From the Linden Trees to the Willows: Female Mourners of Goethe's Werther in Eighteenth-Century England

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Shortly before Goethe's Werther puts the pistols to his head, he gives directives to his beloved Charlotte about how and where he wishes to be buried. Werther's carefully staged death reflects the schism of partaking in a Christian worldview, while being about to commit the unchristian deed of suicide, which will forever set him outside the community. Ostracised after his death, will his mortal remains have a place, will his tomb have a monument, will people pause to mourn him? His concern with the site for his burial reveals a striving for the love that happens after death, for grieving and recollection as expressions of love, when love in the world of the living has become an impossibility. Werther's last words oscillate between detailed guidelines and uncontrolled ravings, taking the reader away from the specific corner of the local churchyard to imagined valleys and waysides where biblical figures may pass by and shed a tear or two:

> I have written a note to your father, requesting him to take my body into his protection. In the churchyard there are two linden trees in the far corner near the field; that is where I should like to lie. He can and will do this for his friend. Do you ask it of him too. I do not mean to impose on pious Christians who might not care to lie beside some poor unfortunate. Ah, I wish you would bury me by the wayside, or in a lonely valley, where the priest and Levite might call blessings upon themselves and pass by the stone that marks my grave, and the Samaritan might shed a tear.[1]

Werther does not picture Charlotte as a mourner by his grave; her task lies in securing him the right burial spot and garments. Imagining his dead body in the coffin, in fabrics rendered magical by his lover's touch, while taking the secrets of unsearched pockets with him into a grave watched over by his ghost, Werther transitions from sentimental into Gothic: 'I wish to be buried in these clothes, Lotte; you touched them and they are sacred; I have made the request of your father also. My soul will be keeping watch over my coffin. I do not want anyone going through my pockets'.[2] The two linden trees, imaginary frames of his tomb, carry a complex symbolism of peace, healing and fertility. Dedicated to Venus, goddess of love, the linden is a sacred tree, its heart-shaped leaves a subtle reminder of the organ, the vital muscle of the human body, in which love

[1] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, translated with an Introduction and Notes by Michael Hulse (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989), 132.

[2] Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, 133.

conventionally resides. Its medicinal powers as a sedative and a tranquilliser make this fragrant tree a restorer of past conditions, and, looking ahead to Marcel Proust, of nothing less than the past.

The pathos of Werther's last moments is replaced by the laconic account of his burial and the reverberations of his death. Short, declarative sentences conclude the novel, suggesting tragic closure and a world of emotional turmoil after Werther is 'buried at the place he had chosen for himself. The old gentleman and his sons followed the corpse, but Albert was unable to. There were fears for Lotte's life. Guildsmen bore the body. No priest attended him'.[3] An unchristian midnight burial sends the mortal remains of Goethe's protagonist to rest, but the fate of Lotte's life is left curiously unsettled. Charlotte Buff, the young woman who had caused Goethe's own unhappy romance, went on to become Frau Kestner in Hannover,[4] yet millions of readers were left wondering what happened to her namesake in the novel.

This chapter is concerned with the fictitious Charlotte's English afterlife, in crafts, poetry and the visual arts. A remarkable shift of focus to the figure of Charlotte took place in England, almost immediately after the novel had been translated (from a French translation) in 1779.[5] Female poets and artisans produced a staggering amount of poetry and mourning objects, revolving around the grieving female lover left behind at Werther's death. But what does it signify to create a cult of mourning which takes a fictitious character as its focusing point? What kind of love is expressed in mourning trinkets and samplers grieving the loss of a suicide protagonist in a German novel? Where, in the 1780s, English male readers mainly saw the tempestuous and self-destructive nature of Werther's love within Jacobite and revolutionary contexts, a force of uncontrollable emotions threatening to upset conventional courtship rituals and the institution of marriage,[6] we detect different reading practices and ways of engaging with the novel when we turn to Goethe's female readers. The interest in the mourning

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3 Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, 134.

4 See the exhibition catalogue *Goethes Lotte: Ein Frauenleben um 1800* (Hannover: Historisches Museum, 2003). See also Thomas Mann's *Lotte in Weimar* (1939) (English: *The Beloved Returns* (1940)) for a fictitious recreation of Charlotte Buff's re-encounter with Goethe later in life.

5 *The Sorrows of Werter: A German Story*, 2 vols, anon. trans. (London: J. Dodsley, 1779). For a discussion of the translator's identity, see Tom Baynes, 'The Authorship of the First English Translation of Goethe', *Publications of the English Goethe Society*, 90:2 (2021), 91–108.

6 Stuart Pratt Atkins, *The Testament of Werther in Poetry and Drama* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1949) is still the pioneering work in the uncovering of the vast Werther literature in France, England, and Germany. Most subsequent critical discussions rest on his extensive bibliography. See also Robyn L. Schiffman, 'A Concert of Werthers', *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 43:2 (Winter 2010), 207–22.

Charlotte would seem to be peculiarly English without counterparts in any of the other European cultures which adopted the 'Werther fever'. Syndy McMillen Conger has uncovered part of the female literary response to Goethe's book, pointing out how

> Well over a dozen women poets, songwriters, and novelists pondered the fates of Charlotte and Werther in print: in addition to Austen, Anne Bannerman, Lady Sophia Burrell, Mrs Sarah Farrell, Anne Francis, Anne Harrison, Barbara Hoole, Mrs Horrel, Mrs Hughes, Maria Montolieu, Amelia Pickering, Mary Robinson, Olivia Serres, Anna Seward, Charlotte Smith, Elizabeth Tomlins, and Lady Eglantine Wallace.[7]

This practice of foregrounding Goethe's female protagonist gives voice to Charlotte in sonnets, heroic epistles, novelistic discourse, in close dialogue with representations of her as Werther's chief mourner in prints, Staffordshire figurines, embroideries, samplers and lockets. What does this commodification of grief tell us about love beyond death, the public expression of a private love that, because of its adulterous nature, was inexpressible when the beloved was alive? Charlotte is included in an already existing popular culture of mourning practices rooted in funeral rituals and the public performance of private grief as an easily recognisable figure, a pattern of constancy and enduring love in a public display of emotions. Essentially the widow of an extramarital affair, she performs love as grief in an Elysian landscape of weeping willows framing a classical urn, taking us far away from the all-male Gothic midnight burial which concludes Goethe's novel. This new English practice of shifting attention to Charlotte's love for the dead Werther is a rehabilitation of Goethe's controversial protagonist and his problematic love. Charlotte mourns Werther not as a conventional member of the Foucaultian heterotopia of the cemetery;[8] his solitary urn does not form part of a larger community of the dead but is the focusing point in a mourning landscape which revolves around the commemoration of a unique individual. The absence that Roland Barthes defines as such an important component of the lover's discourse has taken a new turn:

> Amorous absence functions in a single direction, expressed by the one who stays, never by the one who leaves: an always present *I* is constituted only by confrontation with an always absent *you*. To speak this absence is from the start to propose that the subject's place and the other's place cannot permute; it is to say: 'I am loved less than I love'.[9]

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7 Syndy McMillen Conger, 'The Sorrows of Young Charlotte: Werther's English Sisters', *Goethe Yearbook*, 3 (1986), 21–56, 21.

