

WENDLA, LULU AND WEDEKIND: A NEW HISTORICISM
APPROACH TO THE EXAMINATION OF
CONTEXT IN *SPRING AWAKENING*
AND *THE LULU PLAYS*

By

Sara Brooke Christian

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Committee Members:

Sandra Mayo, Chair

John Fleming

James Price

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I. INTRODUCTION

“Search fearlessly for every sin, for out of sin comes joy.” These are the controversial words of Frank Wedekind, whose work truly embodies this mindset. Wedekind’s reputation and work had an insurmountable impact on the expressionism movement and ruffled as many feathers along the way as he could. His two most prominent projects, *Spring Awakening* (also known as *Spring’s Awakening*) and *The Lulu Plays*, were not only early examples of expressionism, but platforms for provocative material. Wedekind pushed a lot of boundaries with these two plays, as both contain themes such as death, sex, and punishment. One of the most interesting aspects of these particular plays is the outcome and fate of his female protagonists. *Spring Awakening* focuses on three young children, one of which is a young girl named Wendla. At just fourteen years of age, Wendla’s life ended abruptly. Lulu, the central character in *The Lulu Plays*, also died prematurely. While both of these characters had their flaws, their deaths were shocking and unexpected. The treatment of these two characters provides insight into the social and cultural background of the playwright and the world he was writing in, which happened to be Imperial Germany (1871-1918). In order to examine the context of the plays properly, a particular method is needed.

Some might consider gaining cultural, social or political information about a particular time and place from a play or literary text to be quite obvious. And indeed, it appears that way. However, like most things involving theory and theatre, it is much more complicated than that. Diving deeper into the cultural situations in which a play was written and/or when and where the characters are living allows for a greater sense of

history. Theorists have postulated the historical accuracy of literary texts for years, but in the nineteen eighties, a new theory emerged which placed the importance of a literary text as an historical document front and center. This theory, known as New Historicism, favored viewing texts, such as plays, as more of a historical document than piece of art. That is, it is more important to see a text as a window into the past and a commentary on what was happening in the world rather than just a piece of entertainment or perhaps even a form of singular self-expression from the author.

As a historical document, a text is given the responsibility of accurately projecting history and giving the audiences in the future a taste of what life was truly like. When examining a text via the context, an allowance is made that provides crucial information needed to properly understand the plight of the characters. Understanding the context of the situation provides a much-needed exploration of the reasoning behind each action by a character. This also gives a playwright more responsibility to accurately portray society. In addition, the playwright has the ability to comment on said society in different ways. This means bringing social and political issues to the forefront, as well as contributing to their own issues with society. Playwrights, however, are not immune to falling to the woes of society. This means they can discuss important issues that need to be resolved in society while perhaps simultaneously falling victim to different problems in society involving issues with women, class, religion and so on.

The time period in which a play was written influences every aspect of the text. Events happening at the time not only influence the author, but influence the audience as well. An author may use a specific historical event or social problem to not only

influence the text, but comment on how it affects a certain group of people. The culture of the author and the audience plays a huge role. The tendencies, ideals, beliefs, and systems of a culture can be seen in the text through how the characters live and how they respond to their circumstances. It is important to understand the world the play was born into. By doing so, one can gain a greater understanding of the actions of the characters. Imperial Germany is obviously a different environment than Germany a hundred years prior or even late nineteenth century America. The views members of this society held toward women, sex, class, authority, and death were evident throughout both plays. Wedekind did not share many of the mainstream views of society. His views were by no means without fault, but they were strong, obvious, and over the top. He created caricatures of the respectable and heroes of the hidden. Nonetheless, he provided a window to the past.

The New Historicism theory postulates that a text or play is a window into history and the struggles or triumphs of society. Some playwrights truly wrote about the issues that were important at the time. Frank Wedekind wrote a play about children, sex, and authority in *Spring Awakening*, but provides valuable information about the raw state of reality at the time. The same can be said of *The Lulu Plays* involving a prostitute and murder. Both of these plays are not only poignant pieces of cultural information, but leave behind traces of history. The two female protagonists, Wendla and Lulu, offer a great amount of insight into what it was like to be a girl or women in this time when Imperial Germany was littered with tension, rules, and struggle. It brings to light an interesting question. Why did Wedekind kill his two female leads? This is not a black and

white question, but one that deserves careful consideration and extra attention. Is it perhaps because of the cultural situation surrounding Wedekind as he wrote or maybe his own subconscious view? Were the women being punished by society for their actions? Was Wedekind himself punishing them? These are a few of the questions that will be explored with in this thesis. Properly researching the New Historicism Theory, Imperial Germany, and Frank Wedekind while analyzing the characters of Wendla and Lulu will help answer those questions. An examination of context in Wedekind's *Spring Awakening* and *The Lulu Plays*, using the New Historicism method and placing an emphasis on Wendla and Lulu, allows for a deeper understanding of the role society played in sealing their fate.

II. AN INTRODUCTION TO NEW HISTORICISM

The term “New Historicism” came to life in 1982 when Stephen Greenblatt, a theorist from the University of California Berkeley, coined the term and birthed its first intellectual roots. The popularity of this historicism, whose followers showed concern over the relationship between text and context, came about in the seventies, and gained momentum in the eighties and nineties. For example, if Robert Burns was not from eighteenth century Scotland, but instead present day New Jersey, there may have never been an “Auld Lang Syne” to ring in the New Year. Burns was shaped by his meanderings through Scotland and the turmoil that is basically all of Scottish history. His poems tell us their story. The life of the author, their psychological background, or other pieces of literature that may have influenced the author are all factors to be considered when examining a text with a New Historical lens. A piece of literature relies heavily on the social and historical context in which it was written, and this relationship between text and context is of the upmost importance. This chapter focuses on aspects of New Historicism including 1) its comparative relationship to Old Historicism and Cultural Materialism, 2) its interdisciplinary nature, 3) its emphasis on the embeddedness of art and history, 4) the suggested narrow range of culture, 5) the challenges and approaches implemented, 6) its relationship with power and knowledge and 7) the role of language and linguistics.

While Old Historicism scholars view history as written as a more accurate view of what really happened, New Historicism promotes subjectivity. Old Historicism Theory, like the New, follows the idea that knowing the historical background of a text will give

the reader a more accurate interpretation of the text. New Historicism takes this thought to a different level by viewing text as a living culture. The culture and the art are braided together. Old Historicism lets the historical background take a back seat to the actual text because they believe it to be an accurate mirror of history, whereas New Historicism looks closer at the social and cultural factors. Another somewhat likeminded school of thought is Cultural Materialism. It is under the umbrella of Marxist theory, like New Historicism however, its take on politics is where the converging thoughts differ. Cultural Materialists spend more energy placing the text in the politics of the present rather than the past, and in general have a more optimistic view of politics. New Historicists tend to focus on the political and power struggles of the past, which shaped the ideologies of the text. The basic principles of New Historicism include taking into consideration the history of the time, the history of the present and the history of the author. These 'histories' are more than just events on a timeline or words on a government document. They cover a broad and varying surface. An artifact is an item of historical and cultural interest; therefore, a piece of literature is an artifact of history in the eyes of the theorists of New Historicism.

While literature scholars from years past considered history as a sequence of events and ideas portrayed in a linear way, New Historicism is more interdisciplinary. It brings together academic disciplines that were once thought very distinct from each other such as history, science, sociology, philosophy, religious studies, and political studies. Anything of these academic disciplines should be considered within the New Historicism

definition of an historical artifact, and this includes a piece of literary work. Don E.

Wayne argues:

New Historicism does not pertain to a school or coherent theory of cultural history. Rather it designates a fairly diverse body of scholarship with some common attributes. The range of such works includes a type of literary criticism that deals principally with the importance of local political and social contexts for the understanding of literary texts; a type of cultural history influenced by the work of symbolic anthropologies. (793)

New Historicism, according to Greenblatt, based at its core, holds the position that one can gain meanings from the traces left behind from those before them. These traces may not even have been able to be deciphered or articulated by the original party members themselves, and because of this, discoveries can be sought on their own. The ability to grasp something that the original authors may have never been able to grasp from their own era is brought to attention. This ushers an important historical point where art and literature can be interpreted in many different ways. The social and political context in which they are interpreted is momentously important and gives credence to the relationship of text and context being mutually inclusive.

There is a ‘mutual embeddness of art and history,’ says Johann Gottfried von Herder, a German philosopher, theologian and literary critic from the eighteenth century (Gallagher et al 6). In *Practicing New Historicism* the authors Greenblatt and Catherine Gallagher quote Herder:

In poetry's galley of diverse ways of thinking, diverse aspirations and diverse desires, we come to know periods and nations far more intimately than we can through the misleading and pathetic method of studying their political and military history. From this latter kind of history, we rarely learn more about a people than how it was ruled and how it was wiped out. From its poetry, we learn about its way of thinking, its desires and wants, the way it rejoiced, and the ways it was guided either by its principles or its inclinations. (6)

Literature has the potential to tell the audience about the social and political context much like an actual history textbook, or historical document in a museum. New Historicism fights for the contextuality of human activities and thoughts. A person has their own context and their own cultural and historical perspective. Cultural relativism is the principle that an individual human's beliefs and activities should be understood by others in terms of that individual's own culture, and is considered axiomatic in anthropological research. Historian Dwight W Hoover claims, "According to audience reception theory, what a speaker says or a writer writes may be quite different from what a listener hears and a reader reads. Each is conditioned by experience, expectation, race, class and gender" (Hoover 357). Audience reception is simply a way of characterizing a rash of audience research. Edward Pechter says, to "use audience reception theory to interpret the text on the basis of how it articulates with the political views of the audience, either of the author's or the reader's time," in relation to audience reception (Hoover 361). This means that the interpretation of the audience, during either the author's time or the

reader's time, affects the text and how it is viewed. Hoover also explains that New Historicism theorists believe that humans have no nature and are shaped and defined by their culture. They only have history, and is therefore why different societies have such a variation in cultural assumptions. This means an assumption made in one culture cannot be held continuous with another.

