modern monetary practices. The years following the unification of Germany did away with any remnants of the kind of business practice embodied by Thomas Buddenbrook.

The narrator is dispassionate about the decline and fall of the Buddenbrooks and the values they represent: it is a given social reality, and happens, unjudged, in front of our eyes. The end of the Buddenbrooks is, it seems, as inevitable as the end of the Ratenkamps, and the Buddenbrooks are being replaced by the Hagenströms in much the same way as they will in turn be replaced by another family. Thomas Mann gives a striking, impressive portrayal of the paradigm shifts within socio-economic reality in the nineteenth century, of changing values, beliefs, and practices. The novel is the more
impressive for resisting any kind of moralizing, for dispassionately chronicling events and
trends.

The three texts discussed in this *excursus* reflect many of the ways in which
nineteenth-century Germany responded to industrialization and changing economic
practices: the reactions vary from the amazement of Peter Schlemihl in the face of the
magical powers that money confers, via Freytag’s desperate attempt to contain the
emerging economic developments and forces within simple good-bad, solid-speculative
categories, to Thomas Mann’s masterly comprehension of how the public and private
spheres interact in the process of socio-cultural change.
In terms of monetary and economic evolution, the twentieth century enormously accelerated and radicalized the developments of the nineteenth. Money and, since the end of World War II, what it buys, have acquired an ever-increasing importance not only for the individual and his identity, but also for the making of political, social, and economic decisions and policy.

The years post 1945 have seen the rise of money, and especially of materialism, as the signification of class membership. Hand in hand with this development went the slow, but steady, physical disappearance of money in the act of exchange: most transactions of any significance are now done via cheques or electronic currency transfers. Vernon makes a similar point when discussing the portrayal of society in the American novel of the twentieth century: ‘We can see in such a “society” the way money, like a vast reservoir, has drained into all its transactions, the way being has so thoroughly become having.’ Moreover, these events also coincided with an increasing desubstantialization of the monetary substance and its convertibility into gold: the gold standard was abolished by most Western countries in the 1930s, ridding any government from the obligation to convert currency into gold or any other precious metal on demand. Money has become ever more immaterial throughout this century, culminating in the establishment of Special Drawing Rights in the 1970s to replace some of the payments made in gold in

\[\text{Vernon, } \textit{Money and Fiction, p.195.}\]

\[\text{Special Drawing Rights are an international monetary facility which demonstrates how money can be created at will. The following is cited from E. Bruce Fredrikso's article in the Encyclopedia Americana,}\]
international trade.

The financial frenzies, the regular booms and busts of the past thirty years are partly due to an ever increasing abstract, de-substantialized mode of payment which determines the economies of the Western world and the lives of those who inhabit it. Ironically, the establishment of consumer society has led to a demise of money as such within Western society: as I shall discuss in the section on Dürrenmatt in this chapter, it is consumer goods - i.e. the result of spending money - that dominate the face and way of life of Western society. Money is primarily attractive for what it buys, and the social distinctions of consumer society are primarily built upon what one possesses: what Jean Baudrillard calls the "code" of consumer society, as shall be discussed in due course.

Georg Kaiser's *Von morgens bis mitternachts* and Friedrich Dürrenmatt's *Der Besuch der alten Dame* were written roughly forty years apart; Kaiser's play around 1912, and Dürrenmatt's in 1956. In monetary matters, the years between these two plays reach from the reign of the gold standard via the economic miracle of the post-war years to an increasingly speculative financial culture. Both plays reflect on a subject endemic to the twentieth century: the question of genuine values in capitalist society. However, the plays' conceptions at very different times - Kaiser's during Expressionism, before the First World War, and Dürrenmatt's in post-war booming Switzerland - account for significant contrasts between them. Thus, whilst both dramas thematize money and its

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International Edition, Complete in 30 volumes, Grolier Incorporated, 1990, vol. XIII, p.24. This monetary facility 'consists in the creation and allocation of special drawing rights (SDR's) that the participating governments are obliged to accept from one another up to specified limits. [...] Like gold, the special rights are transferable directly among central banks or usable to acquire any national currency actively traded in foreign exchange. [...] They are allotted to members in proportion to IMF quotas over and above a member's previous rights to draw currencies from the fund. In effect, therefore the quotas were enlarged without any payments in gold [...]. Furthermore, the SDR's, once granted, are usable automatically and unconditionally to meet international financing needs [...]. The SDR's are thus backed by the obligation of members to accept them and to pay a convertible currency return.'
power and thereby examine the structures and ideals of society and culture, the answers to the problem of values in life are radically different. Whereas Kaiser's play concludes that values cannot be bought with money, Dürrenmatt creates a world in which, if values exist at all, they are exclusively created by, and are therefore subject to, money and those who own it. Moreover, both dramas explore - and explode - the myth of the validity of socio-cultural ideals by illuminating the ways in which these values are represented, thereby revealing the semiology of success, happiness, and a meaningful life to be totally questionable.

Most critics seem to be content to acknowledge that money - or rather, its embezzlement - prompts the action in Von morgens bis mitternachts; but money is much more than a mere catalyst for the action of the play. Still one of the best analyses of money in this play - and in Dürrenmatt's - is Koester's 'Everyman and Mammon', published in 1969. Koester points convincingly to the all-pervasive and destabilizing role

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3 In sequence:  
money plays in these two dramas. Schürer (1971) asserts that the play is a demonstration of the fact that money is the measure of all values in capitalist society; whereas Huder, nine years later, reads the play as a ‘Testreihe des Geldes’, during which it does not live up to the promises society attaches to it. Schueler, in 1984, sees Kaiser’s drama as a thwarted attempt of the Kassierer to regain man’s prelapsarian condition with the aid of money; whereas Williams (1988) delivers an interesting reading of the play in the light of Gustav Landauer’s socio-economic criticism, declaring that the problem of modern society lies in the very existence of money.

Criticism of Dürrenmatt’s masterpiece often oversimplifies the role of money by simply regarding the drama as an illustration of the general venality of the world. Jenny’s interpretation (1973) does not go any further than this; Davian and Dunkle, a year later, recognize the play as a parable of conflict between twentieth-century materialism and the humanistic tradition. Pausch (1976) discerns an inauguration of new functions for society, time and justice, but excludes money’s crucial role in this process; Tiusanen, in 1977, likewise fails to consider money’s importance in the crazed search for values he identifies as the core of the drama. Jost (1982), however, pays tribute to money as Claire’s means to purchase a dubious form of justice and to brainwash the Gülleners; and Dufresne, a year later, offers a refreshingly original look at Der Besuch der alten Dame by identifying it as an illustration of the processes of ritual. Andreotti, in 1984, points to the way in which the laws of affluence are ousting those of morality in the play; and Maltzan (1988) also sees the play as a demonstration of the venality of the world to which all values are sacrificed. Whitton, for all the strength of his analyses of Dürrenmatt, has little to say specifically about the role of money in Der Besuch der alten Dame.

Buying Your Soul

The plot of *Von morgens bis mitternachts* in itself is quite simple: the cashier of a little bank in a small town is awakened to the dreariness of his petit-bourgeois existence by an elegant Italian lady wanting to draw money from the bank. Mistaking her for a high-class prostitute, he steals 60 000 Marks from the bank and, after being rebuked by the Lady and leaving his family, goes on a spending spree in the hope of discovering the meaning and value of life. However, he encounters one disappointment and failure after the other, and on being finally betrayed for money by a girl he falls in love with, commits suicide.

Kaiser projects the life and adventures of the Kassierer - in typical Expressionist fashion all *dramatis personae* do not have a name, but their role in life expresses as much character as they have - onto the dense matrix of pre-World War I capitalist society. One of the most striking features of this classic text of Expressionism - it brought Kaiser fame over night - is that the quest for the “New Man” and the discovery of the essence of life appear to be intimately related to money. The Kassierer fails in his enterprise, and, in consequence, an additional theme, apart from that of the Expressionist search for life’s essence, emerges: the play interrogates not only money and the things it can buy, but also whether society’s equation of money and happiness holds true.

Significantly, the play opens in the hall of a bank in the little town W., that is - at the heart of an organisation devoted to finance; moreover, money is physically present on stage for most of the play. From the moment that the Kassierer makes off with the sixty thousand Marks, the expectation that the presence of this considerable amount of money generates never leaves the stage until it finally unleashes its power in the final scene in the hall of the Salvation Army.

In the first scene, we see the Kassierer behind the counter: an automaton in his
function, a little cog in the wheel of finance, and 'he accepts the conventional relationship between money and what it can buy without question, even unthinkingly, confining himself to the purely mechanistic role as a minor functionary in the capitalistic economy.' Yet the arrival of the Lady and the Director's remarks regarding the probable venality of her favours deeply disturb his value judgements, and he loses his conventional understanding of the value of money. Having spent his life calibrating sums of money to the last unit, counting money is now no longer important to the Kassierer: not only does he hand out too much to the Servant Girl who comes to draw money, but after she has pointed out his mistake, he is still unable to deduct the correct amount of money from the sum he paid her. The idea that vast amounts of money could buy him the favour of this elegant lady and be the key to the end of his boring existence seems to cause a reassessment not only of the possibilities money appears to afford, but also of his way of life - and this makes him take the 60 000 Marks and embark on a quest to find a new way of life: the comments of the Director and the fat Gentleman have implanted in him the belief that it is through money that he will find happiness.

Having embezzled the money, the Kassierer makes straight to the room of the Lady in the Hotel Elefant, utterly convinced that he holds the means to buy her favour. However, here the Kassierer encounters the first of his many disappointments: the Lady is of irreproachable character, and not a whore. She is utterly resistant to his insistence that she must succumb to the authority of his money. The Kassierer cannot understand that she refuses him despite his 60 000 and the crime he committed to obtain them: 'Jetzt müssen Sie doch!' is his repeated cry of desperation when he realizes his mistake. This first

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4 Williams, 'Culture and Anarchy', p.369.

