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I, Alexandra E. Parks , hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Germanic Languages & Literature.

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Werther vs. Werther: from print to the operatic stage

Student's name: **Alexandra E. Parks**

This work and its defense approved by:

Committee chair: Katharina Gerstenberger, PhD

Committee member: Jeongwon Joe, PhD

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Werther vs. Werther: from print to the operatic stage

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by

Alexandra E. Parks

B.A. University of Cincinnati

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Committee Chair: Katharina Gerstenberger, Ph.D.

Abstract

Jules Massenet re-imagined Goethe's novella *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* as an opera. The audience gains great psychological intimacy with Goethe's Werther because of the Briefroman format, while the audience of Massenet's work is forced into the third person. This results in a fundamental change in how the audience relates to the two Werthers. This project strives to understand th relationship between the two works, and to demonstrate how both the media shift and the different movements affect the narrative.

Acknowledgments

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Reinterpretation of art is nothing new. People have always found inspiration in other people's work, and as they use that input to inform their own art, they combine their unique perspective with some elements of the original to create something that is not totally new, but not a carbon copy. The group of reinterpretations most people are likely to be familiar with is books being turned into movies. Many favorite books have been reinterpreted on the screen, often to the great disappointment of devoted fans. There is also a great tradition of turning poems into songs, which are generally met with more approval. Recently there have been a handful of books converted to broadway musicals, all of which have been extremely popular. These reinterpretations are often judged by the public based on how precisely they reflect the piece the audience is already familiar with.

On the other hand, there is also a great tradition of literature being reinterpreted into new literature, and it is more immune to these kinds of expectations. One good example in German literature is the Faust myth. From the early modern chapbook to Christopher Marlowe's play to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's two part masterpiece, each version has its own take on the classic narrative. Although Alfred Richards says that "[i]t has been very truly said that there is not, in the history of modern comparative literature, a figure so well known as that of Faust" (39), a search for comparisons of various versions of Faust yields practically nothing. Arnd Bohm advocates for a greater examination of the intertextuality of Goethe's Faust (79), yet then only makes a brief mention of the origin of the narrative, devoting the rest of his paper to discussions of the relationship to Greek mythology. When converting from text to text, it seems that there

is no expectation that the author will not make changes. Indeed, it is necessary, or there would be no need for a reinterpretation.

While public approval and reception do not determine a piece's scholarly worth, they do determine its popularity and reach. If one is working under the assumption that the purpose of creating art is to transmit a message to other people, then it stands to reason that the mark of a successful piece of work is one that people seek out and interact with.

Reinterpretations are useful both from an artistic and a more practical standpoint. By examining a reinterpretation of a piece of art, one is afforded the opportunity to see it with a new perspective. It becomes much clearer what is essential to the piece and what is not, because that which is essential is most likely to overlap between interpretations. Transferring a work into a medium different from the original[1] allows the artist to leverage the particular strengths of that medium. A book for example, will almost always have more detail than a film. Songs and music can evoke stronger emotion because of the sound than simple words on a page. Another advantage to examining reinterpretations is that a new medium usually means a new audience. For example, many people sat through the nine to ten hours of Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* films who had never read the books. Now those people have had a chance to interact with that narrative. Even people who had read the books found interest in examining some of the changes that were made and positing probable reasons why. A

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[1] Linda Hutcheon warns against using the word "original" when comparing adaptations in her book *A Theory of Adaptation* for several reasons. The first is that it makes the subsequent works seem inferior to the one labelled "original"; the second is that people often perceive whichever interpretation they encounter first as the original regardless of actual chronology. Here the word "original" will only be used to denote that Goethe's piece predates Massenet's by a century.

reinterpretation often sparks renewed interest in all versions of the work, and therefore leads to more detailed interaction with the narrative.

It is also important to look at which narratives have been reinterpreted multiple times and why. It stands to reason that only narratives that resonate strongly with audiences would be reinterpreted. By examining what is at the core of those narratives, one can begin to learn what themes humans find compelling regardless of situation. Clearly there will always be pieces created addressing issues pertinent to the current time, class, or nation, but when there is evidence of a narrative that transcends those issues, then there must be something appealing at its core. Understanding and identifying this core provides the opportunity to notice and discuss possible intercultural parallels, since there is something there that resonates over multiple cultures and times.

Goethe's 1774 novella, *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* has been reinterpreted and readdressed time and time again. Countless illustrations were made to accompany different versions of the book, some depicting scenes that do not exist. There have been at least fourteen different film interpretations, including one Swedish meta-version about a crazy director trying to make a Werther film (*Werther*, Alexandersson). The release dates range from 1910 to 2010, including several made-for-TV movies and multiple countries and languages. William Makepeace Thackeray wrote a satirical poem in response to the novella, ridiculing how silly the plot is when recounted without emotion. *Letters of Charlotte* was an anonymous, English-language response to the perceived moral destruction being wrecked by the popularity of Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*. In this work, Lotte writes to one of her friends about her friendship with Werther, and she explains how much she admires his intellect, but is not interested

in him beyond that and therefore tries to set him up with a friend of hers (Withington). Thomas Mann wrote *Lotte in Weimar* (1939) in which the real Lotte returns to confront Goethe about publishing their affair as *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*. A short discussion of the text by Gustav Mueller reveals that *Lotte in Weimar* contains many of Mann's traditional issues. He examines the changes in social organization, similar to *Buddenbrooks* (Mueller 232). He examines the differences between "artistic and practical values of life" as is discussed in *Death in Venice* (Mueller 234). In the GDR Ulrich Plenzdorf wrote the novel and play version of his interpretation of the Werther narrative, *Die neue Leiden des jungen W.* In this text the main character, Edgar, realizes while reading Goethe's novella that his life is oddly paralleling the events in the book. It has been hailed as "authentically present[ing] the thoughts, the feelings of GDR working-class youth" (Blomster 567). This pieces demonstrates, perhaps better than some of the others, that the issues, and not just the narrative, of *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* are of enduring interest and applicability. Neither this list nor the one of operas that follows is exhaustive; they are here merely to provide some sense of context for the project. These numerous versions prove that this narrative is still very much alive, and has been reinterpreted often enough to prove its status as transcendent of its initial time and place. What is fascinating is that, while the narrative is transcendent, each reinterpretation adds components that make the piece relevant to and reflective of its time and place. These can give insight into the philosophies of different movements and societies. The interpretation that will be discussed at length in this paper is Jules Massenet's opera in four acts, *Werther*. *Werther* is of particular interest because, while its plot is almost identical to that of the novella, it has a

completely different effect. It is often ignored by scholars of literature because it is not very well-known, and on the surface it seems to have added nothing new. It is, however, a unique and worthwhile piece of art, which can be leveraged both to help understand the culture and movement that it came out of, and to better understand Goethe's original.

Basing an opera off a piece of German literature is nothing new. Richard Wagner based many of his works on German literature, mythology, or history. Charles Gounod did a version of *Faust* (1859) so different from Goethe's that it is often billed as "Margareta" in Germany to avoid confusion. Alban Berg did operatic versions of both Georg Buchner's *Woyzeck* (*Wozzeck* 1925) and Frank Wedekind's Lulu plays (*Lulu* 1937). Benjamin Britten's reinterpretation of Thoman Mann's *Tod in Venedig* (*Death in Venice* 1973) is truly beautiful and thought provoking. With such a large pool, one would think that comparisons between the operas might be helpful, and while that may be the case, there are many problems that preclude that method. Each opera is created in a different set of circumstances, so the problems of reinterpretation are wildly different. An opera based on a play will probably have fewer fundamental changes than an opera based on a book simply by virtue of the media. Additionally, each piece of literature is from a different time and place, and each opera is from a different time and place. While there may be certain traits to be expected from a romantic piece being reinterpreted in the post-modern for example, such parallels cannot be drawn because no two reinterpretations have the same conditions like that. Linda Hutcheon has spearheaded three special editions of the *University of Toronto Quarterly* which deal exclusively with operatic adaptations, and yet none of the articles included comparisons

between opera/literature pairs. Therefore, Massenet's *Werther* will be considered totally independently of other operas based on German literature for the purposes of this paper.