Art emerges in culture with only a narrow range of options and each individual is socially constructed by their environment and surrounding society. Gallagher and Greenblatt say in *Practicing New Historicism*, "Any individual culture, no matter how complex and elaborate, can express and experience only a narrow range of options" (5). There are only so many things the artists can take from and be influenced by within their own culture and within a certain time frame, and in fact we "invent a drama according to its own history, spirit of times, customs, opinions, language, national bias traditions and inclinations" (Gallagher et al. 7). Greenblatt believes it is the inner resources of the people of a particular time and place, and not the individual skill of the artists, where the deepest level of art lies (Gallagher et al. 7). He goes on to assert that poetry "is not the path to a transhistorical truth, whether psychoanalytic or deconstructive or purely formal, but the key to particular historically embedded social and psychological formations" (Gallagher et al. 7). Literature is how we should view the world or what has happened in the world. It is a true representation of history. As per Gallagher and Greenblatt, "The writers we love did not spring up from nowhere" and "their achievements must draw a whole life-world," which "undoubtedly left traces of itself" (Gallagher et al. 12). These traces provide clues that can be interpreted and put together in order to gain an

understanding of the text and its significance. These traces, or clues, must be organized and properly analyzed in order to answer the questions provided by the text and the culture surrounding it.

Practicing New Historicism presents a few of the questions and challenges the theory faces. Firstly, this involves treating these assumptions like a piece of history that needs to be interpreted on its own. Secondly, New Historicists often decide which texts from a particular culture and time are worth pursuing. Which texts are the ones that captivate the historical essence the most, and leave behind the greatest trace of a true history? Thirdly, the way in which a certain person or culture understands something, such as the differences between women and men, should not be limited or reduced to only those representations despite being closely bound to their particular culture representative. Fourthly, another important notion to follow is that there is always more to be discovered; there are always more traces of history found in the text that could be explored and there is always something further to pursue. Lastly, there becomes a vast array of textual archives, and within those archives, a large appreciation for the individual text. New Historicism “becomes a history of possibilities” because while still remaining interested in the collective, it “remains committed to the value of the single voice, the isolated scandal, the idiosyncratic vision, the transient sketch” (Gallagher et al. 16). It does not gloss over the individualistic aspects of a text just in order to gain a larger scale understanding of the time and place, and is not trying to diminish any aesthetic value. Catherine Gallagher, in “Marxism and The New Historicism” reasons:

Although there has been a certain amount of controversy over just what new historicism is... most of its adherents and opponents would probably agree that it entails reading literary and nonliterary texts as constituting historical discourses that are both inside and outside of texts and that its practitioners generally posit no fixed hierarchy of cause and effect as they trace the connections among texts, discourses, power, or the constitution of subjectivity. (37)

These challenges provide a greater understanding of the context and a deeper level of analysis of the text. This illuminates another important relationship between text and context and power and politics. No culture is simply “politics in disguise” but rather an occupation of “particular historical situations” (Gallagher, “Marxism and The New Historicism” 37). New Historicism’s relationship with power is quite prevalent.

There is a notion that history books and the study of politics is disciplined by power. Those with power wrote the historical documents and therefore may not have an accurate perspective of what was really happening during a particular time and place. Carolyn Porter suggests that literature “participates in the historical process,” which shapes a sense of reality for the reader (Hoover 363). This is accomplished by “setting terms of the discourse of a particular age or society. By doing so, it demonstrates the diversity of ideologies present at the same time,” as Hoover further explains Porter’s intent here (Hoover 363). The aim of this theory is to study how the text and the piece of literature reflects the society in which it was written. How does it mirror the social and historical context? Also, how does the text comment on the context? That is, what is the

literature saying about the society? This reveals more than just a series of events that happened during the timeline of the story but what it was like for particular people to live during the time of the story. Historical documents may contain valuable information about how something was won, but literature can tell us why it was lost.

The New Historicism theory is heavily influenced by Foucault, and “following Foucault, the New Historicism is interested in the distribution of power,” according to Paul Fry, as he writes in his chapter of *Theory of Literature* (249). Foucault is widely known for his belief that people do not have power implicitly, but rather it is a tool in which people can engage in. His thoughts on identity and how individuals do not have a real identity per se, but only a way of conversing about one, rejects the popular notion that one has an identity within them. According to Fry, the New Historicism’s younger scholars had a particular view of the pressing social concerns happening at the time. This was post Vietnam, and the distribution of power on a global scale was very concerning to them. They wanted a “return to history.” He says, “it felt that the ethical tipping point had been arrived at and modes of analysis that had been flourishing needed to be superseded by those in which history and the political implications of what one was doing became prominent and central” (248). That time period, and the social issues pressing the views of thought, inspired the New Historicism thinkers to view literature in this same way.

“The study of history is undertaken by this school of thought in part to reveal systems of power,” says Fry (249). He also believes this way of thought came as a response to pressure and a rise in ethical failure in the isolation of literary texts from historical currents by literary studies. Fry vocalizes that New Historicists believe:

Power is not just the power vested authorities of state sanctioned violence or tyranny from above. Although it can be those things and frequently is, power in Foucault's much more pervasively and also insidiously the way in which Knowledge circulates in a culture; the way what we think that is appropriate to think—acceptable thinking—is distributed by largely unseen forces in a social network or system. (249)

The social construct of a society plays a large role in how information is distributed and interpreted. New Historicists see the world as a spirited clash of power; a reticulum struggle of authority and subversion. There are no absolutes in history for New Historicists. The meaning ascribed to history represents the power relations of the time of the writing as well as the time of the event's occurrence. Hoover states in his chapter:

Language has meaning not clear to even the user; it reflects a battle over meaning and represents the victor's party but still contains elements of the loser's position. The universe of the text is expanded to include everything, society and the individual in it not excluded. (357)

This implies that both sides of the power struggle are seen in history through literature.

Many of the reasons why some authors and playwrights wrote their pieces were to have their own say in the matter. The 'matter' being what was happening around them. One may not be able to change any laws or run for an elected position, but they can write characters that do. Or they can write characters that bring important political or social discussions to the surface. If Germany in the latter part of the nineteenth century was undergoing massive amounts of change, none of which included any steps towards a

reformation of the educational system, then a playwright writing a play about young children in a broken and stagnant school system makes a large statement. The language within a text provides clues and act as symbols that represent the conditions of the time and place. These clues provide a glimpse into the perspective of a potentially “voiceless” party or group. For instance, *Spring Awakening* is about young schoolchildren and the struggles they face; however, there are most likely very little historical documents that illuminate the hardships of children. Adults did not always listen to children and the historical documents from that time were written from the perspective of the adult, not the child. Literature can allow the child to speak through the writing of an adult who can provide knowledge they have learned. Literature can empower the voiceless children.

Literature itself, through its language and its meaning, has the capability to influence history, just as history influences literature. Meaning, the relationship between language and history is reciprocal. According to Gallagher and Greenblatt, this thought is what separates the New Historicists from the Old Historicists, who argued history is the “background of discourse in literature” (Fry 250). David Hollinger criticizes the New Historicism’s dependence on language and linguistics by saying it has a “tendency to reduce all history into questions of language and its meaning, to argue that all human action is dependent upon symbolic representation and cultural meaning” (Hoover 356). This linguistic imperialism refers to the transfer of a dominant language to other people. This is not necessarily the case. It dives deeper into the details of the texts some may view as insignificant and avoids sweeping generalizations of a text or period. New

Historicism scholars are interested in the intention of the author and the reception of the original audience.

Greenblatt claimed to be fascinated by how “some texts possess some limited immunity from the policing functions of their society, how they lay claim to special status and how they contrive to move from one time period to another without losing all meaning” (Gallagher et al. 17). This refers to the capability, or in-capability, of a text to move from one time period to the next and still maintain its full meaning. Wesley Morris says, “language for the poet is the key to time present and time future, and for the reader it is key to time present and time past” thereby giving justification to the notion that literature has meanings that are essential to the ‘then-now’ and should be considered by the critic (Morris 793). There are some issues that will always be relevant to the human condition and way of life, however, some elements of history and culture may not translate the same way when moved across decades. But again, it is about traces. There is always a trace of something that any reader from any timeframe can gather from a text. Whether it is a trace of something they already knew from their own historical background or a trace of something new that they never knew they could attach to an aspect of their life, they are still able to gather these traces and create their own truths.

A main objective here is to gain a greater understanding of a text by virtue of the historical context and vice versa. In studying the key aspects of New Historicism, such as, the interdisciplinary nature, the fixation of art and history, the challenges it faces, the influence of power and knowledge, and the meanings of language, awareness is created. New Historicism reminds us that reconstructing the past or a piece of history for what it

really and truly was, is a difficult task, but learning of the intellectual history through literature provides a more culturally sensitive perspective. Being aware of the history within the story, within the time frame of the author and within our own time frame is a key component. Bias runs through all of these avenues, and again is something that should be addressed and further investigated. The core of all this is the relationship between text and context. Through investigating the many relationships New Historicism has within itself and within like-minded movements, absorption of the theories intent is made. Despite New Historicism's complicated history and various approaches, its emphasis on context as a substantial signifier in a literary work is an important tool for the analysis of Wedekind's treatment of the female leads in his plays.

III. IMPERIAL GERMANY

In order to understand the world of the play, it is important to understand the world of the playwright. This means looking into what was happening during history at the time the play was written and the characters were living. In doing so, one can detect the traces of culture and human history mentioned earlier when discussing the New Historicism approach. Instead of trying to encompass an entire country's history, the goal of this chapter is highlighting the key aspects of the era and make note of the significant aspects of the culture that perhaps shaped the playwright's writing, the characters behavior, and the audiences' perception. Both of these plays were written in Germany during the time of Kaiser Wilhelm II's reign (1871-1918). *Spring Awakening* was written in 1890 and takes place during that same time. *The Lulu Plays* were written between 1894 and 1904 and were performed in the first ten years of the twentieth century. This chapter focuses on looking at some of the key facts and figures about Germany during this time including Kaiser Wilhelm II as the German Emperor and King of Prussia, political parties that thrived or were founded, class structure, education and religion, women's movements, and popular art forms of the era.

Imperial Germany, also known as the German Empire or the German Reich, was founded in 1871 by Otto von Bismarck and was a Federal Monarchy. In 1888, Wilhelm II stepped into the role of Kaiser after the death of his father, Wilhelm I, who only held that position a few months. Wilhelm, a grandson of Queen Victoria of England, was sickly as a child and never had full use of his left arm. In *The Economist* article, "How the Kaiser

Led to Hitler”, the author reviews John Rolh’s book, *Kaiser Wilhelm II: A Concise Life*, and says, “His personality combined with the militaristic, authoritarian culture of the Prussian court” created a “monarch who was extraordinarily ill-suited to lead the most powerful country in Europe at the end of the 19th century” (Web). His strained relationship with his mother affected his view of Britain and he turned against many English liberal ideas. He created a large naval army and in doing so created an Anglo-German rivalry, which did not grow cold on the heels of World War I. As Kaiser, he ruled as an absolute monarch and had the sole power to take his country to war.

