



# Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749 – 1832)

*The Sorrows of Young Werther*

Th Curran  
January 27, 2020

# Rousseau: *La nouvelle Héloïse* (1761)

*Si c'est la raison, qui fait l'homme,  
c'est le sentiment, qui le conduit.*

Kant, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche



# *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* 1774



- We read a translation of the heavily revised final edition of 1787.
- Werther (best transliterated as Ver - tear, as in “to tear a strip off”).

# Voltaire's *Candide*:

## 22 February 1759



3

- The bestseller of the European book trade; published simultaneously in Paris, Geneva, Amsterdam, London and Brussels – at least 20,000 copies sold within a month
- Two editions; first edition went through 30 impressions, second edition of 1787 went through 25 impressions. First French translation 1775, English 1779, Italian 1781.
- All based on true events: Goethe's relation to Charlotte Buff & Johann Christian Kestner in the Summer of 1772 – also the suicide of Carl Wilhelm Jerusalem.
- The Epistolary Format gives us the impression that we are the actual and intended recipients of the letters – we are forced to confront the destiny [*Schicksal*] of Werther.



# Vade Mecum:

*Go with Me*

- “a handbook ... carried on the person for immediate use when needed...”
  - Collins
- “a handbook or guide that is kept constantly at hand for consultation...:
  - Oxford



- *Leiden* = Sufferings / Suffering
- *Leidenschaften* = Passions
- *leidenschaftlich* = passionate



■ Othello's final words:

*No more of that. I pray you, in your letters,  
When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,  
Speak of me as I am. Nothing extenuate,\*  
Nor set down aught in malice. Then must you speak  
Of one that loved not wisely, but too well.*

\*weaken, lessen...

# *Sturm und Drang* (Storm and Stress)



- a German literary movement named after a play written in 1777.
- Strasbourg: Herder and Goethe meet and collaborate (1770-1771).
- Essays by Herder on Shakespeare and Ossian (1773).
- The publication of Goethe's *Werther* called the "zenith" of the whole phenomenon.
- Goethe becomes an official of the Duchy of Weimar (with its university in Jena) in 1775; Weimar, seat of government (6,000 souls) for 700 square miles, with 107,000 inhabitants.
- 1810 Goethe publishes his anti-Newtonian *Farbenlehre* (& collaborates with Schopenhauer).



# Caspar David Friedrich

## 1774-1840



8

- c. 1821/22: Morning, Noon, Afternoon and Evening

*(Der Abend; Hannover, Lower Saxony)*

- Oil on Canvas; 22x31cm; approximately two Penguin copies side by side

# Caspar David Friedrich

1774-1840



9





- Pilgrim / Pilgrimage:
  - 85, 86, 87, 103
- Pharisee: 31
- Philistine: 33 (61)

# Two Lindens

- The (two) Linden Trees:
  - pp. 32, 35, 72, [85], 89, 108\*\*, [132]
- Walnut Trees: 46, 93
- Chestnut Trees: 69-70
- Beech Tree: 70





# Intertextuality

- **Klopstock** (1724-1803): June 16, 1771 (Penguin, p. 43); poem written in 1759.
- **Oliver Goldsmith** (1728-1774);
  - *The Vicar of Wakefield: A Tale* (1766) recommended to Goethe by Herder;
  - Latin epigram on title-page: *Sperate miseri, cavete faelices*
  - One version reads:
    - “Take heart, you who are heavy;
    - take heed, you who are happy.”
- **Lessing** (1729-81): *Emilia Galotti* (1772); based on Livy’s Virginia.
- **James Macpherson** (1736-1796): published translations of the ancient bard “**Ossian**” (3rdC Gaelic poet) in 1760, 1762 & 1763



# Intertextuality

- **Herder** (1744-1803)
- **Novalis** (1772-1801)
- 1795:
  - **F.A. Wolf**  
*Prolegomena ad Homerum*
  - **Friedrich Schiller**  
*Letters on Aesthetic Education On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry*
- Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* (1946)



# Intertextuality

- Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus* 1818
- Oxford, p. 103: “But I thought Werter himself a more divine being than I had ever beheld or imagined; his character contained no pretension, but it sunk deep.”
- Sunday before Christmas, 1772; Penguin, p. 115: “Seyn Sie ein Mann!”



