

# Humanities 4

Lectures 12-13:

Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*

# 18th Century German Literature

- Transition from Latin to vernacular and to/from French paradigm
  - Gottsched (1700-1766)
- Enlightenment literature
  - Lessing's *Nathan the Wise*
- *Sturm und Drang* (1769-1786)
- Goethe and Schiller

# Johann Wolfgang von Goethe



- (1749-1832)
- Lawyer, political advisor, scientist, but primarily author
- Novels, dramas, poetry
- *Sturm und Drang*, Classicism, and Romanticism
- 210 and 20,000?
- Importance

# Goethe's Major Works

- *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774)
- *Roman Elegies* (1790)
- *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1796)
- *Faust*, Parts I (1808) and II (1832)
- *Elective Affinities* (1809)
- *Theory of Colors* (1810)
- *Italian Journey* (1817)

# Outline of *The Sorrows of Young Werther*

- Main Characters
- Plot
- Literary Form
- Major Themes
- Influence

# Main Characters

- Werther
  - Talented, isolated, emotionally volatile protagonist
  - Mentally ill (severe depression)
- Lotte
  - Idealized woman of virtue
  - Ambiguity in affections
- Albert
  - Representative of enlightenment values
  - Despite friendship, incapable of understanding W.

# Plot

- Plot Points
  - W arrives, meets and falls in love with L
  - A's arrival, W's unhappiness and departure
  - W's return, increased woes, climax
  - Suicide/resolution
- Plot Features
  - Plot plays only minor role
  - Few external incursions

# Literary Form

- Epistolary novel
  - Subjective perspective of main character dominates
- Editorial intervention
  - Provides information excluded by epistolary form
  - Provides independent moral framework

# Outline of Major Themes

- Nature
- Sentimentalism
- Social Groups
- Suicide
  - W's "justifications"
  - G's critical stance
  - Blame?

# Nature

- Nature vs. social life
  - freedom vs. constraint
- Nature as an active force and source
  - vs. something to be mastered
- W's emotional connection to nature
- Transformation in W's attitude.
- Anticipation of Romantic Conception

# Sentimentalism

- Philosophical Characterization
  - Sentiment/passion vs. intellect/reason
- Literary references
  - Vicar of Wakefield, Klopstock, Ossian, Lessing's Emilia Galotti
- “Man is not master of himself, least of all master of his own emotions” (7-1).
- Mourning as a form of love

# Social Groups

- Nobility
- Bourgeoisie
- Peasants
- Children

# Suicide

- Multiple instances of foreshadowing
- Only possible resolution?
- Werther's "justifications"
  - Natural consequence of disease (8-12)
  - Relieve suffering (3-16)
  - Gain eternal freedom (3-16)
  - Atonement for sin (11-24, 12-20)
  - Sacrifice (12-20)
- G's critical stance

# What's the point?

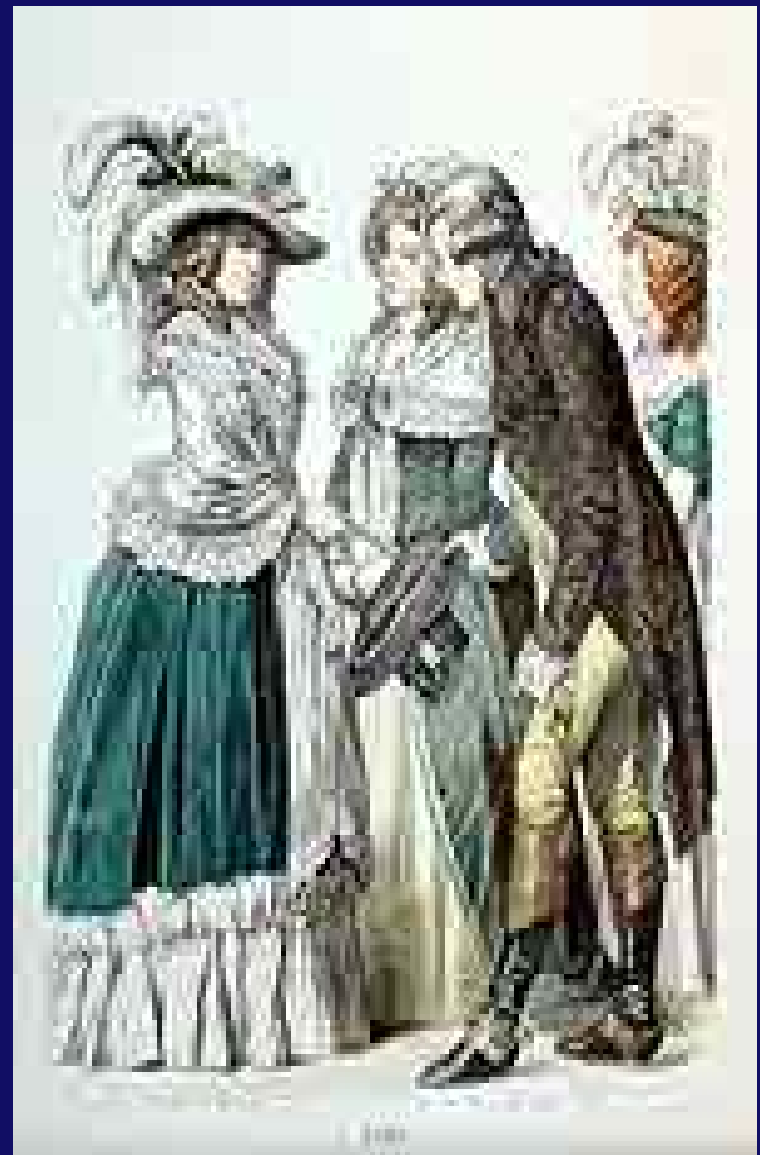
- Suicide?
- Importance of feeling?
- Central figure is Werther or Lotte?

# Who's to blame?

- Lotte?
- Albert?
- Werther?



Deutsche Tracht der Biederzeit.



# Influence

- Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*
- 19th Century French Opera, *Werther* (Jules Massenet)
- *The New Sorrows of Young Werther* (Ulrich Plenzdorff)

# Summary

- New inner world is revealed.
- Fundamental Ambiguity
  - In Goethe
  - In us