8 Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias' (1967), *Architecture/Mouvement/Continuité* (October 1984), 1–9.

9 Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Penguin, 1990), 13.

Werther's permanent absence has transformed Charlotte into the main lover, absorbed by a perpetual longing that can only, perhaps, be satisfied in death. Andrew Marvell's seventeenth-century approach to the subject of love and death –'The grave's a fine and private place / But none, I think, do there embrace' – may not have suited the Romantics with their cult of the *Liebestod*.[10] I am interested in the ways in which English eighteenth-century female poets tap into an existing elegiac literary mode established in the 1740s and '50s by the 'Graveyard School of Poetry', headed by Robert Blair, Edward Young and Thomas Gray, how they transform male into female grief, subduing the Gothic elements of the grave while exploring emotions in a sunny English garden full of classical allusions. The fundamental question raised by Goethe – can Charlotte survive Werther's death? – divides English readers, as does the debate about who to blame for Werther's tragic ending (his own hyper-sensitivity and lack of ethical standards? or, was Charlotte, in fact, coquettishly leading him on against her better judgement?). Is Charlotte victim or agent, a woman whose identity and fall are defined by Werther's or is she a woman with a free will of her own? Does the commodification of grief, which Werther's immediate English afterlife entails, serve to display or control violent emotions? Thinking about the female practices of reading, writing, drawing, dressing, embroidering, decorating interior spaces and engaging with the world outside the private sphere, what can we say about the ways in which literary and visual responses to Goethe's novel interact? As we shall see, objects depicting the mourning Charlotte become love tokens between real-life romantic lovers, as Goethe's fictitious heroine transcends the world of literature and becomes a go-between, mediating between the worlds of the living and the dead. Late eighteenth-century print culture connects translations with new poems, and engravings and illustrations become patterns for embroideries. In my attempt to map the English cult of the mourning Charlotte, spanning a period of less than two decades (ca. 1780–95), I hope to uncover some of the intersecting links between an emerging generation of women writers, popular culture and the ways in which they added a peculiarly national and elegiac twist to the afterlife of one of the great eighteenth-century European novels.

The poet Charlotte Smith (1749–1806) felt so attracted to Goethe's romance that she composed no fewer than three Werther sonnets, later expanded to five, included in her first volume *Elegiac Sonnets, and other Essays by Charlotte Smith of Bignor Park, Sussex*. The slim quarto appeared in June 1784 from James Dodsley,[11]

[10] Andrew Marvell, 'To his Coy Mistress', ll. 31–32.

[11] See the *ODNB* entry by Sarah M. Zimmerman for 'Charlotte Smith': <https://www-oxforddnb-com.ep.fjernadgang.kb.dk/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-25790?rskey=p8aXMX&result=4>, accessed on 20 November 2023.

who five years previously had published the first English translation of *The Sorrows of Young Werter*. James had taken over his brother Robert's publishing house at 'Tully's Head', a house that through the 1740s, '50s, '60s and '70s had become the dominating London publisher of *belles-lettres* and translations, printing the writings of Alexander Pope, Samuel Johnson, Edmund Burke and leading works in the 'Graveyard School', such as Thomas Gray's 'An Elegy Wrote in a Country Churchyard' (1751) and Edward Young's *The Complaint, or Night Thoughts on Life, Death, and Immortality* (1743).[12] By pitching her first volume with Dodsley, Smith was self-consciously placing herself with an elitist publisher who already had a leaning towards the elegiac. She had her own sorrows: twelve pregnancies and the early loss of several of those children, together with a spendthrift husband who had squandered the family fortune and ended up in debtors' prison. Her private condition as a gentlewoman was, in other words, very different from the plotline in Goethe's novel, but sorrow and melancholy attracted her to the German characters and to the public staging of grief. Despite sharing the name of Goethe's female protagonist, Smith let all five Werther sonnets be spoken in the male lover's voice, at times a histrionic Petrarchan lunatic adrift towards the path of death (Smith was one of the important translators of Petrarch at the time), at other times calmly composed, in control of both his own desire to die and of the cult of mourning following his death. She engaged with the final chapter in Goethe's novel by placing Werther in a landscape setting, pointing deictically at his preferred burial spot, while meditating on his lack of a monument and his preferred sequence of solitary mourners:

SONNET XXIV

MAKE there my tomb; beneath the lime trees' shade,
Where grass and flow'rs, in wild luxuriance wave;
Let no memorial mark where I am laid,
Or point to common eyes the lover's grave!
But oft at twilight morn, or closing day,
The faithful friend, with fault'ring step shall glide,
Tributes of fond regret by stealth to pay,
And sigh o'er the unhappy suicide!
And sometimes, when the Sun with parting rays
Gilds the long grass that hides my silent bed,

[12] See James E. Tierney's entries for 'Robert Dodsley' in the ODNB: <https://www-oxforddnb-com.ep.fjernadgang.kb.dk/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-7755#odnb-9780198614128-e-7755> and 'James Dodsley': <https://www-oxforddnb-com.ep.fjernadgang.kb.dk/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-7754?rskey=2a85f7&result=2>, both accessed on 20 November 2023.