This project will strive to demonstrate that Massenet's *Werther* is a legitimate and interesting reinterpretation of Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*. Differences between the pieces will be considered, as well as strengths of the respective media. Most importantly, however, the opera will be judged based on its achievement of its own goals; it will not be judged based upon how well it communicates precisely what Goethe did in the original.

When comparing two works, one of the most important things to do is to resist the urge to label one of them as getting it "wrong". Starting off with the mentality that a reinterpretation is only successful if everything that made the original a success is also present in the new version is limiting and unhelpful. Fidelity criticism (criticism which bases itself around how "accurate" the adaptation is) has a long history, but Linda Hutcheon rejects this approach saying that "[a]daptation is repetition, but repetition without replication" (7)[2]. Plot points that may seem major can be changed without changing the core of the narrative, although that does not stop them from being potentially irritating or confusing to people familiar with multiple versions of the same work. It is more helpful to notice the differences and then try to figure out why those changes were made. When one understands the reasons for the changes, perhaps a limitation of the medium, perhaps to further the goals of a different movement, the inner workings of the piece become more clear, and a deeper understanding is gained. For

[2] The pagination used for Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* is from the eBook edition from the publisher, read online through Google Books.

example, in *West Side Story* (1957), which is inarguably a reinterpretation of *Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare), Maria, the Juliet character, does not commit suicide at the end[3]. While on the surface this may seem like a massive plot change, it affords the opportunity to demonstrate the new relationship between the gangs with Jets comforting Maria and Sharks helping to carry Tony's body. This demonstrates the message of tolerance and reconciliation just as well if not better than Friar Lawrence's speech to the fathers in the catacomb, and therefore this plot change does not undermine the legitimacy of the musical as a Romeo and Juliet narrative. It is precisely this principle that allows minor characters, other young people going to the ball, to utter "Klopstock" instead of Lotte without detriment to the narrative as a whole.

Linda Hutcheon defines an adaptation as a work that recognizably draws from another, recreating and reinterpreting at will, becoming "second without being secondary" (9) While there are some theories that talk about conveying the same "spirit" as the older piece, most comparisons use a common storyline as the framework from which to begin (Hutcheon 6). This alone does not establish legitimacy or value in a work, but merely functions as tool to determine whether a direct comparison would be valid. When boiling a story down to its essential plot points, it is important to be as vague as possible without losing all sense of the original. For example, what gender characters are is not usually so integral to the narrative that there is no flexibility,

[3] Bernstein's 1957 musical was then turned into the 1961 film, which is practically an identical representation save for a few rearrangements of minor plot points. The story focuses on gangs on the west side of New York City, the Jets, a group of Americans who are used to running the neighborhood, and the Sharks, a group of Puerto Rican immigrants. Tony, the best friend of Riff, the leader of the Jets, falls in love with Maria, the sister of Bernardo, the leader of the Sharks. Tony tries to prevent a battle between the gangs but when Bernardo kills Riff, Tony kills Bernardo. Maria forgives him and they agree to run away together, but through a series of miscommunications as they are making their preparations, Tony believes Maria to have been killed. Tony goes into the streets, distraught, where he is killed by one of the Sharks. Maria does not kill herself, and seeing her pain is what brings the two gangs together.

although that would certainly be a glaring difference in a reinterpretation[4]. The time and place is also extremely flexible, as evidenced in all of the "modern retellings" of various fairy tales or Shakespeare plays. While these things can be difficult to ignore, it really is important to deal with the narratives first on the most basic of levels and then get into specifics. Establishing the key narrative elements allows for the examination of how the same things can be arranged to communicate two different things. It is also helpful to consider how some of the same themes and ideas can be expressed using very different media and methods.

Another important consideration when comparing two works are the goals of the works and the movements they come out of. Each movement has its own trademarks and issues, and asking whether a neo-classical drama achieves the goals of a naturalist novella is virtually worthless. Rather, one should try to understand what each piece as an individual is trying to achieve and why, and then proceed with determining whether it achieves those goals or not. For example, Pablo Picasso's reinterpretations of Diego Velázquez's *Las Meninas*[5] cannot and should not be judged by the same standards. A cubist work like Picasso's could not have existed and would not have been accepted in Velázquez's time (*Las Meninas* is from 1656). Similarly, the original does not represent the same level of experimentation and exploration of form as cubism does. To call either a failure for not achieving the goals of the other is to do both a disservice.

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[4] Cincinnati Shakespeare Festival staged a successful production of *Troilus and Cressida* in 2004 in which Pandarus was played by a woman. Sharon Draper wrote a YA novel in 2001 entitled *Romiette and Julio* in which the typical gender roles are reversed.

[5] *Las Meninas* depicts the Infanta Margarita and other members of the Spanish court in a highly realistic style typical of the era. Picasso did 58 versions, all done in his distinctive, cubist style, and all immediately recognizable as "quoting" Velázquez.

If a retelling of a narrative has all the key elements and it achieves its own goals, then it is legitimate. This legitimacy is totally independent of the original. While the reinterpretation surely could not have come into existence without the original, its ability to communicate its own message makes it a unique entity to be judged for its own strengths and weaknesses. It is a piece of art that is consumable without prior knowledge of the original or other interpretations; it deserves to be judged without qualifications. Reinterpretation is just that, reinterpretation. If nothing deviating from the original is acceptable, then a reinterpretation will never be good enough, and there are too many wonderful reinterpretations to believe that.

Having determined what the basis for a good comparison is, it is time to determine the key elements of the Werther narrative. It seems that in order to have a narrative comparable to *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*, one needs a main character, a love interest, and a relationship. The main character should have psychological issues, probably depression and severe loneliness. The main character is a poor communicator but can be very poetic. Because letters are so key to the novella, the presence of letter-writing is not uncommon in reinterpretations, but it is not essential to the narrative. The main character must be driven to suicide by extreme emotions by the end of the piece. The love interest should be the idealized obsession of the main character. The love interest should be mostly oblivious to the main character's feelings due to poor communication. The love interest must reject the main character's advances at the critical moment, and it is essential that the love interest know about the suicide. The relationship should be kept a secret for the majority of the time, and when it is finally expressed, the love interest must deny the main character. While these may

seem fairly specific for a list of elements that should be kept as vague as possible, note that there is a lot of room for interpretation in character motivation, feelings, and circumstances. Both versions discussed in this paper contain all of these key elements.

Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* was published in 1774. From the beginning, Werther is extremely emotional about everything from his surroundings to the people he meets. He has instant reactions to situations resulting in a passionate response, positive or negative. This very quickly establishes his depression, particularly about his particular situation, and highlights his extreme perception of things. Werther very quickly proves himself to be self-indulgent, especially when it comes to giving importance to his emotions over all else. He speaks of poor Leonore who it seems was enamored of him, but he did not return the affection for selfish reasons. He paints and dallies with the children in the field instead of pursuing gainful employment or association with other people of his social status. He even says that he "halte[t]...[sein] Herzchen wie ein krankes Kind" (Goethe, "Die Leiden" 10). These indulgences lead to him existing in a sort of fantasy world parallel to the real one where everything is hyper-symbolic and evocative. Some people have interpreted this as a symbol of a sympathetic soul whose primary strength is in understanding people and situations. Thus his non-conformity is not a mark of a lazy or petulant personality, but rather indicates his frustration with the strictness of society (Pustejovsky 146). While it goes without saying that Werther is well-liked by all those around him, and he is undoubtedly frustrated, it seems more plausible that he is simply engaged in the emotional world rather than making some sort of grand statement about the current social order. Werther solidifies his relationship to his emotions when he refuses to have his books

sent to him. The rejection of conventional knowledge and reason demonstrates that he is extremely willful and mistrusting of any outside input.

Very early in the text, Werther recounts meeting a servant who was miserable because he loved his mistress, but society would not permit a relationship between them. He feels a great sympathy for this man, and it is perhaps the poetic tragedy of the unattainable love story that leads Werther to seek out such an experience for himself. Indeed, it is interesting that the reader feels so much sympathy for Werther in his doomed affair with Lotte since he was particularly warned not to fall in love with her. He willfully indulges his emotions and ignores that warning, thus setting himself up for failure. Perhaps this is less about him being so in love with Lotte and more about him wanting something "legitimate" to be miserable about, since Werther repeatedly blames others for his failures (Pustejovsky 147). This view is also supported by Ignace Feuerlicht, whose article on the motivations for Werther's suicide is cited in almost all following research. He posits that Werther has an unusually strong death instinct and therefore seeks out rationalizations for his suicidal drive (479-480).

Throughout, Werther sees more and more "evidence" that Lotte feels similarly for him. The first and most famous such moment is when he first takes her out to the ball and she sighs "Klopstock". He fancies that that confirms her feeling for him symbolically and that they are soul mates. As Werther imagines the relationship deepening, he continues to interpret Lotte's "symbols".

When his relationship with Lotte becomes too torturous, Werther takes a job with an ambassador at Wilhelm's suggestion. This foray back into reality is brief and intolerable for Werther, lasting just six months before he returns to Lotte. In his

absence, she and Albert have married as planned, making a relationship with Werther more impossible and unacceptable. His letters become more disjointed and crazed, with him fixating more and more on how he is not Lotte's husband.

After the 6. December letter, the editor interjects and begins narrating, breaking the Briefroman form. The reason given is that Werther's letter had become almost too difficult to follow, and that many important things happened that he did not chronicle satisfactorily. The first thing the editor recounts is the conclusion of the story of the servant obsessed with his mistress. He had killed her so she could not marry another, and now the servant is being sent to his death. Werther empathizes deeply with the servant, foreshadowing his eventual suicide. The incidents of Werther and Lotte's last meeting on 21. December are of utmost importance and communicated solely by the narrator. It is during this passage that the clearest view of Lotte's psyche is given, although it is still minimal. She is tortured by the note she has received from Werther announcing his intention to commit suicide. He comes to visit her against her wishes, and in an attempt to hold him at arms length, she asks him to read some poetry aloud. After reading some of his translations of Ossian, his current favorite poet, he is so moved he embraces Lotte, which prompts her to leave the room. Werther leaves, tortured by this final rejection, and sends a note to Albert asking to borrow his pistols for a journey. Lotte personally gives the pistols to the servant to take to Werther, thus acknowledging and accepting his decision to kill himself. Werther lingers for a good twelve hours after shooting himself, but neither Lotte nor Albert go to see him, nor do they attend his funeral. Werther's funeral is not attended by a priest, implying that his actions have cost him his salvation.

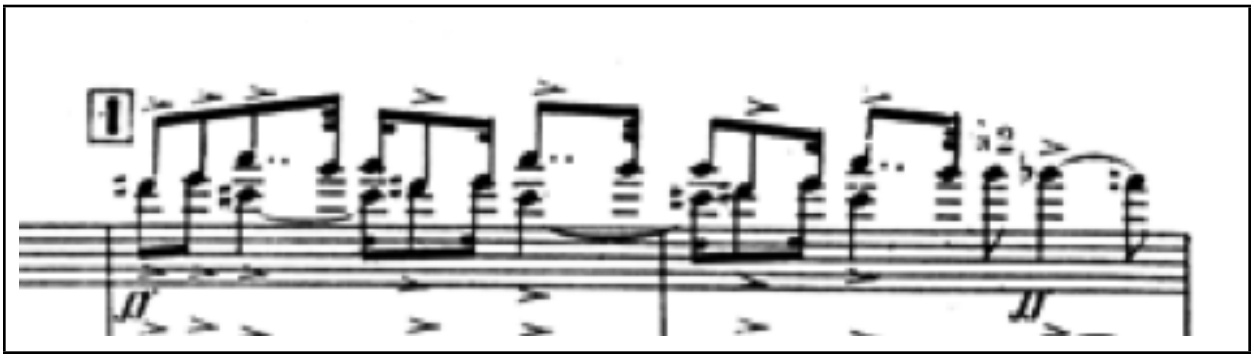
The book was received remarkably well. There were rashes of copycat suicides, prompting the text to be banned in some places. People clamored for illustrated versions so they could better imagine and relate to their favorite characters. Some people even dressed as Werther is described wearing a blue coat. There was some sort of instant connection that people made to this narrative, and the responses to it started almost immediately.

There has been virtually no mention of Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* in regards to Massenet's *Werther* in scholarship. The text has been used heavily in discussions of depictions of love and passion. Roland Barthes uses Werther as an example of everything from letter-writing love to dependent love (Barthes). Still others use the novella as a way to access information about societal issues of the time. Some fascinating work has been done examining the Künstler-Bürger dichotomy personified in the book by Werther and Albert (Bragg). Similarly, Will Hasty wrote about the problems of creating an identity in a time that favored objective reality; the argument being that Werther's identity was somehow not whole and therefore the root of his suffering.

It is tempting, albeit incorrect, to assume that Massenet was looking straight to Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* when composing his opera. There were in fact six prior operatic interpretations of the text, one of which Massenet's librettists, Édouard Blau, Paul Milliet, and Georges Hartmann, borrowed heavily from (Finck 145, Branger 428). He was almost certainly aware of the previous adaptations, and was doubtless influenced by them to a certain extent. The effect of other operas is not discussed here in the interest of simplicity.

Massenet's opera was finished in 1887 and premièred in 1892 in Vienna, translated into German. It begins with a prelude, which contains the distress motif, a highly dissonant and alarming sound (section 1 measures 1 and 2).

Image 1.



This is repeated throughout as a foreshadowing of doom and an expression of pain. The singing begins with the children practicing a Christmas carol wildly out of season - in July! This both foreshadows his impending suicide on Christmas Eve and highlights Werther's isolation and loneliness.

The first act is many comprised of Werther taking Charlotte to the ball and falling madly in love with her. She returns his affections, but not as fervently. He is not explicitly warned that she is already engaged, and in fact seems not to have heard of Albert before Charlotte's father comes to tell her that Albert has unexpectedly returned. Werther warns Charlotte he will die if she marries Albert. Act two finds Charlotte and Albert already married and very much in love. Werther and Albert have a brief exchange, in which it is established that Albert knows of Werther's feelings for Charlotte and empathizes with the pain that he must be feeling at her loss. Charlotte discusses the situation with Werther and encourages him to think of her a friend but nothing more. Act three begins with Charlotte rereading some letters from Werther and getting very

emotional. She sings “Va! laisse couler mes larmes” when her sister Sophie tries to convince her not to be so sad. Werther suddenly and unexpectedly appears, confessing that he cannot stand to be away from her. He sings an Ossian poem, “Pourquoi me réveiller”, and they embrace, even as Charlotte prays for strength to resist. The act closes with Werther’s request for the pistols being granted. Act four consists only of Charlotte going to Werther’s study and finding him dying. He reassures her that he will be saved and finally relieved of his pain. The children’s Christmas song underscores this as he believes that they are angels singing, indicating his redemption. He recites a bit more poetry for her and dies. There are not many stage directions beyond basic stage dressing notes and some small singing directions. The Ossian motif is repeated during “Pourquoi me réveiller”, and it repeats obsessively just as Werther is killing himself.

