

Stephanie E. Libbon
(Kent, Ohio)

Impotent Masculinities in Frank Wedekind's «Erdgeist»

The scientific study of psychopathology of sexual life necessarily deals with the miseries of man and the dark sides of his existence ...

Richard von Krafft-Ebing

Abstract

For most of recorded history, the study of impotence fell under the purview of healers. This changed in the late nineteenth century, however, as the works of *avant garde* artists like the German dramatist and social critic Frank Wedekind ushered analyses of this malady into public discourse. In looking first at conditions in Europe during Wedekind's time and then tracing the history of impotence from the Ancient Chinese up to Wedekind's day, this article investigates how Wedekind's representations of impotence emblemized not only his own personal afflictions but a greater cultural malaise.

Late nineteenth century Europe experienced a period of great change and upheaval that brought with it discord and discontent in many realms. Not least among these was the realm of human sexuality. Prompted by discussions surrounding Darwin's theory of evolution, the Women's Movement, and the increasing visibility of the homosexual, a new brand of physicians came to the fore. These sexologists, as they were called, sought to catalogue and categorize a wide variety of sexual anomalies in order to define what they deemed constituted aberrant sexuality and, by extension then, normal sexuality. In investigations centering on male clients, the sexologists found countless deviations from the accepted norm of manliness that had for centuries been emblemized in the strong, dynamic, and virile male, the male who mastered not only himself but also the world around him. In addition to the physical or psychological disorders from which their clients suffered, the sexologists also observed in

these men a reticence and even fear to discuss their ailments. Unlike the Women's Movement, where women themselves brought their issues to the fore as they demanded more equality both publically and privately, the concerns that troubled men, and especially those dealing with their sexuality, were not so readily revealed. To the contrary, the vast majority of men sought to keep their problems and anxieties *vis-à-vis* their manhood hidden from public view. Where they did turn for help and advice was to physicians and psychiatrists like Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Europe's most renowned sexologist. To what extent men were seeking such consultations discreetly can be gleaned from the foreword of the twelfth edition of Krafft-Ebing's pivotal work, *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1939), in which he attributes the commercial success of the earlier editions to the large number of individuals worldwide who found relief in his work. While Krafft-Ebing indicates that it was «men of refined thought and of high social and scientific standing» (viii) who sought his expertise, a quick perusal of the 200-some case studies in *Psychopathia Sexualis* reveals that it was in fact men of the middle class, often civil servants, who made up the majority of his clients.

While men's concerns about their masculinity may have remained largely hidden and unaddressed for generations outside of scientific and medical circles, the *milieu* of late-nineteenth-century Europe did not allow this *status quo* to continue, as this was a period that placed great emphasis on vitality. Along with Darwin's explanation of the dynamic that has come to be called «survival of the fittest» and an emphasis on athleticism and physical fitness, came a resurgent focus on the connection between the inner and outer man. Medical experts began to reassert that a healthy body and a healthy mind were inseparably bound together and, furthermore, linked to a healthy morality. While the idea that there was a link between the corporal, the cerebral, and the spiritual was not unique to the nineteenth century, one already saw the mind-body-soul connection as far back as Plato, the medicalization and more specifically the pathologizing of sex that took place in the latter decades of the nineteenth century brought a new perspective and scrutiny to this connection. A physically fit man was now considered not only corporeally healthy, but mentally stable and morally sound. By contrast, a sick or diseased individual was believed to suffer not only from physical ailments, but also to be mentally and morally corrupt.

The intense promotion of men of physical, mental and moral fitness that came about in Europe at the end of the nineteenth century occurred during a period of rapid nation-building and imperial expansion, an era

when it was believed that men of strong constitutions were needed not only to help create and bolster emergent nations but, as Michael Kane (1999) notes with regard to Germany, were even seen as extensions of the nation. Concurrently, however, this emphasis on the strongman was also a countermeasure, a longed-for antidote, to the general fear that men in late nineteenth-century Europe had degenerated into weak, enfeebled shadows of their forefathers. Unlike those warrior-heroes of the past, who determined their own destinies through mental, physical and spiritual fortitude, the bourgeois male of the late-nineteenth century was seen by many influential writers as a follower, a servant rather than a master. No longer his own man in the sense that he worked for himself and therefore had sovereignty in the workplace, the bourgeois male was now employed by other men and hence bound to the time clock and a supervisor's whims just as much as was his counterpart on the factory floor. Having lost autonomy in the public sphere, he experienced a waning of his influence on the home front as well. Compelled to work outside the home and thus away from the family, the bourgeois male increasingly found himself relinquishing control of his children to his wife. Indeed, as John Tosh (1999) observes, whereas child-rearing literature in the eighteenth century commonly had been addressed to the father, by the latter decades of the nineteenth century it was written overwhelmingly for mothers. Moreover, whereas industrialization had alienated the middle-class male from his work and even estranged him from his home, the political agitation of women undermined his authority still further as the New Woman questioned not only her own role in society, but by extension then his role as well. With a diminishing sense of masculine agency, both public and private, the middle-class male's disenfranchisement grew. At the same time that he was feeling increasingly disempowered and emasculated, sexologists were noting what appeared to be an escalating number of male maladies. Not least among these disorders was impotence – a condition that many saw as endemic to the age precisely for the reasons listed above.

Although late-nineteenth century medicine prompted a reexamination of this disorder from a new pathological perspective, the study of impotence was not something novel to this period. Indeed, as Qaisar Siraj (2008)¹ observes, impotence has a history almost as old as that of mankind, with tales of this condition ranging from the mythological to the

¹ I wish to give a special thanks to Dr. Siraj for generously supplying me with the references to his work «A History of Impotence». These made up a substantial portion of my overview of the history of impotence.