> The tear shall tremble in my CHARLOTTE's eyes,
> Dear, precious drops!–they shall embalm the dead!
> Yes!–CHARLOTTE o'er the mournful spot shall weep,
> Where her poor WERTER–and his sorrows sleep.[13]

Smith's strange ventriloquism – she is Charlotte but speaks as Werther about Goethe's Charlotte – thus addressing self as other,[14] toys with male and female voices, with the feminine and sentimental within Werther, drawing attention to the new man of sensibility. Who is Werther addressing here? Charlotte, yet picturing her as a figure seen from a distance, whether from the grave or by a stranger passing by? Or some unknown other? The spot of his grave, a place and a non-place at the same time, not marked by any monument, grows romantic and wild, watered by Charlotte's tears which serve as balm to Werther's wounds and contribute to the natural cycle of life. The contrast between the deictic 'there' and the diffusely overgrown spot, which only those in the know can locate, draws our attention to the controversial issue of how and where to bury a suicide. In England, until the 1823 Burial of Suicide Act, interment in consecrated ground would have been forbidden by law, and similar rules applied on the continent. Michael Hulse notes that Karl Wilhelm Jerusalem (1747–72), the young German lawyer whose suicide spurred by unrequited love inspired Goethe's novel, was buried in the far corner of the cemetery in Wetzlar.[15] When Jerusalem's grave became a site of pilgrimage in the 1770s and 1780s as a result of the 'Werther fever', the local authorities removed all signs of where he had been put to rest, and only in 1947, in the bicentenary of Jerusalem's birth, did the municipality erect a memorial stone in the cemetery without any clear indication of where his earthly remains were buried.

Emma Crewe's drawing, multiplied through engravings to become one of the most frequently repeated renditions of *Charlotte at the Tomb of Werter* (Figure 7.1), transferred the suicide's grave to a shady spot under the weeping willows, a

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[13] *Elegiac Sonnets by Charlotte Smith*, Sixth Edition, with Additional Sonnets and Other Poems (Dublin: Bernard Dornin, 1790), 24.

[14] See Anne Myers, 'Charlotte Smith's Androgynous Sonnets', *European Romantic Review*, 13:4 (2002), 379–82.

[15] 'After Jerusalem's death it was uncertain whether he would find a resting place in the churchyard, since the Rev. Pilger, a churlish priest of the kind Laertes complained of, opposed the idea. The Count von Spauer, a friend of the deceased, supported the efforts of Heinrich Buff, and Jerusalem was buried in a remote corner of the churchyard; but the Rev. Pilger, according to Friedrich Christian Laukhard, then a student in Giessen, could not forebear from preaching repeated sermons on the evil of suicide'. Hulse in *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, 144.

Figure 7.1. John Raphael Smith, after Emma Crewe, *Charlotte at the Tomb of Werter* (1783), stipple engraving, 40.2 x 35.5 cm, British Museum London.

classical urn inscribed with the lover's name, transforming the tomb to a site of memory, a sculptural receptacle of the past.

Tomb or cenotaph? Do we imagine Werther's ashes within the urn, or is it merely an empty memorial without relics? This encounter between stone and flesh suggests that the sculptural monument will outlive the female mourner in white: frail, petite and delicate, more girl than woman, Charlotte clutches an open book in her hands. Has she been reading *Werther*, we wonder? Is Crewe constructing a meta discourse in which Charlotte, one step removed from the epistolary novel in which she appears as a character, meditates on a tragic tale of love? Or is she holding a conduct book, instructing how appropriately to mourn her dead lover? Mourning is a ritualised display of love, allowing for a highly codified language of love reminiscent of the codified language of courtship. The rhetoric of love, in life, in death, speaks according to rules established in social practice in order to regulate uncontrolled emotion. The division of Petrarch's *Canzoniere* into 'In Vita' and 'In Morte' (before and after Laura's death) is suggestive of the ways in

which the two kinds of love hold almost equal weight in one of the greatest collections of love poetry in Western literature. Crewe's image becomes a pattern in more than one sense: a pattern of female mourning in dialogue with mourning samplers and rings (Figures 7.2 and 7.3) and a pattern for further dissemination of Goethe's love story. Mourning lockets (Figure 7.4) and decorative fancywork embroideries (Figure 7.5) testify to the spreading of the motif and its integration in many different kinds of female social practices.

Figure 7.2. Embroidered picture, depicting a mourning female figure leaning on a tomb surmounted by an urn under the shade of a weeping willow. The tomb bears the inscription: Sacred to the memory of Dr Robt Rogerson. obt. 1 April 1806, AE 49 y's. Lucy Rogerson. obt. 4 March 1807, AE 39. Danl. H. Rogerson. obt., 25 March 1808, AE 14. Lucy H. Rogerson. obt. 1803, AE 11 months. Embroidered in tan silk on silk foundation with toned watercolour washes. (ca 1810), 41 x 39.5 cm, Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum, Gift of Anonymous Donor from the Fraser/Martin Collection, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mourning_Sampler_(England),_ca._1810_(CH_18482639).jpg>.

Figure 7.3. Mourning ring, depicting a woman by an urn and a weeping willow, 1779, Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin's work on women and the material culture of death reminds us of women's important status as memory keepers for families, local communities, and the nation through a sharing of objects conveying sentiments about the dead.[16] Stressing the permanence of death and the impermanence of life, their volume examines the power of objects as mediators between the living and the dead. Pointing out how subjects become objects in death, they make us aware of the ways in which objects challenge the distinction between what is present and what is absent, what is public and what is private. They employ anthropologist Mary Douglas and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva's idea of the abject – that which was once a subject and is now an object – exploring 'in their discussions of the subject/object divide the ways in which cultural practices are designed to deal with the fluidity and instability

[16] Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin, eds, *Women and the Material Culture of Death* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).

Figure 7.4. Mourning locket, engraved gilded copper alloy locket with hair, ivory painted in watercolour with Charlotte at the tomb of Werther after an etching by J. R. Smith inscribed 'May Saints Embrace Thee with a Love Like Mine' (quotation from Alexander Pope 'Eloisa to Abelard') (1717), height: 7.8 cm, width: 5.4 cm, depth: 1.2 cm. Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

of these boundaries'.[17] Goethe's Charlotte has already undergone several processes of objectification: from the real Charlotte Buff, with whom the author fell unhappily in love, to the fictitious Charlotte in his novel. Barthes employs Lotte's objectification in Goethe's novel to address one of the most fundamental aspects of the lover's discourse:

> ***To Love Love***
>
> *annulation/annulment*
>
> Exposition of language during which the subject manages to annul the loved object under the volume of love itself: by a specifically amorous perversion, it is love the subject loves, not the object.

[17] Goggin and Tobin, *Women and the Material Culture of Death*, 2.

Figure 7.5. Stumpwork embroidery of Charlotte at the Tomb of Werter, paper, glass, wood, felt, silk, diameter 39 cm, On sale at Worth Point.com, <https://www.worthpoint.com/worthopedia/victorian-embroidery-mourning-art-1825889596>.

