



# The Sorrows of Young Werther and Selected Writings

*Johann Wolfgang von Goethe , Catherine Hutter (Translator) , Marcelle Clements (Introduction)*

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## The Sorrows of Young Werther and Selected Writings Details

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## From Reader Review The Sorrows of Young Werther and Selected Writings for online ebook

### R.a. says

I wish these rating systems had "halves" or 1 to 10 scale @ least as I put this one @ 3 1/2.

I, personally, enjoyed the Romantic Idea brought to its logical conclusion with this little gem. But, I can see how others might find it (or much of from the Romantic Movement) too syrupy.

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### Tania ForgivenSoul says

I found the sorrows of young Werther so beautifully tragic. I was drawn to the nakedness of his internal wars of human nature and his stubborn yet graceful character. I was taken by his ponders dealing with an unattainable love and happiness, of deceptive illusions and with his philosophies on suicide and lunatism. He is a classic helpless romantic, passionate and melancholic, a dreamer like myself. Sighs..more dots and sighs.

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### Cheryl says

**"The illusion that life is but a dream has occurred to quite a few people, and I feel the same way about it."** The narrator in one of my favorite books, *The Book of Disquiet*, also thought this of life, and I've found myself pondering the idea after hearing from Werther.

I turn in upon myself and find a world there, again more in a spirit of presentiment and dour longing than dramatically or with vitality. Then everything grows hazy in my mind and I go on smiling dreamily at the world.

This left me in a state of reader perplexity as the question reoccurred: had Werther stayed in this dream state of life, could things have turned out differently, perhaps? Willa Cather once said, and I paraphrase, that to lose oneself in the creation of something, is to live. Werther is an artist who feels himself bogged down by life and with what others expect of him; for example, his parents want him to train and become a diplomat, when all he wants to do is paint nature's beauty. Yet, with life comes expectation, with expectation, duty - unless that is, one extricates oneself, as he does. Werther escapes to what should have been his idyllic setting, but soon finds himself unable to focus on his art, because his heart is now encumbered by the beautiful, mysterious, and 'taken' Lotte.

I coddle my heart like a sick child and give in to its every whim. But don't tell a soul. There are people who would condemn me for it.

There are some who write about suicide in a way that makes you sympathize, while others write about it in a way that makes you empathize; I do believe Johann Wolfgang von Goethe is of the latter group. My copy of this novel (first published in 1774) includes extra stories, and also Goethe's thoughts on *Young Werther*,

wherein he speaks candidly about his own suicidal thoughts: when he decided to live, he knew that in order to "do so happily," he had to first "complete a poetic work in which [he] could express everything [he] had felt about this important subject. Now you see why I've contemplated Werther's creative life.

We are dealing here with people who are weary of life from a lack of activity under the most peaceful conditions imaginable, through the exaggerated demands they make upon themselves. Since I found myself in such a condition once and know how I suffered and what efforts I had to make to escape it, I do not wish to hide the conclusions I reached after giving much consideration to the various forms of death one might choose.

Werther is a character of the psychological novel who speaks clearheadedly about his inner turmoil, and as I followed his journey, it was obvious that this is not a story that is only about unrequited love (which by the way, whether the love was returned or simply COULD NOT be returned, is another story). Here is a man dissatisfied with life and when he stumbles upon some bits of happiness, life seems to take it away also. There are moments in the book where he seems hopelessly needy, and yet, when you actually listen to him, you see that this is a man, pardon the clichéd saying, whose flaw is that he wears a tender heart on his sleeve. Without it being in the epistolary form, I probably would not have received this novel as I did; in fact, "from its initial publication, *The Sorrows of Young Werther* has continually provoked intense reproaches. While some readers identify readily with Goethe's beset protagonist, others respond with puzzled disappointment or impatience."

And I had recognized long ago how useless all forewords were, for the more one tries to explain one's intentions, the more confusion one causes. The author may write as many prefaces as he likes; the reader will always go right on demanding that which the author is trying to avoid. -Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

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## Jimmy says

When a young Johann Wolfgang von Goethe learned of a man's suicide, he asked his girlfriend to find out all she could about him. The result was this fictional story based on an actual event. It is a classic study in depression.

It loses something over time, but it is also far ahead of its time. Consider the hero who looks at the world as a prison and life just "prolongs his miserable existence." But "however confused he may be, he always carries in his heart a sweet feeling of freedom in the knowledge that he can leave his prison whenever he likes."

