To Lady Bradshaigh

Correspondence, iv, 284–92

[1749][23]

You are highly obliging to me, dear Madam, in the warm solicitude you so repeatedly express for my resuming my pen with a view to publication, as well as in that regarding my health. The sea-bathing I have not tried; the tar-water I have, and gave it fair play. But as my malady proceeds from repletion, and too much application to business, I imagine the latter not so beneficial as it might be to an emaciated or decaying constitution.

As to my Scotish friend's plan,[24] had I freedom of spirits, or inclination to set about that, and to trouble the world again, I might as well pursue the other, that I once had thought of pursuing. The gentleman is an exceeding worthy, sensible and learned man, and fain would I have obliged him, if I had thought I could execute his scheme to the purpose. Indeed I have some degree of pain in refusing or declining to answer the wishes of any one for whom I have something more than an indifference. 'Why, then, (will you ask) do you not set about obliging me, for whom you express a high value?'—Health! business! Madam. But for what should I set about the work I had once in view?—To draw a good man—a man who needs not repentance, as the world would think! How tame a character? Has not the world shewn me, that it is much better pleased to receive and applaud the character that shews us what we are (little of novelty as one would think there is in that) than what we ought to be? Are there not who think Clarissa's an unnatural character?

I will only say, that when the world is ready to receive writings of a different cast, I hope writers will never be wanting to amuse, as well as instruct. Nor perhaps may the time be very far off. So long as the world will receive, Mr. Fielding will write. Have you ever seen a list of his performances? Nothing but a shorter life than I wish him, can hinder him from writing himself out of date. The Pamela, which he abused in his Shamela, taught him how to write to please, tho' his manners are so different. Before his Joseph Andrews (hints and names taken from that story, with a lewd and ungenerous engraftment) the poor man wrote without being read, except when his Pasquins,[25] &c. roused party attention and the legislature at the same time, according to that of Juvenal, which may be thus translated:

Would'st thou be read, or would'st thou bread ensure,
Dare something worthy *Newgate* or the *Tower*.[26]

In the former of which (removed from inns and alehouses) will some of his next scenes be laid;[27] and perhaps not unusefully; I hope not. But to have done, for the present, with this fashionable author. . . .

I admire you for what you say of the fierce, fighting Iliad. Scholars, judicious scholars, dared they to speak out, against a prejudice of thousands of years in its favour, I am persuaded would find it possible for Homer to nod, at least. I am afraid this poem, noble as it truly is, has done infinite mischief for a series of ages; since to it, and its copy the Eneid, is owing, in a great measure, the savage spirit that has actuated, from the earliest ages to this time, the fighting fellows, that, worse than lions or tigers, have ravaged the earth, and made it a field of blood.

from a letter of Samuel Richardson's, 1749

Now, my dear Father and Mother, what shall we say of this truly diabolical Master! O how shall I find Words to paint my Griefs, and his Deceit! I have as good as confessed I love him; but indeed it was on supposing him good.—This, however, has given him too much Advantage. But now I will break this wicked forward Heart of mine, if it will not be taught to hate him! O what a black, dismal Heart must he have! So here is a Plot to ruin me, and by my own Consent too!—No wonder he did not improve his wicked Opportunities, (which I thought owing to Remorse for his Sin, and Compassion for me) when he had such a Project as this in Reserve!—Here should I have been deluded with the Hopes of a Happiness that my highest Ambition could not have aspired to!—But how dreadful must have been my Lot, when I had found myself an undone Creature, and a guilty Harlot, instead of a lawful Wife? Oh! this is indeed too much, too much for your poor *Pamela* to support! This is the worse, as I hop'd all the Worst was over; and that I had the Pleasure of beholding a reclaimed Gentleman, and not an abandon'd Libertine. What now must your poor Daughter do! Now all her Hopes are dash'd! And if this fails him, then comes, to be sure, my forcible Disgrace! for this shews he will never leave till he has ruin'd me!—O the wretched, wretched *Pamela!*

SATURDAY Noon, One o'Clock.

MY Master is come home, and, to be sure, has been where he said. So *once* he has told Truth; and this Matter seems to be gone off without a Plot: No doubt he depends upon his sham, wicked Marriage! He has brought a Gentleman with him to Dinner; and so I have not seen him yet.

Two o'Clock.

I Am very sorrowful; and still have greater Reason; for just now, as I was in my Closet, opening the Parcel I had hid under the Rose-bush, to see if it was damag'd by lying so long, Mrs. *Jewkes* came upon me by Surprize, and laid her Hands upon it; for she had been looking thro' the Key-hole, it seems.

I know not what I shall do! For now he will see all my private Thoughts of him, and all my Secrets, as I may say. What a careless Creature I am!—To be sure I deserve to be punish'd.

from Samuel Richardson: *Pamela* (1740)

LETTER XXII

To Julie

SINCE I received your letter, I have gone every day to Monsieur Silvestre's to ask for the small package. It was always not yet come, and devoured by a mortal impatience, seven times I made the trip uselessly. At last, the eighth time I received the package. Scarcely did I have it in my hands than, without paying the postage, without inquiring what it was, without saying a word to anyone, I left in a daze, and having only the thought to return home, I ran so precipitously through streets I did not know that at the end of a half-hour, looking for the rue de Tournon where I lodge, I found myself in the marsh at the other end of Paris. I was obliged to take a hackney coach to get back more promptly. That was the first time this happened to me in the morning. I only use them in the afternoons for some visits, and then even with regret, for I have two very good legs and I should be quite angry if a little more affluence in my fortune made me neglect their use.

I was very nervous in my hackney coach with my package. I did not want to open it except in my room; that was your command. Besides, a sort of voluptuousness, which permits me to forget comfort in ordinary things, makes me seek it carefully in true pleasures. In those I cannot bear any sort of distraction, and thus I wish to have time and ease to savor all that comes to me from you. I held that package, therefore, with an impatient curiosity which I could not overcome. I endeavored to feel what it could contain through the wrappings, and you would have said it was burning my hands to see the continual transfer it was undergoing from one to the other. It was not that by its size, its weight, the manner of your letter, I did not have some suspicion of the truth, but how could I conceive you to have found the artist and the opportunity? That is what I still cannot guess. It is a miracle of love. The more it surpasses my reason, the more it enchants my heart, and one of the pleasures it gives me is that of understanding nothing of it.

At last I arrived at my lodgings, I flew up, I locked myself in my room, I sat down out of breath, and I put a trembling hand on the seal. Oh, the first effect of the talisman! I felt my heart palpitating at each paper I removed, and I soon found myself so overcome that I was forced to get my breath for a moment at the last wrapping . . . Julie! . . . Oh my Julie! . . . the veil is torn away . . . I see you . . . I see your divine features! My lips and my heart pay them first homage; my knees bend . . . adored charms, once more you enchant my eyes. How immediate, how powerful is the magic effect of these cherished features! No, it does not require a quarter of an hour, as you claim, to feel this effect. One minute, one instant was enough to tear a thousand ardent sighs from my breast and bring back along with your image remembrance of my past happiness. Why must it be that the joy of possessing so precious a treasure is mingled with such cruel bitterness? With what anguish the portrait reminded me of the times which are no more! Seeing it, I imagined I was seeing you again; I imagined I found those delightful moments again, the memory of which now creates my life's unhappiness; the moments which Heaven gave me and took from me in its anger. Alas, the next instant undeceives me. All the grief of absence is rekindled and sharpened as the delusion which suspended it vanishes, and I am like those wretches whose torments are interrupted only to make them more sensitive to them. Gods! What torrents of passion my avid eyes absorb from this unexpected object! Oh how it revives in my inmost heart all the impetuous emotions that your presence used to call into being! Oh Julie, if it were true that it might transmit to your senses the delirium and the illusion of mine. . . . But why should it not be so? Why should not the impressions which my soul sends forth with such rapidity not reach as far as

you? Ah dear friend! Wherever you may be, whatever you may be doing at the moment I am writing this letter, at the moment when your portrait is receiving all the homage your idolatrous lover addresses to your person, do you not feel your charming face bathed with tears of love and sadness? Do you not feel your eyes, your cheeks, your lips, your bosom caressed, pressed, overwhelmed by my ardent kisses? Do you not feel yourself surrounded completely by the fire from my burning lips! . . . Heavens, what do I hear? Someone is coming . . . Ah let us lock up, let us conceal my treasure . . . the importunate one! . . . Cursed be the cruel person who comes to interrupt such sweet ecstasies! . . . May he never be in love . . . or else may he live far from the one he loves![25]

from Jean-Jacques Rousseau: *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761), tr. Judith H. McDowell

from Nicholas Boyle:
Goethe. The Poet and the Age
(vol. I.) Oxford and New York:
OUP, 1991