## Racine, *Phaedra*

- Notes by John Edmunds (Penguin); page and line numbers conform to Sisson translation
- pp. 100ff: During the scene Phaedra's mode of address to Hippolytus becomes progressively less formal. She begins with <my lord~*Seigneur*>, switches to <prince~*Prince*> (l. 655) and now uses *tu* [lines 693&696: *que je t'aime*], which indicates both intimacy and lack of respect. The principal characters normally address each other as *vous*; they use *tu* to confidants (including Oenone and Theramenes), servants and the gods or abstract concepts such as Destiny.



# Goethes Werke: Henry Crabb Robinson:



*Bericht über ein Gespräch mit Goethe. 2. August 1829:*

“Something led him to speak of Ossian with contempt. I remarked: The taste for Ossian is to be ascribed to you in a great measure. It was “Werther” that set the fashion. He smiled and said: “That’s partly true; but it was never perceived by the critics that Werther praised Homer while he retained his senses, and Ossian when he was going mad. But reviewers do not notice such things.” I reminded Goethe that Napoleon loved Ossian. “It was the contrast with his own nature,” Goethe replied, “He loved soft and melancholy music. *Werther* was among his books at St. Helena.”



# *Napoleon the Great*

.. *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, which Napoleon read no fewer than six times during the Egyptian campaign, and probably first when he was eighteen.



## Andrew Roberts (2014)

- Napoleon took advantage of being in Erfurt to meet his greatest living literary hero, who lived only 15 miles away in Weimar. On October 2, 1808, Goethe lunched with Napoleon at Erfurt, with Talleyrand ... in attendance. As [Goethe] entered the room, the Emperor exclaimed, "*Voilà un homme*" ... The two men discussed *Werther* ... Napoleon complained that Voltaire should not have "made such an unfavourable portrait of the world-conqueror" Julius Caesar in his play *La Mort de César* ... Napoleon told him he felt that French theatre had strayed too far from nature and truth. "What have we now to do with Fate?" he asked, referring to plays in which prearranged destiny formed the determining agency. "Politics is fate." ...

[Goethe:] *Gleich gegen Gleich...*



## Andrew Roberts:

Napoleon ... idolized Rousseau ... *La Nouvelle Héloïse* ... argued that one should follow one's authentic feelings rather society's norms... [Napoleon's] favourite poet was Ossian ... He took the Ossian poem *Fingal* on his campaigns...

# When Napoleon left for Egypt:



he took with him an impressive array of the great works of his own century, notably those of Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Rousseau, as well as some of the authors of Antiquity... He also took the *Voyages* of Captain Cook... Goethe's romantic and melancholy *Sorrows of Young Werther*; and, significantly, the Koran... it was not out of character for him to read Livy, Plutarch or Tacitus on campaign...

- Alan Forrest, *Napoleon* 2011



## 2 Editions

- Major Additions in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition of 1787:  
According to the Penguin / Hulse translation.
  - Entry for 30<sup>th</sup> May: pp. 34-36
  - 1<sup>st</sup> entry for 26<sup>th</sup> July: pp. 55-56
  - Entry for 8<sup>th</sup> August: “The same evening”: p. 58



## 2 Editions

- Book Two:
  - 20<sup>th</sup> January: “In the evenings I resolve... mornings are gone”: p. 78
  - 8<sup>th</sup> February: p. 79
  - [9<sup>th</sup> May Excerpts, p. 86]



