Meister's Apprenticeship) (1795–1796). Goethe's subsequent visit to Italy, recorded in his *Italienische Reise* (*Italian Journey*) and published later (in 1817), gave him a pleasant escape from the restricted environment of Weimar. It also enhanced his exposure to the classical world, provided the setting for a series of opaquely recorded amorous affairs (some, probably, imaginary), inspired one of his best-known poems, and sparked new ideas that found their way into his masterpiece of *Faust Part I*, the *Römische Elegien* (*Roman Elegies*) (1795) and the *West-östlicher Divan* (1819).

All these works, including the second part of *Faust*, completed just before his death in 1831 (but published posthumously, at his request), reveal to us Goethe at his most philosophical and also at his most romantic. At the same time, they show his preoccupation with the reconciliation of Eastern and Western ideas and thoughts, as well as the need to discover new forms of stability in a changing world through the creation of what he called *Weltliteratur* – the world literature. His call for this was based on his deep conviction that writers and poets should exchange ideas with fellow writers from other countries. This deep belief led him to study very closely English, French, and Italian literature – he highly esteemed Molière, Béranger, and Manzoni and greatly admired the technical qualities of Carlyle's translation of his work. This last of his major preoccupations is fascinating, for it contains useful statements about the dangers of translations (which Goethe thinks can be over-stated), the growing importance of English literature and thinking as a model for Germans,[11] and, more generally, reconfirms the relevance of his ideas for our times.

A life rich in achievements

The life: a sketch

Goethe was born in Frankfurt at noon on the 28th of August 1749. Ever interested in astrology, he remarked to Johann Eckermann that the constellations were at their most favourable moment when he was born, indicating that his life would be one of achievement and glory. The reality, at the beginning at least, was very different. For the birth lasted three days, and when finally born, he was 'blue' as a result of serious asphyxiation. The midwife was apparently not experienced enough to take the steps needed. But the child survived to the ripe old age of eighty-two, so maybe the stars were right after all.

Goethe's mother was Katherina Elizabeth Textor, the daughter of the local mayor; and he seems to have been closer to her – at least in some respects – than to his father, Johann Caspar, with whom he later shared an interest in the language and culture of Italy. The Goethes originally came in part from Thuringia and in part from France,[12] forced to leave when King Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes and drove the Huguenots from that country. France was to pay dearly for the grandson's (Louis) reversal of his grandfather's (Henry IV) policy of religious toleration. The champion of the emancipation of the German language and culture from French tutelage had thus once been French himself and might have remained so but for the short-sightedness of the Sun-King.

Notwithstanding his literary tastes and views, Goethe remained a friend of the French, admired Napoleon – whom he regarded as the strong man who had put an end to the excesses[13] of the French Revolution (of which he did not approve) – and was even decorated by his idol with the insignia of the Chevalier de la *Légion d'honneur* when they met in 1808. For a man like Goethe, who was sensitive to honours, the receipt of this one in particular – from the hands of the Emperor himself – meant a great deal. Indeed, when many of his compatriots chastised him for not being critical enough of the French (after they had routed the German army at the battle of Jena in 1806), he replied that he could never condemn a nation from whose culture he had learnt so much.

Thus, his genes predisposed him to cosmopolitanism, and his birth in Frankfurt completed the process. For the city, though small by today's standards, was an Imperial Free City (*Reichsstadt*) within the German Reich[14] (and, later, the German Confederation). Frankfurt had always enjoyed the privilege of being the site for the formal elections of the German Emperors (who

were usually no more than figureheads),[15] and was also an important trading centre, attracting merchants of differing nationalities. Frankfurt, finally, had also had experienced yet another kind of exposure to the French; for she was occupied by the French during "The Seven Years' War" (1756–1763) which, on its European front, was essentially a continuation of "The War for the Austrian Succession" (1740–1748).[16] During this (second) war, which pitted France, Austria, and Russia against Prussia and Great Britain, a French officer – Count Thoranc – was even billeted in the Goethe house. Goethe's father (being pro-Prussian) resented this 'cohabitation', but Goethe and his mother made a special effort to learn French, a gesture much appreciated by the dignified French officer. Circumstances thus forced Goethe from a young age to develop an interest in languages, ending up with varying degrees of knowledge of English (which he learned as an autodidact), French, Italian, Latin, and even some Greek and Yiddish.

