

GOETHE FAUST PART I (Faust) *striving*

Overview Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) was a German poet, playwright, philosopher, man of state, and scientist, whose achievements in all these domains made him perhaps the most nearly 'universal man' in German culture, the richest exemplar of German classicism in the second half of the 19th century, and an inspiration to such German Humanists as Thomas Mann, in the 20th century. Goethe's *Faust* is his greatest achievement, a vast two part epic verse drama, the first Part of which was initially completed in 1806, although work on the total text—both Parts—continued until 1831.

Character The principal character is a scholar—mediaeval in general conception—who becomes the gambling chip between God and the devil, Mephistopheles. The devil bets that he can win Faust over to evil—the Doctor is already tired of secular scholarly pursuits, and is turning toward magic and the sensational—but Faust enters the bargain, and plunges into a new life of rediscovering the secular world. Among the daunting experiences that confront his experiment is the seduction, and eventual destruction, of a beautiful young girl, Margaret. The death of innocence is a blow to Faust's project!

Parallels The figure of the indomitable striver/quester for knowledge / self-transcender is widespread in western literary tradition. Prometheus (Aeschylus' *Prometheus Unbound*, 430 B.C.) is a classic example, with his insistence on bringing fire and culture to humanity. In him the element of defiance, and fidelity to mankind against the gods, prevails. (Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, 1820, follows the Humanistic path of Aeschylus.) Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, 1604, in the play of the same name, strives for demonic power, while Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus* provides a modern example of the Faust character who transcends reason and comfort to reach for a supreme grasp of power, art (especially music), and control. We might say that the Odysseus of Nikos Kazantzakis, in his *Odyssey* (1938), picks up the Faustian theme where it intersects with that of the hero of Homer's *Odyssey*, whom no obstacle will stop, and who expends himself totally in the recovery of his goals, home and family.

Illustrative moments

1 Meditative/self-reflective/astonished Faust first appears to us at night, in his study. His initial self-evaluation is bleak. He has studied philosophy, jurisprudence, medicine and theology, and here 'poor fool, I stand once more, no wiser than I was before.' Faust's dilemma is there, in the failure of his studies to give him wisdom. He has fooled his students into thinking he knows something, but in fact he is nothing but a failure, who does not even know how to acquire earthly riches. As he meditates he scrutinizes various magical signs, then to his amazement he 'pronounces the sign of the Spirit; a reddish flame flashes, and in the flame appears the Spirit.'

2 Drawn to the Earth-Spirit/mystified Faust defies the Spirit, declaring himself its equal, yet is transported by the grandeur of this Force, which has entered his study and which seems determined to open his world to him. The Spirit: 'thus at time's scurrying loom I weave and warp, and broider at the Godhead's living garb.' Into this endless to and fro of world construction, Faust is invited by the mysterious Spirit, and feels its presence, just as the Spirit intervenes to tell him that what he feels close to is the wraith behind the Spirit, not the spirit itself. Faust is mystified by this absence in presence of the Spirit, and is relieved to hear his man-servant, Wagner, knocking at the door.

3. Restless/confined/spiritually attentive Faust reacts to the earth-spirit with a powerful desire to escape from the dusty, antique atmosphere of mediaeval science. He speaks of 'his cell which stifles,' and of the 'universe of moths where I am pent into a dustbin with a thousand trifles.' Then, from within the crammed in objects in his study, Faust observes a vial 'which now with veneration I fetch down,' and which gradually morphs into a version of the chalice used in the Catholic mass; it is indeed Easter, and with his new awareness he looks up to hear a Chorus of Angels.

4 Loving spring/human Appropriate to the advent of the Spring, and of Easter, Faust and his man-servant, Wagner, stroll outside the city gates, to feel the fresh air. 'Freed are the brooks and rivers, by spring's enchanting, enlivening gaze...' Faust delights in the streaming crowds of townspeople, who are released into nature once again, and he reflects gloomily on the little he has been able to accomplish as a

doctor—a medical doctor—to help others. Not only is he ready for the fresh air of new experience, but he is ready to join the tumult of the human experience.

