



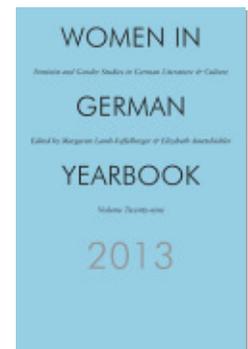
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Performance, Fear, and the Female Body in Sophie Mereau-Brentano's "Die Flucht nach der Hauptstadt" (1806) and Elise Bürger's *Die antike Statue aus Florenz* (1814)

LENA HEILMANN

In this article I consider two lesser-known texts written by women around 1800 that are concerned with issues of performance: Sophie Mereau's short story "Flight to the City" (1990, "Die Flucht nach der Hauptstadt" [1806]) and Elise Bürger's one-act play *Die antike Statue aus Florenz* (1814, *The antique statue from Florence*). The textual representation of fear, I argue, is a useful category of analysis through which to examine these works. In "Flight to the City," the young female narrator repeatedly faces situations that cause her to feel afraid and she acts in response to her fear and anxiety, whereas in *Die antike Statue*, the married protagonist is afraid that she has lost her husband's affection but wins back his love through a performance of her physical beauty. I identify specific moments of fear in each text and trace the motif of the "gaze" in order to tease out the connections between fear and performance. To this end, I argue that Mereau and Bürger employ performance (theater, as well as "performing" gender) so that their protagonists can regain lost agency.

Introduction

Around 1800, the relationship between German women and the theater was in flux. The theater, previously a domain primarily reserved for male actors and playwrights, not only started gradually to incorporate women during the eighteenth century, but it also dealt with topics that addressed women's issues.¹ Around 1800, society's suspicion toward the profession of acting and, more specifically, toward actresses began to subside, and the contemporary discourse began to incorporate the presence of women, on and behind the stage, in terms of morality, education (*Bildung*), and gender roles.² Women who wrote about the theater could construct a literary space in which to address the limits and possibilities of performance and theatricality. For example, women could earn or supplement their income through acting and/or writing plays, or they could

also critique the position of gender offstage, namely, speak to the marginalized position of women in society.

In this article, I concentrate on Sophie Mereau's short story "Flight to the City" (1990, "Die Flucht nach der Hauptstadt" [1806]) and Elise Bürger's humorous one-act play *Die antike Statue aus Florenz* (1814, The antique statue from Florence) and examine how the female protagonists cope with their moments of fear and anxiety.³ "Performing" heroines are at the center of both texts: "Flight to the City" concerns the protagonist's work as an actress, whereas *Die antike Statue* presents a private "performance" in the domestic sphere. This article focuses on the various moments of anxiety in each text and traces the motif of the "gaze" in order to show how feelings of fear are a driving force for performance. Although these works were written roughly twenty years apart and *Die antike Statue* is a humorous play (*Scherzspiel*)⁴ and "Flight to the City" is a short story, both texts comment on the precarious position of women in society and in the theater around 1800.

Scholars such as Barbara Becker-Cantarino, Ruth B. Emde, Susanne Kord, Ruth P. Dawson, Anne Fleig, Wendy Arons, and Mary Helen Dupree have studied the biographies of actresses and playwrights from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. These works, whose aim it is to reconceptualize and articulate the complexities of women and their relationship to the theater, have allowed us to better understand women's contributions to theater around 1800. Also, in recent years, scholars have paid closer attention to individual works written by women authors from this period. For instance, in her monograph, *Performance and Femininity*, Arons devotes a chapter to Mereau's short stories "Flight to the City" and "Marie" (1798), each of which chronicles the life of a hopeful actress. Arons reads the depiction of the theater in the two short stories "as a site of freedom and self-fulfillment for the female protagonist" (187), but, although she notes certain challenges that the narrator in "Flight to the City" faces (such as *Verstellung* [disguise], a central theme in her study), she does not address the motif of fear and anxiety in the text. In *The Mask and the Quill*, Dupree reads *Die antike Statue* in light of Bürger's biography in order to explore issues of agency and femininity in relation to performance and mentions the "dark undertones" at the beginning of the play (Wurst, "Spellbinding" 166). Again, her analysis does not investigate the role of angst and dread. My article, however, provides an alternate reading of these texts that incorporates the presence of fear.