Goethe, like so many others described in this book, wished to study literature and poetry; but the father saw no financial future in those subjects. Much against the boy's wishes, his father dispatched him to study law in Leipsig, then a great centre of French culture known at the time as the 'small Paris'. Goethe lost such interest as he had in the subject after his second semester, so he spent his time reading the subjects that interested him most, learning better the languages that attracted him – mainly English – and perfecting the manners required by those wishing to inhabit the 'polite society' of his times. (These included, learning how to respond to invitations, dancing, and playing cards!) In his *Poetry and Truth* (written when his was in his sixties and thus clearly meant to shape the image by which he would be remembered), he describes how during these years, he developed an interest in what he called "the real and the natural". In particular, the stylized and rigid rules of French classicism began to annoy him more and more; and he even had the 'guts' to say this to Napoleon when they met in Erfurt in 1808.

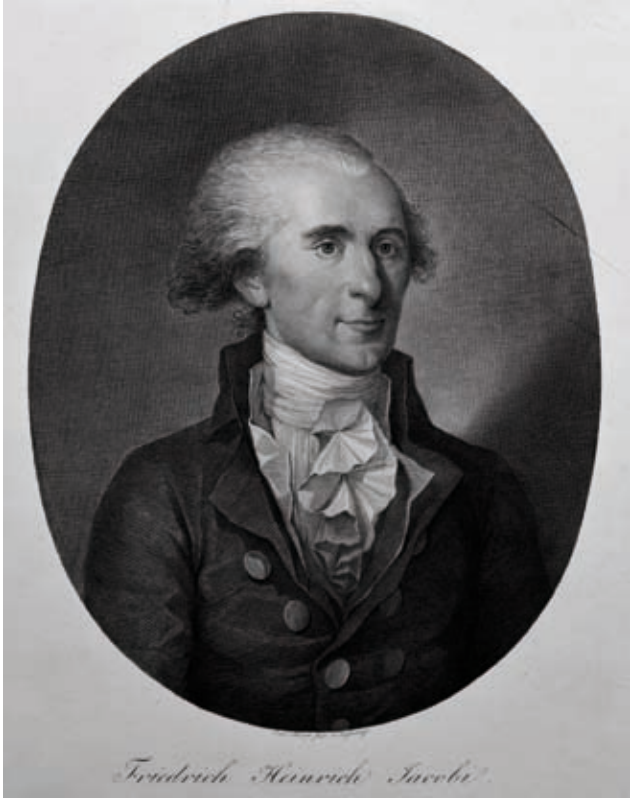
For this amazing encounter of two 'giants' of a different kind we have, if we may digress from our narrative for a moment, two accounts that probably supplement rather than contradict each other. The first comes from the pen of Talleyrand,[17] who was present for part of the meeting with the Emperor and describes a somewhat tense meeting in which the Emperor tried to boast about the merits of French theatre and derided Schiller's *The Thirty Years War* and claimed 'hardly to have heard of Lessing and Wieland'. With admirable self-restraint, Goethe stood his ground, defended German literature, and even scored over the Emperor in an admirable repartee in which he claimed he never dedicated his works to anyone "in order that he should not later repent it." The second account came sixteen years later from Goethe himself; and it looks as if it continued from the point where Talleyrand ceased recording the discussion. The tone here is calmer, perhaps, because by now the two men had got the measure of each other, and shows a Goethe highly flattered by Napoleon's interest in *Werther,* notwithstanding some criticisms expressed about the novel.[18] The enduring admiration for Napoleon is particularly obvious in his discussions with Eckermann.

Returning to Goethe's earlier life, we note that in 1768 he was afflicted by a serious (but never clarified[19]) illness, which forced him to return home. The move was necessary, but the consequences not pleasant; cohabitation with the father proved tense and difficult. For though Johann Caspar provided his gifted son with precisely the kind of book environment which Johann Wolfgang would take advantage of to better his mind, as a man and as a father he was authoritarian, obsessed with details, and something of a pedant. One can thus find some parallels with Leopold Mozart, at any rate in the educational role he tried to play in the upbringing of his son. Like Leopold, he was thus to prove one reason for his son's seeking refuge in other cities; though at this stage of Wolfgang's life, the son had no means of escape.

