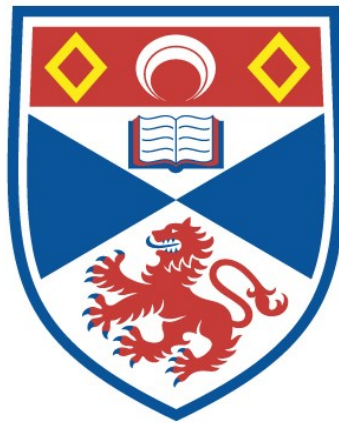


**RELIGIOUS AND MORAL CONCEPTS IN THE  
EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY GERMAN NOVEL OF  
SENSIBILITY : FROM CHRISTIAN FÜRCHTEGOTT  
GELLERT'S 'LEBEN DER SCHWEDISCHEN GRÄFIN  
VON G\*\*\*' TO THE END OF THE 1770s**

Victoria Polák

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD  
at the  
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## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

In my introduction I analyse the state of research in my subject. No detailed study of the subject has been conducted in recent years, hence there exists no work which takes account of recent conclusions in the examination of Sensibility in its entirety. I, therefore, consider it important to trace the origins of a movement in European culture. I draw attention to possible influences from philosophy and psychology which have tended to be neglected in favour of too exclusive emphasis on *Empfindsamkeit* as secularised Pietism. The main part of my thesis is devoted to detailed interpretation of five novels covering a period 1747 to 1776. This study yields various conclusions. In the novel as a *genre*, as in theoretical works on *Empfindsamkeit*, there is no polarity between the Enlightenment and Sensibility. Each of the novelists analysed is concerned to proclaim the necessity of achieving a balance between reason and emotion. In the novels of Gellert and La Roche this is explicitly stated in the form of moral instruction to the reader, while the fate of the heroes of Goethe and Miller perhaps suggests indirectly that such an equilibrium might be desirable. In particular the earlier authors I study equate moderation in feeling with virtue. Here these novelists advocate only feeling in the cause of virtue, while at the same time arguing that those who are capable of "true feeling" are by definition virtuous. In the sphere of religion, all novelists show a tendency to regard Christianity as a matter of emotion on the one hand and of practical ethics on the other. While there was a shift in emphasis from *Tugendempfindsamkeit* to the cultivation of feeling for its own sake, perceptions of the nature of religions and virtue remained constant. (295 words)

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**1. INTRODUCTION: THE ORIGINS  
AND DEVELOPMENT OF SENSIBILITY**

*Was aus moderner Sicht konventionell und trivial erscheint, verdient als Kulturbild des ausgehenden achtzehnten Jahrhunderts neu bewertet zu werden; ein Beispiel für die Interaktion von Publikum und Literatur, für die vielfältigen Möglichkeiten der Romangattung zu dieser Zeit, für die Art und Weise, in der sich Philanthropen und Popularphilosophen des Romans bedienen, um Leserschichten zu gewinnen.<sup>1</sup>*



The aim of this thesis is not to assess the German novel of Sensibility in accordance with any æsthetic criteria. As should become clear in the course of our investigation, perceptions of the role of the novelist and of his product in society have changed too radically for such an approach to be a very fruitful one. Nor do I intend to analyse the works chosen with a view to gaining any very valuable insights into the characters, circumstances or indeed creative processes of their respective authors. Rather I would agree with the supposition put forward by many recent literary historians that it is in the artistic attempts of the less than first-rate that we can find the richest source of information on prevailing and developing attitudes and customs. Those novelists who are least gifted with originality and creative imagination are perhaps most rewarding as informants on contemporary social behaviour and currents of thought, since these might be thought to have remained closest to the aspirations and preoccupations of the ordinary reading public. Hence this essay is almost exclusively concerned with novels which, having enjoyed great popularity at their time of publication, rapidly sank into oblivion and have since received attention very largely only in their role as necessary, if very flawed, precursors of later more congenial examples of their genre.

Of course, such an avowedly sociological approach is not without its dangers. Some historians have tended to adopt a straightforwardly Marxist standpoint, treating individual novels as neither more nor less than political statements, of however veiled a kind, as political statements in the struggle of the middle classes to assert their right to power and influence. While it should not be forgotten that the novel-reading public of the mid- and later eighteenth century was substantially bourgeois in composition (see below), and that many novels of the time do contain an element of social criticism which may well have been welcomed by such an audience, too many historians have been over-zealous in imputing to novelists explicitly revolutionary aims, sometimes on the slenderest evidence.<sup>2</sup> It cannot lie within the scope of an essay of this kind either to apportion blame when an author fails to deliver a political message, or to base an

interpretation of a work of fiction on negative factors -- such as the existence of censorship, or possible fears of giving offence to persons in positions of influence.<sup>3</sup> Quite simply it is my intention to examine in turn five novels of Sensibility, assessing each according to purely historical criteria. The questions to be asked are the following: What was the author's intention in writing this particular novel? What factors influenced his choice of subject matter? How do his attitudes to questions of religion and morality influence both his choice and his treatment of themes? What factors influenced the contemporary reading public in its reaction to these novels? Why were precisely these factors significant? In providing answers to these questions, I would hope to go some way towards constructing a homogeneous picture of the climate of Sensibility in Germany.

Recent research has produced some interesting conclusions about the composition of the eighteenth-century reading public; although, despite studious consultation of statistics from publishers' fairs and lending libraries<sup>4</sup>, it has not been possible to achieve any real degree of consensus about precisely what was read and by whom. In trying to determine who the readers of sentimental fiction actually were, we should begin by remembering the extent to which illiteracy remained a problem throughout the eighteenth century. Thus the mass of the population must be discounted here as lacking the basic education necessary to derive any benefit or enjoyment from literature. Moreover, despite rapidly increasing production and sales, for those outside the economically prosperous classes the cost of books remained prohibitive. Absence of leisure is another crucial factor here: when all the time which was not devoted to the unremitting struggle to earn a living was allocated to the equally necessary pursuits of eating and sleeping, there remained little opportunity for cultivating the finer emotions through novel-reading. Bearing all these points in mind, it is scarcely surprising that by far the largest category of novel-readers at this time appear to have been women of the increasingly prosperous and leisured middle classes<sup>5</sup>.

Some mention must also be made of what was read by those sections of the population who were literate and in possession of sufficient financial resources to obtain books. Here we should not underestimate the continuing influence of the Church, which for much of the century remained largely hostile to the practice of novel-reading, on grounds of its alleged pernicious effects (see below). Furthermore, there is much to suggest that the old habit of "intensive" rather than "extensive" reading, i.e. the oft-repeated perusal of some few trusted favourites, instead of any willingness to try new authors and genres, continued to prevail<sup>6</sup>. While the records of the annual book fairs at Leipzig and Frankfurt show a steady increase in the production of books in the general category of *belles lettres*, works of a religious nature continued to dominate the market. The staple reading-matter of an average middle-class household in the middle years of the century would have consisted principally of the following: the Bible; prayer books; catechisms; lives of the saints or of other pious persons; or, otherwise, the very popular almanacs or *Rath- und Hilfsbüchlein*, which contained a curious mixture of moral instruction and advice on household and agricultural matters. Such books met all needs; it was felt that the written word was by its very nature too serious and important to be expended on mere story-telling. As Albert Ward has pointed out, religion long remained the strongest motivating force in the lives of most people, and their reading-habits were formed accordingly:

Religion was... the highest and mightiest of all social values... The orthodox Protestant had his God before him in all his deeds and in all his thoughts. Life to him was but a short transition, a short but important preparation for life eternal, and nothing was more urgent or more logical to him than to put his time on earth to good use by preparing for death and the entrance to true existence in the Kingdom of Heaven: anything which did not directly help along the path to salvation was rejected out of hand as valueless and sinful. Books which might smooth his path for him were naturally extremely welcome.<sup>7</sup>

Such was the point of view from which the contemporary novel was seen and judged by the mass of readers.

Until quite late in the eighteenth century most æsthetic theories failed to take any account of the novel as a genre. One of the most influential works on æsthetics of the age, Johann Georg Sulzer's *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste* (1771-1775), contained no article devoted to the novel, and Sulzer's definition of the concept of the "novelesque" (*romanhaft*) is derogatory in the extreme:

Man nennt eigentlich dasjenige so, was in dem Inhalt, Ton oder Ausdruck den Charakter hat, der in den ehemaligen Romanen herrschend war, wie das Abentheuerliche, Verstiegene, in Handlungen, Begebenheiten und in den Empfindungen. Das Natürliche ist ohngefähr gerade das Gegenteil des Romanhaften.<sup>8</sup>

Critics frequently objected to the novel on the grounds that it was nothing more than a purveyor of lies:

Es sind ja keine wahren Geschichten,... sondern erdichtete Dinge, und ein zusammengesponnenes Gewebe vergeblicher Einbildungen, die umso gefährlicher sind, je wahrscheinlicher die Lügen, oder wenn man ja das derbe Wort allhier nicht brauchen soll, die auf allen Blättern und Seiten angebrachten Erfindungen seien.<sup>9</sup>

Novelists constantly resorted to a number of ploys in the hope of overcoming prejudice against the genre. Few novels of the time openly declared themselves as such. There were any number of possible disguises, formulaic titles which aimed to present the novel as an authentic piece of documentation. Thus novels masquerade as history, as memoirs, journeys in letters, confessions, biographies of well-documented historical personages. Clearly the authors of such works are doing more than merely adhering to a literary convention. Attacks on the novel by its critics, particularly by those of a moralistic bent, tended to reject the genre out of hand on grounds of its mendaciousness; to avoid such criticism, a work of fiction had to proclaim itself fact, however implausible the events it portrayed. Only thus could general critical and popular approval be won. The eighteenth-century novelist was therefore faced with a daunting task. On the one hand, his plot must be sufficiently believable to avoid the charge of lying; on the other hand, he must present a story unusual enough to be capable of sustaining the reader's interest. He must satisfy the conflicting demand for authenticity and for imaginative depth.

At this point we would do well to consider the chronological or historical position of the novels under discussion in this thesis. There is a gap of almost one hundred years between Grimmelshausen's *Simplizissimus* and Gellert's *Leben der schwedischen Gräfin von G\*\*\**, the first novel which I have selected for analysis. Schnabel's *Insel Felsenburg*, which combines most of the distinguishing features of the classic novel of adventure with an attempt to convey a specifically moral message, dates from some fifteen years before the publication of Gellert's novel. A further gap of no less than twenty-five years falls between the appearance of the *Schwedische Gräfin* and Sophie von La Roche's *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* and Friedrich Nicolai's *Sebaldu Nothanker*. It was only after these works had become popular that Goethe wrote his *Leiden des jungen Werthers*, the novel which was to set new levels of expectation, both as regards ethos and æsthetic standards. Thus the German novel of the eighteenth century was slow to develop and to gain respect as a serious literary genre. By the beginning of the century the Baroque novel, much criticised on account of its excessive length and consequent tediousness, had largely been replaced by the novel of adventure and the so-called *galant* novel; the latter genre dispensed with the element of political interest often found in the Baroque novel, placing the action in the purely personal sphere of love relationships. Such novels were often criticised on account of their supposed moral ambiguity. Frivolous they often were and sometimes explicitly erotic, full of amorous adventures, intrigues and coincidences, with stereotyped characters. This was fiction which could perhaps entertain the reader, but which was scarcely capable of instructing or elevating him.<sup>10</sup>

The dearth of worthy and respected traditions in fiction-writing in Germany had a number of effects. On the one hand, it was by no means entirely to the disadvantage of the novel as a genre that it lacked a reputation hallowed by consistent critical acclaim. Unlike both tragedy and comedy, for instance, the novel was not expected to adhere to any pre-established rules of good taste and sound construction; there were no universally



acknowledged criteria according to which all new examples of the genre were inevitably judged. Instead, the novel found itself in a position conducive to diversity and experimentation. Since there existed no hard-and-fast guidelines for the aspiring novelist, he was thus left with the freedom to allow his initiative and creative imagination to develop at will.

At the same time it is scarcely surprising that German novelists looked to foreign models for inspiration. In this context we would do well to consider the forerunners of the German novel of Sensibility in other European literatures. Critical consensus has long seen the origins of the novel of Sensibility, indeed of the modern novel *per se*, in the output of Samuel Richardson. It is certainly incontestable that Richardson's three novels long enjoyed unrivalled popularity both in England and abroad. The reasons for this prodigious success, particularly of *Pamela*, lie principally in the choice of subject-matter. The novel-reading public was familiar with the theme of persecuted innocence and the eventual triumph of virtue over vice. Such a theme was attractive on various grounds. In the first place it offered gratification of a decidedly prurient impulse. Mr B.'s attempts on Pamela's virginity fall short of the explicitly pornographic, but are nevertheless depicted in such a manner as to call forth both moral indignation and titillation. While enjoying the erotic spectacle the reader might assuage his conscience with the assurance that he was suitably shocked and repelled by the conduct of the vile seducer. Precisely this combination of sex and morality made Richardson's first novel not merely popular but also acceptable as improving reading matter. In producing a novel of this kind Richardson did much to rehabilitate the reputation of the genre.

In both England and Germany the Moral Weeklies were instrumental in gaining acceptance for this new moral type of novel. While they had not hesitated to condemn the *galant* novel for corrupting the taste of its readers and making them vain, superficial and generally unfit to fulfil any useful function in society, as soon as the novels of

Prévost, Marivaux and especially Richardson began to become known, the Moral Weeklies published extracts from these and were quick to point out their potential as purveyors of moral instruction.

*Pamela* was engrossing, quite simply a good read; the choice of the letter form ensured close identification between reader and heroine; the length was ideal, long enough to involve the reader totally, sufficiently succinct to avoid boredom. Clearly *Pamela* was also improving fiction, an expansion of the edifying tales made popular by the Moral Weeklies, with the welcome addition of an element of sensationalism. Thus the novel might legitimately be regarded as fulfilling the twofold function of literature, as defined by popular criticism; Richardson offered both entertainment and instruction, and herein lie the roots of his success.

Whether, or to what extent he can also be said to have provided sentiment remains a vexed question, despite Dr Johnson's famous remark<sup>11</sup>, despite also the consensus of subsequent literary history. Pamela herself, as Fielding was of course foremost in recognising<sup>12</sup>, is somewhat too resolute, too calculating even, to be entirely convincing as the heroine of a specifically sentimental novel. She is singularly lacking in the typically sentimental emotions of pity, gratitude and tender receptivity to the feelings of others. Pamela feels on one issue, and on one issue alone. All-important to her is her "virtue": with the preservation or loss of chastity her entire moral worth stands or falls. Pamela is capable of tears only when her chastity is threatened. Moreover, her desire to preserve her virginity is not based on moral considerations alone. Her chastity is also her fortune, an asset to be guarded as a guarantee of future prosperity. Indeed, one might even go as far as to say that a preoccupation with virtue is the only link between Pamela's emotional world and that of subsequent heroes and heroines of Sensibility; Pamela's concept of virtue is singularly narrow.

Since it is scarcely possible to see in Richardson the sole founder of the sentimental movement in fiction, we should attempt to look for possible forerunners of the German novel of *Empfindsamkeit* in a different tradition. It should not be forgotten that in France even in the seventeenth century we find evidence of a cult of Sensibility, both in the theatre and in fiction. Novels such as Madame de Lafayette's *La Princesse de Clèves* -- which takes as its theme one very dear to later novelists of Sensibility, namely the conflict between feeling and the dictates of virtue -- retained their popularity throughout much of the eighteenth century, as did the novels of Mlle de Scudéry, the creator of the *Carte de tendre*<sup>13</sup> -- what was the cult of *tendresse*, to which even Racine must be seen as having been in some degree an adherent<sup>14</sup>, other than Sensibility under another name? Moreover we would surely not be mistaken in seeing a further predecessor of Sensibility in the *Mémoires d'un Homme de Qualité* of the Abbé Prévost. As has been argued most convincingly:

Déjà l'Homme de qualité est une âme sensible, qui s'interroge sur son destin... Prévost aime prêter à ses héros la violence et la pureté des belles passions... Il découvre dans le sentiment son domaine propre: l'amour maudit, la vocation du malheur, l'aptitude à aimer sans bornes et sans mesure, les paroxysmes de la souffrance.<sup>15</sup>

This kind of sensibility is not primarily concerned with virtue, the questions it posed are much more searching. Here rather than in *Pamela* we find the emotional climate of *Werther* and *Woldemar*.

Preliminary to any consideration of the novel of Sensibility in Germany must be some critical analysis of the contemporary understanding of the phenomenon *Empfindsamkeit*. Contemporary writers were assiduous in their attempts to define and assess this new development in the diverse fields of psychology, pedagogy, moral philosophy and the arts. Some commentators wished to arrive at an understanding of the movement by tracing its intellectual roots. Others were principally concerned to identify different forms and degrees of Sensibility: their aim was to determine when increased emotional



awareness might be regarded as desirable and when it threatened the delicate equilibrium of emotional and intellectual faculties (which was considered essential to mental health in the individual and to the good of society as a whole).