A Pounding Heart and Trembling Body in “Flight to the City”

Sophie Mereau-Brentano (1770–1806) never worked professionally in the theater, but she frequented the Weimar Court Theater and acted in private amateur performances (Arons 188). She idealized the theater as a place where women could envision a liberated existence. Her sparsely written diaries make clear the pleasure she received from the theatrical realm; for example, she notes on 2 December 1796: “Rehearsal in the evening. Very interested in it. New pleasure” (Hammerstein, *Wie sehn’* 22–23).⁵ She was also fond of Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* and its theatrical content, which she reads “with pleasure” (“mit Vergnügen”) (Hammerstein, *Wie sehn’* 24), calls one of the greatest and most beautiful products of the human spirit, and states that nothing comparable in German literature exists (Hammerstein, *Wie sehn’* 181).⁶

Mereau’s personal life was difficult and ended with her death in childbirth. She was married twice: first to lawyer Friedrich Mereau (she divorced him in 1801 and became one of the first German women to make a living by writing) and then to Romantic author Clemens Brentano, whom she “reluctantly” married after their “tempestuous love affair” resulted in pregnancy (Arons 189).⁷ Her second marriage was turbulent and the source of much gossip, in part because Mereau, dissatisfied with the restrictions that eighteenth-century society placed on her role as woman and wife, rebelled against the conventional structures of heteronormativity.⁸ Arons understands Mereau’s keen literary interest in the theater as a possible “utopian projection of her own fantasies and yearnings for freedom and independence” (188) and identifies the rebellious streak in Mereau’s writing as a way to confront “restrictions on women’s behavior [. . .] by creating literary figures who defied conventional expectations, acted in ways that were completely counter to social codes and mores, and yet developed into happy, satisfied women in the process” (190). Other scholarship on “Flight to the City,” which includes studies by Dagmar von Gersdorff, Todd Kontje, and Jeannine Blackwell and Susanne Zantop, focuses on the text’s preoccupation with theater and performance through which a woman’s freedom might be possible. I argue that Mereau’s inclusion of fear in “Flight to the City” indicates that she recognizes that the theater was not always a safe or secure place for women.

The theme of the theater’s lure for a woman in the second half of the eighteenth century is prevalent in “Flight to the City.” In the short story, a young woman (an unnamed, first-person narrator) does not want to mar-

ry her wealthy neighbor Vincent and flees from her small hometown with her beloved Albino, the man she had fallen in love with onstage: “He told me so often that he loved me that he himself finally felt it and I believed it. [. . .] Soon we were playing ourselves in the most fervent roles” (381). Along the way, the couple befriends Felix, an actor, who, shortly thereafter, when he finds the female narrator alone, tells her that her beloved Albino has been captured and that her father is in pursuit of her. Distraught and desperate, the narrator decides to travel with Felix to find work as an actress in order to earn her living. However, she soon realizes that Felix is cruel and manipulative and stops working with him. In the end, Albino sees his beloved onstage and reunites with her, and the narrator discovers that Felix had lied about Albino’s capture. The two return to their hometown to marry in the presence of their family and friends.

Despite the narrator’s humorous and absurd experiences in “Flight to the City,” she also must face situations that cause her intense feelings of dread and anxiety. Fear and uncertainty accompany the narrator on her theatrical path. Her desire to take part in the theater forces her to move from city to city, sometimes by means of uncomfortable carriage rides sitting next to unpleasant people. Also, the income is not steady, and she comes in close contact with deceptive and even physically dangerous men. There are various reasons for the narrator to feel fear: she is afraid of her father’s reaction when he discovers that she has fled from home (384); another “frightful prospect” is living alone without Albino and monetary resources (386); she is afraid of ending up in jail (387); and finally, she has to face her “fearful timidity” when she performs professionally for the first time (392). When she speaks of her fright of prison and of her father’s authority, she uses the word “fear” (*Furcht*) twice in one sentence, which demonstrates on the syntactic level its omnipresence in her mind: “the fear of my father and of prison came terrifyingly to life (387; “die Furcht [. . .] gewann ein fürchterliches Leben” [211]). The narrator’s theatrical career and the situations that cause her fear are inextricably linked together.