> 1. Charlotte is quite insipid; she is the paltry character of the powerful, tormented, flamboyant drama staged by the subject Werther; by a kindly decision of this subject, a colorless object is placed in the center of the stage and there adored, idolized, *taken to task*, covered with discourse, with prayers (and perhaps, surreptitiously, with invectives); as if she were a huge motionless hen huddled amid her feathers, around which circles a slightly mad cock.[18]

In the 'Lotte cult', Goethe's female protagonist becomes both subject and object, the surviving lover 'half in love with easeful death', performing her emotions as a mourning figure around the urn under the willow tree, if not herself transformed into a dead figure, as in several of the poems about her. Symbol of death, grief and forsaken love, the willow has far more sinister connotations than the linden tree; Desdemona's 'Willow Song' in *Othello* (IV,

[18] Barthes, *Lover's Discourse*, 31.

iii, 24–58), with its refrain of 'Sing willow, willow, willow, willow', transforms male into female mourning. The mournful folk ballad, first registered in a book of lute music of 1583, has a melancholy male lover mourn the loss of an unfaithful woman, yet nevertheless insisting in the final lines to be remembered: 'take this for my farewell and latest adieu … / Write this on my tomb, that in love I was true'. By letting Desdemona sing the song, Shakespeare transforms the forsaken lover into a female subject, melancholy with the loss of her husband's love, in dark premonition of her own imminent death. The willow scene was significantly reduced in most eighteenth- and nineteenth-century performances of Shakespeare's play,[19] while the willow tree itself, introduced to England from China in the eighteenth century, was becoming increasingly popular; its ubiquity as a prop in mourning scenes invested it with sadness and grieving which gradually conflated with the refrain of Desdemona's song. Exactly what kind of tree the sixteenth-century text referred to (apart from the sycamore, i.e. 'sick-amour' tree, in the first line), I shall leave it to the early modernists to discuss.

Charlotte's iconic appearance on a wide series of artefacts as chief mourner objectifies her even further. The mourning objects depicting Charlotte at Werther's tomb partake in a widespread culture of mourning in which such artefacts, as Arianne Fennetaux points out, are not just 'passive registers of cultural changes but actually shape and mediate them'.[20] Fennetaux examines how in the course of the eighteenth century mourning jewellery becomes not just a sign of wealth but even more a sign of sentiment, publicly displayed on the body in the form of lockets, rings and brooches, concluding that the seventeenth-century visual language of mourning (skulls, bones, skeletons) becomes gendered and feminised in the early romantic period, as it moves away from death: 'the *memento mori* was gradually replaced by what could be called a *memento moveri*'.[21] In the light of this, it is, perhaps, hardly surprising that the protagonists of one of the most sentimental novels should find their way into the material culture of mourning in England. The depictions of Charlotte comply with the images of the female mourner found in such pattern books as Garnet Terry's *Book of New and Allegorical Devices for Artists in General* (1795) which offered standard

[19] See Chantal Schütz, 'Desdemona's changing voices: from the "Willow Song" to the "Canzona del Salice"', *Sillages critiques*, 16 (2013), 'Métamorphoses de la voix en scène', <https://doi.org/10.4000/sillagescritiques.2847>, accessed on 11 December 2023.

[20] Arianne Fennetaux, 'Fashioning Death/Gendering Sentiment: Mourning Jewelry in Britain in the Eighteenth Century' in Goggin and Tobin, 27–50, 27.

[21] Fennetaux, 'Fashioning Death/Gendering Sentiment', 28.

designs for jewellery.[22] 'Clasped hands, clenched bosoms, drooping heads, or demonstrative weeping, in oversized handkerchiefs: the plates run the whole gamut of the somatic vocabulary of grief with mourners under willow trees sitting by or standing next to tombs or embracing urns'.[23] By far the largest number of the mourning figures in the pattern books were women, hardly surprising, given that in Christian iconography most scenes depicting the death of Christ involve the grieving Marys, the Holy Virgin and Mary Magdalene, sometimes accompanied by Martha. The female mourners often function as intercessory figures, praying for the souls and pleading for the redemption of the dead; early romantic mourning jewellery thus partly functions as a 'secular transposition of former Catholic rituals of intercession'.[24] Excessively governed by his emotions, Goethe's Werther, controversial 'self-slayer' as he was, needed an intercessor more than most others, and the function of Charlotte as that intercessor makes good sense within the predominantly Christian framework of late eighteenth-century England.

The mourning locket with a braid of hair (Figure 7.4) expresses that sense of intercession: 'May saints embrace thee with a love like mine', we read on the plinth, perhaps recognising the quotation as one from Alexander Pope's popular verse epistle 'Eloisa to Abelard' (1717), reprinted repeatedly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, often in editions of the correspondence between the two medieval, and likewise star-crossed, lovers. Accompanied by a dog, the very symbol of fidelity, the aristocratic Lotte points towards the inscription, perhaps with the purpose of making us believe that the words are hers? The pastoral figure of the shepherd in the background may at first confuse the idea of eternal love for the deceased. Inevitably one wonders about the history of this object, with its carefully braided frame of brown hair. The locket acts as a secular reliquary, containing body parts of a real human being (presumably, judging from the length of the hair, a female), and one begins to question who is mourning whom, who is speaking the words of Pope's Eloisa? Is the locket actually mourning a woman rather than a man? is the shepherd in the background grieving over his wife (perhaps a Charlotte?) by having her depicted as the eternally faithful female lover while retaining a small sample of her physical body? The agency of such mourning objects, merging the real

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[22] A digital copy can be found on <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/7d9c7bb0-9a87-0132-8af8-58d385a7bbd0>, accessed on 24 November 2023.

[23] Fennetaux, 'Fashioning Death/Gendering Sentiment', 36.

[24] Fennetaux, 'Fashioning Death/Gendering Sentiment', 36.

with the fictitious, confounds and confuses discourses and genders; perhaps this locket was actually intended to be worn by a male rather than a female lover? Fennetaux draws our attention to the fact that eighteenth-century man could also parade mourning jewellery in public:

> The ambiguous status of manly tears is encapsulated by the paradoxical status of the pendants and brooches, which in practice were worn by men as well as women but whose iconography represented female rather than male figures of mourning. Big boys were not supposed to cry anymore, but the female mourner they wore on a locket could. Offering a socially condoned and socially contained expression of grief with their formulaic weeping women, the brooch or the locket could be worn by a man without undermining his masculinity.[25]

Werther had been awfully sentimental about his own death, but he was far from alone in this. Fennetaux quotes the valedictory letter (1818) of James T. Power to his sweetheart Julia Woodforde 'as he was about to set off for Sierra Leona, where, true to his misgivings, he would die':