One definition of Sensibility which could have enjoyed general acceptance was supplied by Samuel Johann Ernst Stosch in his article "Empfindsam/Empfindlich" in the *Kritische Anmerkungen über die gleichbedeutenden Wörter der Deutschen Sprache*.

Meines Erachtens kann man sich des Wortes Empfindsam sehr wohl bedienen, wenn man von einem Menschen sagen will, daß er geneigt sey, bey allerley Begebenheiten und Umständen sehr lebhaft und rührende Empfindungen zu haben, woran das Herz einen zärtlichen Antheil nimmt... Selbst geringe Dinge und Kleinigkeiten bringen bisweilen sehr lebhaft Empfindungen bey ihm hervor. Alles rühret ihn, alles ist vermögend, seine Empfindungen in Bewegung zu setzen.<sup>16</sup>

One school of theorists was keen to stress the links between Sensibility and the virtues of philanthropy, pity and unselfishness. It was held that the cultivation of emotion was desirable in that it led to empathy with the sufferings of others and to the resolve to alleviate their distress. Such philanthropic action might also be produced by a purely intellectual awareness of need, but it was generally accepted that emotion was a more direct and immediate spur to action than rational perception could hope to be. Thus Karl Daniel Küster writes in his *Sittliches Erziehungslexikon*:

Der Ausdruck "ein empfindsamer Mensch" hat in der deutschen Sprache eine sehr edle Bedeutung gewonnen. Es bezeichnet die vortreffliche und zärtliche Beschaffenheit des Verstandes, des Herzens und der Sinnen, durch welche ein Mensch geschwinde und starke Einsichten von seinen Pflichten bekommt und einen wirksamem Trieb fühlet, Gutes zu thun... denn Empfindsamkeit und Menschenfreundlichkeit sind gewissermaßen Synonymen.<sup>17</sup>

In other words, the purpose and value of Sensibility lie entirely in its tendency to spur its exponents on to the performance of their duties towards their fellow men.

Like numerous other commentators Stosch is eager to point out that Sensibility can be carried too far, so that its practitioners only succeed in making themselves ridiculous.

Above all, these critics argue, it is essential to ensure that emotion is only produced by a

sufficient cause, since noble sentiment can be trivialised if it is expended on unworthy objects. Indeed, it is argued that the whole purpose of feeling is to make people more assiduous in the performance of their social duties. Sensibility should not be permitted to degenerate into a mere fashion or conventional stance. It is not, and should not be, an end in itself. In *Die Feyerstunden der Grazien. Ein Lesebuch* Johann Georg Heinzmann urges this point:

Erinnern sie sich, meine schöne Leserinnen, Ihre feine und zarte Empfindungen sind Ihnen nicht bloß zum Schminken gegeben worden, sondern Sie zu edlen und wohlthätigen Handlungen anzuspannen -- das Mitleiden zum Beispiel ist dem menschlichen Herzen nicht eingepflanzt worden, um bloß ein schönes Gesicht mit sanften Thränen zu zieren, oder einem holden Auge eine schmachkende Anmuth mitzutheilen. Nein, es ist vom Schöpfer bestimmt worden, die eifrigsten Bemühungen zur Hülfe der Nothleidenden in unserem Busen zu erregen.<sup>18</sup>

It is my intention to show in the context of this thesis that Sensibility in Germany was by no means a static or a homogeneous phenomenon. In the early stages of the movement it might perhaps be appropriate to adopt the designation *Tugendempfindsamkeit*, since the feeling displayed by the practitioners and recommended by theorists and novelists is largely concentrated on the experiencing of specifically moral feelings, such as benevolence, gratitude, pity and sympathy. At this time sensibility is viewed as a prerequisite to the conduct of a virtuous life in the community (see esp. chapters on Gellert, La Roche).

It has become a cliché of literary history that the movements designated "Enlightenment" and "Sensibility" are polar opposites. A consideration of contemporary writings on the subject seems to disprove this assumption. Indeed, virtually all those who express an opinion on the subject are specifically concerned not to reject either Enlightenment or Sensibility from the viewpoint of the supposedly opposite movements, but rather are at pains to distinguish between "true" and "false" Enlightenment, "true" and "false" Sensibility. All authors accept that the desired state is one of harmony between head and heart, of equally balanced intellectual and emotional faculties. In fact, the earlier novels

of Sensibility (Gellert, La Roche) share certain assumptions and preoccupations we would generally associate much more specifically with the Enlightenment. As already indicated, for these authors *Empfindsamkeit* is in practice equivalent to *Tugendempfindsamkeit*. They regard the pursuit of virtue as the rightful purpose of all human existence and religion as little more than a vehicle for the realisation of the ideal of virtue. They have no obvious respect for the Church as an institution -- Nicolai indeed quite the contrary -- and do not make pronouncements on matters of dogma. These authors see it as their mission to preach morality, tolerance, optimism, a belief in the perfectibility of mankind, in the eventual triumph of virtue, both in this world and in the next. They deliberately present the virtuous life as not only morally commendable, but also as easy and pleasant, as the best and surest path to happiness -- and this not from any belief that happiness is to be found in self-sacrifice, but out of a belief in a kind of enlightened egotism and out of faith in the beneficence of Providence. Furthermore, there is much to be said for the idea that Enlightenment and Sensibility were, in fact, simply two facets of a single phenomenon: if Man's intellectual faculties were in need of emancipation from the rigid strictures of authority -- be it the authority of the Church, the State, or merely of habit and convention -- precisely the same was surely true of his emotional capacities.

If Sensibility began as a largely moral imperative, it must not be assumed that it long remained so. The link between sensibility and virtue, which at first had been considered all-important, gradually faded from sight. Thus, it came to be felt that emotion was worthy of cultivation for its own sake. Feeling itself was experienced as desirable, regardless of any course of action which it might be expected to instigate. The exponents of Sensibility began to take pride in their simple capacity for feeling, be the feeling inspired by whatever cause. With the appearance of works such as *Werther* and *Siegwart*, in which feeling was seen to have emancipated itself from any concept of virtue, the hero found his whole *raison d'être* in the experiencing of the maximum

degree and intensity of emotion. Only then did the novel of sentiment become a true cult phenomenon. Critics began to decry the advent of *Romanfieber*, the degeneration of *Empfindsamkeit* into *Empfindelei*, the exaggerated and trivialised parody of itself. Writers on the subject repeatedly attacked Sensibility as the source of multifarious social ills -- mental weakness and instability, neglect of responsibilities, apathy and the resulting inability to make any contribution to the good of society. Thus the movement was denounced in the strongest terms. Joachim Heinrich Campe declared Sensibility to be "eine jetzt umgehende Seelenseuche, welche unter allen Kräften unserer gesamten körperlichen und geistigen Natur zu recht sichtbarer Verminderung der Summe unserer Lebensfreuden seit einigen Jahren eine fürchterliche Verwüstung ausgerichtet hat".<sup>19</sup> Various possible remedies were suggested, from medical treatment of an unspecified nature to nothing less than the deporting of advanced cases, since nothing less drastic could be relied upon to stop the spread of the "disease". The danger was felt to be that the sensitive soul would somehow weaken his emotional immune system through over-sensitive emotional responses to such an extent that eventually he would be capable of being brought to the point of hysteria by the most trivial causes. These dangers are threateningly characterised as "Krankheit"<sup>20</sup>, "Nervenschwäche", "Seelenhypochondrie", "Melancholie" and "Schwermut", perhaps the most sinister being the "Nervenfieber", which was thought to have sometimes produced fatal results -- among others, for example, in Wackenroder; though this was a somewhat later development.

We should now turn our attention to the philosophical ideas which might be considered to have exerted some influence on the development of the cult of Sensibility. Since Descartes and Spinoza there had gradually evolved a more positive evaluation of emotion, which previously had been regarded not as a faculty equal in status to reason, but as evidence of man's essentially sinful nature, more precisely as the source of all those sins of self-indulgence emanating from egotistical and corrupt human nature. At the same time emotion was coming to be seen as a valid means of perception. Thus in

England Locke took as the idea central to his philosophy the concepts of "emotion" and "reflection", while in France Condillac based his psychology on the notion of pleasant and unpleasant sensations. In Germany the rationalistic scholasticism of Wolff continued to hold away in the universities, but it must also be argued that *Empfindsamkeit* was working among the mass of the educated classes to foster an entirely different concept of the nature of Man.

Recent historians have rightly stressed the influence on the tendency developing into Sensibility of the "moral sense theory" expounded by thinkers such as Shaftesbury and the Cambridge Platonists. In direct contrast to the egotism preached by Hobbes, these thinkers argued that Man was endowed with an innate capacity for distinguishing good from evil, and that his own natural feelings would inevitably lead him to recognise and to do what was right. Moreover, this instinctive finer moral sense was believed to form the basis of all true religion. According to this philosophy, man is "ein von Natur mit *benevolence* begabtes, geselliges Wesen, das sich den Affekten anvertrauen kann und sein moralisches Gefühl als Richter über Tugend und Laster anerkennt"<sup>21</sup>. Shaftesbury maintained that this innate moral sense enabled man to distinguish good from evil as automatically and infallibly as the ear is capable of distinguishing harmony and disharmony. It is clearly possible to detect a number of points of contact between the moral-sense theory and some of the ideas underlying Sensibility. Not only is supreme importance accorded to the role of spontaneous feeling in the sphere of morality and religion; emphasis on the ethical rather than on the dogmatic aspect of religion and the preoccupation with social virtues such as benevolence is also typical of the thinking of the exponents both of the Enlightenment and of Sensibility.

The phenomenon of Sensibility lacks both the inner cohesion and the theoretical foundations which would easily allow it to be considered a fully-fledged and independent literary movement. Rather it might more aptly be described as a "tendency",



since most of its exponents share certain preoccupations and are aiming to achieve a specific effect on the reader, usually through the use of a number of shared motifs and stylistic features. Thus again and again in the novel of sentiment specific emotional responses are called forth in the characters -- and, it is intended, also in the sympathetic reader -- by exposure to certain immediately recognisable stimuli, such as the moon, sunrises and sunsets, ruins, graveyards, uncultivated English-style gardens, wild and forbidding landscapes. Easily identifiable metaphors occur repeatedly, to very much the same purpose. Thus the heart is seen variously as a storm-tossed ship, as a musical instrument (on which the emotions are the strings) and so on.

Punctuation in the novel of Sensibility similarly adheres to certain conventions, calculated no doubt to ensure the maximum emotional impact. The repeated use of exclamation marks, of dots and dashes and of the so-called *Unsagbarkeitstopos* serve to impress upon the reader the narrator's inability to express within the confines of conventional grammar the degree of emotion to which his characters are subject; furthermore to encourage the reader to participate actively in this overwhelming experience of emotion.

It is the intention of provoking the maximum emotional response in the reader which governs the sentimental novelist's choice of subject-matter, plot construction and depiction of character. Hence spring the preponderance of death-bed scenes, these sometimes being protracted beyond what might reasonably be considered credible, the frequent depiction of pathetic farewells between friends and their subsequent equally emotional reunion. Here also we find an adequate explanation of the most favoured choice of theme, namely love and friendship: subjects which most easily lend themselves to treatment in a sentimental manner, and of which the reader may be expected to have some personal experience -- with which he will therefore be able to identify and which will therefore more easily stimulate in him a specifically emotional response.

It is no coincidence that many examples of the novel of Sensibility were written in the epistolary form. Here the reader is addressed directly by the characters; a direct appeal is made to his emotions, he is asked to bestow his understanding and sympathy on the suffering protagonists. This use of this direct mode of address enables the author to guide -- one would hesitate to say manipulate -- the reader's reactions and feelings, the better to convince him of his own point of view. Very much the same is true of the first-person narrative form. In the latter instance the very fact that the narrator is as it were offering a confession to the reader predisposes the reader to be sympathetic and hence also receptive to whatever messages the author wishes to transmit. Thus both the first-person narrative and the epistolary novel are by their very nature ideally suited to the purpose of the novelist of Sensibility, who explicitly seeks to persuade by means of the cultivation of certain feelings in the reader.

We can perhaps best understand the effect of the adoption of these two forms of the novel if we compare them with a traditional third-person narrative, such as is employed by Wieland. Here the narrator, a figure distant from and often critical of the hero or heroine, is very much in evidence. This kind of narrator stands between the reader and the characters, interpreting the action and commenting on it, sometimes from a highly ironical perspective, at other times embarking on long digressions only very loosely connected with the plot. Such tactics encourage a detached, intellectual response in the reader; he is invited to judge the characters and their actions rather than to sympathise with them. Sophie von La Roche's novel, by contrast, has the reader place himself in the position of the protagonist, to respond directly and emotionally, rather than intellectually. In both cases of course the reader is being manipulated; the author simply employs a different means of bringing him round to a certain point of view, of convincing him of the merits of a life based either on the pursuit of virtue or on the gratification of the need for emotional stimulation.

We have so far considered the composition and habits of the eighteenth-century reading public, the development of the novel as a genre and its reception by critics and historians; the origins of the phenomenon of Sensibility and the salient features of the novel of Sensibility in Germany. Of course, all these points will receive a much more thorough and wide-ranging treatment in the course of the coming chapters. Before concluding this introductory section, however, I would wish to add some comments on the legacy of Sensibility, not only in the field of literature, but in society as a whole.

The heritage of Sensibility is to be seen in the Romantic movement throughout Europe, with its emphasis on the spontaneous, emotional response of the sensitive individual. Themes which recur repeatedly in the literature of Sensibility feature strongly in the works of the Romantics: Nature, and man's relationship to it; love and friendship; personal suffering -- above all suffering brought about by the deliberate cultivation of emotion. What is important is that the *âme sensible* and the romantic hero should feel, and feel as deeply and as much as possible; what cause occasions this feeling, whether indeed there exists a sufficient cause for it, are very minor considerations. One would hesitate to claim, as some critics have done, that only with the invention of the novel of Sensibility -- whether this achievement be accredited to Richardson, to Rousseau or to Goethe -- did anything like modern subjective consciousness emerge from the mass of Man's previous alleged state of rigid and unnatural rationalism<sup>22</sup>. At the same time, I hope that it will become evident in the course of this thesis that Sensibility did at least constitute something of an increase in awareness of the nature and value of feeling in general, and of the gentler emotions, such as pity, gratitude, tender friendship and love in particular.

It remains to make some mention of the possible effect of Sensibility on eighteenth-century society. Here, of course, anything which might unreservedly be considered as evidence is necessarily slight, but it is certain that at the time when the literary



movement was at its height, various measures were gradually being implemented which did point to an increasing awareness of the need for greater humanity in the treatment of the poor and suffering. Indeed, some contemporary historiographers saw in Sensibility the source of certain important changes in attitude and even the root of some fairly far-reaching social reforms. Thus the system of justice was gradually made less rigid and more humane; torture was officially abolished; criticism of the death penalty and of prison conditions at least succeeded in securing some degree of improvement in the lot of ordinary prisoners. Similar improvements were also instigated in the handling of prisoners of war and of the war-wounded. Calls were made for the gentler treatment of servants and children, with a resulting abatement of the tendency of those in authority over them to resort to corporal punishment. In England, France and Germany the rise of Sensibility was largely contemporaneous with the founding of almshouses, orphanages and other charitable institutions<sup>23</sup>. Thus Sensibility was conceived of not purely as an æsthetic code or convention, or even as a social fashion. Its effects went beyond the areas of literary taste and of conventional behaviour to leave a lasting effect on the structure of society as a whole.<sup>24</sup>

1. Sophie von La Roche, *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*, Deutscher Taschenbuchverlag, Munich 1985; Nachwort by Günter Hänzschel, p.336.
2. See Wolf Lepenies, *Melancholie und Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt am Main 1972, p.83.
3. Here we would do well to consider the viewpoint of Alan Menhennet, who puts forward most convincing arguments against those critics who have tended to overemphasise the evidence for an explicitly radical or even revolutionary interpretation of eighteenth-century texts. I quote the relevant passage in full:

The fragmented state of the nation would have made a revolution... difficult, but not necessarily the rise of a revolutionary spirit, or the forceful expression of such a spirit... in uprisings of a more radical nature than in fact occurred. There was repression, true, but hardly as severe as that which obtained, for example, in Imperial Russia, where the spirit of the revolutionary movement, when the political wind began to blow from France, was more radical. Censorship was uneven in its incidence over the whole area. There were some states like Baden, Brunswick, Dessau and others, which had hardly any at all. There was always the possibility of "marching across the border", as Miller puts it in *Kabale und Liebe* (Act 2, Scene V), if one incurred the wrath of one despot. And in any case there are roundabout or symbolic ways in which radical and revolutionary thoughts can be clearly and even sharply hinted at, and private forms of writing in which they can be ventilated. In spite of all this, one's overall impression is that, while the Germans were anything but satisfied with the state of the nation as they saw it, they were less enthusiastic still about possible violent methods of altering it... There was very little, if any democratic spirit abroad. One has to remember that the vast mass of the people were almost totally devoid of education. Everyone, or almost everyone believed in the dignity and majesty of Man, but did not find it embodied in the common people. Even scholars of genuinely popular nature and intent, like Schubart and Bürger, are concerned to dissociate themselves from the *Pöbel*.

