

*Subversive Sublimities:
Undercurrents
of the German
Enlightenment*

Edited by
Eitel Timm

C A M D E N H O U S E

Arnd Bohm

The Desublimated Body: Gottfried August Bürger

IF ONE WERE TEMPTED to sum up the most profound development in the study of eighteenth-century texts of the last twenty years, a possible response would be “the return of the body.” From various disciplines and for diverse reasons, there is a new awareness of the fact that human existence begins with embodiment and that relations — personal, family, social, economic or political — begin with our individual physical being.¹ The importance attached to such apparently simple insights would have baffled observers from earlier eras, as it puzzled non-European cultures. Why all the fuss? The answer resides in the complex intertwining of the history of the rise of the middle class in Europe with a puritanizing campaign aimed at covering, disciplining and defining the body.

Nowhere was the triumph of the mind (“Geist”) more secure than in the German territories of the eighteenth century, where the middle class was able to assert itself in both directions, against rulers and against the peasants. A basic contradiction between freedom and license resulted from the fact that by enforcing disciplines of the body upon rulers, the bourgeoisie was able to gain a measure of autonomy. As for the peasantry, they were subjected to increasing control of their bodies — exemplified in the tragic history of the treatment of unwed mothers²

¹ Nothing approximating a complete list of relevant works is possible. Major points of triangulation are provided by Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1979); Dorinda Outram, *The Body and the French Revolution: Sex, Class and Political Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale UP); Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); and John O’Neill, *Five Bodies: The Human Shape of Modern Society* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1985).

² On unwed mothers and infanticide as a theme in German literature of the time, see Hamilton Beck, “Of Two Minds About the Death Penalty: Hippel’s Account of a Case of Infanticide,” *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 18 (1988): 123-140; and Helga Stipa Madland, “Infanticide as Fiction: Goethe’s *Urfaust* and Schiller’s ‘Kindsmörderin’ as Models,” *The German Quarterly* 62.1 (1989): 27-38. For a socio-historical perspective, see David Sabean, “Unehelichkeit: Ein Aspekt sozialer Reproduktion kleinbäuerlicher Produzenten: Zu einer Analyse dörflicher Quellen um 1800,” in *Klassen und Kultur: Sozialanthropologische Perspektiven in der Geschichtsschreibung*, ed. Robert M. Berdahl, et. al. (Frankfurt a. M.: Syndikat, 1982): 54-76. An overview of the theory

— under the rubric of “improvement.” The intellectual components of the bourgeois program were the elaboration of extreme philosophical idealism and, in the sphere of literature, the ideal of a “classical” norm for embodied behavior.³ The paradigm of German literary classicism was Goethe’s drama *Iphigenie auf Tauris* (1799-80), where the repression of private feelings and physical desires is exalted: good deeds are to result from self-denial and a harmonious society will be composed of disembodied souls.⁴

There was another side to Goethe, of course.⁵ But the alliance of idealistic philosophy and the norms of the *Klassik* have made it especially difficult to recover any body-related themes for German literary history of the eighteenth century.⁶ Without Swift, Fielding, Rousseau or de Sade, obvious gateways where-

of practical Enlightenment by the state is provided in Marc Raeff’s *The Well-Ordered Police State: Social and Institutional Change through Law in the Germanies and Russia, 1600-1800* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1983): 43-179.

³ On the background to the German concept of “Klassik,” see Reinhold Grimm and Jost Hermand, eds., *Die Klassik-Legende* (Frankfurt a. M.: Athenäum, 1971), and in particular Max L. Bacumer’s essay “Der Begriff ‘klassisch’ bei Goethe und Schiller,” 17-49. Although a central text for the *Klassik* was Winckelmann’s *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerei und Bildhauerkunst* (1756), little mention was made of his insistence upon the priority of the body — and the nude body — for the Greek ideal of beauty.

⁴ Thus, Kenneth D. Weisinger, *The Classical Façade: A Nonclassical Reading of Goethe’s Classicism* (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State UP, 1988), p. 102, continues to ask “Can in fact the ethical be grounded in the purely human?” And Ursula Segebrecht, “Götter, Helden und Goethe: Zur Geschichtsdeutung in Goethes *Iphigenie auf Tauris*,” in *Klassik und Moderne: Die Weimarer Klassik als historisches Ereignis und Herausforderung im kulturgeschichtlichen Prozeß*, ed. Karl Richter and Jörg Schönert (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1983): 175-193, comes to the position “Zum Handeln herausgefordert, zeigt Iphigenie ihr neues Menschsein zu allererst darin, daß sie dort, wo es um den Menschen geht und sein Recht zu leben, gesellschaftliche Bedingungen, gesellschaftliche Rollenzwänge nicht zu übernehmen bereit ist, sondern aus ihnen austritt und ihnen gegenüber die *Freiheit der Person* behauptet” (185). It is an odd notion that one can be “purely human” or a “free person” without a body.