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## Michael says

The Sorrows Of Young Werther is the precursor for all of today's teenage rants on internet blogs about love and its hardships, and it is an utterly enthralling read. Goethe has really been denied his proper acknowledgement as an author, where usually the only required reading of his tends to be a sample of Faust at college level. Sorrows is written through a series of letters from Werther to someone at his home, his correspondence with his roots. Though tragic, Sorrows should rather be themed more as a book proclaiming a connection to nature and a very final means of gratification, instead of a book fancifying death.

## **Zeineb Noura says**

There are 4 writings in this book and each is reviewed separately, except for the last 2.

"The Sorrows of Young Werther":

It is an epistolary novel; a collection of letters from a young man called Werther to his friend William. The content of these letters vary from infatuation, to desperation to final lamentation. What strikes me in these correspondences is the amount of details provided about the autonomy of the human spirit. Goethe gives us the story of a man's heart free-falling into an abyss because of an impossible love. Thus, his only outlets is his letters. The affinity of Werther's spirit and the tone of amorous hopelessness permeate every utterance of his. He is on a journey not of self-discovery, for his self is already tanged in the webs of a doomed love affair. It is rather a journey of self-liberation: Werther wants to distangle himself from such a condition, but he fails at doing so. Goethe succeeds to transfer the inner life of Werther by writing a one-way series correspondences (the receiver of letters is not an agent in the story, for he remains on the receiving end). These letters give the impression of being diary entries, for Werther seems to indulge into prolonged soliloquies in order to reflect on, or lament his deperate state. Werther is the epitome of a doomed loved whose obsession with his beloved reaches a pathological level. It is also important to point out the ironic and yet essential continuation of Werther's story by the edito even after his suicide. This is one of Goethe's tools of subverting and "showcasing" the "authenticity" of the epistolary genre.

"Goethe in Sesenheim":

This short story is a "semi-autobiographical" account of Goethe's love affair with a German woman. No, it is a stereotypical description of a state of infatuation and admiration. Goethe masters the Romantic increment as a vessel to such emotions. Imagination coupled with a sense of a patheistic passion are the instruments by which Goethe manages to paint such a lovely portrait of a love relationship. His trips to Sesenheim are like those of a longing wanderer who sees his destination as a temple of the noblest of feelings. This short story really is a beautiful narrative of a passion that transcends this carnal realm.

"The New Melusina" + "The Fairy Tale":

These two short stories are a fine example of Goethe's ability to delve into the realm of the Fantastic. His style reminds me of Brothers Grimm's. Yet, Goethe's Romantic proclivity tinges this type of the Fantastic and makes it a wonderful combination of far-fetched, but heart-warming tales. Goethe manages, indeed, to use these two prolific 18th C. writing styles in a most magnificent mixture.

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## **Jamie says**

I purchased this book from a street vendor almost two years ago not knowing anything about it. I read The Sorrows of Young Werther in about two days and the rest of the commentary and remaining stories in the next week. Brilliant. I think one of the strong points to this story is the form of writing-- one-sided letters to friends of a love struck man. Also, the story line is real and relatable and very forthcoming in the desires and emotions of Werther. Poignant, dramatic, sad, but lovely. A classic on my shelf.

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## **Brynnan says**

The best novel I have ever read. What began as a required read for a class turned into my leisure reading. I am normally a slow reader but I finished it in 3 days, which is very fast for me.