Quoted from Alan Menhennet, *Order and Freedom. Literature and Society in Germany from 1720 to 1805*, London 1973, p.19.

4. For further information on book production and the structure of the reading-public see the following:

Leo Balet/E.Gerhard, *Die Verbürgerlichung der deutschen Kunst, Literatur und Musik im achtzehnten Jahrhundert*. Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Vienna 1973;

Günter Erning, *Das Lesen und die Lesewut. Beiträge zu Fragen der Lesergeschichte*. Bad Heilbrunn 1974;

Herbert G. Göpfert, "Bemerkungen über den Buchhandel zur Zeit der Aufklärung in Deutschland". In *Wolfenbüttler Studien zur Aufklärung I*, 1974, pp.69-83.

5. It is interesting to note that Gellert, for instance, considered women to be by their very nature ideally suited to the cultivation of the finer emotions, and hence to be the most natural audience for the literature of Sensibility:

Die Empfindungen der Frauenzimmer sind zarter und lebhafter als die unsrigen. Sie werden von tausend kleinen Umständen gerührt, die bei uns keinen Eindruck machen. Sie werden nicht allein öfter, sondern auch leichter gerührt als wir. Eine Vorstellung macht bei ihnen geschwind dem andern Platz, daher halten sie sich selten bei einem guten Gedanken zu lange auf... Ihre Gedanken sind wie ihre Eindrücke leicht, sie sind ein scharfes, aber kein tiefes Gepräge... Sie wissen durch eine gewisse gute Empfindung das Gefällige, das Wohlanständige in dem Putze, in der Einrichtung eines Gemäldes, in der Stellung des Tischgerätes leicht zu bemerken und zu finden; und diese gute Empfindung der Harmonie unterstützt sie auch im Denken und Beschreiben.

Christian Fürchtegott Gellert, *Von dem guten Geschmack in Briefen*, Leipzig 1751, p.75ff.

6. See note 4 above.

7. Albert Ward, *Book production, fiction and the German reading public 1740-1800*, Oxford 1974, p.4.

8. Johann Georg Sulzer, *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste. Neue vermehrte Auflage*, Leipzig 1794, part 4, p.110.

9. Anonymous tract *Vom Romanenlesen* (1742). Quoted in Wolfgang Schmitt, *Die pietistische Kritik der Künste, Untersuchungen über die Entstehung einer neuen Kunstauffassung im achtzehnten Jahrhundert*. Diss., Cologne 1958, p.23.

10. See: Alfred Anger, *Literarisches Rokoko*. Second edition, Stuttgart 1968.

11. That "You must read Richardson for the sentiment... because if you were to read him for the story your patience would be so much fretted that you would hang yourself".

12. Henry Fielding, *Apology for the life of Mrs Shamela Andrews*.

13. Madeleine de Scudéry, *Artamène, ou le grand Cyrus* (1649-1653), *Clélie* (10 vols., 1654-1660). The *carte de tendre* is described in *The Reader's Encyclopedia* as "an imaginative map of the amorous sentiments." (*The Reader's Encyclopedia*. Edited by William Rose Benét, second edition, London 1972, article on Mlle de Scudéry.)

14. Racine was described by his son in the following terms: "Il était né tendre, et vous l'entendrez assez dire. Il fut tendre pour Dieu, lorsqu'il revint à lui... Il le fut pour ce roi dont il avait tant de plaisir à écrire l'histoire; il le fut toute sa vie pour ses amis; il le fut, depuis son mariage et jusqu'à la fin de ses jours pour sa femme, et pour ses enfants sans prédilection." Quoted in Gabriel Spillebout, Introduction to Racine, *Bérénice*, éditions Univers des Lettres/Bordas. Second edition Paris-Brussels-Montréal, 1974.

15. René Pomeau/Jean Ehrhard, *Littérature Française*, vol.7: *De Fénelon à Voltaire 1680-1750*. Paris 1984, p.261f.
16. Samuel Johann Ernst Stosch, *Kritische Anmerkungen über die gleichbedeutenden Wörter der deutschen Sprache. Nebst einigen Zusätzen und beygefügteten etymologischen Verzeichnissen derjenigen Wörter der französischen Sprache, welche ihren Ursprung aus der deutschen haben*. Vol.4, Vienna 1786, pp.206-208. Quoted in *Empfindsamkeit, Theoretische und kritische Texte.*, edited by Wolfgang Doktor and Gerhard Sauder, Stuttgart 1976, p.12ff.
17. Karl Daniel Küster, *Sittliches Erziehungslexikon*. Magdeburg 1773, pp.47-60. Quoted in Doktor/Sauder, *op.cit.*, p.9
18. Johann Georg Heinzmann, *Die Feyerstunden der Grazien. Ein Lesebuch*. Berne 1780. Quoted in Doktor/Sauder, *op.cit.*, p.48.
19. Joachim Heinrich Campe, *Robinson der Jüngere, zur angenehmen und nützlichen Unterhaltung der Kinder.*, Vol.1, Hamburg 1779, Introduction. Quoted in Doktor/Sauder, *op.cit.*, p.71.
20. See Wolfgang Doktor, *Die Kritik der Empfindsamkeit*. Berne, Frankfurt am Main 1975 (*Regensburger Beiträge zur Deutschen Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft. Reihe B, Untersuchungen*. Vol.5).
21. See Gerhard Sauder, *Empfindsamkeit*, vol. 1: *Voraussetzungen und Elemente*, Stuttgart 1974.
22. See afterword to *Empfindsamkeit*, edited by Doktor/Sauder, p.202.
23. See Fritz Brüggemann, "Der Kampf um die bürgerliche Welt- und Lebensanschauung in der Deutschen Literatur des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts." In: *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift* 3, 1925, pp.94-127.
24. Afterword to *Empfindsamkeit*, ed. Doktor/Sauder, p.203.

**2. GELLERT: DAS LEBEN DER  
SCHWEDISCHEN GRÄFIN VON G\*\*\***

*Die Empfindsamkeit [ist] gar kein pathologischer Zustand. Sie ist vielmehr lange Zeit hindurch nur eine Form, eine Anschauungsweise gewesen, in der sich die neuen Ideale ethischer und ästhetischer Art sich geltend machten.<sup>1</sup>*

The novel *Das Leben der schwedischen Gräfin von G\*\*\** by Christian Fürchtegott Gellert was first published anonymously in two volumes in 1746 and 1747. At the time of publication Gellert was thirty years old, teaching at the University of Leipzig and already known as one of the editors of the *Bremer Beiträge* or *Neue Beiträge zum Vergnügen des Verstandes und Witzes*, a periodical which made statements on literary matters, taking up a position against the rigid formalism of Gottsched. Gellert had also already published some plays, which had gained a certain popularity, as well as fables and histories with a moral bent. Thus he had already made something of a name for himself; indeed, he had gained a reputation which he did not want to endanger by letting it be known that he had published a contribution to the still very much despised and suspect *genre* of the novel.

The novel enjoyed speedy success both in Germany and abroad. In the remaining years of the eighteenth century there appeared in Germany no less than half a dozen reprints of the book. In addition, translations were made into the following languages: English (four), French (three), Dutch (two), Italian and Hungarian. One English translation was sponsored by Gellert's much-admired fellow novelist Richardson. The preface to this translation is laudatory in the extreme, and if it is typical of the novel's reception in England, bears witness to Gellert's great popularity there.

Die Geschichte hat nichts Romanhaftes, Außergewöhnliches oder Unnatürliches, und doch sind ihre Lebensereignisse mitreißend genug und wohlgeeignet, die Aufmerksamkeit des Lesers zu beanspruchen. Der Roman ist voll rührender Szenen und interessanter Situationen, voll guter Gefühle und beispielhafter Lehren wahrer Moral.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, the Academy of Frederick the Great in Berlin, of which Gellert was a valued and popular member, initiated the publication of a French translation, dedicated to the Danish ambassador, and containing a preface which cited the same points in favour of the novel.



The thoroughly favourable verdict passed by Gellert's contemporaries was subsequently revised, and the author unceremoniously removed from his pedestal, by the new generation of *Sturm und Drang* writers. His immense popularity had been due in no small measure to the fact that the ideas he propounded corresponded closely to the spirit of the age. By the 1770s at latest his particular brand of *Tugendempfindsamkeit* was quite simply out of date.<sup>3</sup> The new generation began to judge his literary production according to principally aesthetic criteria -- and Gellert's artistic failings were many and obvious. Johann Heinrich Voss dismissed his *Schwedische Gräfin* as "ewig unausstehliches Wassergeschwätz";<sup>4</sup> adding, to settle the matter once and for all: "mein Urteil ist das Urteil des Bundes und Klopstocks". This assessment has remained with us. For F.J. Schneider, Gellert's novel was "ein seltsamer literarischer Wechselbalg" -- and nothing more. Possibly in the eyes of *Sturm und Drang* critics -- if not of their modern counterparts -- the extent of Gellert's popularity was in itself an ominous sign: a work, it might be assumed, beloved of so many upright and enlightened citizens, could scarcely be anything other than mediocre. Be that as it may, Voss and others like him clearly saw that Gellert's significance as a writer was not aesthetic but historical. His novel and comedies are of interest today in their function as mirrors of mid-eighteenth-century *mores*, taste and thought.

At the outset we must discuss Gellert's relationship to the Enlightenment. Gellert's treatment of religious questions is typical in many ways of the Enlightenment attitude. The religion of this Countess and her friends is based on reason and conscience. Revelation is obtained from these sources and from Nature. The church as an institution has a negligible part to play in the novel. The sermon given at Steeley's and Amalia's wedding -- the only one to be mentioned in the novel -- is designated not as a *Predigt*, but as a *Rede*.<sup>5</sup> Spiritual guidance from the Bible is apparently equally unnecessary: a good heart and a sound reason, it is implied, will find the right



path on their own strength. Despite abundant references to divine Providence, the characters apparently never turn to prayer in the hope of averting evil. As Israel Stamm<sup>6</sup> has pointed out, the character of Herr R. is particularly illuminating in this context. Herr R. is "in his total adequacy the very antithesis of a Christian. So perfect a vessel has no need of Grace". Armed with reason and virtue, the characters have no need to call upon God in times of trouble. Religion is almost irrelevant in their world. It is experienced as a worthy institution to which lip-service is regularly paid, but which reason and virtue have rendered more or less obsolete. Gellert's God is a mild, good and loving Father, quick to forgive and slow to punish, indulgent of human weakness, even of doubt and unbelief.

Gellert is no metaphysician. His works testify amply to a marked distrust, typical of the Enlightenment, of metaphysical and abstract reasoning. As a true product of his time, he concentrates instead on practical reason, on the problems of day-to-day living. In their search for the right way to live, his characters are influenced above all by experience. It is true only to a limited extent that the Enlightenment may be categorised as the "Age of Reason". Its most characteristic adherents -- Hume, Voltaire, Diderot, Lessing -- were well aware of the limitations of reason, or if not of reason as such, then certainly of rationalism. They were moreover on the whole too well-trained in scepticism to put such faith in metaphysics. The "other world", it was now felt, was best left to the theologians and mystics. The *philosophes* had more immediate and pressing concerns. This focus of interest on the "here and now" perhaps did more to further the secularisation of society than any amount of materialistic thinking in the style of d'Holbach and La Mettrie was ever able to accomplish.

Once the yoke of metaphysical speculation was at last thrown off, the preoccupation with the next world at the expense of this one at last overcome, possibilities for

change and improvement in the immediate environment became obvious. Indeed, Gellert presents reason and philosophy as opposites. The rational approach to religious questions -- or to religious practice, since this is what interests him most -- is represented as being directly contrary to the "philosophical" one. "Man glaube ja nicht, daß er [i.e. the Countess's guardian and educator] eine hohe und tiefsinnige Philosophie mit mir durchging. O nein, er brachte mir die Religion auf eine vernünftige Art bei" [p.192].

Gellert's pragmatic rationalism is accompanied by a large measure of tolerance in religious questions. Almost thirty years before the appearance of Lessing's *Nathan der Weise*, the *Schwedische Gräfin* pleads that tolerance and good will be extended to the Jewish community. While adhering to the general dictates of enlightened benevolence, Gellert shows particular understanding for this repressed and despised minority. The Polish Jew who befriends the Count in Siberia, for all that he is an astute man of business, demonstrates exemplary generosity, quite without thought of material reward. Indeed his conduct is such as would put many a Christian to shame. Gellert acknowledges that the race as a whole does not always correspond to this pattern of perfection, but suggests that the Christian majority may well be responsible for the bitterness and hostility common among Jews. Here we find evidence of Gellert's typically Enlightened conviction that human faults are not only understandable, but capable of correction, often with a minimum of effort in terms of patience and good will.

Gellert's tolerance extends also to free-thinkers, whereas Hermes (for example) sees unbelief as an unmistakable sign of moral depravity. Indeed, the excellent Herr R. has more respect for honest atheism than for hypocrisy in any form. "Die Schmeichler waren seine ärgsten Feinde und er glaubte, daß diese Leute der Wahrheit und Tugend mehr Schaden täten, als alle Ketzler und Freigeister" [p.210]. Thus Gellert no longer

believes virtue to be dependent on religion. In according an autonomous status to morality, he has taken a large step in the direction of secularisation. When the dogmatic element is thus removed from religious belief, the result is a faith in which subjectivity is of central importance. The effect on the believer is very similar to the effect of increasing rationalism:

Das Religiöse hat schließlich keinen transzendental-objektiven Bestand mehr, sondern ist überhaupt nur noch vorhanden in der Einzelseele, in der Aktualisierung des Erlebens. Damit aber erhält diese Einzelseele eine ganz neue, ungemein erhöhte Bedeutung und eine gesteigerte Anziehungskraft.<sup>7</sup>

No mention is made in the novel of the very real dogmatic disagreements between Catholics, Lutherans, Calvinists and Pietists. Gellert's Countess speaks often, but only vaguely, of religion. The exact nature of this religion is never specified. Provided tolerance and genuine piety are present she -- and Gellert -- are willing to approve every shade of belief. She and her friends clearly believe in God, as a loving Father and rewarder of the virtuous; they believe in the immortality of the soul and in the inevitable triumph of good over evil -- neither more nor less. Theirs is a rationalistic, even deistic standpoint, one which has much less in common with orthodox Lutheranism than Gellert may have realised or been willing to admit. Indeed, the tolerance evinced by the characters seems to border almost on total indifference. Their real interest is focused on questions of practical morality; religious faith concerns them less than does the pursuit of virtue. Eichendorff's somewhat extreme and certainly prejudiced analysis is not, therefore, without an element of truth; in his estimation the time is clearly out of joint when:

...selbst ein so nüchterner and so pünktlich gewissenhafter Mensch wie Gellert mitfortglitt und in seiner Unschuld nicht einmal ahnte, daß er mit dem großen Strome fahre... Man sieht also selbst bei dem frommen Gellert die See schon innerlich hohl gehen und die Wogen sind nur durch das oben aufschwimmende Öl der Moral noch beschwichtigt und niedergehalten.<sup>8</sup>

Thus also Kurt May can speak of:

eine unbewußt unsicher gewordene Orthodoxie, die es zwar nicht ausspricht, aber deren mangelnden Folgerichtigkeit man den heimlichen

Zweifel wohl anmerkt, ob sie wirklich im Besitz des echten Ringes ist.<sup>9</sup>

Clearly the religion of the Countess and her friends has a strong practical element. Indeed, much of the value of religion for Gellert lies in its power to inspire virtue. At times this accentuation of practical virtues comes dangerously close to pure pragmatism, to the propagation of Christian ideals not for their own sake, but because a virtuous and God-fearing life will pay good dividends in this world and in the next. This has something in common with Calvinistic concepts of morality. It entails the application of Pascal's wager to earthly as well as to heavenly circumstances. Gellert's enlightened characters almost seem to strike a bargain with the Deity -- a bargain in which belief and virtuous conduct constitute the payment exacted for the guarantee of temporal and eternal prosperity. Religion thus appears advantageous, useful, pleasant; virtue makes life easier. The principles the Countess learns from her guardian serve her well in future years:

er... überführte mich von den großen Vorteilen der Tugend, welche sie uns in jedem Alter, in jedem Stande, im Glücke und Unglücke, im Tode und nach diesem Leben bringt. Er hatte die Geschicklichkeit, mir alle diese Wahrheiten, nicht sowohl in das Gedächtnis, als in den Verstand zu prägen. Und diesen Begriffen, die er mit beibrachte, habe ichs bei reifern Jahren zu verdanken gehabt, daß ich die Tugend nie als eine beschwerliche Bürde, sondern als die angenehmste Gefährtin betrachtet habe, die uns die Reise durch die Welt erleichtern hilft [pp.192-3].