⁵ See for example Chapter 3, “Satanskult: *Walpurgisnacht*,” in Albrecht Schöne, *Götterzeichen-Liebeszauber-Satanskult: Neuer Einblick in alte Goethetexte* (München: C. H. Beck, 1982): 107-230.

⁶ The German discussion, in connection primarily with the 18th century, may be charted via Erika Fischer-Lichte, “Theatre and the Civilizing Process: An Approach to the History of Acting,” in *Interpreting the Theatrical Past: Essays in the Historiography of Performance*, ed. Thomas Postlewait and Bruce A. McConachie (Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1989): 19-36; Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, “‘Mens Sana’ und ‘Körperloses Spiel’/ ‘Sinnloses Treten’ und ‘In Corpore Sano,’” *Sprache im technischen Zeitalter* 92 (December 1984): 262-278; Utz Jaeggli, “Im Schatten des Körpers: Vorüberlegungen zu einer Volkskunde der Körperlichkeit,” *Zeitschrift für Volkskunde* 76.2 (1980): 169-188; Wolfgang Kemp, “Die Beredsamkeit des Leibes: Körpersprache als künstlerisches und gesellschaftliches Problem der bürgerlichen Emanzipation,” *Städte-Jahrbuch* NF 5 (1975): 111-134; Gert Mattenklott, “Körperpolitik oder das Schwinden der Sinne,” in “*Postmoderne*” oder *Der Kampf um die Zukunft: Die Kontroverse in Wissenschaft, Kunst und Gesellschaft*, ed. Peter Kemper

by the body might be recovered for discourse, German literary history continues to occlude the body.⁷ Against this background, it is necessary to re-assess the negative reception granted a writer like Gottfried August Bürger, for his open reliance upon sensuality, his frequent public allusions to the wants and symptoms of the body, and his carnivalization of the body in texts remain an embarrassment to the established view of German literature. More than that, Bürger's reminders that politics originates in the body place him within a radical tradition near the German Jacobins and later writers such as Georg Büchner and Bertolt Brecht.

Bürger (1747-1794) is marginalized in being remembered, if at all, either as the author of the popular ballad "Leonore"⁸ or as the object of a devastating review of his works by Friedrich Schiller in 1789. Unlike J.M.R. Lenz or Büchner, whose sad personal lives have achieved a certain legendary status, and with whom Bürger had much in common, his career is hardly known. His pathetic death in 1794 at the age of 47, pleading with the University of Göttingen for some small financial assistance to stave off hunger, ended a life which should be better known as an example of the harsh reality of literary professions in the eighteenth century.⁹ The surface reasons for Bürger's obscurity are not hard to find. First, there were the negative pronouncements upon him made not only by Schiller, but also by Goethe, typically the kiss of death in German letters. Goethe coldly described Bürger's ultimate failure as true to type: "Es ist traurig anzusehen, wie ein außerordentlicher Mensch sich gar oft mit sich selbst, seinen Umständen, seiner Zeit herumwürgt, ohne auf einen Zweig zu kommen: Trauriges Beispiel Bürger."¹⁰

(Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1988): 231-252; and Liliane Weissberg, "Language's Wound: Herder, Philoctetes and the Origin of Speech," *Modern Language Notes* 104.3 (1989): 548-579.

⁷ A major attack on the absence of the body in idealist German philosophy has been made by Peter Sloterdijk, *Kritik der zynischen Vernunft* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1983).

⁸ See the reclamation of Bürger for the canon by Gert Ueding, "Von der unheilbaren Liebe als Stimulans der Poesie: Der Dichter Gottfried August Bürger," in his *Die anderen Klassiker: Literarische Porträts aus zwei Jahrhunderten* (München: C.H. Beck, 1986): 13-34; and Lore Kaim-Kloock, *Gottfried August Bürger: Zum Problem der Volkstümlichkeit in der Lyrik* (Berlin: Rütten & Loening, 1963): 170-205. "Lenore" also had a considerable reception in England, as documented by Evelyn B. Jolles, *G.A. Bürger's Ballade "Lenore" in England* (Regensburg: Verlag Hans Carl, 1974).

⁹ On Bürger's life, see Günter Häntzschel, *Gottfried August Bürger* (München: C. H. Beck, 1988); Gerhard Kluge, "Gottfried August Bürger," in *Deutsche Dichter des 18. Jahrhunderts: Ihr Leben und Werk*, ed. Benno von Wiese (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1977): 594-618; and Wm. A. Little, *Gottfried August Bürger* (New York: Twayne, 1974).

¹⁰ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Werke: Hamburger Ausgabe in 14 Bänden*, ed. Erich Trunz, Vol. 12: *Schriften zur Kunst*, ed. Erich Trunz with Herbert von Einem (München: DTV, 1982): 531.

Then there has been the problem of the lack of a comprehensive edition of Bürger's works.¹¹ Finally, it is only recently that it has become theoretically possible to cope with Bürger's work, for his was a voice from below, and German literary historians have not been keen to hear from the underground.