Throughout “Flight to the City,” a close relationship exists between fear and flight (*Furcht* and *Flucht*), and the narrator’s fear of her wealthy neighbor frames the story. She first flees from home in order to escape Vincent after he accosts her behind her father’s garden theater. Although the garden theater could be considered a safe space for the narrator, since it belongs to her father, Vincent has access to her there, which means that the theater is coded ambiguously from the start. On the one hand,

the father's garden theater is where the narrator meets and falls in love with Albino. On the other hand, it is where the wealthy brute Vincent pursues her. With his unwelcome "coarse caresses," Vincent poses a serious physical threat to the narrator, and she resists him with all her might (382). She flees from Vincent, but later he reappears in her life. After the narrator makes her theatrical debut, her landlady tells her that a wealthy gentleman has noticed her and would like to marry her. The narrator declines to meet this mysterious gentleman. Later, she learns of his identity when her landlady points out the gentleman to her in the theater's audience. She recognizes Vincent, which brings back unpleasant memories and emotions: "[M]y astonishment was just as great as my horror, when I recognized in him the Vincent whose love had once frightened me so" (395). The narrator's past fear of Vincent reemerges. When she thinks he might reveal her current whereabouts to her father, "the old fear of imprisonment and paternal punishment" stirs inside her "with new intensity," and she trembles "at the thought that [through] his treachery" she could lose her freedom (396). She physically feels her fear: her body trembles. Vincent's threatening presence was the catalyst that had forced the protagonist to flee her home, and his reappearance causes her renewed and heightened anxiety.

The narrator's sense of fear soon extends beyond her dealings with Vincent. Her sense of freedom with Albino and their new friend Felix is short-lived, for soon after she and Albino settle in, Felix writes the narrator a note telling her to "flee" from her apartment because Albino has been captured, which "frightfully" shakes the narrator (385). Unmarried and alone, she now faces an uncertain existence: "This was a dreadful moment [ein fürchterlicher Augenblick] for me! Without a home, without friends, with little money in this big city, I saw nothing before me but the most horrible ruin or a life of disgrace" (386). She reiterates her fear about where to live: "My most pressing concern was to find a lodging; to live alone was a frightful prospect" (386), and she gladly accepts Felix's offer to help her find both lodging and work as an actress.

The sense of fear also becomes part of the narrator's experience in the theater. While playing her first role as the maiden from Marienburg, she observes the "assembled crowd," which causes her heart to pound "fiercely" (392). But her "frightful timidity" actually turns into "an advantage" for her because the audience interprets it kindly as "girllike shyness" that gives her "expression an uncommon warmth" (392). Because the emotions she projects align with the innocence of the character

she portrays, the audience awards her acting skills with “lively applause” (392). The narrator’s moment of fear here translates into skillful acting that propels her career forward.

Feelings of fear and anxiety surface again after a theater performance, when Felix confronts the narrator and Albino, who were recently reunited. Albino challenges Felix to a duel and wins the fight. When asked by the narrator about the outcome of the dispute, he provides evasive answers that are “indefinite.” Also, his “entire manner” appears “so deliberately cold” that the narrator’s heart begins “to pound terribly.” Once again, she experiences great anxiety and fears “very unpleasant explanations concerning Felix” (398). Only after she and Albino cross the border and are “completely out of danger” (399) do her “fears [come] to an end” (398). This is the last time the narrator mentions her feelings of fear. Once she and Albino are back home, only “the happy peace of secluded life” (399) is important. This “happy end” conclusion can be interpreted as a comment by Mereau on the prevailing precarious position of women in the theater around 1800. To this end, Mereau’s chronicle of the actress’s journey avoids any description of the narrator’s physical appearance and only mentions her young age of fifteen without giving any other details. What the reader learns about the narrator’s body is mediated by means of her physical reaction to her feelings of fear and anxiety: her heart that pounds, and her body that trembles. Mereau’s narrative pays little attention to tactile sensations, as Kontje remarks: “Mereau makes no attempt to establish character depth or a realistic narrative” (79). Also, Arons notes that “[Mereau’s] narrator tells the story as if it had happened to someone else” (198).⁹ The narrator of the short story, as these scholars point out, is removed from the narration; she is distanced from her own adventure. Thus, when Mereau describes the narrator’s moments of fear (physical sensations), she incorporates the narrator’s body into the text.