In Gellert's novel virtue triumphs over vice because virtue is, at least in the long term, the more pleasant and rewarding alternative. Gellert accepts that egoism is one of the principal factors motivating human conduct and, pragmatist that he is, wastes no time in regretting this state of affairs. Important here is the distinction between enlightened and unenlightened egoism or blind dependence on subjective -- and eventually destructive -- passion. Gellert sees enlightened egoism as being, happily, entirely compatible with both reason and virtue. Indeed, since Providence has wisely ordained that the virtuous path will also be the pleasant one, egoism of the enlightened variety may even be regarded as a spur to virtue. Self-interest, self-gratification, is, therefore the surest guard against temptation. The Countess believes

that human relationships are governed by the same principle: "Wo würde die Beständigkeit in der Liebe sein, wenn sie nicht durch die Eigenliebe unterhalten würde?" [p.246], she asks. The implication is that a sense of duty is insufficient to ensure good conduct; self-interest must lend a helping hand. The question as to what would happen if the virtuous were to receive no reward is never directly posed -- and understandably so. It is Gellert's aim to promote the cause of virtue. In attempting to convert his readers to his own particular brand of *Tugendempfindsamkeit*, his principal strategy consists in presenting the virtuous life as attractive, *angenehm*.

Reason and religion, religion and virtue are for Gellert inseparable. Reason and religion provide a twofold motivation for virtuous actions, a double source of comfort and moral strength. Thus, for instance, the Count's father can die in peace because he has lived "vernünftig und tugendhaft" [p.206]. In his efforts to assist the conscience-stricken murderer Dormund, Herr R. "nahm alle seine Vernunft und Religion zu Hilfe und suchte, diesem Unglückseligen damit beizustehen" [p.243]. In short, however, great Gellert's debt to Sensibility may be -- and this is a question to which we must return -- both religion and morality are for his characters dependent on reason. I would, therefore, disagree with Newald's assessment of the ideal of virtue contained in the novel: "Er sagte sich von dem rationalistischen Moral, welche seinem Wesen nicht entsprach, los, stellte sich unter den Banner der christlichen Ethik und folgte der Stimme seines Herzens"<sup>10</sup>. I would challenge this interpretation on two counts. As we have seen, Gellert's ethical system is not without a considerable pragmatic or rationalistic element. Nor is his relationship to Christianity as unambiguous as Newald here suggests. Our analysis of the novel's handling of religious themes revealed, on the contrary, that Gellert's characters take from Christianity precisely that which corresponds to their own ideal of enlightened *Tugendempfindsamkeit*. The rest -- which comprises almost the entire corpus of Christian dogma -- they choose to ignore. Fundamental to Gellert's moral code is the conviction that those who know what is



good will inevitably act accordingly. Since the road to virtue is pleasant and eventually rewarding, all that is necessary for the avoidance of evil is the ability to recognise it. Gellert's is a thoroughly optimistic philosophy, committed to the belief that as ignorance is gradually overcome by increasing general enlightenment, vice too will disappear. All that would seem to be required is an adequate process of education.

The assumption that all men are good at heart -- an assumption by no means incompatible with a realistic appreciation of natural human weaknesses such as egoism -- inevitably leads to an over-simplification of the issue. Gellert, not very convincingly, suggests that man's innate goodness requires only some slight encouragement for universal harmony to ensue. Instead of being confirmed in their wicked ways by the assurance that these bring material benefit -- as is, of course, the case when the virtuous refuse to retaliate -- the forces of evil, egoism, cruelty are in Gellert's novel almost effortlessly defeated. The novel contains several instances of sudden conversion or repentance. Dormund, Wid, even the Swedish Prince (responsible though this last is directly or indirectly for all the Countess's misfortunes) -- each undergoes an instantaneous change for the better. Gellert's belief in the possibility of such conversions is based at least partly on the notion that virtue is often the result of a particular emotional state: once this emotion, generally pity or gratitude, has been aroused, a return to virtuous conduct will be more or less ensured. The implementation of the Christian exhortation to "turn the other cheek" is thus often the prelude to harmonious co-operation, ensuring practical benefit for all concerned. Thus, for instance, the sadistic Eskin, who shares Steeley's imprisonment in Siberia, experiences a sudden and complete change of heart the moment Steeley shows spontaneous and selfless generosity. Steeley's willingness to share his meagre rations with a man who has used him thoroughly ill is a gesture capable of changing completely his one-time persecutor. Gellert, therefore, sees morality as being by no

means a matter for the reason alone. Pragmatic though this ethical standpoint undoubtedly is, he also lays considerable emphasis on the role of feeling, especially of gratitude, in encouraging virtue.

Of Herr R. we are told: "Sein Verlangen war, alle Menschen vernünftig und alle Vernünftigen glücklich zu sehen" [p.210]. It is Gellert's conviction that reason and happiness belong together. He shows obvious sympathy for those who are able and willing to enjoy the pleasures of this world. Steeley's father, for example, full of the joys of life despite his advanced age, is portrayed as a lovable and sensible, if slightly comic figure. In good-humour and liveliness he far outdoes his son and younger friends, and what is more rejoices in the fact, certain as he is that he has remained a good Christian.

Ich bin ein Kaufmann; ich habe meine Pflicht in acht genommen, und Gott weiß, daß ich niemand mitwillen um ein Pfennig betrogen habe. Ich bin gegen die Notleidenden mitleidig gewesen, und Gott wird es auch gegen mich sein. Die Welt ist schön; aber jene wird noch besser sein [pp.333-4].

Old Steeley is convinced that even if he were to die dancing he would be assured of a good welcome above. The pleasures of this world -- Nature, love, even money -- are for Gellert gifts from God, and must be enjoyed as such. Disdain for these pleasures would constitute ingratitude towards the Giver.

Herr R. believes that happiness is not only compatible with duty -- happiness is a duty in itself. He maintains "Wir haben alle eine Pflicht, uns das Leben so vergnügt und anmutig zu machen, als es möglich ist" [p.222]. Such an attitude is far removed from orthodox Lutheranism, and further still from Pietism -- a movement with which Gellert does at times seem to have something in common. According to Pietist teaching, all actions, of whatever kind, fall into two categories -- virtues and vices. No action, however trivial, can be morally neutral. Hence all actions which are not

performed expressly in the service of God must be sinful -- even such apparently innocent enjoyments as walking and picking flowers. All time which the Pietist does not spend on the performance of tasks essential to everyday existence should therefore be spent on prayer or meditation. Gellert, with the Enlightenment as a whole, rejects this view entirely. Herr R.'s views on marriage are particularly interesting here. His somewhat unusual argument is that if marriage is an agreeable state, then we are obliged by duty alone to enter into it. For Gellert, happiness is no longer a sin or even a luxury, but a whole *raison d'être*.

Central to this new ideal of earthly happiness is the role played by erotic love. The Countess describes her blissful union with Herr R. in the following terms:

Man denke ja nicht, weil wir die Wissenschaften liebten, daß wir an uns nur unsere Seelen geliebt hatten. Ich hab' bei all meinen Büchern über die metaphysische Geisterliebe nur lachen müssen. Der Körper gehört so gut als die Seele zu unserer Natur... Die sinnliche Liebe, die bloß auf den Körper geht, ist eine Beschäftigung kleiner und unfruchtbarer Seelen. Und die geistige, die sich nur mit den Eigenschaften der Seele gattet, ist ein Himgespinst hochmütiger Schulweisen, die sich schämen, daß ihnen der Himmel einen Körper gegeben hat, den sie doch, wenn es von den Reden zur Tat käme, um zehen Seelen nicht würden fahren lassen [p.225].

Gellert's treatment of love is a subject to which we must return in order to distinguish the type of Sensibility he advocates from that propounded in Richardson's novels.

The catalogue of misfortunes which the Countess relates is little short of incredible. Bigamy, incest, murder, imprisonment in Siberia -- all are experienced by this small circle of friends, and all are endured with varying degrees of resolution and fortitude; as indeed they must be endured, since there can be no reprieve from Fate. This fate is experienced as a malevolent force, which the characters are powerless to resist. At first sight there would seem to be a world of difference between the Christian concept of Providence -- according to which the virtuous are not punished, but rewarded and



protected -- and this *Schickung*. The issue may be clarified somewhat if we interpret each new catastrophe as simply one more stage in the process of moral purification the characters must undergo -- though since Count, Countess, Herr R. and Caroline are presented to us as fully-fledged paragons, one might be tempted to ask how they can possibly be in need of improvement! Each near-disastrous episode may then be regarded as an opportunity for the characters to give further, in each case slightly varied, proof of their exemplary moral qualities. While each situation, each test is in itself a complete episode, a cumulative effect is also achieved; we are left with the impression that a moral code which can emerge unscathed from so many trials should not easily be disregarded.

Significantly, Gellert's paragons suffer less at the hands of enemies or villains than from a series of blows of Fate. This may be explained at least in part by Gellert's own natural mildness of temperament, and his firm belief in the moral perfectibility of the human race. Clearly he is unwilling to portray human beings as other than at least potentially virtuous. This unwillingness creates as a by-product a concept of a mysterious, even malicious Fate; this is an inevitable consequence of Gellert's reluctance to hold man entirely responsible for the sorry state of the world.

*Gelassenheit*, or the peace of mind which comes from the knowledge of a trial endured, a duty accomplished or a generous act performed, is for Gellert a uniquely desirable end. Thanks to his exemplary life, the old Count not only dies a beautiful and universally instructive death, but religion and virtue have also preserved his tranquillity throughout the years. Perhaps the greatest praise the Countess can bestow upon him is the assurance: "Ich kann sagen, daß ich diesen Greis in drei Jahren fast keine Stunde unruhig gesehen habe" [p.205].

Yet the proposition that reason plus virtue equals happiness does not enjoy the

universal applicability one might expect. While the Carlson-Mariane-Dormund episode does not, as Robert Spaethling would have us believe, throw Gellert's entire moral code into question, the doubt and eventual despair experienced by these characters does provide food for thought. Spaethling rightly draws attention to the tendency of the most sorely-tried characters to waver in their *Gelassenheit*<sup>11</sup>. Thus Carlson might be able to reconcile himself to the prospect of an untimely death -- a death we may feel to be a punishment for his incestuous relationship with Mariane -- were it not for his reluctance to leave precisely this Mariane:

Ja, Ja, ich sterbe, ich sterbe getrost. Doch Gott, ich soll Euch nicht wiedersehen? Ich soll Euch verlassen, liebste Mariane? Ich soll sterben? Welche entsetzliche Empfindungen fangen itzt in mir an zu entstehen? Ach, ich kann nicht mehr schreiben [p.220].

If this episode may perhaps be dismissed as a warning example -- warning, that is, against the dangers of unbridled passion -- it is not only these three very imperfect characters whose optimism is shaken. Even the heroine herself, Gellert's ideal of womanhood, on hearing of her husband's imminent execution, is capable of the following: "Alle Trostgründe der Religion und der Vernunft waren bei meiner Empfindung ungültig, und sie vermehrten nur meine Wehmut, und ich sah, daß sie solche nicht besänftigen konnten" [p.213]. The fact that this despair is only temporary scarcely lessens its impact, suggesting as the episode does that even for one with all the sound moral principle the Countess has at her command, a state of mind the very opposite of *Gelassenheit* is at certain times possible and even natural.

Spaethling argues:

Es ist wichtig zum Verständnis der Gräfin und des Herrn R., daß ihre Weisheit und Gelassenheit nur in der Studierstube glücken, daß sie im entscheidenden Augenblick den Kopf verlieren, daß ihre Vernunft angesichts einer kritischen Lebenslage versagt, sie irreführt und sie sogar in Schuld verstrickt, wenn es um Dinge des Lebens und der Liebe geht.<sup>12</sup>

There is in fact no evidence that Gellert intends to portray any such weakness in his characters. All that can be said in favour of Spaethling's interpretation is that when

one disaster has been as it were "overcome", it is quickly followed by another -- and another. The characters are powerless to end the chain of misfortune, and yet they deal with each separate misfortune with exemplary good sense. Their susceptibility to the whims of Fate -- and without this we should remember there could be no plot, no action -- is certainly not designed to expose Gellert's ideal of *Gelassenheit* as a mere illusion, as Spaethling suggests. It would perhaps be more correct to see in the characters' vacillation between rebellion and resigned acceptance not, as Spaethling does, some sort of metaphysical dialectic, but rather an attempt on Gellert's part to give his novel some semblance of psychological credibility.

In Siberia the Count feels himself "von Gott und Menschen in meinen Gedanken verlassen und feindselig im Herzen wider beide" [p.272]. Yet in the very same sentence and precisely because of his lack of *Gelassenheit* he characterises himself as "ein schrecklicher Mensch" [p.272]. Interestingly enough, the reader learns of the Count's sufferings and consequent state of near-despair only in retrospect, in the context of a letter to the Countess which she receives and imparts to the reader only after her husband's return to safety and happiness is already an accomplished fact. To arouse a suspicion in the reader's mind that the Count's depressive state, his failure to derive adequate comfort from religion, might be entirely justified -- this would be directly contrary to Gellert's didactic intention. Sympathy for the Count's plight must not be allowed to cloud the reader's judgement. Natural though such sympathy is, it can and must be kept in check by the assurance that all was indeed well in the end, that virtue did receive its just reward. The result should be to encourage the reader's own faith in divine Providence, since:

Die Gewißheit der Liebe und Weisheit Gottes ist unerschütterliche Voraussetzung. Widersprechen könnte ihnen ein Ereignis oder Zustand nur zum Schein, für unseren beschränkten Verstand.<sup>13</sup>

Gellert's concept of *Gelassenheit* has very little in common with the Pietistic ideal of the same name. The Pietist strives to negate all personal wishes: he himself must

simply be the instrument of the divine will. As we have seen, for Gellert, individual wishes are by no means incompatible with the dictates of duty. Indeed, misfortunes have a positive function in the novel -- they serve to further moral purification and are, in retrospect, a source of edification, of wonder at the mysterious workings of beneficent Providence. The characters' reaction to suffering is entirely positive -- or should be; not even in their most despairing moments do they approach the Pietistic belief in the wretched unworthiness of humanity. Furthermore, the *Gelassenheit* Gellert urges is not without a distinct pragmatic element. The willing acceptance of the inevitable is shown to constitute the only sensible course of action. That submission to God's will might be desirable simply because it is God's will and not because it secures peace of mind, or makes life generally more pleasant -- this more obviously "religious" attitude is scarcely discernible in Gellert's novel -- Gellert reduces the specifically religious content of the *Gelassenheit* ideal to a minimum. In fact, parallels with rationalistic Stoicism would be more appropriate than with Pietism. "Man sieht, wenn man den Betrachtungen über die Vorsehung nachhängt, die Unmöglichkeit, sich selbst zu helfen deutlicher, als wenn man sich seinen Empfindungen überläßt" [p.263]. In Siberia the Count and Steeley are forced to realise the limits of their own capacity for *Gelassenheit*. Here the reality often falls short of the ideal.

Wir richteten uns bei unseren Klagen mit der Wahrheit auf, daß ein gütiger und weiser Gott dieses Schicksal über uns verhängt hatte, daß wir unser Elend nicht leichter machen könnten, als wenn wir uns seinen Schickungen geduldig überließen [p.262].

Yet no sooner have the two prisoners successfully convinced themselves of these helpful truths than they again begin to regret their homeland and to mourn the separation from family and friends. Thus peace of mind, for Gellert one of the greatest goods man can obtain, is by no means always sustained, even by the most exemplary characters.

Nor is the Countess entirely perfect: she is not free, it would appear, from some

degree of coquetry or feminine vanity. Her references to her own charms are by no means infrequent. On a superficial level this preoccupation with her own beauty might be explained by the fact that this attracts the attention of the licentious Swedish Prince, thereby setting the whole plot in motion. At the same time, it seems likely that Gellert's readers would have been more interested in (hence more willing to accept moral guidance from) an aristocratic, beautiful heroine than a low-born ugly one. Moreover, this slight flaw in the Countess's character may be indicative of a desire on Gellert's part to create "mixed" or psychologically plausible characters. The Count, for his part, is prone to sudden fits of anger. Steeley is indiscreet and quarrelsome. Like the Countess's vanity, these are perhaps lovable failings. (Steeley, Gellert's attempt at a typically British character, is irascible in the cause of justice.) But they are failings nonetheless. An at least partially realistic portrayal of his characters' defects should tend to make the experiences -- and the insights -- of these characters more readily applicable to those problems likely to arise in the reader's own life. Gellert is careful, however, not to develop this psychological realism to the point where his heroes might no longer be regarded as providing examples of ideal conduct. In the debate as to whether literature should represent men as they really are, or as they should be, he opts decisively for the latter alternative. The characters must not be so perfect as to make the triumph of virtue seem easy: for Gellert true virtue, on the contrary, is always the result of a conscious decision, in some instances also of intense inner conflict.

We are by no means to suppose that the Countess experiences no doubts or regrets on renouncing one of her husbands in favour of the other. She freely admits that on the resumption of marital relations with the Count she does not immediately become indifferent to Herr R. She has moments of weakness in which she is sustained only by Herr R.'s virtue. Her reaction is therefore more natural than scholars have tended to suppose: it is not Gellert's intention to present his characters, for all their self-



control, as in any way unfeeling.