5 Von morgens bis mitternachts, in Georg Kaiser, Stücke, Erzählungen, Aufsätze, Gedichte, edited by W. Huder, Köln und Berlin: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1966, pp.49-106. [p.67]. All page references are given to this edition and appear in brackets after the quotation in the main text.
setback leads him to consider the future course of his life, with all this money in his pocket, in the famous scene in the snowy field. Having established that he will not repent and return to his former life - ‘Ich bin auf dem Marsche - Umkehr findet nicht statt’ [p.69] - he now wonders ‘was bietet sich?’ [p.70] Commenting that the snow around him is hardly worth 60 000 - money is worthless in isolation, it only possesses value within a society that provides goods and services to spend it on - he decides to set out to find the ultimate value: ‘Wo ist die Ware, die man mit dem vollen Einsatz kauft?! Mit sechzigtausend - und dem ganzen Käufer mit Haut und Knochen?! -- Schreiend. Ihr müßt doch liefern -- ihr müßt doch Wert und Gegenwert in Einklang bringen!!!’ [p.70] It is exactly at this point that the Kassierer makes the decision to test society with money, to search for life’s values with the means that capitalist society has led him to believe will fulfill all his desires and needs, and will answer the perennial question regarding the meaning of life. Being in the possession of a sum of money he could have never dreamed of owning, he now demands that society will establish the equilibrium between real and attributed value - already revealing that so far his life has only revealed disequilibrium. Moreover, his rhetoric of totalizing aspiration - ‘mit dem vollen Einsatz [...] mit dem ganzen Käufer’ - underlines the need to “buy” fully authoritative experience with full (i.e. not merely monetary) payment. The excitement of this passage is heightened by the existential desire expressed within it: skin and bones are what make up and hold together the human body. The Kassierer is ready to engage the whole of his being in this enterprise, with the embezzled money being a means towards his dream of total life experience. For him, it is a question of all or nothing; he is willing to give all of his life - and money - in exchange for an almost Faustian experience. Yet his quest for total values is flawed from the start, since he can only conceive of a way to those values through money. That is, his existential wish-dream is constantly betrayed by the fact that, in the
modern world, money, the emptiest of all signs, is assumed to be the means to intensity and fullness of experience. This means that the gap - between “experience and its payment” - will not close; and he will, at the end of the day, declare that ‘mit keinem Geld aus allen Bankkassen der Welt kann man sich irgendwas von Wert kaufen’ [p.103].

The fact that his monologue is followed by the discovery that “death” has been sitting behind him in the tree all the time eerily prefigures this outcome of his plans: money cannot buy him anything of real value, and the desired equilibrium will not be established.

Already the encounter with the Lady in her hotel room raises the issue of whether he will actually be able to find anything of real value, or whether everything he tries will reveal its ascribed value to be fake. Before the Kassierer arrives at the hotel, the Lady’s son is showing his mother a painting by Cranach which provides a clue to the aim of the Kassierer’s search. It depicts the Garden of Eden. Perhaps the Kassierer is in quest of the blissful integrity of mankind. Yet it is important to realize that Cranach never painted anything that would match the description of the painting by the son [p.62]. Therefore the arty discourse of the son revolves around a forgery: there is an obvious irony in this, and it prefigures the disillusionment at the heart of the Kassierer’s experiences. Like the Lady and her son, the Kassierer is unable to distinguish between the genuine and the counterfeit. He believes the Lady to be a harlot whilst she really is a lady, and he sets out to experience real life in a world of constructed images of happiness and fulfilment; moreover, he himself will become a fake, pretending to be a rich gentleman. With his 60000 he will be chasing a form of happiness - depicted in the painting - which will turn out to be an illusion, a fake like the picture.

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The resolution to search for the ‘Antwort’ of life’s questions [p.76] leads him back to his home in the first instance, in order to re-examine the worth and value of bourgeois life. Yet the daily routine of sleep, work, food and family, guided and surrounded by petit-bourgeois traditions, is not what he has in mind: ‘Es ist ja alles wunderschön - unbestreitbare Vorzüge verkleinere ich nicht, aber vor letzten Prüfungen besteht es nicht’ [p.76]. And indeed this opinion is immediately substantiated: the Kassierer’s mother has a heart attack when the son announces his intention of leaving before lunch. The Mother’s death seems trivial - even comic - since she dies because her son contravenes the rules of the petty-bourgeois world order. The great value that is attached to trivialities, which the Kassierer already mocks in the snowy field [p.69], is thus confirmed, and the Mother’s death rendered ridiculous and pointless. The Kassierer takes this opportunity to assess his filial feelings against the money, literally weighing a handful of notes against the grief he is meant to feel in the face of his mother’s death [p.77]. The promise of the fulfilment of life that the notes seem to exude prevents any emotion, and actually spurs him on in his search: ‘Augen trocken - Gedanken arbeiten weiter. Ich muß mich eilen, wenn ich zu gültigen Resultaten vorstoßen will!’ [p.77]

His first stage is the Sportpalast in Berlin, where the Sechstagerennen is taking place, but the Kassierer is not interested in the athletes, his attention is focused on the audience. Realizing the liberating effect that prize money donations have on the audience, he begins to believe that the stadium might be the place where he could find the essence of mankind. The higher the promised win, the more excited the audience becomes as a whole, regardless of social class. He watches with fascination how the emotions of the lower social classes spill over to the others, until the social classifications are erased - ‘Ein Heulen aus allen Ringen - unterschiedlos. Unterschiedlos. Das ist erreicht!’ [p.83] - and all that remains is

The Kassierer believes he has found the ‘Ware, die man mit vollem Einsatz kauft’, and ups the prize money to 50 000 Marks - almost all of his fortune. The immediate reaction to the announcement of this unheard-of donation appears to prove him right; surveying the ecstasy amongst the spectators, he remembers his re-birth in the snowy field, and declares that ‘das sind Erfüllungen. [...] Wogender Menschheitsstrom. Entkettet - frei. [...] Freie Menschheit. Hoch und tief - Mensch. Keine Ringe - keine Schichten - keine Klassen’ [p.86]. However, his vision of a free humanity is brutally brought back to reality by the entry of the Prince: everyone falls silent and pays his respects to the royal. Thus, although the money briefly removes class boundaries, in German pre-World War I society its influence is not yet strong enough to conquer fear and tradition, and the heady excitement fades.

Disillusioned, the Kassierer makes his way to a Ballhaus in order to enjoy the culture of the chambre séparée. It is at this point that the clash between his origins and the status he is assuming with the aid of the money becomes most obvious: dressed in ‘Frack, Umhang, Schal, Bambusrohr mit Goldknopf’ [p.87], but only equipped with some snippets of popular petit-bourgeois culture, he is unable to understand the discourse of these establishments. Simply believing that a generous supply of sparkling wine and an elaborate dinner will suffice to persuade young women to give him their favours, his first disappointment comes with a masked girl who drinks too much, and proceeds to go to
sleep. Having removed her, he returns with two masked women, and in anticipation of their youth and beauty offers them money so they will unmask themselves. The result is more than sobering - 'Scheusal - Scheusal - Scheusal!' [p.91] - and he chases them out of the room. His words 'Kontrakte Vetteln!' [p.91] seem to indicate that the two were anything but young (a Vettel is a disagreeable old woman), and that he might suspect them to have a contract with the owner of the Ballhaus in order to make the guests spend their money on them.\(^7\)

Yet he still makes another attempt, this time entering the room with a Pierrette whose refusal to dance attracted his attention. Believing that this is due to her having a special technique, he remains deaf to her pleas that she really cannot dance until the moment she reveals to him that she has a wooden leg. Once again, the Kassierer demonstrates his inability to distinguish between the fake and the genuine: whilst he was chasing ugly masks in the belief that they were pretty, giving caviar and Pommery to those who would not stick to their part of the “deal”, he proves himself unable to recognize true honesty and potential interest in him. The Maske with the wooden leg not only ‘schmiegt sich im Polster an ihn’ [p.93], but she also does not gorge herself on the delicacies on offer. She is the only one to respond honestly to the Kassierer, repeatedly declaring that she really is unable to dance. Yet the Kassierer decides to insult her by putting the ice bucket over her head so that her leg ‘soll Knospen treiben’ [p.93]: it seems that he is unable to accept her imperfection. Having come to the establishment in the hope to experience the ‘schöne Möglichkeiten’ [p.89] that these houses appear to promise, he seems unwilling to experience anything but perfection: the first mask is dismissed because she is drunk, the second two are not pretty and beyond the bloom of youth, and the third

\(^7\) After Schürer, Erläuterungen und Dokumente, p.36.
is physically impaired. Realizing that he has gone too far with the ice bucket, he decides to leave the establishment, and we next see him in an assembly hall of the Salvation Army on the arm of the girl who had tried to sell him the *War Cry* throughout his adventures.

Immediately after he has left the *Ballhaus*, two men appear in the room in order to avenge the injustice done to the *Pierrette*. Seeing that Kassierer has departed, but left 1000 Marks towards his bill, they steal the money, leaving the waiter to pay the bill himself. The two men are far more realistic in their attitude towards how to use money to fulfill their sexual desires than the Kassierer had been. Knowing that the women at the ball ‘sind ja doch nur besoffen’, they reach a practical conclusion: ‘Wir ziehen in ein Bordell und pachten den Bums drei Tage’ [p.94].

Georg Kaiser once expressed his wish as a writer to highlight the fate of the deprived and neglected. In an interview with the *Svenska Dagbladet* in 1926, he comments ‘ich bin ganz einfach gezwungen worden, von jenen Menschen zu schreiben, die vom Schicksal ungerecht behandelt werden.’ Kaiser’s criticism of the degrading and dehumanizing effects of capitalism recurs throughout the play. The very opening scene juxtaposes the fat, self-important Gentleman, the rotund Director and the rich Lady with the Kassierer’s monotonous, dreary existence. The amount of money at their disposal - although the Director too is merely a cog in the organisation of the main bank, he still earns a considerable amount more than a little cashier - put them onto a different social scale from that of the Kassierer, whose job merely affords a modest, albeit sufficient, petit-bourgeois life-style: they are capitalists. Their common role in society is expressed in the similar appearance of the two men (both are fat), and in their immediate belief that the Lady is a fraudster and a harlot. This similarity between richer members in society

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again comes to the fore in the Sportpalast, where the Jewish judges are explicitly described as 'ununterscheidbar' [p.78]. As Schürer has pointed out, 'indem Kaiser die Kampfrichter als jüdische Herren identifiziert, schließt er sich dem Vorurteil der Zeit an, das sich die Juden besonders als Großstadtmenschen und Vertreter des Finanzkapitals vorstellt'. But not only the Jews are indistinguishable; money is the great equalizer: whatever it touches becomes part of the same, interchangeable, bereft of all individuality.¹⁰

Kaiser's portrait of bourgeois life is as biting as it is sorrowful. The Kassierer's sarcastic remark that the loss of his cuffs would cause a 'Katastrophe im Waschkessel' [p.69], the setting of his home with its 'abgeblühten Geranien', the Mother at the window, the Daughters playing piano and doing needle work, and his Wife being unable to talk about anything else but frying chops for lunch [p.72], is the soul-destroying picture of narrow-mindedness. Their real impact on the mind is portrayed less in the Kassierer's desperate flight from them than in the wretched cry of one of the Büßer in the Salvation Army Hall, who finishes an account of his life, identical to that of the Kassierer, by declaring

es ist herrlich bei uns - großartig - vorbildlich - praktisch - musterhaft - -

Verändert. Es ist ekelhaft - entsetzlich - es stinkt da - es ist armelig - vollkommen durch und durch armelig mit dem Klavierspielen - mit dem

¹⁰In this connection, it also becomes clear why Expressionism should have chosen not to name its heros, but to let their function in society stand in as their name. The height of this movement co-incided with a volatile period in the functioning of the capitalist economies of the Western World: the greedy run on colonies, harsh trading on the world market, and appalling conditions for the work force. It is not surprising that the Expressionists felt an increased emphasis was given to a person's occupation and social status rather than to his individuality.
It is generally held that Kaiser is poking fun at petit-bourgeois life in the portrait of the Kassierer; but in fact he reveals this life-style as a destructive obsession, desperately upheld by society; one which is without any real, i.e. human, value. The criticism voiced is serious, since the family scene is one of the stages the Kassierer passes through during his crazed search for real value.