Reconciling the individual with a unified rational order by interpreting individual life in terms of pure inwardness is also a theme in the philosophy of the one towering genius intellectual Germany produced in the period of transition from bourgeois to absolutist culture. The thought of G. W. Leibniz (1646–1716), mathematician, logician, inventor, jurist, diplomat, theologian, philosopher, historian, courtier, and librarian, has at least as many facets as his eventful life. But he himself saw the relationship between the individual and the continuum, as he put it, as one of the two major problems of philosophy (the other being the problem of free will), and he laid particular emphasis on the implications for the German social order of his answer to this most abstract metaphysical question. How can a thing both have an identity of its own and yet also belong to a larger order, also be acted upon by other things, for example, to the extent even of being or becoming a part of them? Leibniz's answer contains three features which make of it a prophetic exposition of the entire eighteenth-century German world-view. In the first place, the ultimate constituents of the world, for Leibniz, are not things, but *forces*—forces, however, with an identity, 'substantial forms', he calls them, or 'monads', and his prime example is the human soul. It is in the nature of such a force, or monad, to be always changing its state, to be always developing: its identity lies not in any one particular state but in the rule of its development that describes all its states, like the single algebraical formula that describes all the positions of a point moving along a curve. In the second place, although all the different states of a monad, such as a human soul, may appear to involve it with the rest of the universe, that is, with other monads, so that it appears to come into contact with them, to act upon them or be acted on by them, none the less, according to Leibniz, all these changes are understandable not as the interaction of several monads one upon the other, but as the autonomous development of each monad singly, fulfilling in isolation the law of its being. All *change is internal* and there are no such things as relations. That there appear to be relations, that monads appear to act upon one another, is a result of a 'pre-established harmony' which ensures that the different rules-of-being of all the different monads fit together as perfectly *as if* they acted upon one another: Darius is not defeated by Alexander, rather, the life-lines of Darius and Alexander are so harmonized that at the same moment Darius loses the battle and Alexander wins it. The motions of the body do not cause the motions of the soul, or vice versa, but the two sets of motions are so harmonized that the relation appears to be one of cause and effect. Thirdly, Leibniz believes that each monad reflects at every moment the state of all other monads, though from its own *point of view* (and Leibniz is the first, after Pascal, to introduce the notion of 'point of view' into philosophy). That is to say, each of us reflects in himself the universal order and in his own development the onward development of all. To be sure, our own point of view is a very one-sided affair, and the result is that much in the universe seems to us to be askew, but if we could see the world from a perfectly central perspective—say, that of God—then all would appear to us to be in perfect order. Moreover, since the world that God sees is not a different world from that which we see, that perfect order is already contained in what we now see, however distorted or foreshortened. Our duty, and our nature as developing forces, is to unfold that potential insight that we already contain, to understand ourselves—and that means to understand the world that we reflect—ever more clearly, and so to approach ever more closely to a divine perspective, which, none the less, since the universe is infinite, will always, however rich and great our understanding, remain infinitely remote.

This impressive and inspiring scheme is built on the narrowest of bases—the conviction of the absolute integrity, the logically guaranteed inviolability, of identity, that is, of the human self. The particular strength of the scheme—but also of course the origin of its most serious ambiguity—is that it fuses that apparently atomistic, even anarchistic, conviction with a belief in a universal order by allowing the world of rational interconnectedness to stand *as if* it were real. Really, there are only windowless monads working out their private destinies, but in appearance, and down to the last detail, everything works as if explicable in terms of cause and effect. Indeed the fusion is still more intimate, for each private destiny is a representation, in miniature, and in accordance with a particular perspective rule, of the destiny of all.

It is not difficult to see in this metaphysical compromise a parallel to the social compromise forced on the middle class of the German absolute states at the end of the seventeenth century: a public, political, and independent economic life (a life of cause-and-effect interaction) is denied to them, but for this they have the threefold compensation: firstly, that their private, personal (perhaps originally religious) life, developing according to none but its own inner law, is thereby secured and unexposed to danger; secondly, that the life denied to them is anyway devalued as a 'mere' appearance; and thirdly, that between the humblest citizen and the total state machine there is said to exist a complete, if not always obvious, identity of interest; the grenadier, or the orphan in Halle, carries the Prussian state within him, and lives its life, as much as Frederick William I, if more obscurely. Conversely, the Leibnizian scheme does justice to the two principles of the enlightened despots themselves; that a state can be ordered in accordance with reason (for though the rational interconnectedness of things is an appearance, it is a 'well-founded' appearance and the pre-established harmony knows no dissonances), and that the state is most perfectly ordered around the interest (properly understood) of its sovereign. In particular the metaphor of perspective, of 'point of view', is immensely powerful, for it derives from and reinforces the visible practice of absolutism. To look out from the royal windows on the first floor of Versailles, or at any of the equivalents in Herrenhausen, Ludwigsburg, or Nymphenburg, and to see the flower-beds, the box-hedges, and the coloured gravels, which at ground level seem at best a playful puzzle, coming together and crystallizing into an ornamental, geometrical, or heraldic pattern; or to sit in the royal box of a 'baroque' theatre, directly opposite the perspective vanishing-point, at the one point in the room, therefore, given the stagecraft of the time, from which the proscenium-framed illusion was perfect, is to understand what Leibniz meant by the divine point of view from which the way of the world seems perfectly rational and all seems for the best. And when in his own popularizing writings Leibniz summarized the political implications of his philosophy as content with one's station, eager prosecution of one's own development, particularly intellectual, and confidence that, however confused things may appear to the subjects, the prince is directing all to the best possible end, he may have been coarsening his scheme but he was not falsifying it.