According to *The Economist*, “Germany had the trappings of a liberal democracy with an elected parliament, but its institutions, other than the Prussian-dominated army, were alarmingly hollow. Its government reflected a court society in which all power sprang from the Kaiser.” The article quotes Wilhelm as saying, “I am the sole master of German policy...my country must follow me wherever I go.” According to the *Handbook of Imperial Germany* by Janet and Joe Robinson:

All of the powers that the Kaiser enjoyed under the Imperial Constitution were originally found in the Constitution of the North German Confederation but under three different designations: (1) As the King of Prussia, he was the chief magistrate of the State of Prussia. (2) As Bunderfeldherr, he commanded the Imperial Navy and was responsible for the regulation and organization of the Army; and was also given complete military authority over the North German Confederation; (3) in the capacity of the Prsidium; he opened and closed the legislative bodies,

published federal laws, appointed the chancellor, and supervised the federal administrations. The powers of the King of Prussia, the Bunderfeldherr, and the Präsidium were combined into the powers of the Kaiser in the 1871 imperial constitution. (47)

John Rohl seems to firmly believe that the Kaiser is very much to blame for the events that transpired on July of 1914, and it was no secret that Wilhelm was not going to shy away from any war. And he did indeed lead Germany into the war in 1914. Ann Goldberg says in her book, *Honor, Politics, and the Law in Imperial Germany*, “despite its democratizing and liberalizing trends, Imperial Germany remained constrained within illiberal forms of government and the outsized power of an authoritarian monarchy, military, and bureaucracy” (12). The combination of the Kaiser’s appointed power and his insistence to create a large military created a land riddled with holes. In addition to these holes, Imperial Germany also became a land of separation.

Imperial Germany was composed of twenty-five states and “was not an empire composed of sixty-five million people, but 25 members” according to Janet and Joe Robinson in their *Handbook of Imperial Germany* (42). The states were responsible for enforcing the imperial laws and their officials were the ones to impose taxes and other laws. According to the *Handbook of Imperial Germany*:

The imperial government itself was headed by a chancellor, whom the Kaiser hand-picked and appointed. The chancellor decided what legislation would be drafted. The ministers drew up the legislation for Parliament approval. There were two kinds of laws, general laws and

regulations. Unlike the Constitution of the United States, constitutional amendments were relatively common, and were considered general laws.

(44)

Groups such as The Bunderat, who were the Federal Council, and The Reichstag, who were elected men whom even the Kaiser must go through to mandate legislation, held large roles in the implementation of the laws of the land. The Bunderat were appointed deputies of each state and were a platform from which the Kaiser could introduce bills. The Reichstag was a group voted by men and elected every three years, and had the “right to overturn or approve any legislation” (Robinson et al 46). Members of the different political parties made up the Reichstag and their numbers fluctuated throughout the course of the empire.

Robinson says, “The history of political parties in Imperial Germany is based on disagreements, division and reorganization” (54). There were five major political parties throughout Imperial Germany; however, none had immense support across the board. That is, there were no parties with massive support that held the interests of different groups in regards to class, religion or social spheres. Each party represented a distinct group within the society. The parties included The Conservative Party, The National Liberal Party, the Social Democratic Party, The Progress Party and The Center Party. The Conservative Party represented a more Prussian nationalistic outlook with aristocratic ideals. The National Liberal Party highly valued the unification of the nation. The Social Democratic Party, previously known as the Socialist Worker’s Party, was established in 1890 and gave the working class a voice. They fought for self-determination and self-

government of the people. The Progress Party was faithful to maintaining European liberalism and extending parliament's rights. The Center Party was the Roman Catholic party and had a mixture of conservative ideals and social reform. According to German Bundestag of Parliament of the Federal Republic of Germany:

Although many blocs were formed between parties in the years from 1871 to 1918, these never lasted long enough to become stable 'governing coalitions' even to establish a more parliamentary system of government. Moreover, apart from the SDP, which formed the largest parliamentary group in the Reichstag from 1912, no party saw any lasting benefit in constitutional change, and even within the ranks of the Social Democrats there was an ambivalent attitude to parliamentary democracy. ("The Empire 1871-1918")

The liberal parties "had an historical foundation in the effort to create an English-style parliamentary government," and economically they represented the industrial system, which "favored strong national policy" (Robinson et al 55). The conservatives were more nationalistic and "tended to submerge Prussian interests into the interests of the Empire" and the Conservative Party turned anti-Semitic around 1890, "and appealed to the prejudices of money-borrowing landlords and peasants" (54). The political parties weren't the only things that caused a division across the empire. The class structure played a huge role widening the rift amongst the people.

Society at this time was divided into three basic categories: the proletariat, the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy. Starting at the top, the aristocracy were members of

society who held a title and considered to be associated with nobility. This class did, however, suffer from a large range of wealth and prosperity. They represented one percent of the population, and by 1895 “there were only 317 noble families living in Germany” (Robinson et al 27). The bourgeoisie was about 30% of the population and “tended to believe in property, hard work, achievement, recognition and rewards, and the importance of rules” (28). The family was important, as were their roles within the unit. “The male figure was expected to have a public working life; his spouse was expected to devote herself to domesticity and teaching values to the next generation” and “women and children had specific subordinate roles” as per the *Handbook of Imperial Germany*. There was a significant divide between the bourgeoisie in the urban areas and the people in the countryside who were wealthy. The manual labor and lack of education is what separated the two groups.

The rest of the population (about two-thirds) composed the proletariat class. These were mainly agriculture and manual labor workers. As claimed by Robinson and Robinson, “unemployment and job insecurity were rampant, with a third of the workforce expected to be unemployed at some time during the year” and “lockouts or strikes contributed to this insecurity” (29). They also assert:

During the time of industrialization in German society, the population morphed from the rural majority to urban life. By 1892, the agricultural society along with their dependents represented 42% of the total workforce, compared to 35% in industry and twenty percent in commerce. Just three years into 1895, industry was the largest sector, and by 1907, it

had reached forty percent, matching the agricultural percentages of twenty-five years earlier. (30).

The living conditions of the proletariat were quite poor and involved cramped living spaces, infectious diseases being spread, no ventilation and little to no sanitary conditions. The family dynamics between the families of the different classes varied.

The anti-socialist act ended in 1890, and the Social Democratic Party made huge strides in fighting for equal rights and for the abolition of class rule. In 1871 almost 64% of the population lived in communities with less than two thousand people. By 1890, the number declined to fifty-three percent. The first census, taken in 1872, marked that nearly forty million people occupied the empire and by the turn of the century the population grew to fifty-six million (V. Berghahn 38). The middle class members of society were more likely to be more in tune with the common knowledge of the vital importance of early childhood care however, “It was put into practice more rarely among upper classes, where wet nurses and nannies were more common and where social commitments of the mother kept her away from the children, while the patriarchal father remained remote” (V. Berghahn 79). Berghahn also discusses the “material hardship and the difficulty of articulating feelings toward family member, spouses, or children” being a substantial obstacle within the culture. This carried over to the classroom.

When Wilhelm II became emperor he declared a new era, however the educational system did not reform in any way or make any adjustments for the future. The Social Democratic Party wished to end the segregation of schools and for free education, materials and meals for students. “Further legislation in 1891 raised the

minimum age to thirteen and imposed a general ban on child labor in factories. The maximum hours for fourteen-to-sixteen year olds was fixed at ten hours,” according to Berghahn (81). Authoritative bureaucracies avoided lending any support to reform the school system. They were not teaching young students in a modernized, industrialized or urbanized world.

Their school and their church heavily influenced the social life of a child during this time. Unfortunately for the students, most schools projected a military-like style approach to the classroom. Teachers were like “drill-masters,” and repetition was a large part of their method. Twenty years into the founding of Imperial Germany over half of the student population attended village school. Within these schools, all students of all ages were instructed in a single room environment. Berghahn insists, “we should not underestimate the contribution which the churches and regular attendance of Sunday School made to the socialization of the children” and this only further implemented a conservative mindset, especially in the Protestant area of the Empire. In relation to the tension between religion and secular authorities:

Many who had still been raised in a very strict and hierarchical Catholic milieu now pushed for a modification of what they had been taught on Sundays or in preparation for their first communion. Although anti-clericalism never became as strong as in France, the move of many Catholic workers toward the Social Democrats may also be taken as a sign that Catholic workers as an agency of socialization triggered contradictory responses among a younger generation. (Berghahn 91)

Elderly citizens often found the rapid change in society a difficult thing to grasp and “If the young impatiently pushed toward new frontiers”, the elderly wanted to preserve “what had proven its worth” (Berghahn 86). The young and the old were not the only groups who clashed. Women had their own war to fight with society.

Imperial Germany was still very much a patriarchal society. The status of women was not just a social issue, but a legal one. The legislation put into place cemented their inferior status. “Under the Empire’s long-awaited Civil Legal Code, which came into force on 1 January 1900, married women had no say over their children’s education, and all money or property brought into marriage became the husband’s responsibility” (Jefferies 18). Abortion was not legal and any woman caught having one or assisting in one would be found guilty and face up to five years in prison. Matthew Jefferson implies there was a massive double standard between men and women. For instance, a woman was responsible for the consequence of her sexual actions but a man was not. A Morals Police was implemented in which prostitutes were regulated and made to undergo a medical examination. Meanwhile, there were no repercussions for the male clients.

It is clear that the social context of the time favored men a great deal and “the natural boundaries for women were therefore drawn around the three ‘K’s’: *Kinder*, *Küche*, *Kirche* (children, kitchen, church) – and the female population was all but barred from public life” (Jefferson 19). Although all of the German women were faced with this type of discrimination, many still fought back and formed groups. Two feminist groups emerged from two different classes. The bourgeoisie women formed a movement that focused on education, employment, sexuality, prostitution, and the rights of mothers as

per Jefferson (20). The other women's movement, the proletarian feminist movement, often came head to head with the other feminist bourgeois movement. The League of German Women's Association was loosely established in 1894 and claimed to have 500,000 members by 1914 (20). Jefferson advised it should be noted that despite society's insistence that a woman's place is in the kitchen or with the kids, both educational and employment opportunities rose for women during this era. In fact, many women became successful writers and a reported "6,000 female writers were active in Germany during the second half of the nineteenth century" (Jefferson 19). Many elite women made attending theatrical events an art exhibits a regular part of their routine.

The fine arts in Imperial Germany were heavily influenced by the conservative ideologies held by the majority of society and "the task of the artist to depict what was good, true, and great in humanity" was the heart of the aesthetic principles put into place. Likewise, many of the plays that were written and performed on stage were "intended to please and uplift" (Berghahn 138). "Suburban stages specialized in farces, comedies, and sentimental pieces mostly for the lower middle classes" (138). Berlin was considered the theatre metropolis of the Empire, "Saxe-Meiningen under Duke Georg II developed a type of theatre that was categorized by its (as quoted by H.A. Frenzel in *Geschichte des Theatres*) 'veneration of the text, the inquiry into the historical-geographic ambience, verbal precision, the use of supernumerals, and careful selection of costumes and sets' and performed mainly Shakespeare and Schiller (138). Theatre during this time was supposed to be made for the audiences and therefore not meant to disturb or upset any theatregoer.

