

Mama's Boy is Daddy's Girl: Eccentric Gender Performance in Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling's *Heinrich Stillings Jugend, Jünglingsjahre, Wanderschaft und häusliches Leben*

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Abstract

In Heinrich Stillings Jugend, Jünglingsjahre, Wanderschaft und häusliches Leben the reader is confronted with ungendered boys, crossing of gender boundaries, and reversal of gender roles. A son becomes his father's substitute wife, morphs into his own mother, and has to metaphorically give birth to his own self. As a result of his gender performance he is ill prepared for life and becomes a complete failure. This paper explores the lack of Heinrich's gendering during his formative years, his performance of gender for his father, and the father's scandalous exploitation of his son.

Keywords: Jung-Stilling; autobiographical novel; gender issues; incest; gender performance

Nature would have them children before they are men. . . . Treat your pupil according to his age. . . . Childhood has its place in the sequence of human life. The man must be treated as a man and the child as a child. Give each his place and keep him there.¹

Jean Jacques Rousseau in *Emile* (1762)

1. Introduction

In his popular book *Emile* (1762), the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau proposed a radical new idea for his time: let children be children before they become adults. He believed in a natural order that grants children a special, separate realm from adults. In this realm, rational thinking is not yet required of children, since they do not possess the maturity to do so. Just as fruit needs time to ripen on the tree, so too do children need time to grow and become rationally thinking adults. This development is a gradual process that requires sufficient time. Therefore, he advocated a realm separate and distinct from adulthood, thus challenging the common view that children were but smaller versions of adults.

¹ Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, trans. Barbara Foxley (London: Dent; New York: Dutton, 1966) 54-55, 44.

Children previously were not granted a space where they could play and have a carefree time. According to Philippe Ariès, the author of *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (1962), children in the Middle Ages were viewed as members of the work force as soon as they were able to contribute to the welfare of the family. When boys and girls were old enough to live without the constant care of the mother or nanny, Ariès contends, they became part of adult society.

In medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist; this is not to suggest that children were neglected, forsaken or despised. The idea of childhood is not to be confused with affection for children: it corresponds to an awareness of the particular nature of childhood, that particular nature which distinguishes the child from the adult. In medieval society this awareness is lacking. That is why, as soon as the child could live without the constant solicitude of his mother, his nanny or his cradle-rocker, he belonged to adult society. . . . Language did not give the 'child' the restricted meaning we give today: people said 'child' much as we say 'lad' in everyday speech (Ariès 1962: 128).

There was no slow and gradual growing up in medieval society: from nursing infant, the boy made the jump into the world of adults and working men. Childhood as a realm of play and schooling did not exist, because “medieval civilization . . . had no idea of formal education in a classroom setting” (Ariès 1962: 411). Children learned from their parents through observation and imitation while they worked alongside them. There was no carefree and playful realm of childhood as such, but the young girl or boy's life revolved around work.

Ariès suggests, however, that the eighteenth century brought a dramatic change in the perception of childhood. He calls this process or moment in time the “discovery” of childhood, which was brought on by societal changes. In the course of the eighteenth century, out of economic necessity, many men abandoned their family business and accepted employment contracts with employers, factory owners, and others who offered pay for work. Consequently, the family structure shifted from the extended family (*Großfamilie*) to the nuclear family, and mothers and children in bourgeois families were freed from the responsibility of contributing to the family's economic survival. This change created a space without work or other duties for children who now stayed home with their mothers. Because of these changes, children were seen as separate and distinct entities from adults, and childhood as such was “discovered.” From this point forward, children were treated differently, as children, and the modern concept of childhood was born.

Once freed from labor conditions, however, children in the eighteenth century could by no means spend their days doing nothing. Indeed, the free space was quickly filled with education through literary texts written specifically for children. These moral and educational writings by John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Johann Bernhard Basedow, Carl Felix Weisse, Karl Philipp Moritz, Joachim Heinrich Campe, and others introduced and revolutionized education by providing instructions in a formal setting. The objective was to instruct children in reading, writing, moral behavior, and all other topics worthy of education.²

2. Jung-Stilling

Inspired by this newly-found realm of childhood, a number of authors reflected on their own childhood experiences and recorded them in retrospect during the second half of the 18th century. Heinrich Jung-Stilling wrote an autobiographical novel entitled *Heinrich StillingsJugend, Jünglingsjahre, Wanderschaft und häuslichesLeben*, which describes his childhood and teenage years and his development from child to young man. In 1777, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe edited and published the first part of Jung-Stilling's

² Katharina Rutschky, ed., *Schwarze Pädagogik: Quellen zur Naturgeschichte der bürgerlichen Erziehung* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1997).XLVI

autobiography, *Heinrich Stillings Jugend. Ein wahrhafte Geschichte* without the author's knowledge.³ It immediately was a great success and many speculated about the identity of the author: "It became the literary event of the year" (Cunz 367). Shortly after the book went into circulation, however, the real identity of the author was revealed; he became well known and remained a popular figure in literary circles. The second volume of his work, *H. Stillings Jünglings-Jahre* followed in 1778 without Goethe's intervention. Now a well-respected author, Jung-Stilling had no problems finding a publisher.