semi-historical to the historical. One sees references to this disorder in Greek myths, in the bible, and in medical texts dating back 3000 years. It is mentioned in the *Huang Ti Nei Ching Se Wen* (*The Yellow Emperor's Classics of Medicine*), one of the earliest recorded Chinese medical texts, probably dating back to the second or third millennium B.C. (Veith 121); in the Kahun papyrus, the earliest surviving medical work of the Egyptians, dating from about 1900 B.C. (Tannahil 65); and in a whole series of clay tablets from the Tigris-Euphrates valley (Biggs 21). In addition to references to impotence, these ancient texts also contain suggested cures for this condition. The Egyptian Papyrus Ebers, a medical document dating from about 1600 B.C., suggests mixing goose dung with the juice and sawdust of trees (Shokeir and Hussein, 2004). Assyrian cuneiform tablets mention a recipe composed of dried lizard and cantharides (Herman 96). In India, drinks made from hemp or sap of thorn-apple seed were thought to offer relief (Gunther 102), as was a hairy pod called a cowage, that, when rubbed on the penis, provoked itching, swelling and throbbing (Edwardes 81). Aphrodisiacs containing animal testes as the essential ingredient are mentioned as cures in the Ayurvedas of the ancient Hindus (Herman 95-96), in the Hippocratic corpus (Brooks et al. 23), and by Nicander in 135 B.C. (Berendes 274). Magical incantations and spells likewise played an important role either in conjunction with other remedies or as cures in their own right. Lastly, sexual aids, devices such as penile bracelets, were also recommended for maintaining an erection.

The purported causes of impotence described in these ancient texts vary as much as the suggested cures. The Indian text *Sambhita of Susbruta*, written around the eighth century B.C., lists congenital factors, praecox, genital diseases, and circumcision, which was believed to diminish or destroy penile sensitivity (Bhishagratna, 1963). The ancient Hindus held that impotence could have psychological causes, or be triggered by intercourse with distasteful women (Herman 95). The Ancient Chinese assumed this condition was brought on by an imbalance between the Yin and the Yang (Ebray, 1993). Although the ancient Scythians attributed their bouts with this disorder to a deity, Hippocrates maintained that there were underlying natural causes – the flabby constitutions of these Scythians and the long periods they spent horseback riding in the cold (Chadwick and Mann 107-108). While many of the ancient texts also attributed impotence to preternatural causes, such as evil charms and spells (Nunn, 1996), the predominant focus was on physical and psychological causes. This would continue to be the case well into the Middle Ages outside of Europe, where one sees texts such as the comprehensive Arabian treatise *The Perfumed Garden*,

written in the beginning of the sixteenth century, attributing impotence to premature ejaculation, hypospadias, microphallus, congenital disorders, degenerative diseases, overindulgence, and a cold temperament (Burton, 1964). This was not the case in medieval Europe, however, where one now saw a strong proclivity to blame supernatural forces and specifically witchcraft for this disorder (Roper, 1991).

While the notion that evil forces were to blame for impotence remained popular well into the seventeenth century in Europe as well as in America, the advent of the Scientific Revolution and the increasing validity of the natural sciences once again brought psychogenic and organic explanations to the fore. In Copland's *Dictionary of Practical Medicine* (1858) for example, one finds the following causes: (1) organic due to hypogonadism, (2) functional as a result of excessive or premature sexual indulgence, masturbation, and smoking, (3) moral or mental impotence due to psychological causes, and (4) constitutional impotence inherited genetically (2:320-322). With the emphasis on sexual pathologies that came into vogue in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, other factors such as homosexuality, venereal disease, and even drug use were now also deemed to cause impotence. Although witches and sorcery were no longer contenders for provoking this malady, women were still considered mitigating factors, especially women who were nymphomaniacs, frigid, or simply too demanding in non-sexual respects. In addition to "problematic" women and the above-mentioned causes, an impersonal, bureaucratic society was now also blamed for man's impotence. As the American neurologist George M. Beard contended throughout his research, but in particular in his essay «The Longevity of Brain-Workers» (1873), the chief victim of this bureaucracy was the office or "brain" worker. Ground down by overwork and mental strain, the brain-worker suffered from a chronic mental fatigue that Beard labeled neurasthenia. While Beard's theory would appear to have allowed men to blame their problems with impotence on the pressures of the modern world, it ironically prevented them from actually doing so, since this lassitude was simultaneously associated with mental weakness, which was itself seen as a sign of an internal defect similar to nervousness, brain disease, and insanity.

At the same time that a lack of virility was seen as a pervasive problem for individual men in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, there was also a general feeling of exhaustion, world-weariness, and a strong sense that Europe had reached the end of an age, a *fin de siècle*. In intellectual and artistic circles this feeling of ennui gave rise to the Decadence movement – a predominantly French and English phenomenon whose

themes and motifs satirically addressed the decay of culture in general and the decline of the bourgeois class in particular. Spanning the period from approximately 1880 to World War I, the movement was a conservative reaction to feminism and socialism in that it clung, as Jennifer Birkett (1995) observes, to traditional concepts of authority, hierarchy, and power. Simultaneously, however, Birkett notes it was also a perverse reaction to conventional values in that it portrayed the male as the thwarted virtuous spirit, who, devolving into an exemplar of neurotic impotence, found himself combating forces that perverted his desire into fetishism, violence, incest, torture, homophobia, murder, and madness (Birkett 222-223). Reflecting these perversions, the literary characters portrayed by the late-nineteenth-century Decadents frequently suffered from disease, dysfunction and despair as they expressed ineptitude, decadence, and failure.

While not a Decadent *per se*, as this movement never truly gained foothold in the German-speaking countries, Frank Wedekind was nonetheless influenced by and expressed many of the same ideas espoused by these artists. Like those of the Decadents, Wedekind's works are replete with the sexually deviant, the pathological, the psychosomatic, and the sterile. In contrast to the Decadents, however, Wedekind's works also reference those individuals (the sexologists, criminologists, psychiatrists, and others) who studied these anomalies. It was not by chance that Wedekind's dramas often included references to these professionals or that his images of disease and deviance fit so closely with the medical treatises of his day. With both his father and older brother making their livelihoods as physicians, medical discourses were not unfamiliar to Wedekind. Aside from family members, Wedekind also had friends in the medical profession. One friend, Elias Tomarkin, had become a bacteriologist, another, Leopold Fröhlich von Brugg, a psychiatrist who had once allowed Wedekind to accompany him on a tour of a mental institution (Wedekind, *Briefe* 1:131). Among his acquaintances Wedekind counted Karl Vogt, the famous German craniologist who was not only a school friend of his father's (Wedekind, *Briefe* 1:29-30), but also a long-time friend of Emma Herwegh, one of several older women who influenced Wedekind's literary career. Through his connection with yet another older woman, Henriette Gotthelf, Wedekind came into contact with Leopold von Sacher Masoch, the Austrian lawyer and writer best known for the erotic perversions he described in his literary works and that later bore his name. Finally, through a letter to his brother Armin, written in 1892, we know that during his sojourn in Paris, Wedekind also became acquainted with Max Nordau, the Hungarian physician and social critic who was at that time

working on his famous two-volume study *Entartung* (1896) (Wedekind, *Briefe* 1:229).