Critics have often found similarities between Gellert's novel and *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded*, the only one of Samuel Richardson's three novels with which Gellert would have been acquainted at the time of writing his own. Despite Gellert's undoubted admiration for Richardson -- which did admittedly extend to proclaiming him "more immortal" than Homer -- it would be mistaken to assume that his aim was simply to write a German *Pamela*. Indeed, the differences between Richardson's novel and Gellert's are at least as pronounced as the similarities. Hence Erich Schmidt's criticism: "Wo bleibt Richardson? Gellert ist mit diesem Versuche eines moralischen Familienromans kläglich gescheitert"<sup>14</sup> is entirely misplaced. Of particular interest in this context is Richardson's relationship to the phenomenon of Sensibility. Sensibility does not play the dominant role in Pamela's world view. It is true that she does subject her own emotional responses to the most careful scrutiny, and Richardson is certainly skilled in the depiction of female psychology, especially when it is a matter of tracing the growth of love; but love is something Richardson treats with a good deal of scepticism. Pamela's self-analysis is conducted entirely in the cause of virtue, to which all her feelings are subordinated. It is for her innocence Pamela feels, not for her fellow human beings.

In Richardson's novels virtue is more or less equated with chastity. This puritanical morality in sexual matters is entirely lacking in the *Schwedische Gräfin*. The morality Gellert advocates has a much broader foundation; it is benevolence, philanthropy, above all unselfishness. Indeed, Gellert's treatment of sexual questions is indulgent to the point of laxity. The relationship between the Count and Caroline, and the reaction of the Count's father to this love affair provide a particularly revealing instance. Caroline -- with her never-wavering and abundant *Gelassenheit* perhaps the most virtuous of the virtuous characters -- is presented, despite her status as the Count's

former mistress, in the most favourable light. The Count's promise of marriage as soon as circumstances will allow is implicitly recognised as sufficient justification for the sacrifice of her virtue. The Countess's subsequent verdict is: "ein Frauenzimmer, das sich unter solchen Umständen in eine vertrauliche Liebe einläßt, verdient eher Mitleiden als Vorwürfe" [p.202]. In contrast to the then widespread belief that *c'est le premier pas qui coûte*, that the loss of a girl's virginity before marriage will inevitably lead her down a path of corruption and degradation, in Gellert's novel it is Caroline who, realising that marriage to a *bourgeoise* like herself will necessarily incur for the Count the disfavour of the Court, of her own accord magnanimously renounces all claim upon him. The Count's father is so enlightened as to accept his son's sexual urges as an inescapable fact -- while Richardson's Grandison, by contrast, goes "pure" into marriage -- and accordingly sanctions his relations with Caroline, "um ihn von den gefährlichern Ausschweifungen der Jugend durch ihre Gesellschaft abzuhalten" [p.201]. Similar indulgence is later extended to a girl the friends discover giving birth in a field. The Countess writes: "eine gewisse schamhafte Miene entschuldigte ihren Fehler im voraus" [p.300], thus supporting the Count's analysis of the case: "Das arme Mädchen... wer weiß, welcher Betrüger sie unter dem Versprechen der Ehe um ihre Unschuld gebracht hat" [p.300].

The persecution of innocence is not for Gellert the all-important theme it is for Richardson, Hermes and Sophie von La Roche. The episode of the Swedish Prince, however devastating its consequences, in itself dealt with fairly quickly. It is little more than a device to start the sequence of events on which the plot depends.

The Prince's motivation is clear. He is attracted, overwhelmed by the Countess's beauty, so profoundly and permanently that many years later, after the deaths of their respective partners, he is still eager to offer his hand in marriage. The Count states explicitly: "Die erlittene Ungnade [that is, the Prince's revenge for the Countess's



rejection of his advances] ist nichts als ein Beweis, daß ich eine liebenswürdige und tugendhafte Frau habe" [pp.209-210]. The causal connection is obvious: the subsequent misfortunes are a direct result of the Countess's refusal to compromise her virtue. This is purely on the level of events; no metaphysical necessity is involved. There is no suggestion that virtue must suffer simply because it is virtue, or that vice will always threaten virtue, regardless of the greater or lesser degree of personal satisfaction to be derived from the eventual conquest. The Prince's conduct, on the contrary, corresponds to the familiar pattern of courtly intrigue - the Count had foreseen something of the kind. There is no transcendental connection at work, no great battle between the forces of good and evil, such as Hermes favours.

Indeed, Gellert has been accused, particularly by older generations of scholars, of gross immorality, especially with reference to the apparently unproblematic *ménage à quatre* -- Count, Countess, Herr R., Caroline. One might however take the view (surely Gellert's own view) that the fact that the difficult situation of one woman between two men -- Count, Countess, Herr R. -- is resolved at all bears witness to the moral uprightness and, more specifically, to the unselfishness of the protagonists, rather than to any frivolity or indifference to their fate. Gellert's exemplary characters accept the inevitable and accept it gladly -- as he believes all right-thinking persons will, or at least should.

We must assume that Gellert would have expected the solution of a *ménage à quatre* (albeit a thoroughly virtuous one) to be accepted as an unusual -- and experimental -- situation. Indicative of the fact that Gellert must have been well aware of the radical nature of the solution proposed is the decision, before the supposed death of the Count, to provide for Caroline and her offspring at some distance from the newly married couple. The Countess tells us:

Ich hätte ihr gern das Vergnügen gegeben, den Grafen vor ihrer Abreise

nach Livland noch einmal zu sehen, wenn es der Wohlstand hätte erlauben wollen [p.202]

There is at this stage no question of Caroline taking up residence with Count and Countess. Later all such obedience to the dictates of social convention is discarded, but from the passage quoted above we can deduce that Gellert would have expected the eventual solution to appear unusual, inappropriate or immoral. Similarly, the Countess and her friends are dismayed at the thought of their mutual and complicated ties being disclosed to an uninitiated, potentially uncomprehending or even hostile public. Even the blossoming state of relations between the inner circle and their already much-loved friends Steeley and Amalia provides no guarantee of any very positive response to such unorthodox and at first sight scandalous revelations. Fearing that Caroline's brother Andreas may disclose the secret, the Countess and her two husbands are filled with apprehension. Herr R. hastily leaves the room "mit niedergeschlagenen Augen". And indeed, on Steeley's becoming acquainted with the bare facts surrounding her second marriage, the Countess notes "Er schien wirklich bei dieser Nachricht etwas von seiner Hochachtung gegen mich zu verlieren" [p.308-9].

Acts of generosity on a grand scale are almost commonplace in Gellert's novel. Thus, for instance, Caroline offers the small estate which represents the entire livelihood of herself and her son to the Countess to accept as her own property. She is delighted for the Countess's sake that the Count has apparently, contrary to all expectations, escaped execution by dying an honourable death from his wounds -- her thoughts are all for the Countess; she weeps for her sorrow, not for her own loss of a protector, friend and former lover. Steeley, having been cruelly tortured by the authorities in Moscow, is overjoyed when the Count manages to escape a similar fate. Under interrogation by the same court, the Count overcomes his fear of torture and even of death; he refuses to obtain his own release by testifying against Steeley. On winning the favour of the Siberian governor, the Count's first request is that Steeley obtain

some relief. This generous willingness to sacrifice personal well-being for the good of others is among the salient features of Gellert's moral code. His is by no means an exclusively bourgeois morality (again compare Richardson and Hermes), having little to do with those virtues, such as frugality and sexual restraint, which are generally considered to be middle-class. Indeed, this unselfish generosity might perhaps be seen as a rather more positive force for good than Richardson's ideal, the latter being more a matter of prohibitions.

The morality of Sensibility is complicated. It is not spontaneous, however much the sensitive soul may value spontaneity, however necessary he may consider it to be to genuine feeling. The virtue of the *Empfindsame* is on the contrary always conscious, the product of reflection; at times, it would seem, positively contrived. Good deeds, acts of outstanding generosity and apparent unselfishness are performed not for their own sake or for the benefit of others, but for the personal gratification of the doer. Indeed, the Countess reveals that this is not only the verdict of posterity:

Ich fürchte, wenn ich meine Tugenden und Schwachheiten noch so aufrichtig bestimmte... daß ich doch dem Verdachte der Eigenliebe oder dem Vorwurfe einer stolzen Demut nicht würde entgehen können [p.193].

Thus we are faced with the paradoxical situation that while unselfishness is for Gellert virtue *par excellence* -- so much, indeed, that his characters vie with one another in gestures of self-sacrifice -- even his most exemplary figures demonstrate such pride and self-satisfaction that their virtue seems rather to be adopted for a selfish end, for the attainment of a sense of personal moral superiority. The "stolze Demut" of which the Countess no doubt justly accuses herself, is an apt characterisation of the kind of morality typical of Sensibility -- and of Pietism. The characters' pronounced tendency to self-analysis, the careful watch they keep over their own progress towards virtue, should be proof enough of the Pietistic influence. Like the Pietists, the Countess and her circle delight in the knowledge that they are the chosen few, *die wenigen Edlen*, a *Gefühlsaristokratie*, set apart from the common-place of mankind. Their contact with

the world at large is kept to a minimum, outside influences often being resented as an intrusion into the private and all-important sphere of personal relations.

The Countess's circle has become inward-looking. The result is a kind of group subjectivity, a reluctance to look anywhere other than to this self-sufficient *élite* for the fixing of moral values. While the adherents of the Enlightenment praised and practised sociability -- Gellert's own comedies provide a good example of this "worldly" ideal -- large social gatherings now imply superficiality. Just as the Pietists already considered themselves to be citizens of the next world, temporary and unwilling guests in this one, it is the ultimate aim of this group of *âmes sensibles* to create an "alternative" society, a world of their own, almost as difficult of access as the Pietists' heavenly home; as exclusive as the traditional aristocratic and court *milieux*. Pride in birth, wealth or social status has been replaced by pride in conscious, cultivated feeling, by the agreeable conviction that one's propensity to *Tugendempfindsamkeit* is something extraordinarily admirable.

The best possible ending to each day consists in meditation on the virtuous acts that one has performed in the course of it. No mention is made in this context of any hope of reward in the form of material benefit or of approval from society. The self-satisfaction which would seem to be the inevitable accompaniment to all good actions in Gellert's novel might perhaps be attributed to a new sense of community between those who give and those who receive assistance. Each generous act, providing as it does an example to be followed, is accompanied by the pleasurable prospect of winning new recruits for the ideal way of life. This in turn gives rise to a sense of identity, both individual and collective, to a sense of belonging and a sense of purpose -- all the more necessary, since it would appear that Gellert's characters are no longer able to derive from religion alone the conviction that they are in possession of "the truth".

The conscious enjoyment of one's own exemplary conduct cannot easily be distinguished from self-satisfied hypocrisy. In this context an assurance from Amalia, after help rendered to the Count, is of particular interest:

Mein Gemahl weiß es nicht, daß ich mich Ihres Unglücks angenommen habe, und er soll es auch nicht wissen, auch nicht die Welt. Ich bin zufrieden, daß Sie es wissen. Und vielleicht wäre mein Dienst viel großmüthiger, wenn ich Ihnen solchen nicht selbst bekanntgemacht hätte [p.291].

Thus Amalia, in conduct and sensibility as exemplary as the Countess and her immediate circle, acknowledges that she has been guilty of at least some small weakness or vanity in owning herself to be the Count's benefactress. Significantly, she shows no interest in earning the approbation of the world at large. Her husband, moreover, is so thoroughly lacking in sensibility that he has no right to knowledge of her inner life; his character necessarily excludes him from the community of noble souls for whom each emotion constitutes a new and vital experience. The Count, however, does belong to this *élite*, as was immediately evident to Amalia. Hence it was entirely natural that she should help him -- and equally natural that she should admit to having done so. The "return" which Amalia may confidently expect consists in the shared edification -- one is tempted to say intoxication -- to be derived from the awareness of her generosity and the shared enjoyment of the Count's gratitude.

In her letter to the Count, Amalia makes it clear that she finds particular pleasure in the knowledge that the help she has rendered in securing the Count's release will secure for her the love of the Countess. As is typical of Sensibility, Amalia expects friendship to be established between the two women, although they have never met. Direct, personal communication is hardly necessary when unique individual qualities are less essential to a relationship than is conformity to the familiar pattern of selfless generosity and cultivated sensibility. The fact that Goethe was able to conduct an intimate correspondence with Auguste von Stolberg without having met the lady



provides a useful parallel here. Significant in this context is also the contemporary habit of reading aloud letters addressed to one person for the benefit of entire assemblies. Letter and hearsay, the description of a noble character or single generous action is often sufficient to establish a basis for affection or love (as for example in Jacobi's *Woldemar*) -- a phenomenon of which Lenz's *Der Waldbruder* supplies a final and grotesque example.

The *âmes sensibles*, then, delight not only in feeling as such, but also in the awareness of their emotions:

Allen pessimistischen Anschauungen von der menschlichen Natur zum Trotz, wie sie die Theologen predigten, fühlt sich der empfindsame Mensch innerlich ungeheuer aufgewertet, erhält im Gefühl, in seinem Herzen, einen Garanten, daß er von Natur aus gut sei.<sup>15</sup>

The ability to experience emotion is considered to be positive in itself. Whether the feelings in question are themselves pleasant or unpleasant is largely irrelevant. The sensitive individual is ever eager to expand and develop his capacity for emotion. The loss of his ability to feel would be equivalent to the loss of his personal identity; it would almost inevitably entail the loss of the much-prized gentler virtues -- pity, gratitude, unselfishness, benevolence. Hence the emotion cultivated is never allowed to become overpowering.

Our analysis of Gellert's moral viewpoint has already involved us in a consideration of his relationship to *Empfindsamkeit*; this relationship must now be examined in some detail. Important here is Gellert's treatment of personal relations: love, friendship, marriage, parent-child relationships. The eighteenth century as a whole, it has often been pointed out, had more time for friendship than for love. Christian teaching, both orthodox-Lutheran and Pietistic, with its distrust of sexuality, was clearly influential here. Love was widely held to be a selfish passion, morally inferior to "pure" or unselfish friendship. As a result, that kind of love which corresponded

most closely to the ideal of sentimental friendship tended to meet with most approval. The erotic element, if it could not be eliminated, was certainly valued much less highly than it was by the *Sturm und Drang* generation. Since friendship was considered to be the nobler sentiment, and since friendship was distinguished by the absence of the "inferior" erotic element, the transition from the latter to the former can scarcely be regarded as the supreme feat of human sacrifice critics have often imagined. When the Count returns home to reclaim his wife, having been presumed dead for some ten years, Herr R. is able to assure him: "Hier... übergebe ich Ihnen meine Gemahlin und verwandle meine Liebe von diesem Augenblick an in Ehrerbietung" [p.253]. We have every reason to suppose that he is capable of doing just this. Walther Gebhardt sums up the situation most aptly with the sardonic comment "In der Verdrängung hat der Mensch des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts ja einige Übung."<sup>16</sup> Instead of concentrating all or most of his emotional energies on a single beloved object, the sensitive soul of the eighteenth century tended to divide his feelings out among a larger or smaller circle of friends. The term "friend" was much used, abused and inevitably trivialised. Platonic relationships, or those generally accepted as such, were frequent. Nothing could be more innocent than the love of Miller's Siegwart for his Mariane. Werther feels that Lotte is "ein Engel", "heilig". At the same time friendships between members of the same sex are described or conducted in terms we would nowadays consider more appropriate to the sphere of erotic love: "Ein jedes Wort von uns [Count, Countess, Herr R., Caroline, Steeley, Amalia] war eine Liebkosung und anstatt zu essen, sahen wir einander zu" [p.309].

There is no very great difference in outlook, mode of experience, perception or feeling between Gellert's male and female characters. The qualities which subsequent generations have tended to regard as specifically or principally feminine -- sensibility to pity and to tears, a tendency to spontaneous emotion and to sudden changes of mood, reliance on intuition -- these typical features of Sensibility are here common to



both sexes. Indeed, Werther, Siegwart and Woldemar are much less able to preserve an emotional equilibrium, much less pragmatic than are Lotte, Therese and Henriette. The more similar the two sexes are thought to be in their emotional make-up, the more the specifically non-sexual element in their relationship, i.e. all that which they have in common, will be accentuated. And as that which they have in common is here sensibility, this forms the basis of Platonic love and of the cult of pure friendship between man and woman.

The friendship between the Count and Steeley is very much in the sentimental mould. The grand, generous gestures, so central to Gellert's concept of morality, are as we have seen very much in evidence here. Tears and embraces are frequent; the strength of feeling at moments of farewell or reunion can even be such as to make articulate speech impossible:

Nunmehr durfte ich an der Hand meines Steeley, der noch wie in einem Traume war, und nichts als etliche abgebrochene Worte zu mir gesprochen hatte, nach meinem Behältnisse eilen. Unsere erste Beschäftigung, als wir alleine waren, bestand darin, daß wir einander eine lange Zeit ansahen, ohne ein Wort zu sagen [p.284].

In Gellert's novel sentimental friendships are established much less on a one-to-one basis than in the context of a select circle, of an albeit limited community. New arrivals, provided of course that they measure up to the required standards of sensibility, are always welcome. The concept of friendship as a unique relationship between two unique individuals -- such as we find in Jacobi's *Woldemar* -- is entirely absent. As indicated above, what is important for Gellert's characters is precisely this sense of community, this sense of belonging to a closed group or society within society, with shared interests and ideals. These interests and ideals are distinct from and may even be contrary to those prevalent in the outside world. Gellert's characters have "opted out". They live according to their own philosophy, showing little interest in whatever may lie beyond the horizon they have deliberately set for themselves.