The plot of the autobiographical novel is quickly told: After the death of Heinrich's mother, his father is incapacitated by the loss and the grandfather takes on the role of mother and caretaker for Heinrich. During an extended period of mourning, his father eventually retreats with Heinrich to the seclusion of a room, where they reside together in total isolation. The father does so to protect himself from his sexual desires which he is unable to control any other way. Because of the isolation in which the boy grows up and the restrictions put upon him by his father, he retreats into a world of unreality and fantasy which hinders "normal" gender development.

Jung-Stilling's autobiographical novel is especially interesting because the description of his childhood and youth seems exceptionally unrealistic and out of any given norm of the time. What is described as an average or normal childhood is eccentric behavior pushed to the extreme. The reader is confronted with crossing of gender boundaries and reversal of gender roles. A son becomes his father's substitute wife, morphs into his own mother, and has to metaphorically give birth to his own self. For this reason, gender development, as described here, does not follow the prescriptive literature of the time. The outcome seems to be a boy who remains in a prepubescent childhood stage indefinitely. The child is set on a track early in his childhood from which he cannot or chooses not to deviate. Given a chance to change his life, he opts to continue on this given path without hesitation. He is oblivious of women, does not see himself as a sexual being in any way, and is ignorant of anything post-pubescent. However, as a result of his upbringing, he is able to cross given gender boundaries of the time and perform acts usually reserved for women. The description of Heinrich's life can thus also be read as a liberation from and a re-definition of given norms and constraints of society. Heinrich is happy in his world of oblivion and ignorant to prescribed gender. His position in life, in society, and his development cannot be assigned or attached to any given norm and he is a free spirit who can do things no one else can. Jung-Stilling, by publishing his life story, advocates a life like his and he advertises it as a happy childhood.

3. Gender Norms

Norms or descriptions of expected gender behavior clearly existed in the 18th century. Prescriptive literature such as *Sittenbüchlein*, *Elementarbücher*, und *moralische Erzählungen* instructed children on how to behave as girls or as boys. Educators also concerned themselves with what we might term gender issues. They believed it was very important to instruct boys and girls in the art of gender specific behavior. In 1776 Friedrich Eberhard von Rochow in *Der Kinderfreund. Ein Lesebuch zum Gebrauch in Landschulen* (1776) tries to instill the differences between the sexes when he writes: "The tender girls observed those games which were not suitable for their gender, and braided a wreath from flowers of the fields for the winner. One never saw them quarrel or hit each other, also not soil themselves with dirt or bathe during the day in an unacceptable, immodest, indecent manner."⁴ Girls and boys were taught what society expects of them and how to fill their assigned gender roles. Boys play in the mud, but the girls' roles were diminished to weaving wreaths to honor the male hero.

³ According to Jung-Stilling Goethe eliminated long passages dealing with religion. Essentially Goethe shortened the manuscript, but did not add anything. See Dieter Cunz, "Nachwort," *Heinrich Jung-Stillings Jugend, Jünglingsjahre*, Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1994) 398.

⁴ Friedrich Eberhard von Rochow, *Der Kinderfreund. Ein Lesebuch zum Gebrauch in Landschulen* (Frankfurt, 1776) 19.

A seemingly natural result of conformity to gender ideas is eventually an attraction between the sexes. Johann Bernhard Basedow writes in 1774 in *Des Elementarwerkes zweytes Buch*: "One gender has a natural affinity to the other so that most desire to cohabit with a person of the opposite sex and to conceive children."⁵ According to these words, a liaison between a man and a woman is desired and natural for the purpose of procreation. In accordance with these instructions, we see that boys and girls should take their assigned place in society, and marry when the time is right to have children.

Though this paradigm was the generally accepted norm, there were deviations from the customary. Eccentric behavior, behavior out of the norm of the given time, seems a common occurrence in Jung-Stilling's work. Little Jung-Stilling deviates from this standard and lives a lifestyle that appears extreme and very strange. Prescribed sexual norms are meaningless in the Stilling household, gender-specific expectations as imposed by society are overthrown and little Heinrich is pressured into playing a number of roles for his father.

As we will see, this playing of roles hinders Heinrich's "normal" development, as would have been expected at this time, and Heinrich is incapable of constructing a separate and distinct personality in order to establish himself in society. That is because he is constantly guided, directed and manipulated by his grandfather, his father, and by a Pastor, who all force their beliefs and judgments on him. Consequently, Heinrich becomes a total failure in the eyes of his father.