As Imperial Germany modernized, so did the theatre. An open discussion of sexuality became more prevalent in literature and the notion of sex without love, prostitution and erotomania were more openly discussed (154). “Just as the visual arts began to shock people with their nudity, literature was not far behind” and Frank Wedekind emerged as a leader of these topics and became one of the “enfants terribles” due to his material consisting of “sexual murder, homosexuality, masturbation, and procurement” (154). There were of course limits and criticism to pieces, which examined such topics and, “There were limits to the discussion of sexuality in pre-1914 Germany that existed not merely because of the watchful eye of the censor. Even those artists who counted themselves among the avant-garde adhered to a concept of gender relations that was by no means “free” (155). When discussing female portrayals in literature Berghahn asserts, “the widespread stereotypes about women rampant in society at large offered a stability that the male artist, however radical his ideas may have been in other respects, did not dare to undermine” and “literary taboos concerning sexuality and gender were broken much later in the twentieth century” (155). There were of course, plays that did tackle such issues, such as Wedekind’s *The Lulu Plays*, which fought censorship for many years due to its graphic material. Once again, as the culture modernized, so did the arts.

The artistic aspects of the German culture were influenced, like any other culture, by the politics and societal norms put into effect. The relationship between text and context once again rises to the surface. How the empire was ruled, the political parties that existed, the class divide that occurred, what and how children were taught in school,

the influence religion held, how women were treated by the laws that were implemented or within their own family unit and the art that was produced were all factors that leave traces in the text. It is important to understand the perspective of someone who lived during this time. Seeing the world through his or her lens can illuminate the darkness. If a playwright lived through observing a repressive school system, a somewhat absent father, a conservative government, and a restrictive theatre movement than his writing makes more sense. His message becomes clearer and a better understanding of the characters he wrote and the struggles they faced is reached.

IV. WEDEKIND AND HIS STYLE

The playwright is a starting point in New Historicism research. Their life experiences, tragedies, and viewpoints shape not only what they write but also the style in which they write it. Many times the style of the author is a direct result of the historical and cultural happenings of their environment. Frank Wedekind is just one example of this. Wedekind emerged as a leader of the expressionist movement and paved the way for many young playwrights to follow. This chapter focuses on Frank Wedekind's upbringing, his time at university, his time traveling, the themes in his writing, and the style of his plays.

Benjamin Franklin Wedekind (1864-1918) was born in Germany and considered himself a bohemian, actor, social critic, journalist, songwriter and playwright. He was the son of a German doctor and a Hungarian-born actress and singer who was substantially his junior. The pair met in San Francisco, but moved back to Europe permanently in 1864. Soon after, Frank was born in Hanover, Germany. Wedekind's father was wealthy, so Wedekind grew up a solid member of the middle class. His father eventually turned in his medical day job for a place in politics. His father was very vocal about his disdain for Bismarck, which caused the Wedekinds to pick up and move to Switzerland in 1872 thereby avoiding raising his family in the "intolerable oppression of Germany" (Gittleman 7). Young Frank had a happy childhood and was tutored privately due to his parent's liberal stance. He attended the University of Lausanne and majored in German philosophy and French literature before moving to Munich, Germany.

His parents encouraged him to become a lawyer, but that was clearly not his passion. While studying law at university, he attended several theatre and opera performances. According to Sol Gittleman, Wedekind would spend time focusing on the theater instead of his law studies and also gained interest in medical studies, particularly gynecology lectures. Munich allowed him to explore several intellectual avenues he had not known before. He was introduced to Zolaism and found himself at odds with most of Naturalist thought. “Wedekind permanently rejected Naturalism in favor of a freer, non-regulated form of expression,” and did not enjoy the restrictions he found in Naturalism or the way he felt it to be society-oriented (Gittleman 12). He already considered himself an “enemy of social injustice” and did not contain any sympathy for the “artistic and intellectual restrictions of Naturalism” (Gittleman 12). He fought with the Naturalism theatrical style throughout his career but still sought to press social issues, believing “The resolution to society’s problems lay within, not without” (Mueller 7). This paves the way for much of his writing that focuses on the inner anguish of his central characters.

During his time at school, his relationship with his parents grew heated as tension mounted surrounding his future. Gittleman describes a particular incident: “Returning home, he was involved in a bitter argument with his father concerning his future during which the bitter old man violently accused his wife of encouraging Frank’s disobedience. Frank lost his temper and in a rage attacked his father” (12). This uproar led to Frank gaining sole control of his life and spending more time with his writing. He was banished from his home and lost all financial support. He did not return to school as a result, but he quickly got a job at an advertising company. This only lasted six months as he grew tired

of the job and began to work as a freelance writer for Zurich newspapers. Here he published articles about his fascination with the circus and “explored the esthetics of motion in relation to circus performers and animals” (13). He also explored popular themes in his future writings: “The body has its own morality,” which is a thread that can be found in both *Spring Awakening* and *The Lulu Plays* (13).

Wedekind was raised in an extremely open environment for the times. All issues were openly discussed in his household, which set him apart from the traditional way of life during this time. He believed “man’s salvation lay in the liberation of primitive instincts from social conditioning” and Wedekind was extremely fascinated by morality and sexual repression. Sol Gittleman refers to Wedekind as a “poet in revolt” and says, “For most of his life, Wedekind was a fighter for unpopular causes” (5). He believed in individual freedom and was an inspiration to young bohemian playwrights and artists long after his death, some of which included Bertolt Brecht.

In his early years of playwriting, Wedekind’s two brothers made their way to America for a brief time. Neither was too impressed and quickly returned to Germany. Wedekind always meant to make the journey to America himself but was never given the opportunity. “As a result—and in spite of the disillusionment of his brothers—a particular idea evolved in his mind”, which made America “a land of unattainable freedom and opportunity” (Gittleman 8). Not surprisingly, some of his most desperate characters in his plays express a desire to escape to America. “America offers” the characters from both *Spring Awakening* and his *The Lulu Plays*, “hope of escape from persecution, and characteristically in each case this escape is denied them” (8). Wedekind spent the early

1890s in Paris, where he lurked backstage at various circuses. Many of his friends were German writers who left Germany to “escape the stifling intellectual atmosphere” (17). Wedekind also spent time traveling around and found himself in Switzerland and London for short periods of time. In London he lived from meal to meal and by the time he left London in 1894 he was very poor (18).

Carl Mueller describes Wedekind as a man who “had no superiors” but he looked up to the revolutionaries of the time:

Social, scientific, economic and musical revolutions were rocking nineteenth-century society. The year 1859 alone saw the appearance of three works that changed the world as Wedekind knew it: Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species*, Karl Marx’s *Critique of Political Economy*, and Richard Wagner’s *Tristan and Isolde*. Wagner’s opera was, in its own way, a profound study in eroticism never before encountered. In 1886, Kraft-Ebing published *Psychopathia Sexualis*, his study of sexual perversions. (5)

Wedekind wanted a more honest society. He was upset over the lack of freedom in regards to sexuality and urged a more natural way of living. Society should rely on their natural instincts, including sexuality. He believed that natural instincts should determine morality and society should give in to their biological instincts. Wedekind fought censorship for most of his career and “was admired most by the avant-garde who saw in the government’s attack on his plays an effort to stifle the expression on the nonconformist” (Gittleman 5). Wedekind, like his brief friend August Strindberg,

rebelled against naturalism and wrote about sexuality and the role of the female. Their points however, were polarizing. Wedekind viewed the female as “the embodiment of man’s genuine inner needs, the expression of a beautiful instinct”, whereas Strindberg thought of the female as a representation of evil and destruction. Interestingly enough, their broken friendship became even more shattered when Strindberg’s ex-wife divorced him and eventually moved in with Wedekind and bore him a child.

Both Wedekind and Strindberg were still leaders amongst the expressionists. Although the movement did not reach its full peak until after Wedekind passed away, he still made his mark. The term expressionism began as a style of painting but over the years developed to music, architecture, and theatre. Artists such as Edvard Munch and Vincent Van Gogh escalated this artistic movement through the popularity of their paintings that featured distorted forms and conveyed anxieties within the piece. The likes of Wedekind, Büchner and Strindberg paved the way for German filmmakers to create expressionistic films such as Robert Wiene’s *The Cabinet of Dr. Calagari* (1920) and Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* (1927) and *M* (1931).



Figure. 1. *Women on the Shore*. Edvard Munch 1898.



Figure 2. *Cabinet of Dr. Calagari*. Robert Weine. 1920.

Wedekind made an immense contribution to the expressionist movement that became a dominating force in theatre. Wedekind focuses on dark subject matter that is internally driven and presented in an episodic structure both of which were shaped by historical context. According to J. L. Styan, the devices Wedekind used included “ways to counteract realism, and consisted of fragmented dialogue, forensic, episodic scenes, a distortion of natural phenomena...the disarmingly modern technique of isolation” (17). Frank Wedekind was acting upon his natural instincts in the “spirit of revolt and social criticism,” which Sherrill E. Grace asserts was a goal of the expressionism movement in Germany. Wedekind was introduced to Georg Büchner and was very much influenced by his fragmented style and isolation techniques. “Expressionism is the intellectual movement of a time which places the inner experience above external life,” says Stefan Schultz (13). Expressionistic playwrights sought to project their own subjective and eccentric view of the world.

Anthony Grenville says, “Expressionism was thus a utopian, idealist movement that strove for nothing less than a spiritual renewal of society, a renewal whose necessity was drastically reinforced by the mass slaughter of the First World War” (Web).

Grenville goes on to state:

Expressionism marked the revolt of the young generation of the 1880s and early 1890s against the materialism and commercialism, the complacent philistinism of pre-1914 Germany, where man’s spiritual side seemed to have been stifled in the dehumanized world of the modern industrial metropolis. It was that spiritual side of human existence, ‘Seele’ (‘soul’),

that the Expressionists sought to rediscover, as their dramatic techniques sought to reveal truths that lay beneath the surface detail of modern life.

