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Cum repeto noctem. Citations of Exile in Goethe's *Italienische Reise*

Goethe's *Italienische Reise* opens and closes in the dead of night. The initial, rash flight out of Karlsbad before dawn finds a direct parallel in the concluding departure from Rome, where Goethe cites Ovid's *Tristia*, a poem that expresses the pain of having left his home, also quite suddenly, in the quiet darkness of the early morning hours. As a result, Goethe's description of the final night of the sojourn, the departure from Italy back towards Germany, effectively recalls or repeats, but also reverses or reflects, the first night of the extended expedition, the escape from the North en route to Italy. Taking the book as a whole, this chiastic framing works to turn the linear unfolding of time – the time that spans from the beginning to the end of the travelogue – into a ring composition, in which the final departure structurally rehearses the inaugural flight. The project thus aims to dramatize and ultimately overcome temporality through the very force of recollection. Much in the same way, the long interval that separates the events of the journey and their literary formulation thirty years afterwards appears to collapse into a magisterial effort of memory. This triumph of art over time is again premised on the subject's power of recollection, the ability to unite temporally and geographically disparate events into a unified work.

And yet the poetic citation at the book's conclusion, letting Ovid have the very last word, should give some pause. While preparing his manuscript, reflecting on his last night in the Italian capital, the aged autobiographer, rather than formulate his own thoughts, is simply content to recollect Ovid's recollection of banishment from Rome – *cum repeto noctem* ("when I call to mind or repeat that night"). The citation from the *Tristia* not only reverses the values of the proper and the foreign by interpreting the trip home as an exile's banishment, but also disrupts the artistic project by repeating a repetition. When we consider the specifics of Goethe's citation – when we examine this repetition of another poet's words and how it overrides a purely subjective recollection – we confront a literary gesture that in fact questions the efficacy of the subject's aesthetic designs, one that causes a fissure or asymmetry that undermines the attempt at unification. Recollection, which could be understood as an artistically strong, subjectively guided repetition, yields to a much different kind of repetition, a rather curious act of citation, which, as I hope to show below, signals precisely the subjective weakening that Theodor W. Adorno ascribes to 'late style,' whereby the material overtakes the artistic subject's will to form.

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Insofar as the concept of lateness involves temporality, the classical struggle of art against time may not be as resolvable as the old autobiographer would lead us to presume.

Goethe's account of his Italian journey sets off boldly, with no time to spare: "Früh drei Uhr stahl ich mich aus Carlsbad, weil man mich sonst nicht fortgelassen hätte."[1] Thus, beneath the cover of darkness and with explicit heedfulness of the time, Goethe begins the story of the two-year excursion that released him from the frustrating tedium of the Weimar court – the journey that, if we take the author at his word, inspired him and rejuvenated him, bringing him closer in touch with himself and changing his life from that point forward. If, from the perspective of the writer writing late in life, the time spent in Italy is to be regarded as a new beginning, then the account begins before the beginning, in the hours before dawn – "früh drei Uhr." The reckoning itself already underscores the role of temporality, including the time that has lapsed between the journey itself, from 1786 to 1788, and its literary composition, begun in 1816. As a work of recollection or repetition, the autobiography constitutes itself within this gap of three decades – a work that consistently presents itself as 'late' in relation to the events recounted, as a *Spätwerk* that strikingly commences with the word *früh*.

"Früh drei Uhr stahl ich mich aus Carlsbad": The opening sentence of the *Italienische Reise* could be read as programmatic, as putting into play the basic structures of the autobiographical project, a project, moreover, that is entirely set outside the German States, setting off at an early hour from this Austrian village. In addition to stressing the importance of time, the initial act of creeping off or 'stealing oneself away' warrants attention. The verb *sich stehlen*, analogous to the French *se dérober*, broaches connotations of *stealth*: whereby stealing, in the sense of taking something without anyone noticing, is linked to secrecy, covertness, and deception. The reflexive construction – *sich stehlen* – essentially splits the ego in two, into the one who steals and the one who is stolen. And it is this reflexive split that is clearly mirrored in the very form of autobiography, which distinguishes between the narrating and the narrated self, even though Goethe, by incorporating verbatim passages from his diaries, letters, and sketches works to conflate any clear distinction, which allows *dem erzählten Ich* to assume the role of *des erzählenden Ichs*.[2] Here, in the entry that opens the book, *sich stehlen* suggests that one part of Goethe is actively free and capable of stealing a more passive part of himself that remains obliged to

1 FA I, 15 1/2, 11.

2 On this device in the *Italienische Reise*, see Reiner Wild: "Italienische Reise." In: *Goethe-Handbuch*. Vol. 3: *Prosaschriften*. Ed. by Bernd Witte and Theo Buck. Stuttgart 1997, pp. 331–369, here p. 349.

others. Stealing away, the writer dissolves the bonds that would have prevented him from flight. He emancipates himself, stealthily, without forewarning, in order to set off for the South. Like a thief in the night, Goethe aims to redeem himself.