4. The Family Constellation

In the opening to *Heinrich Stilling Jugend*, the protagonist inscribes himself into the history of his family by researching his roots and beginning the narration long before he was born. This approach illustrates how his genealogy influences and molds him and makes him a product of his lineage. Immediately, we are confronted with the powerful and omnipresent patriarchy of Eberhard Stilling, Wilhelm's father, and Heinrich's grandfather. Though he is physically absent during the week, his presence tightly embraces every member of the household and his laws are strictly obeyed.

Before we can turn our attention to Heinrich and his childhood, however, we must first investigate the family constellation into which he is born. Of great importance here is the interplay between his father Wilhelm and his grandfather Eberhard long before Heinrich sees the light of day. Their father-son relationship is part of a family constellation that extends the realm of childhood almost indefinitely. Wilhelm, the schoolteacher and tailor, had already left the protection and influence of the patriarchal home when he finds a bride, Dortchen, who is from a poor family. To receive his father's blessing, Wilhelm returns home to reveal his intentions. In this conversation, we learn that Eberhard, his father, appears extremely tolerant and open. "Though hast knowledge enough" (4), father Stilling replies, and leaves the choice up to the son.

This open-mindedness, however, is quickly qualified when he tells his son to return home into the sanctity of his patriarchy once again and take his place in the family hierarchy. "What he earns he shall give us, and we will provide them both with what is needful" (4), he instructs his wife. Immediately, Heinrich reverts to a childhood mode of dependence and submits himself to a childlike position in the family. In addition, the father gives the following instructions about his daughter-in-law: "Doris⁶ shall assist me and my daughters, as much as she is able" (4). Dortchen, the daughter-in-law, is accepted and adopted into the family, yet not as an equal, but simply as a helper. She is clearly of lesser worth or ability since she is not capable of working as hard as his daughters.

⁵ Johann Bernhard Basedow, "Vom Ursprung des menschlichen Lebens durch den Geschl . . . tr . . . ," *Des Elementarwerkes zweytes Buch, für Lehrende und Lernende. Von Mancherley, Besonders von dem Menschen und der Seele* (Leipzig, 1774) 212.

⁶The translator refers to Dortchen as Doris throughout the novel.

Wilhelm not only accepts this offer, but also praises his father for extending it. “The tears stood in Wilhelm’s eyes . . . oh God! . . . I thank thee for having given me such parents” (4-5), he exclaims in a moment of extreme euphoria. He is elated to return to a relationship that is, in essence, an extended childhood, where he completely submits to the father.

Father Stilling, though he is portrayed as a liberal, tolerant person, is very much in control of his family. He claims to allow free thinking and independent decisions—as he did when Wilhelm desired to marry—yet his influence is so strong and ever present that his children always chose according to his wishes.⁷ Father Stilling's controlling style of government is very apparent in one particular scene when the Stillings take a family stroll one afternoon. The old Stilling carries a crude stick, a “thick thorn stick” while walking behind his family (5). It is not just a simple walking stick, but it is thick, heavy, and has thorns. With this rod or stick—whose phallic symbolism is hard to deny—heherds his family like cattle. “When old Stilling went out with his children, they were always obliged to go before him that he might observe their gait and manners, and instruct them in propriety and manners” (5). There is also a distinct order in how they proceeded down the street. “The daughters then went before, Wilhelm followed them, and last of all the father, with his thick thorn stick” (5). The weakest members, the women, walk first and are watched by the men. The Patriarch observes and directs them from behind with the help of his stick. His style of leadership is not tolerance and self-governance but coercion and imposed implicit rules. Father Stilling is a manipulator and patriarch whose great power extends into all aspects of family life.

Just as the old Stilling rules over his children with the help of a symbolic rod, so too does Wilhelm later direct Heinrich’s life with a “rod” (15), a “*Rute*” (53). The *Rute*⁸ is also a stick, but much smaller than the large thorny staff father Stilling carries. At that time, they all live under one roof in the old Stilling’s house and, although he has some power over his son, Wilhelm himself is still in the position of a child. He surrenders his income to the management of his father, he obeys the hierarchical order of the family, and when he is unable to care for his son, the old Stilling arranges for childcare. His father has absolute authority and Wilhelm submits to the almighty rod. The symbols of their power are very telling, and the different sizes indicate a distinct hierarchy. Clearly, Heinrich is born into a male-dominated patriarchal family where the women are submissive to male power, but not much else is told about the women.