A phrase which Spener could have written, but which comes in fact from St Teresa of Avila, characterizes for Leibniz the condition of the human individual: 'the soul should often imagine that there is in the world only it and God'. Spiritual solitude of course is not a German monopoly, and it is worth a literary digression to draw a parallel and contrast with contemporary England. *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*... first appeared in 1719, and by 1740 Germany alone had furnished nine separate translations, the first in 1720, and ten imitations, all frequently reprinted. The immense European success of Defoe's novel plainly reflects a general understanding of the experience of isolation (which after all literally means 'being marooned on an island'), yet the story of Crusoe's reaction to his fate is equally plainly a story by and of an eighteenth-century Englishman. If we compare Defoe's book with his model, Henry Neville's *Isle of Pines* (1668), where the narrator is a cabin-boy happily cast away with a clutch of ladies, we notice at once that Crusoe's isolation is complete, and totally unerotic. In this, *Robinson Crusoe* resembles an earlier imitation of Neville, the *Continuation* of Grimmelshausen's *Simplicius Simplicissimus* (1668), in which the hero becomes a hermit living only for his devotions. Like Grimmelshausen's Simplicissimus, and like Leibniz's monad, Crusoe has initially only God for company. Unlike both his predecessors, however, but like his contemporary Leibniz in his drive to transcend monadic solitude, Defoe shows us a hero whose burning desire is to escape back to the company of men—or at any rate of Englishmen. The erotic force, frustrated by isolation, is not simply, as with Grimmelshausen, sublimated into religious fervour. It also expresses itself in the work's extraordinarily detailed eye for, and sensuous interest in, the material objects and material conditions of Crusoe's little world; in the active and aggressive spirit in which Crusoe both exploits his island and fortifies it against that human contact which would constitute not escape but violation; and in the moving relationship, both benevolent and condescending, with Friday who, though alien, is no threat, but the object of pious pedagogic zeal. *Robinson Crusoe* is thus an exact delineation of coming British attitudes, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to the material world, to personal and international relations, and to the Empire beyond the seas. Crusoe's self is as secluded, and as theocentric, as any monad, but the seclusion is overcome, as far as that proves possible, in the partial, loveless, aggressive, sensual, inventive, obsessional, constructive, dutiful and benign way in which the British founded and ruled an Empire, while all the time really wanting to go home. It may be that this solution was open only to a maritime nation. At any rate, while the most significant and most successful German imitation of Defoe offers an almost equally prophetic depiction of future developments in German sensibility, the reader does not find himself breathing the salt air of the open sea. On the contrary, the prevailing impression left by J. G. Schnabel's (1692– after 1750) *Fastness Island* (*Insel Felsenburg* 1731–43) is of the foulness, miasmata and constriction of the European parlours, hovels, galleys and torture-chambers from which the migrants are gathered who people his island utopia. The fastness Felsenburg, like Prussia, opens its arms to the persecuted from every corner of Germany, and beyond, and incorporates them into a rationally ordered Lutheran patriarchy. That this is situated on an island in the South Seas might seem no more than a poetic convenience. But we are indeed dealing with a genuine local variant of the Robinson Crusoe theme—we are in the presence of the specifically German compromise between isolation and engagement so shrewdly anticipated by Leibniz. Crusoe's isolation is a fate which it requires all his energies without exception to overcome, and he gains only partial success—what he cannot overcome he has simply to accept; he does not compromise, he is defeated. By contrast, there is from the beginning something half-hearted about every aspect of *Fastness Island*'s totally successful utopia, if we compare it with its literary forebears. By contrast with the Catholic Grimmelshausen, there is, given the mixed nature of the community from the start, no erotic frustration and so no eremitic otherworldliness. By contrast with Neville, however, there is no erotic anarchy either, for all is kept within the bounds of the proprieties of the Lutheran Church. By contrast with Defoe, there is no harshness of fate, for the isolation of Schnabel's migrants is either deliberate or, if accidental, willingly accepted. Above all, and by contrast with all three, the very isolation of Felsenburg is unreal, not only because, whenever the consequences of seclusion become serious, contact is restored with the rest of the world, either by a convenient shipwreck or by an expedition of the islanders themselves, but also because the very problems that the islanders find most serious, and whose solution occupies most of their time, are problems that presuppose so elaborate a social fabric that the analytical force of the myth of the desert island—what is human life when reduced to its simplest terms?—is hardly felt at all. The problems that preoccupy the Felsenburgers are: how are they to avoid intermarriage within the forbidden degrees of kinship? and how are they to secure apostolic succession for their ministers of communion? Once these questions have been answered satisfactorily, Felsenburg seals itself off from the world. But isolation on these terms can no more be called isolation than can the state of a Leibnizian monad that, though inviolable, knows its own order to be identical with the order of the world at large, or the state of a Pietist soul alone with God but in harmony with the will of the Prussian king. It is difficult to see either Schnabel's or the Leibnizian-Pietist compromise as anything but a classic case of bad faith: the Felsenburgers are loyal neither to their island, for they seek all the benefits of Europe that matter to them, nor to Europe, for they withdraw when they have what they want; and similarly Leibniz's ideal subject is neither loyal to the public realm, for that is unreal to him except as an internal modification of his inviolable self, nor, on the other hand, does he possess the inner life of a distinct individual for he acknowledges no disharmony between himself and the general order. Defoe's Crusoe and Grimmelshausen's Simplicissimus draw their strength as individuals from their conflict with an external order of which none the less they make the best while they can; such strength was not in demand in the enlightened despotisms of eighteenth-century Germany.

The German name for the cult of sentiment or sensibility, 'Empfindsamkeit', has, unlike the unprepossessing English term 'sentimentality', a specific and wholly literary origin. It is derived from an adjective, 'empfindsam', invented or revived by J. J. C. Bode (1730–93), at the prompting of Lessing, in order to translate the title of Laurence Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* . . . (1768). Bode's version (1768–9) had if anything a greater success in Germany than the original in England, and it provoked many imitations though, as is often the case in cultural history, it came, chronologically speaking, rather towards the end of the development to which it gave a name. Sterne's tale, which Miss Lydia Languish borrowed, along with Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling* and Baculard D'Arnaud's *Tears of Sensibility*, from a circulating library in Bath (she had to conceal them all rather hurriedly on the sudden arrival of Mrs Malaprop) shows Sentimentality at its most condensed and stylish. A series of loosely connected and inconclusive adventures of the heart ('It had ever . . . been one of the singular blessings of my life, to be almost every hour of it miserably in love with some one') are narrated by 'Yorick' in a mercurial, or would-be mercurial, language trembling between whimsicality and innuendo. The emotions and motives surrounding the slightest of incidents—the hire of a carriage, the purchase of a pair of gloves, giving alms to a beggar—become the object of the humorous microscopy familiar to the reader of *Tristram Shandy*. At more seriously eloquent moments (and there is little to the book except moments) it becomes clearer why the modern word 'sentimental' has the connotations it has:

> I sat down close by her and Maria let me wipe them away as they fell, with my handkerchief,—I then steeped it in my own,—and then in hers, and then in mine,—and then I wiped hers again;—and as I did it, I felt such undescribable emotions within me as I am sure could not be accounted for from any combinations of matter and motion.
>
> I am positive I have a soul; nor can all the books with which materialists have pestered the world ever convince me to the contrary . . .
>
> Dear Sensibility! source inexhausted of all that's precious of our joys, or costly in our sorrows! . . . Eternal fountain of our feeling! . . . this is thy *'divinity which stirs within me'* . . . that I feel some generous joys and generous cares beyond myself;—all comes from thee, great—great *Sensorium* of the world!

God, soul, and immortality: despite materialist philosophy and science the existence of them all is proved by, or found in, the existence of feeling, of the capacity for the undescribable emotions that accompany tears—or a blush, or a touch, or a glance—but especially tears.

When Sterne lauds the capacity for feeling as the genuinely divine element in man, he identifies it as a capacity for joys and cares 'beyond myself'. None the less there is in his cult—in any cult—of Sensibility a strong impulse towards egocentrism. The feelings may be feelings of sympathy, common humanity, or love, but the feeling centre from which they emanate is one, indivisible, and solitary. Yorick and Maria may commingle their tears, but the undescribable emotions are located within Yorick, and Maria is credited with no emotions, describable or otherwise. It is true that, in the English literature of sentimentalism, the story for example of Goldsmith's Vicar of Wakefield (1766), or of Henry Mackenzie's Harley, the man of feeling (1771), are stories as much about the world with which an exceptional sensibility conflicts as about the exceptional sensibility itself. Yet even in these writers the temptation to an excessive subjectivity is obvious. In his elegy of 1770, *The Deserted Village*, Goldsmith laments the consequences for rural life of the new agricultural policies, yet it is only with difficulty that he concentrates his attention on the visible devastation of the village. The enormity of what has happened is expressed largely in terms of its cost to Goldsmith's own sensibility, just as it is said of the village preacher:

> He watch'd and wept, he pray'd and felt, for all;

as if the highest, the culminating, form of engagement were personal feeling. Yet, paradoxically, the cult of the sympathetic feelings emphasizes the distinctness of him who feels from the object of his sympathy.

> As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation

writes Adam Smith in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). Goldsmith is not a suffering inhabitant of Auburn, he is a returning visitor. He writes with passion of the misery of the villagers not because he shares their fate, but because he has a lively faculty for sympathy.

Thomas Gray, too, in one of the best known of all Sentimental poems, his *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* (1751), exemplifies this tendency to give a position of privilege, and even primacy, to the feeling heart rather than to its object. The climax of the poem is its transition from the fate of the 'unhonour'd dead', with whom the poet has been 'sympathizing', to the fate of the poet himself. Purportedly, the lot of the poet is here being assimilated to the lot of the rude villagers: like theirs, his transient life, 'to fortune and to fame unknown', will be forgotten. Yet the poem in fact ends with a representation of the poet as somebody who is *remembered*, and remembered in some detail, and commemorated by an epitaph in far from 'uncouth rhymes', which are all the memorial the villagers have. The poet, in other words, is not assimilated, he is differentiated.