Ironically, Bürger had very much wanted to be known as a spokesman for the people. It was in relation to the "Volk" that he had introduced himself in the 1789 collection of his poems:

In dem Sinne, wie ich ein Volksdichter, oder lieber ein populärer Dichter zu sein wünsche, ist Homer, wegen der spiegelhellen Durchsichtigkeit und Temperatur seines Gesangstromes, der größte Volksdichter aller Völker und Zeiten, sind es, mehr oder weniger, alle großen Dichter, auch die unsrigen, und gerade in ihren allgemein geliebtesten und unsterblichen Versen, unendlich mehr als ich gewesen.¹² (C I: 8-9)

By positing himself as a "popular poet," Bürger helped to provoke the negative response from Schiller which disputed the validity of Bürger's claim to the title. According to Schiller, Bürger could not be a genuine poet of the people because his work remained too bound to its personal and idiosyncratic origins. What Schiller required was rather an abstracted attitude:

Als der aufgeklärte, verfeinerte *Wortführer der Volksgefühle* würde er dem hervorströmenden, Sprache suchenden Affekt der Liebe, der Freude, der Andacht, der Traurigkeit, der Hoffnung u.a.m. einen reinem und geistreichern Text unterlegen; er würde, indem er ihnen den Ausdruck lieh, sich zum Herrn dieser Affekte machen und ihren rohen, gestaltlosen, oft tierischen Ausbruch noch auf den Lippen des Volks veredeln.¹³

The genealogy of Schiller's ideas derived as much from his medical training as from aesthetic theory.¹⁴ Neither had any place for bodies which were not perfect and exemplary. Therapeutics and aesthetics combined in Schiller's proposition that the poet's task should be, and Bürger's should have been, to produce "entire beings" in literature:

¹¹ The gap was only partially filled with the appearance of the *Sämliche Werke* (München: Hanser, 1987), edited by Günter and Hiltrud Häntzschel.

¹² Johann Gottfried Bürger, *Bürgers Gedichte in zwei Teilen*, ed. Ernst Consentius (Berlin and Leipzig: Deutsches Verlagshaus Bong & Co., [1914]): 1: 8-9. References to this edition will be made parenthetically as *Gedichte*, with volume and page numbers.

¹³ Friedrich Schiller, "Über Bürgers Gedichte," in F. Schiller, *Werke in drei Bänden*, ed. Herbert G. Göpfert with Gerhard Fricke (München: Hanser, 1981): II: 627-638, here p. 630.

¹⁴ See John Neubauer, "The Freedom of the Machine: On Mechanism, Materialism, and the Young Schiller," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 15.1 (1981): 275-290; and Walter Hinderer, "Utopische Elemente in Schiller's ästhetischer Anthropologie," in *Literarische Utopie-Entwürfe*, ed. Hiltrud Gnüg (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1982): 173-186.

Bei der Vereinzelung und getrennten Wirksamkeit unsrer Geisteskräfte, die der erweiterte Kreis des Wissens und die Absonderung der Berufsgeschäfte notwendig macht, ist es die Dichtkunst beinahe allein, welche die getrennten Kräfte der Seele wieder in Vereinigung bringt, welche Kopf und Herz, Scharfsinn und Witz, Vernunft und Einbildungskraft in harmonischem Bunde beschäftigt, welche gleichsam den *ganzen Menschen* in uns wieder herstellt.¹⁵

Schiller sees the problems of the "whole person" in terms of the mind which has been fragmented by specialized knowledge and must be reunified. In the process, actual lived experience would become irrelevant.¹⁶ All sensations are to be subordinated to the abstract mind, if necessary by sheer willpower. The body is doubly displaced in Schiller's program, for even where sensations can be integrated into the text, they must be those of an idealized presence — a pure vessel filled with laudable sentiments. Given such premises, it followed that Schiller should also have objected to what he considered Bürger's illegitimate intermingling of popular elements into the text: "Hr. B *vermischt* sich nicht selten mit dem Volk, zu dem er sich herablassen sollte, und anstatt es scherzend und spielend zu sich hinaufzuziehen, gefällt es ihm oft, sich ihm gleich zu machen."¹⁷ For the idealist Schiller, Bürger's error was to identify with the people as they lived, when he should have set his work above experience, in order to offer as a utopian goal the idealized community of a timeless German readership. The larger context for Schiller's criticism was his adherence to and advocacy of the aesthetics of the sublime, with which he strove to defend the autonomy of art and poetry. What Schiller could perceive but not tolerate was the contrary aesthetic upon which Bürger had developed.¹⁸

Bürger admittedly had not helped his case through the introduction to his collection, which was intended as something of an advertisement. He was quite aware of the influence of criticism and of the supremacy of the ideals of the Weimar Classicists. He was also well-versed in dissembling, after years of trying

¹⁵ Schiller, "Über Bürgers Gedichte," II: 627.

¹⁶ "Nur die heitre, die ruhige Seele gebiert das Vollkommene. Kampf mit äußern Lagen und Hypochondrie, welche überhaupt jede Geisteskraft lähmen, dürfen am allerwenigsten das Gemüt des Dichters belasten, der sich von der Gegenwart loswickeln und frei und kühn in die Welt der Ideale emporschweben soll. Wenn es auch noch so sehr in seinem Busen stürmt, so müsse Sonnenklarheit seine Stirne umfließen." Schiller, "Über Bürgers Gedichte," 2: 638.