The opening speech of one of the Officers is, apart from the ending of the ball scene, the harshest socio-economic criticism Kaiser voices in the play. The scene at the Ballhaus highlights not only exploitationary working practices - the desperately poor waiter has to foot any unpaid bill - but also that the life of capitalist luxuries is exploitative of the weak and dependent. The speech in the hall, together with the Kassierer's confession and the subsequent events, aim at the very fabric and effects of capitalism, culminating in the exposure of religion as the last empty signifier.

The Officer's short speech revolves around the effects metropolitan life has on the city dweller, a subject of concern to the Expressionists and one which Kaiser also addresses in other plays, especially in the Gas trilogy, in Nebeneinander, Gats, and Mississippi. Many thinkers saw the big towns as a curse and a threat to the individual, severing him from the links of a community and from nature, as well as making him lose his sense of self. Of concern were also crime and poor hygiene conditions, leading to epidemics, and often the sheer hardship of the poor. Although the Expressionists did not

\[\text{\footnotesize{Georg Simmel ("Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben"), Helmut Bahr ("Der Betrieb der Großstadt") and Oswald Spengler (\textit{Der Untergang des Abendlandes}) were amongst the best known critics of large cities.}}\]
specifically tackle these issues - because they tended (as Kaiser himself does in this play) to go for existential grandiloquence rather than offering precise socio-economic analysis - concern for the state of social affairs is readily detectable at every turn.

It is thus no surprise that the Officer focuses first on the isolation of the individual by asking: ‘Wer kennt seinen Nachbar?’, before moving on to remind the audience that ‘Krankheit und Verbrechen sind allgemein in dieser asphaltenen Stadt’ [p.96]. The word ‘asphalt’, relating to the mixture of bitumen and stone with which most streets and squares were laid, is heavily charged with negative connotations. It sums up the unnaturalness of the big towns, and became a ‘typisierendes Beiwort für die Großstadt’ in literature since the turn of the century. Encouraging the members of the audience to flee this atmosphere and the neighbour they can no longer trust, the Officer calls upon them to come up on stage and confess in order to regain their lost souls. However, there is already plenty of indication that not all is holy in this organisation, prefiguring the violent and greedy end of this assembly.

It is exactly the Officer’s words regarding the climate of distrust within the community that have a sinister ring to them. In opposition to Christ’s teaching, the Officer does not adhere to the love-thy-neighbour philosophy of Christianity, but actively encourages suspicion, fear, and possible hatred:


12 Schürer, Erläuterungen und Dokumente, p.39.
Although the speech is a critique of capitalism for its lack of compassion, it is conceptualized in fiercely individualistic terms. Instead of preaching Christ's words of caring for those who are sick and in prison (Matthew 25. 34ff), the Officer isolates each member of the audience even further by declaring that it is not only on the city streets where one cannot trust anyone, but also in this very room, where people should have gathered out of love for God and fellow human beings. Thus she encourages an egocentricity typical of capitalism that finds its ultimate expression in the greed and hatred at the end of the scene, when the Kassierer is throwing his stolen fortune at the congregation in a desperate attempt to rid himself of the money: 'Dann ist heißer Kampf um das Geld entbrannt. In ein kämpfendes Knäuel ist die Versammlung verstrickt. [...] Die Bänke werden umgestoßen, heisere Rufe schwirren, Fäuste klatschen auf Leiber' [p.104]. Religion is as empty as any other discourse he has encountered.

In agreement with the Officer's speech, all the people coming up to confess tell a tale of the inherent loneliness of modern, big-town life, apparently hidden behind the celebrations of sporting achievement and fame [pp.97f], sexual pleasure and prostitution [pp.99f], petit-bourgeois Gemütlichkeit [p.101], and money [pp.102ff]. The suffering of their souls only ever comes to the fore when they are thrown out of the merry-go-round, forced, in total isolation away from the crowds, to listen to themselves, thus recognizing the ideals and pleasures of capitalism to be empty of any real meaning.

It is, however, the Kassierer's analysis of his day and of money that sums up and clarifies all the issues raised in the play. Telling the assembly that he has been searching for life's essence all day 'prüfenden Blicks, tastender Finger, wählen Kopfs' [p.103] - he has finally found that which merits the 'vollen Einsatz' [p.103]: this room, and 'Bekenntnis und Buße!' The experience of sharing the darker side of one's life with other
people, the discovery that his feelings and actions are not unique, but shared by others -
all the other confessions, in typical Expressionist mode, mirror aspects of his own life -
now seems to him to be what he has been looking for, and he is ready to reject the
monetaristic ideals of capitalist society in exchange for the values of humanity. Believing
himself to be surrounded, for the first time in his life, by real human beings, he is ready:
‘ich bekenne!’ The subsequent denunciation of money as worthless is the more significant
since he has spent his whole life dealing with it, and gave up his secure life because his -
and society’s - belief in money led him to regard it as the means to all ends in life, indeed
to life itself. Now he knows:

mit keinem Geld aus allen Bankkassen der Welt kann man sich irgendwas
von Wert kaufen. Man kauft immer weniger als man bezahlt. Und je mehr
man bezahlt, um so geringer wird die Ware. Das Geld verschlechtert den
Wert. Das Geld verhüllt das Echte - das Geld ist der armeligst Schwindel
unter allem Betrug! [pp.103f]

As Williams has suggested, this passage does indeed point to the work of a contemporary
social critic and friend of Kaiser, Gustav Landauer’s Aufruf zum Sozialismus, in which he
strives to establish the difference between real, true value, and exchange value,
demanding “daß der Preis dem Wert gleich sein soll”. However, what speaks clearly
from the Kassierer’s as well as from Landauer’s words is the awareness of the
displacement (Verdrängung) of values through money. According to Georg Simmel, this
was strongly felt around the turn of the century and beyond, because of an increase in the

\[\text{Cited in Williams, ‘Culture and Anarchy’, p.368.}\]
commodification of goods and services ‘welche gar nicht zum Verkauf hergestellt sind [...]': Geschäfte und Betriebe, Kunstwerke und Sammlungen, Grundbesitz, Rechte und Positionen aller Art.\textsuperscript{14} Money is no longer merely the calibration of value in comparable units of the same, but actually part of and process of radical abstraction. This inevitably means that money replaces all values by making them equatable on the grounds of money: money becomes the representation of value per se. This goes hand in hand with the replacing of values through money:

Der Umfang, in dem sich das Geld für das Wertbewußtsein verabsolutiert, hängt von der großen Wendung des wirtschaftlichen Interesses von der Urproduktion zum industriellen Betrieb ab. Die neuere Zeit und etwa das klassische Griechentum nehmen dem Gelde gegenüber hauptsächlich daraufhin so verschiedene Stellungen ein, weil es damals nur der Konsumtion, jetzt aber wesentlich auch der Produktion dient.\textsuperscript{15}

Since wealth (and value) has now become represented by money in an industrialized society, productivity becomes an end in itself for all owners of means of production, services, and handicraft professions. Yet just as the mass-produced goods are replacable non-originals, so the crisis of the authentic, brought about by money as the means which only ever measures in units of the same, eclipses the possibility of buying anything valuable, real or original with money, as the Kassierer discovers.\textsuperscript{16} All that is available is


\textsuperscript{15}Ibid, p.299.

\textsuperscript{16}As discussed in the chapter on \textit{Der grüne Heinrich}, pp.186f and p.190.
fake, an image without substance, a cultural temptation that is to be adored and coveted, but once it is tested it is found wanting.

During his day with the stolen money, in search of true value, the Kassierer reveals the discrepancy between the actual value of things - and life - and that which capitalist society ascribes to them. Realizing that everything purchasable with money is reducible to it, and therefore inherently interchangeable and drained of all particularity, the Kassierer reveals capitalist society to be no more than a hollow system of socio-economic signifiers propelled forward by money. He simultaneously discloses the worthlessness of money and all that it can afford.

His death after the final disappointment is therefore as logical as it is unavoidable: denouncing the money and throwing it amongst the masses, he renounces this society and its culture for the paradisical union of man and woman before the expulsion: ‘Mädchen und Mann. Uralte Gärten aufgeschlossen. Entwölkter Himmel. Stimme aus Baumwipfelstille. Wohlgefallen. [...]. Mädchen und Mann - Sinn und Zweck und Ziel.’ [p.104]. His words evoke the picture of Adam and Eve he saw in the Lady’s hotel room, yet it is impossible to return to a pre-lapsarian state. His original mistake of wanting to find the essence of life with the very means that destroys it is corrected by the wish to return to a state which does not even know the meaning of society, let alone economics. This, however, is no longer possible, man has gone too far in his development after eating of the tree of knowledge. Hence it is no surprise that the girl from the Salvation Army, who had followed him throughout the day and sworn never to leave him, betrays him for money by fetching a policeman and telling him ‘da ist er. Ich habe ihn Ihnen gezeigt. Ich habe die Belohnung verdient!’ [p.105]

It is at this point that the fundamental flaw in the Kassierer’s attempt to find the essence of life comes to haunt him. He has spent all his life dealing with money, and then
he embarks upon a quest of fulfillment through the only means known to him: money. It is part of the bitter irony of this play that the Kassierer’s grand existential endeavour is constantly thwarted by the brutally contingent means (money) envisaged for its fulfilment. The Kassierer seeks to discover the worth of experience and ends up putting a price on everything; however, as he realizes in the final scene, this process is doomed from the start, since nothing of any real value can be bought by money. When finally he is betrayed for money, when his vision of a new mankind evaporates, the play comes full circle and the Kassierer utters the words that give the play its title: ‘Von morgens bis mitternachts rase ich im Kreise’ [p.106]. By delivering him to the Policeman for the sake of a reward, the girl destroys the Kassierer’s vision of a possible new life and thus he has no chance other than to take his own life.