5. A Family Tragedy

Dortchen is obedient to the male patriarchy; she gives birth to male offspring, and then passes away. The death of his wife comes as a surprise and it affects Wilhelm misses her so much that he is unable to function in society. He not only retreats into his own private sphere but he also vows celibacy. In a conversation with his friend Niclas, who is a practicing member of a *Christengesellschaft*, it is evident that the unfulfilled desire to have sexual relations is the source of much evil. As Wilhelm is utterly depressed and unable to function, his friend simply counters: “Thus it happens, Master Stilling, when we attach ourselves, with our desires, to anything of a transitory nature. . . . But still how useful it is, to exercise ourselves in mortifying even this pleasure, and denying ourselves in it!—the loss would then certainly not be so grievous to us” (14). Niclas points to a clear connection between the feeling of loss for a person and the desire for sexual involvement. He explains to Wilhelm that he is in complete despair only because he misses the pleasures of the flesh, which were fulfilled by Dortchen’s body. Dortchen then, was an object and was not exactly regarded as a person or companion. Her absence and the consequent lack of her services cause deep melancholia. Only through great self-control can this problem be overcome, and Wilhelm attempts to

⁷Schindler writes with regards to the relationship between Heinrich and the grandfathers: “[H]at doch der Großvater sein Panopticon weniger sichtbar im Innern des Kindes schon längst errichtet” (*Subjekt* 137). The same is true for his relationship to his own children.

⁸A *Rute* is usually a bundle of switches used for spanking children.

resolve the problem by withdrawing from the world. So we can conclude that Wilhelm's devastation and excessive mourning is in part a result of a lack of physical involvement with Dortchen.

Before we investigate Wilhelm's complete removal from the world and from reality, however, let us first take a closer look at Wilhelm, Heinrich, Dortchen, and the relationship between the three. Because Dortchen is weak she is not capable of working as hard as the Stilling daughters are. Besides pleasuring her husband, Dortchen's only purpose in life is to give birth to a male offspring, nurse him, and then die.

She fulfills her duty of giving nourishment to little Heinrich until he can survive on his own. "She suckled her boy Heinrich every moment; for this was now all to her, and the boy was also fat and strong" (11). The pregnancy and subsequent nursing consumed her to such a degree that she is unable to fulfill her other duties in the household. In addition, she is melancholic, depressed and she longs to die. As she becomes weaker, Heinrich gains in strength, indicating that he is literally consuming his mother. Clinging to her breast, the child slowly incorporates the mother who becomes a part of him.⁹Dortchen has become obsolete after nursing Heinrich, and, since she is weak and an inadequate worker, there is no place for her in the family—and she dies.

Though Heinrich is not dependent on Dortchen, Wilhelm certainly is. He is devastated by her death, unable to function in the world. He clings to every memory of her because he believes she was the perfect compliment for him: "Wilhelm Stilling had lived alone with his Doris in a very populous district. She was now dead and buried, and he found that he was living quite alone in this world" (13). After her death, Wilhelm retreats with his son to the isolation of his room. Heinrich still has contact with the rest of the family, but Wilhelm isolates himself almost completely, ". . .and lived there, in this manner, many years with his boy" (15). In this realm he allows his sons to read select books, but strictly forbids any contact with other children. "Wilhelm never permitted the boy to play with other children; but kept him so secluded, that in the seventh year of his age he knew none of his neighbors' children, though well acquainted with a whole row of fine books" (15). Thus, Heinrich is forced to live in a world of fiction and fantasy. In this world of make-believe, he is unable to find himself and learn who he is, yet he is strongly influenced by the characters in the books he reads. His entire perspective on the world and on life is from these books. "But all these persons, whose biography he read, remained so firmly idealized in his imagination that he never forgot them during his whole life" (15). Not the positive influences of a mother and father or an extended family—or even school or a nanny—shape the young impressionable person, but the characters in book which are brought to life by the authors.¹⁰ He turns life into literature and thus is utterly unprepared for life. On occasion, when he loses himself in his books, which make him forget the world, he basks in the feelings and sensations that literature can create. "He shed sympathetic tears. . . and forgot the whole world over it. . . . The effect of this kind of reading on Stilling's spirit was wonderful" (36). Through reading he removes himself farther from reality: "By this means his spirit received an extremely singular direction. . . . Everything that he saw in nature, every prospect was idealized into a paradise; all was beautiful in his estimation, and the whole world almost heaven"(37).The idealized world he creates for himself with the building blocks provided by literature is far removed from reality, contributing to his suffering once he enters reality again.

In their retreat, in their own distorted reality, Wilhelm rules with an iron fist over Heinrich, because, "Wilhelm's intention was to bring up his son to be docile and obedient, . . . Wilhelm was very strict; he punished the smallest transgression of his commands most severely with the rod."(15). We already discussed the symbolic meaning of the *Rute* but the *Rute* takes on significance for other reasons. Within their retreat,

⁹See Stephan K. Schindler, "Homosexual Necrophilia: The Making of Man in Jung-Stilling's Idyllic Patriarchy," *Outing Goethe*, ed. Alice Kuzniar (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996) 61-76. Consuming the mother is one important step in the process of becoming his own mother.