5 Drawn to the deed/ ready for new world view Returned to his study, Faust finds all has been renewed. He opens a random volume, and begins to speculate off of it. 'In the beginning was the Word'—thus runs the text. Who helps me on? Already I'm perplexed!' Faust is dissatisfied with this priority for the word. He tries 'in the beginning was the sense.' He finally arrives at the formulation that fits with the suddenly new way he is viewing the world: 'The spirit speaks! And lo, the way is freed, I calmly write: "In the beginning was the deed." This is exactly the right expression for the fresh new way Faust is discovering, to view his world.

6 Bet-ready/risking As the devil intrudes in Faust's study, Faust and Mephistopheles come to a subtle agreement, on the terms under which the Devil can fetter the shackles to Faust's feet, and put an end to the vitality that defines him. 'When first by flattery you lull me into a smug complacency, when with indulgence you can gull me, let that day be the last for me.' The devil's challenge will be to bring Faust to a standstill, while Faust will give up his bet on the day he stops immersing himself in the fervor of the earth-spirit. The ultimate challenge to Faust, a beautiful and innocent young girl, is just about to present herself, and to raise the stakes at once!

7 Lustful/charmed/plotting Faust is ripe for Margarete, whom he sees passing in the street. 'My fair young lady, may I make free to offer you my arm and company?' To which she replies: 'I'm neither fair nor lady, pray, can unescorted find my way.' Faust demands that Mephistopheles set something up between himself and Margarete, but Mephistopheles tells him to cool it. Faust then demands something intimate and personal of Margarete's with which he can lure her, and give proof of his intimacy with her. Mephisto promises to reconnoiter, and does what is best of all, introduces Faust into Margarete's modest house and bedroom.

8 Imagining/longing/touching Mephistopheles listens cynically, while Faust replays in his mind the scenes of innocent bliss that must have transpired in these rooms as Margarete grew up in them. Then Mephisto presents to Faust the box of random and simple trinkets which he has collected for Faust, and which Faust embraces as a way to enchant Margarete. After a certain comedy of errors, Faust asserts his ownership of the newly gifted jewels, and he and Margarete find themselves, quite entranced, in the garden of the house of Martha, Margarete's older and savvier friend.

9 Impregner/striver/destined to tragedy The inevitably rocky, and unrequitable nature of Faust's love for Margarete leads to her pregnancy. Upon the discovery of that condition, Margarete's brother, Valentin, challenges Faust to a duel—and is killed. Faust is far from free, for Margarete goes on to murder her infant, and to be taken off to prison—to the infinite despair of Faust. Faust, with the help of Mephisto, tries to help Margarete flee from prison, but she refuses, whereupon Faust and Mephisto flee, having brought to a head the inevitable bad consequences of Faust's effort to discover a new life for himself.

Character interactions

10 Negative and positive forces/ inherent tragedy Faust is the driver of the drama, Mephistopheles is simply his implicit negative. Whatever Faust strives for Mephistopheles negates its possibility or desirability. In a sense, then, these two figures are interchangeable aspects of one another. The earth-spirit, to which Faust allies himself early on, uses Faust himself to rediscover the tumult inside him. Mephisto does not plot against Faust, in fact complies with his compact with Faust. That compact however is a call for negation, and nothing Faust can propose to his 'ally' can modify that provision.

GOETHE IPHIGENIE IN TAURIS (Iphigenie) *trusting*

Overview Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) was a German poet, playwright, philosopher, man of state, and scientist, whose achievements in all these domains made him perhaps the most nearly 'universal man' in German culture, the richest exemplar of German classicism in the second half of the 19th century, and an inspiration to such German Humanists as Thomas Mann, in the 20th century. Many

of Goethe's finest plays, like the *Iphigenie in Tauris* (1779), were direct reinterpretation of ancient Greek plays; in this case, of a superb play of the same name, by Euripides.