Thus the overriding message of the play is deeply negative and bleak. Not only is it a critique of the Kassierer and his attempt to find anything of real human value through the means that only knows of market-oriented exchange value and of individuality-destroying interchangability, but it is also the disturbing portrayal of a society that knows of no other value than that of money. It is this double aspect of the play which also softens the criticism it voices against the Kassierer - Von morgens bis mitternachts has been compared frequently to passion plays and the Kassierer has been made into a Jesus-like figure - and he appears as the victim of capitalist society: first, in his bleak, routine existence as a cashier, second in his fervent but fateful belief that money is the means to a new life, and third in the fact that, just as he is at the point where he realizes that money and what it buys is worthless and is close to finding a “new” form of happiness, he is betrayed and sees no alternative but to kill himself.\(^{17}\) As in many an Expressionist play,

\(^{17}\)Although the idea of pure love in a state of Arcadia is by no means new, for Kaiser a return to nature was the most promising option. See K.S. Guthke, Geschichte und Poetik der deutschen Tragikomödie, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961, pp.322ff.
the New Man and the New Life cannot be realized in this world - a paradox that ultimately explains the tragicomic nature of *Von morgens bis mitternachts*, the oscillating of the Kassierer between the tragic and the ridiculous: tragic in his ill-fated attempt to escape his desperate life, ridiculous in his behaviour in many of the actual scenes.\footnote{The ridiculous aspect of the Kassierer's character is most prominent in the scene with the Lady in the Hotel Elefant, where he makes a fool of himself by assuming her to be a harlot (*Von morgens bis mitternachts*, pp.63ff); and in the Ballhaus, where the incongruity between his outward appearance (the expensive clothes) and his ignorance (in the conversation with the waiter and his dealings with the women) is perhaps most obvious (pp.87ff).}

**Selling Your Soul**

Whereas in *Von morgens bis mitternachts* we see the Kassierer chase the illusory value of his sixty-thousand marks, in *Der Besuch der alten Dame* money is not even present: we only ever see the articles purchased by, or witness the economic effects of, the expectation of money. At the end of the play, a cheque is handed over, no money changes hands. In as much as the Kassierer’s 60 000 Marks assert their presence on stage, from the beginning of *Der Besuch der alten Dame*, money makes itself felt by its very absence: in the depressing opening scene, with Güllen in a state of total poverty, we learn that this is due to a lack of money. What is more, the story that unfolds is based not on actual money, but upon the promise of a promise - a cheque is always a promise to pay. Although money, credit, indeed the whole range of financial facilities in a money-based economy are always based upon assumption and speculation, the twice removed nature of Claire’s reward - twice removed from any tangible means of payment - highlights these characteristics and alerts the reader to the strange nature of Güllen’s ensuing economic recovery.

Yet before examining the complex role money and consumption play in this drama, I would like to outline briefly some historical facts behind Dürrenmatt's
masterpiece.

Many of the critics who have discussed Der Besuch der alten Dame have ignored the fact that its original version of 1956 bore the subtitle “Eine Komödie der Hochkonjunktur” in favour of the “Eine tragische Komödie” of the 1980 version. Although the 1980 publication of Dürenmatt’s oeuvre bears the stamp of the author’s approval, the change of the subtitle marks a shift in the outward intention of the play that is reflected in the many treatises on the drama from the angle of tragic comedy as elaborated in Theaterprobleme. “Eine Komödie der Hochkonjunktur”, however, emphasizes that the play is not only a critical assessment of the questionable morality and values of twentieth-century society, but also of the underlying economic forces and their reflection in society.

The end of World War II marked a radical turn in the economic fortune of Switzerland. The boom that swept through the whole of Europe in the 1950s saw the establishment of an unprecedentedly affluent middle class in the small Alpine country. Indeed, the general recovery of the war-damaged economies in the rest of Europe was as nothing compared to the boom experienced by Switzerland’s undamaged economic infrastructure. Real GNP rose from Sfr. 34.6 billion in 1948 to 52.4 billion in 1957, and the average real wages went up ‘250% between the end of the war and the early 1970s.’

Growing average wealth and a shift away from agriculture towards the industrial towns also meant a weakening of the rigid social stratification and white-collar jobs became increasingly the norm. Generally speaking, the feast of production and consumption that the whole of the Western world enjoyed was strongly felt in a small nation whose traditionally agriculture-dominated society became an urban and highly successful

economy almost over night. It is against this background that Der Besuch der alten Dame was originally written: as Dürrenmatt himself pointed out in Theaterprobleme, ‘jede Kunst nützt die Chancen ihrer Zeit aus’. In the case of post-war Western Europe, this time was one of economic boom and consumption, coupled with the desperate desire to forget the horrors of the war. Dürrenmatt’s focus in Der Besuch der alten Dame on the complete venality of the world, including justice, morality, and traditional values, affords him the additional opportunity to examine power issues in the post-war world. In Theaterprobleme, he also draws our attention to the fact that power is now no longer visible: ‘Die Macht Wallensteins ist eine noch sichtbare Macht, die heutige Macht ist nur zum kleinsten Teil sichtbar, wie bei einem Eisberg ist der größte Teil im Gesichtslosen, Abstrakten verschwunden’ [p.119]. The consequence of this invisible and abstract power is that it is no longer identifiable; hence the individual is helpless when seeking to challenge some of its manifestations. As will be discussed, Der Besuch der alten Dame identifies money and man’s craving for it, and the things it can buy, as the prime force at work in the Western world. Moreover, not only is money in itself an abstract entity, but Dürrenmatt further exploits its uncanny power in the twentieth century by keeping the promised money - the driving force behind the plot and Güllen’s economic recovery - off-stage.

This not only enhances its eerie quality behind the scenes, but allows for the portrayal of its effects in the gradual, continuous and visible improvement of Güllen as described in the stage directions towards the end of the play. All we ever see are the

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21 Drückten die immer besseren Kleider den anwachsenden Wohlstand aus, diskret, unaufdringlich, doch immer weniger zu übersehen, wurde der Bühnenraum stets appetitlicher, veränderte er sich, stieg er in seiner sozialen Stufenleiter, als stiedelte man von einem Armeleutequartier unmerklich in eine moderne wohl situierte Stadt über [...]. Die einst graue Welt hat sich in etwas technisch
effects of money: from the yellow shoes to the final chorus, when all of Güllen has been transformed into ‘etwas Blitzblankes, [ist] in Reichtum verwandelt’ [pp.131f], we witness the incredible power of money, or rather, the belief in it, since all of Güllen’s new lease of life is built upon credit. In a development that dwarfs Keller’s Revalenta Arabica,\textsuperscript{23} Der Besuch der alten Dame demonstrates money’s ability to create something out of nothing, to energize and dynamize an economy that had hitherto been strangled. On mere credit, which in turn is based on nothing more than the promise of a cheque, Güllen’s economy begins to flourish and to provide work and wealth for the citizens. Frau Ill and Hofbauer, who becomes a butcher, even plan to create employment [p.92]: we witness a whole economy being built, essentially, on nothing, on a piece of paper with numbers on it, to be transformed into different numbers on different sheets of paper. Here, even more so than in the Revalenta, it becomes obvious that the power of money merely rests upon the belief and trust of those who use it. By focussing almost exclusively on the depiction of the effects of money, Dürrenmatt achieves a remarkably forceful portrayal of money’s power in our century.

This makes Der Besuch der alten Dame more than just a comment on what can be achieved through money: it makes it an assessment of the organization and structures that determine and shape society. This corresponds to Dürrenmatt’s own conviction of the necessity ‘Strukturen der menschlichen Gemeinschaft selbst zum Handlungsträger zu machen’,\textsuperscript{23} and money is the determining power in the twentieth century because it has become the very essence of socio-economic structures and stratifications.

The other medium at the heart of Der Besuch der alten Dame is language - above

\textsuperscript{22} See pp. 184ff of this thesis.

all language’s ability to lie. Ill’s original lie (and his desire for money) is at the root of the story, as are those of Koby and Loby; and Claire now employs money not only to uncover the truth, but also to erect a new reality through the (self-)deception and distortion of reality and truth the Gülleners engage in after her offer of one billion. The abuse of truth through the manipulation of language corresponds to the manipulation of justice and society by means of money. In this play both media are shown to be inseparably intertwined in the modern world.

The Gülleners’ bad luck, as it is portrayed at the beginning of the play, is an economic miracle in itself: the Pfändungsbeamte points out that ‘das ganze Land floriert, und ausgerechnet Güllen mit der Platz-an-der-Sonne-Hütte geht bankrott’.

Güllen is excluded from the prosperity that the rest of the country enjoys, and the reality and severity of their condition, as well as the nature of twentieth-century economics, is expressed in the quick exchange between the Mayor, the Parson, and the Teacher. The Mayor points out that Claire and her billions are their only hope, the Parson’s interjection of ‘außer Gott’ is immediately undercut by the Teacher with a practical remark: ‘Aber der zahlt nicht’ [p.18]. This emphasizes the fact that in the world of the twentieth century God has no place any more, not even metaphorically: the social order, once believed to be ordained by God, is now ruled by Mammon, or by Mammon’s representative in Güllen. Mammon and Claire have become interchangeable. This becomes explicit at the end of the drama, when Claire turns into ‘ein altes Göttzenbild aus Stein’ [p.134] during the chorus in which the Gülleners celebrate their regained affluence. I believe it is particularly this connection that makes Claire into a goddess - more than the Teacher’s likening of her to

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Clotho. (This is suggested by the fact that the teacher makes a mistake. Clotho did not
spin the threads of life [p.34]; rather, she holds the distaff. Kenneth Whitton falls for the
Teacher’s comment. He also wrongly calls Clotho one of the Furies, whereas she is a
Fate.\textsuperscript{25} However, this misconception by the Teacher highlights Claire’s real importance: if
indeed she is Clotho, she has in her hands the means whence all life springs, the root of
being. Given her links to Mammon and her financial power, this in turn reflects on the
omnipotence of money in this play and our own times, suggesting it to be the basis of our
existence.) Dürrenmatt himself compared Claire to Medea in the \textit{Anmerkung I}; yet what
crucially distinguishes her from the famous heroine of Greek tragedy is the fact that, as
the author himself remarks, it is ‘durch ihr Vermögen’ [p.142] that Claire is able to enact
this role. Significantly, it is through money that a modern Medea exacts her revenge,
since it is the very nerve of twentieth-century society and economy. Claire will change the
very basis of Güllen’s sense of being from that of a town embedded in the tradition of the
Western world to a new, shiny, state-of-the-art place built upon the denial of humanist
values in favour of her own \textit{Weltdordnung}.

Much mention has been made of Claire’s apparent other-worldliness. I do not
however find the argument persuasive. Admittedly, she appears to be grotesque in her
assembled state, in her absolute power that overrides the laws of nature, as the station
master comments when she stops the express train in Güllen [p.21], in her absolute desire
for revenge. Yet there are reasons for this: Claire is assembled in the same way as the play
is a mix and match of dramatic traditions reaching from Antiquity (the chorus) to
Expressionistic features in the namelessness of many in the \textit{dramatis personae}. Similarly,
twentieth-century post-war society is a patched-up conglomerate from classical,

\textsuperscript{25}K. Whitton, \textit{Dürrenmatt}, p.37.
Enlightenment, pseudo-religious and countless other values. Yet she is also assembled from the two paradoxical basic forces of the human world: life and death. Not only is her body part living, part dead material, but her function in Güllen is also not only evil: although she has come to execute implacable revenge, she will also be the saviour of Güllen should its inhabitants be willing to fulfill her conditions. It is this ambiguity which allows for the change in the minds of the Gülleners in the first place, this ambiguity enables them to make her over into the saviour by calling her revenge 'justice'. It is also important in this connection that they do not learn about the real reason behind the economic decline of Güllen until this psychological process has gone beyond the point of no return. When the Teacher and the Doctor come to see her at the beginning of Act III, the Gülleners have already started to regard her as the saviour, as the poor victim, in order to justify their purchases on credit in the expectation of her donation. Ill's position as the future mayor of the town has already been taken from him, he is already being seen as no longer possessing 'gewisse Forderungen sittlicher Natur' [p.71]; and the many credit purchases during Act II leave the Gülleners no other choice but to continue the process started. Had Claire admitted in the Hotel Apostle that it was she who ruined the once flourishing Güllen in order to be able to exact revenge, things might have developed very differently with the Gülleners turning on her.