In the mid-eighteenth century there arises not just a cult, but a problematic of feeling. Is emotion a medium which relates me to things and people 'beyond myself'? Or is the capacity for feeling simply a component of my own personality —my heart secreting emotions as my lachrymal glands secrete tears? If this were the case, then feeling would not offer an escape from my own identity into communication with other identities, but would simply be the brightly painted walls of my own prison. These questions are more explicit in German than in English Sentimental literature, though they clearly underlie the ambiguities of tone we find in Gray, Sterne, or Mackenzie. In Britain (for, in the age of the Scottish Enlightenment, England is too narrow a term) and in Germany the roots of the Sentimental movement go down into a matrix of developing conceptions and preconceptions which are as much philosophical as they are literary. But in Britain the philosophical tradition to which, for example, Adam Smith belongs, is dominated by Locke, whilst the corresponding German tradition is dominated by Leibniz. English sentimentalities developed against the background of a philosophical concern with the knowledge our sensibility might provide about things and minds other than ourselves—German Sentimentalism against the background of a philosophical concern with the unity of the soul. The emphasis on the individual's capacity for (tearful) sympathy and the resultant drift towards egocentrism are common to both versions of the movement. But German Sentimental literature concentrates less on the overt manifestations of sensibility, its social consequences and social penalties, and more on the faculty of sensibility itself, its internal processes and —ultimately—its self-destruction. The presupposition of a Leibnizian psychology accounts—at least in part—both for the narrower, and clearer, focus of German Sentimentalism and for its closer association in literature with the theme of isolation, and in aesthetics, as we shall see in a later chapter, with a cult of heroic genius.

The heroine (and narrator) of *Life of the Swedish Countess of G——* (1747–8), which its author Gellert intended to have the same appeal as a novel of Richardson's but a more edifying effect, is an example of the Leibnizian tendency of German Sentimentalism. The countess lives a life of which the still centre remains untouched not merely by the disasters which fate sends to try her but by the storms of her own emotions which these disasters provoke and even by her own moral shortcomings. From the position of slightly dry detachment from which she recounts her life, all things, even her own feelings and actions, appear simply as thoughts that occur to her. 'Nothing can happen to us but thoughts', says Leibniz, we are 'absolutely sheltered from all external things': the life-story of the countess is that of a windowless monad. But Gellert was not the only German admirer of Richardson. The complexity of the mind of Lessing, who as a young man ran away from theology to try his luck on the stage, and who then became the first and greatest of modern German publicists, appears in the fact that isolation is none the less the lot of all the major characters in his first full tragedy, *Miss Sara Sampson* (1755). As an attempt, however odd it may sound, to treat within the confines of a five-act drama, which more or less observes the three unities, the themes, characters, and setting, for which Richardson required many-volumed novels, it is a logical continuation of Gottsched's project of compromise with the courtly form of the theatre. Into that form Lessing is attempting to pour the most modern self-expression of a middle class whose economic and political circumstances are increasingly far removed from those of their German counterpart, and it is no surprise if the result is bursting with improbabilities. The play also shows up the difficulty experienced by the Leibnizian Enlightenment in explaining or even acknowledging the existence of evil and error in a world that from one point of view at least is perfectly ordered. The isolation of the characters is the natural, if paradoxical, result of their being endowed with almost infinitely receptive hearts. For each one of them, therefore, all his relations with the other characters are brought within the prison walls of his own self. They are so incapable of any failure to understand one another, any hesitation in forgiving one another or any desire to harm one another that they are effectively incapable of any dramatic interaction with one another. All they can do is to suffer, that is, have 'thoughts'. Such plot as the play contains has to be introduced by a (female) villain whose physical and metaphysical constitution is so utterly different from that of the other major figures as to put her beyond the bounds of humanity. Only on condition, that is, of a breach of the dramatic, as well as the world, order can Lessing motivate an irremediable catastrophe, an object of mourning and remorse. Despite their differing points of view, Lessing's other characters agree so nearly in their vision of what is, and is worthwhile, and it is so difficult for a drama, unlike a realistic novel, to depict the material obstacles to their happy unanimity, that the only conflict possible between them is temporary misunderstanding.

The pattern is no different in Lessing's last play, his refined blank-verse comedy, or 'dramatic poem' as he called it, *Nathan the Wise* (*Nathan der Weise*) (1779), which can be seen as inaugurating the last phase in Gottsched's historic compromise: German literature comes to specialize in the philosophically reflective verse play which, though performable on the stage, is most influential as a book. *Nathan the Wise*, the first German classical drama, properly so called, is often disastrously misunderstood as a plea for religious tolerance. The representatives of the three major religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, are not here shown to tolerate one another's differences, for it is only temporary misunderstanding that prevents them from recognizing that they all think alike: they are shown rather to be agreed in a fourth, secret, religion of agnostic humanism, to promulgate which Lessing wrote the play once he had been forbidden by his employer and ruler, the Duke of Brunswick, to engage further in the theological pamphleteering in which in the end his true, and immensely deceitful, genius lay. Between the two landmarks that open and close his career as a major dramatist Lessing wrote two plays which at once continue the theme of isolation and point to its social and political roots. *Minna von Barnhelm* (1767), set in the chaotic circumstances of the end of the Seven Years' War, is a more realistic comedy than *Nathan the Wise,* if also more stilted, and in it irreconcilability of viewpoints prevails rather than identity, but that of course brings us no nearer to interaction. The source of the irreconcilability, however, lies not in the psychology of the characters but in the incompatibility with all decency and morality of the brutal military and financial policies of Frederick the Great, who is (very) surreptitiously caricatured as a comic Frenchman. In Lessing's model tragedy, *Emilia Galotti* (1772), the avoidance of conflict in the denouement could hardly be more explicit: faced with an absolute princeling intent on ravishing his daughter, the middle-class hero, on whose mind and decision all our attention is concentrated, murders not the tyrant but the daughter. Lessing, wily as ever, does deliberately what seemed to his successors imposed on them by a requirement of art: he makes his conclusion appear tragic, or what his age understood as tragic, in order to conceal that it is revolutionary. The 'bourgeois tragedy', which Lessing did so much to make one of the distinctive genres of the new German literature, is characterized by its concentration on internal conflict within the middle class, or within its individual representatives, rather than on class confrontation and its mechanisms. *Emilia Galotti,* uniquely, raises these issues, but judiciously brushes them away in a conclusion which, with a poker-faced irony subtler than anything of Brecht's, presents a constitutional scandal as a tragedy of individual decision, and murder as a refined form of suicide.

Lessing came to understand the iron necessities that dictated the circumstances of German intellectuals, and in the inevitable compromise saved his self-respect through bitter and devious irony. Klopstock may serve as the model of the new 'official' literary man of Imperial Germany, who lacked that degree both of realism and of self-knowledge, and in whose work the tendency to reduce relationships to internal modifications of the self is taken to the point where it is destructive of content. Born the son of a princely official, Klopstock, after a rigorous classical education, was from the age of 26 the beneficiary of a series of princely pensions, yet refused to dedicate his poetry to the 'courtly praise of . . . half-men who, in full stupid seriousness, think themselves higher beings than us'. This paradox he resolved by claiming for the poet, or 'bard', a privileged status and devoting himself instead to the praise of God. 'The dignity of the poet's subject matter elevated his sense of his own personality' was the dry comment of the older Goethe, and indeed Klopstock was not above a certain cult of his own person, forming coteries of friends who bathed and skated together and wrote, and published, poems to and about each other and gave themselves purportedly old Germanic pseudonyms. Yet although he came to be seen, and saw himself, as the first and most representative figure of a new breed, the independent man of letters, it has been calculated that Klopstock's receipts from his literary works made up only 17 per cent of his life's earnings.