> I purchased yesterday a Diamond Mourning ring. I will place a brade [sic] of your hair and mine in it. On the inside I will inscribe 'James T. Power, died …' leaving a vacancy for the date if this should be my fate shortly you will receive an account of the time and get it filled up and I have no doubt you will regard the ring with affection and wear it on my account. You will consider this a romantic proceeding, anticipating what may not happen, very true, but as it may happen will it not be a pleasure in my last moments to think you possess such a memento besides you ask for a lock of my hair, your desire will be thus gratified. Please send me a small lock of yours to place it in as soon as possible.[26]

There is something morbid and macabre about Power's anticipation of his own death and his imposition of mourning upon his betrothed in the form of an object with an empty space left for the date of his expiration. Sinister prophecies fulfilled always carry something of the uncanny about them, as does the ring's double function as love token and mourning memento: love in this life is familiar, but the love that awaits after death is a ghostly, yet unknown, echo. The ring unites the betrothed in love and death, with their earthly remains intertwined in a kind of microcosmic *Liebestod.* The language of courtship toys with anticipated death as romance: 'You will consider this a romantic proceeding, anticipating what may not happen'; the imagined death, united in the ring, takes on almost erotic dimensions, while also casting a long shadow of enduring love on the woman left behind. We are reminded of the magic powers of the braids of hair in such

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[25] Fennetaux, 'Fashioning Death/Gendering Sentiment', 46.
[26] Fennetaux, 'Fashioning Death/Gendering Sentiment', 32.

poems by John Donne as 'The Funerall' and 'The Relique' where they preserve the spiritual and physical intimacy of the two lovers:

> Whoever comes to shroud me, do not harme
> Nor question much
> The subtile wreath of hair, which crowns my arme;
> The mystery, the signe you must not touch,
> For 'tis my outward Soule,
> Viceroy to that, which then to heaven being gone,
> Will leave this to controule,
> And keepe these limbes, her Provinces, from dissolution.
>
> ('The Funerall', ll. 1–8)

Julia Woodforde's reply to James Powers does not form part of Fennetaux's discussion, and we can only guess. Did she send him the desired lock of hair, and were the two lovers, at least, united in the ring? And did she turn to mourning embroidery after the announcement of his death, with the implied duty to mourn him imposed by his letter? If so, she would have joined the thousands of other women, stitching emotions into silken thread and fabric, confining their grief into material form which could decorate the walls of the domestic interior.

The engraving after Emma Crewe's drawing served as pattern for fancywork stitching, the sophisticated and expensive embroidery with silk thread on delicate fabric which upper-class women practiced as the culmination of their long education in how to sew and embroider.[27] Such techniques were employed for the mourning sampler (Figure 7.2), a piece of cultural memory, outliving its maker, to be hung on the walls of bedrooms and parlours, memorialising both those who had passed and the woman who had done the stitching, which she would frequently sign. In terms of iconography, Crewe's image imitates the standard mourning sampler in which the conventional cherubs from the mid-eighteenth century were replaced with the willow trees overhanging a pedestalled urn venerated by a mourning female figure.[28] The embroidered Charlottes (Figure 7.5), of which, judging from auctioneers' catalogues, several exist, are in mixed media: felt, silk thread, water colour on paper, even including the face and arms from Crewe's drawing, and neatly framed. With a diameter of some 30 cm, they are slightly larger than the human face and were likely used as decorations on pole screens, those eighteenth-century adjustable fire screens which would shield both men and women, all wearing makeup, from reddened faces or running makeup

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[27] See Maureen Daly Goggin, 'Stitching (in) Death: Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century American and English Mourning Samplers', in Goggin and Tobin, 63–89.

[28] Goggin, 'Stitching (in) Death', 76.

when sitting in front of the fire. They would, in other words, have had an audience which consisted of both sexes. As late as 1855, Mrs Merrifeld would recollect how the motif was one of the most popular ones for embroidery when she was a girl:

> The two favourite subjects, and in fact the only two that I remember, were 'The Sacrifice of Abraham' and 'Charlotte Weeping at the Tomb of Werther'. In these, gaudy and crude colours attracted the eye without satisfying the taste, and the fine pink and white complexions were scarcely in harmony with the subjects. As for the last-mentioned composition the common-place sentimentality of the design was on a par with the morality of the subject, the introduction of which into a lady's school must ever be a matter of surprise. And who was Charlotte? who was Werther? were questions which the schoolgirls might have asked to this day, had not one of the pupils, with a full appreciation of the sweetness of stolen joys, smuggled into the school a copy of the novel in which the history of the lovers is related. Considering the tendency of the book, its extreme popularity in this country is quite astonishing.[29]

This is the mid-Victorian woman looking back at the frivolity of an earlier period; even though the motif of the embroideries is an unerotic celebration of love beyond death, the suicide and adulterous romance still summoned moral condemnation some eighty years after the publication of Goethe's novel. Angelica Kauffmann's *Fame at the Tomb of Shakespeare* (1782), likewise engraved and embroidered (Figure 7.6) to adorn domestic spaces, contextualises the embroideries after Crewe's image: the classical tomb, the Elysian landscape, the female, here allegorical, mourner (this may make us question the extent to which Charlotte was already being allegorised), give a new twist to the idea of mourning 'the one and only'. Was the canonical status given to Charlotte and Werther (and implicitly to Goethe) already in subtle dialogue with the attention granted the national bard?

The decorative qualities of the mourning Charlotte within the domestic interior take sculptural form in this Staffordshire figurine (Figure 7.7), existing in a range of different glazes. The tender embrace of the urn is both pornographic and necrophiliac; the proximity of the phallic plinth to the lower part of Charlotte's body might well have seemed indecent to a Victorian spectator. Yet the Victorians could do even more erotically charged works of art: William Holman Hunt's *Isabella and the Pot of Basil* (Figure 7.8) took its motif from John Keats poem based on a tale from Boccaccio. The woman depicted in a close embrace with the pot hiding the head of her dead lover Lorenzo was modelled on Hunt's recently deceased wife Fanny: her posture imitates that of the Staffordshire Charlotte, and the intense intertwining of erotic love, longing, and mourning over a dead spouse may perhaps suggest to us that the eighteenth-century cult of the female mourner was long-lived. It possibly

[29] Mrs Merrifeld, 'On Design as applied to Ladies' Work', *Art Journal*, 1:2 (February 1855), 37–41, 38.

Figure 7.6. *Fame at the Tomb of Shakespeare,* embroidered picture from a painting by Angelica Kauffmann, after a print by Francesco Bartolozzi, 1782–1800, coloured silk on white satin ground worked in feather stitch, height: 44.5 cm, width: 39.5 cm, Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

even gained new relevance in a culture where the Queen from 1861 and until her death 40 years later would perform most of her public duties as the mourning widow.