This particular translation I found very suitable and elegant. The language, though, should not distract one's attention. I began reading half-heartedly, not having any prior knowledge of the book. As the plot began to unfold, I was unwillingly drawn in and unwillingly subject to a flood of emotions. I found that I could relate entirely with Werther, being an introvert and having found myself in similar circumstances, though not exactly similar, those being two things that Goethe mentions in his reflections that produce the most impassioned, moved readers of the book. I have never been more emotionally and deeply tampered with by a fictional book in all my life. During the final succession of events at the end, I felt that I was alongside Werther undergoing the exact same emotions, enduring the painful suspense and having to mentally prepare myself with him. I feel as if I have experienced what he experienced because I have read the book. Goethe wrote out of personal experience according to his reflections, to express his own similar emotions, and I must say that my own experience tells me that writing out of passion and personal experience produces the most highly charged work. The plot is no surprise. At very occasional times I even felt angry at Werther for idolizing Lotte. I felt that his utter devotion was really unprompted, perhaps suggesting insanity, but these moments quickly faded again into a personal sympathy for Werther and an anger, rarely at Lotte and many times at Albert, for the circumstances which they foolishly foisted upon Werther, Albert especially guilty of not proceeding to try to console Werther or offer him at least the effort to help him. If any, Lotte's guilt lay in her hasty foolishness at the end and her egging Werther on, or failing to limit her requiting, at the very outset. Anyhow, I found the story cohesive and meaningful, and no aspect detracted from the work. How anyone couldn't be in some way moved by Werther is beyond me. A mind free from an idealistic, giddy view of the world will see Werther's life most clearly. It is precisely that cloud that was lifted from his mind shortly after the beginning that caused the ensuing events. They can't be understood except in such such a light. Near the beginning he was passionately arguing against the folly of not seeing the world happily, of not coming alongside your friends and helping to "leave them with their joys and increase their happiness by sharing it with them. Can you give them a little comfort when they are tormented by fear?" He also says, "What wretches they are, those who take advantage of the power they have over the heart of another...and rob him of the simple joys within him!" Both quotes are found on page 29 of this publication. It is precisely this fact of life that Werther comes to terms with. As Sir Toby the drunkard of Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night" said to the stereotypically puritanical Malvolio "Dost thou think because thou art virtuous there shall be no more cakes and ale?" Though Werther had a large role in furthering his suffering, nevertheless he is right to one degree or other when he repeatedly says something like "Fate has given me [insert undesirable circumstance]." Werther's ideals were destroyed by the contrasting harshness of reality. He should have destroyed his idealism before he allowed his feelings for an engaged woman to grow, he and she both knowing that their feelings wouldn't go anywhere. His descent into reality carried him six feet under, as it were. Anyhow, that is the extent of my criticism of Werther. This translation has earned 5 stars, easily, with the quality of language as well as Goethe's exceedingly superb story. I must say, I found myself frenzily warding off melancholy every time I read it. It was that profound and tangible for me, though probably not for every reader. Best novel I've ever read, replacing Tolstoy's "The Death of Ivan Ilyich." Both present profound reflections on life.

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### **Sam Ruddick says**

it probably deserves four stars, maybe five. i don't know. it's very short, which is good. 100 some odd pages. that means that our hero, young werther, cries about 100 times. i was glad when lotte finally told him to "be manly." i mean, for christ's sake. it nearly killed me, this guy weeping, literally every couple pages. that said, it's the first book i've picked up and had a hard time putting down in ages. probably since the last time i read after leaving mr mackenzie. it's odd. i mean, this was the story of an intelligent young man, and he was sort

of interesting, and he said some good stuff, but suffering through the sentimentality was irritating, after a while.

perhaps goethe was aware of this? one would think, simply because the end - the very end, narrated by the author, rather than taken from werther's letters - was absolutely unsparingly cold, and therefore much more affecting than almost anything that came before it. it's an interesting study in self-absorbtion, for sure, and that might be why i enjoyed it so thoroughly; i'm pretty self-absorbed and, in spite of all his apparent obsession with lotte, the true subject of werther's obsession is himself. so the book both enralls and repels, in that sense. as a proto-romantic text it's sort of interesting, too. my understanding is that it is to romanticism what bovary is to modernism.

but i have limited patience for the incessant weeping. i mean, let's say goethe knew perfectly well what he was doing (i doubt that he did; he wrotew the book very quickly, when he was very young), even if he was making an effort to make this character get on your nerves, does there have to be merit in that? if the book is annoying, isn't it annoying even if it's meant to be annoying?

still, i couldn't put the thing down. i went whale watching yesterday and, once i saw the first couple whales come close to the boat, i was more interested in my book. been whale watching before, but still. so what do i do about this book? three stars? i'll raise it to four later.

maybe.

for my next trick, maybe i will read a book by an american man, about an american man, in the hopes that the character will at least make an effort to act like one.

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## **Nooilforpacifists says**

Germans are odd. Clipped, precise and order-driven, yet over-the-top sentimental. And this is the book that started it all. Overwrought in the extreme, it sparked a wave of ever more extreme suicides in the German-speaking world that persisted at least until WWI (one enterprising Austrian broke into Beethoven's apartment, years after his death, to kill himself where genius had dwelt). Anyway, this is barely readable, but important historically.