Character Goethe's *Iphigenie in Tauris* (1779) highlights a tense and tragic moment in the long drama of the House of Agamemnon. Iphigenie herself, reputedly sacrificed by Agamemnon in his effort to secure favoring winds for the Greek fleet, at the start of the Trojan War, was in fact long ago spared, and has remained in the land of the Taurians as the high priestess of Artemis. There she finds herself when her brother Orestes, and his friend Pylades, come to rescue her and take her back to Athens. Her dignity and patience are highlighted by the courage with which she respects her ardent suitor, Thoas, the barbarian (but noble) king of the Taurians, whose prisoner she is.

Parallels Iphigenia, the victim of her father Agamemnon's sacrifice, and thus the actual launch pad for the Trojan War, is important to the arguments of both Homer (in the *Iliad*) and Aeschylus (in the *Oresteia*, 458 B.C.), especially as they explain the later wrath of Clytemnestra. (The Biblical story of Abraham and Isaac, of another parent tested by the challenge of sacrificing a child, indicates the common Near Eastern origin of the legends of both Iphigenia and Abraham.) Iphigenia is mentioned by many other Greek authors, like Hesiod and Euripides, who devotes *Iphigenia in Aulis*, 408 B.C., to the place of the young girl in the quarrel between Agammemnon and Achilles.

Illustrative moments

Character

1 Ignorant/dealing with the situation Iphigenie knows nothing about the outcome of the Trojan War, nor about the fate of her siblings in the wreckage of the house of Agamemnon, which followed on the murder of her father by her mother, and the descent of the Furies onto the head of Orestes. Yet she must give some account to Thoas, king of the Taurians, in whose land she has ended up as priestess of Artemis. And Thoas, whose prisoner she is, wants her to accept him as a bride, a situation the arrival of her brother and his friend is about to make exceptionally unlikely.

2 Precarious position/isolated/proud Compelled to level with Thoas, Iphigenie recounts to him the story of how she was slated for death, as a sacrifice to provide momentum for the Greek forces heading to Troy. '...inside this temple I first regained my senses out of death.' Having confided in her captor, Iphigenie can claim as protective privilege only the sacred role she plays, in Taurus, as priestess of the Temple of Artemis. She is buffaloes by Thoas' dignified refusal to abandon his suit, and to leave her in peace. Iphigenie must maintain a careful balancing act. She doesn't tell him, for she doesn't know her own identity.

3 Near breaking point/conflicted/dignified Iphigenie nears the breaking point of her patience—the intervention of Orestes is still ahead, with its solving potential—and considers her role, between Thoas and her priestess position—slavery: 'Life is not merely freedom to draw breath.' Her own life, as she sees it, is just a monotonous preparation for the mournful next world. She has to wonder whether yet worse is in store for her, from the direction of the still benign and noble King Thoas? 'Does he intend to drag me from the altar to his bed by force?' She fends off his inquiries, into just who she is, by warning him against knowing her too well.

4 Astonished/enlightened/self-aware Iphigenie is astounded to encounter Pylades, the best friend of her brother Orestes, at the precinct of the temple. From him she beseeches a brief history of the Trojan War itself, and of the fate of her own lineage—the tale of the *Oresteia*—which to her has been a closed book. (So, therefore, has her own destiny, of which she knew nothing except that she had been snatched away from sacrifice, and whisked to the remote sacred spot in Tauris, where she presently finds herself.) In the end she talks him into telling her how the slaying of her father Agamemnon went down. She sees the light!

5 Self-aware/self-confident/perceptive As Iphigenie grows aware of her precarious position—caught between the advances of the King and her own desire to flee, especially after the arrival of

Orestes—she is eager to justify the place of woman. ‘Do not find fault, O King, with our poor sex. Not glorious like yours, but still not wholly ignoble are the weapons of a woman.’ She continues, claiming that she can see further into Thoas’ happiness than he can. ‘You, unfamiliar with yourself or me, think closer ties will bring us happiness.’ She begins to see that she is the only actor who holds all the pieces of the puzzle together.

6 Confrontation/ careful/shock Finally Iphigeneia confronts Orestes head on, in front of the temple where she worships. He is a suppliant, as they both know, and is not immune to sacrifice at the hands of Thoas and his men. Yet, as Iphigeneia knows from talking with Pylades, Orestes is a suppliant fraught with unique importance for her. She moves carefully in filling out their relationship, and is long reluctant to declare her own identity. ‘Your inmost being tells you who I am. Orestes, it is !! Iphigeneia! I am alive!’ She is shocked at Orestes’ response of shame, for the sacrilege he has committed toward their parents!