This is definitely an example of the Werther narrative, as Werther is described from the beginning as melancholy, establishing his emotional state. He is extremely poetic, having more verse to sing than any other character, and he does commit suicide in response to his emotional situation. Charlotte in this case is more aware of his feelings than Goethe’s Lotte, but there is overall much less communication demonstrated between the two. She rejects him at the crucial moment, and sends the pistols to him, just like the novella. While the attraction between the two is not strictly a secret, it is not consummated in any way beyond the final embrace. Albert is keenly aware of Werther’s feelings for Charlotte, but he would rather ignore the situation since nothing is happening.

The opera was initially a huge success, being performed one hundred times in the first year at the Opéra-Comique alone (Giroud 209). Its popularity swiftly dwindled to the point that as early as 1910 it was being discussed as a forgotten masterpiece (Finck 154). Today it is still not terribly well-known, and many people write it off as being musically clichéd and a poor rendition of Goethe's narrative. Musical value is highly subjective and difficult to quantify. While it is readily apparent that the music is fairly repetitive, there is also no doubt that it does a fine job of communicating the emotional nature of the material. Perhaps the repetitiveness is a result of the narrative focusing only on one emotion. The accusation of it being a poor portrayal of Goethe's work is irrelevant, as that holds the opera to a set of standards it was never trying to achieve.

Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* is firmly rooted in the Sturm und Drang movement. Sturm und Drang was a protest movement by young intellectuals against the rationalism of the Enlightenment. They preferred to pursue feelings and emotions with a somewhat anti-authoritarian bent (Wucherpfennig 94). With this increased emphasis on emotionality and the heart, Stürmer und Dränger were separating themselves from society in pursuit of their individuality. This created a loneliness, which in turn spawned the melancholy that the genre is so well known for (Wucherpfennig 95).

Many of the works of Sturm und Drang depict violence. This is not totally surprising because when emotions are more powerful and real than reason, there is a natural tendency to submit to the base reaction rather than reason out a rational response. This led to a an element of danger in the Sturm und Drang works because when rationality is undermined and emotions made king, society ceases to function. This seemed especially disturbing at the time because the Enlightenment had taken

such a long time to fully develop, so the notion of basically throwing most of the improvements it had made away was shocking.

Stürmer und Dränger had a special relationship to poetry[6]. Because poetry is, at its core, a more emotional genre, it was particularly appealing to them. Many of the poems were about how the speaker felt in relationship to love and nature. Favorite poetic forms of the movement were the ode, the hymn, and the ballad, the ode and the hymn because they expressed feeling without apology, and the ballad because of its roots in folk culture (Wucherpfennig 99). Important Stürmer und Dränger include Johann Gottfried von Herder, Jakob Lenz, and Friedrich Schiller (Wucherpfennig 100-102).

While it may seem like an utter waste of time to establish *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* as a piece of Sturm und Drang literature since it is usually held up as the best example of such, doing so will allow for a better understanding of how this work achieves its goals, and how that is different from how the opera achieves its goals. Werther's refusal to have his books sent to him demonstrates the distrust of rationality and the favoring of emotions so common in Sturm und Drang. This sets up very early on that, to Werther, his emotions and the world he constructs around them is very much more real than reality. This, interestingly enough, leads to the conclusion, that it does not matter at all whether Lotte loves him or not, or even if she is half as wonderful as he claims. She can hardly be considered an autonomous character, in fact. The information about her given to the reader is always filtered through Werther's twisted

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[6] Stürmer und Dränger also had strong ties to drama, writing a large number of their texts in this genre. It is not discussed at length here because besides the allusion to *Emilia Galotti*, Werther has no special interest in dramas, and therefore mention of it would not help establish*Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* as a Sturm und Drang piece.

perspective[7]. She is neither character, nor caricature, but rather an ideal that Werther has superimposed upon the true Charlotte. Regardless, it is rather immaterial to the narrative what she does or does not think or feel, as it is Werther's mental interaction with his concept of her that is the focus of the novella (Barthes/Gutbrodt 589). It is telling that he never refers to her by anything but Lotte. It is another way for him to prove their intimacy to himself.

Gutbrodt makes a convincing argument that "to [Werther], love is nothing but the reading and inscription of signs" (590). The first and most famous "sign" is Lotte's sigh of "Klopstock" at the ball (Goethe, "Die Leiden" 27). Werther, without confirming with her, assumes that they are thinking of the same poem, and therefore are soul mates. Because Werther only thinks of his love in terms of signs, he never states it directly to Lotte, and he reads quite a bit in to every exchange with her. In addition, Werther never mentions making his feelings plain to Lotte. Instead, he constantly regales Wilhelm with evidence of their mutual affection, leaving Lotte uninformed, and possibly unaware. Even if the reader is to believe that Werther is reliably recounting the events that transpired between them, there is reason to doubt that Werther's interpretation of the events may not be in line with Lotte's intentions.

One of the best illustrations of such is Werther's delight at the closing of one of Lotte's letters: "Adieu lieber Werther!" (Goethe, "Die Leiden" 87). Here Werther manipulates Lotte's language so that, rather than simply having properly declined the adjective, she is calling him *Lieber* in the comparative, thus implying that he is dearer to

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[7] Regardless of what is actually thought of Lotte, any information the reader is given about her comes from Werther, thus making it unreliable. She certainly appears to be virtuous and well-respected, but without an outside perspective, it is impossible to know what is true.

her than other people in her life, perhaps particularly Albert (Gutbrodt 587). This is a perfect example of Werther searching for a sign of her affection where there is most likely nothing untoward in her mind. Thus the reader must be wary of everything Werther says about Lotte returning his affections, as it is most likely a misinterpretation of a perfectly innocent exchange.

Similarly, while Werther expresses his feeling for Lotte to Wilhelm in no uncertain terms, it stands to reason that he expects Lotte to recognize signs and hints from him, rather than plainly confessing his love to her. The best evidence of this is in the Ossian recitation scene (Goethe, "Die Leiden" 115). When his is overcome by the symbolism and emotion of the poetry and embraces her, she quickly disengages herself from him and leaves the room. She was neither ready for nor expecting physical contact, thus revealing that, while Werther imagined her interpreting all the signs he was sending, she was in fact either unaware of the extent of his emotions or unwilling to face to social stigma of such an affair. Had she loved him as completely he loved her, she would have risked anything to be with him. Throughout he projects his ideal woman onto her in order to serve his emotional needs, and his emotions would ostensibly not change regardless of reciprocity. This makes his emotional world of paramount importance, and reality is left mostly a mystery to the reader.

There are also constant references to poetry and how great of an impact it has on Werther. Of course Lotte's sigh of "Klopstock" is a reference to a poem, but beyond that Werther often references carrying and reading from a copy of Homer. In fact, it is a gift of a new edition of Homer and one of Lotte's ribbons that sends him into unspeakable ecstasies. He eventually decides that he likes Ossian better than Homer,

abandoning the old, narrative based poet for a newer, more emotional one. The emphasis on the emotional power of poetry throughout demonstrates a deep respect for and interest in the genre.

