
Coercion and Confinement in Eleonore Thon's *Adelheit von Rastenberg*

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Eleonore Thon née Röder (1753-1807) began her literary career in the late 1700s.¹ Thon, a member of the middle-class and a contemporary of Sophie von La Roche, published poems, translations, essays, and fictional narratives. The sole drama in her body of literary work is *Adelheit von Rastenberg*. The drama is a gender-conscious criticism of basic dramatic tenets of the Storm and Stress that focus primarily on father-son conflicts. Thon, in contrast, centers the plot on women's, as opposed to men's, predicaments associated with quests for autonomy. Surely, the range of choices open to individuals drives their pursuit of self-determination, while part of that quest often includes choosing a mate. In this context, *Adelheit von Rastenberg* explores possible behavior models for eighteenth-century women when they are at the center of romantic pursuits that for various reasons cannot lead to socially sanctioned relationships (i.e., marriage).

Dramatic texts by female playwrights such as Eleonore Thon have sparked renewed interest in past decades, especially among feminist critics, who attempt to track an archetypal, elusive woman in the narratives of past generations. One such pivotal study from which this analysis draws is that of Susanne Kord, who establishes that plays authored by women offer a highly critical view of the basically functional, proactively oriented world order suggested by male playwrights of the Storm and Stress era ("Gerechtigkeit" 104). Kord argues further that women dramatists often depict their heroines as predetermined to fail while the conflict raised in these texts remains without resolution. A second cornerstone for this analysis is Karin Wurst's study *Frauen und Drama im Achtzehnten Jahrhundert*, in which the author effectively demonstrates that women playwrights of the era generally direct attention to patriarchal power constellations and unveil them as oppressive to women. In her reading of *Adelheit von Rastenberg*, Wurst additionally suggests that Thon aligns herself with the gender criticism of her female contemporaries as her text undermines Storm and Stress dramatic convention ("Introduction"). *Adelheit von Rastenberg* depicts a historical moment of crisis; the play juxtaposes claims of sexual equality imbedded in a sentimental-romantic love paradigm with

the social reality that opposes this claim of parity. Thon highlights the negation of gender equality in the love rhetoric employed by her storming and stressing heroes who, in their quest to undermine convention and secure a mate, rely on the conventional separation of the sexes.

Analysis here builds on the critical questions raised by Susanne Kord and Karin Wurst in an effort to delineate Thon's attempt to undermine conventional sympathetic portrayals of the love-struck hero so prevalent in conventional Storm and Stress literature. While the author employs the highly emotional rhetoric we associate with this era, her tragedy encompasses a strong criticism of the violence that it reflects and that eventually erases the entire female cast. In this vein, the analysis also highlights Thon's theatrical use of "spaces," which signify the central conflict of the plot, namely the narrow scope of choices open to women that leads to their subsequent erasure.

It is useful to cast a glance on contemporary perceptions of late eighteenth-century history and the literature that sprang from it in order to contextualize the social landscape with which Thon takes issue. Today's academic community casts Storm and Stress "not as an irrational counterpoint to Enlightenment, but as an integral part . . . , an almost predictable continuation of European Enlightenment."² One of the most striking properties of its "crisscrossing themes and styles" is that Storm and Stress literature emerges from an unusual historic context, namely a dis-unified nation (Hill 2). Eighteenth-century German-speaking territories constituted a patchwork of free cities and principalities in which the socio-historical transition from feudal to modern society sparked debates about identity and nation.³

Indeed, this transition also left its mark on the literary landscape as it fueled the imagination of Storm and Stress authors with concerns regarding the contemporary world rather than the afterlife. Given these circumstances, many texts of the 1770s including Thon's *Adelheit von Rastenberg* depict tensions between social integration and individual desires, between the pull of the community and the essence of selfhood. Unlike Thon, however, in attempts to simultaneously unify *and* boost the confidence of audiences with the sheer strength and conviction of dramatic characters, luminaries such as Schiller (*Die Räuber, Kabale und Liebe*) and Goethe (*Götz von Berlichingen*) succeeded in coercing spectators to exonerate the violence of their heroes, and even to side with murderers.⁴ Above all, such hyperbolic characteristics boosting the "greatness" of male protagonists employed in Storm and Stress literature serve to evoke a sense of impatience, and spontaneity that is typical for this era (Leidner 7). To be sure, heroes standing at the center of conventional Storm and Stress drama frequently reveal themselves