Luckily, help came from an unexpected quarter. For Wolfgang's acquaintance with Catharina von Klettenberg, a pietist mystic, helped his convalescence and marked the second of numerous relationships with women to whom he felt, at the

55 Goethe in the Roman Campagna. *Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Tischbein*

56 Friedrich Schiller. *L. Simanowitz*



57 Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi. *Ernst Thelott*

58 Anna Elisabeth Türckheim. Profil and bust with.
Elise (Lili) von Türckheim (née Schönemann)

59 Charlotte Ernestine Albertine Freifrau von Stein.
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

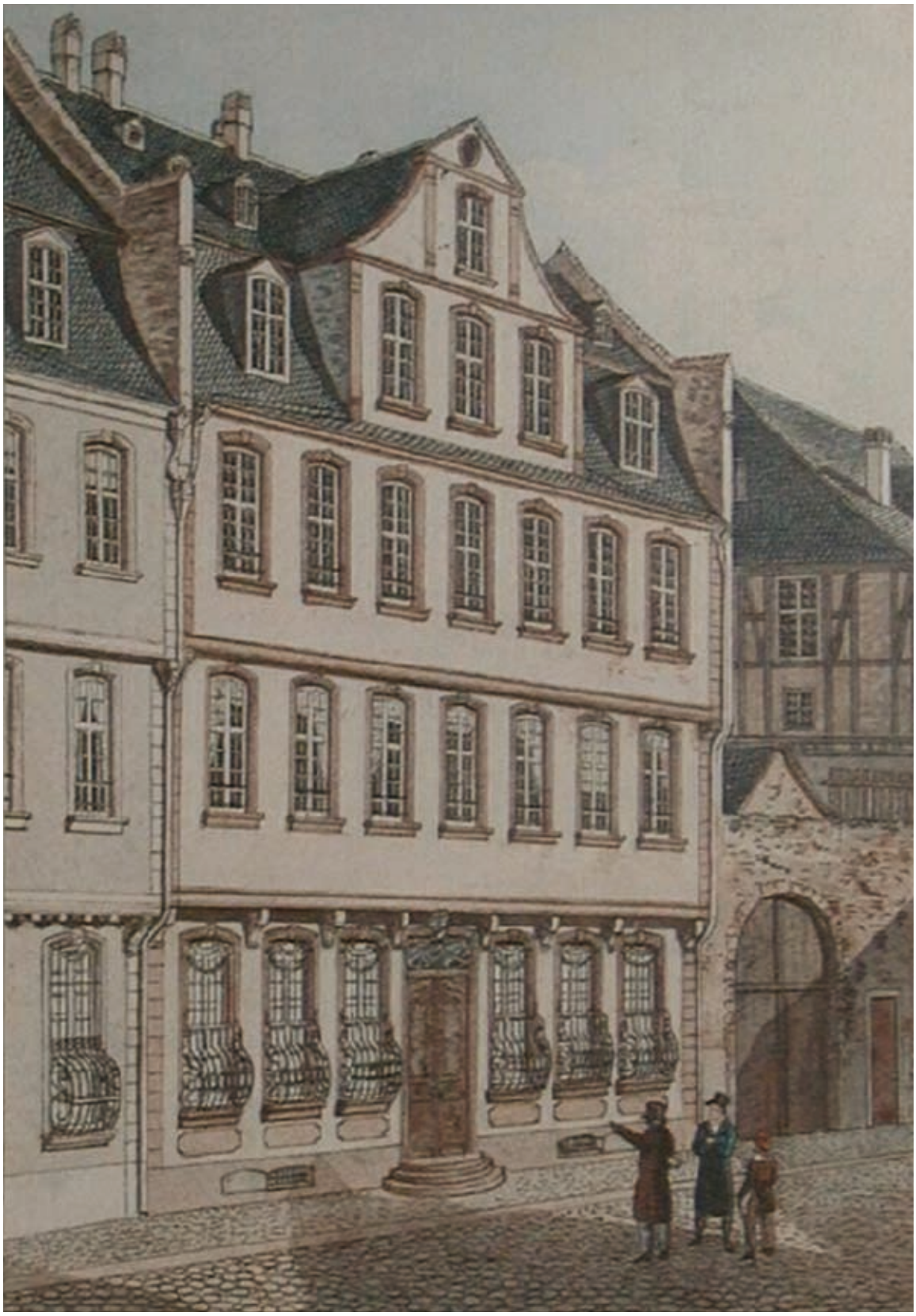
60 Goethe's wife Christiane Vulpius (1765–1816).
Friedrich Bury

61 Goethe, leaning out of the window of his house on the Corso in Rome.
Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Tischbein

62 Italian landscape in the full moon. *Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*

63 Castel Wörlitz. *Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*

64 Goethe at the Coliseum. Rome



65 Goethe's birth house in Frankfurt. *Ludwig Schütze*

time, closely attached. Later, in *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, he was to use her as a model for a character, who dominates the sixth book of that work, known as the 'beautiful soul' (*schöne Seele*). The platonic relationship, however, lasted only until March 1770 when Goethe was sent to Strasbourg (then a city more German in character than French) to complete his legal studies. What it did, however, was to give him the chance to indulge in alchemy and the study of Neo-Platonic writings, both of which were popular at the time among the pietist circles.