That Wedekind was himself an avid reader of medical works and especially those that dealt with sexual deviance and disease is clear from many sources. In his three-volume study of Wedekind and his works, his biographer, Artur Kutscher (1922-31), notes that Wedekind was influenced by the Italian neurologist and physiologist Paolo Mantegazza's *Die Physiologie der Liebe* (1877) and *Die Hygiene der Liebe* (1877), the French neurologist and scholar of male hysteria Jean-Martin Charcot's *Neue Vorlesungen über die Krankheiten des Nervensystems* (1886), and the works of the German psychiatrist Albert Moll. In his diaries Wedekind makes several references to reading Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* and the German internist Felix von Niemeyers' *Lehrbuch der speciellen Pathologie und Therapie mit besonderer Rücksicht auf Physiologie und pathologische Anatomie* (1863). In one of his many notebooks, Wedekind lists the famous Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso's *Genie und Irrsinn* (1887) as one of his most cherished texts (Kutscher 1:81). Finally, from his library holdings we know that Wedekind owned a copy of the German gynecologist and anthropologist Hermann Ploss's *Das Weib* (1885), which, Elisabeth Boa observes, offered Wedekind a cross-section of medical and anthropological opinions (185). While critics have long noted that a great deal of Wedekind's work comes from personal experiences as well as those of friends and family, much of what he develops in his dramas also comes from the sources mentioned above, and in particular, as Rolf Kieser (1990) observes, from the case studies found in Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*. This is particularly the case with *Erdgeist* (1895), the first of Wedekind's two Lulu plays, where Wedekind addresses, among other sexual disorders, various forms of impotence.

Like the Decadents, Wedekind believed that Europeans were no longer living in a robust age and that this lack of vitality was due in large part to a bourgeois class that sought to restrain sexual impulses in order to define itself as more civilized and moral than other cultures and classes. To counter this *bürgerliche Moral*, as Wedekind sarcastically labeled these prudish pieties, he proposed a new way of life which he believed would reawaken the most vigorous of human drives. This *menschliche Moral*, as Wedekind called it, was not a morality *per se*, but instead an expression of the life force he believed to be missing from modern society. Viewing sexuality as the most rejuvenating of human drives in that it held within it the primal instinct for life, Wedekind championed a more open expression thereof as a means for fostering his *menschliche Moral*. Unlike many of his

contemporaries, however, Wedekind did not see a rejuvenating sexuality in terms of procreation. For Wedekind, the reinvigoration of mankind would not come about by fathering more offspring, but rather by reawakening the life-affirming energies which the strictures of bourgeois morality had for too long repressed and denied.

How to incorporate his *menschliche Moral* into a society that was the antithesis of an instinctual lifestyle was a task that would occupy Wedekind throughout his career as each play he wrote would present a different scenario for meshing his instinctual imperative with the social norms of his day. While each work would eventually present a failure to attain this goal, nowhere does one see more clearly than in his Lulu plays, and in particular in *Erdgeist*, the first of these plays, the clashes that would occur when Wedekind's *menschliche Moral* would meet society's *bürgerliche Moral*. In *Erdgeist*, as the title itself suggests, Wedekind pits a female life force, wild, elemental and amoral in nature, against debilitating social conventions as they are expressed in men who suffered from morbid masculinities. In the conflicts that arise between his protagonist's primordial drives and the pretentious moralities of bourgeois society as they are projected onto her by the men in this work, Wedekind challenges the images of womanhood that real women were expected to emulate. Concurrently, by portraying his male characters as pillars of society and hence as supposed bastions of manhood but presenting them as satirical caricatures thereof, Wedekind likewise exposes the fallacious nature of these social representations.

In order to emphasize the enigmatic and suprahuman qualities of his female protagonist, Wedekind provides her with as little history as possible. Other than her name, Lulu, which she herself states «klingt ... ganz vorsündflutlich» (Vinçon 36), we know nothing significant about her background until she meets her benefactor, Dr. Schön, at the age of twelve. Even then, with the exception of a few minor references to Lulu's formative years under Schön's tutelage, we learn little else about her until Schön marries her off first to one ill-suited husband and then another. Within these marriages, Lulu's identity continues to remain intangible as each husband not only does not see her for what she truly is, but instead tries to project onto her that which he wishes her to be. By exposing the precarious nature of these *Wunschbilder* by which these men try to define not only Lulu but by extension then themselves as well, Wedekind submits his critique of both the institution of marriage and bourgeois society as he deconstructs the various masks worn by these "pillars of society", as well as the masks they attempt to superimpose onto Lulu.