The narrator frequently refers to the overlap between “truth” and “deception.” In the beginning of “Flight to the City,” the narrator’s and Albino’s “practiced” (play-acted) emotions become truly felt emotions, and the audience lauds the couple’s love at the garden theater: “The audience’s most ardent applause gave our talents the praise which was actually due our hearts: they thought that deception had been heightened to truth, while we were actually giving them truth as deception” (381). This performance with Albino foreshadows the narrator’s acting as the maiden from Marienburg when the audience perceives her emotional presentation to be a deception created by skillful acting. The slippage between “truth”

and “deception” extends to the final wedding scene. Here the narrator explains: “Thus ended unexpectedly in comedy what had started out as sure tragedy [. . . and] we gladly traded the flighty stage for the secure walls of domesticity” (399). Mereau frames the final depiction of marriage as another type of performance: a comedy now rather than a tragedy. A reading of the marriage as a continuation of previous performances suggests that “the secure walls of domesticity” are also a stage, upon which the narrator and Albino continue to perform their love for one another.¹⁰

The Gaze and the Female Body in *Die antike Statue*

Elise Hahn Bürger (1769–1833) famously dedicated a poem to Storm and Stress author Gottfried August Bürger in the journal *Beobachter* in 1789 (Kinder, preface). The poem begins, “Oh Bürger, Bürger, noble man, / Who sings songs, like no one can, / Full of spirit and emotion!” (Kinder 9), and closes with her hope that G. A. Bürger will choose her to be his wife: “Should you ever think of courtship, / So let it be a Swabian girl / And always choose me!” (Kinder 11).¹¹ Intrigued by this letter, G. A. Bürger sought to find the anonymous poet. After discovering her identity, he engaged her in an epistolary correspondence, which soon led to their marriage. Elise Bürger’s awareness of the power of performance is clear through this poem, for, as Dupree points out, “[l]ike her later *tableau* performances, Bürger’s early poem dramatizes a woman’s attempt at seduction of her male audience through performance, in this case a literary one that foregrounds the author’s claim to forthrightness and sincerity” (*Mask* 137). Bürger’s involvement with performance on the actual stage and her use of her publications as a platform frame her life and writing. After her divorce from G. A. Bürger, Elise faced a grim future with few possibilities.¹² She chose to become a performer and first joined the *Altonaer Nationaltheater* and then the *Dresdener Hoftheater*, where she became well known for her performances of declamatory concerts, tableaux vivants, and attitudes (*Attitüden*); the latter two, new genres in the last decade of the eighteenth century, were performed in silence solely by women.¹³

In her play *Die antike Statue aus Florenz*, Bürger satirically imagines how a neglected wife could reestablish her relationship with her husband who no longer pays any attention to her.¹⁴ The play begins with Laura’s lament about her husband’s lack of affection; she desires to understand why Ludwig spends his time locked away in an attic room. Her sister Rosaura peers through the keyhole and discovers that Ludwig hides ancient

Greek pictures, busts, and statues in there.¹⁵ At this point, the sisters become aware of Ludwig's approach and quickly hide in a side room where they overhear him tell his servant Friedrich that he eagerly awaits a statue of a Vestale from Florence.¹⁶ Now that the women know his secret, Laura uses this information to play a trick on him: she disguises herself as the veiled Vestale (which she learned, in the meantime, was broken in transport), and Ludwig, unaware that he is admiring Laura instead of the statue he ordered, exalts her and wants to see her face. Laura reveals her identity by removing the veil, and ultimately her tableau performance leads to the couple's reunification. Dupree notes that "[i]n its depiction of an 'ordinary' woman who becomes a *tableau* performer in order to win back her husband, *Die antike Statue aus Florenz* suggests that all women are actresses; negotiating between subversion and compliance, they are forced to embody images of femininity" (*Mask* 159). Laura's acting, primarily intended for her husband, also depicts a wife's performance within the domestic realm.