Yet, like a more common, less Messianic thief, Goethe also commits a kind of crime, one that he explicitly acknowledges in the sentence that follows: "Die Gesellschaft die den acht und zwanzigsten August meinen Geburtstag auf eine sehr freundliche Weise feiern mochte, erwarb sich wohl dadurch ein Recht mich fest zu halten."[3] Unlike the accusative pronoun in the form *sich stehlen*, the dative construction of *sich erwerben* indicates that the friends "acquired a right *for themselves*," namely the right to hold the writer in place. The friends are depicted as possessing the right to detain the artist who perhaps has always been a flight risk. Consequently, there is something 'unjust' or 'wrong' – something *unrecht* – about Goethe's decision to steal himself away in the dead of night and leave everyone else behind. Thus, the secret departure, Goethe's birthday present to himself, not only signals a longing for rebirth, but also corroborates an act of thievery: his flight to Italy flies in the face of the law that would hold him back. Still another reflexive construction settles the case: "Ich warf mich, ganz allein, nur einen Mantelsack und Dachsranzen aufpackend, in eine Post-Chaise."[4] Having crept off in darkness, having stolen himself away, he throws himself into a coach, decisively breaking the bonds of friendship, which would have held him in place. He is now "entirely alone" ("ganz allein"), as though in a state of exile or self-exile, relinquishing all that is familiar and taking along only that which can be gathered in relative haste.

This opening nighttime scene of stealth, the sudden departure and exile out of the Bohemian village of Karlsbad, presented beneath the vague shadow of crime, recurs at the very end of the book, as Goethe reflects on taking leave of Rome. Yet, unlike the opening sequence, on the final page of his account, the author now steps to the side and yields his place to the poet Ovid, "der, auch verbannt, in einer Mondennacht Rom verlassen sollte."[5] The citation is thus introduced with a justification, whereby Goethe identifies his lot with Ovid's. One exile can speak for another. The identification is striking, because now, after two years abroad, Goethe considers Rome to be his true home, which turns his departure into banishment. Before setting off, Goethe makes one concluding tour of his beloved city,

3 FA I, 15 1/2, 11.
4 FA I, 15 1/2, 11.
5 FA I, 15 1/2, 596.

climbing up to the Capitol, then down to the Forum, standing in the dark shadow of the Triumphal Arch of Septimius Severus and walking quietly along the Via Sacra, all the while recollecting the past two years, drawing for himself "ein unübersehbares Summa Summarum meines ganzen Aufenthaltes." The experience summons up a "heroic-elegiac" mood, which brings Goethe to Ovid:

> Cum repeto noctem! seine Rückerinnerung, weit hinten am schwarzen Meere, im trauer- und jammervollen Zustande, kam mir nicht aus dem Sinn, ich wiederholte das Gedicht, das mir teilweise genau im Gedächtnis hervorstieg, aber mich wirklich an eigner Produktion irre werden ließ und hinderte; die auch später unternommen, niemals zu Stande kommen konnte.[6]

Thus, upon summing up the entire journey, which Goethe repeatedly claimed to have brought him closer to himself, to have tapped into an original source of creativity, the poet gives up and merely repeats a poem by another poet – "Ich wiederholte das Gedicht" – an act of recitation that "actually sets his own production astray and hinders him," a poem that imposes itself, irresistibly, and thereby prevents Goethe, despite all subsequent attempts, from composing his own heroic elegy to commemorate the sad occasion. Rather than write his own poem – *seine eigene Produktion* – he repeats another's poem, yielding his voice to the voice of an ancient poet. The proper (*das Eigene*) has ceded to the foreign (*das Fremde*), which of course also implies that the foreign city is now home, and that the return to Germany is, for Goethe, an exile.