He embodied in his own person that illusion fundamental to 'official' literature: that it was the voice of free men, though it was paid for by the State. His twenty-canto hexameter epic, *The Messiah,* was none the less—perhaps for that very reason—the most important, and was certainly the most controversial, work in mid-eighteenth century German literature. The choices of genre, of form and of theme, were all significant, and all characterized by a certain evasion of reality. To set out to write a Miltonic epic was certainly to follow Bodmer's and Breitinger's analysis of what was appropriate to the Swiss context, but it was to avoid the challenge German conditions posed: to decide, or mediate, between the novel and the drama. To choose to write the epic in the German hexameter, a medium hardly tried and indeed largely of Klopstock's invention, was an act of great bravery and considerable originality, but as an attempt at creation *ex nihilo* it again simply ignored the problems of Germany's literary tradition, which was defective and interrupted, but certainly not non-existent. To choose a sacred subject was the gravest decision of all, and Klopstock reflected deeply and publicly on it. The question what to write about became exceptionally acute for eighteenth-century writers throughout Europe as a result of a new historical awareness. The statesmen and heroes, and even the poets and philosophers, of classical antiquity, who since the early Renaissance had been the timeless models of secular human psychology and morality, now seemed as remote from the modern age as in sacred history, bisected by the saving work of Christ, the Hebrew patriarchs and prophets of the Old Dispensation had always been. 'What is the history of the Greeks and Romans to me, however interesting?' Klopstock asked in his review of Winckelmann's thoughts on the imitation of ancient art. The repository of received themes and figures in which Gottsched still confidently believed had, for the thinker, drained away by mid-century. In a remarkable creative act, the European mind at this time, deprived of its secular past, found a new secular material for literature in the present, in itself, and it invented two new forms for dealing with that material which were to dominate literature for two hundred years: the novel, dealing with contemporary social life, and the subjective lyric poem, dealing with the self. If England and France laid the foundations for the first of these forms, Germany can in Goethe claim possibly the earliest and certainly in his time the fullest exponent of the second. Klopstock, however, like other visionaries who to some extent learned from him, such as Hölderlin and Blake, saw the present age as essentially Christian and the task of literature therefore as the creation of a new sacred poetry appropriate to the new historical vision: 'sacred history and the history of my fatherland', he says, in response to Winckelmann, that is to be his theme. The history of his fatherland, however, always remained in Klopstock's treatment of it a shadowy, semi-mythical affair of Tacitus and Arminius, virtuous German tribes—scarcely distinguished from Scandinavians and Celts—pitted against the corrupt might of Rome, all studiously remote from the political reality in which the poet lived. A similar reluctance to grasp the real characterizes his approach to sacred history in *The Messiah:* the principal actors are anyway angels who spend much time in the sun or other parts of the heavens, human beings are on occasion represented by their guardian angels or simply as 'souls', events on earth get little space in comparison to the feelings they are held to evoke in the poet or the angelic observers, even God the Father is concerned to tell us about the intensity of his feelings, and in so far as the events of Christ's Passion and Resurrection are recounted rather than hymned it is for the sake of their effect on the meditating Abbadona, a fallen angel who is ultimately redeemed. The insistent dualism of the poem, which gives far less attention to the physical and historical world than to the supposedly invisible and supernatural world that shadows it, is most evident and most questionable in the treatment of Christ, whose earthly existence is simply a mask concealing from men and demons his transcendent, omnipotent, and omniscient Divine self, which floats away from his body on the cross and converses with God the Father in the moment of his death. Whatever the intrinsic merits or demerits of such a theology it was in one crucial poetic respect detached from reality: it contained no hint of an engagement with the contemporary intellectual processes which were making increasingly difficult any assertion of the divinity of Christ. In 1773, as the last cantos of *The Messiah* were being published, Theophilus Lindsey proclaimed his conversion to Unitarianism and in the following year he was installed in London's first official Unitarian church. The lasting importance of *The Messiah,* as of Klopstock's odes in classical metres, lay not in their contribution to a new sacred poetry but in their cult of emotion and their stylistic innovations, particularly the encouragement they gave to the growth of unrhymed free verse. But although there is plenty of activity in Klopstock's writing—in its neologisms, accumulated verbs of motion, interjections, and adverbs of direction—much of the activity is unattached; it is reflected rather than immediate, metaphorical rather than descriptive, hectic rather than vigorous.

The extreme example—Goethe himself called it 'bizarre'—of emotion isolated from any relationship is a play whose obsession with solitude makes it read like an anticipation of the non-dramas of Samuel Beckett. *Ugolino* (1768), by Klopstock's disciple H. W. von Gerstenberg (1737–1823), is often classified by literary historians as one of the first works of the Storm and Stress. Yet it contains nothing beyond its desperate shrillness that is not implicit, or even explicit, in the literature of the previous twenty years. Its five prose acts, which observe the unities of time, place, and action more conscientiously than most classical tragedies, show us a father and his three sons starving to death in a dungeon (the incident being taken from Dante, *Inferno*, XXXIII). There are no other characters and almost nothing happens. There is an ineffectual attempt at escape, and the corpse of Ugolino's wife is introduced into the prison by his tormentors. Otherwise there is talk: talk expressing affection, despair, fear, anger, and pain—and then just talk, and sometimes silence. The constriction, physical and mental, is implacable and unrelieved: the almost total impossibility of any action leaves the characters to express themselves only in a fantasia of increasingly hysterical feeling. The prison-house of the windowless but sentient monad is here presented with the starkest literalness. And it is in that literalness that *Ugolino* takes on after all the contours of a protest. Its neurasthenia is directly related to the panic which, in the very year of its publication, drove Winckelmann back from German soil and into his lurid death.

Will the race that the genius Prometheus shapes in refusal of submission to Jove truly be his like and image? Will it live? *Can* it live, supported only by the 'creative', monadic soul, the feeling heart? And is any soul (even that of Nietzsche) capable of this exertion? The extraordinarily forceful diction of the 'Prometheus' poem is in part due to Goethe's resentful awareness that he is having to cut a path through a jungle of public, not personal issues, which none the less are fraught with extreme danger for the mind of the individual. (This is why Zeus, like Nietzsche's God, is for Goethe-Prometheus an enemy, not a nonentity.) 'What it costs to dig wells in the desert and knock together a hut', Goethe exclaimed to Kestner while working on the drama. The Wanderer learned, chanting his song into the storm, that the white heat of an autonomous sensibility cannot be indefinitely maintained. 'You *cannot* always *feel*' ('Man *kann* nicht immer *empfinden*'), said Goethe to Lavater. Sentimentality's picture of the human soul, with all the demands that it imposes, is simply wrong. Awakened, if it is fortunate, in time from the delusion, the exhausted heart, the 'armes Herz', will retire to shelter in its hut before it is finally drained and shattered.

It was because it so perfectly understood and represented the pathology and the crisis of contemporary Sentimentality that *Werther* became a European success. Goethe understood that crisis because it was his own. Never again in his writing life was there so exact a coincidence of personal and general concern. But the crisis was imposed, and the coincidence was only momentary, it was neither stable nor straightforward. We shall not have a complete understanding of *Werther* until we have taken account of its—for Goethe—uniquely close relationship to its public. Only then can we grasp the importance, throughout the rest of Goethe's life, of the memory of the experience chronicled and exorcised in his novel.

It mattered to Goethe that his *Götz* was successful with the public and that Gerstenberg thought him capable of contributing to the public's formation. It was in a rueful tone that he wrote to Kestner in August 1773, 'I think it will be some time before I again do something that will find a public'. In April 1773, it is true, a visit to Frankfurt from one of the Buffs' neighbours had caused all the memories of his time in Wetzlar to 'bubble up': 'I'd like to tell the whole story of my life with you, down to the clothes and postures, that vividly', but he did not at that stage have the understanding of himself or his art to see how that story could be made into something of general, public significance. Although *Werther* was, like *Götz*, a composite of elements both intimate and alien, it was not quite the straightforward affair that Goethe suggested in his, understandably rather delighted, summary of April 1774: 'I have lent my feelings to [Jerusalem's] story and that makes up a marvellous whole.' In order to fuse Goethe's feelings—that is, his letters to Merck—with Jerusalem's story—that is, Kestner's report on his last days and death—it was necessary to create the figure of Werther, at once a character and a consciousness, a human symbol who both represented a social and cultural phenomenon of his time, as Götz did, and spoke, with a voice that said 'I', of internal longing and division, as did Weislingen. That meant, firstly, taking the next logical step onwards from *Götz*, the 'Germanic drama', and expressing the national identity in terms not of its past, but of its present—Germany as it was in the 1770s, grasped with the same concrete imagination that had felt its way into the sixteenth century and that now put itself in the service of the very genre that German circumstances seemed to exclude: the realistic novel. Secondly, it meant that Werther's ability to say 'I' was essential to his characterization and to that of the cultural movement which he represented, and therefore that 'his' life could not just be 'told vividly' in the third person, as Goethe had at first thought of telling the story of his time in Wetzlar, or as in 1773 he was probably attempting to tell the story of Wilhelm Meister. It would have to be impersonated, be acted out by Goethe in one of those ghostly conversations with his absent dear ones in which he created images of 'myself not myself', and which he said bore so strong a resemblance to the process of letter-writing, a half-way house between monologue and dialogue. The decision to write *Werther* as an epistolary novel may well have been influenced by the example given by Sophie von La Roche—while Goethe was himself drafting the opening pages of *Werther* he was advising Frau von La Roche on the construction of her second such novel—but the decision was essential if *Werther*, like *Götz*, was to become a 'national' work, given, that is, the prominence of Sentimentalism in the national life.