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## **Kyle says**

1774. Most people know what this book is about before they read it I think, but if you don't here come spoilers: it's about Werther, who falls in love with a woman engaged to another and eventually offs himself. Might sound kinda pathetic, but the character and the writing make this little book a gem. If I had to compare it to anything I'd compare it to Marilynne Robinson's Gilead and Roland Barthes' A Lover's Discourse. It is epistolary for the most part and a philosophical consideration of love and unrequited love, as well as nature, art and God. When Werther killed himself I felt like it was the right thing for him to do under the circumstances, or at least that I could understand why he did it. So enchanting.

## Marisa says

I want to write novels about this book. Actually, others have already. Well, not precisely, but Mary Shelley did include "Sorrows" in the trio of books that the Monster finds in the portmanteau in the woods, alongside Milton's Paradise Lost and Plutarch's Lives.

I now know why.

This is an incredibly sensory and heartfelt collection of letters from "a young unstable man," Werther, who falls in love with an engaged woman.

Goethe (whom I adore) explores and gives commentary on societal duties and expectations, happiness and depression, devoted and unrequited love, and suicide, which fascinates me. Goethe wrote this in four weeks when he was 24 and went through a difficult time, and the passion and wildly fluctuating emotions of Werther are both invigorating and dispiriting in turn. The novel is relatively short for the level complexity and number of ideas it conveys, and feels a weighty semblance to Shelley's Frankenstein, in atmosphere if not entirely in tone.

This is a tragedy in the vein and spirit of Hamlet, and the moment it ended I wanted to start it again.

Please try and read this book.

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## Vishal says

*'A man is a man, and the little bit of sense he may have plays little or no part at all when passion rages in him, and the limitations of humankind oppress him'*

Ah, Young Werther! Your sorrows were often mine; you dragged me down into the mire with your incessant melancholy and self-pity, so much so that I wanted to shake you by the shoulders and order you – in slightly more colloquial language than this - to have some self-esteem in your nether regions, and find a different woman to tickle your fancy. But then again, I was never much for the Classicists.

It says much for Young Werther that I found the follow up to the title story more of an engaging read. Reflections on Werther is an interesting psychological analysis that explores the reasons for deep melancholy, and the subsequent journey into depression that some find unavoidable. According to Goethe (or at least my interpretation of what he said), it is what happens when introverted personalities becoming perhaps too deeply in sync with Nature; it's transitoriness reminds us of the 'worthlessness of Earthly matters'. Once we, say, experience a pure emotion like love passionately, the rest of love loses all its meaning, so that an indifference and hopelessness soon sets in.

Goethe even cites English poetry as a contributing factor in the melancholia of the era; that could be quite close to the truth! Undoubtedly Goethe understood – and expressed most eloquently – the power of great poetry:

*'True poetry proclaims itself as a secular gospel in its ability to liberate us from the earthly burdens that oppress us by producing in us serenity and a sense of well-being. It lifts us and our ballasts into higher spheres like a balloon, leaving the confused and labyrinthine part of our earthly meanderings below us in bird's-eye perspective'.*

No wonder we love reading!

Werther's unrequited love is based on Goethe's own life, and what follows is an account of his time in Sessenheim, where we see the origins of his love take place amidst idyllic German countryside.

The collection is rounded off with two fairy tales to showcase Goethe's diversity, and his love of all things pastoral.

Overall, not exactly my cup of tea, but I guess this is one of those important reads (and writers) that all ardent readers need to check off their lists.

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### **Lee says**

I probably shouldn't rate this since I skimmed its second half and didn't spend more than a few minutes looking at the supplemental bits. Felt like things fell off the table about fifty pages in. Started wonderfully, with plenty of wisdom and enthusiasm and vivid description of village life. Love interest develops. Charismatic youth who abhors grumpiness falls for a hottie named Lotte betrothed to a good dude. Cue Werther's dissolution! Activate the chute down which protagonist slides en route to the grave, addled with plentiful apostrophes! I'm not sure I like Goethe -- he's maybe too conscious of his role as acknowledged legislator? Anyway, might look at Elective Affinities one day. Watched FW Murnau's Faust (as rad as it was silent, although it too seemed to lose its plot a bit midday way through), which will have to suffice as preparation for Mann's "Doctor Faustus" in 2014.

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### **John Zelazny says**

Before I was halfway through this book I had already connected with it on a deep level. I didn't know what was going to happen in the end but I knew Goethe was telling my story and the opposite of my story at the same time. Ten years later I published my first novel, The Sorrows of Young Mike, which is a parody of this great tale. I can only be grateful to Goethe and encourage everyone to read The Sorrows of Young Werther. Also, if you like it enough or even if you hate it — you should check out my parody.

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