to be rather arrogant figures, aloof toward their environment and their fellow human beings whom they find too insignificant to approach with compassion. In light of these basic tenets, Franz Moor of Schiller's *Die Räuber* seeks "to exterminate everything around [him] that limits [his] potential to be master" while he plans to "attain by violence where kindness fails [him]."⁵ In addition to arrogance and violence, one of the Storm and Stress hero's most dubious characteristics is his ability to coerce and inspire the audience in an attempt to establish a functional, literary community of like-minded individuals. In fact, Goethe communicates this admiration for his proactive hero Götz von Berlichingen through Brother Martin's expressed "delight to meet such a great man."⁶ The Storm and Stress hero's ability to inspire always seems to play on the shifting, even contradictory values that transcend all narrow cultural specificity (Leidner 9; Hill 8-9, 21). Preoccupied with his own circumstance, a Storm and Stress hero may be violent to gain control of the environment although he resents the violence that others exercise to control him. The coercive tirades of charismatic titans such as the brothers Moor in *Die Räuber*, Ferdinand in Schiller's *Kabale und Liebe*, and Goethe's iron-fisted Götz depict the world as artificial and degenerate, while the characters' violent contraventions give onlookers temporary license to transgress the boundaries of their insignificant, oppressive lives. Consequently, the prayer of Götz' adolescent squire Georg expresses this secretly harbored longing for greatness: "Holy St. George! Make me big and strong, give me such a lance, amour, and horse, then let the dragons come!"⁷

The conventional but peculiar pairing of cultural pessimism and the confidence in reinstating a functional world order consistently threatens women characters in literary contributions of female dramatists. One reason for this circumstance may be that Eleonore Thon and her contemporaries Christiane K. Schlegel (*Düval und Chamille*, 1778), Sophie Albrecht (*Thresgen*, 1781), and Marianne Ehrmann (*Leichtsinn und gutes Herz*, 1786) comprise their plays not only "from the margins" of mainstream Storm and Stress discourse, but also in hindsight, in the late eighteenth century, when the movement seemed already a thing of the past (Kord, "Discursive" 243). However, what unites Thon's dramatic text and those considered more central to the movement, despite all their differences, is their mutual rejection of truths and values that are not validated by personal experience. Reading Thon's text as a contribution by an observer and covert critic of Storm and Stress convention unveils the male protagonists in *Adelheit von Rastenberg* not as heroes to be emulated but as atrocious tyrants endowed with unrivaled selfishness and coercive skills in the tradition of Storm and Stress. *Adelheit* demonstrates that the emotionally charged quest of heroes seeking romantic reciprocation cannot

always lead to marriage. The play takes into consideration that the lover or the love object may be already married, or of a lower class, a circumstance that would make the bond socially unacceptable. The violent fervor of storming and stressing suitors often leaves the love interest in jeopardy when evading such advances, as any form of rejection may have fatal consequences. The restricted and gendered landscape of Thon's play, to which the male lover contributes literally and psychologically, imprisons women. In this context, the plot of *Adelheid von Rastenberg* also pivots on tracing the demise of the entire female cast.

Thon's drama brings to the stage concerns centered on gender and autonomy. The chivalric play, situated in the Middle Ages, questions the importance of family alliance over romantic love, two paradigms of social interaction. Knight Adelbert von Hohenburg, ordered to fight in the East, leaves his beloved Adelheit to fend for herself. Upon his departure, Adelheit's father literally drags his daughter to the altar to wed Hohenburg's more affluent rival, Robert von Rastenberg. Robert, however, is a man on the rebound. Some years before meeting Adelheit, he disregarded his father's demand for chastity and secretly courted Franziska, an impoverished French aristocrat, who bore him out of wedlock a child named Franz. Infuriated over his son's misconduct, Rastenberg Senior ordered Robert to redeem himself in the crusades while leaving Franziska and her son Franz to fend for themselves. Responding to rumors that indicate Franziska had committed adultery in his absence, Robert dissolves the unsanctioned bond with his common law wife upon his return from the East. The infuriated crusader separates mother and child as he expels Franziska from his estate condemning her to confinement in a convent. From there the scorned woman eventually escapes and begins leading the secluded life of a hermit in the woods near the Rastenberg estate. While Franziska still hopes she one day will be reunited with Franz and Robert, Rastenberg raises his illegitimate son and eventually takes the reluctant Adelheit as his new wife.

After Adelbert von Hohenburg returns from the battlefield, he seeks to rekindle his relationship with Adelheit, now the wife of Rastenberg, and plans to flee with her. In the meantime, Bertha, a countess long since infatuated with knight Adelbert, has her eyes on Hohenburg in her quest for a new husband. While Adelheit resists the temptation to flee with her former lover, Hohenburg in turn publicly rejects Bertha's advances and therewith embitters the headstrong countess. Envious of Adelbert's feelings for Adelheit, Bertha begins to monitor the secret encounters between the lovers that unfold in close proximity to the home of Franziska, the mother of Rastenberg's illegitimate son. Franziska identifies with her successor's moral dilemma and attempts to intervene on Adelheit's behalf.

Disguised as a hermit, Franziska even succeeds in preventing a bloody battle between Adelbert and Robert. Yet, the intervention of the hermit fails to protect Adelheit's safety. The young woman becomes a pawn in her stepson's quest for the Rastenberg fortune and eventually falls victim to a murderous plot executed by Countess Bertha. These tensions precipitate a series of events that eventually culminate in the demise of all the female characters.