Thirdly, the symbol that was Werther could only be created if Goethe treated with complete seriousness and as equal partners, and with no trace of embarrassment or contempt, the anonymous reading public to whom Werther's story is addressed and whose condition Werther symbolizes. This crucial step away from the courtly fear of print as a bourgeois medium, which had been strong in Goethe since his Leipzig days, was undoubtedly prompted by the public success of *Götz*. 'I am quite pleased with myself that it is I who am breaking down the paper wall between us', Goethe wrote to Bürger, using a multiply ambiguous metaphor, as he initiated their correspondence by sending a copy of the second edition of his play. The two poets had so far known each other only through their published works—but the division between writer and reader is now seen to have been only as thin as a sheet of paper. Far from being vast, anonymous, and solitary, the world of the reading public turns out to be scarcely different from the intimate world of a personal exchange of letters. Although *Werther* is a book, it is also a collection of letters which appear, since they never receive a reply, to be written to the reader. The purported editor of Werther's papers speaks to his readers with a concern to inform them accurately, and certain of their collective sympathy. Goethe himself approached the publication of the work in a confident and businesslike way, seeking a normal commercial arrangement, and saw no contradiction between that approach and the ravishing thought that the name of Lotte is now being 'spoken with awe by a thousand holy lips', as if what had been published was not a book but a personal circular. The monologue-cum-dialogues of the solitary poet can be addressed either as letters to friends who are known but distant, or as books to those who are unknown but who, in virtue of their reading, are drawn into the extended circle of Sentimental correspondence and so become friends too.

Fourthly, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*—the title could equally be translated *The Passion and Death of Young Werther*—only became a possibility with the completion of Goethe's religious emancipation. Religious vocabulary in this book does not provide a meaning for the story: rather the story gives meaning to any religious terms it may contain; the 'word of God', as Goethe wrote to Lavater, is no more than the 'word of men'. It is Lotte's name that makes sacred the lips that utter it, not vice versa. If Werther is compared to Christ, or if he speaks of a future happiness in heaven, it is not because our attention is being pointed to external realities that transcend these little events. On the contrary, the reader is being told that the fullest meaning of such terms as 'Christ' and 'heaven' lies in the story of Werther's sufferings. And if the reader then asks what the meaning is of *that* story only two answers are possible: either, nothing at all, it is just a story; or, that it is the story of the suffering of a whole age, exemplified and identified pre-eminently in the experiences of the Promethean creator who shaped these 'men in my own image, a race to be like me'. Wha 'significance' does it have that Werther's birthday is 28 August or that he flee his Lotte on 10 September? Either none—or that his personal liturgica calendar runs in parallel with Goethe's. Werther dies as Christ is born—is th conclusion, then, that if Goethe is to be born, Christ must die? 'All this time, Goethe told Lotte as his work on the novel progressed, 'and perhaps more tha ever you have been with me, *in, cum et sub*'—he was using the terms definitive o the Lutheran doctrine of the consubstantiation of Christ and the Eucharisti species. Goethe's life—his time in Wetzlar, for example—has becom sacramentally significant, for his literary works have raised it to a level at whic it stands for some general feature of the age; the literary works themselve however, have become the sacramental vehicles of his life.

In all these four respects *Werther* is a creation of Goethe's intellectu development in 1773 rather than of his Wetzlar experiences of 1772. Fort years further on, reflecting in his autobiography, Goethe took care to situate th genesis of *Werther* amid the sufferings and frustrations of an entire generation:

> The effect of this little book was great, indeed immense, and principally because it h exactly the right moment. For just as little priming is needed to detonate a powerf bomb, so the explosion which ensued among the public was so violent because the your people had already undermined themselves, and the shock was so great because ea

> erupted with his own exaggerated demands, unsatisfied passions and imagined sufferings.

The reference to 'exaggerated demands' may be misleading. Goethe is not thinking of the revolutionary's demands that the world should be different, as he makes clear when he contrasts the melancholy of his own generation with the great suicides of ancient Rome:

> We are not here talking of such persons as led an active and significant life, employed their days in the service of some great kingdom or in the cause of freedom . . . We are dealing here with those who lost the taste for life essentially for want of action, in the most peaceful state imaginable, through exaggerated demands upon themselves.

What destroyed these young people, undermined them from within, was a requirement they imposed upon themselves and were unable to fulfil, a requirement to produce—from their own resources—feelings, ideas, perhaps even works of art, a requirement to be original, creative, sensitive, to be, in short, a Promethean genius.

The story of Werther is not, in the first instance, a love-story. It is the story of the self-destruction of a feeling heart, a sentimental soul, and a love-relationship is only one of the elements in that process. Werther, a young man of accomplishment and means, comes to a south German town partly in order to settle a family matter concerning an inheritance and partly in order to escape the aftermath of an unhappy entanglement at home. It is May, and in the countryside and villages round about, in the country folk and their children, in his volume of Homer and the sketch book in which he attempts to record his impressions, he finds a source of intense delight, though his weakness as a draughtsman causes him some regret. Through the medium of his letters to an old friend (whose replies are not given) we learn how he lies in the grass watching insects, how he helps a woman to carry water from the well, and how he is totally won over at a country ball by Lotte, daughter of a local bailiff ('Amtmann'—the office occupied by Lotte Buff's father). Lotte is not only lively and practical, but she has a similar sensibility to Werther's, revealing at the ball her taste for Goldsmith and Klopstock. Her domestic life echoes *The Vicar of Wakefield*, and with increasing ecstasy Werther watches and shares her round of simple duties and virtuous actions: cutting bread for her younger brothers and sisters before they go to bed or visiting an old parson or a dying friend. But, as Werther had known since before he met her, she is 'as good as betrothed' to Albert, who now returns from a business trip, and with him, excellent man that he is, friendly, active, and sensible, a shadow of frustration enters Werther's life. The conversations Werther reports turn more frequently on subjects such as death, infanticide, and suicide; nature causes him no more delight. Finally, on 10 September, he breaks away and leaves the area. As his friend, we gather, has advised him, he takes up a diplomatic post in another part of Germany. But though he meets feeling and intelligent men in public life, the shallowness of most, the tedium of affairs, and above all the social humiliation to which he, not a born aristocrat, is exposed, bring him to resign within the year. A period as house-guest of a count and a visit to the scenes of his childhood are no more successful as distractions from the obsession which draws him back to Lotte. Lotte and Albert are now married, not perhaps as happily as they had hoped (shades of *Partners in Guilt*), and another winter is drawing on. In an atmosphere of increasing gloom and friction with Albert, Werther gives himself up completely to a hopeless passion. At this point in the novel an editor intervenes to provide a narration linking the records of Werther's last days. For, recognizing the pain he is causing to Lotte, whose love for him is transparent, but unfulfillable, Werther discovers in suicide a means of relieving the personal tensions without renouncing his desire. After a last hysterical interview with Lotte, whom he fleetingly embraces, he shoots himself with Albert's pistols, dying, after a twelve-hour agony, at noon on Christmas Eve.