The stay in Strasbourg may have helped complete the studies in law but did nothing to rekindle his interest in the subject, which he regarded as too formalistic and even pedantic.[20] But Strasbourg put him in touch with Johann Gottfried Herder, who infected him with his new German thinking and whom Goethe was later able to recall to serve with him in Weimar. As a result of this contact, Goethe was introduced to the works of English poets and the history of German poetry. This new interest found its expression in the composition of a set of poems, such as his *Mailied (May Song)* and *Willkommen und Abschied (Welcome and Farewell),* which are full of grace and power and were written for his new sweetheart, Frederike Brion. True to form, however, the idyll of the Strasbourg phase was short-lived. From September 1771 to the end of 1774, we find him back again in Frankfurt, practicing law both in that city and in Wetzlar (which was the seat of the Imperial Court, established back in 1496). His heart was never in law but always in search of new young ladies. Charlotte Buff (known as Lotte) was destined to be the next one who charmed him, but she was already engaged to Johann Georg Christian Kestner. In the beginning, at least, Goethe did not know this; later, the platonic coexistence of the three continued for a while.

Apart from the fact the Goethe was beginning to acquire a taste for engaged or married women and thus show a tendency to try and enter into doomed relationships, the acquaintance was to inspire his aforementioned *Sorrows of Young Werther*. Over one hundred years later, the great German writer (and subsequent Nobel prize winner) Thomas Mann wrote an imaginary reunion of the two 'unfulfilled' lovers – containing wonderful sketches of Goethe's character – under the title *Lotte in Weimar.*

By 1774, a new love had taken Lotte's place in Goethe's heart. She was Maximilaine Euphrosene von La Roche Brentano, future mother of the well-known romantic poet Clemens Brentano. This platonic affair soon gave way to an even greater infatuation with the beautiful Anna Elisabeth (Lilli) Schönemann, to whom he even became engaged. Some believe that this engagement was facilitated by the activities of a certain Mademoiselle Delf of Heidelberg, an intermeddling businesswoman who totally misjudged Goethe's willingness (ability?) to enter into a stable relationship with any woman. For various reasons (many of which may strike us as trivial), Goethe thus hesitated to tie the knot.

His ambivalence is even reflected in many of his contemporary (and later) poems but cannot really be explained unless we adopt the theory given below that his 'concurrent affair' with Fritz Jacobi was pulling him in different directions. In any event, the concurrent relationships with Lilli and Fritz followed the earlier pattern of 'psychological ambivalence and confusion', which he had experienced while in Leipzig when corresponding (and flirting) with his sister Cornelia, his then-sweetheart Käthchen Schönkopf, and his (male) friend Ernst Wolfgang Behrisch – who, at the time, was his mentor and for whom he progressively harboured homosexual desires. Goethe's ability to become involved in triangular and bisexual relationships was thus almost becoming a 'specialty' of his; the habit, however, proved time and again emotionally draining.

The engagement with Lilli was thus doomed and broken off, confirming Goethe's pattern of successive infatuations that almost certainly remained platonic. Lilli, however, seemed to have occupied a very special place in his heart – in his discussions with Eckermann at the end of his life, he maintained that she was the one woman he had loved most. The most passionate of Goethe's affairs thus came to grief.

Various minor works were written during this period, but the next turning point (which coincided perfectly with his break-up with Lilli) was

his meeting with Karl August. August was the young ruler of the tiny dukedom of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach (barely 750 square miles large and with a population of approximately 100,000 mainly poor inhabitants), who persuaded him to join his court as an adviser and personal friend. Goethe accepted and, a year later, was granted citizenship. From then onwards (apart from his sudden two-year escape to Italy and a few more trips to Switzerland and France during the Napoleonic wars), he spent the rest of his life in the pretty but tiny town of Weimar. He was increasingly involved with its administration and artistic life, composing beautiful poems such as the *König in Thule* (King of Thule, subsequently incorporated into *Faust Part I*), and, eventually, completing all his major works.