¹⁰Later this trend will be continued as the grandfather, father, and the Pastor determine his life.

Wilhelm exercises power over his son, just as the old Stilling does over him.¹¹ His mourning, according to Niclas, is a result of his sexual desires—he misses Dortchen’s body. In this same conversation, though, Wilhelm makes it clear that abstinence is an impossible feat. “It is very easy to preach so; but doing—doing—observing and keeping, is another affair” (14). Wilhelm is driven by a strong desire to have physical relations and is certain that living a life of celibacy is close to impossible for him. His retreat is thus an attempted escape from the temptations of the flesh.

6. Heinrich, Wilhelm, and the Mother

Just prior to their withdrawal we learn that Heinrich resembles his mother: “In the face of his orphan child he saw only the lineaments of Doris” (13). Obviously, Heinrich is not an orphan since he still has a father, but the rhetoric makes it clear that Wilhelm shuns every responsibility. Recognizing the resemblance, however, causes Wilhelm to dramatically change his attitude toward Heinrich: “He then took his little Heinrich in his arms, bedewed him with tears, pressed him to his breast, and slept with him” (13).¹² The ambiguous language used in this passage, such as Wilhelm “sleeping” with his son, could lead us to a new interpretation of their isolation, especially in light of the fact that Wilhelm is in possession of a *Rute*, a rod.

Let us reexamine the term for a brief moment. Bearing in mind that the stick the old Stilling is carrying is, of course, a symbol for his power and authority over his family, then Wilhelm’s *Rute*—although it is much smaller—symbolizes the same masculine power, just less potent. Considering that Wilhelm is driven by his sexual desires, we must ponder yet another meaning for the term *Rute* because in German vulgar language it often refers to the male sexual organ. It is entirely feasible then that Wilhelm’s involvement with his son, in light of his drives, goes beyond the father-son relationship. Here, symbolically, Heinrich is not a male offspring who is threatening the father’s position or who longs to acquire the father’s place in society, but he is in the position of a dependent, suppressed female. This is the first step in Heinrich’s plight of becoming Dortchen.

How is it possible for a boy to slowly morph into his own mother? What other events take place to cause such a strange twist in his life? Because Heinrich occupies the place of his mother for his father, Heinrich is never gendered. Nobody shows him how to be a man or how one acts. Lacking any gender assignment, Heinrich is prevented from really discovering his place in the world and from finding who he is. Though he is the son, and his physical gender is male, he eventually becomes his mother by falling in love with her. “Heinrich became so attached to the memory of his mother, that he made all he heard of her his own, which pleased Wilhelm so well that he could not conceal his joy” (16).¹³ From here on the narrator refers to them as “the two lovers” (16). Slowly, first under force by father’s *Rute* and then voluntarily, Heinrich occupies his mother’s place. Wilhelm is elated about this change—in some strange way having his wife back—but he still treats him with little respect.

Then, in an instant, their world as they knew it is completely uprooted and their relationship becomes even stranger when Heinrich finds a knife, which he realizes belonged to his late mother. As he reads the engraving—“Johanna Dorothea Catharina Stilling”—he faints. He recognizes this utensil to be special and it seems to be endowed with certain powers. Knives, thus far in the text, have been symbols of male power and domination. Now he finds a knife with his mother’s name, which was given to her on her wedding day.¹⁴ Not only was the mother in possession of a knife, but it was given her the same time she consummated her marriage to Wilhelm. We can conclude then that, as Dortchen married Wilhelm, she was endowed with

¹¹Interestingly, father Stilling is opposed to Wilhelm's use of the *Rute*. He, the superior male, might see his position threatened.

¹²Schindler believes that “this incestuous reinscribing of (fe)male identity reaches a climax when the homophile organization of the father-son relationship breaks the armor of the pietistic denial of the body in an *Urszene* of physical affection” (“Homosocial Necrophilia,” 73).

¹³The original text states that Heinrich fell in love with his mother (57).

¹⁴The first and only other reference to this particular knife is on page 19 in the original.

some of his masculine power, because as his wife she shared some of that authority. The fact that a woman could possess a knife, and that he himself does not have one, is inconceivable to him and he loses consciousness. This epiphany, the recognition that even his mother was in possession of some patriarchal power, but that he is not, emasculates him completely.