Outsiders may be objects of pity or of charity -- they are tolerated, but not without condescension. The gulf which separates natural rationalists such as Andreas from their more emotional contemporaries is accepted as an inevitable, unalterable fact. Caroline's somewhat rough-and-ready brother has no time for sentimental outpourings or extravagant demonstrations of feeling. He finds the cult of sensibility practised by his circle rather improper, scarcely compatible with feminine dignity. It is certainly not capable of engaging his own interest for any length of time. The portrayal of Andreas may perhaps be seen as an attempt on Gellert's part to deal with, or at least to take account of, possible objections to his sentimental ideology -- such as he might expect from the ranks of the older, more exclusively rationalistic generation. For this generation, tears can betoken only sadness; and sadness, as an unpleasant emotion, should be avoided or at least restrained in favour of cheerful sociability. The *Wollust der Tränen*, the pleasure which may be derived from pain, simply because that pain offers proof of the individual's capacity for feeling -- all this is incomprehensible to Andreas and those like him. The Countess carefully distances herself from such emotional Philistines. Andreas, for all his merits, is never included in the *élite* "we" which encompasses her other friends. Nor does any member of the circle attempt to convert Andreas to their way of thinking -- or more precisely, of feeling. Emotion, Gellert implies, cannot be taught.

Possible reasons for this emotional and ideological isolationism are not immediately obvious. An unacknowledged need for security or reassurance may have some role to play. I have already suggested that the sentimental community, in fiction as in reality, had much in common with religious sects such as Pietism. Precisely this need to share all emotions is typical of Pietistic circles, whose members regarded faith as anything but a matter for isolated individuals. On the contrary, the group of fellow-believers must always be at hand to provide encouragement, comfort, reassurance and, if need be, a timely word of admonition to potential back-sliders. I would argue that

the circle of friends Gellert's Countess gathers around her performs a similar function. The catalogue of catastrophes courageously endured by the protagonists of this short work should provide sufficient proof that living up to the ideal of enlightened *Tugendempfindsamkeit* was no easy matter. Yet, come what may, there is always a trusted friend or confidant -- or more frequently a number of such friends -- at hand with a ready supply of spiritual sustenance. However great the disasters may be (and some of them are truly breath-taking) they need never be endured alone. Friends are comforters, sustainers, living exemplifications of all that is right and proper. Each is, in word and deed, confirmation of the values upheld, against no small odds, by the community as a whole.

As mentioned above, Gellert has been much criticised for his "shallow" or even "immoral" treatment of love relationships. Thus Hettner does not shrink from the adjectives "grell", "beleidigend", "empörend"<sup>17</sup>; and Brüggemann notes:

Wie konnte Gellert, der von allen gepriesene Sittenlehrer, sogar kein Arg darin finden, daß eine wackere, feinempfindende, fromme Frau von Mann zu Mann gewürfelt wird, ohne daß ihr sittliches Gefühl Einspruch erhebt oder sich im mindesten verletzt zeigt?<sup>18</sup>

That there is a marked difference between Gellert's handling of love and that with which we are familiar from the poetry of Klopstock or from Goethe's *Werther* -- so much is clear. For Gellert romantic love is by no means the pinnacle of existence, the one essential aspect of human life, to which all other considerations must be subordinated. Those characters who experience love in this way and to this degree -- Carlson, Mariane, Dormund -- come to a dire and, we are led to believe, inevitable end.

Brüggemann regrets bitterly that "heißblutige Leidenschaft" was a phenomenon as yet unknown to Gellert and his contemporaries. That Gellert was unaware of the existence of overpowering emotions is disproved by the inclusion of the Carlson-Mariane-

Dormund episode. Far from failing to recognise the presence of such emotions it is here Gellert's intention to depict and warn against their necessarily destructive effects. He clearly does not intend that the reader should withhold all sympathy from the miserable plight of these characters. They are not vicious, simply weak -- too weak to be able to deal adequately with their own emotions. Given character and circumstances it is easy to see why they act as they do; to understand them, forgive them, if not to approve. Their history demonstrates that

the human faculties are not themselves bad, but when not controlled and sublimated... they can be misused as the vehicles of selfishness, destructiveness and sin, and lead to unhappiness.<sup>19</sup>

Gellert is well aware of such tendencies in the human psyche, but would wish to see their role kept to a minimum. Carlson and Mariane are therefore "nicht Vertreter einer neuen Haltung, sondern sie können sich in einer Art ethischer Unreife noch nicht zu der neuen Haltung der Gräfin und Caroline etwa durchdringen".<sup>20</sup> Scholars such as Hettner and Brüggemann miss above all perhaps the element of inevitability "ein deterministisches Verfallensein"<sup>21</sup> in Gellert's treatment of love. But it does not necessarily follow that if the growth of love is dependent on respect or on an appreciation of the moral excellence of the beloved object that any morally excellent object will be equally beloved. The description of the Countess's awakening feelings for her first husband should alone serve to refute the argument that moral uprightness would of itself be capable of engaging her affections. As we have seen, the physical element of love is not neglected in Gellert's novel -- the Countess is prompted to think of a second marriage by her memories of "die Süßigkeit der Liebe" [p.221]. She tries to convince herself that she is instead only anxious to escape unwelcome suitors:

Du willst, dachte ich, um diese Herren los zu werden, dich selbst zu einer Wahl entschließen. Diese Ursache zu einer Ehe ist etwas weit hergeholt. Indessen war es gewiß, daß ich sie bei mir selber vorwand, weil es mein Herz haben wollte [p.221].

This, surely, is astute and convincing psychology. Any number of virtues may be

present and love still lacking, as Herr R. argues:

Ich habe gewiß recht, daß er [one of the Countess's admirers] ein liebenswürdiger Mann ist, allein diesem Urteile dürfen Sie darum nicht trauen. Ich betrachte den Mann zwar nach einerlei Begriffen mit Ihnen, allein nicht nach einerlei Empfindungen. Ich liebe ihn als einen Freund, und als ein Freund kann er Ihnen angenehm und liebenswert vorkommen, aber darum noch nicht als ein Ehemann [p.221].

Moreover, if Gellert's treatment of love appears superficial, we would do well to compare it with what would seem to have been the contemporary reality. In Gellert's time not only the aristocracy would appear to have contracted marriages for reasons of state -- among the *bourgeoisie* too it was considered infinitely more commendable to marry for money than for anything as transient and undependable as love. Gellert portrays marriage as a true partnership, as a community of interest in more than merely the financial sense. For Herr R. "Eine recht zufriedene Ehe bleibt nach allen Ansprüchen der Vernunft die größte Glückseligkeit des gesellschaftlichen Lebens [p.222]. None of the female characters in the work correspond to the ideal of the courtly romances of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries in which the *grande dame* fulfils an almost exclusively ornamental function, seeking only to please the masculine world by beauty, charm and wit. By contrast, Gellert's Countess, Caroline and Amalia are presented as complete human beings with wide-ranging interests, duties and responsibilities. Similarly, whereas children were previously expected to submit with unquestioning obedience to parental authority, with the growth of *Empfindsamkeit* the role of the ties of affection increased in this sphere also. This new concept of the parent-child relationship is reflected in the enlightened views of the old Count: "Mein Sohn durfte in mir nicht sowohl seinen Vater, als seinen Freund lieben und verehren" [p.201]. Thus the individual's freedom of action is theoretically unlimited. It is the duty of natural guardians such as parents and educators to maintain order, to further the cause of reason and virtue, to convince those under their protection that the morally correct alternative is also the more rational and in the long run the more pleasant.



Tears flow plentifully in Gellert's novel. Even soldiers, "Leute... denen die Wildheit und Unerschrockenheit aus den Augen sah" [p.207] weep reverently at the few kind words spoken to them by the old Count on his death-bed. Nevertheless, such tears should be carefully distinguished from those shed still more copiously in, for example, Miller's *Siegwart*. The cause of such tears, as indeed of most suffering in the *Schwedische Gräfin* is almost invariably pity for others. The *Wonne der Wehmut*, *Wollust der Tränen*, Anton Reiser's "joy of grief" is familiar to the Countess and her friends, but (Carlson and Mariane always excepted) their tears are never prompted by selfish passion. Thus the Countess is greatly distressed on learning of the disgrace and imminent death of her husband; but once she must accept his death as an accomplished fact, once his sufferings are at an end, she is able to moderate her own. Her feelings are concentrated on what he, not on what she herself must endure.

Diese Nachricht vergnügte mich, so betrübt sie war, doch unendlich. "So ist er als ein Held an seinen Wunden gestorben?" rief ich aus. "So hat er die traurigen Zubereitungen zu einem gewaltsamen Tode, welche ärger als der Tod selbst sind, nicht ansehen dürfen. Nunmehr bin ich ruhig" [p.213].

Nor do Gellert's characters weep for trivial causes. The deaths of beloved dogs, cats or canaries have as yet no part to play in the emotional fabric of the novel, just as solitary walks, graveyards and the weeping moon of *Siegwart* as yet make no appearance. For the early *Empfindsamkeit* to which Gellert is indebted, tears are a sign of virtue, a communal rite, a badge by which every sensitive soul at once becomes recognisable to his fellows. In Gellert's novel, tears are still reserved for special occasions, especially by the older generation: the old Count has not wept for forty years, and is by no means ashamed of his apparent insensibility.

Gellert shares with Sensibility in general a distinct predilection for death-bed, farewell and reunification scenes. Such scenes are productive of *Rührung* and this is a desirable end in itself. Derek van Abbé has calculated that the novel contains one

death to approximately every ten pages of text. An exemplary death is considered to provide the most decisive testimony to a virtuous life. An exemplary death therefore has an educative function: it is symptomatic of the spirit of the age that in 1742 the mother of Frederick the Great received from a certain Graf Henkel a work bearing the ominous title *Sterbebettsszenen in vier Bänden*.<sup>22</sup> Gellert's contemporaries witnessed a peaceful and virtuous end with little short of delight. The old Count is fully aware of the responsibility he has towards potential onlookers:

Also habe ich nur noch drei Tage von dem Leben zuzubringen, von dem ich meinem Schöpfer Rechenschaft bringen soll; ich werde sie nicht besser anwenden können, als wenn ich durch meine Freudigkeit den Meinigen ein Beispiel gebe, wie leicht und glücklich man stirbt, wenn man tugendhaft gelebt hat [p.206].

Here the reader's attention is once again drawn to the practical benefits of virtue as a prerequisite of the universally desired peaceful end. The old Count's death-bed scene lasts for three days and his daughter-in-law is duly appreciative: "Gott, wie lehrreich war das Ende dieses Mannes!" [p.205].

Reunification scenes too lend themselves well to sentimental treatment. The meeting between the Count and Steeley is a particularly good example: "Der Graf zitterte, daß er kaum von dem Sessel aufstehen konnte, und wir sahen ihren Umarmungen mit einem freudigen Schauer zu" [p.305]. Such scenes would seem to place Gellert's novel firmly in the tradition of the cult of sentimental friendship. What is especially typical of Sensibility is the way in which the very natural joy the two friends experience on meeting communicates itself to the rest of the circle -- and all are intoxicated together:

Oh, was ist das Vergnügen der Freundschaft für eine Wollust, und wie wallen empfindliche Herzen einander in so glücklichen Augenblicken entgegen. Man sieht einander schweigend an, und die Seele ist doch nie beredter als bei einem solchen Stillschweigen... Caroline und Herr R. teilten ihre Freude mit der unsrigen, und wir traten alle viere um Steeley und waren alle Ein Freund [p.306].

In the context of Sensibility pity ranks among the most frequently experienced as well



as the most pleasurable of emotions. As the Countess experiences in Holland, society's unfortunates are always certain of a warm reception:

Ich erfuhr, daß ein großes Unglück in den Gemütern vieler Menschen fast eben die Wirkungen hervorbringt, welche sonst ein großes Glück zu verursachen pflegt. Man schätzt uns hoch, weil wir viel erlitten und verloren haben, und man macht unsern Unfall zu unserem Verdienst [pp.217-218].

The sentimental propensity to pity for unfortunate fellow creatures is less altruistic than might at first appear. Pity is experienced above all as identification with another's sufferings, as an opportunity to experience a kind or degree of emotion which would not otherwise be encountered. Since it is assumed that misfortune is itself proof of moral worth, it is natural that pity should often form the basis for love or friendship -- as is the case, for example, in the relationship between Steeley and Amalia. As is typical of much of the literature of the time, Gellert aims to produce an emotional response in his readers by depicting the sufferings of virtuous people. Hard-luck stories are frequent in the novel of sensibility. All realism is abandoned in the hope of arousing the reader's pity and preferably also his tears. The sad tale of Steeley's first engagement -- the bride is struck by lightning on the way to the altar - is an obvious example. It would no doubt be correct to assume that the more frequent contemporary response to such incidents, particularly from the young ladies of good family who were among Gellert's most fervent admirers, would have been tears, not laughter.

Gellert's characters display a devotion to literature which is typical of Sensibility.. Their approach to reading is largely subjective: "Und ob ich's gleich nicht allemal sagen konnte, warum eine Sache schön oder nicht schön war, so war doch meine Empfindung so getreu, daß ich mich selten betrog" [p.205]. Literature for the Countess and her circle is most enjoyable when it is shared, when the feelings to which it gives rise can be exchanged and compared. The characters' appreciation of literature is based not on scholarship or on the knowledge of aesthetic rules, but precisely on

feelings. That Gellert should have created literary-minded characters is in itself scarcely surprising. In his *Moralische Vorlesungen* (delivered at the University of Leipzig) and in his capacity as a valued correspondent, he was active in the cause of literature, compiling reading-lists for the edification and entertainment of the young and especially of the *Frauenzimmer*. His comedies contain frequent references to, indeed advertisements for literary works. Here his characters are judged according to their attitude to literature. His *Betschwester*, for instance, could give no more cogent proof of her own hypocrisy and narrow-mindedness than by her rejection of *Pamela* and the *Moralische Wochenschriften*.

Shared delight in literature is important in establishing personal relationships, in Gellert's own novel, as later in *Werther* and *Siegwart*. The Countess's two marriages are all the happier for this shared interest. Indeed, life for the adherents of Sensibility is very much a literary affair. Reality is often experienced very much in terms of literary associations and references. There are obvious dangers inherent in this tendency to vicarious experience through literature. However intense the enjoyment of sentimental literature may be, however direct or overwhelming, it is nevertheless true that literature can only provide a second-hand experience. When literature becomes all-important, when the æsthetic dimension is over-emphasised, everyday life becomes stylised, and contact with reality is made more difficult: the very directness and spontaneity of response sought in the original confrontation with literary works is necessarily lost. Gellert's characters, unlike for example Siegwart and his friends, not only select their reading matter carefully -- they even submit it to critical analysis. A "correct", objectively verifiable response to literature is here presupposed, a response which will be similar for all educated readers, endowed as such readers are assumed to be with reason, virtue and a "noble heart". Literature gives rise to *Empfindungen* but these *Empfindungen* are (with modifications) common to all. Gellert's characters' preference for reading aloud within a small circle of close friends is itself entirely

typical of Sensibility: their conviction that this should be conducted principally with a view to moral improvement, rather than simply to arouse emotion, is more characteristic of Enlightenment thinking.

*Empfindsam* also -- indeed reminiscent of Richardsonian psychology -- is the portrayal of Amalia's growing love for Steeley. Amalia, however, has more faith in the positive value of emotion than does Pamela. Far from calling upon reason, or even virtue, to protect her from the dangers inherent in sensibility, Amalia decides to let reason well alone, to allow her feelings to run their natural and (the implication is) desirable course:

Ich merkte, je mehr er redte, daß etwas in meinem Herzen vorging, allein ich hatte keine Lust, es zu untersuchen, und ich hütete mich zugleich, mein Herz nicht zu stören [p.313].

Steeley's and Amalia's love develops cautiously and uncertainly. Even when they have found the courage to admit their feelings to themselves, they have by no means overcome their shyness sufficiently to be able to confide these emotions to one another. Each can only guess at the state of the other's heart and attempt to establish the truth by every possible indirect means. It is a task made all the more difficult by the fact that both are equally determined to disguise their love.

To what extent, if at all, does Gellert's novel reflect contemporary reality? To argue, as Brüggemann does, that the acts of supreme generosity and self-sacrifice depicted in the novel, and the world-view which gives rise to them, were entirely typical of Gellert's time would seem to be dubious to say the least.