In order to draw attention to gender issues as opposed to class (*Kabale und Liebe*), generational (*Die Räuber*), or even political conflicts (*Götz von Berlichingen*), *Adelheit von Rastenberg* focuses on the domestic lives of men and women belonging to the German gentry.⁸ Thon highlights the violent outbursts of the men in her play and the women's lack of opportunity to give direction to their lives while redefining qualities such as strength and self-confidence to include compassion and respect for others. With the emphasis placed on the casualties of mental and physical abuse, an approach that differentiates Thon from her male contemporaries writing in the tradition of Storm and Stress, the plot traces over a three-day period the growing aggression exercised by two love-struck knights, Adelbert and Robert, who wage war to gain compliance from the "object" of their affection. Thon uses the time and place of the medieval setting as historical foils to discuss decidedly eighteenth-century themes such as love and family alliance. Much like *Götz von Berlichingen* and *Die Räuber*, *Adelheit von Rastenberg* brings to the stage radical articulations of competing views on self-determination associated with choosing a mate.

Examining the rhetorical tools employed as weapons to enforce women's compliance, while at the same time comparing Thon's treatment of male characters with that of heroes in canonical plays of the era, brings to light the means Thon employs to depict the circumstances under which her women characters have to negotiate their lives. This approach intends to initially "flesh out" the boundaries of the author's alignment with Storm and Stress convention.

Oblivious to the women's plight, Thon's male characters make abundant use of the rambling rhetoric we associate with Storm and Stress. Their statements can be organized into four categories: the first group of utterances serves to defend the rights to the love interest. In the same sentiment as Schiller's Ferdinand reprimands Luise for her reservations concerning the legitimacy of their relationship, Robert, whom Adelheit married against her will, scolds his wife an "ungrateful woman" as she refuses to solidify their relationship by "pretend[-ing] tenderness" (19).⁹ When his patience grows thin, Robert implicitly threatens his wife with impending retaliation: "I shall not be slave to this attraction forever" (19). Ferdinand, in *Kabale und Liebe*, also expresses that he may be temporarily

“blinded” by emotion but that this sentiment may transform into violence if his needs are not met.¹⁰ Next to Hohenburg’s stalking Adelheit and threatening to kill her husband if she refuses to cooperate with her lover, Rastenberg’s decision to confine his wife to the tower is perhaps the most explicit consequence of Adelheit’s victimization. Schiller’s protagonist Ferdinand conceivably gives the most extreme example of retaliation as he eventually turns his threat into action and poisons the object of his affection.

The second type of statement seeks to legitimize the hero’s hyperbolic behavior. Ferdinand plans to rob his father to finance his (and Luise’s) escape; he explains, “It is permissible to plunder a robber, and aren’t his treasures the fatherland’s blood money?”¹¹ Similarly, Adelbert legitimizes stalking Adelheit by arguing that “he sees no other way to rescue the unfortunate casualty of [his rival’s] passion?” (29). While the men settle scores with those obstructing their quest, the love interest struggles, however unsuccessfully, to stay out of harm’s way.

The hero’s third type of utterances aims at persuasion. For example, with the statement that a “vow taken under duress is no vow at all,” Hohenburg hopes to convince Adelheit to leave her husband (11). His rationalization for demanding compliance from Adelheit compares with Ferdinand’s appeal to a higher power: “the eternal one shall decide whether my love is a crime.”¹²

If the appeal to a higher power does not convince the women, the fourth type of statement highlights the unreserved quality of the hero’s demand for affection. To be sure, Hohenburg can hardly keep his hands off “his” Adelheit when he throws himself at her feet, ranting, “In the heat of battle and the hush of prayer, waking and dreaming, I hear: ‘Adelheit is yours.’ . . . Adelheit, look upon the victor at your feet, . . .and be the reward for his bravery” (10-11). Here, too, Schiller’s Ferdinand rivals Adelbert’s fervor: “I fear nothing—nothing—but the boundaries of your love.”¹³ This statement voices the hero’s conviction that the needs of the love interest ought not interfere with the direction of his romantic quest.

There can be little doubt that the rhetoric Thon’s heroes employ mimics that of Schiller’s Franz Moor in *Die Räuber*, or that of Ferdinand in *Kabale und Liebe*, both of whom violently rebel against parental domination. Furthermore, the rambling of Goethe’s Werther, who responds to the injustice of his superiors, evokes a similar sense of urgency.¹⁴ Yet, in comparison to such canonical texts in which authors “subtly exonerate [their heroes] for their actions,” Thon’s male characters *are not* depicted under duress from coercive elders but are portrayed as men in power (Leidner 11). First and foremost, the author shows her male protagonists outside of the public sphere coercing and threatening the women in their care. While in canonical plays of the time the language invokes the heroes’ subjugation

to a community run by elders, Thon's use of Storm and Stress rhetoric places primary emphasis on the men's abusive nature.