In Weimar, his acquaintance with the older, married, not particularly attractive, but highly intelligent Charlotte von Stein (whose husband and father were both local courtiers) gave him his new female muse, friend, teacher, and mentor. For nearly ten years, they were literally inseparable. The relationship was intense and, arguably, the most influential relationship with any woman he met in his life. Yet the reader will have noticed that 'love' is missing from the above list of words, even though in Goethe's correspondence with her – all but one of her letters to him were destroyed – allusions to love and romantic attachments exist aplenty. Though these mentions of love could be interpreted differently, they seem on balance to form part of his usual poetic exuberance. In the end, as Nicholas Boyle puts it so well, "she mattered to him only as the sine qua non of his own identity."[21] Charlotte von Stein was thus 'useful' – in more ways than one – to Goethe but, ultimately, only in the context of his lifelong ambition to take himself to the top. Goethe's Faustian thirst for new experiences, coupled with her self-restraint, may explain why the reality of their relations was not what the letters and poems of the period could be taken to suggest. His own tormented sexual ambiguity must have also played a part in this unfulfilled relationship, as we shall suggest below.

Goethe's sudden escape to Italy on the morning of September 3rd, 1786, took Frau von Stein totally by surprise, as it did most of Goethe's Weimarian friends, including his employer. Some have argued this was in part prompted by his desire to escape her 'intellectual clutches'; others have seen it as fulfilling the dream his father instilled in him to visit Italy and be exposed to its beauty and culture. Either way, Goethe's subsequent (sexual) infidelities in Italy, of which Frau von Stein became aware, must have provided further cause for estrangement. Indeed, from then onwards, their paths remained (essentially) separate, even after his return to Weimar. This separation may help explain her growing critical (but very perceptive) comments about his (flawed) personality and character.

Yet in purely selfish terms, the move was more than a good one; it was essential. For in Italy, Goethe recharged his batteries and was deeply inspired by the scenery – which later led to some of the most evocative poems of his life (such as the famous *Kennst du das Land, wo die Zitronen blühn*) and his most beautiful collection of poems, published under the title of *Römische Elegien* when he returned to Germany in 1795. Much later (in 1814), he would begin writing a modified version of a diary,[22] describing the various Italian cities he visited; Naples and Rome seem to have left a very deep impression.

The escape to Italy was also an eye-opening experience, for it finally gave him the chance to lose his virginity at the ripe old age of thirty-seven or thirty-eight.[23] As we shall note below, however, Goethe is characteristically opaque as to with whom this happened. Indeed, it is probable that his erotic affairs in Italy – apart from giving him the occasion to express in his numerous letters to his friends back home his paranoic fear of contracting the "French disease" (syphilis) – were almost certainly bisexual in nature. Whatever actually happened to Goethe while in Italy, he saw it as a journey of self-discovery and rebirth; on his return to Germany, he completed and published works such as *Egmont* (1787), *Iphigenie auf Tauris* (also in 1787), and the most important collection of erotic poetry of those times, his *Roman Elegies* (1795).

These years also mark the beginning of one of the most important literary friendships of all

times, that between Goethe and Friedrich Schiller. In their joint attempt to establish a classical German literature that they both felt was comparable to that of classical antiquity, they published jointly edited journals, first *Die Horen* and later *Die Propylaen*. Goethe also published scientific works of various kinds at the time, and, after repeated rewrites, his classic work *Faust Part I* appeared in 1808. This will be looked at in a separate subheading below but here, briefly because of lack of space, we shall say a few words about his two historical plays – *Egmont* and *Iphigenia* – and discuss briefly his *Roman Elegies* under the subheading dealing with his poetry.

Before we do, however, we should note for the benefit of the non-specialist reader that this explosive literary productivity continued throughout the 1800s, with his *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* (1809), the *Zur Farbenlehre* (*Theory of Colours*) (1810), the aforementioned autobiographical work *Poetry and Truth* (appearing in three volumes between 1811 and 1813), his *West-östlicher Diva*n in 1819, *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* (1829), *Faust Part II* (1831), and his *Conversations with Eckermann* (dictated from 1822 onwards but appearing posthumously). This account does not include his many scientific works (particularly controversial in so far as they challenged Newtonian physics), his numerous poems – to which, arguably, he owes his real position in German literature – and his endless and fascinating letters with German and foreign literati, including such luminaries as Lord Byron, Thomas Carlyle, and Alessandro Manzoni in Italy.