7 Sensitive/in the middle In talking with Orestes, about how to extricate themselves from their bondage to the Taurian cult, and to Thoas himself, Iphigeneia finds herself conflicted. For her two kinsmen, Thoas can be only an objectionable impediment, standing in the way of what could be a quick and efficient escape—down to the boats, and away! The two guys can have no sense of the sensitivity with which Thoas has encountered and treated Iphigeneia, whom he wants to marry but whom he is handling with extraordinary respect. Only Iphigeneia is conscious of the crossroads of moral conflicts with which she is confronted.

8 Honest/true to self Finally, and as she becomes aware of the full situation, Iphigeneia feels obliged to tell Thoas everything. She identifies Orestes and Pylades through their mutual bonds, assures him that these two Greeks intend to steal the statue of Artemis, and to flee Taurus en route to their home in Greece, where finally Orestes can be fully purged. It is intolerable for her to deceive her captor: he asks her why she has confidence that this ‘rude barbarian,’ himself, will ‘hear the voice of human decency that Atreus the Greek would not hear?’

9 Suppliant/honorable At this point, Iphigeneia simply begs the king for mercy; ‘you swore to let me go.’ ‘A king will not, like vulgar men, consent out of embarrassment just to be rid one moment of the suppliant...he feels his worth only when he can gladden those who wait in hope.’ The king remains more than suspicious of a plot, but in the end yields, sends his beloved Iphigeneia back to Greece, frees the two young men, and gives his blessing to the woman he loves, so that she can return to her own salvation with a good conscience.

10 Honorable/faithful When finally convinced that Thoas will release her and the young men, Iphigeneia is grateful but not satisfied. She needs more than the blunt permission to leave. ‘Not thus, my king! Without your blessing, with your ill-will, I shall not part from you.’ In other words she requires the seal of ‘farewell’ which she gets from Thoas in the last line of the play. Iphigeneia promises her undying respect and affection to Thoas, and leaves him in a mode of high reconciliation, at the end of a play in which, it would seem, there is no character whose intentions are not ultimately good.

GOETHE FAUST PART I (Mephistopheles) *diabolical*

Overview Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) was a German poet, playwright, philosopher, man of state, and scientist, whose achievements in all these domains made him perhaps the most nearly ‘universal man’ in German culture, the richest exemplar of German classicism in the second half of the 19th century, and an inspiration to such German Humanists as Thomas Mann, in the 20th century. Goethe’s *Faust* is his greatest achievement, a vast two part epic verse drama, the first Part of which was initially completed in 1806, although work on the total text—both Parts—continued until 1831.

Character Mephistopheles is a demon in Germanic folklore, and appears associated with the figure of Dr. Faustus in the 16th century Faust chapbook. This demon typically serves as a vehicle for bad actors who have already in some sense ‘lost their souls,’ and it is in that sense that Goethe converts

Mephistopheles, the supreme negative force, into a 'literary character' in *Faust*. From his first appearance as a sassy poodle, to his wild witchrides through the Harz mountains, to his gleeful destruction of Margarete, Mephistopheles introduces Faust to a wide range of unpredictable and harmful actions.

Parallels Mephistopheles springs from mediaeval German demonology, and is widely known in the Renaissance for his diabolic magic; as such he wreaks havoc in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* (1616). Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1676) gives classic expression to the principle of evil in his Satan/Lucifer, the angel rebelling against God; a concentrated form of evil targeted in Saint John's *Book of Revelation* (last third of first century A.D.) Klaus Mann, son of Thomas Mann, took up the Mephisto theme in the novel of that name (1956), in which an ambitious citizen of Nazi Germany sells his soul for political favors.