The verses from Ovid's *Tristia*, written while the Roman poet suffered a life of exile on the Black Sea, interestingly center on repetition as well: Ovid's recollection of the night he was compelled to leave the capital: "Cum repeto noctem!" ("When I recall that night!"). Goethe, in other words, does not simply repeat Ovid's lines, but rather repeats a repetition, which opens onto a chain of recurrences that is in fact abysmal. At the conclusion of his long journey, incapable of writing his own elegy, Goethe repeats a poem that repeats a night – a night, in turn, that repeats that initial night, when Goethe stole himself away from Karlsbad. And just as Ovid recalls that night of banishment from a position of exile, so Goethe recalls his night of banishment at his desk in Weimar. Thus, Goethe appears to offer a stunning example of what he memorably designates as 'wiederholte Spiegelungen': Decades after he left Rome, Goethe recalls his recollection of Ovid's recollection, which recalls the night with which the journey began. The poetic gesture is not without ambivalence. On the one hand, by establishing this mirrored analogy, Goethe aims to achieve a masterful transformation,

6 FA I, 15 1/2, 596.

which, as he famously describes it, "das Vergangene nicht allein lebendig erhalten, sondern sogar zu einem höheren Leben empor steigern [kann]."[7] While on the other hand, any analogy so posited – above all a *recollection of a recollection* – reveals a quality of incommensurability or incompatibility, which disrupts the reabsorption into an integral whole.[8]

A series of specular and ultimately ambivalent repetitions therefore lies at the core of the *Italienische Reise* and reveals how the specific character of this autobiographical project appears to corroborate the assessment of 'late style' as Theodor Adorno portrays it. In order to ascertain with greater precision the quality of this *Spätstil*, we should consider the very last page of Goethe's account, where two passages from the third poem of the first book of Ovid's *Tristia* are cited, first in verse translation and then in the original Latin:

> Wandelt von jener Nacht mir das traurige Bild vor die Seele,
> Welche die letzte für mich ward in der römischen Stadt,
> Wiederhol' ich die Nacht, wo des Teuren so viel mir zurückblieb,
> Gleitet vom Auge mir noch jetzt eine Träne herab.
> Und schon ruhten bereits die Stimmen der Menschen und Hunde,
> Luna, sie lenkt' in der Höh' nächtliches Rossegespann.
> Zu ihr schaut' ich hinan, sah dann capitolische Tempel,
> Welchen umsonst so nah' unsere Laren gegrenzt. –
>
> Cum subit illius tristissima noctis imago,
> Quae mihi supremum tempus in Urbe fuit;
> Cum repeto noctem, quâ tot mihi cara reliqui;
> Labitur ex oculis nunc quoque gutta meis.
> Iamque quiescebant voces homniumque canumque:
> Lunaque nocturnos alta regebat equos.
> Hanc ego suspiciens, et ab hac Capitolia cernens,
> Quae nostro frustra iuncta fuêre Lari. – [9]

Goethe thus concludes his long account neither in German nor in Italian, but rather in classical Latin. This gesture demonstrates how the Italian journey established the author's classicism and further points to the central role that Ovid plays in his classicizing aspirations, for example in the *Römische Elegien* and elsewhere.

7 FA I, 17, 371.

8 On this problem of incommensurability in Goethe's work, see Hermann Schmitz: *Goethes Altersdenken im problemgeschichtlichen Zusammenhang*. Bonn 2008 (Reprint of the original edition from 1959), p. 251, and Volker Zumbrink: *Metamorphosen des kranken Königssohns. Die Shakespeare-Rezeption in Goethes Romanen "Wilhelm Meisters theatralische Sendung" und "Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre."* Münster 1997, p. 411.

9 Ovid: *Tristia* 1.3, v. 1–4, v. 27–30.

Here, on the final page of the *Italienische Reise,* Ovid's elegy vividly rehearses the "saddest image" (*tristissima imago*) of his last night in the city of Rome, when he had to leave behind so much that was dear to him. The image of "that night" (*illius noctis*) "draws near" or even "approaches stealthily" (*subit*) – a movement under wraps, sudden and rash, recalling the scene of hasty escape with which the *Reise* began. In the translation prepared for Goethe by his old acquaintance, the philologist Friedrich Wilhelm Riemer, the notion of something coming to mind surreptitiously, expressed by the Latin *subire*, is rendered as "wandeln vor die Seele," whereby the image is portrayed as sneaking into the interior space of consciousness. Around 1800, the verb *wandeln* retained its early connotations of shiftiness, clandestine wandering and transformation, specifically as a weakened form of *wenden* and cognate with *wandern* and *verwandeln*.[10] These implicit connotations all the more reach back to the initial episode, when Goethe – ever the *Wanderer* – stole himself away in the dead of night, longing for rebirth.