## 2 Editions

- Book Two:
  - 16<sup>th</sup> June (Year ii): p. 87
  - 4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> September: pp. 90-92
  - 12<sup>th</sup> September: p. 93
  - 27<sup>th</sup> October: “The same evening”: p. 97
  - 22<sup>nd</sup> November: p. 100
  - 26<sup>th</sup> November: p. 101
  - p. 108: “Repeatedly...” to the conclusion of December 14<sup>th</sup> on p. 113
  - p. 114: December 20<sup>th</sup>: “We scarcely...” to “her husband's respect”





- Sunday before Christmas, 1772; Penguin, p. 115: “Seyn Sie ein Mann!”
- *Freitod / Selbstmord*



# Hamlet

*To be, or not to be – that is the question;  
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune  
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles...  
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time...  
The pangs of despised loves...*



# Hegel's Berlin Lectures on Aesthetics

Hamlet: "is melancholy, meditative, hypochondriacal, and pensive..."

"But death lay from the beginning in the background of Hamlet's mind."



## Rousseau: *Discourse*, Part One (Hackett p. 60)

Now I would very much like someone to explain to me: what kind of misery can there be for a free being whose heart is at peace and whose body is in good health? I ask: which of the two, civil or natural life, is more likely to become insufferable to those who live it? We see about us practically no people who do not complain about their existence; many even deprive themselves of it to the extent they are able, and the combination of divine and human laws is hardly enough to stop this disorder. I ask: has anyone ever heard of a savage who was living in liberty ever dreaming of complaining about his life and of killing himself?



# Unwandelbar G.

- Wandrers Nachtlied II  
Über allen Gipfeln  
Ist Ruh,  
In allen Wipfeln  
Spürest du  
Kaum einen Hauch;  
Die Vögelein schweigen im Walde,  
Warte nur, balde  
Ruhest du auch.
- Hill-tops, tree-tops, the tiny birds ...



# W.H. Auden

*"We are all here on earth to help others; what on earth the others are here for I don't know."*

- For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives...
  - Denn Dichtung bewirkt nichts; sie überdauert...
  - "Theoretically, it is impossible. One has to try."
- Samuel Beckett:
  - "Nothing to say. Here goes."

# Heinrich von Kleist (1811): Dedication to *Prinz Friedrich von Homburg*



30

- First performed posthumously in 1821
- Dedicated to Amalie Marie Anne, born as the Princess of Hessen-Homburg:  
Gen Himmel schauend greift, im Volksgedränge,  
Der Barde fromm in seine Saiten ein.  
Jetzt trösten, jetzt verletzen seine Klänge,  
Und solcher Antwort kann er sich nicht freun.  
Doch eine denkt er in dem Kreis der Menge,  
Der die Gefühle seiner Brust sich weihn:  
Sie hält den Preis in Händen, der ihm falle,  
Und krönt ihn die, so krönen sie ihn alle.



## End of July 1794, University of Jena, Duchy of Weimar

- “... thus through the most intense conflict between object and subject, perhaps never full to be resolved, we sealed an enduring union rich in benefit to us and to others.”
- [of such great benefit to ourselves, and also to all who knew us and read our works...]
- Michael Frayn, *Copenhagen*:  
Niels Bohr: “I was formed by nature to be a mathematically curious entity:  
not one but half of two.”





# Napoleon

- Napoleon's former classmate Louis-Antoine de Bourrienne. Appointed Napoleon's private secretary during the negotiations with Austria in Leoben in 1797, Bourrienne was then no longer permitted the use of the familiar "tu" with Napoleon, which he said was "an easy sacrifice" for the honour of becoming head of his *cabinet* (private office) ...
- Andrew Roberts, *Napoleon the Great* 2015, p. xxxi
- p. 115:
- "Think of the many joys your spirit, your knowledge and your gifts afford you! Be a man. Put an end to this dismal attachment to a creature who can do nothing but pity you."
- *Sei'n Sie ein Mann!*