(Web)

For Wedekind, dehumanization meant resisting natural instincts. Expressionism was at first a sort of protest theatre. Playwrights, such as Wedekind, wrote about their reaction to authority of the government, the family units and the community. Styan talks about the “rigid lines of the social order,” the “industrialization of society” and the “mechanization of authority” (3). Wedekind’s work focused more on the individual. There is a line in *Spring Awakening* where Melchior and Wendla are in the woods. The two children are discussing the act of charity. Wendla says the line “What serves each of us best serves all of us best,” and Melchior agrees. This line implies an individuality that became lost under the realm of the German Empire and in a pre-war German culture. Expressionist views were subjective and personal. His plays focused on the new rather than the old and sought for freedom against an authoritative society.

Styan describes the characteristics of early expressionistic plays using six areas of focus: atmosphere, setting, plots and structure, character, dialogue and acting style. The atmosphere created by these playwrights was dreamlike. Often times, a nightmarish world was created using sharp angles, dark shadows and distorted images for the set. The setting was often simplified and non-naturalistic. The setting was greatly dependent on the themes of the play. The plot and structure of the pieces were typically episodic or disjointed. Each scene could have varied in style. Unlike a well-made play, the dramatic tension came through statements of the author. Meaning, each scene was its own

expressionistic statement. The characters would often times lose their identity. The audience would know them by a nameless description or a broad term such as “man” or “woman” who represented a certain social group. This was not set in stone as both *Spring Awakening* and *The Lulu Plays* feature characters with distinct character names. The dialogue was poetic and sometimes lyrical. For example, in *Spring Awakening*, one scene in Jonathan Franzen’s translation consists of only a short monologue by Wendla:

Why did you sneak out of the room?- To look for violets!- Because
Mother sees me smiling.- Why can’t you make your lips work anymore?-
I don’t know. I don’t know. I can’t find the words... The path is like a
thick carpet-no pebbles, no thorns-My feet don’t touch the ground...oh
did I sleep last night! This is where they were.-I’m starting to feel as
serious as a nun at communion.-Sweet violets! Shush, Mommy. I’m ready
to put my sackcloth on.- Oh God, if only somebody would come who I
could throw my arms around and talk to. (44)

This steers away from naturalism and realism and focuses on a poetic and dreamlike way of speaking. The acting style was a departure from realism as well. Since the subject matter of many plays was about the robotics of life and the loss of individuality or personal thought, the acting was encouraged to mimic a puppet or robot.



5 Wedekind's *Spring's Awakening* at the Kammerspiele, Berlin, in 1906. Melchior is expelled from school, with **Bernhard von Jacobi** as Melchior and design by Karl Walser.

Figure. 3. *Spring's Awakening*. Max Reinhardt. 1906

Wedekind's writing "daringly attacked" the "shams of bourgeois society and provocatively introduced hitherto unthinkable subjects to the stage" (Styan 17). He wrote things for the stage that were unheard of during this time. He wrote about sex and "made heroes of criminals and glamorized his prostitutes" (17). Things did not go so smoothly for Wedekind because of his subject matter. He wrote *Spring Awakening* in 1890 but it was not first produced until 1906 and even then, it was an edited version directed by Max Reinhardt at the Berlin Kammerspiele. German censorship of the theatre was the cause; however, this production did run for 321 performances (17). The play was honest but "the content of the play was too highly charged" for the audience during this time and many considered it to be an obscene piece of theatre. This insured a certain reputation for Wedekind. On the one hand, the success of the play marked his success as a playwright

however, many people viewed him as a ‘pornographer’ and therefore limited the impact of *Spring Awakening* during this time.

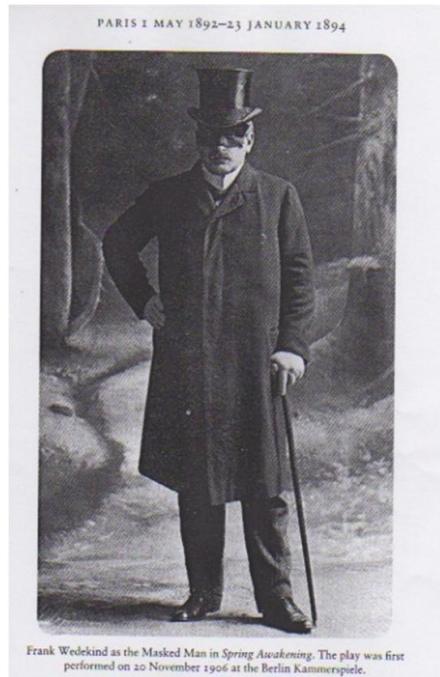


Figure. 4. Frank Wedekind as Masked Man. 1906.

Wedekind played with the boundaries of the theatre. Both his content and his style painted new and controversial ways to tell a story. He used the expressionistic style to tell his stories in a way that would be the most impactful. His stories emphasize natural instinct and a fight against authority. Although he himself was born into the middle class, he remained a champion for the oppressed. Wedekind gave poetic and intellectual language to characters society during this time had deemed unworthy: children and prostitutes. The struggles with his parents and the openness of his parents, his travels around Europe, his time at university, his adventures with style and his fight against censorship are all factors in his writing. The social and historical background of

Wedekind provides ample information when it comes to diving into the texts of *Spring Awakening* and *The Lulu Plays* and understanding his female leads through the concepts of New Historicism.

V. WENDLA AND LULU

This chapter illuminates the development of the characters by Wedekind and establish the influence of context on the outcomes. It looks into Wendla and Lulu, the social and historical context that surrounded them, and the views which Wedekind himself held of society. In the end, society should be held accountable for both of their deaths, and the particular time and place in which these plays were written sealed their fate. In addition, this chapter analyzes why Wedekind may have had to kill his female protagonists and what could have led him to make this decision. Wendla and Lulu are two very different female characters written by the same playwright and around the same time, yet they both represent a different societal woe and endure their own fair share of struggles. The main thing they have in common is their tragic fate. Wendla and Lulu both die at the end of the plays and both deaths were a result of other people's hands and possibly the society in which they lived. Delving into the social and historical background surrounding the text allows the reader to gain a more encompassing understanding of the plight of the characters. The "interplay between the literary and the social world" is the leading focus of the theory (Kaes 210). This next section puts this approach into practice using the characters, Wendla and Lulu, as guides.

WENDLA

According to a young Melchior Gabor, Wendla is a "wood nymph that's fallen out the branches" (Bond 17). At just fourteen years old, Wendla Bergmann is the female

lead in Wedekind's play *Spring Awakening*. She is one of the driving forces of the piece and her innocence, naivety, and heart elevate the story and its sense of humanity. By looking into the many levels of this character and her relationships throughout the play, it is possible to gain a better understanding of how Wedekind wanted this character to be viewed by the audience at the time it was written. When examining the text with the New Historicism approach, this section concentrates on Wendla's relationship with her mother, her relationship with Melchior and how Wedekind upstages her with Melchior and Moritz, her relationship with her friends and her relationship with death.

Wendla holds the reigns as the female lead, but Melchior is considered the play's protagonist. *Spring Awakening*, often referred to as "A Children's Tragedy," is a tragic story about the hardships of young children in a small German community in the 1890s. The three central characters, Melchior, Moritz and Wendla, come face to face with the oppressive society in which they live, and it costs two of them their lives. Wendla's importance, however, should not be overlooked in regards to what Wedekind wanted to portray in his play. Her relationships in the story play a vital role in her fate and the consequences that have been thrust upon her. Her mother is a prime example of a mother in Germany who longs to keep up her Christian appearances, even at the sake of her own daughter. She keeps her child in the dark and does not value the importance of Wendla's questions. Wendla's relationship with Melchior reveals her heart and her strength. She speaks with Melchior frankly, but she finds herself in a dangerous situation when she enters the hayloft with him alone. It is through her relationship with Melchior where the audience learns of her frustration with the lack of feeling or warmth in her household. It

is through her friends that another layer is peeled and that the audience sees the compassion in Wendla. The audience sees her pain when she wishes to switch places with a friend in an abusive situation. Wendla alludes to her death several times throughout the play and explains these thoughts come to her in her sleep. Her relationship with death becomes more intimate when she is forced into an abortion in which she dies. All of this is coated with the poetic and prophetic language Wendla uses to predict her own fate.

Wendla's dysfunctional relationship with her mother forwards the ignorance that leads to her demise. Frau Bergmann, Wendla's mother, opens the play with a scene with her daughter on her fourteenth birthday. Wendla is examining the dress her mother made her and complains of its length. "If I'd known you'd make my dress so long, I wouldn't have wanted to be fourteen," she says (Frazen 7). Immediately the audience gets a sense of who Wendla is and how innocent she can be. She does not wish to grow old or become a woman just yet. She does not even really understand what that fully means. Her mother tells her to cover up and according to Sol Gittleman, this sets up the child-adult conflict for the entire play. This opening scene works to "symbolize the adult's effort to stifle and to 'cover up' the physical beauties of the body" by showing a mother tell her daughter she must stay sheltered away (Gittleman 43).

In scene two of the second act, Wendla shares a scene with her mother once again. Here, Wendla learns that her sister, Ina, is going to have a child and Wendla will be an aunt and says, "Now I'm an aunt for the third time—the aunt of a girl and two boys"! (Franzen 35). She attempts to have a conversation with her mother about a truth in

life. Wendla insists to learn how one becomes a mother and her mother evades the questions with talks of storks. Wendla goes on:

Don't get mad, Mommy; don't get mad! Who in the world am I supposed to ask if not you! Please mommy tell me! Tell me! Mommy! I'm ashamed of myself. I'm begging you, Mother, say something! Don't tell me not to ask things like that. Answer me—what goes on?—how does it happen? (37)

Her mother responds, “I certainly can't do a thing like that,” and reaffirms a viewpoint of how many adults viewed children. She never tells Wendla the truth, despite her begging. As mentioned in chapter two of this paper, parents during this period often struggled with articulating warm feelings toward their children. Frau Bergman finds keeping up appearances and not discussing uncomfortable matters in the home valuable to their status within the village.



Figure 5. Wendla and her mother. Off-Broadway Production. 2006

Keeping to the order of the social structure was of the utmost importance to Wendla's mother. When Wendla threatens to go ask the chimney sweep about where children come from, her mother almost comes undone with embarrassment because of the impropriety of it all. They were church people and took their reputations within the village very seriously. When Frau Bergmann discovers that Wendla was intimate with a boy and fell pregnant, her first thoughts were not of compassion for her daughter, but of fear for her social status. They lived in a small community and word spread quickly. She asks her daughter how she could have done this to her and then proceeds to have her undergo an abortion. Wendla does not survive the procedure. The audience discovers Wendla is dead simultaneously with Melchior in the final graveyard scene. Her gravestone reads she has died from anemia, an illness her mother thrust upon her in order to hide the way she truly died.