For Ovid, the very thought of that painful event of exile, as it wends its way into the poet's soul, "even now" (*nunc quoque*) still brings a tear to his eye. Relegated to the furthest border of the Empire, the poet is devastated, having been put out of play. And yet, the "tear" (*gutta*) that flows from his eyes, also conjures the tiny dot-like ornaments (*guttae*) that adorn Rome's Doric columns directly beneath the triglyphs of the architrave. Although appearing to be a rather insignificant architectural detail, the *guttae* ostensibly protect the columns from water damage. The exiled poet thereby associates himself with a miniscule component of an Empire that has banished him as unnecessary, an Empire that fails to recognize that its mighty political structure still relies on the singular citizen to prevent erosion. Thus, Ovid, the marginalized individual, "even now" performs a functional role at the very center of imperial life. A sole column, detached from every temple, stands upon the shores of the Black Sea, recalling the daunting silence that accompanied his banishment and the bright moon that illuminated the home, which is no longer his home.

In his citation, Goethe gives no indication that he is combining two separate passages from the same poem: lines 1–4, then lines 27–30. The ellipsis itself is elided. A consideration of the verses left out would, at least to a certain point, reinforce the connection with the opening scene of the *Italian Journey*, when Goethe stole himself away from Karlsbad. In the intermittent lines not quoted by Goethe, Ovid reports how he had neither sufficient time nor inclination to prepare for the journey (*nec spatium nec mens fuerat satis apta parandi*),[11] which

10 Cf. the entry "wandeln" in DWb, Vol. 27, col. 1587–1640.
11 Ovid: *Tristia* 1.3, v. 7.

calls to mind Goethe's apparently impulsive decision to leave his home, "packing only a small bag and a satchel." Ovid, too, did not bother to take along "the clothes and gear an exile needs" (*non aptae profugo vestis opisve fuit*).[12] However, whereas Goethe left Karlsbad without a proper goodbye to those close to him, Ovid relates how he bid farewell to his grieving friends, who moan and mourn. In this case, Ovid's words more exactly resemble Goethe's final days in Rome, when he took care to tell his friends of his departure.

To be sure, suggesting a parallel between Goethe's voluntary self-exile and Ovid's compulsory banishment is a rather bold move. Nonetheless, by citing Ovid's poem to close off his book, Goethe executes a gesture that correlates the abandonment of Germany for Italy with the abandonment of Italy for Germany. The analogy established by this forceful repetition at the book's end thus reinterprets the secret flight described at the book's start. If Goethe's final departure from the Italian city is formulated as a kind of exile, then his initial escape from the German village constitutes an exile from exile. This reinterpretation very much belongs to the main plot of the *Italienische Reise*, in which the initially "strange" or "foreign" South becomes "proper" or "familiar," especially after Goethe returns to Rome after an extended stay in Naples in Sicily. Upon his arrival back in the Italian capital, Goethe writes to his friends:

> Mir geht es sehr wohl, ich finde mich immer mehr in mich zurück und lerne unterscheiden was mir eigen und was mir fremd ist. [. . .] Jetzt fangen erst die Bäume, die Felsen, ja Rom selbst an mir lieb zu werden; bisher hab' ich sie immer nur als fremd gefühlt; dagegen freuten mich geringe Gegenstände, die mit denen Ähnlichkeit hatten, die ich in der Jugend sah.[13]

The return to Rome, therefore, is now felt to be a homecoming in the strongest sense, a place perfectly *eigen* rather than *fremd*, deeply linked to the writer's childhood, when young Goethe marveled at the many mementos collected by his father during his own *Viaggio per l'Italia*. Despite his father's frequent urgings and despite many excellent opportunities to do so, Goethe refrained from traveling across the Alps, at least until his thirty-seventh birthday, when he finally stole himself away to his spiritual homeland: "Es ist nur Ein Rom in der Welt, und ich befinde mich hier wie der Fisch im Wasser und schwimme oben wie eine Stückkugel im Quecksilber, die in jedem andern Fluido untergeht."[14] For Goethe, to leave this enchanted city constituted the gravest of