Holding the knife, which is incidentally still as shiny and new as it was on their wedding day, now puts Heinrich even more in Dortchen's position for the father. Though he used Heinrich before this incident as a Dortchen substitute, now Heinrich takes a position still closer to Dortchen, endowed with the same symbolic power she possessed after the wedding night. Wilhelm acknowledges this transformation by pouring out his love for him/her. Up to this point their relationship is somewhat distant, but now he shows emotional involvement and hugs his son/wife, "he thought he ascended into the glory of heaven, and saw Doris amongst the angels" (17). The entire relationship is transformed to a spiritual level and Wilhelm feels like he has entered heaven. He now acknowledges Dortchen in Heinrich and the replacement is complete. Affections flow freely and emotions are strong. Heinrich, who is surprised and stunned by this outpour of affection, asks: "Father, do you love me" (17) whereupon Wilhelm replies "yes" and then cries profusely. Heinrich is not an object anymore but finally accepted as a person—but only as an image of the mother.

The moment when Heinrich holds the knife is significant for another reason: Heinrich here has a rare chance to enter the male order. He is a boy and holds the symbol of male power, which he has been lacking, in his hand. Equipped with masculine authority, he could have become his father's equal; he could have become an accepted member of the brotherhood of males. However, the knife, and the power associated with it, was only borrowed—from a female at that—and in a strange twist of fate, the emblem of manhood is lost forever. Even an extensive search cannot recover it and Heinrich's chance to become a man has passed.

Nevertheless, to his great satisfaction, Heinrich finally believes to have gained his own personality. Thus far, he has been an extension of others. Mistakenly, he now believes that he is treasured and accepted by his father as his son and therefore considers himself a member of the human family. Unfortunately for Heinrich, Wilhelm does not perceive or accept him as his progeny, but "he had perceived, in the finding of the knife, Doris's entire character in the boy" (17). Only now, believing that he resembles and represents Dortchen, does Wilhelm accept him as person, not an object. He, however, is just a replacement or substitute for Dortchen, and most importantly, he is by no means a fully functioning male. Whereas the grandfather carries a cane and Wilhelm a *Rute*, he has no such symbol. Contrary to prescribed gender development though, Heinrich feels extremely happy in this female-like position. Heinrich occupies a position similar to that of his mother's, and he identifies with it, because it makes him feel like a human being. Although he considers himself a *Mensch*, Heinrich remains without gender or any notion of gender identity. His process of sexualization fails miserably, causing him to remain in sexual limbo.

The entire incident, however, changes Wilhelm's outlook on life and he now desires to live a normal life again. In an instant, he overcomes his melancholy, he has Dortchen back, and he ends his mourning. Oblivious to what is happening and unable to establish his own self however, Heinrich remains in childhood into his twenties. Just as his father is submissive to his own father, so Heinrich remains in a state of dependence. Unable to hold a job longer than a few months, he frequently returns home, submitting himself to the father and depending on his financial support. His father is very upset with Heinrich, not because he consistently returns home, but because he is not able to work as hard as would be expected from a boy. "Thou must apply thyself regularly to thy trade and to farming or else I cannot employ thee" (40) he chastises his son. Strangely enough, his sisters work much harder than he does.

7. Genderless Existence

Neither man nor woman, lacking any gender identity, Heinrich has a difficult time dealing with women because he has no understanding of the opposite sex. During several significant encounters with females, the

women are quite taken by him. Ignorant of their advances, he cannot understand what they desire, and he is actually afraid of them. The landlady's beautiful daughter is very interested in a relationship with the young man. "Stilling felt that he sympathized with this girl, and she also with him, but without any inclination to marry" (49) the narrator relates. To him this relationship is nothing but a "friendship" (49) without any interest in or desire for further involvement. Eventually, the girl becomes depressed and disillusioned because of Heinrich's inability to react to her advances, "without Stilling's ever being able to ascertain the cause" (50). When another young woman clearly makes it known that she has feelings for him, Heinrich reacts in a very odd way to her advances. "He felt very sensibly that he could love her, but he was horrified at the consequences" (37). He is aware that he might be capable of loving her, but he is disgusted by the consequences—the commitment and the possible intimate involvement—and he simply dismisses the thought from his mind. Since her emotions and affection do not move him at all, Heinrich looks at the entire situation from a very rational and calculated point of view. The only feeling he has for this girl are "sympathy and compassion" (38) because she is in mental anguish. His sole concern is the question what his duty is toward her: "He resolved within himself how he ought to act. His heart spoke for compassion upon her, but his conscience demanded the strictest reserve" (38). There is no hint of any sexual desire. Consequently, he is not only not interested in the opposite sex, or any physical involvement; he is actually disgusted by such a prospect. Anything intimate or sexual is a mystery to him.