Illustrative moments

Character

1 Negative/destructive/subversive Mephistopheles, who for some time has been appearing to Faust in the form of a poodle, suddenly outs himself from behind the pot-bellied stove in Faust's study. He appears 'clothed like a mediaeval traveling student, steps forth from behind the stove as the vapor clears.' Questioned on his identity, Mephistopheles will only say—as Milton essentially said in *Paradise Lost*—that 'I am part of that force which would do ever evil, and does ever good.' He clarifies this: 'I am the spirit which eternally denies,' for all that has been created deserves to be uncreated.

2 Ready to bargain/offering new sense-life Trapped in Faust's study, by the presence of a pentagram or hex sign, Mephistopheles finds himself at the other end of a proposition. Faust is interested in a bargain, to savor the world to the full, to break from his study, and Mephistopheles to taking Faust's soul in return for providing such a rejuvenation of the restless scholar. Mephistopheles accepts the bargain—it is his business to do so—and promises in return a renewal of life for Faust. 'Smell will be set to rapt enjoyment, the palate to superb employment, your touch not least be set aflame...'

3 Mocks pedantry/soars to adventure To show Faust how vain traditional academic learning is, thus to mock Faust's own life way, Mephistopheles dons Faust's academic garb, and pretends to interview incoming students in Faust's University. After mocking the studies of logic and metaphysics—central topics of mediaeval education—Mephistopheles turns to the young candidate with a disturbing summary of higher education: 'gray, dear young fellow, is all theorizing, and green, life's golden tree.' At that point Faust enters, and Mephistopheles spreads his mantle for a magic ride, on which Faust will soar into heady new air, his new life.

4 Practical/anti-metaphysical, keeps it real Metaphysics, a staple of mediaeval training, comes in for a particular drubbing from Mephistopheles. He lards with deep irony his advice to the student of metaphysics: 'there make your deepest insight strain, for things out of scale with the human brain, for whatever fits into it and doesn't, some wondrous word is always present.' For Faust's benefit, Mephistopheles exposes the fakery of the teacher, who without knowing anything insists that all be copied down from him, as though 'the Holy Ghost were writing it.' The real knowledge, of the senses and practical intellect, are what Mephistopheles has to offer.

5 Prankster/sinister/showman Mephistopheles invites Faust along, to visit a drinking hall, so he can see how merrily true ordinary 'jolly fellows' behave. The master trick of the occasion is this: that Mephistopheles, a living parody of Christ at the wedding in Cana, offers to sate the students' palates with fine wines. How he does it? He orders a drill, from the back room of the bar, and opens spigots in the sides of the drinking tables; from those drill holes spring the finest of wines; but not a minute later Mephistopheles calls on fire to emerge from the table holes, then attaches each merry young fellow to the nose of his buddy!

6 Compliant/cynical Mephistopheles caters to Faust's growing sexual desire, and prepares him a potion. He adds, in an aside to the audience: 'No fear—with this behind your shirt you'll see Helen of Troy in every skirt.' Whereupon Faust looks up and sees the charming face of Margarete pass in the street.

Faust asks Mephistopheles to get him that wench, to which the demon replies that he has no hold over her. And why not? Mephistopheles has just been eavesdropping at Margarete's confessional, and can confirm she has practically no sin to confess! He has no control over her. But Faust is delighted, and prevails over the demon!

7 Cynical/persistent At Faust's demand, Mephistopheles assembles some jewelry and trinkets, with which Faust can lure the maiden to him. Unfortunately, however, the young girl's priest gets a whiff of this bonanza, which has been left in Margarete's room. He lifts the jewels, duping the girl's mother, and opening to Mephistopheles a valued chance to whip the Catholic Church: 'the Church has a superb digestion, has swallowed whole countries without question, and never suffered from stomach pains.' Mephistopheles carries on with Faust's plan, arranges a rendez-vous at a neighbor's house, and keeps his bargain with Faust.

8 Merciless/remorseless As Faust and Margarete grow in love for one another—she a naïve, he old enough to know better—Mephistopheles delights in ridiculing their passion. 'Just as a freshet floods its banks when swelled by thaw, you poured into her heart the raging current, and now your brook is shallow as before.' The devil has no mercy on those who make a pact with him and then complain at the consequences. He recalls that those who fall for his traps, and indeed are already fallen, and have only borrowed him to provide mobility and function to their desires.