This deconstruction begins with Lulu's first husband, the wealthy but

aging doctor and medical councilor Goll. Here, in her role as a child-bride, Lulu represents not only the image of woman naïve and innocent enough to be molded into whatever her husband desires, but as such, an unthreatening creature who lacks any resistance to the particulars of masculine desire. Goll expresses this same contention himself in the original manuscript when he tells Schöning (as Wedekind initially named Schön): «Ich liebe, wissen Sie, das Unfertige – das Hülflose – dem ein väterlicher Freund noch nicht entbehrlich geworden. Es weiß Einen wenigstens nicht zu kontrollieren» (Vinçon 11). Despite the appeal of innocence and acquiescence, the image of the childlike woman also carried with it an inherent threat, since it was generally believed that this kind of woman had neither the intellectual faculties to tell right from wrong nor the self-control to restrain her more instinctual urges. Given these shortcomings, general consensus mandated that the male, as the woman's guardian, be the one to regulate both her body and her behavior. With Goll portrayed as too old to actually consummate his marriage, the most he can do is enjoy his young bride vicariously in a voyeuristic manner. Understanding, however, that his wife requires more than mere visual appreciation, Goll must keep constant watch over Lulu to protect his own interests. In as much as Lulu is a prisoner of his gaze, so too then is he a prisoner of this very same gaze as his doubts and fears force him to keep up what Mark Breitenberg calls a «specular vigilance» (148) over his bride. Trapped by his own insecurities and distrust of Lulu's inherent nature, his desire to possess leads to a state of being himself possessed. Indeed, as Wilhelm Emrich observes, «Indem er sie derart zu seinem Objekt macht, wird er selbst zu ihrem Objekt. Argwöhnisch muß er sie bewachen. Aber der Bewachende ist an die Bewachte gebunden. Der Herrschende wird zum Opfer der Beherrschten. Seinen Besitz kann er in Wahrheit niemals besitzen» (213). The extent to which Goll is the victim of his own fears and insecurities *vis-à-vis* his manhood becomes clear when he encounters Schön and the latter's son, Alwa, at the atelier where he is having Lulu's portrait painted. Invited to join the two men for the opening of Alwa's play, Goll must choose between accepting the offer and leaving his wife unsupervised with the painter Schwarz or declining it and consequently exposing his fears of being cuckolded. Caught between two evils, Goll opts to protect the image of his manhood rather than to remain behind guarding Lulu. His death by heart attack is triggered when he returns from the theater and catches Lulu and Schwarz *in flagrante*. At this moment, it is not only the fidelity of his wife that he has lost, but perhaps more importantly, the loss of face relative to his own manhood. The insult that is added to this

injury is that his wife's seducer is both much younger and more virile, and thus appears to exemplify those traditional masculine characteristics lacking in Goll. In dying Goll delivers the final strike against his manhood himself as he underscores that he does not have the strength of will or body to withstand the shock of his wife's betrayal and his own disgrace.

After Goll's death, Schön marries Lulu off to Schwarz. Ironically, in this second marriage, Schwarz envisions Lulu first as a virgin-bride who has no sexual experience of her own and then as a "proper" housewife who has no sexual urges of her own. In this marriage, Lulu is no longer the prized possession of a man's erotic gaze, as she was with Goll. Instead, she is now simply one of the many opulent objects Schwarz accumulates to reflect his success as a society portraitist. Unlike Goll, who recognized and vicariously enjoyed Lulu's sexual endowments, Schwarz, is totally oblivious to these qualities as he sees in Lulu only the muse that inspires his paintings. His complete disavowal of her sexual nature as well as his own disinterest in sex, other than to impregnate Lulu, addresses, on the one hand, society's contention that the respectable lady was sexless, and, on the other hand, the notion that connubial relations with one's wife existed to propagate children; sex for pleasure was to be obtained elsewhere and then only seldom. Unlike Goll, who recognized Lulu's talents for the erotic and was himself a carnal creature, Schwarz has no comprehension of, let alone appreciation for Lulu's gifts in this respect. Furthermore, despite the fact that he pursued Lulu and that she gave in to his advances while still married to Goll, it is inconceivable to Schwarz that Lulu might not be the dutiful, faithful housewife he envisions her to be. Unlike Goll, whose downfall is brought about when his fears of being cuckolded come to fruition, Schwarz' downfall comes when his illusions of Lulu's purity are shattered. As Carola Hilmes remarks: «(i)n dem Augenblick, in dem ihn Dr. Schön über die wirkliche Lage aufklärt, ... wird [er] damit zum Opfer seiner eigenen enttäuschten Phantasien. Die verhängnisvolle Ent-Täuschung beruht dabei auf einer vorgängigen Selbsttäuschung, nämlich der blinden Fixierung auf das Bild der reinen Frau» (160). Unable to come to terms with Lulu as a sexual creature, let alone one who has been having an affair with Schön, Schwarz commits suicide by slitting his throat with a razor. The greater cruelty of Schwarz' death compared to Goll's indicates, as Boa observes, «a more vicious attack on Schwarz's sentimental moralism than on Goll's consciously exploitative hedonism» (83). Indeed, as Boa continues, «Lulu's preference for Goll indicates that she shares her creator's judgment on this matter, and reflects the general thrust of Wedekind's attack on morality» (83).

It is in Lulu's third husband, Schön, however, that Wedekind's sharpest criticism comes across. In this figure Wedekind depicts the hypocrisy of a society that knowingly and readily forces woman into the role of either Madonna or whore. Although Schön has no qualms about having an affair with Lulu during her marriage to Schwarz, once he realizes this intrigue could become public knowledge and threaten his own engagement, he attempts to end it. In this figure, then, Wedekind criticizes what Wolf Dietrich Rasch calls «(e)ine Gesellschaftsmoral, die sexuelle Aktivität zugleich erstrebt und verdammt, genießt und verachtet, heimlich praktiziert und öffentlich diffamiert» (411). Despite the fact that Schön recognizes Lulu's erotic nature and has taken advantage of it himself many times even prior to her marriage to Goll, he refuses to marry her because of it. While he concedes the hypocrisy of this stance, he nonetheless chooses to maintain it. Unlike her previous two husbands, who either did not recognize her carnal side or recognized only that, Schön is able to envision Lulu as both an erotic being and a bourgeois housewife. Despite his ability to integrate these supposedly contradictory images of womanhood, and his attempts to persuade Schwarz of the advantages of such a spouse, Schön does not want such a woman for his own wife and thus relegates Lulu to the realm of the purely sexual. Now in sharp contrast to the downfalls of Goll and Schwarz that came from their own failures to control Lulu and thus to live up to the bourgeois ideals of manhood, it will be Lulu who instigates Schön's destruction. Spurned by his rejection as well as his attempts to objectify her in front of his fiancée, Lulu refuses to keep the impropriety of their affair secret. Taunting him, she underscores the extent to which he is enslaved by her and hence too weak to break off their relationship.