Considering his relationship with his father (which makes him feel like a "*Mensch*"), it makes sense that a relationship with a girl might not be desirable for him. One wonders if, in this quasi-female position which he occupies for the father, he is drawn to friendships with men. In two or three brief sentences, we learn about his friend Caspar and his colleague Graserbut that is the extent of it. We learn that Casper "completely understood him, and to whom he could utter all his complaints . . . with a heart full of sensibility" (41). It is not at all clear what these friendships mean to Heinrich. Keeping in mind, as I argue, that Heinrich has not reached sexual maturity, it is understandable that he is not at all interested in any kind of physical involvement.

Though he is lacking a sexual drive, Heinrich has to contend with another drive that is equally strong in his case and apparently much more devastating. This one force is a strong and all controlling desire for "fame and ambition" (45). Heinrich reveals this weakness in a conversation with his cousin:

Well, then, examine this impulse impartially. Are not fame and ambition connected with it? Have you not been pleased with the idea of being able to appear in a fine coat and the dress of a gentleman, when the people will be obliged to bow themselves before you and take off their hats to you, and at the thought of becoming the pride and the head of your family!' 'Yes, answered Stilling candidly; I certainly feel that, and it causes me many a happy hour' (45).

Heinrich is fully aware of the very strong drive that is guiding and running his life. Not sexual desire but the drive to reach a position of importance in society directs his life. This drive virtually compels him to action, replacing any intimate or libidinous feelings he might have.¹⁵ Clothing, outward appearance, respect, and occupying the patriarchal position in the family are his highest goals and contemplating the possibility gives him a feeling of delight.

Interestingly, despite his lack of masculinity, Heinrich desires to be the head of his family (45), completely unaware that, to be the head of a household, requires physical involvement with a female. In his imagination, in his world of unreality, this feat seems possible to him because he is imitating his grandfather

¹⁵One might argue that Heinrich is sublimating his sexual desires. He seems to be slightly aware of the possibility of sexual and intimate feelings; however, they never surface in any way.

without realizing the implications of such a position. Without a “rod” or knife, Heinrich retains his child-like innocent state.

In addition, there are numerous hints in the text that describe Heinrich and his actions in definitely feminine terms. Let us take a closer look at his physique and his reaction to opposition. In his description, the narrator uses some traditionally feminine terms to depict him. When he meets a young girl by the name of Dortchen, Heinrich suddenly faints. In this particular scene we get a very important glimpse of his physical build. The girl was very surprised to notice that “he had such soft hands and so white a face” (23). Since he is from a family whose members toil in the fields and perform manual labor, one would expect his hands to be rough and his face weathered and tanned. Heinrich, however, is unable to work like a man and it is, as we have seen, the source of much contention between him, his father, and his new stepmother. His father needs a strong man to help him in the fields but Heinrich is physically too fragile to fulfill this job. “Thou must apply thyself regularly to thy trade and to farming or else I cannot employ thee” (40), his father admonishes him. The narrator is very revealing when it comes to Heinrich's physical shortcomings: he “had not been accustomed to so severe labor, nor were his limbs suited for such employment” (23). Not one single limb in his body is capable of performing the work that is expected of a male his age. In the German original the term for limb is *Glied*, which can also refer to the male sexual organ. So essentially the narrator is pointing out that Heinrich is without a masculine signifier.

Not only is he physically unable to work like a man but also his actions exemplify behavior that generally belongs in the feminine realm. Heinrich certainly deviates from the given masculine norm of his time. On numerous occasions, he faints when he is overwhelmed with sorrow and self-pity. Frequently he breaks out in tears, even at the age of seventeen. Every time he is dismissed from his job, he sobs; when his grandfather's table is removed from the living room, he cries; when he is criticized for his teaching methods, he wails: “Stilling's heart now began to give way; it was constitutional with him, instead of being angry and irritated like others, for the tears to come into his eyes, and flow down his cheeks” (30).

Even as a teacher he cries when the students tease him excessively in girl-like manner “the schoolmaster wept” (31). There are countless examples in the text of Heinrich breaking out in tears when other boys or men in the same situation might have reacted defensively, with anger, or very offensively. Heinrich, however, retreats into this world of self-pity and cries until he feels better. All told, we get a very feminine picture of Heinrich. His description, his actions, and his inability to work like a man make him appear more feminine than masculine.

The insinuations about his femininity continue when he speaks with his grandmother about his unhappiness. One of Heinrich's hopes throughout the novel is that his sorrows will come to an end. As he discusses this point with his grandmother she replies: “I know that thy fate will be like that of a travailing woman; with much pain, thou will bring forth that which thou art to become” (48). Like a pregnant woman, Heinrich has to give birth to that which is to become of him. His grandmother uses this appropriate metaphor to explain that his life is difficult and that he is destined to suffer. Through a process that resembles labor, Heinrich has to become who or what he is supposed to be.