¹⁷ Schiller, "Über Bürgers Gedichte," 2: 631.

¹⁸ Because the basic assumption is that Schiller must have been correct in his *interpretation* of Bürger, commentaries on the controversy tend to side with Schiller. See for example Walter Hinderer, "Schiller und Bürger: Die ästhetische Kontroverse als Paradigma," *Jahrbuch des Freien Deutschen Hochstifts* (1986): 130-154; and Helmut Koopmann, "Der Dichter als Kunstrichter: Zu Schillers Rezensionstrategie," *Jahrbuch der Deutschen Schillergesellschaft* 20 (1976): 229-246, here pp. 243-244. Rather more open to Bürger's position is Jürgen Bolten, *Friedrich Schiller: Poesie, Reflexion und gesellschaftliche Selbsteutung* (München: Fink, 1985): 195-201.

to adapt to the public demands of bourgeois conventionality. Nothing could be more typical of this dissembling than the "confession" in which Bürger stated that he was speaking too much about himself: "Es thut mir leid, daß ich hier so viel von mir selbst reden muß, welches, wie ich wohl weiß, nicht fein läßt. Ich bin mir indessen bewußt, daß ich von mir selbst so unbefangen und gleichgültig, als von einem fremden Manne rede" (*Gedichte* 1: 9). Yes, Bürger was speaking of himself "as if he were speaking of a stranger," precisely because in the effort to establish his public persona, he could not reveal much about Bürger the person. Schiller was quick to pick on the difference between the role and the person, and to notice that while the introduction invoked a poetry dedicated to the cause of the sublime, the poems undermined the pretense. Bürger's aesthetic was not based upon the sublime but upon an aesthetics localized in the lived body, whence it might manifest itself as the beautiful, the ordinary, the grotesque or even the ugly. Furthermore, the bodies which now appeared in the texts were those of the "Volk" as common people, those who were neither aristocrats nor members of the middle classes, but lived at the bottom and margins of eighteenth-century society. In the extended discussion of the contribution which Bürger made to German literature by re-invigorating the ballad as a genre, this dimension has generally been overlooked. Yet it is important. Bürger's insertion of the embodied experience of marginalized members of society represented a politics and poetics of transgression. In Bürger it is possible to observe the dissolution of the bond between the subjected bourgeois body and literary textualization.¹⁹

The three elements which repeatedly returned Bürger to the lived body as the locus of production, both of texts and of history, were poverty, sickness, and sexuality. There can be no doubt that a man who until his death was continually struggling to make ends meet, to be able to buy food and keep a roof over his head, was aware of corporeal existence most directly. The body could not be kept at a distance by theorizing or idealizing under such dire conditions. Illness, exacerbated by poor diet and overwork, was also a constant in Bürger's life, as his letters frequently testify. For example, he wrote to his publisher Dieterich on March 5, 1781:

Stelle dir den Jammer vor! Alle von 1ten Januar 1748 an begangene Sünden meines Madensacks brachen in einem ganz infamen Geschwür gerade über der Pulsader meiner rechten Hand hervor. In kurzem waren meine Hand und Arm so dick, wie mein Lende, und ich konte die Hand nicht so viel rühren, um nur einen

¹⁹ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: U of California P, 1984): 131-153; Frances Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body: Essays on Subjection* (London and New York: Methuen, 1984); and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, "Beginn von 'Literatur'/ Abschied vom Körper?" in *Der Ursprung von Literatur: Medien, Rollen, Kommunikationssituationen zwischen 1450 und 1650*, ed. Gisela Smolka-Koerdt, Peter M. Spangenberg, and Dagmar Tillmann-Bartylla (München: Fink, 1988): 15-50 map the intersection of bodies and texts in an exemplary fashion.

Buchstaben zu machen. Vorige Woche war die ärgste Marter Woche meines Lebens, das Geschwür ist endlich aufgegangen und bald wird der Schade wieder heil seyn.²⁰

From a psychoanalytic/psychosomatic perspective, the imagery with which Bürger describes his illness and the recovery is revealing. Like a fleshly text, one limb has swollen with the memory of the sins of the entire body, thereby blocking any writing, any confessional re-textualization. The opening of the boil in turn enables him to write again, so that the body publishes, as it were, its agonized history. Numerous equally graphic passages about the state of the physical body could be quoted from the letters, indicating Bürger's ongoing concern with his physical being. What is striking is Bürger's continued effort to give voice to the body, including genital and scatological aspects, in written texts. The semi-public forum of the letters allowed more freedom than the published literary works, yet Bürger also made some extraordinary efforts at the integration of body and text.