Yet also in Claire herself there is no real other-worldliness. As Dürrenmatt himself pointed out in the Anmerkung I to the 1980 edition, 'Claire Zachanassian stellt weder die Gerechtigkeit dar noch den Marschallplan oder gar die Apokalypse, sie sei nur das, was sie ist, die reichste Frau der Welt, durch ihr Vermögen in der Lage, wie eine Heldin der griechischen Tragödie zu handeln, absolut, grausam, wie Medea etwa' [p.142]. That she has powers other human beings have not has a very simple reason: she is unbelievably rich, and money is the basis for everything, as Claire herself explains to the Gülleners in
the Apostle: ‘Man kann alles kaufen’ [p.45]. Moreover, we even get a fairly complex explanation as to why Claire’s revenge is so severe and absolute. The issue is multi-layered and additional light can be thrown on it when considering the original version of the play.

On the first level, Claire seeks justice: she ‘bietet eine Milliarde, wenn ihr das Unrecht wiedergutmacht, das Frau Zachanassian in Güllen angetan wurde’ [p.46], as the former Judge explains to the Gülleners. The injustice done to her consists of Alfred Ill’s denial that he is the father of her child, of his bribing two young men to bear false witness, and, finally, of marrying another girl, because it will make him the owner of a small shop. Thus his betrayal was three-fold: he refused responsibility for his actions, branded Claire a whore, and betrayed her for money. This is the first reason we get for Claire’s desire for revenge, and it is not without tragic overtones when she turns to Ill, agreeing ‘das Leben ging weiter, aber ich habe nichts vergessen, Ill. Weder den Konradsweilerwald noch die Petersche Scheune, weder die Schlafkammer der Witwe Boll noch deinen Verrat’ [p.29]. The Teacher realizes the severity of her suffering in Act III – ‘Sie sind ein verletztes liebendes Weib’ [p.90] – seemingly unaware of the ironic, yet fateful connection to the sermon just delivered during her wedding ceremony, Corinthians1. 13, known in German as Das Hohelied der Liebe. In this chapter, as is well known, love is made the essence of life, revealing, in the disturbing repetition of that he or she who ‘had not love’, can find no form of happiness. Love is described as undying, and as the primus inter pares of faith, hope, and love. This is what happened to Claire, and the original version captures this better than that of 1980. In her last conversation with Ill, in the Konradsweilerwald before his certain death, Claire says in the original version:

If anything, it is this unrequitted love for III, together with the destruction of faith and hope within her (in which the Gülleners played no small part), which made her inhuman and, as can be seen in her identical and totally interchangeable husbands, unable ever to love again. Claire’s attitude towards her husbands, who are kept for ‘Ausstellungszwecke’ [p.114] and who have to give up their real name in order to suit the name of the butler - ‘den hat man schließlich fürs Leben, da müssen sich dann eben die Gatten nach seinem Namen richten’ [p.26] - drastically demonstrates money’s effect of reducing everything to units of the same, of erasing individuality. That money makes everything interchangeable and quantifiable also determines III’s fate: one billion in exchange for his life. Yet Claire’s husbands are also the perfect example of Baudrillard’s claim that people ‘of wealth are no longer surrounded by other human beings, as they have been in the past, but by objects.’27 Yet Baudrillard’s sentence intimates that rich men’s fates condemn them to deal with and strive after objects; he falls short of its logical consequence: the reduction of others to the status of mere operational entities. Nowhere is this clearer than in Claire’s


27 Baudrillard, Selected Writings, p.29. [italics in the original]
treatment of her husbands and her retinue, all of whose names end in -oby.

The role her money plays in the original version of this admission of her undying love for Ill is very different to that of the 1980 version. Here she says 'ich liebte dich. Du hast mich verraten. Doch den Traum von Leben, von Liebe, von Vertrauen, diesem einst wirklichem Traum habe ich nicht vergessen. Ich will ihn wieder errichten mit meinen Milliarden, die Vergangenheit ändern, indem ich dich vernichte' [p.117]. This corresponds more closely to the psychology of revenge, and explains Claire’s craving for what she perceives as justice: as Erich Fromm points out, ‘vengeance is in some sense a magic act. By destroying the one who committed the atrocity his deed is magically undone.’

In the first version, money is portrayed as an active part of destruction, the harbinger of the final satisfaction of her obsessive and possessive, yet betrayed love, almost an ambush waiting for Ill after his betrayal of Claire for a small financial benefit forty-five years ago. It seems as if the money itself had overgrown and choked Claire’s love, as if the realization of money’s corrupting powers had turned her, and her love, into something evil. In the original version, money is made the active part in Ill’s death, Claire appears as the passive owner, watching it spin its fateful net, happy to see her former lover reduced to a ghostly figure in a life she is desperately trying to forget: there is an actual human sadness in her last sentence. Money here is a sign for absolute possession and revenge - money has deformed both Claire and Ill.

In the 1980 version, however, there is neither sadness nor passivity in Claire. Money is no longer the active avenger, but the tool with which to erase the past in order to satisfy her need for vengeance. In as much as money, for the miser, is a means of protection against the future, or, for the debtor, a means of quantifying the future whilst living on borrowed time, for Claire in the final version, it is the means to shape not only

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her present, but to eliminate the past and to create a reality according to her wishes. Money plays an almost schizophrenic role in this: on the one hand, it is the agent with which the reality of the past is brought to light in the first place, on the other it is the means with which she eventually re-creates her own life, erasing III and the past.

From the beginning of the play it is clear that III and the Gülleners are not honest about the life of Klara Wäsher in Güllen. III denies the rumors the Parson mentions, declaring, although it is obvious from his comments that he and Klara had had a sexual relationship, that ‘das Leben trennte uns, nur das Leben, wie es eben kommt’ [p.18]. The Gülleners talk spitefully about her parents, and the Mayor knows he will have to bend the truth in his speech before the dinner held in the Apostle. The deceit carries on during Claire’s and III’s visit to the Konradsweilerwald, where III tries to deny leaving Claire for his wife and her shop, but hypocritically insists that he did it for her good - ‘dir gehörte die Zukunft’ [p.37] - and even claims he wishes that life had never separated them [p.39]. In the face of all this dishonesty, Claire’s frankness about the reality of her youth after the Mayor’s speech does not bode well, the more so as she is very outspoken about the nature of her relationship with III. She then declares that she is willing to give Güllen one billion on one condition, and at this point the promised billion becomes the agent of revealing the truth about the past. III, through his denial of his paternity and by producing false witnesses, had branded Claire a whore, which she then became in real life until Zachanassian fell for her in a Hamburg brothel. Now she wants III’s death as a means for justice, and the promised billion becomes the means for this. The Gülleners reject her offer, invoking the humanist values of the Western tradition.

29 Given the era in which their love affair happened - the beginning of this century - a time in which pre-marital sex either meant a promise to marry or else would condemn the girl to be regarded as a harlot, III’s words have a slight sinister ring to them, and this is later confirmed when Claire tells her side of the story.
Yet Claire knows the power and temptation of money better - 'ich warte' [p.50] - moreover, she is after more than merely the murder of Ill: she wants to see the Gülleners officially establish a set of moral values and a world order according to the rules of money. In other words, she wants to unmask the values that govern Güllen, namely monetary ones. In so doing, she will not only reveal that bourgeois values are essentially based upon the desire to be rich, but also make clear that affluence itself is built upon corruption.

The totality of her revenge exists, first, in the careful planning of it: the hiring of the judge who sentenced her, the castration and blinding of the false witnesses, the purchase and ruin of Güllen and its economy in order to put herself in a position where she will be the only hope for the town. Her money has enabled her to be in this situation as well as to dictate the shape of the world now, as she explains to the Teacher and the Doctor in Act III: 'Die Menschlichkeit, meine Herren, ist für die Börse der Millionäre geschaffen, mit meiner Finanzkraft leistet man sich eine Weltordnung. Die Welt machte mich zu einer Hure, nun mache ich sie zu einem Bordell' [p.91]. Second, her absolute revenge consists of making the Gülleners prostitute themselves and by revealing the hypocrisy behind their humanist values. The Gülleners had had no humanity for her after Ill deserted her: 'Es war Winter, einst, als ich dieses Städtchen verließ, im Matrosenanzug, mit roten Zöpfen, hochschwanger, Einwohner grinsten mir nach. Frierend saß ich im D-Zug nach Hamburg [...]’ [p.90]. Her ultimate satisfaction will not merely derive from Ill’s death, but from the prostitution and perversion of Güllen’s identity. Claire shapes the world according to her will: she is omnipotent, as long as this world is based on money. The world outside Güllen has long made money the measure of all things, the basis of their lives, and the story of Güllen can be seen as an analogy of the way in which traditional humanist values are merely cosmetic in the capitalist world.
Güllen’s values were never challenged until Claire’s arrival, thus the inhabitants were able to actually still think that they believed in them. Yet once tested, they crumble quickly before our eyes, revealing Güllen’s hypocrisy and, by implication, the shallow nature of these values in the capitalist world per se.

It is their desperate poverty, which, of course, will make the Gülleners lap up any chance to join the merry-go-round of possession and production. Claire’s plan has worked to perfection: the Gülleners, albeit ‘nicht im Vorsatz, Ill zu töten’ [Anmerkung I, p.143], have accumulated debts in their hunger for the good life, debts which are only repayable with money, and this money can only come from her: they have joined the world of money, and are now dependent on its, and therefore Claire’s, principles. Her logic is brutally correct: ‘Wer nicht blechen kann, muß hinhalten, will er mittanzen. Ihr wollt mittanzen. Anständig ist nur, wer zahlt, und ich zahle’ [p.91]. The last sentence sums up the morality of Claire’s and the outside society’s world, it is the code of conduct, the Weltordnung, and it had also always ruled the Güllener’s behaviour and thought, despite their self-delusion that their lives were governed by the Western humanistic tradition. It is this hypocrisy that Claire destroys with her millions, forcing the Gülleners to prostitute their illusionary values and veiling this process in the cloak of justice.

The Gülleners, during Act III, do indeed internalize this moral code, degrading themselves in the way Claire had envisaged. Ill, who was ‘schließlich die beliebteste Persönlichkeit’ [p.57] still in Act II, is in Act III a ‘Halanke’ and a ‘Schuft’ [p.101], and finally even a ‘Schwein’ [p.129]. The slighting of Ill’s character is a psychological necessity for the Gülleners in order to be able to kill him. Moreover, the eventual exchange of Ill’s life for the billion turns human life - and justice - into a commodity; and Ill ‘becomes the collateral for their unpaid bills.’