The form of the novella is also indispensable to its achievement of its goals. The Briefroman format puts the reader inside of Werther's head and denies any other reality. This creates a deep, psychological bond possible that could not exist in any other medium. Because there is very little communicated to the reader that is not from Werther's own hand, it is easy to forget that he is an unreliable narrator. The whole book is practically an exercise in demonstrating to the reader how easily one can be caught up in emotions by indeed wrapping them up wholly in a fictional, emotional world. If the overarching goal of Sturm und Drang is to communicate extreme emotion and its power, then there is no doubt that *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* achieves that goal.

Romantic opera is a bit harder to qualify than literary Sturm und Drang as there are both musical and thematic issues to consider. Musically, romanticism was one of the first movements to use motifs. Motifs are short musical statements that can stand in for just about anything symbolically. They can be used to remind the audience of things or people who are not onstage, or to give a musical sound to a particular emotion. There was also an emphasis on breaking away from the more structured musical forms of previous eras (Wörner 200). Therefore, lyricism, chromaticism, complex tonalities,

and discord were used liberally to create more free-form pieces. In opera particularly this meant that the distinction between recitative and aria was no longer as clear[8].

Musical romanticism, like literary romanticism, sought to reconcile emotion and reason. The scientific examination of emotions allowed them to be represented more accurately and powerfully than ever before. There was also a renewed interest in nature and its relationship to humanity. Similarly, there was special attention to women as real people rather than puppets. There was simultaneously a renewed interest in folk culture and exotic sounds (Wörmer 200). This striving for balance between knowledge and emotion, humans and nature, men and women, familiar and exotic, really encapsulates the spirit of romanticism. This also informs some of the musical choices in that theoretically a balance could be achieved between rigid forms and total musical chaos.

Massenet's *Werther* does achieve the goals of romantic opera, regardless of its musical value. The distress motif is dissonant, and a recurring symbol of extreme emotional pain. The use of motif was noticed even when the opera first came out with one review saying "Massenet est un disciple de Wagner. Il [nous] a supris et utilisé plus d'un des secrets du maître de Bayreuth"[9] (Branger 420) In contrast to Wagner, however, Massenet's motifs change and evolve between repetitions, indication a progression in emotion or action (Branger 425).

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[8] Also relatively new to opera was the possibility of a tragic ending. Rossini earlier in the nineteenth century wrote two endings to his *Otello* (1816), one where Desdemona survives and they get married, and one where Otello does kill her. The emotionalism and pervasive tragedy in *Werther* therefore is something that might not have been acceptable in an earlier opera.

[9] "Massenet is a disciple of Wagner. He surprised [us] and used more than one of the secrets of the master of Bayreuth" (translation my own)

The diminished seventh chord is one of the most expressive harmonic structures because of the many different possibilities for resolving it. A fully diminished seventh is made of three sets of minor thirds, giving it an inherent emotional tug (Roig-Francolí 357). It is easy to see why it is a desirable tool, given these qualities, but an overuse of anything dulls its effect, eventually leaving the music sounding too repetitive. While some sources suggest that Massenet abuses the diminished seventh in an attempt to emotionally move the audience, there is no doubt that the opera has an overall melancholy tone, and that the music matches the mood of the narrative perfectly. Throughout, the orchestra can almost be considered a character itself, commenting on and interacting with the characters (Finck 153).

The way the characters are handled also reflects the goals of romanticism. Charlotte, for example, is a true character here. The audience hears her speak and knows that those are her true, unfiltered thoughts. In fact, one of the most passionate moments in the opera is her “Va! laisse couler mes larmes” at the beginning of the third act (sections 167-170). The translation that follows is from Martial Singher (107).

Table 1.

Va, laisse couler mes larmes -- elles font du bien ma chérie. Les larmes qu'on ne pleure pas, dans notre âme retombent toutes, et de leurs patientes gouttes martèlent le coeur triste et las. Sa résistance enfin s'épuise; le coeur se creuse et s'affaiblit -- il est trop grand, rien ne l'emplit; et trop fragile tout le brise.	Please, let my tears flow -- they do [me] good, my darling. The tears we don't shed all fall back into our soul, and with their patient drops hammer on our sad and weary heart. Its resistance finally wears out; the heart grows hollow and weakens -- it is too big, nothing fills it; and, overly fragile, anything will break it.

From the first notes of the orchestra, it is clear that incredible pain is being expressed. The minor key and the insistent descent of the melody set the scene, transporting the listener to into Charlotte's painful reality. The first sung line is very expressive; it is high and almost all one note so it sounds like a wail. Throughout the orchestra both repeats and anticipates Charlotte's melody, creating layers of harmony and intensifying the moment. The melody sung in section 168 measures 1-3, "Les larmes qu'on ne plure pas, dans notre âme" is immediately echoed in measures 4-5 by the clarinet then in 6-7 by the saxophone. Here the orchestra is being supportive and sympathetic by echoing her sound.

Image 2.