12 Ovid: *Tristia* 1.3, v. 10.
13 FA I, 15 1/2, 375–376.
14 FA I, 15 1/2, 379–380.

banishments, where the poet was compelled to return to the asphyxiating atmosphere of the Weimar court. However, perhaps the tears he shed, like the architectural *guttae*, would provide sufficient evidence that he still belonged to and served some purpose in the Empire of art. Goethe provides no explicit account of his return to Germany in the *Italienische Reise*, yet he alludes to his re-entry in the *Metamorphose der Pflanzen* – a work directly inspired by his Italian excursions, which tellingly bears an Ovidian title: "Aus Italien dem formreichen war ich in das gestaltlose Deutschland zurückgewiesen, heiteren Himmel mit einem düsteren zu vertauschen; [. . .] niemand verstand meine Sprache."[15] The comment perfectly reverses the ascription of *eigen* and *fremd*: if he were once a German living in Italy, he now sees himself as an Italian living in Germany, speaking an entirely different language.[16] The *Italienische Reise* is a record of this thorough *Verfremdungseffekt*, written within the perceived context of cultural isolation.

Soon after his arrival back at Weimar, Goethe had come to link Ovid's verses to his retreat from the Italian capital. Already in the winter of 1788, Goethe describes his last days in Rome, confessing to Herder:

> Mit welcher Rührung ich des Ovids Verse oft wiederhole, kann ich dir nicht sagen:
> Cum subit illius tristissima noctis imago,
> Quae mihi supremum tempus in urbe fuit.
>
> Ich fühle nur zu sehr, was ich verloren habe, seit ich mich aus jenem Elemente wieder hierher versetzt sehe [. . .].[17]

Nearly forty years later, as he was preparing the third and final part of the *Italienische Reise*, Goethe still approached that last night in Rome with the same sense of ineffability and with the same Ovidian lines imposing themselves upon his memory:

> Bei meinem Abschied aus Rom empfand ich Schmerzen einer eignen Art. Diese Hauptstadt der Welt, deren Bürger man eine Zeitlang gewesen, ohne Hoffnung der Rückkehr zu verlassen, giebt ein Gefühl, das sich durch Worte nicht überliefern läßt. Niemand vermag es zu theilen als wer es empfunden. Ich wiederholte mir in diesem Augenblicke immer und immer Ovids Elegie, die er dichtete, als die Erinnerung eines ähnlichen Schicksals ihn bis am Ende der bewohnten Welt verfolgte. Jene Distichen wälzen sich zwischen meinen Empfindungen immer auf und ab. *Cum subit illius*

15 FA I, 24, 414–415.

16 On this point, see Thomas O. Beebee: "Ways of Seeing Italy: Landscapes of Nation in Goethe's *Italienische Reise* and its Counter-Narratives." In: *Monatshefte* 94.3 (2002), pp. 322–345, here p. 327.

17 Goethe to Herder, 27. December 1788 (FA II, 3, 452).

> *tristissima noctis imago* [. . .]. Nicht lange jedoch konnte ich mir jenen fremden Ausdruck eigner Empfindung wiederholen, als ich genöthigt war ihn meiner Persönlichkeit, meiner Lage im besonderen anzuzeigen. [. . .] Doch scheute ich mich auch nur eine Zeile zu schreiben, aus Furcht, der zarte Duft inniger Schmerzen möchte verschwinden.[18]

The Latin verse, notable for its anaphora (*cum subit illius tristissima noctis imago* [. . .] *cum repeto noctem*), forces itself upon the author's consciousness with relentless repetition, *immer und immer*. As a poet who has suffered a "similar fate," Goethe feels compelled to compose his own elegy to express his pain. He strives to display his "Persönlichkeit," by transforming "that foreign expression of his own sentiment" into a text that would present his own, singular experience. Yet, as an older man, he fears that the inner pain of separation – a pain that he clearly cherishes – might disappear, should it be consigned to his own poem. Instead, for the final edition of the *Italienische Reise* of 1829, for the *Ausgabe letzter Hand*, Goethe contacts his colleague Riemer, to request a metrical translation of Ovid's verses:

> Verzeihen Sie ein eignes Ersuchen oder vielmehr eine wunderliche Zumuthung: ich bedarf einer deutschen metrischen Übersetzung beykommender sechs ovidischen Verse, finde aber hiezu nicht den mindesten rhythmischen Anklang in meinem ganzen Wesen. Möchten Sie mir damit aushelfen, so geschähe mir ein besonderer Gefallen.[19]

Rather than compose a poem to express his "personality" – a poem he apparently could not write – or, perhaps, rather than dispel the ineffability that respected his inner pain, old Goethe resigned to his impotence and repeated a repetition, letting the metrical rhythm of the "foreign expression," translated by another hand, stand in place of his own sentiment.