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30 Koester, Everyman and Mammon, p.375.
Claire is called ‘eine zweite Lais’ [p.34] in Act I; in Act III, after her wedding, even Frau Ill finds ‘Klären ist das Glück zu gönnen nach all der Misere’ [p.91]. Now the offer of a billion is ‘doch nur ein Ausdruck des namenlosen Leids gewesen’ [p.93]; whereas Claire’s attitude that everything is purchasable had been rejected with a contemptuous ‘nicht bei uns’ [p.59] in Act II. Although Claire’s revenge also has a monstrous logic to it, her victory is at this point, when blind hatred, corruption and revenge are being called and perceived as justice.

The only one to see the profundity of the change in the Gülleners is the Teacher. In the scene in Ill’s shop in Act III, after the bitter farce with the journalists, the Teacher, distraught at Ill’s decision to accept his fate, calls Claire a ‘Erzhure, [...] die unsere Seelen einsammelt’ [p.102]. Up to this scene, he was the only one in Güllen who had not participated in the credit purchases, who, protected by his real respect for the classic values of humanity, had refused to get entangled in the net of credit and debt that Claire had spun. Not even the Parson had been able to resist the temptation, selling his soul to the new god of Mammon. The Teacher recognizes the deeper changes in the psychological make-up, realizes the perversion of values that Claire’s money, with the murder condition attached to it, is bringing in its wake. Whereas the Kassierer attempted to find his soul with the aid of money, Der Besuch der alten Dame drastically suggests that the structure of a capitalist, money-based economy and society relies upon, and demands, the selling of one’s soul in the sense of forsaking the Western humanistic tradition. As Koester has pointed out, we are witnessing in both plays ‘the development from money as a panacea to money as an agent of human degradation’[^1] - be it in the animalistic fight erupting in the Salvation Army Hall or in the prostitution of the Gülleners.

The first sign of the Gülleners' change of mind are the much discussed yellow shoes. Two things are important: not only is yellow the colour of jealousy, inconstancy, adultery, perfidy, and cowardice, but also that of gold and - by extension - money. In terms of all the Gülleners acquiring yellow shoes, this is not only a sign of the beginning treason, but also one of loss of differentiation. As money, or rather, credit, begins to touch and engulf them, their interchangeability and emerging inhumanity begin to resemble the medium they desire, and they have only one thought in their minds: to ensure they will get the cheque, i.e. to find a way of killing III. In that they resemble the two eunuchs, who were the victims and provide the monstrous example of the most violent undifferentiation money can afford.

The proliferation of the yellow shoes can be seen as a visible sign of the increasing proliferation of the invisible credit money, culminating in an all-engulfing image towards the end of the play: 'Gelb alles, nun ist der Herbst auch wirklich da. Laub am Boden wie Haufen von Gold' [p.112]. Reminiscent of the original version of Claire’s speech about her love for III in this final part, the forest has become the image of Claire’s billions and the fact that they have consumed Güllen - not the least because the Konradsweilerwald is hers. The fact that the forest is an integral part of the plot and of Güllen is very much underlined by the fact that the trees are to be played by Gülleners themselves. It is possible to suggest that this impersonation of the forest implies that nature, too, is party to the social world: it is never other, never radically separated from society. As such, it is impossible to get away from Güllen, even when in nature: thus one

[^2]: The Wordsworth Dictionary of Phrase and Fable also mentions that, 'in France, the doors of traitors used to be daubed with yellow and in some countries the laws ordained that Jews must be clothed in yellow, because they betrayed Jesus, and in mediaeval pictures Judas is arrayed in yellow'. [p.1171].

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could argue that nature, and by virtue of her depiction, the Gülleners, were complicit to
the betrayal of Claire and are now to that of III.

Claire’s revenge is total in that nothing is left as it was, she has come to not only
avenge the injustice done to her, but to mould the world according to her wish. In this,
money has been her principal aid: ‘man kann alles kaufen’ [p.45]. This absolute
elimination of not only III, but of the old humanistic world order and its values, is the
centre of the drama and its focus on the venality of the world. Der Besuch der alten Dame
does not merely portray the age-old human flaw of corruption, but shows man’s ability to
deny himself and his principles to a point where he has even forgotten he ever possessed
any in order to create and believe in a new system. The Gülleners do not feel guilt in any
way: he who pays is indeed the just one, as the chorus at the end of the drama confirms.

This chorus is one of the most wicked scenes in this savage portrait of consumer
society. In Greek tragedy, the chorus fulfilled the role of the commentator to the events
unfolding on stage, explaining their corporate meaning; and it expressed the spirit of the
community which the death of the hero, and its cathartic effect, would restore to purity,
re-establishing the moral code. However, ‘die Gesetze des Wohlstandes haben jene der
Sittlichkeit [...] ersetzt’ in Güllen.33 The chorus sings the praise of prosperity, venerating
the blessings of better clothes, expensive cars, and bourgeois Gemütlichkeit [pp.132ff]. The
catharsis has not dispensed with evil, but with poverty and ‘an die Stelle einer gereinigten
Welt [...] tritt damit ein “Welt-Happy-End” (Dürrenmatt) ein, in dem die Zerstörung des
Sittlichen eine totale ist.’34 In their chorus, the Gülleners identify poverty as the worst of
all evils that can befall man, even worse than natural catastrophes or those produced by
men, namely war and the nuclear bomb [p.132]. Poverty is worst because it attacks the

34 Ibid.
individual and the community from within by depriving its victims of anything worth living for, killing the very desire to live.

This juxtaposition of the choruses is the final great grotesque in this play. Robert E. Helbling, in his essay 'Dürrenmatt Criticism: Exit the Grotesque?', convincingly argues 'that in twentieth-century art and literature grotesque imagery may serve the purpose of disclosing the stupendous incongruity between a traditional humanistic concept of man and ugly reality'. The grotesque comes to wreak havoc with the traditional values, the tacitly agreed order of rationality and humanity of the Western world. Nowhere does this become clearer in Der Besuch der alten Dame than in the events in the wake of Claire's offer of a billion in return for Ill's murder; and nowhere do the old humanist values that the Gülleners have abused shine through more grotesquely than in this projection of twentieth-century corruption and greed onto the foil of Greek tradition.

There is also another message in this final scene. As Whitton has pointed out, the opening lines of Chorus I and Chorus II are those of Friedrich Hölderlin's translation of a Chorus from Antigone: 'Ungeheuer ist viel. Doch nichts/ Ungeheuer, als der Mensch.' In the context of Sophocles's play, ungeheuer means wondrous, great; yet Dürrenmatt exploits the double-meaning of the German word, which can also mean monstrous. The Gülleners Chorus reads as follows:

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35 In Lazar (ed), Play Dürrenmatt, pp.175-188. [p.181].

36 In the same essay, Helbling also suggests that 'the grotesque discloses fear-inspiring horrors through comic exposure' [p.178]. In the case of Der Besuch der alten Dame it could thus be argued that many of its grotesque elements illustrate a fear of total materialism or monetarism coming to rule the world.

37 Cited in Whitton, Dürrenmatt, p.63.
Thus the negative meaning of *ungeheuer* is established quickly, yet the fact that the two opening lines are almost identical to Sophocles’s gives rise to the expectation in the reader to see the line continued by ‘der Mensch’ rather than ‘die Armut’. Given the inhuman treatment of Ill by the Gülleners, this suggests that the real meaning of monstrous is applied to man as well; the more so as his destructive powers are already juxtaposed to that of nature in the first Chorus. The word *ungeheuer* also re-affirms their acceptance of Claire’s world, indeed they are reiterating the very word which characterized the reaction of the Doctor when he learns that Claire had been behind the decline and fall of Güllen: ‘Das ist doch ungeheuerlich’ [p.90].

In Dürrenmatt’s post-war world, money is not only the means with which to chase happiness: it is the ultimate basis of reality, determining its shape and the way it represents itself to us. With Claire’s inconceivable amounts of money, a reversal of the core of nineteenth-century realist fiction has taken place.

Realism is that form of fiction in which the I constantly defines itself
against the not-I, by finding itself involved in ever larger structures of chance and social necessity, so that personal needs clash with the desires and needs of successively larger groups: relatives, friends and lovers, other social classes, other races and nationalities.  

For Claire, there is no longer any such thing as a “not-I”, the world will show no resistance against any of her desires. It is in accordance with this that all of Claire’s initial comments to the various functionaries of Güllen come true [pp.29ff]. In the end, the death penalty is re-introduced in Güllen, the Policeman does close both eyes to the events in Güllen, the Doctor diagnoses heart attack, and the Athlete strangles Ill. Money makes the future predictable because its owner can determine its shape; in the case of Claire, this combines with money’s ability to erase the past to an absolute autonomy over time. This, combined with Claire’s destruction of the moral code of Güllen and its replacement with another one under the same name - Gerechtigkeit - makes the drama a show piece of the post-war world: the traditional functions of society, time, and morality are broken, and re-assembled in a way befitting the capitalist consumer society. It is at this point that Baudrillard’s thought on the post-modern world as a semiotic system becomes important, which I am now to discuss.

_Breaking the Links_

By way of conclusion, I wish to consider language and semiotics in *Von morgens bis mitternachts* and *Der Besuch der alten Dame*.

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Expressionism attempted to reflect its aim - the search for the New Man - in the way they used language in their writings:

Central to my investigation are points b) and c): the attempt to make language less ambiguous and more defined, and the strongly felt need to adjust language to the needs of the time. However, in accordance with Kaiser's negative outlook on the possibility of renewing mankind (the Kassierer's only way forward is death), the typically Expressionist features only occur in the language of the Kassierer, and only after his unsuccessful visit to the Lady. This "new" language isolates the Kassierer even further, matching his separation from the rest of mankind, who do not understand the purpose of his quest, by adding an additional layer in that the Kassierer's words remain incomprehensible to others.

Maybe the two most striking and alienating characteristics in the Kassierer's language are his pathos and his Wortsätze (sentences consisting only of very few words,

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and usually without a verb). In the scene with his family, it is primarily his pathos which prevents communication. During his brief visit at home, his language is exalted and vivid, yet his metaphors remain undecipherable for his family. When he tells them he has come ‘aus dem Grabe’, speaking of ‘Schädelstätte’; or is seemingly talking of buttons when he says ‘Sie fassen nach einem - sie krallen Nägel ein!’, it comes as no surprise that the Mother decides: ‘Er ist krank’ [pp.73f].

In as much as he has lost the connection with his former life, during the search for the new one he is unable to find a mode of expression for his feelings and desires that would be meaningful to others: the “new” language cannot be comprehended by those who do not participate in the search for the New Man.

The most marked example of the use of Wortsätze is the ‘Mädchen und Mann’ speech Kassierer gives in the hall of the Salvation Army.


