



The Sorrows of Young Werther

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe , Elizabeth Mayer (Translator) , Louise Bogan (Translator) , W.H. Auden (Foreword)

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A major work of German romanticism in a translation that is acknowledged as the definitive English language version. The Vintage Classics edition also includes NOVELLA, Goethe's poetic vision of an idyllic pastoral society.

The Sorrows of Young Werther Details

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From Reader Review The Sorrows of Young Werther for online ebook

Rachel says

A different cover for this book features half of a young man's face, dripping with many tears. Covers of classics are usually classy, but this one's really bad. If you're me, you can't look at it without hearing "Everybody Hurts" and giggling -- I mean, it's way over the top. I thought the book couldn't possibly be that *feelingsy*. But it is!

But it's also gorgeously written, in a way that makes you (again if you are me) wish that everyone was this moved by other people and intuitive of their surroundings.*

* = I will admit that I did frequently want to, in the favorite words of my dad's mother, suggest that Werther "oh get a life."

Alexis says

A good gateway to Goethe. This book has some beautiful imagery, but of course a frustrating main character.

Anne Johnson says

Star rating is pointless. This intensely annoying story about a guy to whom I long to scream, "GET A LIFE!" is the essence of Romanticism, and among the most-read books of the 19th century. So, who cares what I think?

Matthew says

This book is pretty much the happiest thing I've ever read.

Actually, this book is pretty damn bleak. You know it's going to be -- it has "Sorrows" in the title for crying out loud! But I found out that apparently lots of people who read it then go and commit suicide right afterwards. Makes a lot of sense!

This is all about poor young Werther, who falls in obsessive, unrequited love... and can't handle it. The writing is beautiful, helped I think by the amazing translation by the two translators, one of whom was a poet in her own right (Louise Bogan). The most beautiful passages are not about love or sorrow, though -- they're about nature! Strange, I know, but there it is!

The attached story, NOVELLA, is also good. I think I liked it a little better than Werther, actually. It felt more immediate, had more action, and didn't make me want to kill myself at the end.

You should read this. You should hide all sharp objects, poison, guns, and nooses first, and maybe up your dose of whatever antidepressant you prefer, but you should definitely read it.

Brian Gramman says

Before I can even begin to address the substance of *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, I first have to talk about nicknames. Nicknames, in theory at least, should be used only when they make a person's name both easier and more enjoyable to say. If someone is named Nicholas, calling him "Nick" or "Nicky" might be convenient and endearing. Calling a woman named Charlotte "Lotte" is neither of those things. The name Lotte conjures up the image (at best) of a very unpleasant, broad-faced woman, or, if you've spent much time with the Old Testament, the husband of a salt lick. Charlotte is a pretty name. Lotte is a grotesque one. Werther's decision to call Charlotte "Lotte" while continuing to call Wilhelm "Wilhelm" rather than Wil or Will or whatever is utterly ridiculous.

Unfortunately, his choice in nickname for his love interest is just one of many of Werther's failures in Goethe's semi-autobiographical epistolary novel. He falls in love with a woman he can't have, allows her to become his obsession, and then shoots himself after weeks of terrible suffering. Not exactly a banner 18-month stretch.

W.H. Auden, who wrote the forward to my edition, didn't feel much sympathy for Werther, calling him a "horrible little monster." I wouldn't go that far, as I find myself empathizing with some of his emotional turmoil, but dude, the world doesn't revolve around you. As someone who finds value in Romanticism and Romantic literature, I'm often frustrated by the way that passion and egoism seem to link together so frequently. In my dream world, profound feelings for both people and nature would make a man want to serve the people and things he cares about rather than weep bitter tears every time whatever he happens to love isn't just handed to him, but for whatever dumb reason, we don't live in my dream world. We live in a world where unrequited love makes one person a victim and the other an antagonist even if both people are acting on their honest emotions.

That being said, I'm not even entirely convinced that what Werther felt for Lotte was love at all. If you truly love someone, and you believe that they love you (as Werther did the last day of his life), then how do you ever make the decision that causing the person you love unimaginable pain is worth escaping your own pain? I don't even think a man as self-absorbed as Werther could justify that. I know next to nothing about mental illness, but I have a much easier time believing that his obsession with Lotte was the result of forces outside of his control rather than her charming personality and skill with a clavichord.

Weirdly enough, despite all that Werther went through, I don't believe that he'd see *The Sorrows of Young Werther* entirely as a tragedy. Rightly or wrongly (definitely wrongly), this was the kind of life that Werther wanted to live, the way he maintained that life should be lived. "I treat my heart like a sick child," he wrote, "and gratify its every fancy." His heart led him to a place no one should have to go, but at the very least, the journey there was the kind in which he believed.

Also, thank God kissing strangers' children is no longer a thing. Why was that ever a thing?