In the poetry intended for publication, Bürger could hardly express the pains and needs of the body explicitly or directly. The body's actual history could in most cases only be made public through allegories and discrete allusions. In the process of textualizing what the body knew, Bürger often could not speak in the first person, for the market constituted by eighteenth-century middle-class readers would not have paid for the reports of the life of a nobody. Just tolerable for the conventionalized taste was a poem such as "Zum Spatz," which picked up on the topos of the caged bird as metonym for the constrained poet. Worth noting in this text are the contorted stance of the speaker and the intensity of the inscribed violence. How power moves with social roles is indicated by the shifting voices. Until the final two lines, it is difficult to decide whether the speaker is foe or friend:

Ich sein Despot und Er mein Sklav'!
Bei seinem Spatzvolk!

Later, the speaker shifts positions:

Doch, daß ich stets eingedenk Ihm sei,
Die Freiheit sei ein güldner Schatz,
So hudelt man Ihn erst, Herr Spatz,
Und scheucht Ihn hin und her, husch! husch!
Nun Fenster auf! Hinaus zu Busch! (*Gedichte* 1: 225)

Are humanity or servility responsible for the bird's freedom? Given that the bird represents the situation of a writer, when the speaker is also a writer, matters become complicated. The poem does not remain on the level of idealized relation-

²⁰ Gottfried August Bürger, *Mein Scharmantes Geldmännchen: Gottfried August Bürgers Briefwechsel mit seinem Verleger Dieterich*, ed. Ulrich Joost (Göttingen: Wallstein-Verlag, 1988): 78.

ships, but instead foregrounds the implications of arbitrary despotism for the writer as a human being. The verbalized threat depicts the violence that might be done to the body of the bird, or the speaker-writer:

Hör er nun,
 Was all mit ihm ich könnte thun.
 Ihn zupfen, rupfen, halsumdrehn —
 Da wird nicht Hund noch Hahn nach krähn,
 Zerschlagen ihn mit einem Hieb,
 Und das mit Recht, Er Galgendieb. (*Gedichte* 1: 225)

These images have been projected by the body as its anxiety about the government which reigns by using force, torture, and the threat of force. We recognize in the cavalier mistreatment of the helpless bird the disciplining of the body meted out by eighteenth-century rulers against writers, such as Schubart, who did not strike the proper note.²¹ Bürger dare not say, perhaps could not bring to the level of words, that he felt the rule of society and law working him over thusly.

Not only formal political institutions operated as constraints upon the body and upon texts. Comportment of the body was also regulated by the imposition of courtly style upon posture. The allegorical poem "Mamselle La Regle" identifies the regulation of the literary text with a social discipline of the body. The personified "rule of style" links the postures of the text and of the body. Both are subject to the control of convention:

'Fein gerade!
 Hübsch Füßchen aus, und einwärts hübsch die Wade!
 Den Rücken schlank! Fein Hals und Kopf empor!
 Zurück die Schulter! Bauch ein! Brust hervor! (*Gedichte* 1: 226)

The German-speaking reader will hear in these instructions overtones of the military as well as of the schools, for both were also institutions by which the absolutist state inscribed correct mental and physical attitudes upon subjects.²² A parallel passage, displaying the similar conjunction of forces actually at work, is found in Act I, Scene 4 of Lenz's *Der Hofmeister* (1774), where the Major is beating posture into his son:

²¹ Duke Carl Eugen of Württemberg had Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart (1739-1791) arrested in 1777 because of his political writings. After 377 days of solitary confinement, Schubart remained in prison without trial until 1778.

²² For an introduction to this complex topic, see Georges Vigarello, "The Upward Training of the Body from the Age of Chivalry to Courtly Chivalry," in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, ed. Michel Feher with Ramona Naddaff and Nadia Tazi (New York: Zone, 1989): 2: 149-196; Bernd Jürgen Warneken, "Bürgerliche Emanzipation und aufrechter Gang: Zur Geschichte eines Haltungsideals," *Das Argument* 179 (1990): 39-52; and Henning Eichberg, "Geometrie als barocke Verhaltensnorm: Fortifikation und Exerzitien," *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung* 4 (1977): 17-50. Eichberg observes the political implications of the "undisciplined" bodies and irregular military formations of the American and French revolutionary armies (p. 40).

Lippel! ich bitt Dich um tausend Gottes willen, den Kopf grad. Den Kopf in die Höhe, Junge! *richtet ihn* Tausend Sackermant den Kopf aus den Schultern! oder ich zerbrech Dir Dein Rückenbein in tausendmillionen Stücken Ich will dich zu Tode hauen — *gibt ihm eine Ohrfeige* Schon wieder wie ein Fragezeichen? Er läßt sich nicht sagen.²³

The Major reads the son's slouch as a text of disobedience: therefore the body must be corrected according to the edicts of authority.

Although an interaction between texts and bodies was possible, there could be no dialogue between the government and the subject about the latter's position. Instructions about whether to speak or be silent, whether to stand straight or kneel came in one direction, from above. Only in the guise of fiction could the subject respond, challenging authority by reminding its spokesmen of their own embodiedness, their carnality and mortality. Bürger's poem "Frau Schnips" is a witty example of the reversal. The dead woman responds at the entrance to heaven to charges that her sins of the flesh should preclude her being admitted. Citing the Bible in rebuttal, she points out that every kind of sin has already been recorded in Scripture. Although they might now be angelic, the denizens of heaven were once beings in human bodies. The consequences of embodiedness begin with Adam:

Ei, zupfte sich Herr Erdenkloß
Doch nur an eigner Nase!
Denn was man ist, das ist man bloß
Von seinem Apfelfraße.