9 Spoiler/without compassion Mephistopheles is well placed to enjoy the fatal breakdown of Faust's desires. He delights in knowing that no lasting happiness could accrue to Faust and Gretchen as lovers, and in fact that his most ambitious spoiler schemes will bear fruit. Gretchen will poison her mother and get pregnant; Gretchen's brother will defend her honor but be killed by Faust and Mephistopheles; Gretchen will kill her illegitimate child. Faust tries rescuing her from prison, and the whole compact-drama goes up in tragedy! Mephistopheles merrily flees the wreckage of his compact with Faust, nothing to apologize for.

Character interactions

10 Character or spirit? Is Mephistopheles a 'character' or a 'spirit'? He is in a sense the downdrag in all human enterprise, and as such he functions in Goethe's play. He is the negative of all that is plan and desire, he is cynical about human institutions and desires, and is in fact a kind of pop-up—as in the way he appears first as a poodle, then as a mediaeval student growing out of the vapor behind Faust's stove. Mephistopheles is without origin or progeny, but he is effectual if giving the downer spin to whatever surges in human projects. None of the other 'characters' would be what they are without the current of Mephistopheles flowing through them.

GOETHE THE SORROWS OF YOUNG WERTHER (*Werther*) *suicidal*

Overview Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) was a German poet, playwright, philosopher, man of state, and scientist, whose achievements in all these domains made him perhaps the most nearly 'universal man' in German culture, the richest exemplar of German classicism in the second half of the 18th century, and an inspiration to such German Humanists as Thomas Mann, in the 20th century. Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, published in 1774, was written when he was 24 years old, and became an overnight success, remaining to this day the best known of Goethe's works.

Character *The Sorrows of Young Werther* was composed in 1774—during six weeks of intensive writing—and represents a collection of letters written by a passionate young man to his friend Wilhelm. In these letters, Werther describes his enchantment with a certain removed mountain village, then with a young woman, of great dignity, whom he meets there. Their growing love affair is blocked by the decision of Charlotte (the woman) and Albert (the fiancé) to marry, despite the continuing love of Charlotte and Werther for one another. A dreadful impasse is created, by this love triangle, and from it Werther emerges the ultimate victim, removing himself from the equation by a gunshot.

Parallels Werther, the type of the romantic but hypersensitive, and potentially suicidal young man, brings to mind any number of figures from nineteenth century culture—Edward (in Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, 1811), Dominique (In Fromentin's novel of that name, 1862), Reinhart (in Theodor Storm's *Immensee*, 1849.) More widely, the figure of the ingénu or young star-crossed lover, like Werther, shows up everywhere: from Telemachus in the *Odyssey*, through Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, to J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* (1951).

Illustrative moments

Character

1 Peaceful/ecstatic Werther writes to Wilhelm, upon arrival at the mountain village to which he has gone on vacation. 'A wonderful serenity has taken possession of my entire soul, like these sweet spring moments which I enjoy with all my heart. I am alone and feel the joy of life in this spot...' He goes on to explain the closeness to God, which he feels as he stretches out in the grasses of a mountain meadow. All the tensions of bourgeois life, which he is in flight from, drain from him. 'I shall perish under the splendor of these visions.'

2 Innocent/open A couple of days later, as Werther begins to know his setting better, he expatiates on the archaic patriarchal feelings, of life in the mountain village. 'I see them, our old ancestors, forming their friendships and doing their courting at the well, and I feel how fountains and streams were guarded by kindly spirits.' Werther's romantic soul is filled with the imagination of a simpler and more faithful age. He is ripe for inter personal discovery, yet so innocent and naïve that one has to feel worried about his ability to adjust to this fresh world.

3 Susceptible/in love/vulnerable The guiding inspiration for Werther, as he starts belonging to the mountain village where he is discovering himself, is the presence of a young woman named Charlotte, whose mother has died, and who is selflessly, and cheerfully, taking care of her orphaned siblings. To Wilhelm he writes: 'to tell you in orderly fashion how I met this most enchanting of creatures will be a difficult task: I'm happy, ecstatic, and therefore not a very reliable reporter.' The ball which follows this tender meeting, however, fills Werther's ears with the name 'Albert,' for he is just learning that Charlotte is engaged to be married.