The most prominent formal feature of *The Sorrows of Young Werther* is that, although it is an epistolary novel, the letters in it come, all of them, from one correspondent. We hear, not the polyphony of Smollett, Richardson, or even Rousseau, but the single—and, till the end of the second book, uninterrupted—voice of Werther. Even the editor who holds the narration together during Werther's disintegration does not offer an alternative point of view: his interpretation of character, Lotte's, Albert's, Werther's even, is Werther's own, though his knowledge is more extensive. He shares Werther's interest in the details of his dying and the location of his grave (both Werther's anticipation and the editor's narration of the event recall the close of Gray's *Elegy*). He simply provides external confirmation of the truth of Werther's perceptions; assures us that the unease between Albert and Lotte is real and that Werther's belief that he represents a serious threat to Lotte's virtue is well founded. The catastrophe affects all three principal characters, but it has a single source in Werther's sensibility, and that sensibility is indeed, we gather from the editor's intervention, as it has appeared to us in Werther's letters. We are dealing therefore essentially with a monodrama, and it is not a development in the plot that holds our fascinated attention but a development in the mood. In this novel—perhaps it should be called a sequence of prose poems—feeling is all (to cite the words of Faust). Ten years later, when much had changed, Goethe still marvelled at its 'white-hot expression of pain and joy, irresistibly and internally consuming themselves'.

In his first weeks of happiness Werther rejects with a laugh the suggestion that he should undertake a more active life: is he not as active now as he could be in any employment (letter of 20 July 1771)? Werther is completely committed to the life of sentiment, to life as if the theory of the active autonomous sensibility presented an attainable ideal. From the start, however, if only he would attend to them, there are indications that he is trapped by a ghastly delusion. In the glory of Maytime his soul quests in vain for an object, for an idea that will give the full satisfaction of the knowledge: 'this outward thing I have produced from within me'. But no specific, individual thing, however small, will accommodate itself perfectly to his feeling, and the only alternative for his heart is to subside into impotence:

> Wenn das liebe Thal um mich dampft, und die hohe Sonne an der Oberfläche der undurchdringlichen Finsterniß meines Waldes ruht, und nur einzelne Strahlen sich in das innere Heiligthum stehlen, ich dann im hohen Grase am fallenden Bache liege, und näher an der Erde tausend mannigfaltige Gräsgen mir merkwürdig werden. Wenn ich das Wimmeln der kleinen Welt zwischen Halmen, die unzähligen, unergründlichen Gestalten, all der Würmgen, der Mückgen, näher an meinem Herzen fühle . . . Aber ich gehe darüber zu Grunde, ich erliege unter der Gewalt der Herrlichkeit dieser Erscheinungen.
>
> When the mists rise from the dear valley all around me and the sun high above lies on the roof of the impenetrable darkness of my forest and only scattered rays steal through into the inner sanctuary, and I lie in the tall grass beside the falling water and closer to the earth a thousand various grasses become objects of my interest; when I feel, closer to my heart, the teeming of the little world between those blades; the innumerable, unfathomable figures of the little worms and flies . . . But it is destroying me, I swoon at the power of the splendour of these appearances.

Those contemporaries who found Werther's sensibility distasteful objected in particular to his habit of appropriating everything about him by means of the possessive adjective ('my forest', 'my Homer'). Yet that very act of appropriation indicates a discrepancy between the heart and its object, the feeling does not *quite* reach out and embrace the 'appearances'. And when Werther's mood changes, as it does after the arrival of Albert, the unchanged glory of the natural world proves incapable of sustaining him in his earlier ecstasy. On the contrary, the requirement that all life should be open to, and suffused by, his own feeling becomes a torment when his own feeling is one of misery:

> Mußte denn das so seyn, daß das, was des Menschen Glükseligkeit macht, wieder die Quelle seines Elends würde?
>
> Das volle, warme Gefühl meines Herzens an der lebendigen Natur, das mich mit so viel Wonne überströmte, das rings umher die Welt mir zu einem Paradiese schuf, wird mir jezt zu einem unerträglichen Peiniger . . . Es hat sich vor meiner Seele wie ein Vorhang weggezogen, und der Schauplatz des unendlichen Lebens verwandelt sich vor mir in den Abgrund des ewig offnen Grabs . . . Der harmloseste Spaziergang kostet tausend tausend armen Würmgen das Leben . . . Mir untergräbt das Herz die verzehrende Kraft, die im All der Natur verborgen liegt . . .
>
> Was it necessary, then, that what makes man's happiness should also become the source of his misery?
>
> My heart's full, warm feeling for living nature, that used to flood me with so much bliss, that all about me made the world a paradise for me, is now become my unbearable tormentor . . . A curtain has as it were been drawn back from before my soul, and before

my eyes the theatre of endless life is transformed into the maw of the ever open grave ... The most innocent walk costs the lives of a thousand thousand poor little worms ... My heart is being undermined by the consuming force that lies hidden in the natural universe ...

The keyword in *Werther* is 'heart' (Herz). 'What is the heart of man?' is the second sentence of Werther's first letter. His own heart, he tells us, is his only pride.

was ich weis, kann jeder wissen.—Mein Herz hab ich allein

what I know, anyone can know—only I possess my heart

Unstable though it is, he indulges its every whim, as though it were a sick child. It is therefore with something like the shock of tragedy that we learn that this power of feeling is no more, that overtaxed by excessive and conflicting demands Werther's heart is now dead—

Und das Herz ist jetzo tot, aus ihm fließen keine Entzükkungen mehr ... ich habe verlohren, was meines Lebens einzige Wonne war, die heilige belebende Kraft, mit der ich Welten um mich schuf. Sie ist dahin! ... o wenn da diese herrliche Natur so starr vor mir steht wie ein lakirt Bildgen, und all die Wonne keinen Tropfen Seligkeit aus meinem Herzen herauf in das Gehirn pumpen kann ...

And the heart is now dead, no ecstasies flow from it any more ... I have lost that which was the only bliss of my life, the sacred lifegiving power with which I created worlds all around me; it is gone ... oh, when this glorious Nature stands frozen before me like an enamelled miniature and none of this bliss can pump a single drop of happiness up from my heart into my brain ...

The detachment of feeling from its object is now complete. Werther never quite knew the reciprocity of Ganymede's relation with Nature—but now reciprocity has disappeared altogether. And the hypertrophied heart takes its revenge—Werther has lived by feeling and must die by it. Freed from the control of any object, either natural or human, his emotions swirl into hysteria: the clear Homeric vignettes of the early letters give way to wild but indefinite Ossianic landscapes; in the place of the thousand details Werther experienced in the springtime of his heart there is now only moonlight, floodwater, and winter wind. He dies a drained and dismembered travesty of his former self, yet still, hideously, recognizable as the man who sought to grasp, and create anew, the world with his heart.

Even simply as a story in which excessive demands on the capacity for feeling lead with irresistible logic to a loss of all contact with the objects of feeling, *Werther* is still a story of and for our own time. It is true that, with the passage of two hundred years, its immediacy as a documentary novel has paled. It requires some historical empathy to recognize in it the picture of that specific age when the names on the lips of the avant-garde student were Sulzer, Batteux, and Heyne, when friends circulated their portraits in the form of silhouettes, and when Werther's characteristic dress—blue frock-coat, buff waistcoat and trousers, and boots—marked him out as one who followed the English fashions, rather than the French, and lived an outdoor, not a salon, life. (Whether Goethe also knew of the association of 'the buff and the blue' with uncompromisingly middle-class English politics is unclear.) The precision in the dating of Werther's experiences—in 1771 and 1772, when Ossian has 'arrived' but it is not yet essential for a thinking and feeling man to express his view of Shakespeare—is likely nowadays to go unremarked. But in the late eighteenth century the overt theme and its documentation were equally contemporary: their combined effect was overwhelming. Until the last two decades of his life, when *Faust* began to occupy the foreground, Goethe owed his European reputation to *Werther*. Within a year of its publication two French versions and a French dramatization had appeared. The work, first translated into English in 1779 (there were at least seven more English editions in the next twenty years), was by 1800 available in most European languages. On his visit to Italy in 1786–8 Goethe found himself plagued, as he had been plagued in Germany, with questions about the autobiographical background of a novel that he then wished rather to forget. When in 1808 he had a series of interviews with Napoleon the conversation turned mainly on *Werther*, which the Emperor claimed to have read seven times. (One may note that—coincidentally?—*Werther* was also the first, and favourite, reading matter of the monster-hero of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818).) In Germany the effect was immediate: by the end of 1775 no less than eleven editions (mostly pirated) had appeared, and only three months after the publication of the first the reviewers had to acknowledge that the novel was too widely known for them to affect its popularity. Two camps quickly formed: those who stammered out their adoration in sentences such as 'Criticize, should I? If I could, I'd have no heart', and who regarded the shower of parodies and 'corrected' versions with happy endings as little short of blasphemy; and those who followed the lead of the redoubtable Pastor Goeze of Hamburg in seeing the blasphemy in *Werther* itself, a book calculated to encourage the mortal sins of adultery and suicide and a sure sign that contemporary Christendom was about to suffer the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah. (It is of course impossible to prove that *Werther* caused any suicides, but cases of suicide associated with a reading of *Werther* are reported until well into the nineteenth century.)