During these later years, he also legalized his long (sexual) relationship with Christiana Vulpius, who was charming and loyal but socially inferior to him. He probably married her out of a sense of gratitude for saving his life against marauding French soldiers who entered his house in Weimar in 1806.

Two historical plays

Lamoral, Count of Egmont and Prince of Gavre, was a real Flemish soldier and politician who was born in Hainaut in 1522. He served in the army of the German Emperor Charles V and was rewarded for his bravery during the campaign of Algiers with the Order of the Golden Fleece, the highest Order of Chivalry of the Hapsburgs. In 1554, he came to England as the Emperor's Ambassador to arrange the marriage of Charles' son Philip II of Spain and Mary Tudor. Subsequent military successes on the battlefield led to his appointment as *stadholder* of Flanders and Artois. As the move to rid the Low Countries of Spanish rule gained momentum, Egmont vacillated. When civil disorder broke out and the representative of the Spanish King, Margaret of Parma, proved unable to suppress it, the tough Duke of Alba was sent by the Spanish King to do the job. The scene is set for the drama by the way Egmont and Alba are conceived as polar opposites. The first is a man of the people; the second is a man of the king; the former is self-confident; the latter is tough on the outside but weak and uncertain under the surface.

Most Dutch nobles chose to leave the country temporarily rather than risk defeat at the hands of superior forces, planning later to open the dikes and drown the Spanish soldiers. Egmont stayed, possibly because he thought that the Spanish King would not risk bloodshed and would be amenable to compromise. Arguably, he was also anxious about what would happen to his family and countrymen if he joined the armed resistance. The first is a political explanation, the second stems from personal family concerns. When he tried to reason with the Spaniards, Alba imprisoned him in Ghent. Later, in 1568, he was executed in Brussels. His trust in people proved his undoing.

Those are the historical facts in bare outline. Goethe as a playwright (and later Beethoven as a composer) chose to give the story a different slant. Beethoven made much of Egmont's heroic stance; Goethe chose, instead, to make the play turn on exploring Egmont's character. To do so, he makes him twenty years younger than he was in actual fact and a bachelor without a family. His character is presented to us in a series of loosely connected scenes. First, he is described as the hero history attests he was. A scene with his secretary tries to demonstrate Egmont's love

for tolerance. Other scenes follow where Egmont disagrees with William of Orange, who wishes to engage the enemy; and various love plots are thrown in, totally unsupported by historical evidence. The structural quality of the play corresponds to the episodic nature of Egmont's whole philosophy. As Professor Gray remarks,[24] "Egmont ... takes each moment as it comes." He thus declares:

"Do I live only in order to think about living? Am I not to enjoy the present moment, that I may be sure of the next? ... Does the sun shine on me today in order that I may reflect on yesterday, and guess at connections where there is nothing to be guessed at, no connection to be made, namely the destiny of the day that is to come?"

In contrast to *Faust* – a more mature play or a play where the protagonist is fashioned closer to his creator's temperament? – Egmont is only interested in the fleeting moment; he is, unlike Faust, determined to enjoy it to the full. Egmont may wish to talk with Alba because he genuinely believes that the 'tyrant' will accept compromise. His choice not to act against him may be a form of pacifism, helped by his belief in living for the moment. When his calculations are proven wrong and we see him asleep in his prison cell, he has a dream in which an allegorical figure tells him that his death will procure for the provinces their liberty. Neither history nor the play makes this plausible; and Schiller, a friend of Goethe's, expressed serious misgivings about the play and its structure. Thus, at the very end, Egmont is made aware that his policies have not worked and have not avoided the bloodbath that haunted him into inaction. He is thus made to say:

"Stride on, brave people! The goddess of Victory leads you forward! And as the sea breaks through your dykes, break down and smash the walls of tyranny and hurl them from the ground they dare enclose."

Herein lies the drama of the play: the person who lives just for the present moment is damned. Goethe must have believed it, for he makes this a main reason for Faust's salvation in his later eponymous drama. Then comes Goethe's preoccupation with the opposites, what we shall later call his doctrine of polarity. He thus may not be trying to tell us when Egmont is right: when he is a pacifist or, at the end, when he has finally come around to the need to fight. Perhaps it is in the synthesis that one will find the answer.