The men's indifference to the needs of the women makes explicit that neither Robert, nor Adelbert, believe they are conversing with equals as they seek to possess and dominate the loved one; the knights' behavior is solely guided by fear of losing the "object" of their desire. Hohenburg primarily uses emotional blackmail designed to force Adelheit into choosing between life as a disgraced common wife or risk having Adelbert think her feelings are shallow. Rastenberg, in turn, compels his wife to choose between staying in an unwanted marriage or living in fear of his retaliation. As Adelheit's hand legally belongs to Rastenberg, but her heart beats for Hohenburg, neither of these choices leaves Adelheit "happier" (13). In this vein, Adelheit and Schiller's Luise share a similar dilemma as inclination and duty "tug at [their] bloody soul[s]."¹⁵ Both women are compelled to subjugate their feelings in order to remain integrated in the communities they call home. Thon's emphasis on force in connection with romantic pursuits undermines an important assumption embedded in the love paradigm, namely that both lovers, men and women, are entitled to end the relationship.

Adelheit von Rastenberg, unlike more canonical Storm and Stress plays, exclusively traces romantic restrictions from the perspective of its women characters. In addition, the character after which Thon names her play specifically undermines what according to Käte Hamburger became the buzzword of the age of Enlightenment (135), namely the concept of the beautiful soul (*schöne Seele*), Schiller's theoretical depiction of moral grace (*Anmut*). The notion of *Anmut*, as Schiller defines it in *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*, praises a woman's ability to balance her passions (*Gleichgewicht der Leidenschaften*, *Würde*), a skill which Thon's Adelheit finds impossible to attain.¹⁶ This failure, however, is not due to a deficiency in moral fiber, but rather because she lacks the freedom to live according to her moral conviction. As this synthesis of duty (*Pflicht*) and inclination (*Neigung*) cannot be attained, Thon's text explicitly undermines Schiller's argument for moral grace.

In addition to emphasizing Adelheit's lack of self-determination, Thon simultaneously draws parallels between the ranting and raving knights and Countess Bertha, the woman who eventually murders Adelheit. This brutal act earns Bertha immediate disapproval from other characters in the play and perhaps even from the audience. Both Adelbert and Bertha discard responsibility for their actions and view sentiments that supposedly are beyond their control (namely love, and its opposite, hate) as catalysts giving direction to their violent behavior. It cannot escape the attentive reader that the countess breaks stereotypes normally reserved

for eighteenth-century woman in that she “waste[s] little] time dreaming [but] take[s] action” (27). Bertha prefers to conquer exterior worlds without examining whether murdering Adelheit justifies her wish to possess Adelbert. A similar emphasis on action echoes in Hohenburg’s understanding of steadfastness. To him, constancy “means the courage and strength to uphold his convictions and to overcome misfortune” (32). In sentiment, the zealous fervor of both Adelbert and Robert, who lash out in violence, resembles Bertha’s state of mind in that in all three cases the end, namely romantic conquest, seems to justify violence. Read in this light, parallels between Bertha’s and the knights’ conduct suggest that Bertha is not the only rogue here.¹⁷ The violent competition of conventional storming and stressing protagonists, regardless of gender, is detrimental to characters unwilling or unable to participate in this competition. Franziska’s turning to the audience and saying, “How clever humans are in putting a good face on their crimes” (29), places into question not only Adelbert’s and Robert’s but also the exoneration of violence in canonical plays.

Read in this context, Franziska also extends her criticism of human crimes to Robert’s and Bertha’s evasion of responsibility. Hohenburg rejects responsibility for the consequences of stalking Rastenberg’s wife, which indirectly precipitates her imprisonment. Robert’s nagging suspicion toward Adelheit prevents her from establishing a functional relationship with him. For fear of her husband violently lashing out at her, Adelheit reluctantly abandons his estate and falls victim to Bertha’s jealousy. And finally, the countess’ manipulations cause Franz to lose his entire family; not only do his step-mother (Adelheit) and mother (Franziska) perish, but also his father (Robert) abandons the estate to commence the secluded life of a hermit.

Besides pointing to the consequences of destructive behavior, Thon’s additional emphasis on the bond between Adelheit and Franziska undermines the dramatic practice of her male contemporaries, in which women protagonists compete with female adversaries for the love of a man. Such highly charged character constellations that pit woman against woman have been played out in perhaps less violent variations between Lady Milford and Luise (*Kabale und Liebe*) or Sara and Marwood (*Miss Sara Sampson*); they are standard material in many conventional tragedies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In Thon’s work, too, rivalry threatens to unfold between Adelheit and Franziska, Robert’s common law wife, whom Adelheit meets on her secret sojourns into the woods. However, against all expectation, the supposed adversaries form a bond and the younger of the two (Adelheit) begins to seek the elder’s company.¹⁸ It speaks to Thon’s pessimistic, or perhaps realistic, view in her time of social change that this meeting of the minds

can occur only because Franziska is in disguise, and the encounters occur in seclusion, in a landscape oblivious to social convention.¹⁹