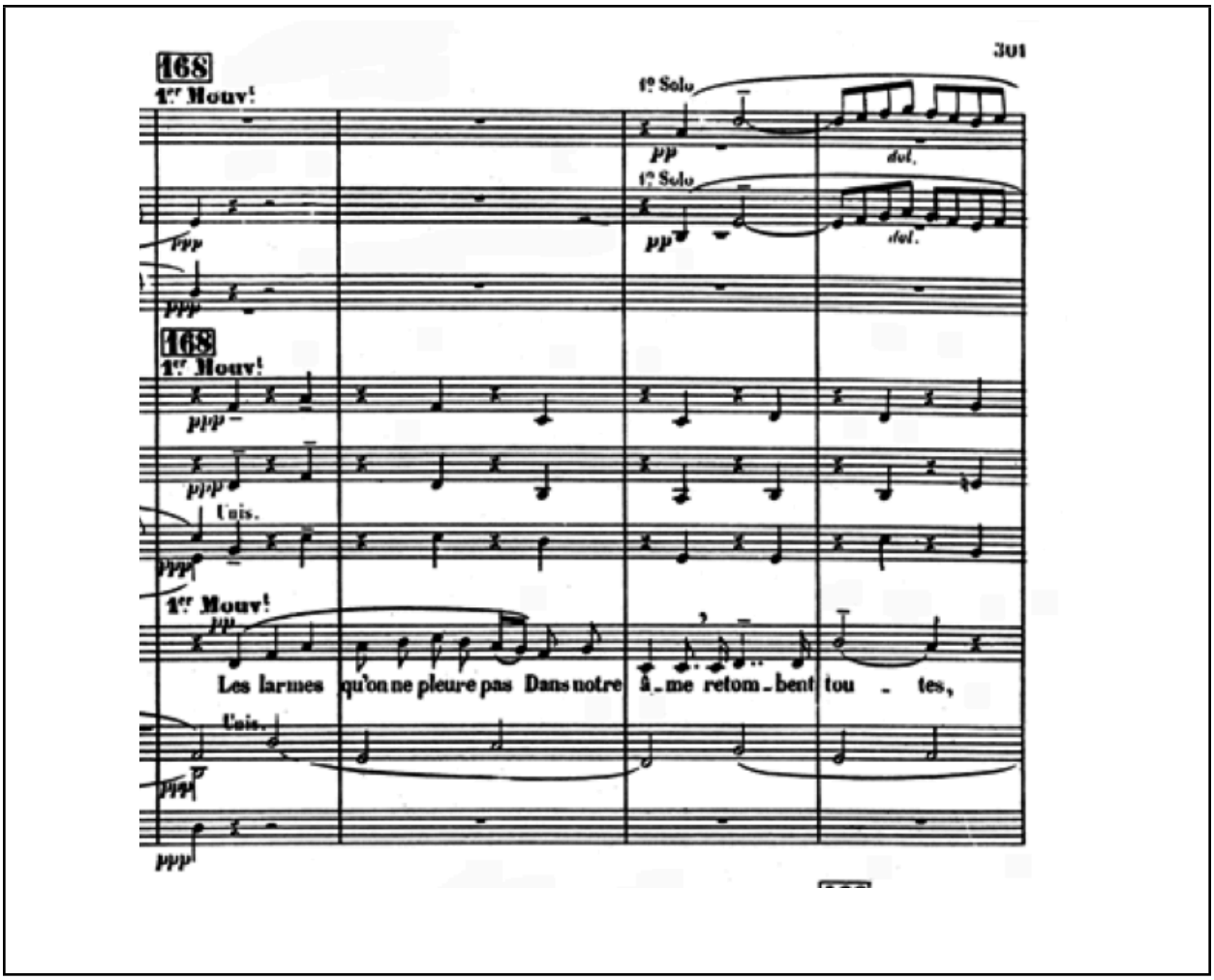
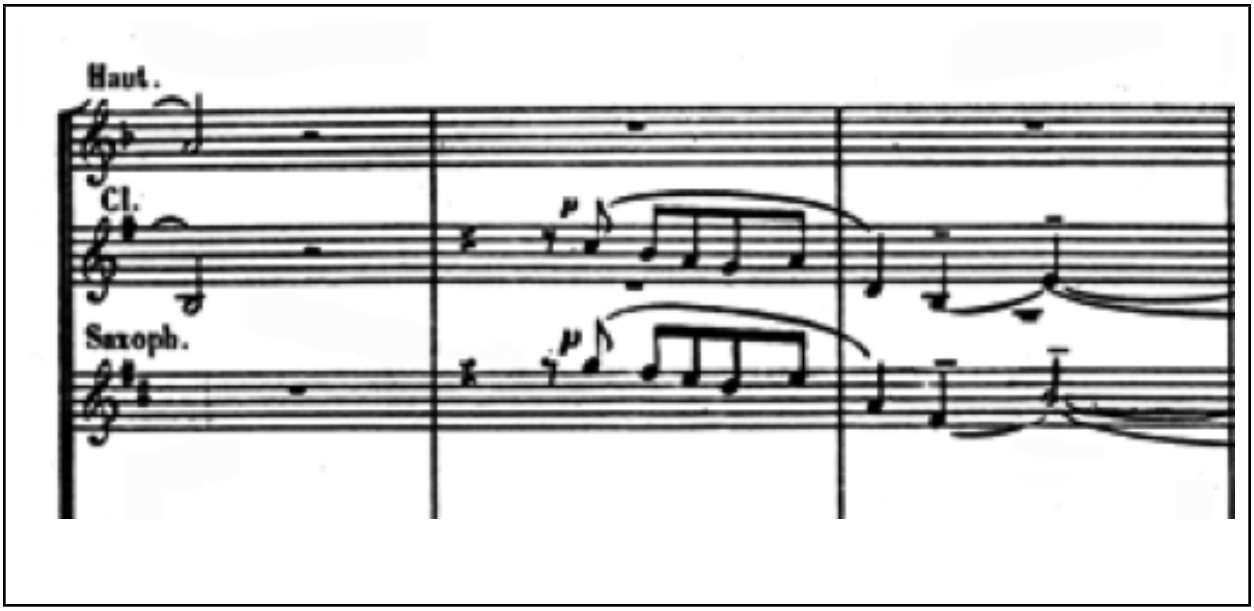

301
168
1er Mouv!
1e Solo
dol.
1e Solo
dol.
168
1er Mouv!
Cois.
1er Mouv!
Les larmes qu'on ne pleure pas Dans notre â_me retom_bent tou _ tes,
Cois.

Image 3.



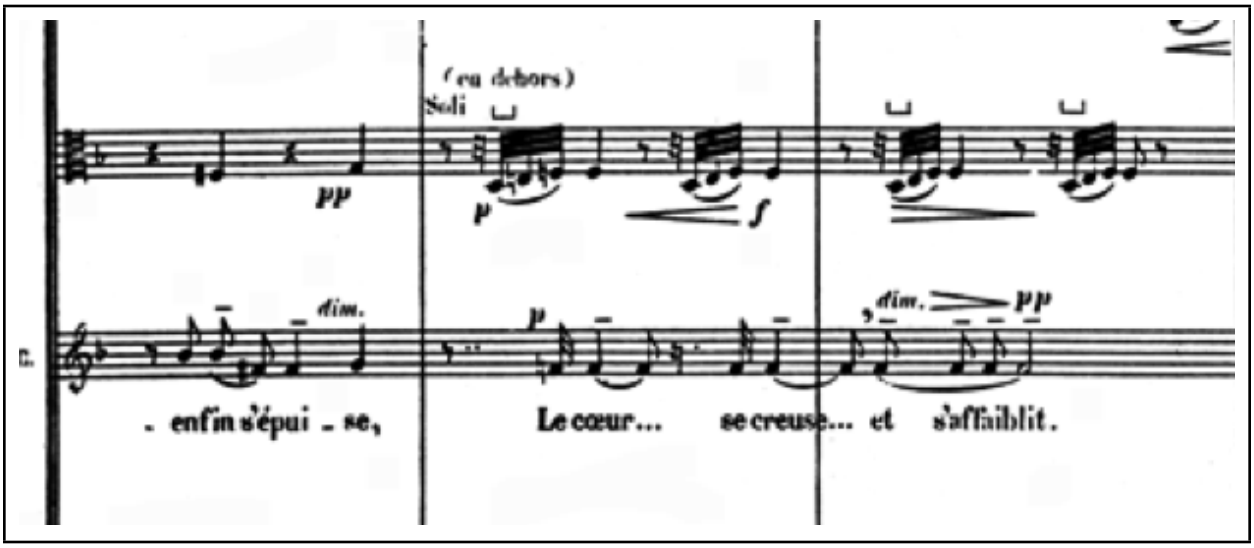
This harmonic complexity and use of the orchestra almost an independent entity is indicative of romanticism in music. These are techniques to manipulate the listener's feelings rather than simply convey a storyline. These choices are in accordance with a statement Massenet made, claiming that the substitution of orchestra in the stead of a chorus was due to the fact that he "wanted to translate with the orchestra alone...the profound human sentiments that motivate Werther and Charlotte" (Huebner 126).

There is no repetition of blocks of text, as is usually associated with an aria, but rather many repetitions of the same sentiment using different words. The main point conveyed here is that Charlotte must cry over Werther and their impossible love, because it would be even sadder not to cry. This is a totally romantic sentiment, given that romanticism is generally about examining emotions and attempting to reconcile subjective and objective reality. Charlotte has considered her emotional situation as logically as possible and come to the conclusion that crying is the only possible

response. Rather than using the aria to express her emotion as might have been more typical in earlier opera, she uses it to examine her emotions and take a more scientific look at what is happening with her.

Halfway through the aria (section 169, measures 3-4) she sings “Sa résistance enfin s’épuise” as the strings of the orchestra take up a motif that seems to be totally unrelated to the rest of the melody.

Image 4.