Egmont shows Goethe's vacillation in another sense as well. This is not a *Sturm und Drang* play, but one marking the return to classicism. This happened to Herder (in later life) as well as Goethe; and it is shown more clearly in his play *Iphigenie auf Tauris*. There, the theme is taken from ancient Greece; and the structure of the play preserves French classical drama's sacred command of unity of action, time, and place. Is Goethe being contradictory? One can never be sure. Yet, it is more likely that he is pursuing here (more successfully than in *Egmont*) one of his own themes, which he introduces by altering the facts of the original plot of Euripides' similarly named play. The themes are humanity and how human belief can determine 'action' – a favourite Goethian theme – and through it, reach the desired results. Goethe thus forges a link between virtue and action.

In Euripides' version, Iphigenia is saved from being sacrificed by her father Agamemnon thanks to the intervention of the Goddess Artemis (Diana). Later, however, Iphigenia is a priestess at this goddess' temple in the kingdom of the (barbarian) King Thoas, where she ended up after she was 'snatched from the jaws of death' in Aulis. In both Euripides' and Goethe's versions of the play, she is asked to perform a sacrifice only to discover that the proposed victim is none other than her brother Orestes (who has, by now, killed his mother Clytemnestra because she killed Agamemnon on his return from Troy).

The similarities between the two plays, however, cease at this point. In Euripides' version, to avoid fratricide, Iphigenia persuades the gullible king that the statue of the goddess is polluted by the presence of Orestes and has to be cleansed at sea. When it is taken there, she and her brother escape in the waiting boat and would have succeeded but for divine intervention, which makes the journey back to Greece hazardous. Euripides was not a particularly devout author (except in his last play, the *Bacchae*, which was written

when he was well in his eighties and might have thus shown signs of 'respect for the Gods' because he was so near to his own death and might have wished to appease them!). So whether this divine intervention is meant to remind us how mischievous the Greek gods were or whether, by contrast, it is meant to suggest that human endeavour cannot succeed on its own without divine assistance remains to be clarified.

In the Goethe version, Iphigenia is straighter, more ethical, and unable to deceive her aging host who is in love with her (though she is not in love with him). Like Ilia in Mozart's *Idomeneo*, she chooses to offer her life in exchange for her brother's and tells Thoas so. Again like Ilia, she in effect challenges the gods to prove their virtue by following hers. And (as in Mozart's opera, where Poseidon relents) Thoas, in the end, shows himself to be magnanimous and lets the brother and sister go. Unlike Alba, who in *Egmont* kills his prisoner, the captor here is thus shown to be as human as Iphigenia. Humanity, so valued at the time these plays (and operas) were being written, prevails. Goethe's theory is that if one member of the family can achieve pure humanity, all will be redeemed. Iphigenia's purity redeems the family curse. Thus Professor Gray reminds us that Goethe put this idea in verse many years later when he observed:[25]

"Alle menschlichen Gebrechen
Sühnet reine Menschlichkeit"
which in English reads,
"All infirmities are atoned for by pure
humanity".

Yet Goethe proves more; for he shows that "Barbarians [Thoas] too deserve ethical treatment, just as they too can be expected to hear the voice of truth and humanity."[26] In this pursuit of 'universal humanity', which he intensified in his later works, he is nonetheless again following the ancient Greeks. For it is Pausanias who, after the victory of Plataea, intervened to spare the lives of captured Persians who were about to be put to the sword, uttering the truly grand phrase – which contrasts him and his culture so much with our contemporary barbarity – "Barbarians they may be, but they are also human." Greek humanism was thus still alive and appreciated.

Polarity

In a life as long as Goethe's and a work as varied as his, it almost appears a vain task to seek a common theme. Yet both the life and the work that reflects it constantly turn on the idea of duality, which I have chosen to make the central theme of this book. More importantly, Goethe acknowledges it himself at every turn of his life and work; he summarizes the theme most beautifully in the "Zwei Seelen" speech of Faust's when he says:[27]

"Two souls there dwell, alas, within my breast, and one would cut itself away from the other; one of them clutches with lustful senses at the world it loves, the other rises powerfully from the dust to reach the fields of lofty ancestors."