So gut wie Er, denk' ich zur Ruh
Noch Platz hier zu gewinnen. (*Gedichte* 1: 182)

The label "clod of earth" is less rude than it is etymologically correct, for Adam's name refers back to his creation from the dust and underscores his material existence. Since the Fall, no one has been able to avoid being born on earth or managed to evade the body. The poem dismantles the illusion of transcendental existence. One after another, biblical figures are confronted with the argument that while she may be no better than those who have already been saved, Frau Schnips has been no worse. Even a king such as Solomon will have had something to confess:

Sieb'n hunder Weiber auf der Streu,
Und extra noch dameben
Drei hundert — — Andre! Meiner Treu!
Das war ein züchtig Leben! (*Gedichte* 1: 184)

²³ Jacob Michael Reinhold Lenz, *Gesammelte Werke in vier Bänden*, ed. Richard Daunicht (München: Fink, 1967): 1: 46.

Of course, she wins in the end. Despite its allegorical framework and the fact that Bürger had in the main taken the story from the English ballad "The wanton wife of Bath," he had great difficulty in getting it published because of the threat of censorship. Goeckingk, the editor of the *Musen Almanach*, found it unsuitable for polite mixed company.²⁴ Beyond the taint of blasphemy, the poem offended against the social order which regulated matters of sex and sensuality. Even Bürger's appended apology, in which he reminded readers that the messages were already in the Bible, did not mollify readers such as Goethe or Schiller.

Two other short texts manifest a similar projection from the body through the imagination against those in power. "Der Bauer an seinen Fürsten," one of the most astounding political poems in German from the eighteenth century, develops its arguments on the basis of the body's rebellion.²⁵ As in "Frau Schnips," the rhetorical strategy is to remind those in power that on the plane of embodiment they are no better than other human beings:

Wer bist du, Fürst, daß über mich
Herrollen frei dein Wagenrad,
Dein Roß mich stampfen darf?

Wer bist du Fürst, daß in mein Fleisch
Dein Freund, dein Jagdhund, ungebläut
Darf Klau- und Rachen haun?

Wer bist du? daß durch Saat und Forst
Das Hurra deiner Jagd mich treibt,
Entatmet wie das Wild?

Die Saat, so deine Jagd zertritt,
Was Roß und Hund und du verschlingst,
Das Brot, du Fürst, ist mein!

Du Fürst hast nie bei Egg' und Pflug,
Hast nie den Erntegang durchschwitzt!
Mein, mein ist Fleiß und Brot! —

Ha! du wärest Obrigkeit von Gott?
Gott spendet Segen aus! du raubst!
Du nicht von Gott! Tyrann! (*Gedichte* 1: 55-56)

The poem is a more acute version of "Frau Schnips." Now the speaker is alive and the opponent is a ruler in the political realm of eighteenth-century Europe.

²⁴ "Frau Schnips ist schlechterdings keine Gesellschaft für die Herren und Dämchen welche den Almanach lesen Ohn alles Bedenken aber laßt es in das Museum einrücken, denn dieses wird doch mehrenteils nur von Männern gelesen." *Gedichte* 2: 310.

²⁵ Häntzschel, *Gottfried August Bürger*: 70-73; Little, *Gottfried August Bürger*: 72.

The strategy of the argument again draws upon Scripture by reminding the nobleman that everyone was born to labor after the Fall, earning bread with the body's sweat. The despotic state, where many work and a few play, is seen as a violation of the divine economy. Not idealized principles of liberty or the desire to participate in a heroic scripted history lead to revolt; only the "too much!" of an exhausted, tortured body leads to this articulation of self-awareness.²⁶ What is striking is the fact that the peasant here gives voice to his own feelings, disrupting the social illusion that only the upper classes could have emotions worth knowing. Bürger has assigned to the peasant the role of advocate for embodied passions and interests.²⁷ The laboring body has become aware of its subjectivity and is now able to articulate the sentiments which are grounded in physical experience. Again, the stance of the speaker is worth noting: a peasant known only through the title speaks, in fictional direct speech, to the Prince, without using the shielding honorific "Sie." The "Du" is not the companionable "Du" of a Goethe addressing Duke Karl August as social or intellectual equal, but is an accusatory definition of the Other whose presence excludes and yet establishes the Self. The renaming of the Prince as Tyrant is the moment when the speaking Self translates the body's knowledge of hunger, weariness and fear into the language of the body politic.