Die antike Statue is, in part, Bürger's satirical response to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Pygmalion* (1762). Rousseau's theater piece and *Die antike Statue* are both one-act plays with a comparable plot. In *Pygmalion*, the sculptor falls in love with Galatea, the statue he has created to perfection. In a long monologue, he implores Galatea to come to life. His passionate pleas transform the statue into a beautiful and loving woman. Bürger's restaging of the Pygmalion story changes the plot insofar as the woman's love for her husband repairs their unhappy marriage. Whereas Galatea is able to speak only at the very end of the play, Laura and her sister Rosaura speak at both the beginning and the end of *Die antike Statue*. Hence, Bürger's addition of the second woman splits the original single female identity into two and thus frames her play with the two women voicing their points of view in the first and in the final scene. In the end, Ludwig and Laura reestablish their marriage, but Rosaura, standing on a pedestal as if watching over them, breaks the binary between man and woman that dominates *Pygmalion*.

As in Rousseau's play, the power of the male gaze privileges Bürger's plays. In *Die antike Statue*, Laura's opening lines begin with:

Cold has, for quite some time, my man against me been,
 How sweet he was before, so here I should mention,
 The marriage its first year receded like a dream.
 And now, you gracious Lord, he scarce now shows esteem. (1)¹⁷

This stanza contrasts the past with the present and thus underscores how Ludwig's lack of affection toward Laura makes her fearful. Her tone becomes more anxious when she reflects on the neglect she is experiencing and cries out to her sister: "Poor spouse am I! / His heart I lost most certainly" ("Ich ärmste Frau! / Sein Herz verlohrt ich sicherlich" [3]). Her feelings are full of fear and anxiety about Ludwig's lack of attention (13). Laura's first inclination is to leave her husband and go live with her uncle (11) because she feels helpless and afraid. When she learns that Ludwig is unimpressed with her body and his eye has become accustomed to a nobler desire ("ein edleres Verlangen" [8]), the female perfection of antique statues, she decides to appeal to this "refined" sense of beauty.

The words "edleres Verlangen" invokes the famous phrase "noble simplicity and quiet grandeur" ("Edle Einfalt und stille Größe") coined by Johann Joachim Winkelmann (1717–68). Laura embodies this motif as the Vestale. As a statue with a veiled face, Laura first remains silent and still, which allows Ludwig to revel in her beautiful body. His gaze exposes his feelings of temptation and expectation and places him in a powerful position. He praises her perfectly symmetrical physical features (22). Unaware that the statue is Laura, Ludwig sees the same aesthetic qualities in her that he did earlier in the sketch of the statue. He does not recognize Laura in the statue and, therefore, he does not perceive any faults. He assumes that he sees the Vestale, which reinforces his preconceived notion that the statue represents the perfect female form. Laura's performance, her deception of Ludwig, discloses his gaze as unreliable, which demonstrates how Bürger challenges the accuracy of knowing what one sees.

Although the play primarily emphasizes Ludwig's gaze, Laura's gaze also comes into play when she decides to act after she discovers that Ludwig's Vestale broke in transport. Rosaura notices a distinct change in Laura's appearance—with cheeks that glow like roses (16)—and encourages her to speak up ("Doch sprich! / Du siehst ganz anders aus" [16]). Laura's decision to disguise herself as the Vestale not only brings happiness but also causes her a moment of fear: her heart beats quickly ("so bange" [16]). This moment marks the turning point from Laura's lack of agency to assuming a significant degree of power. Laura's gleeful appearance accompanies the change in agency at the prospect of winning back Ludwig's affection. Here, Bürger empowers Laura's gaze and thus mitigates Ludwig's agency and the power of his gaze.

Laura performs a tableau vivant to gain her husband's attention.¹⁸ Lud-

wig believes that he is admiring a statue and is completely oblivious to the fact that he is talking to his wife. Consumed with feelings of love and desire, he entreats the statue to step off the pedestal and become his lover. If only he could see the statue's hair, forehead, and eyes to praise them, he exclaims (22). He desires to see underneath her veil and instructs the statue to lift it, so that he can see the rare wonder ("dies seltne Wunder" [25]) in its totality.¹⁹ To his horror, the statue does stir and slowly moves her right arm. Then Laura reveals her identity as she speaks while lifting the veil ("So sieh dein liebend Weib" [25]). This third-person phrase—"So look at your loving wife"—enables Ludwig to reconcile his admiration for the idealized, static beauty of the Vestale with his love for his wife. When he recognizes Laura, Ludwig's fear dissipates, and he throws himself into her arms swearing that he will never again look for "unfamiliar forms" ("fremde Formen" [27]).