Wo ist Ihre Energie? – Sie sind seit drei Jahren verlobt. Warum heiraten Sie nicht? – Sie kennen keine Hindernisse. Warum wollen Sie mir die Schuld geben? ... Seien Sie doch ein Mann. – Blicken Sie sich einmal ins Gesicht. – Sie haben keine Spur von Gewissen. – Sie schrecken vor keiner Schandtät zurück. – Sie wollen das Mädchen, das Sie liebt, mit der größten Kaltblütigkeit unglücklich machen. – Sie erobern die halbe Welt. – Sie tun, was Sie wollen – und Sie wissen so gut wie ich – daß ... Sie zu schwach sind – um sich von mir loszureißen. (Wedekind, *Stücke*, 139, 141)

Just how inseparably bound to Lulu Schön is becomes clear when she triumphantly dictates to him the letter that breaks off his engagement. While the phallic and therefore emasculating nature of this action is obvious, the fact that Schön is an important newspaper man who makes his living by the pen, gives this act even greater significance. By controlling

his pen, Lulu demonstrates to Schön that she commands two key features that define him as a man – his word and his will. Unable to keep up appearances, Schön can no longer make an advantageous marriage. As his pretentious posturing crumbles before Lulu's greater sexual power, he consents to marry her, but for Lulu this acquiescence comes too late. Because he, of all men, could recognize and appreciate the vitality of her nature but chose nonetheless to let society's norms dictate his actions, his hypocrisy is to be all the more despised as he lives in what Emrich calls a «dauerndem Selbstwiderspruch» (218). «[S]ein "Geist" ist im Grunde nichts anderes als der Geist ... [der] Gesellschaft selbst, deren Ideale er zwar als ideologische Tarnungen durchschaut, deren Wirklichkeit er aber um so rücksichtsloser lebt und verkörpert» (Emrich 212). Contrary to the relationships she had with her two previous husbands, Lulu's marriage to Schön will now be one of deliberate artifice and emasculation as she has sundry affairs, including one with his son. Cuckolding him publically to the extent that she brings her lovers into their marriage bed, Lulu not only strips Schön of any remnants of the bourgeois affectations behind which he might have hidden, she also destroys any vestiges of manhood to which he might have clung. Like her two previous husbands, Schön dies, but this time at the hands of Lulu, who shoots him to death with his own revolver. As with the pen previously, the phallic connotations here cannot be overlooked. The fact that Schön has readily given Lulu this weapon, albeit in an attempt to supposedly force her into suicide, adds yet more significance to this act. Whether Schön is making one final effort to impose his will on Lulu and thus regain control of his own life and manhood, or whether he is conceding defeat and staging his own murder, is unclear. Whatever his motivations for placing his weapon into Lulu's hands, in doing so Schön surrenders to her not only his manhood but his life as well.

While each of Lulu's husbands attempts to project a specific image of woman onto her, they also attempt to live up to a specific image of masculinity themselves. Goll is a well-respected physician who has risen high enough in his field to have become a medical consultant; Schwarz has become a well-known, well-paid society painter; and Schön is an important, influential newspaper man – in fact, Editor-in-Chief. Each in his own right has become a man of means, of prestige, and hence of power. But there is a sharp incongruence between their public personas, which demand respect and esteem, and their private lives, where each projects onto Lulu an image of womanhood meant not only to constrain *her* true nature, but simultaneously to help shield *his* own debilitated masculinity. Indeed, as Gerald Izenberg notes, «Lulu supplies, in fantasy at least, what each

male lacks for his sense of masculinity» (56). It is, however, more than a «sense of masculinity» that is lacking in these men, but in fact the ability to function sexually as men, as Wedekind depicts each of Lulu's husbands suffering from different forms of impotence.

To what extent Wedekind is indebted to the medical discourses of his day, but in particular to Krafft-Ebing, becomes clear when one analyzes the various forms of sexual dysfunction from which each of these men suffers. Borrowing heavily from research done by Lombroso, Darwin, Ploss and Mantegazza, Krafft-Ebing catalogued a multitude of sexual perversions, labeled them according to psychological or physical origins, and then cited over 200 case histories as examples of each of these anomalies in his pivotal work *Psychopathia Sexualis*. In discussing the causes of impotence in this work, Krafft-Ebing identifies both psychical and somatic factors. Under the former, he lists emotional factors such as disgust, fear of contagion, and even fear of impotence itself. Furthermore, Krafft-Ebing notes that psychical impotence can be found in men «who have an unconquerable antipathy to women» (50), who suffer from *sexual anaesthesia* (absence of sexual instinct), and men with perverse sexual instincts, such as masturbators, homosexuals, or effeminate men. Under somatic influences, he lists overstimulation of the genitals, which leads to a desensitizing thereof; diseases, such as gonorrhea and diabetes; poisons that affect the central nervous system; injuries, such as paralysis and other neurological damage that hinders stimulation; abuse of various substances such as alcohol and morphine; degenerative anomalies that have been inherited; and age-related impotence.

It is this latter form of impotence that Wedekind presents in Lulu's first husband Goll, who, in addition to being unable to consummate their marriage, exhibits other signs Krafft-Ebing attributes to this form of sexual deficiency. In addition to impairing the act of coitus itself, Krafft-Ebing notes that age-related impotence takes its toll on the sufferer psychically and emotionally and that it is often accompanied by an age-related dementia and moral depravity that leads the sufferer to turn to children for sexual satisfaction.

The first objects for the attempts of these senile subjects of brain atrophy and psychical degeneration are children. This sad and dangerous fact is explained by the better opportunity they have in succeeding with children, but more especially by a feeling of imperfect sexual power. Defective sexual power and greatly diminished moral sense explain the additional fact of the perversity of the sexual acts of such aged men. They are the equivalents of the impossible physiological act. (Krafft-Ebing 58)

Although Goll does not necessarily display signs of dementia, in having his housekeeper treat Lulu as a child to the extent that she even bathes and dresses her, and then he himself commanding that Lulu dance suggestively for him while he directs her with a whip, Goll expresses the pedophilic traits of moral depravity Krafft-Ebing attributes to those suffering from age-related impotence. Additionally, Goll's penchant for using the whip indicates a sadistic proclivity that Krafft-Ebing also attributes to certain forms of impotence. «If the sadist is psychically or spinally impotent, as an equivalent of coitus there will be noticed ... flagellation (of women ... [or] whipping of school children)» (Krafft-Ebing 53).