Yielding the demands of personal expression to external form – letting the material speak for itself – is, for Adorno, an earmark of 'late style.' Indeed, for Adorno, it is a mistake to attribute the fissured quality of late works as "Produkte der rücksichtslos sich bekundenden Subjektivität oder lieber noch 'Persönlichkeit.'"[20] Although his essay on late style in *Moments musicaux* deals specifically with examples from Beethoven, Adorno draws an analogy to the late work of Goethe, particularly to the second part of *Faust* and to *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*, where one discerns "die Konventionen, die von Subjektivität nicht mehr durchdrungen und bewältigt, sondern stehen gelassen

18 WA I, 32, 428.

19 Goethe to Riemer, April 2, 1829 (WA IV, 45, 229).

20 Theodor W. Adorno: "Spätstil Beethovens." [1934] In: T.W.A.: *Gesammelte Schriften*. Vol. 17: *Musikalische Schriften IV*. Ed by Rolf Tiedemann. Frankfurt/Main 1982, p. 13–17, here p. 13.

sind."[21] In Adorno's assessment, conventional material – material from sources other than the poet's subjective expressiveness – not only betokens the impotence of the aged artist but also the artist's close relation to death. "Vom Tode berührt, gibt die meisterliche Hand die Stoffmassen frei, die sie zuvor formte; die Risse und Sprünge darin, Zeugnis der endlichen Ohnmacht des Ichs vorm Seienden, sind ihr letztes Werk."[22] Accordingly, near the end of his life, Goethe allows the heterogeneous text of Ovid's *Tristia* to have the last word. The repetition compulsion, noted above, readily signals a death drive.

Calling attention to the proximity of death motivates a specific reading of the epigraph to the *Italienische Reise*: "Auch ich in Arkadien." In his brief but authoritative interpretation of the Latin motto, *Et in Arcadia ego*, Erwin Panofsky attributes the elegiac reading, "I, too, once lived in delightful Arcady," to a tradition initiated by the English painter Richard Wilson and perpetuated by Félibien, the Abbé du Bos, and Diderot, who presumably guided Goethe's sense of the line. Here, Goethe would appear to be alerting the reader that he once spent time in the pleasant climes of the South. For Panofsky, this humanistic-elegiac tradition moves away from the earlier, medieval understanding of the phrase, which operates as a *memento mori*, where the *ego* is Death personified: "Even I, Death, am present in Arcadia."[23] Yet, reading the *Italienische Reise* with Adorno, one may conclude that the ego of the epigraph is in fact Death, or at least the late-style author who is already dead. In the intermittent verses of Ovid's *Tristia*, not printed in Goethe's citation, on that last night in Rome, the poet was, indeed, mourned as dead. Moreover, this darker interpretation of *Et in Arcadia ego* is clearly at work in the eponymous painting by Guercino, whom Goethe, himself an aspiring painter at the time, singles out as a consummate artist, whose paintings display "eine zarte moralische Grazie, eine ruhige Freiheit und Großheit, dabei etwas eignes, daß man seine Werke, wenn man einmal das Auge darauf gebildet hat, nicht verkennen wird."[24]

Das Eigene is precisely what Goethe hopes to discover in his Italian sojourn and it may be what he mourns as an older man, long exiled in Weimar. Curiously, this search for his own, proper creativity appears to take the specific form of a search for figs, as though that which could be *eigen* had been metaphorically and literally re-marked as *Feigen*. Already at the head of his journey, in Regensburg, Goethe confesses the specifics of his hunger: "Gute Birnen hab'

21 Adorno: "Spätstil Beethovens" (see fn. 20), p. 16.
22 Adorno: "Spätstil Beethovens" (see fn. 20), p. 15.
23 Erwin Panofsky: "'Et in Arcadia ego': Poussin and the Elegiac Tradition." In: E.P.: *Meaning and the Visual Arts. Papers in and on Art History*. Garden City, NY 1955, pp. 295–320.
24 FA I, 15 1/2, 109–110.