Brüggemann states his case as follows:

An der Aufrichtigkeit dieser Erzählung ist nicht zu zweifeln. Es ist alles mit so viel Natürlichkeit geschrieben, daß nichts den wahren Lebensverhältnissen Widersprechendes und künstlich Erfundenes darin gesucht werden kann.<sup>23</sup>

And further:

Dafür spricht der Erfolg des Romans, der auf die Leser des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts also nicht unwahrscheinlich gewirkt haben kann, und das heißt, daß er ihren eigenen seelischen Dispositionen mithin nicht widersprochen hat.<sup>24</sup>

This thesis is unacceptable. The undoubted popularity of Gellert's novel does not by any means indicate that the men and women of the 1740s and 1750s saw in the Countess and her friends people very like themselves. Indeed, the opposite might equally well be true. The catalogue of calamities which makes up the plot of the novel is certainly extreme -- and surely the characters are "extremes" also. Gellert's intention, crassly stated, is to propagandise an idea of selfless behaviour. And such an ideal will of course best be exemplified by perfect or near-perfect characters. Such characters can appear extreme to the point of psychological impossibility -- they are all the more unambiguous for that. Moreover Gellert's novel has something in common with modern "escapist" fiction. This type of literature provides both entertainment and an opportunity for the reader to forget for a time the harsh realities of everyday life. In the 1740s, as today, the reader might derive considerable pleasure simply from reading about the rich and beautiful. The literature of Sensibility provided an outlet for surplus emotion, a chance to indulge freely in emotional exaltation. Everyday life, with its burden of work and practical cares, rarely provided such opportunities. The bourgeois lifestyle adopted by the Countess is clearly intended to be something of an idyll: it is idealised, as the characters are idealised. Indeed, one might argue that Gellert's novel may have enjoyed such immense popularity precisely because the middle class saw in it not a reflection, but an idealisation of its own attitudes and way of life. Paul Mog sees in the discrepancy between *bourgeois* ideal and *bourgeois* reality the most likely explanation for the popularity of the philanthropist figure -- Count, Countess, the Count's father, Caroline, Herr R. and the Polish Jew are all philanthropists in one way or another. According to Mog, this figure:

birgt in sich diese Sehnsucht nach Abweichung von der ökonomischen Rationalität. In ihrer Selbstlosigkeit, ihrem Mitleid konzentriert sich die Essenz der Empfindsamkeit als Reaktion auf die unempfindsame soziale Wirklichkeit.<sup>25</sup>

We would be equally mistaken to draw from the attitudes personified by Gellert's characters any very clear conclusions as to the true state of public morals in eighteenth-century Germany. We would, it has been suggested, be wrong in supposing

daß das Leben der Bürger im achtzehnten Jahrhundert ein besonders hohes moralisches Niveau gehabt hätte. Wir glauben vielmehr, daß infolge des wachsenden Reichtums und auch der ständigen Zunahme des Luxus unter den Bürgern, dann auch infolge des Beispiels der sogenannten Immoralität des Hofes, gerade das Gegenteil der Fall war und die Diskrepanz zwischen theoretischer und praktischer Moral in der zweiten Hälfte des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts größer war denn je. Jedenfalls in den Städten.<sup>26</sup>

One is indeed tempted to deduce from the eighteenth century's constant invocation of virtue that vice was rather more prevalent than might have been considered desirable. It should not be forgotten, however, that while the possession of material wealth may in some instances lead to moral depravity, the pursuit of riches is not infrequently accompanied by a distinct Puritanism. Moreover, the influence of court circles on the *bourgeoisie* was of course complicated by the eagerness of the middle class to establish an independent identity and independent values. The fact that the aristocracy was reputedly immoral thus tended rather to encourage the *bourgeoisie* in its pursuit of virtue. Nevertheless, it cannot be over-emphasised that Gellert's ideal of *Tugendempfindsamkeit* was an ideal and not a reality. The plain facts must have been very different. A *bourgeoisie* consisting principally of sensitive souls would scarcely have been capable of economic survival, still less of a rise to prosperity and eventual relative political influence:

Die Vorstellung von einem rührend aufrichtigen, handlungsunfähigen Bürgertum widerspricht die aktenkundige Tätigkeit bürgerlicher Kapitalien, die adligen Gutsbesitze in wachsender Zahl in bürgerliche Hände übergehen ließen: während in der Literatur sich die moralische Überlegenheit des Bürgertums bekundet, manifestiert sich im praktischen Leben in zunehmendem Maße seine ökonomische. Damit aber tritt gegen die unökonomische höfische Rationalität eine ökonomische bürgerliche Rationalität auf, von der die Gefühlskultur abweicht, ohne sich zunächst aus der Verklammerung mit ihr zu lösen.<sup>27</sup>



Brüggemann believes that the phenomenon of *Empfindsamkeit* was symptomatic of an entire social revolution: "Die Isolierung des Individuums schwindet. Es steht nicht mehr einer gegen den anderen. An die Stelle von Betrug und Bosheit treten Aufrichtigkeit, Redlichkeit und Treue... Das Ergebnis ist ein ganz neuer Typ Mensch."<sup>28</sup> This assumption of a sudden, by no means clearly motivated change in the mass of humanity from cold and hard to warm and soft borders on the absurd. Rather more convincing is Pikulik's argument, that the change is not to be sought in people's feelings as such, but in their attitude to these feelings:

Was die Empfindsamkeit von der scheinbar gefühllosen Zeit, die ihr vorausging, unterscheidet ist... die Tatsache, daß in ihr sich die Menschen zum ersten Mal des Gefühls bewußt wurden... Gefühle hatten sie auch vorher, und vielleicht echter, und stärker als die nachfolgenden Generationen, doch war dieses Fühlen naiv, d.h. sie fühlten, ohne es zu wissen.<sup>29</sup>

Yet this interpretation too leaves some questions unanswered. Apart from the fact that it is difficult to imagine how one can be said to experience emotion without knowing it -- one inevitably wonders why these emotions should suddenly become conscious when previously they were unconscious. Even if we substitute "problematic" for "conscious", this puzzle remains. I would rather take the view that while Brüggemann's pre-subjective man must have had as many and varied feelings, he felt with greater spontaneity, was content to feel without wondering why, wherefore or to what degree. There was no sudden transformation in 1750, 1760 or 1770. A new theoretical interest in the nature of feeling and the gradual decline in the importance in orthodox religion combined to produce a shift of emphasis. What was new was a growing realisation that the emotions were of supreme and universal importance, that they were worthy of analysis in philosophical works and in imaginative literature.

To what extent Gellert's concept of Sensibility -- and Sensibility *per se* -- was a specifically *bourgeois* phenomenon is a question to which we must now turn our attention. In the very first paragraph of the novel, Gellert presents his heroine as

*bourgeois* by inclination, if aristocratic by birth<sup>30</sup>. Little attention is paid to her lineage. She is not proud of her noble birth, mentioning only that her father "ein rechtschaffener Mann gewesen ist und wenig Mittel besessen hat" [p.191]. Gellert is careful to distinguish his novel and its ethic from the *galant* tradition of romance-writing. "Vielleicht würde ich bei der Erzählung meines Geschlechts ebenso beredt oder geschwätzig als andere gewesen sein, wenn ich anders viel zu sagen wüßte" [p.191]. Significant here is not only the Countess's eagerness to dissociate herself from "andre", her words also contain a slight but unmistakable note of irony. Pride in noble ancestry and social prestige is here implicitly dismissed as *Geschwätz* [p.191].

Of the *bourgeoise* Caroline the Countess says "Ich sahe beinahe keinen Vorzug, den ich vor ihr hatte, als daß ich adlig geboren war. Und wie geringe ist dieser Vorzug, wenn man ihn vernünftig betrachtet" [p.202]. These words are all the more convincing for being spoken by an aristocrat. Nor does the Countess restrict her open-mindedness to words alone. She chooses her second husband, the middle-class Herr R., on account of his personal merits: she attaches no importance to the fact that as her social inferior he would generally be thought unworthy of her. Indeed, the entire life-style favoured by the Countess is specifically middle-class. She and her two husbands reject the world of the court, with its *galanterie* and intrigue, for the sake of a quiet life in thoroughly *bourgeois* Holland. They create for themselves a veritable middle-class idyll. "Wir lebten, ohne zu befehlen und ohne zu gehorchen. Wir durften niemanden von unseren Handlungen Rechenschaft geben als uns selbst" [p.224]. On arriving in Holland, the Countess chooses to conceal her rank, turns her family jewels into hard cash and sound investments -- on the flourishing state of which she frequently reports -- and divides her time between charitable works, study and the education of her own and other people's children.

The Countess introduces her guardian and educator as "mein Vetter, der auch ein



Landedelmann war, und doch in seiner Jugend studiert hatte" [p.191]. This *doch* is significant, suggesting as it does that a university education might have been considered more appropriate for the sons of the middle classes than for the aristocracy. The landed nobility to which the Countess's enlightened guardian belongs had little in common with the court aristocracy. Lacking the means to indulge in luxury and corruption, the *Landadel* would in many cases be scarcely distinguishable from the wealthier farmers. Given this rural lifestyle and lack of interest in higher education -- the *Ritterakademien* provided precisely the sort of education the name suggests -- it would be surprising if this class, any more than the *Hofadel*, would have provided many models for Gellert's ideal of cultivated, reflective *Tugendempfindsamkeit*. Thus the Countess's guardian is educated, enlightened, not because of, but in spite of his rank.

The "enlightenment" of which this guardian approves has very little to do with book-learning: it is his intention that his pupil become "Nur klug und gar nicht gelehrt" [p.191]. He is to receive a "moral" education, no doubt in the style of Gellert's *Moralische Vorlesungen*, the purpose of which was to help form the young men of Leipzig into honest, industrious, "rational" citizens, husbands and fathers, capable of making a practical contribution to society. In other words, the Countess is to receive a middle-class education -- a point which becomes entirely clear if we compare her upbringing with that destined for the daughters of the vain and silly Frau von Hohenauf in Nicolai's *Sebalduß Nothanker*. For this lady the only instruction which seems either desirable or necessary consists in dancing, hat-trimming and the creditable conduct of love affairs and intrigues at court. Gellert clearly wishes to present the Countess's education as corresponding closely to his own ideal. The early inculcation of sound *bourgeois* principles is shown to serve her well in later life; in proving her exemplary virtue in each new trial she proves also the merits of her education.

As Meyer-Krentler has shown, Gellert writes with a specific type of reader very much in mind. This reader was familiar with the courtly romances<sup>31</sup>. Here love is a game, an art, an intrigue, virtue is irrelevant or even ridiculous. At first sight, Gellert's novel might seem to promise a reader of such romances more of his customary fare. The title, at least, is reminiscent of romantic adventure tales in the courtly genre, suggestive of scandalous confessions or amorous intrigue in an aristocratic *milieu*. We are told almost at once that the Countess is young and beautiful, and such expectations would thereby appear to be confirmed. Yet all hopes of this kind are consistently and systematically disappointed.

There is much to suggest that Gellert hopes to convince his reader of the validity of a new ideal of virtuous enlightenment, sensibility and philanthropy. Straightforward moralising would be inappropriate for the communication of such ideas, considering the nature of the public Gellert presupposes. Such readers would simply close the book and resort to something more immediately palatable. Thus concessions must be made to the reader's taste. The inclusion of adventure story motifs will ensure the continued interest of large sections of the public. At the same time, through the introduction of gradual and subtle deviations from the popular pattern, Gellert can hope to persuade the reader of the merits of his alternative to the courtly ideal. Again, as Meyer-Krentler has convincingly shown, this is achieved above all through ironic treatment of the clichés of the adventure story. The reader's expectations are encouraged up to a certain point, only to be disappointed, even mocked. The question of the heroine's rank brings just such a disappointment. She is indeed a "Countess in name only", an aristocrat who chooses to live a retiring, virtuous, thoroughly *bourgeois* existence. In creating this character Gellert is able to provide his middle-class reading public with the glamour it wants, and at the same time give added authority to the *bourgeois* ideal. The Countess is faced with a real alternative: she

chooses to renounce what the reader would probably consider to be distinct advantages, and by so doing she challenges that reader to think again about the real value of aristocratic luxury and pleasure-seeking.

When her eagerness to report the truth requires her to disappoint the reader's expectations, the Countess adopts an almost apologetic tone:

Ich hatte noch nie geliebt. Wie unglaublich wird dieses Bekenntnis vielen von meinen Leserinnen vorkommen. Sie werden mich deswegen wohl gar für einfältig halten, oder sich einbilden, daß ich weder schön noch empfindlich gewesen bin, weil ich in meinem sechzehnten Lebensjahr nicht wenigstens ein Dutzend Liebeshändel zählen konnte. Doch ich kann mir nicht helfen. Es mag nun zu meinem Ruhme oder zu meiner Schande gereichen, so kann man sich darauf verlassen, daß ich noch nie geliebt hatte [p.196].

The Countess regrets that she must report the truth, "unexciting" though it is. With the emphasis on authenticity typical of the time, she is concerned to distinguish "what really happened" from what might have happened and in a "novel" probably would have happened. An abduction before her marriage would no doubt have made for interesting reading but -- incredible as it may seem -- she arrived safely in Sweden, without interruption or misadventure. In other words, a new type of novel is being created, in which accepted conventions and expectations no longer apply. It is a novel which can hope for a favourable reception from those sections of the public normally suspicious of literature in general and of the notorious novel form in particular; from those whose reading-matter would hitherto have been restricted to texts of a devotional nature. Among criticisms most often levelled at the traditional romance -- apart from the charge of gross immorality -- was the assertion that fiction was simply "lies" and should, therefore, be dismissed as a waste of time and money, and as ungodly into the bargain.

One of the main reasons for Gellert's popularity was surely his ability to be all things to all men. As we have seen, his novel is indebted both to the Enlightenment and to

Sensibility. Gellert is no polemicist. All forms of religion win his respect and sympathy, provided only genuine piety is present -- and genuine virtue, for the two are closely related in Gellert's estimation. The actual content of religious belief concerns him but little. He lets questions of dogma well alone, and extends tolerance to Christians, Jews and free-thinkers alike.

As regards questions of morality, Gellert is convinced that while reason and emotion need not conflict, neither reason nor emotion should be permitted to gain exclusive control over the individual's behaviour. Yet, while emotion may be un-rational, that is to say separate from reason, it should not be and need not be irrational or contrary to reason: harmony between the two forces is attainable. Gellert believes that feelings should not be suppressed, but rather channelled into the service of virtue -- restrained and guided, not overpowered by the intellect. If emotions are schooled in this way they will serve to complement reason. The result should be a balanced, useful, virtuous and hence necessarily also happy individual. As Meyer-Krentler states: "Das Herz steht nicht auf der Seite der dunklen, irrationalen Kräfte, sondern überwindet diese gerade, indem es sich mit der Vernunft vereinigt"<sup>32</sup>. Only that love which is sanctioned by reason gains Gellert's approval, since the rational course of action is not only the morally correct one, but also that most likely to be productive of happiness. Happiness is both a duty and a clearly defined end which can be attained without undue difficulty; all that is required is consistent adherence to a number of entirely reasonable rules.

There are, of course, striking differences between Gellert's brand of *Tugendempfindsamkeit* and the *Sturm-und-Drang-Empfindsamkeit* of a Werther or Woldemar. Gellert's cult of Sensibility, tempered as it is by reason and virtue, is cultivated, civilised, restrained. The Countess and her circle enjoy their emotions; only the unfortunate misguided trio -- Carlsson, Mariane and Dormund -- allow themselves

to be overwhelmed by them. Gellert's exemplary characters find that this measured sensibility makes life more comfortable, easier, more aesthetically gratifying. Martin Greiner rightly draws attention to the "rokokohaften Charakter"<sup>33</sup> of this cult of feeling. In the words of Carsten Schlingmann: "Er selbst ist nicht eigentlich der empfindsame, er ist der zärtliche Gellert... für ihn ist die Grenze der Empfindsamkeit dort, wo die Schwärmerei beginnt."<sup>34</sup> At the same time it should be noted that Gellert's characters tend their feelings with great care and subject them to the most subtle analysis. Their personal relationships are decidedly *gefühlbetont*. They indulge in a cult of friendship not so very different from that practised by Miller's Siegwart almost thirty years later. They have a preference for solitude, for the enjoyment of literature and of the emotions to which that literature gives rise. They are ever eager to experience new kinds, new degrees of emotion and welcome all opportunities to indulge in pity or gratitude. Yet all this only to a limited extent. There would always seem to be an invisible barrier beyond which Gellert and his characters are unwilling or unable to pass. This boundary is fixed not by religion, to which the characters are more or less indifferent, but by "virtue". This concept of virtue is fundamental: it is already a substitute for religion, the one constant factor in a very fluid *Weltanschauung*.

