

Humanities 4

Lectures 11-12:

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

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



Deutsche Tracht der Biederzeit.



1800

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