Werther, in short, became a fashion. (The Chinese porcelain manufactories executed commissions for services decorated with scenes from it.) This, however, is no accidental feature of the book's 'reception', an appendix for the delight of literary antiquarians: rather, it corresponds to an essential and almost completely new feature of the book itself, to its ultimate, concealed, theme for which its analysis of Sentimentality is only the excuse. *Werther* became a fashion because it was about a fashion. It is the first novel in European literature after *Don Quixote* to have such a theme, and this is both the real secret of its modernity and the reason for the precision of its location in place, time, and culture. Werther's innermost life is determined by a public mood, he lives out to the last, and inflicts on those around him, the loyalties which—because they are literary, intellectual, in a sense imaginary loyalties, generated within the current media of communication—most of his contemporaries take only half-seriously. His obsessions are not gratuitously idiosyncratic—they belong to his real and socially determined character, not just to a pathologically self-absorbed consciousness. In the, in his, bitter end, Werther's identity is swallowed up by his reading matter, by Ossian, the vehicle of his last declaration of passion, and by *Emilia Galotti*, which lies open on the desk beside his mangled body. It is not simply to the self-destructiveness of Sentimentalism that Goethe is referring when he writes of *Werther*: 'I myself was in this case and know best what anguish I suffered in it and what exertion it cost me to escape from it.' He is referring also to the fact that, like the confrontation with the God of Pietism, so this very impetus to self-destruction is being imposed on him by the German public mind, commerce with which he cannot avoid, or wish to avoid, if he is to express himself at all in the language and literature that are both his property and the nation's.

How very specifically Werther's case is that of Goethe—Goethe at grips with his age—and not simply that of any 'typical' contemporary we can see by comparing the novel with another work of Storm and Stress to become the object of a cult, Schiller's first play *The Robbers* (1781). (The auditorium on the first night, in 1782, was said to be like a madhouse, with sobs, swoonings, and strangers falling into each others' arms.) Partly borrowed from Goethe's *Claudina of Villa Bella*, the story of Carl Moor, who believes himself disinherited by his father, who gets together a band of student friends, and who, until his conscience gives him insight, leads a life of crime which he interprets as a revolt against an unjust society, had a contemporary appeal in the 1780s which is hardly less in the Age of Terrorism. But the contemporary theme is given a historically indefinite setting and so its very contemporariness, the dependence of the central characters' attitudes on the attitudes generally fashionable in their society, the fact that in their minds and feelings they too are people of a certain time and place and set of circumstances, that remains totally unexpressed. True, Schiller presents a milieu and attitudes more central to the national culture than anything in Goethe's book—the world of the university students with its two most widespread substitutes for a dispassionately realist view of contemporary German society: the fulmination against all forms of paternal authority, and the compensating cult of blood-brotherly friendship—but he presents them as if his play were bringing them into existence for the first time, with no understanding, or even awareness, of the world of which they are a part. The self-consciousness of Carl Moor, and of his evil brother Franz, is inexplicable, it has no earthly origin: in this respect they, and practically all Schiller's subsequent heroes and heroines, are unmistakably the monadic souls traditional in German official literature from the Countess of G—— to

Odoardo Galotti and beyond. Werther is the victim of the delusions fostered by that tradition, in its Sentimentalist form, but the literary method which presents him as a young German of 1771 and 1772 has presuppositions quite different from those of Sentimentalism, and of Werther himself. They are none other than the presuppositions of Lenz when he set out to paint human society; the Sentimentalist content of the novel is in perfect but momentary balance with a Storm and Stress aesthetic which determines the manner of its presentation. This is most obvious, in this first edition of *Werther,* in the editor's report to the reader, in the contrast between the dispassionate registration by the editor of the detail of times, actions, and even feelings, and the nebulous emotionalism of the participants. But the whole book is sustained by a premiss of social objectivity. The novel's setting contrasts—indispensably—with the historically remote world of the protagonist's favourite authors, Homer and Ossian. Werther, like Goethe, may not be living his life in Germany's intellectual centre, in the universities which he almost contemptuously disregards, but his confrontation with the determining social realities is direct: through the social and economic station which gives him leisure, through the barrier to his advancement constituted by aristocratic privilege, through the real restrictions imposed by the convention of marriage, through books and conversations about them. Carl Moor's confrontation is indirect and unspecific, one is tempted to say uninterested in what it is opposing: it is a confrontation through the melodramatically deceitful intrigues of his brother, through highly metaphorical verbal denunciation, and through the fantasy of a violent revolt against the world-order in general. Matthias Claudius's suggestion that rather than kill himself Werther should go on a journey to Peking may have been intended as a criticism of the book's morals but is in fact a compliment to its realism. Saint-Preux, the lover-hero of Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse,* is indeed rescued from suicide by his English friend's arranging for him to accompany Anson on an expedition to the South Seas. The difference from Werther's case, however, is not a difference in the morals of the authors but a difference in the real circumstances of colonial England and provincial Germany, and it is the strength of Goethe's novel that on such differences the story depends.

But the realism of *Werther* is of a peculiar—and peculiarly modern—kind because the real circumstances of Werther's case include, and are predominantly, intellectual, literary, and cultural circumstances. The epistolary form is essential to the novel, for through it Werther's intellectual ideals and cultural loyalties, his conscious moulding of his experience, as he writes, into the patterns given him by Rousseau, Klopstock, or Goldsmith, become as much a part of the subject-matter as the events he recounts. Werther's awareness of the significance of his sitting shelling peas and reading his Homer constitutes the 'mood' which is the book's true subject quite as much as those actions themselves. The real effect of Werther's intellectual attitudes is most clearly seen in the last pages of the book, when his readings from Ossian exacerbate beyond endurance the emotions of an already tense household. It is certainly important that by having recourse to the events of his own life Goethe has found an answer to the question: what can be the subject-matter of a new, contemporary secular literature? But it is equally important that, in the peculiar form of autobiographical literature of which he will become the supreme and perhaps only master, 'the events of his own life' furnish neither a reservoir of impersonal knowledge nor a string of anecdotes accidentally attached to this particular historical personage. The events are not detached from the life so as to become examples of the way of the world, fitted decoratively, as circumstances dictate, into artistic structures obeying their own laws (the relationship which obtains between the notebooks and the novels of many nineteenth-century writers). Nor on the other hand are Goethe's works simply encoded memoirs. It was not in the first instance his recollections on which Goethe drew in writing *Werther*. He did not, in that sense, draw directly on events in which he had been involved: he drew on his formulation of those events two years before in his letters to Merck, and he wrote a novel about the mind that wrote those letters, as well as about the man that met Lotte Buff. Throughout his subsequent literary career the new subject-matter—his own life—will never be available to him simply as material but always in the only half-objectified form of 'myself not myself'. The realism of Goethe's writing after *Werther* will always be of the kind which includes among the realities of the world the consciousness that grasps them. But never again will that consciousness be so closely identified with a current, determinable, datable public reality—with an intellectual fashion. The coincidence of the mind of the poet and the mind of the age could only be momentary, given the power of the poet and the character of the age, if Goethe was not to end as his hero did. The only conceivable third possibility was to live altogether less independently, and be content with a long dotage, writing second-rate works that suited exactly the taste of the time.