There is not one active verb in this ten sentences long speech, only one past participle, and the average word count per sentence amounts to just over four, with one sentence consisting of a single word. This results in a strange intensity, and the speech has an almost incantatory character: language, in this paragraph, is reduced to pure medium, without the trappings of a grammatical system. According to Scher and Schürer, this is a phenomenon typical of Expressionism, an attempt to cut out long-winded sentences in
order to get to the bare essentials: the Expressionist writers began ‘to attribute more importance to the single word as the principal and most effective medium of expression than to complete sentences’. The Wortsätze are most striking when used, as in the speech in the snowy field, in moments of exaltation. The clash of excitement - and high pathos - with almost rudimentary utterances gives the Kassierer’s language an edge and acuteness which add a particular force and sense of urgency to his words. Moreover, the above quotation is the vision of the new life the Kassierer has set out to find - a return to pre-lapsarian unity - and as such the language mirrors the simple, unreflected state of mankind’s mind before the Fall.

The key gesture of Expressionist speech is one that aspires to regenerate the language - to get away from everyday discursivity - hence, the breaks in syntax, hence the all-pervasive attempt of finding a new, energizing simplicity of language. However, the problem with that language is that it can sound both visionary (as in the Mädchen und Mann speech) and catatonic (cf. the Kassierer’s language at home). The anti-syntactical, paratactic sentence-formations can be sometimes uplifting, sometimes fractured: simplified language hovers between the sublime and the brutalized. In other words (as with money) - what looks to be liberating and energizing can turn out to be the debased currency of mere recycled and recycling interchangeability.

Language is, then, deeply expressive of the ideals and the anxieties of Expressionism. This often self-conscious manipulation of language in an attempt to make it an active part of a literary and ideological movement underlines the condition of language at the beginning of this century: it was an object of study for the philologists, it

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41 This state of mind Kaiser called ‘Mythos’, and he regarded the return to and promotion of this state as the aim of humanity and literature. ‘Mythos’, in Stücke, Erzählungen,...pp.671f.
was the mode by which the world imposed itself upon us, or it was the self-conscious medium of the literary artists; and linguists and linguistic philosophers explored language as an inherently arbitrary system of signifiers. Hence, when the Expressionists felt a crisis in human culture and the need for renewal, that crisis is extended to signs per se, whether linguistic or other - culture was seen to consist of nothing but signifiers, of images without a reality behind them.

Language in *Der Besuch der alten Dame* cannot be discussed without looking in more detail at issues of semiotics: as I shall argue in the remainder of this chapter, *Der Besuch der alten Dame* shows many of the features Baudrillard has identified as the semiotic system of consumer society.

Dürrenmatt himself emphazised the specific nature of the language of the theatre. In the *Theaterprobleme*, he identifies the plot as the means with which to force characters to deliver a certain speech, and this speech must be 'besonders, dramatisch, doppelbödig' [p.111]. In other words, theatre, potentially more than any other literary art form, relies upon language’s intrinsic ambiguity, on the possibility that words have more than one meaning, or that their meaning can be distorted or even falsified. In accordance with this, the main characteristic of the language in *Der Besuch der alten Dame* is its falseness, the distortion of the relationship between the signifier and the signified it is commonly associated with. Indeed, the very origin of the events unfolding on stage are based upon lies: Ill’s denial of his paternity and the false accounts of Koby and Loby, then Sparr and Huhnlein. Right from the beginning of the play it is clear that the Gülleners have only one aim with regard to Claire: ‘Die Zachanassian soll mit ihren Millionen herausrücken’ [p.19].

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The whole welcome, from Ill’s pathetic lies about his motives of marrying his present
wife, culminating in ‘ich liebe dich doch!’ [p.39], to the grossly dishonest speech the
Mayor delivers in the Apostle, is a farce: the Gülleners pretend to be simply touched and
happy about Claire’s visit, and Claire pretends to believe them. However, the Gülleners’
bending of the truth takes on far more sinister overtones as the gap between words and
deeds that characterized the past engulfs the present. The grand words of the Mayor after
Claire’s offer turn out to be as devoid of real meaning as his speech itself had been; the
highly ironic - assurances given to Ill regarding his popularity and his future post as mayor - ‘todsicher, Herr Ill, todsicher’ [p.57] - are immediately undermined by the fact
that the better goods they have come to procure from him are obtained on credit. Credit
however is, as discussed in the Grüne Heinrich chapter, a means to live on borrowed
time: Ill, as a shop keeper, knows full well that it will have to be repaid, and that the
Gülleners have no other means of repayment than Claire’s promised billion - conditional
upon his death. In other words, it is the credit given to the Gülleners after Claire’s
promise that makes them manipulable, first by granting them the fulfillment of their
desires and, later, by the inevitable need to conform to Claire’s demand in order to be able
to repay. Claire exploits the desire of the Gülleners to be part of the affluence present in
the rest of the country, or, in Baudrillard’s terms, she exploits the principle of
consumption governing the Western world: ‘credit is [...] an economic calculus for
generations of consumers who, in a life of subsistence, would have otherwise escaped the
manipulation of demands and would have been unexploitable as a force of
consumption’. Had the Gülleners refrained from any credit purchases and continued to
live their poverty-ridden life, they would have been able to escape manipulation. Thus the
Gülleners allow themselves to be manipulated in two ways: initially through their own

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Baudrillard, Selected Writings, p.49.
demands and the ensuing process of consumption on credit, and, consequently - since the 
credit will eventually have to be repaid - through Claire, who holds the means to 
repayment. Thus, from the moment of taking up the credit facilities in order to satisfy 
desires, Ill’s fate has been decided. Realizing the discrepancy between the verbal 
assurances given to him and the behaviour displayed, Ill sets out on a round of visits to 
the town’s functionaries. However, his efforts are in vain: the functionaries, from the 
Policeman to the Parson, are joining in the feast of consumption. Wherever he turns, he is 
swamped with a load of meaningless assurances about his safety and the innocent nature 
of the credit purchases. Maybe the most sinister sign of the inevitability of his murder is 
the gold tooth in the Policeman’s mouth: not for what it must have cost, but for its 
connection to the colour of money, to the yellow shoes, and to the golden leaves at the 
end of the play indicating the total surrender of the Gülleners to Claire’s norm. Even the 
Parson hides behind words, giving a traditional lecture to Ill about saving his soul rather 
than worrying about his earthly life; until despair strikes Ill at the sound of a second 
church bell and the Parson takes pity. He, together with the Teacher, realizes the 
 omnipresence of the web Claire has spun, and advises Ill to flee the town.

The discrepancy between the words of the Gülleners and the implications of their actions 
reveal the meaninglessness of the signifier, and it is interesting that their purchases 
disclose their intentions. Again in accordance with Baudrillard’s assessment of the nature 
of consumer society, the Gülleners actually reveal their true intentions through their credit 
purchases: ‘Marketing, purchasing, sales, the acquisition of differentiated commodities 
and objects/signs - all of these presently constitute our language, a code with which our 
 entire society communicates and speaks of and to itself’. It is not through talking to each

44Ibid., p.48. [Italics in the original].
other that the Gülleners arrive at their *consensus communis* to kill III, but through the general purchases, with the yellow shoes the strongest indicator of a whole community in transition and understanding of the path they have chosen. Here their changing character becomes manifest, on this level they communicate the inevitability of III’s demise. Eventually, this provides the foundation for that greatest of all farcical moments in the play, the final speech of the Teacher before III is killed.

Yet before looking at this particular moment in the play, it is interesting to note the particular shape wealth takes in Güllen. Once granted credit, the Gülleners start to buy not only better quality food (full fat milk, white bread, Cognac, or import tobacco) and luxuries (a radio, a washing machine, a TV), but target specifically brand name goods. The Mayor acquires a Remington type writer [p.69], Hofbauer and Helmesberger now smoke Camel and Chesterfield and use Saridon against (affluence-induced) headaches [p.92], and instead of simple Schnaps the Gülleners now drink Steinhäger [p.94]. Brand names fulfill a particular function in the society of the twentieth century: they are more than the product itself, carrying advertisement-induced meta-messages about the apparent character and social standing of the person who buys them. Thus they become a sign, carrying a message in the discourse of consumer society. In *Der Besuch der alten Dame*, this semiotic function of the brand name doubles up as a sign of the community’s increasing hostility towards Alfred III and his pending murder, the more so as, in the last Act - where III’s murder becomes a fact - three brand-named products appear on one page.

Baudrillard argues that in the modern commodity - and brand names epitomize it - ‘the relation of word, image or meaning and referent is broken and restructured so that its force is directed, not to the referent of value or utility, but to desire’. 43 In this sense, the

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increasing use of brand names during the play can also be seen as a sign of the growing desires in the Gülleners as their affluence swells, making Ill’s death further inevitable. Another interesting issue in connection with Baudrillard’s thought is the problem of ethics and morality in consumption. Baudrillard speaks of issues of guilt in the mind of the Western person when it comes to enjoy consumption. This is due to ‘the fact that puritan ethics are not abandoned in periods of affluence, and that an outdated moral and self-denying Malthusianism has not been replaced by a modern ethos of pleasure. […] Sublimation, transcendence, and repression (in a word, morality), haunts consumption and needs’. Nowhere is this more pronounced than in the initial reactions of the Gülleners when Ill questions their purchases, when they clearly betray a bad conscience. From the more harmless ‘man muß sich auch etwas gönnen’ [p.57], ‘man kann doch nicht ewig in den alten Schuhen herumlaufen’ [p.60], or the many ‘nun?’ or ‘na und?’, to the more aggressive defensivism of the Policeman ‘Wohl verrückt?’ [p.66] and the Mayor ‘Sie sehen Gespenster’ [p.71], even the initial acquisitions are laden with guilt. This culminates, however, in the transference of guilt from each single one of them onto Ill as the proverbial scapegoat. The first one to go that route is the Mayor, explaining to Ill that he no longer is the preferred candidate for the post of mayor, because he does not fulfill the moral requirements for that post. Act III shows the growing hostility of the Gülleners towards Ill, culminating in the preparedness for bloodshed in the assembly which condemns him to death in order to consolidate the world they have erected.

The speech by the Teacher and the oath the Mayor makes them take re-defines the semiology of the Gülleners by finally merging consumption and affluence with the new moral code and Weltordnung; creating a new reality. Timo Tiusanen argues that the

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46Ibid., p.43.[Italics in the original].
Teacher holds out a last chance to the Gülleners to retreat from the murder of III by asking the Gülleners to reflect upon the evil in a world of injustice [p.122]; but this surely is doubtful. The Teacher confesses his pending treason to III in the scene in his shop in Act III and consolidates it with a bottle of Steinhäger on credit, he is also part of the chorus praising the new life [p.133]. Now justice means vengeance, and the ‘Ideale, für die unsere Altvordern gelebt und gestritten hatten und für die sie gestorben sind’ [p.121] are affluence, and the freedom to buy. Language in this finale is severed from its original meaning, has been redefined and is operating on three levels in its relation to its signified and to reality.