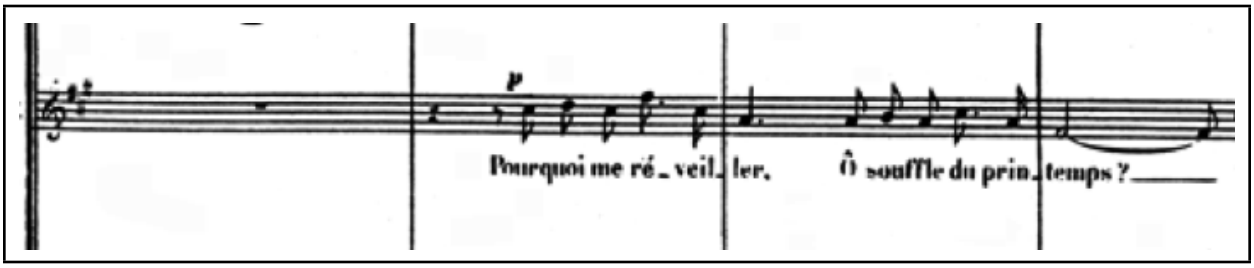


As Charlotte struggles through that portion of the aria, it is as if the orchestra is trying to break her resistance. It wins, and the aria is quite soft at the end, leaving the audience sympathetic and quiet rather than applauding wildly. There is neither triumph nor resolution at the end of this passage. Charlotte comes to no conclusion except that she must be miserable. The aria does not help her deal with her emotions in a more effective or productive manner, but rather reinforces her instinct to embrace them and allow herself to feel as fully as possible.

Charlotte is in pain because she has not been able to balance her feelings with reason. She tells herself that she logically must not love Werther, and yet she does. This also demonstrates, not for the first time, that Werther's feelings are very much reciprocated in this piece. When Charlotte is also an active member in the love and passion, not merely friendly affection, it makes Werther's situation that much more pitiable since he has something concrete to be upset about. It also makes Werther seem somewhat more rational and justified in his actions. Both the material and the way it is handled musically demonstrate romanticism. The importance of emotions, yet the rational handling of said emotions is a much more romantic approach to the problem (as compared to Sturm und Drang where the emotions would have taken over completely by this point). The use of the orchestra as its own entity and the fact that this is an aria more about communicating the moment both to the audience and other characters and less about repeating virtuosic verses over and over, make this a highly successful romantic piece.

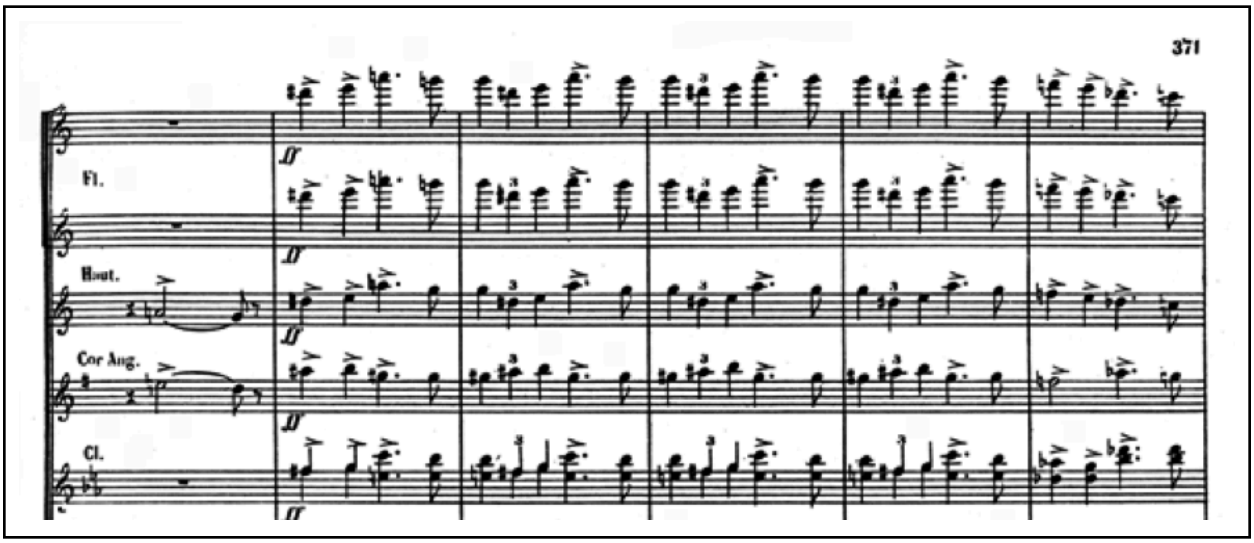
The inclusion of the Ossian motif in Werther's "Pourquoi me réveiller" demonstrates the pain that he is feeling at that moment (section 190, measure 5).

Image 5.



This theme, which is repeated both by Werther and the orchestra throughout sounds very unstable, as if it might devolve into the distress motif from the prelude at any moment. It conveys the sense that Werther is barely holding himself together through this recitation, and it foreshadows the repetition of the distress motif at his death (section 209, measures 4-7).

Image 6.



In fact, when played in sequence, the motif here sounds almost like a response to the distress motif. Although the text is just the poem he is reading for Charlotte, the orchestra, again acting as an independent entity creates layers of harmony to convey the extreme emotion of the moment. From before he even starts to sing, the harp sets the scene, invoking the image of Greek poets with their lyres[10]. With the exception of the first iteration, the orchestra almost always anticipates Werther's "Pourquoi me réveiller", leaving him to catch up, almost as if the music, which could represent the

[10] The use of the harp, especially in the introduction is also reminiscent of Verdi's "Piangea cantado" from *Otello* (1887) in which the orchestra is later used to emulate a raging storm outside, representing Desdemona's internal turmoil. Might this be an oblique reference?

poem, is the only thing getting him through that moment. The key slips from easily from major to minor through section 194, making the mention of “gloire” seem that much more glorious, and then equally more tragic when it is taken away only a few measures later. Again, the translation that follows is Singher’s (108-109).

Table 2.

Traduire! Ah! bien souvent mon rêve s’envola sur l’aile de ces vers, et c’est toi, cher poète, qui bien plutôt était mon interprète. Toute mon âme est là! “Pourquoi me réveiller, ô souffle du printemps, pourquoi me réveiller? Sur mon front je sens tes caresses, et pourtant bien proche est le temps des orages et des tristesses. Pourquoi me réveiller, ô souffle du printemps? Demain dans le vallon viendra le voyageur se souvenant de ma gloire première. Et ses yeux vainement chercheront ma splendeur. Ils ne trouveront plus que deuil et que misère! Hélas! Pourquoi me réveiller...	Translate! Ah! oftentimes my dream took flight on the wings of these verses, and it is you, dear poet, rather, who were my interpreter. My whole soul is there! “Why awaken me, o breath of spring, why awaken me? On my brow I feel your caresses, and yet so near is the time of storms and of sadness. Why awaken me, o breath of spring? Tomorrow to the valley the traveler will come remembering my original glory. And his eyes in vain will look for my splendor. They will find nothing but mourning and misery! Alas! Why awaken me...

Because romanticism does not have the same anti-authoritarian bent that Sturm und Drang does, there is a certain sense of needing to protect social order and the family unit. Charlotte does not pursue a relationship with Werther even though she is

extremely attracted to him because she promised her mother she would marry Albert, and now to not go through with that would be inviting chaos. Again and again she makes the impossible decision to stay with what is socially acceptable rather than indulge her emotions.

To balance all the pain, Werther is saved at the end of the opera, in contrast to the novella. Charlotte is with him, and he reassures her that he will be happier after he is dead. He imagines that the children are angels singing for him, implying that his death does not preclude him from faith as was the case with Goethe's Werther. His salvation is their reward for making the painful, but appropriate decision to maintain order.