Late eighteenth-century London staged the death of Werther in a rather spectacular context. At 189, Fleet Street, Mrs Salmon's Royal Wax-Works had among its display of some 200 life-sized figures 'A fine Representation of the Death of *Werter*, attended by *Charlotte* and her Family', we learn from an advertisement of the contents of the four rooms in the museum.[30] On show

[30] 'At Mrs Salmon's Royal Wax-Works', <https://go-gale-com.ep.fjernadgang.kb.dk/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Monographs&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&retrievalId=96c9f257-fc27-45f8-b90f-5ed1b7ddc5dc&hitCount=1&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&currentPosition=1&docId=GALE%7CCW0102381051&docType=Monograph&sort=Pub+Date+Forward+Chron&contentSegment=ZCET&prodId=ECCO&pageNum=1&contentSet=GALE%7CCW0102381051&searchId=-R1&userGroupName=dkb&inPS=true>, accessed on 27 November 2023.

Figure 7.7. Figure of Charlotte weeping for Werther, lead-glazed earthenware, made in Staffordshire, ca. 1780–1800, height: 22.9 cm, Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

alongside 'The chaste Nuns of Collingham, who slit their Noses and upper Lips to preserve their Virgin Vow, when the *Danes* invaded this Land' and '*Marc Anthony* and *Cleopatra*, with their two Twin Children weeping over them, and their proper Attendants', Werther's last moments were here blessed by the company of Charlotte and her siblings. Real hair and teeth, glass eyes, theatrical poses, and strategic lighting would have given the visitors a spine-chilling experience as the translucent wax imitating human skin made the figures more than usually life-like.[31] This interaction between the artificial and the animate, dead matter and life-likeness, gave Goethe's figures a new presence. The very same institution which advertised its creation of '*Exact Likenesses taken from*

[31] For a good discussion of Mrs Salmon's Wax-Works in the late eighteenth century, see Ianna Recco, 'In the Flesh at the Heart of Empire: Life-Likeness in Wax Representations of the 1762 Cherokee Delegation in London', *British Art Studies*, Issue 21, <https://dx.doi.org/10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-21/irecco>, accessed on 27 November 2023.

Figure 7.8. William Holman Hunt, *Isabella and the Pot of Basil* (1867), oil on canvas, 187 x 116 cm, Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:William_Holman_Hunt_-_Isabella_and_the_Pot_of_Basil.jpg>.

Dead Faces on reasonable Terms' brought Goethe's fictitious characters to life, inventing a scene which the German author deliberately avoided. Sadly, the group has not survived, but it is hard not to imagine it being full of pathos, with the children as innocent spectators, features which linked them to the accompanying group of Marc Anthony and Cleopatra. At a time when there was a craze for the automaton, Charlotte at the Wax-Works would have brought English female visitors one step closer to being Charlotte.

In Naples, Emma Hamilton was developing her famous attitudes, embodying figures from ancient vases and mythology. Embodying Charlotte might have been a popular pastime among Emma's English sisters, as suggested in Charlotte Smith's novel *Emmeline* (1788). The fictitious Mrs James Croft arrives at a party accompanied by her two eldest daughters, 'one, drest in the character of Charlotte in the Sorrows of Werter; and the other, as Emma, the nut brown

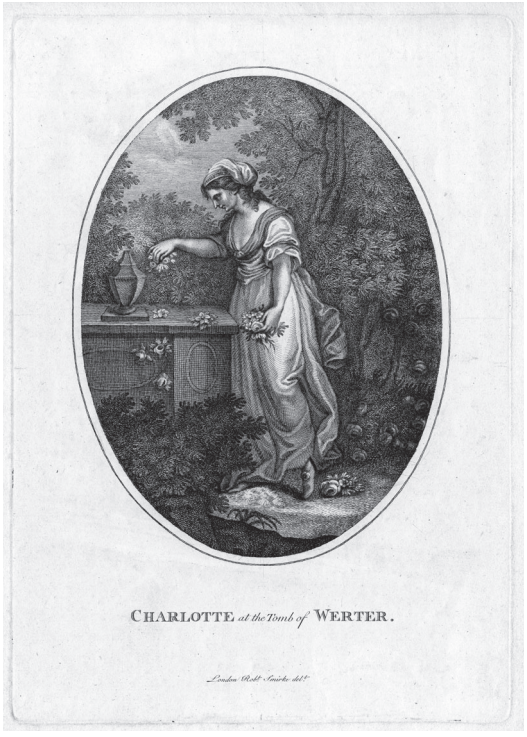

Figure 7.9. Etching after Robert Smirke, *Charlotte at the Tomb of Werter* (1780s), 29.5 x 20.8 cm, British Museum, London.

maid. Their air and manner were adapted, as they believed, to the figures of those characters as they appeared in the print shops; and their excessive affectation, together with the gaudy appearance of their mama, nearly conquered the gravity of Emmeline and of many others of the company'.[32] Within four years, Smith had come a long way from her Werther sonnets, reflecting the spread of the 'Lotte fever' in the meantime. A young girl impersonating Charlotte with 'excessive affectation' must suggest something about the rise of her popularity, while the reference to the ubiquity of representations of her in the print shops must indicate something about the proliferation of her image. Smith may well have had in mind the two companion pieces by Robert Smirke (Figures 7.9 and 7.10). A very intense-looking Charlotte, with a Phrygian cap, is strewing roses on

[32] Charlotte Smith, *Emmeline: The Orphan of the Castle*, ed. and intro. Anne Henry Ehrenpreis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 506–7. The 'nut brown maid' is a reference to Prior's ballad 'Henry and Emma' (1709).

Figure 7.10. Etching after Robert Smirke, *The Nut Brown Maid* (1780s), 29.8 x 19.4 cm, British Museum, London.

a monument, mirroring Kauffmann's *Fame at the Tomb of Shakespeare*. The rose as the flower of love is hardly surprising, but the Phrygian cap is. Charlotte's loose hair and garments in a wild romantic landscape, combined with her determined flower strewing, may suggest a woman who has broken free of conventions and is now following her own will.