Unlike Goll, whose impotence expresses itself in a pronounced physical debility, Schwarz' impotence is what Krafft-Ebing describes as psychological in nature in that it has its origin in a reticence to have sex. While Wedekind presents Schwarz' inexperience in the original manuscript as due to a lack of courage and Schwarz even tells Lulu, «mir fehlt der rechte Muth zum Leben – zum Lieben» (Vinçon 29), by the 1895 version, Wedekind morphs this timidity into an outright fear of sex when he has Schwarz state, «[i]ch bin dem Glück nicht gewachsen. Ich habe eine höllische Angst davor» (Wedekind, *Stücke*, 106). That this fear of sex is specifically a fear of sex with women, what Krafft-Ebing labels *horror feminae*, is made clear in Lulu's observation «[E]r [hat] nie in seinem Leben das Bedürfnis gefühlt ..., mit Frauen zu verkehren ... Er hat Angst vor Frauen» (Wedekind, *Stücke*, 115). There may be more to Schwarz' fear than meets the eye, however, or than Schwarz may be willing to admit. In explaining his lack of courage in the original manuscript, Schwarz refers to himself as «eine alte Jungfer» (Vinçon 29). While this outdated form of *Jungfrau* explains his status as a virgin and thus as inexperienced, the fact that Wedekind employs the feminine form of this word instead of the masculine term, *Jüngling*, suggests another possible reason why Schwarz might be reticent to have sex with Lulu. In his analysis of impotence, Krafft-Ebing indicates that *sexual anaesthesia* may be triggered not only by a disinterest in or fear of sex, but additionally by homosexuality or effeminate tendencies, which Krafft-Ebing categorizes under *antipathic sexuality*. Whether Schwarz' reticence to have sex with Lulu is due to a lack of courage, fear of women, or one of these latter causes, Lulu's reproach «Sie sind kein Mann» (Vinçon 27) underscores the lack of masculinity she sees exemplified in this flaw. Whereas in the original manuscript Lulu makes this acerbic remark to Schwarz privately and bases it solely on his personal characteristics, by the 1895 version she expands her disparaging observation to encompass his career as well when she tells him «Ein Mahler ist doch auch eigentlich

gar kein Mann» (Wedekind, *Stücke*, 96). That Lulu ridicules Schwarz thus in front of both Goll and Schön, who have themselves been denigrating his artistic talents, makes Schwarz' emasculation all the more severe and punishing.

With Lulu's third husband, Schön, Wedekind portrays yet another type of impotence. Represented initially as a very powerful, virile man and the only one of her three husbands to have fathered offspring, Schön is a man whose impotence is not due to age, as we have seen with Goll, or psychological, as with Schwarz, but is instead the result of morphine dependence. While this detail is dropped from the later versions of the Lulu plays, in the original manuscript Wedekind stresses that Schön(ing)'s addiction interferes not only with his sex life but, as the following scene reveals, even with his will to continue dominating and controlling Lulu.

- Lulu:* Willst du denn nicht wieder mal ...
Schön(ing): Was denn?
Lulu: Was denn anders. – Du mußt mich binden und peitschen.
Schön(ing): Umsonst!
Lulu: Bis Blut kommt. – Ich schrei nicht. – Ich beiße auf mein Taschentuch.
Schön(ing): Es ist Hopfen und Malz verloren.
Lulu: (*läßt ihre Hand über sein graues Haar gleiten*) Aber warum vergiebst du mir denn dann nicht?
Schön(ing): Das ist das Morphinium.– Weil ich dabei zu Grunde gehe ... Ich war immer wie ein Vater zu dir.– Jetzt erst recht. (Vinçon 68)

While Schön(ing)'s inability to take up this role clearly points to his drug-induced impotence, the fact that it is Lulu and not Schön(ing) who attempts to initiate sex further underscores his loss of manhood. Given Lulu's own desires, the true extent of Schön(ing)'s impotence can now be seen in the fact that he not only exhibits a loss of physical desire, but also a lack of emotional and psychological motivation. In contrast to Lulu's previous two husbands, in Schön(ing) we now observe a double-impotence, so to speak, as he illustrates the worst of both Goll and Schwarz – the inability to have sex with Lulu, on the one hand, and the inability to desire it with her, on the other.

In addition to their impediments where the sex act itself is concerned, Lulu's husbands also lack other masculine characteristics and thus represent, as Izenberg states, «Wedekind's diagnostic chart of the infirmities of bourgeois masculinity at the end of the nineteenth century» (56). Goll is a fat old toad of a man and thus fails to live up to the physical ideal of male beauty; Schwarz lacks the courage to live a self-determined life and hence

cannot live up to the ideal of strong will; and Schön, while initially appearing to have what the other two men lack, nevertheless succumbs to the vagaries of addiction and thus allows not only the morphine to master him, but Lulu as well. Additionally, despite the façades of power and prestige each man projects outwardly, all are failures where other men are concerned since none of them are able to protect Lulu and hence their own masculinity from the onslaught of male rivals. In a society that defined a man not only by his capacity to possess a woman but also by his ability to control and keep her, these men come up short. With none of Lulu's husbands able to ensure her fidelity and therefore to secure their own faltering masculinities, they are no longer able to mask the fact that they are incomplete men. This exposure of their inadequacies serves in turn to fracture their precarious sense of manliness yet further as it reveals what they have all sought so desperately to hide – their deficiencies as men.

That each of Lulu's husbands lacks a significant portion of that which was upheld as the idealized notion of masculinity speaks not only to their own individual infirmities or the precarious position of bourgeois men in late-nineteenth-century Europe, but also to Wedekind's own personal fears and failings, since his characters invariably express facets of his own fragile masculinity. The impotencies of Lulu's husbands, which are at once physical, psychological, and metaphorical for a greater social malaise, reflect Wedekind's own struggles with this disorder. As his diaries reveal, impotence was a chronic problem for Wedekind during the initial writing of his Lulu plays, and, as Alan Best (1975) suggests in referring to the following quote from Tilly Wedekind's autobiography, may have continued to be a problem for him in his own marriage: «Er beschäftigte sich damit [Liebes- und Eheleben] theoretisch, aber tatsächlich spielte es gar keine so grosse Rolle bei ihm ... er war vor allem in Sorge, sein Partner, also ich, könnte anspruchsvoll sein» (100). In addition to this debility, Wedekind experienced other difficulties *vis-à-vis* his manhood that are likewise reflected in his male characters. Like Schwarz, Wedekind often found it difficult to cope sexually with adult women, and like Goll, found himself drawn to very young girls.