The bond between the women comes into play when Hohenburg and Rastenberg converge with Adelheit on the hermit's (Franziska's) home in the woods. Adelbert accuses Adelheit of emotional superficiality; husband Robert insists his wife is an adulteress. In light of these accusations, Franziska attempts to shield her friend from the men's hostility. Soon, both women speak "*almost simultaneously*" (33), insisting on the validity of Adelheit's determination to honor her marriage vow. As tensions rise and the lovers duel over the possession of Adelheit, Franziska bravely throws herself between the fighting parties demanding an end to the violence. Nevertheless, the inefficacy of her protest throws this resistance back to its source, namely to mere words. As quickly as it arose, Franziska's confidence collapses. Able only to revert to a life-long conquest of interior rather than exterior worlds, the hermit resigns: "My duty is to condone and to forgive" (33). Thon leaves little doubt that Franziska's brief insurgence fails because it remains limited to words, not as in the men's case to rhetoric enforced by action. Nevertheless, the play's unconventional twist of events, most prominently the unexpected friendship between Franziska and Adelheit, replaces the traditional virtue-vice conflict depicted in character constellations of tragedies such as *Kabale und Liebe* and *Emilia Galotti*, with an example of female bonding that strengthens the women, if only temporarily.

Virtue-vice clashes of conventional plays generally culminate in the tragic death of a woman, and therefore Susanne Kord argues that the demise of this heroine is appropriated for sublimatory functions ("Discursive" 262). For example, the tragic demise of innocent heroines such as Emilia Galotti, Luise Millerin, and Sara Sampson serves not only to signify the tragic demise of an individual. The circumstance that these characters succumb to a system, which undermines the moral foundation of the middle class, demonstrates that the heroines' resounding but fatal rejection of vice also signifies the ethical superiority of the bourgeoisie in general. While Lessing's Sara Sampson falls to the deceitful courtesan, Marwood, Schiller's Ferdinand falsely questions Luise's virtue and, therefore, takes her life. Finally, Emilia Galotti, captured by the corrupt prince, forces her wavering father to turn the dagger against her and thus preserve her virtue.²⁰ Compared to the heroines Sara, Luise, and Emilia, readers conceive of Adelheit and Franziska as real women, not as signifiers of a virtue-vice conflict. Adelheit's flight from Rastenberg's estate, and particularly her reluctance to die for upholding her marriage vows, substantiate that she is "no heroine" (50).

With the unruly Franziska and the benevolent Adelheit, Thon portrays her characters as women caught between opposing paradigms of self-assertion, one of whom aligns herself with the needs of the community, whereas the other does not. Especially, Adelheit oscillates between two domineering lovers who bring to the stage these opposing behavior models; her husband sides with social convention, as he has no qualms about forcing Adelheit to marry him. Hohenburg opposes arranged marriages and therefore relentlessly coerces Adelheit to break her vows. Neither Rastenberg's ranting persistence on social convention—"Adelheit, Adelheit! How much have I suffered on your account!" (19)—nor Hohenburg's raving about social injustice—"The One who rules above us Himself is opening my arms for you" (11)—make Adelheit any happier. More mature and perhaps better advised (by Franziska) than Lessing's Emilia Galotti, Adelheit distinguishes between the staged nature of "youthful fervor" that is so typical of Storm and Stress characters, and the reality of her personal experience, which confirms that despite the dramatic love rhetoric, she is simply a pawn in a competition between lovers, who seek to assert themselves (Kord, "Discursive" 262).

Adelheit can neither act upon her feelings toward Adelbert nor surpass the "semblance of affection" for her husband Robert. It is the utter constraint and dependence on the men around her that ultimately leads to the protagonist's demise. Unlike Bertha, who profits from a network of strategically placed informants, Adelheit depends on Adelbert's, Robert's, and eventually Franz's spin on events, a circumstance that ultimately costs her life. Her most frequently used utterances—"I am not capable" (19), "I cannot, may not" (31), and "I can do nothing" (49)—are not only evidence of Adelheit's restricted autonomy but also expressions of protest against and rejection of this condition.

Regardless of the growing pressures to comply, Adelheit is determined not to perjure herself and therewith to assume responsibility for her decisions. The dying Adelheit directs her last words at both Robert and Adelbert after Bertha falls into a jealous rage and thrusts the dagger into her rival. Adelheit insists once again that her "bleeding heart... had no love" (55) to give to Rastenberg, and that she will follow Hohenburg, but only "in that other world" (56). Adelheit's dying testimony, unlike Emilia Galotti's, meets no opposition.²¹ Seizing the opportunity to finally have her say, Adelheit's last words undermine the lovers' demands for compliance and reaffirm her position as a woman who stands by her word. Readers may feel for Adelheit and her peers, as their suffering and tragic demise remain without consequence in that they fail to bring about social change.