ich gespeist; aber ich sehne mich nach Trauben und Feigen."[25] In the very next entry, now from Munich, Goethe writes: "Es begenete mir eine Frau mit Feigen, welche als die ersten vortrefflich schmeckten. Aber das Obst überhaupt ist doch für den acht und vierzigsten Grad nicht besonders gut."[26] It is only when he reaches the Italian village of Torbole, that his search is fully gratified: "Hier traf ich auch zum erstenmal die weißen kleinen Feigen, als gemeine Frucht, welche mir die Gräfin Lanthieri verheißen hatte."[27] One may surmise it was this promise by the countess, a member of the party at Karlsbad, that instigated Goethe's decision to steal himself away.

The fig readily recalls many Classical and Christian traditions of birth and divine intervention: Romulus and Remus were suckled by the she-wolf beneath the shade of a giant fig tree; the fig worshipped at the center of the Roman Forum commemorated the place where Jupiter's lightning was buried[28]; while the fig further marked the site of Augustine's uncontrollable tears and radical conversion. In Italian, the word *fica* immediately bears erotically vulgar connotations – something not lost on the German ear. Yet, figs do not simply serve as an allegory for new life and what can be appropriated as creative vivacity. In the Hebrew Bible, the fig comes to be linked instead to human finitude and mortality. After the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, the fig is the third tree identified in the Book of Genesis, for it provides the leaves to cover mankind's nakedness after the Fall. Perhaps along these lines, Hölderlin – in his translation of the prologue to Euripides' *Bacchae* – exploited the similarity of the Greek word for fig (*sykos*) and the word for burial ground (*sēkos*).[29] Even before setting off for Italy, Goethe had recognized the ambiguous value of figs, its relation to both life and death. In a poem dated February 4, 1781, Goethe rehearses the Hesiodic distinction between the one who ventures out to sea and the one who stays put on his farm.

25 FA I, 15 1/2, 13.

26 FA I, 15 1/2, 15.

27 FA I, 15 1/2, 32.

28 Pliny the Elder (*C. Plini Secvndi Natvralis historiae libri XXXVII*. Vol. 2: *Libri VII–XV*. Ed. by Karl Mayhoff. Stuttgart 2002, p. 537) writes: *colitur ficus arbor in foro ipso ac comitio Romae nata sacra fulguribus ibi conditis magisque ob memoriam eius qua nutrix Romuli ac Remi conditores imperii in Lupercali prima protexit* ("A fig tree grown in the Forum itself and the Comitium at Rome is worshipped as sacred because lightning is buried there; and moreover in memory of it, by which the nurse of Romulus and Remus first sheltered these founders of the empire on the Lupercal Hill").

29 For a fuller analysis of this translation and its relation to Hölderlin's *Wie wenn am Feiertage*, which was composed on the same manuscript page, see John T. Hamilton: „Fulguratores: Lessing and Hölderlin." In: *Poetica* 33.3 (2001), pp. 445–464.

Im Abendrot liegt See und Himmel still
Dich lockt der West mit seinen leichten Flügeln,
Von seinen kaum erreichten Hügeln
Zurück ins Meer, das wieder Feigen will

Es siehts dein Freund und gönnt dir das Vergnügen,
Er wünscht dir auch in jeder Freude <Fremde?> Glück,
Sieht deine bunte schöne Wimpel fliegen
Und kehrt auf seinen Acker still zurück.

Dort treibt er sein Gewerb nicht ohne Sorgen,
Und schränkt sich ganz in seine Hecken ein,
Du warst gewarnt; du schienst geborgen,
Nun sei Gewinnst und auch Verlust sei dein.[30]

Whereas the venturesome friend may gain or lose everything at sea, the friend who limits himself to his safe field risks nothing and reaps only what he sows. It is this cautious voice that serves as the poem's narrator. In his view, the sea entices with its stillness, which causes the enterprising man to forget the dangers of shipwreck, that the sea makes itself appear inviting because it is hungry for figs. Hans Blumenberg traces the poem's principal figure back to the *Adagia* of Erasmus, which includes the story of a Sicilian sailor, who suffered a horrible shipwreck and lost his entire cargo of figs. Subsequently, while sitting on the shore, he admires the peacefulness of the sea, yet resists its allure, crying: οἶδ' ὃ θέλεις, σῦκα θέλεις ("I know what you want, you want figs!"). For Erasmus, the moral lesson is for all those who flirt with the idea of exposing themselves to grave danger despite their own experience.[31]