The short prose text "Der Maulwurf und der Gärtner" is a remarkable political fable. The conflict is between a mole, who has been digging up the flowers, and an infuriated gardener, who threatens to kill the animal. The mole is an archetypal representative of "those who are below."²⁸ In this instance, the harmless creature tries to defend itself by pointing to its usefulness in the economic sphere:

'Gnade!' flehte der Maulwurf, 'da ich dir doch sonst nicht unnütz bin. Ich vertilge die Regenmaden und manches Ungeziefer, das seine Pflanzungen verwüftet.'
(*Gedichte* 1: 240)

The gardener refuses to listen and replies with brute force:

'Hole dich der Henker,' versetzte der Gärtner, 'wenn du Tugend mit Untugend aufwiegst!' und schlug ihn ohne weitem Prozeß tot. (*Gedichte* 1:240)

²⁶ For the background to this process, see Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Geschichte und Eigensinn: Geschichtliche Organisation der Arbeitsvermögen* (Frankfurt a. M.: Zweitausendeins, 1981).

²⁷ On the passions and the interests, see Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1977); and Winfried Schulze, "Vom Gemeinnutz zum Eigennutz: Über den Normenwandel in der ständischen Gesellschaft der frühen Neuzeit," *Historische Zeitschrift* 243.3 (1986): 591-626.

²⁸ Karlheinz Stierle, "Der Maulwurf im Bildfeld," in *Bewegung und Stillstand in Metaphern und Mythen: Fallstudien zum Verhältnis von elementarem Wissen und Literatur im 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. Jürgen Link and Wulf Wülfing (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1984): 121-141.

So much, then for the possibility of a discourse of reason between those from below and those who wield power and control the economic order. The mole, whose mere effort to stay alive has disturbed the calm surface of things, is dispatched without further ado. Like the caged sparrow or the peasant, the mole represents what could happen in the eighteenth century to those who refused to let themselves be blended into the background as part of "the natural order." By speaking, by giving voice to their sufferings, these beings insisted upon the difference between bodies with consciousness and mute objects.

Given that the fable of the mole represented accurately the realities of the distribution of power in eighteenth-century German society, the question that remains is why Bürger failed to conform. Why did he not keep silent? Goethe was correct in his cynical diagnosis of Bürger's lapses when he wrote to him suggesting that Bürger was inherently disposed to dissatisfaction with bourgeois society:

Die Unzufriedenheit mit Ihrem Zustande, die Sie mir zu erkennen geben, scheint mir so sehr aus dem Verhältnis Ihres Innersten, Ihrer Talente, Begriffe und Wünsche, zu dem Zustande unserer bürgerlichen Verfassung, zu liegen, daß ich nicht glaube, es werde Sie die Veränderung des Ortes, außer einem geringen Mehr oder Weniger, jemals befriedigen können ... Tüchtige Kinder dieser eingeschränkten Erde, denen im Schweiß ihres Angesichts ihr Brot schmecken kann, sind allein gebaut, sich darin leidlich zu befinden, und nach ihren Fähigkeit und Tugenden das Gute und Ordentliche zu wirken.²⁹

The reference to the Biblical injunction (Genesis 4.19) is cited rather cruelly by Goethe, reminding Bürger that he had better be contented with the human condition of hunger and labor. Yet Bürger refused, and this has puzzled his biographers.

If good behavior and polite silence had simply been a question of acceding to external social pressure, then perhaps Bürger might have been able to conform. However, the roots of his resistance were inextricably bound up with the sexual dimension of physical being. The texts in which Bürger deliberately spoke of topics such as male and female anatomy, intercourse or sexual desire have earned him enduring opprobrium. Little is gained by labelling such elements of Bürger's work "pornographic" or "obscene." They were evidently intended by him as subversions of the controls imposed by genre and censorship that excluded physical being from textualization. In one of the few articles dealing with Bürger from this perspective, Alfons Höger has shown how Bürger subverted the traditions of the "Anacreontic" love-lyric, which had been imitated from the French courtly tradition, by inserting a body-based sensuality into chaste texts.³⁰

²⁹ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Werke*, Sophien-Ausgabe, Part 4: *Briefe*, Vol. 5: *Weimar, 7. November 1780-30. Juni 1782*) (Weimar: Böhlau, 1889), letter of February 2, 1782. The letter was on a par with Schiller's review in devastating Bürger's self-confidence.

³⁰ Alfons Höger, "'Und etwas anders noch ...': Galanterie und Sinnlichkeit in den Gedichten G.A. Bürgers," *Text und Kontext* 9.2 (1981): 250-270.

In many of his published love lyrics, Bürger veered towards an explicit physical dimension. In “Stutzertändelei,” the exchange between Cupid and the woman leads towards a suggestive conclusion. Cupid is to transform himself into a fly and explore the hidden recesses of the female body:

In eine kleine Fliege —
Siehst du, was ich erfand! —
Verwandle dich und fliege
Auf ihrer Schnürbrust Rand.