The similarities between Wedekind and his characters do not stop with his physical and psychological conditions, but carry over to his marital relations as well. Like his father before him, Wedekind chose his spouse not from the middle-class *milieu* of women born and bred to be housewives, but instead from the artisan community. What attracted both men to their future spouses were their vivacious, independent natures. Ironically, what

would then trouble both men in their wives would be these very same qualities. At the same time that Wedekind's relationship with Tilly replicated that of his parents, it also duplicated that of Lulu and her husbands. As Tilly relays in her autobiography, once they were married, Wedekind, like Schwarz, had little interest in sex. Like Goll, however, he was insanely jealous and possessive and obsessed constantly over the fidelity of his young wife, who was nineteen years his junior. Echoing Schön's stance, Wedekind was able to appreciate Tilly's independent, unconventional nature when he first met her, but in a wife he wanted a more traditional spouse – a devoted wife and mother who would raise the children and tend the home. As Tilly herself bemoans, Wedekind wanted «einen streng korrekten, bürgerlichen Haushalt» (124). Although he was not so conservative that he compelled Tilly to give up her career in the theater, Wedekind was insecure enough both as an artist and a man that he confined her acting solely to his own plays. Despite spending his whole career advocating a more liberal sexuality as a way to rejuvenate society, when it came to his own personal life and to protecting his own fragile sense of masculinity, Wedekind readily rejected his idealized *menschliche Moral* in favor of the *bürgerliche Moral* he had for so long vilified as antithetical to life.

Wedekind's anxiety *vis-à-vis* his own masculinity was not only an expression of his own personal demons, but very much a reflection of his times as well. Haunted by images of lost virility and emasculated men, Wedekind advocated a revitalizing of his age by championing a remasculinizing of his society. Like Krafft-Ebing and others whose works he incorporated into his own, Wedekind saw the malaise of his world, the *mal du siècle*, as a reflection of a society that had lost its regenerative force. That Wedekind took his cues from Krafft-Ebing and other social scientists who attributed much of this degeneration to inherited disorders and “diseases of modernity” such as neurasthenia and male hysteria can be seen throughout his vast *œuvre* where he repeatedly depicts these and other debilitating ailments and in particular those that result from sexual aberrations. In sharp contrast to popular opinion and mainstream medical thought, which maintained that society's decay was prompted by increased licentiousness and depravity, Wedekind asserted that just the opposite was true. For him, the decadence he saw all around him was not the result of lax ethical standards, as the purity leagues were asserting, but instead due to an overly restrictive moral code that had warped mankind's true nature into something deviant and degenerate. For Wedekind, the revitalization of society would not come about by curbing one's baser drives, but instead by giving them freer rein.

Although Wedekind placed great emphasis on a more liberal sexuality for both men and women (at least outside his own bourgeois marriage), this was not to say that he believed in emancipation for women in other respects. Despite critical interpretations that have understood Wedekind as an advocate for women (Hibberd, 1984; Völker, 1965; Rasch, 1969), as someone who advanced many of the same ideas espoused by the First Women's Movement (Lorenz, 1976), or as an artist who identified with the feminine (Izenberg, 2000), Wedekind remained very much in lockstep with the patriarchy of his times. While his works are replete with highly erogenous women, these female characters were a means to an end and nothing more. As much as Nietzsche's superwoman was to serve his superman, so too were Wedekind's sexually vibrant women meant to service his men. In contrast to Nietzsche's superwoman, whose role was to bear the next generation of supermen, Wedekind's sirens were not to be mothers or necessarily even wives, but instead to be what Carl R. Mueller calls the «lure and the allure» (18), the sexual conduits through which his male characters would reconnect to their more primal instincts and hence return to their true masculine natures. As such, Wedekind's sexually dynamic women were the tools but not the telos of his *menschliche Moral*. The freedom that could come from living a more vibrant lifestyle was to be gained through the woman, but not for the woman. This is particularly true for Lulu, who, the ringmaster tells us in the Prologue to *Erdgeist*, is «[d]as wahre Tier, das wilde, schöne Tier» (Wedekind, *Stücke*, 81). Beautiful as she might be, vibrant as she might be, she is nonetheless a beast, and one in fact in search of a master. Given a choice between the whip-yielding Goll who was physically impotent but nevertheless erotic and the banal Schwarz who could function sexually but had no interest in doing so, Lulu readily chooses Goll. That it is ultimately only Schön, however, whom she desires and only Schön whom she professes to love, makes it clear that Lulu wants the man strong enough – physically, mentally, and spiritually – to dominate her and bind her to him. That her first two husbands lacked the physical or mental fortitude to carry out this task, and that Schön opts in the end to choose conventional morality and morphine over vitality, speaks not to a failure on Lulu's part to entice the men to the more elemental, vibrant lifestyle of the Earthspirit, but rather to the men themselves and the times in which they lived.

Wedekind wrote his works during a period when rapid industrialization, increased urbanization, and technological concentration were, as Michael Kimmel observes, «creat[ing] a new sense of an oppressively crowded, depersonalized, and often emasculated life» (83). The Women's

Movement, the increased visibility of the homosexual, and the sexologists' investigations into male maladies exacerbated this sense of impotence still further as they exposed the precarious nature of masculinity. While Wedekind attempted, through his literary works, to map a path back to what he envisioned had been more robust times and more vigorous men, it would be the outbreak of hostilities in 1914 that would appear to offer ordinary men a panacea for their sense of powerlessness. Ironically, as these men marched eagerly off to war, envisioning themselves becoming warrior-heroes and thus recouping their worth as men, they could not foresee to what extent this conflict would shatter not only their hopes and dreams, but, in many cases, their minds and bodies as well, thus leaving them even more hopelessly debilitated and impotent than ever before.