It is, in fact, more than duality; it is constant tension produced by contradictory forces that he calls polarity, taking the idea from the twin poles of a magnet. His life – and of all the geniuses we have examined in this work, the link between it and his work is most clearly established – centres on the notions of attractiveness and repellence, creation and destruction, pulsating expansion and constriction, assertion and counter-assertion. As Professor Gray puts it,[28] "The idea of polarity always contains potentially the idea that evil as well as good is part of a divinely ordained or fatal order of things, and therefore in some sense to be accepted and possibly even practiced."

Further, in the Goethian world, the clashes and tensions are not resolved through inactivity, patience, and good fortune, but through action. This captivating belief in activity is beautifully expressed in the lines of *Faust* where the learned Doctor is attempting a new translation of the Gospels and disagrees with the opening lines of the Gospel according to Saint John: no, in the beginning was not the word but the act! Action thus makes matters move forward, even if it comes at a price. Though it is difficult for a non-specialist to characterize in psychiatric terms Goethe's vacillation from euphoria to utter misery, his letters provide us with abundant evidence that he lapsed from the one to the other quite easily but, ultimately, found salvation in action.

These contrasting and conflicting emotions are also reflected in his poems, which, at the end of the day, could lay a good claim to being the most beautiful (if not the most important) product of his creative powers. In these we thus find the creative genius lapsing from the sentimentally moving ("The King of Thule"), to the scenically evocative ("The land where the lemon trees blossom"), to the atmospheric and dark ("Erlkönig"), to the provocatively erotic ("The Roman Elegies"). He can treat all these emotions successfully because he can identify with them all. He is, as Professor Gray puts it, "a chameleon, adapting himself to every outward circumstance."[29] However, he is also conscious of their differences and strives for their reconciliation; a reconciliation he seeks between art and science, East and West, Nordic and Southern, Christianity and Islam, classical and romantic.

The reconciliation in Goethe and his work never comes easily. Egmont ends his life as the hero he was at the beginning but also realizes that he was wrong in the middle. Goetz and Werther, so very different as characters, find in death the freedom they seek. Faust, the intellectual, unsatisfied in the beginning despite his constant search for knowledge, ends his life almost as a high-powered social worker doing good for humanity. The opposites strike one here, as much as the process of going from point A to B of the compass and making the journey look worthwhile. Personally, I find considerable similarities in these underlying ideas found in Goethe's profound thinking and the apparently simpler ideas that lie just under the surface of Mozart's greatest operas. The fact that they overlapped and were subject to some of the same intellectual trends I alluded to at the beginning of this essay may account for this similarity, which has never, in my view, been adequately explored by writers.

The same tension and contradictions existed in Goethe's sexuality, which must have caused him as much pain and loneliness as the other conflicts explored in his works. What is thus amazing is the point made by Professor Simon Richter[30] that,

"Against their better knowledge, scholars of German culture have for the last 200 years regularly falsified literary history by assuming, consciously or not, that the complex period known as the Age of Goethe was fundamentally structured along heterosexual lines. Such an assumption, though understandable on the face of it, is fraught with difficulties and contradictions. For one thing, it is every bit as anachronistic to assume eighteenth-century heterosexuality as it is to speak of eighteenth-century homosexuality. After all both terms were first coined in the late nineteenth century. More egregious, however, is the patent bad faith of the main traditions of scholarship. Scholars of German literature – up until recently a group consisting primarily of classical educated men – knew better, for they were, like all who have been educated, privy to an overarching knowledge that concerned the cultural centrality of male-male friendship and male homosocial culture."

One may disagree with a few words here and there in the above quotation, which may take the antithesis advanced in the book of which it is part as far as the thesis it is meant to refute. Yet the sense of surprise it expresses for the general neglect of the homosexuality theme is understandable; Goethe's opponents, mainly during the 19th century, were quick to hurl at him serious abuse: heathenism, lack of patriotism, authoritarianism, immorality, and even writing ... bad poetry. This self-imposed blindness towards one particular aspect of his character fits in beautifully with the theme I explore in the Epilogue of this book, namely why do some 'flaws', 'shady' aspects or, to use less morally loaded terms, individual features of a great man end up being concealed, especially if they can be substantiated? Since the appearance of Dr. Karl Hugo Pruys' wonderfully understated but well-documented monograph *The Tiger's Tender Touch. The Erotic Life of Goethe*,[31] this thesis is bound to attract even more attention; we should deal with it briefly in a separate subsection, even though it is still an illustration of the tensions and contradictions that rocked Goethe's life. As always, however our brief comments must be seen not as criticisms, but as attempts at enhanced understanding.