4 Love-overwhelmed/ passionate Even as he becomes keenly aware of the Albert factor, and of his own growing jealousy, Werther starts to fall hopelessly in love with Charlotte. Upon returning from the ball, Werther asks Charlotte if he can visit her later that very day, to which she agrees, plunging him yet more deeply into the depths of passion. 'Since that time,' he writes to Wilhelm, 'sun, moon, and stars may pursue their course; I know not whether it is day or night; the whole world about me has ceased to be.' To which he adds: 'little did I imagine, when I selected Wahlheim as the goal of my walks, that all Heaven lay so near it.'

5 Passionate/conflict-aware In the midst of his infatuation Werther is called away to service with his Ambassador, a work-role he has no desire for—though his mother longs for him to be employed. 'Am I not sufficiently employed,' he asks, 'and in the end isn't it the same whether I count peas or lentils?' He reflects, under the powerful light of his love for Charlotte, that any man who works without 'passion or inner compulsion' is a fool. Much as he dislikes the formalities of the work-life, however, his situational awareness at this point includes the knowledge that Albert, Charlotte's fiancée, has just moved permanently to stay in their town.

6 Darkly fated/trapped After a talk with Albert about guns, and suicide, Werther develops his thoughts about the nature of the universe and his role in it. 'The most innocent walk costs thousands of poor insects their lives; one step destroys the delicate structures of the ant and turns a little world into chaos.' 'Nature has formed nothing that does not destroy itself, and everything near it.' His own dark fate preoccupies him, as part of nature: 'I weep over my dark future.' It becomes clear to Werther that his passion is leading him down a dark corridor with no clear exit. He writes to Wilhelm that plans must be made for him to get away.

7 Deteriorating/losing control/feeling guilty Werther increasingly loses the power to control himself inside the hotbox of his small mountain village. As the situation degenerates, Werther ceases to keep up his flow of letters to Wilhelm, and we are left for coverage with a few final letters, and an editorial by the collector of Werther's letters: 'His mind became completely deranged; perpetual excitement and mental irritation, which weakened his natural powers, produced the saddest effects upon him....' His love for Charlotte grew, while his distaste for Albert also grew; in addition he struggled with the bad conscience, that he was tearing his friends' marriage apart.

8 Furious passion/yielding/defeated The editor describes the final meeting between Charlotte and Werther. It follows upon a reading, together, of the romantic poems of Ossian, a reading in which the two lovers sensed the essence of their longing for one another. 'He clasped her in his arms tightly, and covered her trembling, stammering lips with furious kisses.' With a feeble effort she pushed him away, as they struggled to regain composure. Then Charlotte strikes the body blow that had to follow: 'This is the last time, Werther! You shall never see me again!' Werther knocks on her door, later, but getting no response gives up.

9 Suicide/freedom The night of Werther's final departure from Charlotte is the last night of his life, for he will commit suicide that night. He had been discussing the topic with Albert, while also asking Albert to supply him with a couple of pistols, for an upcoming hunting trip. During the evening the pistols are delivered to Werther, and serve their purpose by freeing in him a knot of conflicting passions and guilt. Werther's suicide reached deeply into the world of his time, triggering suicides throughout Europe, and establishing an awareness of the power of Romantic love, that would open arts and lives in the last decades of the century.

10 Character interactions

The epistolary novel harnesses energy and intensity, and Goethe writes as though he were at no remove from Werther himself. Charlotte and Albert, not to mention Wilhelm the recipient of the letters, derive their energy from Werther's needs and drives. It is, however, this very monomaniacal Werther energy that finally makes him unable to compromise—to leave Charlotte, to accept his ambassadorial assignment—or break free from the intensity that first drove him out into the mountains. The famous love triangle, the stuff of literature and the arts, finally consumes Werther, who is unable to take any stance apart from himself, and to review his situation 'objectively.'