The plot development, linking the violently enforced coercion with the women characters' anguish and demise, coincides with Thon's dramatic treatment of spaces

stressing women's physical confinement. This unique pairing of mental and physical restraint also suggests that the women's lack of autonomy is a direct consequence of the desperation and frustration encapsulated in conventional Storm and Stress love rhetoric. In particular, the impenetrability of certain settings, both interior and exterior, signals the restrictions imposed on the women. For instance, as Countess Bertha recalls her recent past, we learn that she was forced to marry a man twice her age. As if to underscore the physical and emotional restrictions of the character's previous marriage, the author places the now widowed countess exclusively in the woods, a locale generally signifying unbridled nature.²² The text shows Bertha exclusively in the woods, for after the death of the husband releases the countess from an arranged marriage, she seeks to assume control over her life by choosing a new mate. With this goal in mind, she designates knight Adelbert to be that person. Yet the man Bertha desires repeatedly rejects her in public. The humiliation associated with this rejection plunges the scorned woman into an emotional abyss, signified by the wilderness, from which the countess violently lashes out and eventually succumbs to her fervor.

Franziska, like Bertha, dwells in the wilderness and seeks to determine her destiny. The character's flight from the convent additionally accentuates Franziska's determination to shape her life. While living disguised (i.e., "imprisoned" in men's attire) on the margins of society, the outcast yearns to become reconciled with her family. Much as in Bertha's case, it is telling that the exile wishes to relocate from one space to another, from the exterior (margins of society) to the interior (the community), but is unable to do so. Mysteriously, after shedding her disguise, Franziska dies *en route* to Rastenberg's estate, a locale she considers home. Given Bertha's and Franziska's untimely deaths, the text suggests that attempts to reintegrate into society are futile, even lethal, for women who seek actively to change their fate.

Finally, the second woman associated with the house of Rastenberg, namely Adelheit, seems most explicitly restricted in her movements. The second scene of the first act depicts the female protagonist "lost in melancholy," wandering through the wilderness near her husband's estate (8). If we accept that spaces are endowed with meaning, Adelheit's outdoor excursions signify an attempt to temporarily escape the restrictive, interior rooms she is forced to inhabit. The tower (the German word *Zwinger* seems more appropriate here) to which Robert banishes his wife once the danger of her removal is most imminent embodies the space that makes her lack of self-determination most explicit. While drawing attention to Adelheit's marital status—after all she sees herself as "no longer free"—the tower accentuates this confinement in a loveless marriage of convenience (9). Further,

beyond Adelheit's forced relationship with Robert, even in the presence of Adelbert, Thon highlights the inability of her protagonist to move about freely. Already in Adelheit's first reunion with Hohenburg (as in all later encounters), he clasps her hand, "*holding her tight*" (10-11). His physical coercion is so excessive that Adelheit is unable to pull away from his embrace: "Let me go, Adelbert, let me go"; "Let me go, for God's sake, let me go!" (11, 12). Adelheit's fainting spell paired with the words "I am lost" epitomizes the insurmountable obstacles preventing the protagonist from gaining control over her life (32). In addition to these examples of women's restrained movement, it is telling that unlike the male characters, who easily move from one space to another, the entire female cast perishes while attempting to stray from the spaces assigned to them: Adelheit is fatally wounded while fleeing from the Rastenberg tower into the wilderness, Franziska passes away in an attempt to return to the Rastenberg estate, and even Bertha dies while hoping to take Adelheit's place. All of these women, despite their differences, seek to assume control and subsequently pay with their lives. In fact, even Adelheit's sustained endurance of social convention does not allow her to survive.

In order to draw awareness to the tensions linked to a rigid gender landscape, Thon places her female characters in extremely precarious situations. Adelheit suffers because she is wedged between two feuding lovers while Franziska must wear men's clothing to protect herself from persecution. Only the annihilation of all the women, including Bertha, brings a temporary end to violence.²³ Thon depicts domestic domination as cruel from the perspective of the women. Her representation of violent characters who are guilty of exercising damaging control over their companions, paired with the play's critical consideration of coercive rhetoric, constitutes a sweeping criticism of Storm and Stress dramatic conventions and the *Zeitgeist* it reinforces.

Thon's criticism of Storm and Stress convention is all the more convincing if we consider that the death of her women characters stands in no relation to the way they react to the men around them (Kord, "Gerechtigkeit" 104). To make this point explicit, the plot traces multiple behavioral models open to women: according to Thon, women may choose to endure like Adelheit, fail and regret like Franziska, or seek revenge like Bertha, yet the result of their behavior leads in Thon's play to an unsatisfying end, namely the death of the character. In the dramatic world of *Adelheit von Rastenberg*, women have no chance of surviving their relationships with Storm and Stress characters.