Smirke was stressing Charlotte's passion; indeed, the boundary between passion and madness is a delicate one. In several of the women's poems about Charlotte, she does not survive Werther's death. Anne Francis (1738–1800) had in 1787 published her 'Poetical Epistle from Charlotte to Werther', in which the heroine's sad affection for her unfortunate lover was expressed. Three years later she returned to the couple in a poem where the ghost of Charlotte frequents Werther's grave. Elegiac, atmospheric, haunting in its dactylic rhythm, the poem recalls the visual representations just discussed. The anonymous midnight observer evokes a willow-ridden landscape in which sounds from above and below the grave make the dead communicate with each other in a world

of cosmic grieving where the sequence of rhyming words 'below, grove, woe, love' sum up the major ideas:

> By the willow that waves o'er the tomb,
> O, think not 'twas Charlotte, you spied;
> When Werter had seal'd his sad doom,
> She heard, – she despair'd – and she died!
> How deep, and how awful the sound –
> Of the bell, – as it broke on the gale!
> From the steep-rock I heard it rebound,
> And it plaintively poured through the vale.
> …
> Oft-times, at the noon of the night,
> Pale Charlotte appears on the green,
> When the moon strikes askaunt on the sight,
> And fancy emblazons the scene;
> Her cheeks all bereft of their bloom!
> Her eye-balls no lustre retain!
> She steals, a wan ghost, from the tomb,
> And glides to the verge of the plain
>
> Where Werter's cold relics repose;
> ('Neath the willow impregnate with dew,
> Where the green-grass luxuriantly grows
> Round the tomb – half conceal'd from the view),
> I've seen the light phantom recline,
> The marble sustain'd her white breast;
> In sounds that were almost divine,
> I've heard her fond passion express:
>
> 'Dear shade! to thy Charlotte attend,
> Tho' fate have deprived her of breath,
> She hangs o'er the urn of her friend,
> And love's in the mansion of death:'
> Soft murmurs ensued from below –
> Faint echoes were heard thro' the grove,
> The accents were mingled with woe –
> But woe – that was sweeten'd with love.[33]

The green and the white, signs of life and of ghostliness, flow through the poem: the willow and the grass, the moonlight, the marble and the breast divide the worlds of the living and the dead. Francis's poem may not be great literature, but it taps

[33] Anne Francis, 'The Ghost of Charlotte at the Tomb of Werter' in *Miscellaneous Poems by Anne Francis* (London: T. Becket & R. Baldwin, 1790), 213–15.

into the 1790s taste for the Gothic, and the restless lovers prepare us for other great love stories to follow in the nineteenth century like that of Cathy and Heathcliff in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847). In death, the ghostly Charlotte has the agency to chase her lover which she never had when alive, and her flitting spirit cannot be contained by family duties or decorum. Her face may be pale, and the relics of Werther and the marble monument which covers them may be cold, but warm passion transcends cold materiality and there is hope for love, even in death. Sophia Burrell's (1753–1802) 'Charlotte's Lamentation' (1793) was less hopeful; seated on Werther's grave, she evokes both inner and outer turmoil in her monologue, and cosmic chaos becomes comic chaos when she expires on his tombstone:

> Loud thunder burst over her head,
> The tempest dishevel'd her hair;
> She clung to the moss-cover'd stone,
> Till the lightening affected her frame –
> To Werter she gave her last groan,
> And dy'd, in pronouncing his name.[34]

Theatrical thunder and lightning, followed by a groan, death and curtain – Lady Burrell's verse is neither subtle nor moving, but at least she managed to kill off Charlotte once and for all. Interestingly, the poet who did have a background on the stage, Mary Robinson (1756/1758–1800) – actress, wife, mother, mistress to the Prince Regent, exiled wanderer across the European continent in the mid-1780s – was the most sensitive of the three and the least dramatic, writing a poem on site imbued with sentiment.[35] Her 'Elegy to the Memory of Werter, written in Germany, in the year 1786' is composed by the literary tourist/reader and lover, merging place, time and moment of composition in a way that the romantic poets would develop further. With its long vowels and diphthongs, its atmospheric landscape descriptions, the poem is a celebration of Werther rather than of Charlotte. The lonely wanderer is a pilgrim at the shrine of love, and Robinson merges the poet with the sequence of visitors to Werther's grave: the lovelorn girl, the male pilgrim and Charlotte. Touched by love, they have all come to weep together and bring forgiveness of sins to the lonely Werther in his grave. His solitude is mirrored by the sequence of solitary visitors to his

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[34] Sophia Burrell, *Poems* 2 vols (London: printed by J. Cooper, Bow Street, Covent Garden, 1793), 2:134.

[35] See Martin J. Levy's entry for 'Mary Robinson' in the *ODNB*: <https://www-oxforddnb-com.ep.fjernadgang.kb.dk/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-23857?rskey=CA6Af7&result=4>, accessed on 28 November 2023.

spot between the lime trees; although together they form a tearful community of Wertherians, unhappy lovers and mourners, the ritualistic visit to the tomb must be solitary. Denied a Christian burial, Werther and his sins are exonerated by nature and fellow lovers, and human tears and nature's balmy dew provide the lover with the absolution he desired.

'With female Fairies will thy tomb be haunted
And worms will not come to thee'. SHAKESPEARE. [Cymbeline, IV, 2]

WHEN from Day's closing eye the lucid tears
Fall lightly on the bending lily's head;
When o'er the blushing sky night's curtains spread,
And the tall mountain's summit scarce appears;
When languid Evening, sinking to repose,
Her filmy mantle o'er the landscape throws;
Of THEE I'll sing; and as the mournful song
Glides in slow numbers the dark woods among;
My wand'ring steps shall seek the lonely shade,
Where all thy virtues, all thy griefs are laid !
…
Oft by the moon's wan beam the love-lorn maid,
Led by soft SYMPATHY, shall stroll along;
Oft shall she listen in the Lime-tree's* shade,
Her cold blood freezing at the night-owl's song:
Or, when she hears the death-bell's solemn sound,
Her light steps echoing o'er the hollow ground;
Oft shall the trickling tear adorn her cheek,
Thy pow'r, O SENSIBILITY ! in magic charms to speak !
…
So from the mournful CHARLOTTE's dark-orb'd lids,
The sainted tear of pitying VIRTUE flows;
And the last boon, the 'churlish priest' forbids,
On thy lone grave the sacred drop bestows;
There shall the sparkling dews of Evening shine,
AND HEAVEN'S OWN INCENSE CONSECRATE THE SHRINE.[36]

* 'At the corner of the church-yard are two Lime-trees, 'tis there I wish to rest'. SORROWS OF WERTER.

Soon English caricaturists, undoubtedly catering for a voracious audience, had had their fill of the 'Lotte cult'. This anonymous caricature of January 1788 (Figure

[36] Mary Robinson, 'Elegy to the Memory of Werter, written in Germany, in the year 1786', in *Poems by Mrs M. Robinson* (London: J. Bell, 1791), 1:80–81.