Her statement, though, is ambiguous and allows for two possible interpretations. “Which thou art to become” can mean that his future, his destiny is predetermined by a higher power and that he has no influence over it. Its fulfillment, however, is a difficult task and is connected to much suffering. Yet her words could also mean that he does have influence over his destiny, and that Heinrich has to decide what is to become of him. In both cases, pain and suffering are prevalent and inevitable. Thus, Heinrich gives birth to who he is to become, to his future self. Fittingly, he does become his own mother for his father, and in this light, he is able to birth himself. Unlike a biological woman, Heinrich cannot give birth to genuine children, of course, but he can give birth to that what is to become of him. Heinrich, the ungendered boy, is in a position to cross gender boundaries and perform acts usually reserved for women.

Because of his unique position, Heinrich is alone and very much oblivious to the realities of life. He is happiest not in the presence of adults but when he is surrounded by children whom he can teach. In their presence, there is no hint of sexuality, and Heinrich can remain the ungendered child that he is. Surrounding himself with children is one way of escaping reality and the social imperative to grow up.¹⁶

As a schoolteacher, Heinrich employs unorthodox methods. He freely mixes Greek mythology with Christian teachings and the fictional content from novels. One source of great contention among the parents of the pupils he teaches is the fact that he makes no gender distinction when teaching. He teaches boys and girls the same curriculum, including math and science, which was unacceptable in those days. His unisex approach to education shows once more his ambiguous position in society.

8. Conclusion

Karl Philipp Moritz, a contemporary of Jung-Stilling and author of *Anton Reiser*, praised this autobiographical novel as an authentic reproduction of Jung-Stilling's life. The entire novel, however, presents an utterly strange family dynamic. Heinrich remains in a pre-pubescent phase of his life where, according to Rousseau, gendering has not yet taken place. "The child brought up in accordance with his age is alone . . . is unconscious of his sex and his species; men and women are alike unknown" (Emile 180). We are confronted with a son who becomes the wife for his father and then is removed from reality for an extended period of time. By becoming his father's substitute wife he morphs into his own mother. He takes the places of a female and even has to give birth to his own self. The boy, who can mimic the attributes of a woman but is unable to be a male, is ill prepared for life; consequently, he becomes a complete failure. He cannot hold a job, is oblivious to women and their feelings, he does not see himself as a sexual being, and returns to the protection of his father's authority. Heinrich is ill prepared for life and he constantly returns to his father's lap, submitting himself to his authority, even at an age when others have successful careers. For this extended period of time he remains under the rule of his father and is unable to escape the role of the dependent minor.¹⁷ Consequently, the title *H. Stillings Jünglingsjahre*, therefore, is deceiving. Heinrich's biological age would indicate that he has graduated from childhood to youth, but the circumstances and his dependence on his father make it clear that his childhood years are prolonged.

We clearly see that Heinrich Stilling's life is evidently determined by his childhood. From an early age, he was programmed to be an outsider and even a failure in the society of the day. Although Heinrich Stilling appears to be a unique specimen of a young boy, he is actually not alone. Moritz's *Anton Reiser* experiences very similar problems, which result in almost identical outcomes.

Despite the odd development of his life, the first two parts of the autobiography were well received by the public, and contemporary readers considered them accounts of a happy childhood.¹⁸ The positive reception of this work indicates that the general perception of a happy childhood did not at all match proposed idea of what childhood should be. Suppression of individuality and the surrender of the self were regarded as accepted parts of a happy childhood.

Yet his unique upbringing enables Heinrich to live and develop outside of any given norm with regards to his age and gender. It might be that the liberation from and a re-definition of given norms and

¹⁶This action reminds one of Werther in Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*. Werther is happiest in the presence of children.

¹⁷For this reason I believe that *Jugend* and *Jünglingsjahre* should be read together as a unit since Heinrich is in a dependent child-like relationship with his father in both parts. This contradicts Schindler's statement: "Der von Goethe herausgegebene erste Teil der Lebensgeschichte 'Heinrich Stillings Jugend,' wird als in sich geschlossener Teil betrachtet, in dem [. . .] Kindheit in der patriarchalischen Idylle inszeniert wird" (*Subjekt* 129). One would overlook the extended childhood by limiting one's investigation to only the first part. As we will see, the *Jugend* is not a youth in the conventional sense but simply childhood extended indefinitely.

¹⁸See Schindler, *Subjekt*. "Die Erörterung dieses Textes scheint hier um so wichtiger, weil der Roman schon von den Zeitgenossen als Schilderung einer glücklichen Kindheit angesehen wurde" (129).

constraints of society must have appealed to readers and critics alike. Heinrich is happy in his world of oblivion and ignorant to anything gender prescribed. His position in life, society, and development cannot be assigned or attached to any given norm and he is a free spirit who can do things no one else can.

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