Wendla's relationship with her mother is an example of the generation gap social issue seen in that society. In this case, her mother is almost directly responsible for her death, and all because of fear. She was afraid to tell Wendla the truth, she was afraid for Wendla to act like a child in a world where she would be seen as a woman and she was afraid of her reputation being ruined by her daughter having a child out of wedlock. Wendla herself looked to her mother for guidance, but got none in return. Many children growing up in Imperial Germany may have experienced this same thing. The adult world did not have time for children. Her mother chose not to give Wendla the power of knowing the answers to her questions. This scene sets up "terms of discourse of a particular age in society" and a historical sociological analysis helps to understand the

relationship between a mother and daughter to decipher their culture (Hoover 363).

Wedekind wanted to demonstrate “the beautiful lyrical sensitivity of the children in contrast to the wholly grotesque stupidity of their parents” (Gittleman 46). In this case, Wendla’s mother comes across as dim and cruel by not telling her daughter the truth, and expecting her to believe the outlandish lies she’s told. Her mother has no regard for her ideals, dreams or feelings, just as society has bred.

For a brief moment in the woods, Wendla had someone understand those things for her and this positive moment with Melchior contrasts with the negative moments with her mother. Melchior and Wendla grew up together but they never shared a real connection until a certain meeting in the woods. Melchior’s peers describe him as a ‘radical.’ He is a bright young boy who does well in school and has parents who allow him to read his own books, like Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s *Faust* and books about human sexuality, and come to his own opinions. He urges his friends to not feel guilty about their feelings and to think for themselves before the establishments of school. He gives in to the urges of his body and takes advantage of Wendla after he beats her, albeit upon her request. He writes an essay for Moritz that comes back to haunt him as the school uses it as evidence against Melchior for the reason Moritz committed suicide. His parents send him to a reformatory after they discover that Wendla is pregnant and Melchior knew what he was doing when he forced himself on her in the hayloft. He feels guilty over what he did to Wendla and chooses to live instead of die. Melchior listens to her ideas and is even the one who asks her questions.

This is a drastic difference to the scenes with her mother when Frau Bergmann

avoids answering any of Wendla's questions, however, it does not last. Melchior asks Wendla what she was dreaming about just before they met in the woods and Wendla shows no hesitation of answering his question. She immediately tells him the truth, not only because she feels as though she can trust him, but because she is hardly ever asked to answer a question in her household. She tells him she dreamed of being beaten by her father after confessing one of her friends is being abused. She then proceeds to ask Melchior to beat her with a stick from the woods. One of Wendla's most telling lines, although not spoken to her mother, provides a much-welcomed insight into the mind of this character and her life at home. Her simple line "I don't feel a thing" after she asks Melchior to beat her and he complies shows how much she longs for any type of passion or feeling in her life (Franzen 27). She wished to trade places with her friend because "I have never been beaten in my whole life", implying a lack of any sort of physical touch whether it be in a loving manor or a disciplinary action. Any touch, even if it hurts, is worth it to her because it is better than a feeling of numbness.

The relationship between Wendla and Melchior is curiously developed by Wedekind in that he spends more time focusing on Melchior's feelings and reactions than Wendla's. As Melchior beats her with the stick, tears fall down his cheek. He moves to violently thrash her with his fists, seemingly in his own world now. He eventually jumps up and runs away crying. A boy violently beats a girl in the woods, and yet he is the one whom Wedekind spends time with after the action to describe how he feels. According to the Franzen translation, Melchior runs "sobbing piteously from the depths of his soul" but does not share how Wendla must be feeling as she lies on the ground (27). Let us take

into consideration a few of the things Wedekind believed about women. He believed them to be an “embodiment of man’s genuine inner needs” and the “expression of a beautiful instinct” (Gittleman 19). Both of these are reactions to man. Melchior’s reaction to what he has done to an innocent girl may be more important for Wedekind to write about than her actual raw reaction to what was done to her. This is an important matter to take into consideration because the society at the time often defines a woman by the reactions of a man. A woman’s worth was hardly her own and was in most cases tied to her father or her husband. Her actions affected his reputation, and that is what defined her. Melchior reacts to his own actions, but they were put into place by Wendla’s question. Once again, she starts with a question and never receives an answer. She is still powerless.

Wendla becomes even more powerless when she finds herself alone in a hayloft with Melchior where the play takes a drastic turn towards the darker sides of life. In the hayloft scene, she goes to Melchior and asks him what’s wrong. This short scene quickly veers when Melchior tries to kiss her. She refuses him, but he presses on. She asks him to stop and reveals “People love each other—if they kiss” to which he responds, “Oh believe me, there’s no such thing as love! There’s only selfishness, only ego” and continues to kiss her (Franzen 42). Wendla’s last word in this scene is “don’t” (42). The rape is not seen in the text but deeply implied and a graphic image for the stage is projected. That is the last scene they share. Melchior learns of Wendla’s death in the graveyard at the end of the play when he stumbles upon her fresh grave. Again, Wedekind does not give the audience Wendla’s reaction to what has been done to her, but instead shows Melchior’s

reaction. The audience is even given Moritz's reaction to his own death and circumstance. After Moritz commits suicide, his ghost visits Melchior in the graveyard and tries to convince Melchior to join him in death. Moritz took his own life but was still given a chance to be heard by the audience and by Melchior, whereas Wendla was silenced yet again. Her power is lost.

It is also interesting to note that the Broadway musical production of *Spring Awakening*, produced in 2006, features both the ghosts of Moritz and Wendla in the final graveyard scene. It could be inferred that contemporary audiences would be more upset or dissatisfied without Wendla making one more appearance after her sudden and off stage death. An audience in 1906 would react differently than an audience exactly one hundred years later. This is itself a trace of history, meaning that contemporary audiences seem to view women as less powerless and more deserving of the same choices men have than the audience of Imperial Germany. Even when it comes to death, Moritz, the male character, has a choice, where as Wendla, the female character, does not. Whether this was due to the views of Wedekind, the views of the audiences at the time or perhaps a mixture of both is something to take into consideration.

Those with power write history, but literature can help give a voice to those with none and Wedekind stifled Wendla. Wendla is a person who would not make it into a history book. Her voice would not be heard because no one listened. She was powerless in context and Wedekind made her powerless in text. This relationship provides its own statement because Wendla was pure, naïve and led by her heart. Wedekind wrote this play as a blatant reaction to society. He created caricatures of adults to prove a point and

wrote about the tragedy of youth, however Wedekind was not immune to his own narrow range of culture. Despite his travels and adventures in Paris and London, he was still limited to the ideals he believed and his works are reflections of his own views, flaws and all.

Wedekind was a believer in the natural thinking that men had superior minds to women. He believed their intellectual inferiority to be “indisputable fact,” but he also believed he was fighting for women, and not against them (Hibberd 344). It is interesting to note that all of the boy characters in this play are in school and speak with each other about their school work. The main force driving Moritz is his inability to remain focused on his lines of Virgil for class. The girls, however, never speak of schoolwork. They appear more carefree and are not really held accountable for their intellectual pursuits. Their conversations navigate toward boys and their future children, not their individual goals or aspirations. During this time in Germany, many universities did not accept women into their institutions. This, combined with Wedekind’s own ideals about the intellectual capacity of a female, was represented in the text by making the boys appear to be learning and holding intellectual conversations, while the girls talk of domestic issues. However, the scene in the woods between Melchior and Wendla showcases Wendla’s ability to speak intellectually and think for herself. In that moment, Melchior was speaking with someone he viewed as an equal, someone who held a similar belief that he held. This is what sets off his attraction to Wendla and what causes the chain of events that follow: her being beaten and her being raped. It could be interpreted as Wendla being punished for speaking like a boy when her place in society is that of a

girl.

Wendla's relationship with her friends allows her voice to be heard because it is only through them that the audience learns some of Wendla's deepest and darkest thoughts. She seems to be happiest when with her friends and their conversations provide evidence as to how Wendla views herself and the goodness within her. In Wendla's only scene with her friends, Thea and Martha, Martha reveals she is beaten by her father and is forced to sleep outside sometimes by her mother. Wendla immediately says, "I'd be very happy to sleep in your sack for you sometime" and does not give a second thought to taking her friend's place (Franzen 17). Their conversation turns to the girls talking about what they would do with their own children. Martha would let them grow tall like "weeds in a flower garden" and Thea will make hers wear pink (17). Wendla says she wants boys, which is something they all agree they want, for "Better twenty boys than three girls" says Martha (18). Wendla then says, "it must be a thousand times more uplifting to be loved by a man than by a girl" (18). Martha questions her comment using the example of assistant forest commissioner and his wife, to which Wendla responds, "Pfalle is proud of being the assistant forest commissioner— because Pfalle doesn't have anything.— Melitta is blissful, because what she gets is ten thousand times more than what she is" (18). Martha asks if Wendla is proud of herself and she responds, "That would be silly" and moments later, "I'm just so happy I am a girl; if I wasn't a girl, I'd kill myself"(18). This scene provides traces the reader can use to decipher the relationship with the context.

In a society where women are valued by their relationship to men, it is no surprise

that young girls are molded to have the mindset that men are superior to women. The line mentioned above not only signifies Wendla's connection with death, but also reveals her longing to be loved by a man because she believes it to be a far superior feeling than being loved by a woman. These young girls talked of wanting to have boys because they knew how hard it was to be a girl. Wendla's line about the love of a man being superior to the love of a woman is very telling. On its own it creates a hierarchy in which men are above women. This is not the only revelation that comes from Wendla's relationship with her friends.

Wendla demonstrates her good-natured heart, while simultaneously revealing its darker side. She is led by her heart and is compassionate by nature. She truly wishes to take Martha's place in that moment. When Wendla is speaking with Melchior in the woods about Martha being abused, she claims:

Oh what that girl must suffer! Your face gets burning hot when you hear her tell about it. I feel so horribly sorry for her, sometimes I have to cry in my pillow in the middle of the night. I've been trying for months to figure out how to help her-- I'd be happy to take her place for a whole week sometime. (26)

Although she is demonstrating an act of being a good friend and a caring person, Wendla in her own way, wants to feel what Martha feels not just to protect Martha, but to feel something for herself. This lack of feeling leads to her dismal thoughts about death.