Jill says

I felt more of a connection to this in my 20s, but I still think it is beautiful & passionate in its desperation.

Biblio Curious says

3 or 4 stars. The novella included at the end turned into the reading experience into some sort of religious Daniel in the lion's den story. I'm not sure if the themes from that Bible story/Novella are trying to be attached to Sorrows of Young Werther. Perhaps some Bible themes can be woven in.

I think Werther stands better on it's own. But I found it far more powerful reading it as a human's journey, without any religious ties or preaching. I could see the development of Young Werther and it seems like a realistic journey with a little melodrama added to give empathy a stronghold for the reader.

If you pick up this grey Vintage edition, skip the Novella at the end or read it well after the fabulous Werther story has seeped in. I found the Novella a bit jarring to read immediately after Werther.

Stephen Douglas Rowland says

OH MY GOD, QUIT YOUR WHINING.

Ben Loory says

crap.

BAM The Bibliomaniac says

Catching up with classics

Erik Graff says

The book that made Goethe famous, this epistolary novel depicts a worthless young neurotic through the travails of self-absorption to eventual suicide. As a remarkable testament to how times have changed, the story caused a rash of suicides among young men inspired by Werther's example.

I was unutterably bored.

Picked it up at a bookstore at what was at the time the world's largest shopping center somewhere out in the Chicago suburbs. Some friends had business there, I had nothing to read along with me and I was very much into self-edification in those days. Knowing it was a famous and influential book, I forced myself through the whole of it just as I was to read all of Dante's Purgatorio and a number of other "famous and influential" books.

Andrew Barger says

Review of the Sorrows of Young Werther

by

Andrew Barger <http://www.AndrewBarger.com>

Author of "Coffee with Poe: A Novel of Edgar Allan Poe's Life"

Background

The literary impact of Johann Goethe's 1774 novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther*

<https://www.amazon.com/Sorrows-Werthe...> cannot be underestimated. It was the second Gothic novel, a decade after the first: Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*. The *Old English Barron* followed in 1778 and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* in 1794. In 1796 *The Monk* was published and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in 1818 where the unloved monster finds a worn copy of *The Sorrows of Young Werther* and likens himself to the protagonist. *The Sorrows of Young Werther* was impactful in ushering in the romantic age of literature--though Goethe nearly killed it off before it began. The novel was the foundation on which the German Sturm und Drang (storm and urge) literary style was launched, sporting reckless characters tossed about the seas of love.

Comments

Poor, poor young Werther and his sorrows inflicted by a love interest who has a modicum of interest in him. Charlotte wants to be more friends than lovers. (Guys: Have you experienced that one before?) She is, after all, betrothed, and then married, to a plucky, self-absorbed man named Albert who can hardly be bothered with the young man named Werther who keeps hanging around the house.

In sharp contrast to his personality, Werther dresses like a bright canary (that alights on Charlotte's shoulder in the novel) in his blue suit jacket and yellow vest. He was Oscar Wilde a 100 years prior. His foppish outfit launched a fashion style during the late eighteenth century and the first rash of ancillary marketing ever experienced by a novel.

Think Eau de Werther cologne and China teapots on which portraits of the fictional Werther were hand painted as shown here, which the photo is copyright the Victoria and Albert Museum, and made in 1789. This is two years after the revised edition of *The Sorrows of Young Werther* was printed. The literary fever of the novel was still burning 15 years after its original publication. In Germany, where it was originally published, some 20 editions were already in print. Plays, operas, and satirical works soon followed. And copycat suicides that got the book banned in some German villages. The term "furor Wertherinus" was coined to reflect the suicidal passions of young men and woman scorned.

Parallels to Life

Most of the novel is written in epistolary form. Craftily, Goethe only lets the reader see the letters of Werther, not those of Wilhelm to whom he is writing. *The Sorrows of Young Werther* oozes in parallels to Goethe's own life. The novel is set in the fictional village of Walheim where "the reader need not take the trouble too look for the place...." But finding the real village was easy to do since, at the age of 19, Goethe met Charlotte Buff at a small dance in the German village of Whitsuntide in Wetzlar. (Stop it with the W names, Goethe!). He fell in love with her that evening but, just like in the novel, Charlotte was engaged to another.

The Forbidden Act

Two years prior to its publication, his friend Karl Wilhelm Jerusalem, committed suicide after falling in love with a married woman and "[in] that moment the plan of Werther was found...."