The sea can gratify its appetite for figs because there will be always courageous voyagers, who are themselves hungry for the fruit. For spirited souls, the risk is not denied but rather boldly accepted. As early as 1774, Goethe used the figure to describe his restless desire for distant lands, writing to Sophie La Roche: "Es mag eine Zeit kommen da ich wieder ins Haus gehe. Das Meer verlangt Feigen! sag ich noch iezzo, und lasse nich[t] davon."[32] Yet, the poem cited above is not merely about the menacing nature of adventure, it is also about how the intrepid traveler must divorce himself from his circle of friends who remain at home. In the *Italienische Reise*, sailing back from Sicily, the author recounts

30 FA I, 2, 257–258.
31 See Hans Blumenberg: *Die Sorge geht über den Fluß*. Frankfurt/Main 1987, pp. 26–27.
32 Goethe to Sophie La Roche, November 20, 1774 (FA II, 1, 403).

how narrowly indeed he and his fellow passengers avoided disaster as their vessel approached the island of Capri:

> Gebet und Klagen wechselten ab und der Zustand wuchs um so schauerlicher da nun oben auf den Felsen die Ziegenhirten, deren Feuer man schon längst gesehen hatte, hohl aufschrien: da unten strande das Schiff! Sie riefen einander noch viel' unverständliche Töne zu, in welchen einige, mit der Sprache bekannt, zu vernehmen glaubten, als freuten sie sich auf manche Beute die sie am andern Morgen aufzufischen gedächten.[33]

At this terrifying moment, the fate of Erasmus's Sicilian sailor could not have been more vivid – a traumatic experience that would color the calm of the morning after: "Als ich früh am vierten Tage unserer Fahrt erwachte, befand ich mich frisch und gesund, so wie ich auch bei der Überfahrt zu eben dieser Epoche gewesen war".[34] The early hour corresponds to the early departure that opened the journey, marking yet another new dawn, another adventure, in spite of all the danger.

A few years before publishing the *Italienische Reise*, Goethe had recourse again to the ancient adage, now in a difficult attempt to console his friend, Karl Friedrich Zelter, who was mourning the suicide of his stepson:

> Ich weiß recht gut, was es mich für Entschlüsse und Anstrengungen kostete, damals den Wellen des Todes zu entkommen, sowie ich mich aus manchem spätern Schiffbruch auch mühsam rettete und mühselig erholte. Und so sind nun alle die Schiffer- und Fischergeschichten. Man gewinnt nach dem nächtlichen Sturm das Ufer wieder, der Durchnetzte trocknet sich, und den andern Morgen, wenn die herrliche Sonne auf den glänzenden Wogen abermals hervortritt, hat das Meer schon wieder Appetit zu Feigen.[35]

While these remarks constitute a rather questionable effort to provide solace to a bereaved friend, the elderly author of *Werther* still recalls the stormy night that he narrowly escaped – a dreadful ordeal that he managed to transmute into literary success. The selfsame endeavor is discernible in the autobiographical project of the *Italienische Reise*. Poetic achievement falls to those who are capable of surviving the nocturnal anguish, to those who retain the *tristissima noctis imago*.

For the younger man, the longing for sweet fruit expressed ("ich sehne mich nach Trauben und Feigen"), however much it plays into the fatal hands of vora-

33 FA I, 15.1, 341.

34 FA I, 15.1, 342.

35 Goethe to Karl Friedrich Zelter, December 3, 1812 (FA II, 7, 133).

cious nature, requires the resolve to cut oneself off from familiar surroundings, a resolve that will ultimately revalue the familiar as the foreign, transforming one's previous home into a place of exile: "Niemand verstand meine Sprache." However, for the older man – for the autobiographer who gathers his recollections of a journey forty years before – what is properly one's own may ultimately succumb to the material force of the foreign. Once intent on winning the fruits of artistic labor, the aged writer is left with a late style that may consign his subjective expression to a silent tomb, leaving the foreign material to speak for itself and in the writer's stead. At the head of his essay on Beethoven's "Spätstil," Adorno is perfectly clear: "Die Reife der Spätwerke bedeutender Künstler gleicht nicht der von Früchten."[36]

36 Adorno: "Spätstil Beethovens" (see fn. 20), p. 13.