Ludwig expresses his fear through both content and form. While the whole play is written in alexandrines, Bürger alters the meter here to rhymed couplets: "How? What? Does she not lift her hand? / Ha, if only she could thaw out? / Am I not a fool? / What? What is happening to me, poor soul?" (23).²⁰ Although the lines still rhyme in the German original (erwarmen/Armen [thaw out/poor soul]), the anapests, "How? What" ("Wie? Was?"), repeated and reversed in the fourth line ("Was? Wie?"), disrupt the iambic form and slow down the rhythm, which reflects Ludwig's fear and confusion. The tension between the alexandrines and the rhymed couplets parallels the tension between static and dynamic, that is, between idealized and natural beauty.

Standing on a pedestal in the play's final scene, Rosaura proclaims that Laura's loveliness is simultaneously antique and modern, and thus eternally beautiful ("antik, modern und ewig schön" [28]).²¹ Her final words, reminiscent of Goethe's "The eternal feminine draws us on" (*Faust II*), unite the Greco-Roman with the "modern" qualities of beauty that were previously incompatible in Ludwig's eyes. Holding a wreath above Laura and Ludwig, Rosaura announces that these qualities of beauty are truly worthy of being seen, which once again underscores the importance of Bürger's motif of sight.

Conclusion

Both Mereau and Bürger explore in different ways the theatricality, that is, the performative aspects, of the relationship between man/husband and

woman/wife. In “Flight to the City” the plot ends with the marriage ceremony, whereas in *Die antike Statue* the story deals with the estrangement of a married couple and ends with their reawakened love. However, the female body is presented quite differently in the two texts. While in Bürger’s play the focus is on the female body as a representation of “eternal” beauty, in Mereau’s text the female narrator rarely mentions her body, but when she does, it is often in conjunction with feelings of fear and anxiety. Her apparent reluctance to foreground her body contradicts her work as an actress. By contrast, *Die antike Statue* highlights the perfection of the female form and the male desire to gaze upon it, but Bürger complicates the reliability of sight and thus mitigates the power of the male gaze. Fear and anxiety drive the performances of both actresses as they regain lost agency. The protagonists in both texts, one acting on a public stage and the other in her domestic realm, challenge the construction of gender in the eighteenth century by addressing both the body and the role of performance, onstage as well as offstage.

Acknowledgments

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Notes

1. See Fleig, who writes that women before the 1770s wrote more dramas than novels (4–5).

2. Other important texts concerning the theater include Lessing’s plays, which give voice to the middle class; Schiller’s 1784 essay, “Die Bühne als eine moralische Anstalt betrachtet,” which explores the benefits of viewing theater performances; and Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795–96), which narrates a semihistorical account of theater in the eighteenth century.

3. “Die Flucht nach der Hauptstadt” was probably written around mid-July 1796, but it was not published until 1806 in the *Taschenbuch für das Jahr 1806* (Hammerstein, *Ein Glück* 293). All translations of “Flight to the City” are from Vansant. *Die antike Statue aus Florenz* was published in 1814 and was performed for the first time in 1815 (Dupree, *Mask* 152).

4. See Dupree: “The play uses humor to expose Ludwig’s enthusiasm for the ‘classical’ as nothing more than a kind of voyeuristic sexual fetishism, which causes him to neglect his wife and shut himself away with his beloved drawings and plaster casts of Greek and Roman statues” (“Elise” 124).

5. “Abends Probe. Dabei sehr intreßirt [*sic*]. Neues Vergnügen.” All translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

6. “[E]ines der größten und schönsten Erzeugnisse des menschlichen Geistes.”

7. On her making a living by writing, see Arons (188) and Vansant (372).

8. See Hammerstein (*Wie sehn*’ 279) for a more comprehensive biography. See also Vansant: “By creating as characters iconoclastic, pleasure-loving women who chafe under society’s bit, and by parodying the Sentimental literary topos of ‘virtue in distress,’ Mereau created literary models that both countered and affirmed the Romantic ideal” (371); and “[I]ike her other works, this playful, frivolous story of elopement, free love, and a *bohème* existence on the margins of good society contains a passionate plea for free choice, for love and pleasure without guilt and without society’s interference” (373).