The Gülleners accept its new meaning - they do, by now, believe that they are executing justice - and have internalized the new world order, as the chorus shows; they have created a new code and a new set of values which language now defines. As is the case with the nature of the commodity, in which signifier and referent are broken and reassembled, so the Gülleners have broken the traditional link between word and meaning in order to become part of consumer society.

The Press takes everything said and done at face value, assuming the traditional meaning is still valid and that some great reconciliation has happened in the town. Unaware of the distortion of the relationship between signifier and signified, they make this process complete by presenting it as true and real to the rest of the world. Here Dürrenmatt has a little side-swipe at the media. In Theaterprobleme he commented that film finally achieved what the theatre could only dream about: ‘die Wirklichkeit vortäuschen’ [p.99]. Here, however, this vortäuschen becomes sinister, as the

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47Tiisanen, Dürrenmatt, pp.238ff.

48In this connection it is also noteworthy that they call facts lies. The Gülleners are nervous that the journalists who invaded the little town for Claire’s wedding might talk to III, and that he would ‘Lügen erzählen, sie hätte etwas auf seinen Tod geboten [...]’ [p.93].
vorgetäuschte Wirklichkeit ist the only reality there is: only we - the audience - and Ill
know that what the media are representing as real is, in fact, a fabrication. However, with
the death of Ill, the Gülleners' collective lie will be the only available version of the truth,
and hence reality.

Finally, the language means something very different to Ill as he sits in the
assembly, listening to his death sentence. He is the only one who is aware of the
perversion of justice, values and language that has befallen his home town, and yet the
dishonesty and hypocrisy of it all still surprises him, as the agonized 'Mein Gott!' [p.125]
at the end of the first oath shows. Ill, in the days he had fought with his fate and his
conscience, had come to accept responsibility for his actions - 'Ich habe Klara zu dem
gemacht, was sie ist [...] Alles ist meine Tat, die Eunuchen, der Butler, der Sarg, die
Milliarde' [pp.102f] - rather than hiding behind lies and falsifications. Moreover, he has
also found his own sense of justice in this process, and he has come to the conclusion that
all he can do is to subject himself to the sentence of Güllen, whatever its outcome may be.
By doing so, he is trying to reconcile Gerechtigkeit and Recht, whilst simultaneously
insisting that Güllen be the judge by refusing to take his own life. He is forcing Güllen to
commit the murder, thus obliging them to abuse the law and cloak the deed in the name of
justice. The last conversation with the Mayor can be seen as the final attempt of Ill to
open Güllen's eyes to the gross distortion of the meaning of justice ('Für mich ist es die
Gerechtigkeit, was es für euch ist, weiß ich nicht' [p.109]) and thereby save his life.
However, the Güllener's are too entangled in Claire's world, and so the justice evoked in
the speech and in the oath does mean death for Ill and affluence for Güllen.

Language and money are the agents of a topsy-turvy world - and express another
central notion of the play, that of transformation. Experience transforms Klara into Claire,
an adolescent villager into a whore and then into a millionairess. For her the world
becomes a brothel, a place of trading and commerce. And so she comes back to Güllen determined to transform it: from poor to rich, from traditional to modern, from morally sound to corrupt, and to transform her own past by having Ill killed. Language, too, is utterly part of the transformative possibility she has inaugurated through her promise of money. Language can say one thing and mean something else; if it is, as Saussure said, only underwritten by an arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified, then (in Dürrenmatt's universe, at any rate) people can be made to say anything. The centrality of the issue of transformation is most poignantly portrayed in her key speech at the beginning of Act III, which highlights the parallels and symmetry of transformation at the root of her return to Güllen: 'Die Welt machte mich zu einer Hure, nun mache ich sie zu einem Bordell' [p. 91].

From the dismemberment of language and of the value of money in Von morgens bis mitternachts we have come a far way to the condition and effects of money and language in Der Besuch der alten Dame. Whereas the Kassierer sees no way of finding a meaningful life in a world of empty images and signifiers governed by money, which in turn is just as empty as that which it buys, the Gülleners merge language, money, and reality into one great new concoction, redefining the meaning behind the representational systems of their world. For Kaiser, writing in the 1910s, there could be (however problematic) a redemptive aspiration for values beyond the monetary; for Dürrenmatt, in post-war affluence, all the redemptive values succumb to the omnipotence of the cheque book.

The attempted transparency in Kaiser's play gives way to a language in which meaning appears to be multi-layered, yet where, in essence, there is only one truthful layer, that of consumerism. Any other apparent layer of meaning can be revealed to be
nothing more than empty verbiage. In *Von morgens bis mitternachts* money and language are empty signs that cannot help the Kassierer in his search for the desired new reality, in *Der Besuch der alten Dame* they interlock, ruling each other and reality on the semiotic principle of consumer society.
Conclusion

'By using money, we convert our world into it'.¹ Maybe James Buchan’s words could be used as a motto for the whole of this thesis: as the preceding chapters have shown, money has slowly turned from a representation of wealth into the ground and purpose not only of economic action², but, one might argue, into the common ground and glue of Western society at large.

One of the most fascinating aspects of this development is the fact that it coincides with profound changes not only in the understanding and perception of language, but also with the emergence and refinement of the European vernaculars and radical alterations in the human understanding of the world. Looking at *Fortunatus* and *Ulenspiegel*, we concluded that money - in the shape of precious metals - and wealth, in a world seen as a finite entity, were still incarnate and seen as interchangeable; though changes in this perception were already discernible. At the same time it became apparent that language - one of Till’s prime tools for his pranks - was noticeably in a state of slippage, that a change seemed to take place which emphasized the need - or possibility - to (re)interpret language in order to unearth its meaning. *Nathan der Weise* can be read as a showpiece of seventeenth/eighteenth century views of money as a representative of wealth; moreover, *Nathan* illustrates the way in which money had come to be seen, like language, to be an economic agent rather than an entity with intrinsic value (which corresponded to the view of language as being purely a semiotic aid in the discovery of truth). *Kabale und Liebe* not only pays tribute to a surprisingly monetary mode of expression, but also highlights

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the way in which money was becoming an indicator of social status - and of the value of human life. *Faust II*, as a panoramic overview of the processes at work in the transition to modernity, matches the increasingly abstract modes of money’s, society’s and the economy’s operative ways on a linguistic level; whereas Keller depicts a life lost in the semiotics of these modes. In both works a sense of confusion in the face of an increasingly abstract and unstable world can be felt. In the twentieth-century works, we could discern the transition from a moment in time where it was still believed to be possible to retract from the all-pervading monetary principle (not least expressed in a language searching for human essentials only, attempting to do away with elaborate and abstract language and notions and revealing money to be incapable of purchasing anything of real value) to a situation where money - albeit invisible - is the only principle governing a world built on the semiotics of materialism, and in which the meaning of language, too, can be distorted by money: revenge and murder can be called justice with sufficient amounts of money.

As expressed in the introductory chapter, the simultaneous changes money and language underwent throughout the centuries are due, to my mind, to the fact that they both are human inventions, stemming from our ability to abstract and metaphorize. Hence, when changes in our understanding - and therefore view - of the world occurred, it is only logical that the tools with which the human mind maps its way through it should have changed as well. There are, however, also more prosaic explanations.

Florian Coulmas convincingly demonstrates that the growing economic activity and expansion of the economy from the late middle ages onwards necessitated linguistic change.² He argues that the development of the European vernaculars coincided with the

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transition from the middle ages to modernity - and hence with the establishment of a capitalist order - for the simple reason that

Industrial production requires standardized and orderly ways, as well as a mobile, homogenous and more highly educated population. These requirements imply the need for using a single standard language by means of which all members of society who are drawn into the economic process can be reached. [p.33]

It is thus no surprise that he draws attention to the fact that it was mainly the bourgeoisie who were advocating and furthering the development of a standard vernacular: analogous to Goldmann's argument, it is in the bourgeoisie's economic interest to do so. Here, linguistic change emerges out of economic necessity. Bauer and Matis advance a similar argument, although they interpret the linguistic changes as signs of the transformations of the political power structure following in the wake of a money-based - and hence bourgeois governed - economy.4

Whichever view one might take as to the reasons for these changes, the fact that they do occur - and concurrently - underlines the argument of money and language as endemic to our nature as social beings, and to the historicity of that nature. Moreover, since they are readily detectable in the literature of the times, I would like to argue - and hope to have shown - that interpretations which do not pay attention to these factors are

4See especially pages 252 & 259 in their Geburt der Neuzeit. Bauer and Matis also deliver a fascinating account of the way in which not only the view of the world, but also of society and, especially, of human nature, were adapted to the needs of the emerging capitalist economy: they term this the birth of homo oeconomicus.
omitting an important strand at the very heart of many literary works.

In conclusion, I would like to cast a brief glance at the question of, or rather search for, values that reverberates, reflected in the literary works, through the centuries. In *Fortunatus* and *Ulenspiegel* we find a society in transition, with narrators assuming a sovereign, though curious stance in their chronicling of the demise of the feudal value system and the resulting void. Enlightenment rationale, the belief in unalterable basic and universal human values and rights, are readily detectable in *Nathan* and *Kabale und Liebe*. These, however, are called once more into question under the impact and demands of the industrial revolution and the increasing monetarism of the nineteenth century, with *Faust II* and *Der grüne Heinrich* capturing the tensions, insecurity and despair caused by the collapse of the Enlightenment values and the rise of a money-based value system. *Faust II* portrays, with unrivalled insight at the time, the way in which money and speculative economics, once they have infiltrated the socio-economic structure, begin to replace all other values and affect the perception of reality. Reality becomes producible, manufacturable and manipulable according to economic principles and to the desires of those who own money. Moreover, both *FaustII* and *Der grüne Heinrich* reveal the processes of simulacra at work in the modern economy in their portrayal of the fictional that infiltrates - and comes to dominate - the real.

However, the belief in some intrinsically non-monetary values still haunts the early twentieth century - depicted in the Kassierer’s crazed yet, tellingly, fruitless search - but, some forty years later, Dürrenmatt portrays a world in which values are exclusively created through money. Here, Tiusanen misses a key strand in Dürrenmatt’s insight: the point is not that there are no absolute values available any more, but that values are entirely based on money.5 Hence, they acquire money’s characteristics: subjected to

5Dürrenmatt, p.248.
principles of interchangeability, indifferenciation and easy replacement, they have become negotiable - absolutely negotiable. Dürrenmatt's world is an eerie concoction of money, consumer semiotherapy, and distorted language - or, simply, of money and fiction. Hence, values are subjected to the very same principles and, analogous to the principles of a market economy, there exist now a range of value systems available from which the 'consumer' can choose: from religion, New Age, and popular psychology to the countless ideologies existing in today's Western society, the choice is breathtaking. The belief of the Enlightenment in at least some universal values seems to have collapsed irrevocably in our post-modern time. However, this also means that in the end there is only one constant and universal value and reality principle: money.
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Abbreviations:
UP = University Press
GLL = German Life and Letters
GQ = The German Quarterly
GAG = Göpinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik

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