Works Cited

- Beard, George M. «The Longevity of Brain-Workers». *The Public Health Papers and Reports*, Vol. 1. 1873. 54-69. Web. 14 May 2012. <<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2272666/?page=1>>
- Berendes, Julius. *Die Pharmacie bei den alten Culturvölkern: Historisch-kritische Studien*. Halle: Tausch u. Grosse, 1891. Print.
- Best, Alan. *Frank Wedekind*. London: Oswald Wolf, 1975. Print.
- Biggs, Robert D. *Sà.zi.ga, Ancient Mesopotamian Potency Incantations*. New York: J.J. Augustin, 1967. Print.
- Birkett, Jennifer. «Decadence». *The New Oxford Companion to Literature in French*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995. Print.
- Boa, Elisabeth. *The Sexual Circus: Wedekind's Theatre of Subversion*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987. Print.
- Breitenberg, Mark. *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1996. Print.
- Brooks, Chandler et al., *Humors, Hormones, and Neurosecretions: The Origins and Development of Man's Present Knowledge of the Humoral Control of Body Function*. New York: SUNY Press, 1962. Print.
- Chinese Civilization: A Sourcebook*. 2nd ed. Ed. Patricia B. Ebray. New York: The Free Press, 1993. Print.
- Copland, James. *A Dictionary of Practical Medicine*. Vol. 2. London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans & Roberts, 1858. Web. 14 May 2012. <<http://books.google.com/books?id=kvhIgyYuMCgC&pg=PA322&1pg=PA322&dq=copland+dictionary+impotence&source=bl&ots=beoYqeL5xB&sig=TbEiKYfhi3ZuuglMaITDegDI3jI&hl=en&sa=X&ei=-6JST8XQBM260QHHz8i0DQ&ved=0CDsQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false>>

- Edwardes, Allen. *The Jewel in the Lotus: A Historical Survey of the Sexual Culture of the East*. New York: Julian Press, 1959. Print.
- Emrich, Wilhelm. «Wedekind – Die Lulu-Tragödie». *Das deutsche Drama: Vom Barock bis zur Gegenwart*. Ed. Benno von Wiese. Düsseldorf: August Bagel, 1962. Print.
- Herman, J.R. «Impotencia through the Ages». *Journal of the American Society of Psychosomatic Dentistry & Medicine*. 16.3 (1969): 93-99.
- Hibberd, J.L. «The Spirit of the Flesh: Wedekind's Lulu». *The Modern Language Review*. 79.2 (1984): 336-355. Print.
- Hilmes, Carola. *Die Femme Fatale: Ein Weiblichkeitstypus in der Nachromantischen Literatur*. Stuttgart: Metzler, 1990. Print.
- Izenberg, Gerald. *Modernism and Masculinity: Mann, Wedekind, Kandinsky through World War I*. The University of Chicago Press, 2000. Print.
- Kane, Michael. *Modern Men: Mapping Masculinity in English and German Literature, 1880-1930*. London; New York: Cassell, 1999. Print.
- Kieser, Rolf. *Benjamin Franklin Wedekind: Biographie einer Jugend*. Zürich: Arche, 1990. Print.
- Kimmel, Michael. *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford UP, 2006. Print.
- Krafft-Ebing, Richard v. *Psychopathia Sexualis: A Medico-Forensic Study*. Trans. Victor Robinson. New York: Pioneer Publications, 1939. Print.
- Kutscher, Artur. *Frank Wedekind, sein Leben und seine Werke*. Vol. 1. München: Georg Müller, 1922-31. Print.
- Lorenz, D.C.G. «Wedekind und die emanzipierte Frau. Eine Studie über Frau und Sozialismus im Werke Frank Wedekinds». *Seminar*. 12.1 (1976): 38-56. Print.
- The Medical Works of Hippocrates*. Trans. J. Chadwick and W.N. Mann. Oxford: Blackwell. 1950. Print.
- Mueller, Carl R. *The Lulu Plays*. Lyme, Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications, 1967. Print.
- Nunn, John F. *Ancient Egyptian Medicine*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996. Print.
- The Perfumed Garden of the Shaykh Nefzawi*. 1886. Trans. Richard F. Burton. Ed. Allan Hull Walton. New York: Putnam, 1964. Print.
- Pharus III. *Frank Wedekind: Die Büchse der Pandora: Eine Monstrettragödie*. Ed. Hartmut Vinçon. Darmstadt: Jürgen Häusser, 1990. Print.
- Rasch, Wolfdietrich. «Sozialkritische Aspekte in Wedekinds Dramatischer Dichtung: Sexualität, Kunst und Gesellschaft». *Gestaltungsgeschichte und Gesellschaftsgeschichte*. Stuttgart: Metzler, 1969. 409-26. Print.
- Roper, Lyndal. «“Wille” und “Ehre”: Sexualität, Sprache und Macht in Augsburger Kriminalprozessen». In *Wandel der Geschlechterbeziehungen zu Beginn der Neuzeit*. Eds. Heide Wunder & Christina Vanja. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1991. 43-68. Print.

- Shokeir, Ahmed and Mahmoud Hussein. *International Journal of Impotence Research*. 16 (2004): 385-388. Web. 14 May 2012. <<http://www.nature.com/ijir/journal/v16/n5/full/3901195a.html#aff2>>
- Siraj, Qaisar Hussain. «A Short History of Impotence». Knol. 2008 Aug 1. Web. 14 May 2012. <<http://knol.google.com/k/a-short-history-of-impotence>>
- The Susruta Samhita*. Trans. and Ed. Kaviraj Kunjalal Bhishagratna. Calcutta: Bharat Mihir Press, 1907-1916. Web. 14 May 2012. <<http://www.archive.org/stream/englishtranslati00susruoft#page/n17/mode/2up>, <http://www.archive.org/details/englishtranslati01susruoft>, <http://www.archive.org/details/englishtranslati03susruoft>>
- Tannahil, Reay. *Sex in History*. New York: Stein and Day, 1980. Print.
- Tosh, John. *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-class Home in Victorian England*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1999. Print.
- Veith, Ilza. *Huang Ti Nei Ching Su Wen. The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine*. Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins, 1949. Print.
- Völker, Klaus. *Frank Wedekind*. Velber bei Hannover: Friedrich, 1965. Print.
- Wedekind, Frank. *Gesammelte Briefe*. Vol 1. München: Georg Müller, 1924. Print. – *Stücke*. München: Albert Langen & Georg Müller, 1970. Print.
- Wedekind, Tilly. *Lulu: Die Rolle meines Lebens*. München: Rütten & Loening Verlag, 1969. Print.