While exploring various behavior models for women, Thon additionally undermines our conventional hope that virtuous women such as Adelheit, Emilia, or Sara can survive. Time and again, the text emphasizes Storm and Stress vio-

lence. It is perhaps this underlying criticism of injustice that resonates in Franziska's voice as she pleads with Rastenberg to abstain from hostilities: "Knight, Knight, your fate affects me more than you know" (33). After all, a duel with Adelbert may deprive either Adelheit or Franziska of a lover while it may also rob Franz of a father.

Emerging from the bloody conclusion in *Adelheit von Rastenberg* is Thon's highly critical view of the aggressive Storm and Stress hero, whose self-serving violence traditionally earns viewer approval. In contrast to the dramatic convention of her day, *Adelheit von Rastenberg* evokes empathy towards women characters who are severely limited in their choices to assume control over their lives. This point gains even more importance as the scenes depicting women's physical and emotional constraint stand in stark contrast to those that depict male characters exploring an array of exterior and interior settings. In contrast to the women, even Franz, a character who perhaps holds the most precarious position among the men, moves with ease from his father's estate into the wilderness to pursue his romance with the countess. At the conclusion of the drama he even joins Adelbert to cross national boundaries en route to the East.

In *Adelheit von Rastenberg* it is not class, nor rank, but gender that determines a person's ability to negotiate the environment. In addition to Thon's criticism of the coercive rhetoric and self-serving violence we associate with conventional Storm and Stress titans, the playwright's treatment of spaces also emphasizes the lack of self-determination of disadvantaged characters such as Adelheit and Franziska. Thon achieves this goal by staging the violence that prompts the women to submit. Given the author's vehement disapproval of Storm and Stress convention, it is curious to detect a degree of pessimism concerning social change in the play. After the gruesome murder of Adelheit, the death of Franziska, and Bertha's suicide, Robert simply withdraws from society, whereas Franz and Adelbert depart for the Crusades rather than reflect on their participation in the multiple loss of lives.²⁴ Despite the urgency of Thon's protest, there lingers a sense of conservatism about her play and perhaps about the entire literary production we associate with Storm and Stress. For this reason, Karin Wurst rightfully concludes that instead of endorsing radical change, *Adelheit von Rastenberg* simply calls for measures promoting the "integration of weaker individuals, in this case women" ("Introduction" xxviii).

The social integration of disadvantaged individuals is perhaps the most fundamental objective of authors responding to the Storm and Stress. In a world in which competition and merit simultaneously promise to enrich human lives but also reveal the potential to fragment societies and isolate individuals, the crown-

ing achievement of the period is perhaps its sensitivity to restrictions placed on the individual. In the play's emphasis on women, Thon also reveals that Adelheit cannot achieve the desired synthesis of duty (*Pflicht*) and inclination (*Neigung*), which Schiller defines as the sole avenue to achieve moral grace. The plot explicitly defies this definition of enlightened moral grace as the failure of Thon's main character to attain what Schiller defines as the harmony of passions lies not in Adelheit's lack of moral beauty, but rather in the coercive environment that literally forces her to abandon her moral convictions. In this vein, the text deliberately negates Schiller's theoretical depiction of moral grace, that is, the beautiful soul (*schöne Seele*), as this ideal is only useful to a society which allows all individuals, including women, to live freely by their moral convictions.

While showing little sympathy for those characters who are self-centered, coercive, and violent, Thon instead directs attention to various, distinctly gendered behavior patterns, each of which culminates in the demise of a woman character. The text emerges as a tragedy highly critical of Storm and Stress dramatic convention that exclusively places the wants and fates of male heroes at its center. Intentionally or not, the construction of the plot undermines self-centeredness by removing the social context (i.e., the generational struggle for dominance fought in the public domain) that conventionally exonerates the titan's subjugation of disadvantaged individuals. Depriving such storming and stressing characters of their symbolic significance and shifting the play's focus to images more conducive to the lives of those conventionally underrepresented may be one of Thon's most significant achievements and certainly one that aligns itself with today's multifaceted view of the movement we call Storm and Stress. ✱

Notes

¹ The list of her principal works includes narratives such as *Julie von Hirtenthal* (1780-83) and *Marianne von Terville* (1798) written in the tradition of Sophie von La Roche's sentimental novel *Die Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* (1771). Thon's epistolary text, *Briefe von Karl Leuckford* (1782), is a travel narrative advocating education for women.

² See Alan Leidner's "Introduction" in *The Impatient Muse*; see also David Hill's "Introduction" in *Literature of the Sturm und Drang* where the author depicts the period as "both a radicalization of the European Enlightenment and a failure to realize its potential" (18).

³ Hill suggests the background of the literary rebellion of Storm and Stress is to be found in underlying shifts in the social structure (17).

⁴ Hill voices reservations as to the inclusion of Schiller in his list of Storm and Stress authors. Nevertheless, he admits that a discussion of the movement would be incomplete if it did not take into consideration Schiller's early writings that feature a spirit of turbulence, protest, and emotional outbursts reminiscent of the period in question (16). See also Susanne Kord's "Schiller and the End of the Sturm und Drang."