Figure 7.11. Anon., *Charlotte at the Grave of Werter*, 1788, etching, 23.2 x 23.5 cm, Lettered with the title 'Pubd. Jany. 1 1788 by S W Fores, at the Caracature Warehouse no. 3 Piccadilly', British Museum, London.

7.11) reminds us what perpetual mourning looks like: skulls, bones, shovels, and pickaxes are what death is really about, forget all about willows and the Elysian fields. Suicides belong outside the city gates, and the two histrionic middle-aged crones, toothless, with sagging breasts, strip death of all sentimentality. The broadside with the title 'The Last Dying Speech of Werter' has commercialised the staging of death and public mourning. Rather than mourning lockets and brooches, the broadside seller has marketable prints pinned to her front, selling her sentimental texts as she might be selling her body, a living advertisement for erotica and sentiment. The same year, George Wright published the combination of a very free translation of Goethe's novel and a conduct book for women: *The Unfortunate Lovers… to which is added the Lady's Counsellor respecting Love, Courtship, Marriage, &c…* A ventriloquist text, it pretended to be written by a woman, giving good advice to young girls on how to succeed in marriage, while

running a commentary in the notes to the Werther text which pointed out every time Lotte made the wrong decisions in her male relationships. The good marriage should be founded on love and trust, common good sense and no excessive sentimentality, were the well-meaning messages of the 'Lady Counsellor', a term behind which was hidden a man of leisure with a propensity for books on the pleasures of the retired life and 'Pleasing melancholy', as was the title of one of his other books.[37]

Did Lotte and Werther end up at the very heart of the English battle between the sexes? It would seem that certain male readers and writers felt the need to 'answer back' in response to the overwhelming female interest in Goethe's book and the material and literary culture it generated. A cult springing up around a dead excessively sentimental suicide, thwarted in love, must be problematic for any sense of male identity. What is interesting, however, is the extent to which late eighteenth-century female readers seem to have sympathised, if not even identified, with Werther as much as with Charlotte. Mary Wollstonecraft's two suicide attempts related to her unhappy affair with George Imlay, together with her sentimental correspondence, made her widower William Godwin compare her to a female Werther in an attempt to transform her to the heroine of a sentimental novel.[38] Praising her letters as

> the finest examples of the language of sentiment and passion ever presented to the world', he pointed out how 'They bear a striking resemblance to the celebrated romance of Werter, though the incidents to which they relate are of a very different cast. Probably the readers to whom Werter is incapable of affording pleasure, will receive no delight from the present publication. The editor apprehends that, in the judgment of those best qualified to decide upon the comparison, these Letters will be admitted to have the superiority over the fiction of Goethe. They are the offspring of a glowing imagination, and a heart penetrated with the passion it essays to describe.[39]

Yet as Michelle Faubert asserts, in her own writings (*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, *Maria*, *Mary and the Wrongs of Woman*), Wollstonecraft was actually promoting suicide as a woman's free choice, an entirely reasonable act setting her

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[37] *The Unfortunate Lovers, abridged from The Sorrows of Werter, to which is added the Lady's Counsellor, Respecting Love, Courtship, Marriage, etc., in Prose and Verse with Occasional Notes, by the Author of Retired Pleasures* (London: C. Stalker, 1788). For bibliographical information about George Wright, see Edward W. Pitcher, 'The Periodical and Miscellaneous Publications of George Wright ("Bob Short Junior")', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 74:4 (1980), 379–408 and 'New Facts on George Wright's Eighteenth-Century Miscellaneous Publications', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 80:2 (1986), 237–40.

[38] Roswitha Burwick, 'Goethe's *Werther* and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 24:1 (Winter 1993), 47–52, 48.

[39] *Posthumous Works of the Author of The Vindication of the Rights of Woman by William Godwin in Four Volumes* (London: J. Johnson, 1798), vol. 3, Preface.

free from the slavery of human life, drawing parallels to the ways Black slaves often chose suicide above thraldom.[40] Asserting women's rights to take their lives and loves into their own hands, Wollstonecraft was far more revolutionary than her widower would concede to. The little vignette, reported by Claire Tomalin, that Godwin and Wollstonecraft read Werther together the evening before the birth of their daughter Mary seems almost too good to be true.[41] Shortly afterwards, of course, Wollstonecraft would die from complications following childbirth; so much for women's rights. The future Mary Shelley would read Wollstonecraft, *Werther*, and the texts Werther read before dying (Ossian, Lessing) and make Goethe's novel one of the three civilising texts which the monster in her own first novel *Frankenstein: or, the Modern Prometheus* (1818) read (alongside Plutarch and Milton). In her novel, *Werther* teaches suffering and empathy to the monster, who is, of course, far less monstrous than his creator. In search of love, the monster is denied one of the most fundamental of human needs and is left to roam the world alone.

Was *Werther* only a text for the civilised? Was Goethe's novel the key to the *éducation sentimentale* of modern men and women? This anonymous caricature from around 1810 (Figure 7.12) with the title 'A Naturel Genius' is suggestive of a great many things when it comes to the English reception of Goethe's novel in the early nineteenth century: the headmistress of a finishing school is receiving a new pupil and her mother, garishly clad in loud colours. Next to the piano is an embroidery of Charlotte at the tomb of Werther. The exchange between the three ladies is as follows: Headmistress: 'You would perhaps like the Young Lady to work something in silks Madam! there is a pretty subject, Charlotte at the Tomb of Werter'. The visitor exclaims: 'A very pretty piece I pertest! my Dater has a Genii for Drawing! Penelope my dear! you shall work Charlotte at the Tub of Water'. The girl, delighted, answers: 'La Mother! I shall like that! you know Mounseer Gumboge says: I make Water as natural as Life'. The joke is a bad one: while the exchange reveals the complete lack of education of the two female visitors and the transformation of Goethe's text into a pattern for embroidery, the impact of *Werther* has literally become diluted. As 'Werther' becomes 'Water', and all German puns on 'werth' as 'worth' seem to be forgotten or transformed into the crude appetite of the new mercantile classes, all emotional havoc can be contained by needle and thread. Charlotte's English sisters, touched and moved by her fate as they were in the eighteenth century, left a far more complex bequest to the

[40] See Michelle Faubert, 'The Fictional Suicides of Mary Wollstonecraft', *Literature Compass* 12:12 (2015), 652–59.

[41] Claire Tomalin, *The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), 273.

Figure 7.12. *A Naturel Genius*, ca. 1810, hand-coloured etching, 23 x 32.9 cm, British Museum, London.

nineteenth century than can be surmised by this caricature, and they certainly managed to put a woman on the map who might otherwise have been forgotten.

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