9. Arons points out: “From the moment of its first appearance, ‘Flight to the City’ has been criticized for the lack of deep subjectivity and moral grounding in its characters. While some modern critics see this as a flaw in the work, I argue that it is precisely the surface, performative nature of its characterizations that gives ‘Flight to the City’ the opportunity to make a radical critique of eighteenth-century conceptions of ideal femininity” (197).

10. See Arons: “By suggesting that marriage and bourgeois life might merely be seen as another act of performance, Mereau pointedly undermines the institution of marriage and the role it plays in anchoring bourgeois mores and values” (204).

11. “O Bürger, Bürger, edler Mann, / Der Lieder singt, wie’s Keiner kann, / Voll Geist und voll Gefühl!”; “Drum kommt Dir mal das Freien ein, / So lass’s ein Schwabenmädchen seyn, / Und wähle immer mich!”

12. Kinder explains that in Elise Bürger’s divorce paperse, she writes that her husband found letters she and the unnamed man had written to one another, in which she is named the man’s “Weib” (wife) and “Gattin” (spouse). Elise also writes that she has agreed to her husband’s terms of divorce so that the name of her lover will not be made public (149–50).

13. Women performed the popular genres of tableaux vivants or *Attitüden* in silence and in semiprivate spaces “such as salons, spas, ballrooms, and dinner parties” (Dupree, *Mask* 141). The women performers were usually of “middle-class and aristocratic sociability” (135). Around the turn of the century, women who performed *Attitüden* and tableaux vivants experimented with transforming the female body. Sophie Albrecht (1757–1840), for example, performed *Attitüden* and tableaux that focused the audience’s attention on women’s bodies and the ability to transform a woman’s shape with just a veil or scarf in many plays of Friedrich Schiller, who was a close acquaintance. Other important tableaux performers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries included Friederike Brun, Ida Brun, Elise Bürger, Lady Hamilton, Henriette Hendel-Schütz, Madame de Stäel, and Madame de Genlis. For more on tableaux see also Wurst, “Spellbinding” (151–55). For a discussion of Goethe’s incorporation of themes of monodrama and attitudes, see Holmström (110, 140, 145, 215–16, 231).

14. To consider the fictional play alongside Bürger's real life compounds the implications that Laura might face if her husband leaves her, since thoughts about Bürger's biography were most likely not far from the minds of the theatergoers when they saw the first performance, in which Bürger played the role of Laura (Wurst, "Spurensicherung" 217).

15. See Dupree's discussion about the importance of the classicizing phenomenon of copies of Greco-Roman art and artifacts ("Elise" 124).

16. Wurst explains that the husband tries to undress the statue of the "Vestalin," who in ancient times was a priestess. Bürger's contemporaries probably associated the Vestale with the city of Florence and its representations of the female nude ("Spurensicherung" 222).

17. "Kalt ist seit ein'ger Zeit, gegen mich mein Mann. / Wie zärtlich war er sonst, so daß ich sagen kann, / Der Ehe erstes Jahr verfloß mir wie ein Traum. / Und jetzt, Du guter Gott, jetzt achtet er mich kaum."

18. "Foregrounding the ways in which women use theatricality in order to navigate the domestic sphere, Bürger's play performs a bitter critique of the ideals of marriage and domesticity with which Bürger herself had struggled in her marriage to Gottfried August" (Dupree, *Mask* 159).

19. "Laß mich Dich schauen, lüfte diese neidsche Hülle, / Damit sich mir dies seltnen Wunder ganz erfülle" (25).

20. "Wie? Was? Erhebt sie nicht die Hand? / Ha, könnte sie erwarmen? / Bin ich nicht ein Thor—/ Was? Wie geschiet mir Armen?" (23).

21. Regarding the pedestal, see Dupree: "Recalling the curtains, frames, and portable stages used by *tableau* performers, the pedestal functions as a kind of second stage, adding another dimension of theatricality to the performance" (*Mask* 157).

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