Dort gleite durch die Falte,
Im zarten Musselin,
Bis zu dem tiefen Spalte
Des warmen Busens hin. (*Gedichte* 1: 28)

Slightly more risqué was “Collin und Juliette,” in which the prohibition against speaking openly about sexual matters becomes the point of the wit. The teasing refrain “Ich mag es nicht zu sagen,/ Und etwas andres noch” (*Gedichte* 2: 163) gains increasingly explicit values as it mocks the pretenses of bowdlerized pastoral poetry:

Des Schäfers banges Sehnen
Ist nun gestillt — es floß
Ein Strom von Freuenthränen
In der Geliebten Schoß
Und etwas andres noch, —
Ich wag es nicht zu sagen, —
Und etwas andres noch; —
Wer wird nach allem fragen?

This went too far; the poem was not published in Germany until 1905. However, Bürger wrote other poems which transgressed even more against the norms of his readers, for they spoke openly about male anatomy and desires. One such poem was written as a parallel to “Das Mädels, das ich meine,” which had described the ideal of womanhood in the conventions of polite, sublimated discourse. No reader then could have taken offense at the rarefied description of the perfect woman, done in a series of stereotypical images:

Wer hat das Rot auf Weiß gemalt,
Das von des Mädels Wange strahlt? —
Der liebe Gott! der hat’s gethan,
Der Pfirsichblüte malen kann;
Der hat das Rot auf weiß gemalt,
Das von des Mädels Wange strahlt. (*Gedichte* 1: 65)

Bürger had also produced a similar poem about the ideal, entitled fittingly enough “Männerkeuschheit.” There he had described being a man in sublime language far removed from any actual body:

Sein Auge funkelt dunkelhell,
Wie ein krystallner Schattenquell.
Sein Antlitz strahlt, wie Morgenrot;
Auf Nas' und Stim herrscht Machtgebot.

Das Machtgebot, das d'rauf regiert,
Wird hui! durch seinen Arm vollführt.
Denn der schnell aus, wie Federstahl;
Sein Schwerthieb ist ein Wetterstrahl. (*Gedichte* 1: 75)

Given Bürger's own anxieties about his physique and about his continuing struggle against illness, it is hard to take this poem as more than a series of clichés. This was the normative language in which the body could be discussed in public.

In very different texts, Bürger mocked the polite discourse of ideal bodies. One was a parodistic parallel to "Das Mädchen, das ich meine" and proceeded to enumerate parts of the male anatomy in gross detail:

Wer hat die Arspace ausgestopft,
Die sich so prall' anfühlt und klopft? —
Der große Satler hats gethan,
Der Pferdellenden polstern kan;
Der hat die Arspace ausgestopft,
Die sich so prall' anfühlt und klopft. (*Gedichte* 2: 248)

Editors who might hope to ban the text from Bürger's works are hindered by the fact that he sent a copy to Dieterich, so that the authorship is clear.³¹ Whether he also wrote "An die Feinde des Priaps" is more circumstantial, but nonetheless convincing. Apparently it was his contribution to a small competition with Johann Heinrich Voß, who provided "An Priap" and Friedrich Leopold Graf zu Stolberg, who offered "Wahl meiner künftigen Gattin und ihre Eigenschaften." All three texts are patently obscene in the sense that they challenge the normative aesthetic of the period. Bürger's ode to the penis is a ribald exercise in saying the unspeakable. The disembodied figures of classical mythology are satirically shown draped in bodies whose grotesqueness undermines their function in the German Klassik:

Charon, beim Überfahren,
Fuchst alles rauch von Haaren,
Schont auch die Votzen nicht;
Pluto fuchst Proserpinen,
Und Luchse fuchst Luchsinnen,
Warum denn Menschen nicht?³²

³¹ Bürger, *Mein Scharmantes Geldmännchen*, p. 73, letter of July 20, 1780.

³² *Dein Leib ist mein Gedicht: Deutsche erotische Lyrik aus fünf Jahrhunderten*, ed. Heinz Ludwig Arnold (Bern/ München/ Wien: Rütten & Loening, 1970), 131.

These texts could only circulate in manuscript. Nowhere in the idealized aesthetics of eighteenth-century Germany was there an opening for the reception of such bawdy display. What might be displayed publicly then was only the regulated vision of the male, bodied as empowered and noble. Nevertheless, the guise of polite display did permit at least a utopian projection of an unabashed body to be shown and sustained, even if the foundations of physical being had to remain veiled. The possibility, however circumspectly uttered and carefully guarded, that one day he too might incorporate such an ideal was one source of Bürger's resistances. Although this vision of the emancipated male body may strike us today as itself repressive of other bodies, its revolutionary impact for the eighteenth century should not be denied. The radical implications of developing the body in public would return, elaborately, in the gymnastics movement in the German states of the early nineteenth-century.

But neither politically nor personally was Bürger to achieve in his lifetime the ideal of a body able to move and desire freely. The discrepancy between the powerlessness and immobility of a political subject and the aspirations of the lived body to be free and to move, to eat and drink, and to satisfy sexual desire, perforce led to crises, of which the French Revolution was not the least.³³

³³ I am grateful to the Department of Romance Studies, Duke University, and especially to the Chairman, Dr. J.-J. Thomas, for accepting me as a visiting scholar and facilitating the completion of this essay.