Consider this magazine excerpt from the early nineteenth century (Eight Historical Dissertations on Suicide,

pg 117, 1859):

Let us, by way of specifying only a very few well-authenticated prominent instances, think of Captain Arenswald who shot himself Sept. 19, 1781, and had been fond of reading this Novel during the latter part of his life; 1) of Miss von Lassberg, one of Goethe's friends at the court of Weimar, who was found Jan. 17, 1778 drowned in the lime, with a copy of Werther's *Leiden* in her pocket; 2) of Gunderode who stabbed herself at Winkel on the Rhine from an unhappy attachment to an already married Heidelberg Professor, the learned and amiable Creuzer, and who used to read Werther together with her friend, the well-known Bettina von Arnim, and speak much about suicide. 3) — Aye, Mme. de Stael was not far wrong, when she asserted that it had "caused more suicides than the most beautiful woman," 4) nor does Goethe himself (in his Autobiography) deny that this aesthetical masterpiece of his proved a daemonic charm which wrought deadly ruin unto many. Therefore, we cannot but pronounce it, in a moral point of view, a great error; for no book can be veritably of good which proves a sort of impulse and guide for the many unto self-destruction; — and what we may justly complain of is this: that Goethe, as far as we can learn, never regretted this its influence, never penned aught to counteract it, never, if I may here employ serious language, like a man and a christian repented of it!

III. Ugo Foscolo's *le ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis* (1802).

It was Goethe himself who stated: "Suicide is an event of human nature which, whatever may be said and done with respect to it, demands the sympathy of every man, and in every epoch must be discussed anew." *My Life: Poetry and Truth*

Rating & Recommendation

I recommend *The Sorrows of Young Werther* because of its high impact on literature. It was wholly cathartic for Goethe and left him feeling like he had made "a general confession, again happy and free and justified for a new life."

I end this review with sage words of advice for our poor foppish Werther. Man-up, young Werther! Man-up. If the woman fails to reciprocate your love, forget her and move on as quickly as possible and you are sure to find your true love at another time.

#ReviewSorrowsOfYoungWerther #WertherLiteraryImpact

Antigone says

When Goethe was a young man, he fell deeply in love with a woman named Charlotte Buff. Charlotte wound up marrying her fiancé, who was not Goethe, and abandoned our author to what David Foster Wallace once termed "a level of psychic pain wholly incompatible with human life as we know it." This is not synonymous with being broken-hearted. This is an existential crisis. And how do we know that? We know by the presence on our bookshelves of *The Sorrows of Young Werther*.

David Lynch once went to a psychiatrist. He asked the doctor whether the treatment process would damage his creativity. The doctor admitted it could. They shook hands and he left.

Artists are in a difficult position. The very region of the psyche that serves as a breeding ground for anxiety and depression is also the landscape the artist tills for truth in self-expression. Where most of the afflicted benefit from guidance toward emotional restriction, ruminative limitation, the realignment of patterns of thought, the artist does not. In fact, such tactics are frequently viewed as creatively threatening. So, apart

from popping a pill and back-burnering the entire existential conflict (Anathema! Anathema!), what's an artist to do? Some choose to write their way through.

Under such circumstances, it is not at all surprising to find young Werther insufficiently drawn. Compartmentalization is the point, after all. The crisis is to be shunted into a fictional construct, distant from reality, where it can be adequately expressed and explored. As Werther is only a part of the identity of Goethe, he cannot be inhabited in full. Yet it is imperative that the madness he suffers be completely relayed. And so we have these letters written to a friend about a woman, about a passion, about investment, immersion, imbalance, disassociation, disconnection, pleasure, rage, agony, delusion, suicide; loss without gain. Werther seems, to many who have read the story, to be a dilettante, an egoist, a shallow and callow youth. W.H. Auden, in his introduction, calls him a horrid little monster. Perhaps he is, yet I think it's only fair to point out that Werther was never intended to have more than half a soul to begin with. He's a portion of life; the portion in which we encounter our vulnerability to insanity.

Readers of this novel trailed Goethe for the rest of his years with questions about the outcome. He admitted to wishing he'd never written the thing. Yet he also allowed that, in terms of psychic consequence, it was either Werther or him. Through authoring *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, Goethe was able to re-establish a sense of internal security without sacrificing his artistic self. Would that *The Pale King* had done the same.

Chas says

It gets points for inspiring the later Romantic poets, but is narrated by one of the most irritating protagonists ever. Still, it's an ambiguous work, and uncomfortable, possibly because Werther's dilemma hits us, at times, so close to home.

Cynda says

I have had this book on my tbr list for 20 years. So I have read it. To not enjoy the story disappoints. I kept my emotions in check and read for quotes, for a study of literary elements of sturm and drang (storm and drive/urge) and Proto-Romanticism. I recorded some quotes. I saw the sturm and drang in the intense inappropriate love story. I saw the prot-Romanticism is some description of storm and an appreciation of near-pastoral scenes.

Emotionally reading this book could have been overwhelming. I chose to keep focused on literary aspects and to remember people this willful will do as they will. I watched willfulness play out. It is not attractive.

I am glad I read this novel as I felt as though I was missing out on something. Now I am done.