Wendla alludes to her own death several times. She begins the play saying "Who knows- perhaps I won't be around anymore" and explains these thoughts come over her in her

sleep (Franzen 7). The Edward Bond translation says, “perhaps I won’t be anything anymore” (1). Wendla frequently admits how happy she is and believes it to be true, however she mentions yet again a dream about her death in the third act. When Wendla is in bed and not feeling well, unaware that she is pregnant she says:

Sometimes I feel wonderful--everything sunshine and happiness. I wouldn’t have thought it was possible to feel so good! I’ll feel like going outside, out on the grass in the evening sun, and looking for primroses along the river, and sitting on the riverbank and dreaming...And then this toothache starts, and I think I’m going to die before the sun goes down tomorrow; I feel hot and cold, everything starts going dark, and then the monster comes fluttering in. (Franzen 71)

She senses her death coming and dreams about not being anything anymore. She is connected with death from the start. In the first scene, after her mother questions where she got such ideas about not being around she replies, “ I don’t feel sad at all, and I know I’ll sleep all the better then” implying that it may bring her peace. She then asks, “Mother is it sinful to think about things like that” (8)? Her mother ignores her question and goes back to their talk of the dress. In the scene with her friends she shares that “If I wasn’t a girl, I’d kill myself, so that next time...” (19). Wendla’s preoccupation with death almost makes her fate inevitable.

Looking at Wendla’s relationships and the way she was treated, a deeper level of insight into the depths of her as a character is reached. Wendla is a naïve creature who is pure in spirit. She represents the powerless. If history was written down by those with

power, then surely Wendla was left off the page. Wedekind created her in literature where historical documents would otherwise list her as a statistic of children who died of anemia. It is hard to say just how the audience viewed Wendla at the time of its first production in 1906, however when looking closer at the historical context and the beliefs Wedekind held, it is easier to decipher a possible persuasion. If one were to look at this particular text, and indeed this particular character within the text, as an example of a historical document some discrepancies may be found. Wedekind wrote his characters as caricatures and they were meant to be over the top and exaggerations of what real life was like for these teenagers. On the other hand, the tragic events of these children's lives were happening. Children were suppressed by the authority figures in their life, be it their parents, school, church or government. A playwright has the power to write his or her own version of the truth in order to get others to see just a glimpse of their own.

LULU

While Wendla is pure in spirit, Lulu is quite the opposite. She is her own creature who follows a different drummer than that of our young Wendla. Unlike Wendla, "She was created to stir up great disaster" according to Frank Wedekind. (qtd. in Mueller 65). Wedekind wrote his Lulu plays over the course of years, beginning in 1892. The play was originally just one long six-hour play before he divided it into two plays: *Earth Spirit* (*Erdgeist*) and *Pandora's Box* (*Die Büchse Der Pandora*). Together they are known as *The Lulu Plays* or *Lulu: A Monster Tragedy*. Lulu "is more than the main character of the plays, she is their lifeblood. She is the central mystery to which the other obscurities are

subordinate and the means by which Wedekind suggests his alternative morality”

(Hibbered 338). Her morality is unique and indefinable.

This story follows Lulu as she moves from one frantic situation to the next. J. L. Hibbered describes it as “an unlikely story involving improbable fools and outrageous scoundrels in a series of violent deaths, which culminate in the slaughter of the promiscuous heroine by the manic Jack the Ripper” (336). The play opens with an artist named Edvard Schwartz speaking with his client, Dr. Shöning, where Lulu enters with her husband Dr. Goll. When Goll and Shöning leave Lulu in the studio alone with Schwartz, he chases her around until she falls onto the couch with him. Dr. Goll enters, and upon seeing his wife underneath the artist, falls down dead. Lulu does not seem affected by his death at all. She promptly marries Schwartz; however, the audience learns that she has been keeping up an affair with Dr. Shöning, whom she has known since she was a little girl. She complains about Schwartz to him and becomes jealous when he reveals he is engaged and wants to end their affair. Dr. Shöning reveals his relationship with Lulu to Schwartz who becomes so distraught with the news that he slits his throat and commits suicide. Lulu then marries Dr. Shöning under his own hysteria. His son Alwa and a lesbian Countess called Geschwitz become enamored with Lulu and grow increasingly attracted to her. Shöning, however, loses his patience with Lulu and hands her a gun so she will kill herself and end his misery. Instead, she turns the gun on him and kills him in a scuffle of confusion created by Alwa. Lulu and Alwa escape to Paris where they marry despite her being wanted by the German police for murder. When the police arrive to arrest Lulu, she narrowly escapes to London. She becomes a prostitute

where one of her customers accidentally kills Alwa. The play ends with Lulu meeting a customer, Jack the Ripper, who kills both her and Geschwitz. Lulu is often described throughout German history as “woman in her most primitive form” and “a mythic force incomprehensible to those who lust after her” (Mueller 27). Wedekind wrote her as his most true form of Eros and Lulu even means “light.” A new historical analysis illuminates Lulu’s relationships with the men in her life, her sexuality and lastly her identification as a monster.

The men Lulu encounters all meet unfortunate fates except for the very last man in her life. Each one cannot control his own impulses when it comes to Lulu. Some are reduced to madness and others are just met with an unfortunate ending tied to Lulu. Lulu should not, however, be solely blamed for the death of her husbands. Her first husband, Dr. Goll died of a heart attack after lunging at Schwartz; “Crimson faced, bloodshot eyes, throws himself on Schwartz with a raised stick ‘You cur- you cur- you-‘ He crashes forwards on the floor” (Bond 96). Schwartz was an artist who became infatuated with Lulu after she and her husband visited his studio. When she marries Schwartz after the death of Dr. Goll she becomes even more depressed and dissatisfied with her life than she was before. After Schwartz learns that she is having intimate relations with Schöning, he slits his own throat. Some of his last words are “It’s crushing my chest- choking me-if I could cry- oh if I could shout” (123). Schwartz was an extremely naïve fellow who believed that he, her second husband, took her virginity. He was in despair because he was disturbed that Schöning “deflowered” her. “Deflowered?” he said, “there wasn’t much left to deflower” (123).

While Lulu is using her sexuality for her benefit, she is not the driving force behind the men's destruction; it is their own sexuality. They become obsessed with Lulu in every possible way. They desire her and treat her like their own personal sexual object. When Schwartz begins getting more recognition as a painter his treatment of Lulu changes. She urges, "I am nothing to you!" (103). He responds:

I owe everything to you. Since I've had you, the whole world can see I'm marked out... My confidence, my creative joy, my pride as an artist- all- all- I owe it to you. And you ask if you're anything to me? You're my happiness. You don't know how you do it, but you can't help it. You flowered for me, and you'll wither for me. For me! For me! Your body lives for me [...]" (103).

The sentiment about her body living for him is a prime example of depicting the status of their marriage. "Take your happiness- it's all you've got. Now happiness pours over me. Everyday I'm more famous and-whether you like it or not-every year you'll add another little blessing to my happiness," he continues (103). Her marriage with Schöning ends in a tragic state as well. Schöning becomes jealous and threatens to kill her. He hands her a revolver and demands she shoot herself. When he turns, she shoots him in the back. Moments before he injected himself with morphine, inferring he knew his own fate. The audience can see that he was the only one Lulu truly loved when Lulu kisses his hand and puts her own hand over his heart as he dies. His jealousy and the fact that he brought the gun into the situation in the first place should be enough to put blame on Schöning and not Lulu. He was the only man Lulu ever loved. "She respected him" because he was the

only man in her life who would actually stand up to her and not allow her to walk all over them (Muller 28). “He made her what she is and gave her what she needed: security from societal ostracism” according to Muller, and showcases Lulu violating her own law in addition to a state law (Muller 28).

Lulu becomes vulnerable and allows herself to come closer to the society she once drifted over with ease. This is a huge turning point for her decline. She emerges from this turn of events with slightly beaten armor and on the run from the police. This leads her into a life of prostitution in London. By 1890, some German cities inhabited over a half million people, and with that came different ways of living and making money. Prostitution began to grow rapidly during this time and “people began to regard the growth of prostitution as a social problem of the first order” according to Richard T. Evans in his article *Prostitution, State and Society in Imperial Germany* (108). “By the turn of the century, estimates of the total number of prostitutes active in Germany varied between 100,000 and 200,000,” Evans continues (Evans 108). The only city in Germany that had brothels sanctioned and supervised by police was Hamburg. The growth around the country made for a difficult job on controlling the regulation and rate of prostitution. German audiences during this time were familiar with prostitution and were most likely fully aware of the goings on of the lifestyle in which Lulu lived during the last part of her life.

The Social Democratic Party in Germany viewed prostitution as a symbol of corruption and regarded it “as the most degrading of all the evil consequences of the capitalist system and used it as a symbol for the rottenness of bourgeois society” (Evans

124). Evans says, “The rapid expansion of prostitution that took place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries thus reflected the social upheaval through which Germany was passing in the process of industrialization” and many prostitutes were young women who, at last resort, succumbed to the notion of selling sex for money in order to help provide for herself or her family because of the “generally low demand for female labour and the low pay which the woman worker was forced to accept” (116). In 1891, a scandalous murder case involving a pimp and his prostitute killing a church night watchman in Berlin caught even the attention of the Kaiser, who in response insisted on tougher and even harsher laws against prostitution and those who support the practice. The Kaiser insisted on strengthening the police regulation practices on brothels, and this in turn stirred up mixed reviews from the different political parties. Nonetheless, this was a world in which Wedekind wrote *Lulu* to enter and one in which he knew his audience would have an opinion. Deciding to involve murder was also an interesting choice considering the aforementioned murder case.

The last man in *Lulu*’s life was Jack the Ripper. Known for terrorizing London in the late 1880s, Jack the Ripper was a serial killer whose activities were chronicled by the papers with great interest and detail. Five of the known women he killed were prostitutes of different age ranges and physical appearances. Having been sensationalized by the London tabloids, he no doubt gained notoriety in Europe and even the name incited fear. He was surely a known name during the time these plays were written and performed for an audience. He enters near the end of the last act as another one of *Lulu*’s clients. After a brief quarrel about the issue of payment, Jack rapes her in the back bedroom. *Lulu* comes

running out yelling for help. After a brief struggle from Lulu, he carves out her vuvla killing her and keeping it to sell at an auction. Lulu lost the fight against civilization. She represented freedom and liberation and ended up dying as a defenseless 'whore'. She has been purged by society and "fallen into the hands of a sex maniac," as she so feared in the first act (qtd in Gittleman 78).

Sol Gittleman asserts Lulu "represents the antithesis of a civilized society, someone totally alien to the everyday world of reality" (65). She is on a different level than all the rest and cannot be upheld to the same standards. Lulu can only follow her own nature. Lulu does not deny herself from the pleasures she seeks. She feels free to feel them and take part in them without limitations. She is the object of everyone's affections. The ability to capture someone's heart and interest does not make one a monster or responsible for the actions of those she affects. Wedekind presented, as Muller states, "a woman struggling against the odds of bourgeois male supremacy, in a world in which the female was to be seen and not heard [...]" (26). Lulu is perceived as cruel because she is not happy. When she does finally find a small sense of happiness, she is murdered.