The fact that this is presented on stage has a great impact on how it goes about achieving its goals. The characters are necessarily much more straightforward with each other, as all interaction must be through real encounters with real words. There is much less overall that goes on simply because the audience would not want to sit through twelve hours of opera just to get every detail. This stripped down version only communicates that which is necessary for it to achieve its goals.

While initially the fact that the opera must be performed on stage might seem limiting compared to the infinite nuance possible in Goethe's Briefroman, in fact it is the key to understanding all of the other changes made. The stage makes characters interact with each other, demonstrating the struggle that occurs when emotions must coexist with reality. There are sometimes staging choices made that attempt to recreate some of the effect of the Briefroman, but with very little success. For example,

the Bayerische Staatsoper put on a production where the walls became more and more scribbled as time went on to reflect Werther's increasingly tortured psyche (*Werther*, Massenet). While this on the surface seems like a fine idea, and indeed the images and handwriting became more disturbing and harder to decipher as they got more crazed, this approach completely ignores that Charlotte is just as involved and responsible as Werther. She too is suffering, and Werther takes it upon himself to end their mutual pain by removing himself from the equation. Ignoring Charlotte's role in the relationship completely undermines the goals of the opera.

Another production, which was largely panned by critics, was put on in San Francisco, using a multi-level set wherein the characters interested on the ground level with each other to represent reality and then ascended above to interact in Werther's mind ("'Werther'"). Again, this is attempting to recreate the Sturm und Drang goals of isolating the narrative to Werther's experience, and it does not work. This approach seems doubly doomed as there are few to no times that we get to hear from Werther what is going on in his head without him speaking directly to another character, in which case that should be in reality. If this production put Charlotte on the second level to sing "Va! laisse couler mes larmes", it would make her emotion less genuine, and in fact make Werther look like a self-absorbed egotist to be imagining that Charlotte would be so distraught without any proof of such.

Of course each production of *Werther* is different, and it would be ridiculous to condemn them all for the shortcomings of one, but still it is important to remember that a truly outstanding production of this opera would ideally let the material do what it was

meant to rather than attempting to force it into a set of values that it simply is not interested in[11].

One of the most important and interesting differences between the novella and the opera is the emergence of Charlotte as a genuine character. Part of this, again, can be attributed to the necessities of the stage. At some point Charlotte must speak for herself. While it might be physically possible to have a leading lady who appears as a pure image without singing, an opera without a soprano, especially in this era, would not have been an option. This combined with romanticism's search for balance explains perfectly why Charlotte must be a real, thinking, feeling character.

The fact that she is a real character with real feelings who does participate in the relationship drastically changes Werther's character. In the book, he comes across as overly melodramatic, and his suicide, while tragic, is over something that existed only in his mind. The opera completely destroys this by making the pain over something that is very real, and therefore the suicide is every so much more tragic. This is heightened by Charlotte racing to his side, whereas in the book, while the narrator says that she was upset, she does not visit him or attend his funeral, which if she had truly loved him would not have been the case. Essentially this boils down to whether the audience is being asked to have sympathy or empathy with Werther. Goethe asks his reader to empathize with Werther, and rather forces them to do so by manipulating them into feeling everything along with Werther such that his feelings are the most important. By

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[11] Of course each director's interpretation of the piece is just that: another reinterpretation. However, some of these choices seem to have been made with the express purpose of "correcting" the fact that the opera is not as deeply embedded in Werther's psyche as the original, and this does it a disservice.

not allowing the reader to ever step outside Werther's head (even when the narrator takes over, Werther's psyche is very present), Goethe is forcing the reader to either totally buy into Werther's worldview or write off the entire piece as senseless. Because people are rather used to trusting the "narrator", in quotes here because Werther functions as the narrator for most of the book even though there is a separate entity who narrates the end, they forget to question the reality or sanity of the situation and are therefore swept up in it almost without realizing. Massenet's audience is allowed to decide for themselves whether to sympathize with Werther and Charlotte because, while their situation is pitiable and the audience is made sensitive to that fact, the audience is not manipulated into reacting to an imaginary situation. Instead, they are presented with a real situation and allowed to have a real reaction to it. It is the artistry behind the work that ensures the desired reaction.

One extremely interesting difference between the two pieces is the character Sophie, the next oldest after Charlotte. In the book, Lotte is only presented as a mother figure, caring for "her" children. In the opera, Sophie is only a bit younger than Charlotte, her sister's confidant, and perhaps has a bit of an interest in Werther herself. This, too underscores the essential form and purpose of the two works. Goethe chose not to let any of the children become supporting characters, because to Werther it is only important that Lotte is a wonderful mother, thus increasing her appeal as the ideal woman. Massenet's Charlotte needs to demonstrate her true feelings for Werther, and because this is from an era that favored more realistic operas, rather than sing an aria

to the audience as if she were discussing it with herself, she must have someone to talk to, hence making Sophie a character as well.

One of the most glaring differences between the two is the change in who says "Klopstock". Naturally, Goethe used the utterance from Lotte to initiate the "symbolism" that caused the whole affair. Massenet first has some other young people chatting about the poet as they are on their way to the ball. Charlotte's father then repeats the lines after they are gone. Massenet rather wisely decides to make this moment a side note in his piece, probably because the audience may or may not have understood the reference. The second edition of *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* contained twelve extra lines clarifying the significance of that moment because in that short amount of time Klopstock had already begun to pass out of the public consciousness. One hundred years later and in France, the chances that an audience would understand that nuance are minimal. However, Massenet clearly did understand the reference himself and put it in as a nod to his inspiration.

One final and minimal change is that Werther never leaves to try to find a job in the opera. This could be purely due to time constraints; it's a sub-plot that does not advance the love story beyond allowing Werther to pine for Lotte from afar. It could also be because in the novella it represents a half-hearted attempt to return to the real world and control his emotions. There is no need for such in the opera because their love exists in the real world.

While it may seem a bit backwards to label these works as being individually successful due to their reflection of the values of their era, considering the definitions of

an era are almost always made in retrospect, it is nevertheless a helpful way to think about how the contemporary reader or viewer would have reacted to the piece. Characteristics of eras are decided by looking at the best works from that period, then seeing what they have in common. Those common elements are likely the subjects and techniques that resonated with the audience of that particular time and place. Therefore, saying that Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* is successful purely because it demonstrates Sturm und Drang is a bit misleading, but to say that the Sturm und Drang issues it deals with were important and interesting to the people of the time, contributing to the popularity, reception, and success of the book is absolutely correct and the reason for establishing *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* as a Sturm und Drang novel in this paper. The same can be said for labeling Massenet's *Werther* a successful romantic opera. While he did not set out to write an opera that would fulfill the requirements of romanticism, by writing an appealing opera for the people of his time and place, he did write a romantic opera because romanticism was what that culture was receptive to at that time.

Overall, these two works have a curious relationship. In some respects they are so similar that it seems Massenet might have been trying to create an exact copy of Goethe's work. Things like Charlotte referring to Werther as a cousin, to his great delight in both works, reinforces such a notion. This assumption leads to the tendency to look at the changes that are made more critically. However, when the initial reactions can be controlled, and a more careful inspection is made, it becomes obvious that while Massenet's work differs greatly from Goethe's, it is still a legitimate and

interesting interpretation of the Werther narrative. It is a strong reinterpretation, worthy of being considered independently of Goethe's precisely because it recognizes and makes use of the strengths of its medium without apologizing for adjusting the story to suit the needs of its specific audience.

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