⁵ All quotations from Schiller's *Die Räuber* have been translated by me: "Ich will alles um mich her ausrotten, was mich einschränkt, daß ich nicht Herr bin. Herr muß ich sein, daß ich das mit Gewalt ertrotze, wozu mir die Liebenswürdigekeit gebracht" (15).

⁶ I have translated all quotations from Goethe's *Götz von Berlichingen*: "Es ist eine Wollust, einen großen Mann zu sehen" (13).

⁷ "Heiliger Georg! Mach mich groß und stark, gib mir so eine Lanze, Rüstung und Pferd, dann lass mir die Drachen kommen" (13).

⁸ Given the play's focus on gender rather than class, Karin Wurst's placement of the drama between chivalric play and bourgeois tragedy seems questionable ("Introduction" xv, xvii).

⁹ "Siehst du, Falsche, auf welchem Kaltsinn ich dir begegnen muß? Wärst du ganz nur Liebe für mich, wann hättest du Zeit gehabt, eine Vergleichung zu machen?" (14) [Do you see, snake, what detachment I must encounter in you? If you would truly love me, how much time would you have to make comparisons?]

¹⁰ "Kalte Pflicht gegen feurige Liebe! - Und mich soll das Märchen blenden? - Ein Liebhaber fesselt dich, und Weh über dich und ihn, wenn mein Verdacht sich bestätigt" ["Cold duty against fiery love. - And this tale is meant to deceive me? - A lover holds you, you and he will be sorry if my suspicion proves right"] (61). Although both Rastenberg and Ferdinand react out of jealousy, the scene in *Adelheit von Rastenberg* differs from *Kabale und Liebe* in that Rastenberg knows of his woman's affection for another man whereas Schiller's Ferdinand falsely accuses Luise of infidelity.

¹¹ "Es ist erlaubt, einen Räuber zu plündern, und sind seine Schätze nicht Blutgeld des Vaterlands?"

¹² "Ich will sie führen vor des Weltrichters Thron, und ob meine Liebe Verbrechen ist, soll der Ewige sagen" (42).

¹³ "Ich fürchte nichts—nichts—als die Grenzen deiner Liebe" (15).

¹⁴ Although it is clear that *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* is not a dramatic text, Goethe employs a similar rhetoric.

¹⁵ "der Himmel und Ferdinand reißen an meiner blutigen Seele" (12).

¹⁶ "In einer schönen Seele ist es also, wo Sinnlichkeit und Vernunft, Pflicht und Neigung harmonieren, und Grazie ist ihr Ausdruck in der Erscheinung" (72).

¹⁷ Leidner emphasizes that in conventional plays of the time period the dramatic action surrounding a murder is designed to make audiences side with the violent male protagonist (2).

¹⁸ Granted, the bond between the women is somewhat tainted as Adelheit believes Franziska to be a man. Yet Franziska as the scorned common law wife of Robert perhaps has reasons to resent her successor Adelheit. After all, Adelheit is the legal mate of Franziska's former lover. However, rather than undermining the budding bond, the elder woman seems to nurture it.

¹⁹ Susanne Kord makes a similar observation analyzing the friendship of Amalie and Marianne in Schlegel's *Düval and Charmille* ("Discursive Dissociations" 248).

²⁰ Bernadette Hyner argues that the dagger is endowed with phallic connotation, given that, as Countess Orsina points out, the weapon affords Odoardo the chance to subdue his princely tormentor—Orsina: "diese Gelegenheit,... Sie werden sie ergreifen, wenn Sie ein Mann sind" (64)—then the text depicts the hesitant parent as a miserable failure. The heroine's attempt to wrestle the weapon away from her father after falling short of calling him a coward ("Solcher Väter gibt es keinen mehr!") at best bestows comically Freudian overtones upon this exchange (Hyner 19). For a more detailed discussion of this scene, see Inge Stephan's "So ist die Tugend ein Gespenst."

²¹ Emilia Galotti seeks to assume control over her death as she forces Odoardo to raise the dagger against her. Her dying utterance, "Not you my father—I myself—I myself" —"Nicht Sie mein Vater—Ich selbst—ich selbst" (78)—is aimed at assuming responsibility for her death. Yet, Odoardo's response, "Not you my daughter—not you!—Don't leave this world with a lie"—"Nicht du, meine Tochter—nicht du!—Gehe mit keiner Unwahrheit aus der Welt" (78-9)—redesignates the heroine to the role of the passive victim, which she sought to escape.

²² David Hill asserts that, generally, authors of the Storm and Stress considered the natural landscape to be an accurate reflection of the physical world in as much as it had not been subordinated to the intelligence of human beings (21).

²³ The violence only ends temporarily; as Robert assigns Adelbert as chivalric tutor to his son, Franz, and the two men embark on a journey to the East to participate in yet another bloodbath, namely the Crusades.

²⁴ Robert decides to withdraw from society and become a hermit; Adelbert and Franz embark on a trip to the East.

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