Each of Lulu's husbands called her by a different name, which furthers their own projected views of who she is versus who they fantasize she is. Dr. Goll called her Nelli and Schwartz referred to her as Eve. Dr. Shöning called her Mignon, which was "perhaps to her nostalgia for a long-lost happier past", as this references the young temptress from *Willhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (Hibberd 342). The title gives the assumption that Lulu is perhaps a monster. Some blame her for the death of all her husbands and link the name Pandora with evil. "The nature of sexual struggle,

with the resulting victory of the female's sexual drive destroying a helplessly struggling male victim," alludes to a woman who is the sole cause of the destruction that follows her (Hibbered 337). Others describe her as "sensuous, cruel and tempting" (Schuler-Will 32). It is important "to interpret Wedekind's text by reference to ideas which were 'in the air' in the 1880s and 1890s and more particularly those which are known to have had a considerable, if hitherto vaguely defined, impact on him" (Hibbered 338). This includes his fascination with hedonism. Hedonism is the pursuit of pleasure and coincides with a self-indulgent sensuality. Pleasure and pain are marked as the pillars of hedonism. They are essentially the only things that matter according to the hedonism philosophy. Lulu brings both pleasure and pain to everyone she meets. She herself struggles with finding the balance of pleasure and pain in her own life.



Figure 6. Lulu. Metropolitan Opera. 2015

"She is called a serpent created to cause disaster, to seduce, and to murder," but Lulu was not portrayed as a "scheming sophisticated vamp" in many early productions but with "the simplicity of a child" (Hibbered 338). She is considered a monster, but given child-like qualities. She was to be natural. Everything came so naturally to her that

her innocence was, in a way, maintained by her charm and spontaneity. Lulu cannot be tamed by society, but she can be destroyed by it. Hibberd claims that Lulu being killed in England is a reference to Wedekind's belief that women in England were not appreciated by the society in which they lived. He "believed that woman stood in opposition to the idea of property with which contemporary morality was inextricably linked" and "Lulu never becomes a husband's property and is horrified at the prospect of becoming an object to be sold" (343). She is linked to a monetary value as this was a concern of Wedekinds. "The economic position of women" was of his concern, however, Wedekind was guided by "questionable generalizations about the female sex frequently aired at the turn of the century" (343). This references the social order, which was in place. For instance, Otto Weinger described women as "shallow amoral" beings with no souls. Many believed women "stood for instinct as opposed to social order, for freedom as opposed to discipline, and that the natural love which was an essential part of a woman's being knew nothing of faithfulness" (344). Lulu is very much represented with this thought. In reference to a shift in focus, Kaes states:

The new historicist's attention has moved to the 'borders' of the text where it connects with the material world, where traces of the negotiations and transactions between the social and the aesthetic realm are still visible, where classical concepts such as representation authorship, and autonomy of art are called into question. (213)

Lulu's presence, ability and sexual power calls into question many of the social norms of the time. Lulu was written to challenge the social order of the male-dominated world.

Wedekind thought about the role of women in society throughout his life. According to Muller, “For Wedekind, a woman’s greatest possession is her femininity- more directly, her sexual freedom” and “her femaleness is her means to strike out against the inhuman restrictions of a patriarchal world and destroy it” (27). Muller quotes Gittleman, “Lulu is Wedekind’s single most imposing symbol of his fight against civilization” (27). No one in the text fully understood Lulu and her way of living. She was used for her body, her spirit and her experience. She sought to be the opposite of confinement. She epitomized a world of freedom and a new kind of morality. Lulu was truly misunderstood in every way. She was not culpable for the death that followed her. She was not a sexual creature on the prowl for another male victim to claim. She fell victim herself to not just a single man but to all of society. While Wedekind was right when he said that Lulu was meant to stir up disaster, she should not be personified as a monster; she should be symbolized as a casualty of society, much like Wendla. As per the New Historical approach:

Literary works can be seen as social documents that intervene in the material world through their form; they display, embody, and allegorize the social tensions of an historical moment and polyphonic and often contradictory ways. They can invoke the spirit of subversion and rebellion only to contain it again and again. (Kaes 213)

The containment comes with disagreement, censorship and disapproval. If the piece of text does not follow the rules of society, society has a way with making sure the text does

not grow any legs. This means that certain plays can be banned from the theatre, which was precisely the case for *Spring Awakening* and *The Lulu Plays*.

Much like Wendla and Lulu, “social literary texts are seen as products of circumstance, as expressions of, and comments on, collectively shared fears, hopes, wishes, and anxieties, and as active agents within the social context of their time” (Kaes 214). These two characters represent much more than just themselves. They offer a glimpse into, not only the world of a female, but into the world of a tragic soul trapped in a society they cannot control. They provide a “public sphere” where “ideas are forged, contested, negotiated, accepted, repudiated” and articulates the desires and lack of desires within this particular society. As Kaes suggests, “A critical practice that synthesizes theoretical, historical, literary and anthropological methods of analysis, New Historicism has great practical potential for cultural studies in general and for interdisciplinary work in German literature in particular” (211). He continues with acknowledging the questions this approach allows one to ask, thereby “broadening our textual base” and opening up “new archival sources” which, in turn, allows “literary texts and other cultural representative to resonate more fully” (211). Today, the work done by Wedekind is not viewed as harshly as it was a hundred years ago. Many companies and publication outlets considered Wedekind’s work pornographic whereas today, they might only characterize it as raunchy or mature. Kaes asserts that:

Literature and other cultural representations also record an imaginary, in-official history consisting of collective wishes, desires, fears, and hopes.

Literature thus participates in a nation's communal self-definition and in the creation of a public memory. (215)

This provides ample opportunities to study pieces of literature and compare the context to the social and political ways of thought in that specific time and place. Wendla and Lulu's deaths serve as more than just a sad piece of storytelling. It represents a societal flaw as seen by the playwright. Wedekind potentially felt the need to kill his two female protagonists in order to send a message to society about their treatment of women or perhaps he wanted to show how they were punished for their actions. The relationship between text and context allows audiences today to gain a greater understanding of what the characters truly went through and possibly a firmer grasp on why the characters behaved the way they did and how they may have possibly been perceived by the audiences of Imperial Germany.

DIE SCHWARZE FLASCHE

Drama in einem Aufzuge von E. von KEYSERLING

PERSONEN:

Max, Student, 23 Jahre alt	CARL NEUBERT
Milli, Musikschülerin, 18 Jahre alt . . .	YELLA WAGNER
Ein Kellner	PAUL LARSEN
Ein Stubenmädchen	MIZZI MEIER

LULU

Tragödie in einem Aufzug vom Scharfrichter FRANK WEDEKIND

PERSONEN:

Lulu	YELLA WAGNER
Gräfin Geschwitz	ADELE BAUMBACH
Dr. Alwa Schön	CARL NEUBERT
Schigolch	PAUL LARSEN
Mr. Hopkins	HANS DORBE
Kungu Poti, Erbprinz von Uahube . . .	OTTO SCHLOSSER
Dr. Hilti	FRANK WEDEKIND
Jack	PAUL SCHLESINGER

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Figure 7. Program cover of Wedekind's *Lulu*. 1901

VI. CONCLUSION

What were the reasons behind Wendla and Lulu's death? One can only use the clues left behind from history and literature to put the pieces together. Analyzing these two plays using the New Historicism method granted high quality traces of history to be interpreted in a way that provides a voice to the voiceless. The characters in the plays would not have been heroic figures found in the history books. As mentioned earlier, the winners wrote history. Literature provides traces of people who may have not been remembered in years to come. Wendla was just a little girl and her gravestone does not even read the truth. It is covered with the lie surrounding her death, where only the reader and her mother know the truth. Lulu's death is also surrounded in mystery by having a well-known figure with an unknown identity kill Lulu and her friend in the very last scene of the play. But the greater question is 'why?' Why would Wedekind kill his female protagonists and what does a finer examination of the context provide?

It provides understanding and reasoning. Wedekind wrote on many levels. Nothing was as plain as it seemed. Although he had some rather troubling views of women, he viewed himself as a fighter of their behalf. In Wendla's case, he created caricatures out of the authority figures in the children's lives. Although Melchior and Moritz were able to express their reactions to the wrongdoings done to them, Wendla's death still stands for a great deal. She was ignorance and innocence. She was purposefully left in the dark and then punished for it. This is a very obvious statement made by Wedekind. Yes, Wedekind seemed to fall victim to his views of women being a reaction to man and even seemed to silence Wendla in critical moments, but he still

provides a different perspective of what society was like and the consequences that accompanied it. Both of these observations of Wendla are important. Not only had society silenced her, but Wedekind did so as well.

Lulu suffered from different consequences. She was blamed for everything that happened to her and how people responded to her. She was blamed for the actions of the men around her as if she were solely responsible for their behavior and was viewed as a monster. Wedekind had her murdered by a famous serial killer behind a closed door. Like Wendla, the death was offstage or hidden. Wedekind describes it as a hiding hole. The significance of this similarity can be amplified upon the notion of Wedekind's thoughts about women. In addition, Lulu was a prostitute when she died, a role society looked down upon. The answer to the question of why Wedekind killed Wendla and Lulu is revealed in the context. The punishment of giving into a sin or a selfish desire is death. Society cannot condone such actions, even from the most innocent of creatures, such as Wendla or the most unique creatures, such as Lulu.

Both of these characters and the worlds they lived in provide traces of history and can and should be viewed as an historical representation of the time period. The culmination of the societal pressures of Imperial Germany and the self-expression of Wedekind allows the reader to view these plays as artifacts. They are historical documents according to New Historicism. These plays are important pieces of history and provide insight and valuable knowledge for the reader to interpret. These historical clues are what allow a current audience to discern the truth. The context surrounding the texts dictates what happens in the text. Frank Wedekind wrote these two plays amongst a

time and place riddled with problems and tensions. Imperial Germany was an uptight and rule centric nation. It is no surprise that it was also heavily censored. This censorship only fueled playwrights like Wedekind and provided more material for them to write about. This societal commentary in turn equips the text with traces of reality.

Breaking down the relationship between the text and the context in these two plays truly provides a deeper understanding of the outcome society led the characters to. The impact of Wedekind's views and the views of people of Imperial Germany is found on every page. Whether through text or subtext, the characters of Wendla and Lulu provide traces of what life was like during this time. As per the new historical mindset, these plays can act as historical documents. The traces of history found in *Spring Awakening* and *The Lulu Plays* serves to enhance the reader's awareness of historical truth. Wedekind says, "Search fearlessly for every sin, for out of sin comes joy," but the fates of Wendla and Lulu say otherwise.

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