1. Quoted from Max von Waldberg, "Goethe und die Empfindsamkeit". In *Berichte des freien deutschen Hochstiftes*. N.F. 15, 1899, pp.1-22; here p.22.
2. Quoted from the Afterword to C.F. Gellert, *Leben der schwedischen Gräfin von G\*\*\**. Edited by Jörg Ulrich Fechner, Stuttgart 1968, p.165.
3. See the Afterword to Gellert, *Schwedische Gräfin*, ed. Fechner.
4. *Johann Heinrich Voss*, edited by A. Voss, 1840, Vol.1, p.5.
5. Christian Fürchtegott Gellert, *Das Leben der schwedischen Gräfin von G\*\*\**. In: Gellert, *Sämtliche Schriften* (10 vols.), Leipzig 1839; vol.4, p.327. All subsequent references to the novel are to this edition.
6. Israel S. Stamm, "Gellert, religion and rationalism". In *The Germanic Review*, 28, 1953, pp.195-203; here p.200.
7. Wolfdietrich Rasch, *Freundschaftskult und Freundschaftsdichtung in deutschen Schrifttum des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts, vom Ausgang des Barock bis zu Klopstock*. Halle a.S. 1936 = *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift Buchreihe*, vol.21., p.48.
8. Joseph Freiherr von Eichendorff, *Der deutsche Roman des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts in seinem Verhältnis zum Christentum*. In: Eichendorff, *Sämtliche Werke, Historisch-kritische Ausgabe*, vol.8, *Literar-historische Schriften, II, Abhandlungen zur Literatur*. Regensburg 1965; here p.88ff.
9. Kurt May, *Das Weltbild in Gellerts Dichtung*, Frankfurt am Main 1928. *Deutsche Forschungen* 21, p.132.
10. Richard Newald, *Die deutsche Literatur vom Späthumanismus zur Empfindsamkeit 1570-1750*. Munich 1950, p.520.
11. Robert H. Spaethling, "Die Schranken der Vernunft in Gellerts *Leben der schwedischen Gräfin von G\*\*\**. Ein Beitrag zur Geistesgeschichte der Aufklärung." In *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 81, 1966, pp.224-235.
12. Spaethling, *Die Schranken der Vernunft*, p.226.
13. May, *Das Weltbild in Gellerts Dichtung*, p.124.
14. Erich Schmidt, *Richardson, Rousseau und Goethe. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Romans im achtzehnten Jahrhundert*. Jena 1875, p.29.
15. Lothar Pikulik, *Bürgerliches Trauerspiel und Empfindsamkeit*. Cologne-Graz 1966, p.80.
16. Walther Gebhardt, *Religionssoziologische Probleme im Roman der deutschen Aufklärung*. Diss. Gießen 1931, p.98.
17. Hermann Hettner, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur im achtzehnten Jahrhundert*, Munich 1970, p.362.
18. Fritz Brüggemann, *Gellerts Schwedische Gräfin. Der Roman der Welt- und Lebensanschauung des vorsubjektivistischen Bürgertums. Eine entwicklungsgeschichtliche Analyse*, Aachen 1925, p.35.



19. David Hill, "Die Schwedische Gräfin: notes on early bourgeois realism." In: *Neophilologus* 65, 1981, pp.574-584; here p.576.
20. Eckhardt Meyer-Krentler, *Der andere Roman. Gellerts Schwedische Gräfin. Von der aufklärerischen Propaganda gegen den "Roman" zur empfindsamen Erlebnisdichtung.* Göppingen 1974 = *Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik* 128, p.68.
21. *ibid.*, p.67.
22. Willy Breml, *Der Weg des protestantischen Menschen von Luther zu Albert Schweitzer*, Zurich 1923, p.127.
23. Brüggemann, *Gellerts Schwedische Gräfin*, p.15.
24. *ibid.*, p.35.
25. Paul Mog, *Ratio und Gefühlskultur. Studien zur Psychogenese und Literatur im achtzehnten Jahrhundert.* Diss., Tübingen 1976, p.56.
26. Leo Balet/E. Gerhard, *Die Verbürgerlichung der deutschen Kunst, Literatur und Musik im achtzehnten Jahrhundert.* Edited and introduced by Gert Mattenklott. Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Vienna 1973, p.289.
27. Mog, *Ratio und Gefühlskultur*, p.47.
28. Fritz Brüggemann, "Der Kampf um die bürgerliche Welt- und Lebensanschauung". In *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift*, 3, 1925, pp.94-127, here p.98.
29. Pikulik, *Bürgerliches Trauerspiel und Empfindsamkeit*, p.5.
30. John van Cleve, "A Countess in name only. Gellert's *Schwedische Gräfin*." In: *The Germanic Review* 55, 1980, pp.152-155.
31. Meyer-Krentler, *Der andere Roman*, p.52.
32. *ibid.*
33. Martin Greiner, *Die Entstehung der modernen Unterhaltungsliteratur. Studien zum Trivialroman des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts.* Edited and revised by Therese Poser. Reinbek bei Hamburg 1964, p.50.
34. Carsten Schlingmann, *Gellert. Eine literar-historische Revision.* Diss. Frankfurt am Main 1967=*Frankfurter Beiträge zur Germanistik*, 3, Bad Homburg v.d.H. 1967, p.28.

**3. SOPHIE VON LA ROCHE: DIE  
GESCHICHTE DES FRÄULEINS VON  
STERNHEIM**

*Sie wissen, daß die Ideen, die ich in dem Charakter und in den Handlungen des Fräuleins von Sternheim und ihrer Eltern auszuführen gesucht habe, immer meine Lieblingsideen gewesen sind; und womit beschäftigt man seinen Geist lieber als mit dem, was man liebt?*<sup>1</sup>

*Die Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim. Von einer Freundin derselben aus Originalpapieren und anderen zuverlässigen Quellen gezogen*, the first novel of Sophie Marie von La Roche, was originally published in 1771 by Christoph Martin Wieland, without the prior consent of the authoress. Wieland also supplied a preface and footnotes, in which he both praised the work and pointed out what he considered to be its weaknesses. He took particular exception to stylistic defects and to the (in his opinion) excessive subjectivity of its heroine. Neither preface nor footnotes explicitly named La Roche as the authoress. However, since Wieland was by then well known in the literary world, and since it was furthermore common knowledge that he maintained close ties with the La Roche family (dating from the time when the young Sophie had been his fiancée and Muse) the apprentice novelist could not expect to remain anonymous for long.

The book was an instant success. In 1771 alone three editions appeared, to be followed by a further edition in 1772, and by four more in the course of the next fifteen years. The reception from almost every quarter was favourable. Most reviewers had nothing but praise for the work. Soon La Roche was known throughout Germany simply as *die Sternheim*.<sup>2</sup>

A typically enthusiastic response to the novel came from Caroline Flachsland, a member of the Darmstadt circle of *Empfindsamen*, in a letter to Herder:

Mein ganzes Ideal von einem Frauenzimmer, sanft, zärtlich, wohltätig,  
stolz und tugendhaft und betrogen. Ich habe köstliche, herrliche Stunden  
beim Durchlesen gehabt.<sup>3</sup>

Herder shared her enthusiasm, for he quoted the novel from the pulpit, an honour only rarely accorded to a work of fiction.

There are a number of possible reasons for the immediate success of the book. La Roche, like Gellert with his *Schwedische Gräfin*, offered something for every taste. The

novel's pedagogic tendency, the treatment of questions relating to social and educational reform, must engage the interests and approval of the *Aufklärer*. Moreover, the heroine's subjectivity, her emotional fervour, could not fail to appeal to the young *Stürmer und Dränger*. Moreover Sophie von La Roche herself was a person of potential interest to the reading public: not only because she was known to be a friend of Wieland, but also as the wife of Johann Michael von La Roche, whose *Briefe über das Mönchswesen* (1771) had recently caused no small scandal in Catholic circles; and as the adopted daughter-in-law of the notorious sceptic and hedonist, Graf Stadion. Thanks to her husband's position as friend, assistant and (very probably) also illegitimate son of the Count, Sophie was accustomed to move in the highest circles, both on the Count's estates and at the Court in Mainz. She must, therefore, have had access to "inside information", and readers might hope to become informed through her writings of the activities of the rich and famous. The fact that both novelist and heroine were women may also have contributed to the success of the book. Most readers of fiction tended to be women, who in general had more leisure-time at their disposal than did men. Women surely tended to identify with the heroine of a sentimental narrative -- with Richardson's Pamela, for instance, whose attainment of wealth, social status and marital bliss must have corresponded fairly closely to the day-dreams of many female readers. The same might equally well be said of La Roche's Sophie Sternheim, who is also rewarded with happiness and tranquillity, after the patient endurance of many cruel blows of fate.

Before proceeding to an analysis of the novel, we would do well to consider Wieland's preface in some detail. If this preface is to be believed, the work succeeded in engaging Wieland's sympathies to a greater degree than he would have thought any sentimental narrative capable of doing. His initial scepticism was soon overcome:

alle meine kaltblütige Philosophie... konnte nicht gegen die Wahrheit und Schönheit Ihrer moralischen Schilderungen aushalten; mein Herz erwärmte sich: ich liebte Ihren Sternheim, seine Gemahlin, seine Tochter und sogar seinen Pfarrer. [p.21]

These remarks should not perhaps be taken at face value. It must be remembered that La Roche was a close friend, whom Wieland would have been reluctant to injure or offend by too critical a reception of her first novel. On the other hand, his decision to have the book published at all does suggest that he was on the whole favourably impressed. Wieland's qualified enthusiasm is significant. If even this sceptical man of the world was impressed, how much more likely was it that the work would be well received by those sections of the reading public predisposed in favour of Sensibility.

It should be noted that Wieland does not expect the novel to gain universal acceptance. He implies that some degree of conformity with the opinions and tastes of the heroine will be required if the public is to approve the work. A more critical response might perhaps be expected from the professional reviewers and from the *Weltleute*; from those, in short, whose world-view was more exclusively rationalistic, even materialistic, than La Roche's own. Wieland himself sees it as a fault that Sophie Sternheim shows such undisguised hostility towards *die große Welt*. While he does not explicitly identify himself with the ideas and tastes of contemporary high society, Wieland does implicitly accept the standards of this class as the norm. He finds Sophie Sternheim's moral fervour exaggerated; greater flexibility, more willingness to conform, would win his approval. He criticises

die Singularität unserer Heldin, ihr Enthusiasmus für das sittliche Schöne, ihre besondern Ideen und Launen... und was noch ärger ist als dies alles, der beständige Kontrast, den ihre Art zu empfinden, zu urteilen und zu handeln mit dem Geschmack, den Sitten und Gewohnheiten der großen Welt macht [p.24].

Wieland suggests that the heroine's caprices should be forgiven, overlooked, by the indulgent reader; he proposes that Sophie Sternheim be called "die liebenswürdige Grillenfängerin" [p.24]. This assessment would necessitate a distanced, even condescending attitude on the part of the reader, an attitude which would be directly opposed to La Roche's intention, since it would of course prevent the reader accepting the *Fräulein* as an ideal, or example, to be followed.



In the letter to Wieland which he quotes in his preface, La Roche emphasises the pedagogical purpose of her novel. She expresses the hope that her readers will be inspired to emulate Sophie Sternheim's exemplary conduct;

wenn diese [unsere Kinder] durch ihre Bekanntschaft mit jener [Sophie] in tugendhaften Gesinnungen, in einer wahren, allgemeinen, tätigen Güte und Rechtschaffenheit gestärkt würden, welche Wollust für das Herz Ihrer Freundin [p.20].

Wieland is convinced that the novel will be able to exercise an influence for good:

Ich habe nicht vonnöten, Ihnen von dem ausgebreiteten Nutzen zu sprechen, welche Schriften von derjenigen Gattung, worunter Ihre Sternheim gehört, stiften können... [Ich wollte] allen tugendhaften Müttern, allen liebenswürdigen, jungen Töchtern unsrer Nation ein Geschenk... machen, welches mir geschickt schien, Weisheit und Tugend unter Ihrem Geschlecht, und selbst unter dem meinigen, zu befördern [p.20].

La Roche aims to influence the reader for good by providing him both with examples to imitate and with warning examples to avoid. Sophie Sternheim's story is the story of the triumph of virtue over vice. Each of the characters is rewarded or punished as he or she deserves. Derby dies in the prime of life, his health destroyed by remorse and dissolute living. Sophie is rewarded with the most desirable of husbands, a melancholy English lord, and is permitted to spend the rest of her days in the idyllic setting of an English country-house.

Like Richardson, Gellert and Hermes, La Roche believes that the public will be most receptive to a moral message when it is delivered in the form of a gripping and entertaining narrative. Her heroine's views on education in general reflect La Roche's attitude to the reading and writing of novels:

Wir vergessen nur die Sachen gerne, die mit keinem Vergnügen verbunden sind, und die lächelnde, zu der Schwachheit der Menschen sich herablassende Weisheit will daher, daß man die Pfade der Wahrheit mit Blumen bestreue. Die Tugend braucht nicht mit ernsten Farben geschildert zu werden, um Verehrung zu erhalten; ihr inneres Wesen, jede Handlung von ihr ist lauter Würde. Würde ist ein unzertrennbarer Teil von ihr, auch wenn sie in der Kleidung der Freude und des Glücks erscheint. In dieser Kleidung allein erhält sie Vertrauen und Ehrfurcht zugleich [p.218].

Equally revealing is Sophie Sternheim's answer to the question whether an intending governess such as Madame C. should permit her charges to read such novels.

Ja, zumal da Sie es ohnehin nicht werden verhindern können. Aber suchen Sie... nur solche, worin die Personen nach edlen Grundsätzen handeln und wo wahre Szenen des Lebens beschrieben sind [p.219].

La Roche can recommend such novels with a clear conscience: indeed, it is precisely such a novel she is attempting to write.

The true significance of this view of the novel and its function becomes clear when we compare it with the traditional attitude to the *genre*. One of the criticisms more frequently levelled at the novel form, above all by Pietist writers, was that it consisted entirely of lies. Wolfgang Schmitt quotes an anonymous treatise *Vom Romanenlesen* (1742) in which the novel is attacked for propagating falsehoods:

Es sind ja keine wahren Geschichten... sondern erdichtete Dinge, und ein zusammengesponnenes Gewebe vergeblicher Einbildungen.

These are, it is claimed, all the more dangerous

je wahrscheinlicher die Lügen oder, wenn man ja das derbe Wort allhier nicht brauchen soll, die auf allen Blättern und Seiten angebrachten Erfindungen seien.<sup>4</sup>

Significantly, the writer does not concede the possibility that realistic fiction might be uniquely capable of conveying a moral message.<sup>5</sup>

We must remember that the public, or more precisely the middle-class public (for the peasants were almost invariably illiterate and the aristocracy more likely to be receptive to the gallant romances which mirrored its own lifestyle) was accustomed to turn in its leisure hours to devotional literature, to religious tracts and to the autobiographies of pious persons, at most to the *Moralische Wochenschriften*.<sup>6</sup>

It was widely held that only faithful accounts of actual happenings could be morally justifiable, since mere fiction, it was argued, could not inspire the reader to emulate

exemplary patterns of conduct. In order to be accepted by this middle-class public, the novel must therefore present itself as truth. La Roche's narrative puts forward an emphatic claim to authenticity: the editor and sources are both identified and their reliability underlined.

Such then was the background against which La Roche was writing; an understanding of it goes some way towards explaining her relationship to the novel as a *genre*. Yet, however profoundly she was convinced that the novel ought to serve a didactic purpose, considerations of a more personal nature also influenced her decision to write. These factors too must be named. In his preface, written in the form of a letter to the authoress, Wieland describes the book as "ein Werk Ihrer Einbildungskraft und Ihres Herzens... geschrieben zu Ihrer eigenen Unterhaltung" [p.19]. It is clear that La Roche neither intended nor expected her work to reach the general public; the readership she had in mind was composed of personal friends. Wieland suggests that the book was written to provide *Gemütsberuhigung* for the novelist. He cites a letter from La Roche in which she attributes her decision to write to an emotional urge: "Ich hatte Stunden, wo diese Beschäftigung eine Art von Bedürfnis für meine Seele war" [p.20].

Much as La Roche benefited from the advantages of rank she obtained in marrying Johann Michael, much as she enjoyed her life as a lady of fashion, her position was not altogether an easy one. In the circles in which her husband moved sensibility was likely to meet with ridicule, or at best (as from Johann Michael himself) with good-humoured indulgence. Here French culture, French wit and sophistication governed all questions of taste. Frivolity, superficiality, sensuality were more likely to be tolerated than was an excess of feeling. In order to hold her own, Sophie was obliged to suppress what had hitherto been her most characteristic trait. However successfully she did so her sensibility evidently remained with her. When it could no longer find a suitable outlet in her everyday life, as it had done in her relationship to the young Wieland, she sought to

express herself in literature. The moment of decision came when her two daughters left the parental home to complete their education:

Ich wollte nun einmal ein papiernes Mädchen erziehen, weil ich meine eigenen nicht mehr hatte, und da half mir meine Einbildungskraft aus der Verlegenheit und schuf den Plan zu Sophiens Geschichte.<sup>7</sup>

The emphasis on pedagogy is something which La Roche clearly shares with the current of Enlightenment thinking. There is much in the novel to suggest that in many important questions her sympathies are very much with the adherents of the Enlightenment. La Roche's exemplary characters are exemplary at least in part by virtue of their adherence to the ideals of the age of reason. Colonel Sternheim, in particular, may be regarded as representing the ideal of enlightened benevolence. He has a natural respect for learning and his bourgeois scholarly background -- his father was a professor -- is shown to have exercised a very positive influence in shaping Sophie's character. Colonel Sternheim devotes much time and energy to improving the condition of the tenants on his estates. He has an enthusiasm for social and educational reform which clearly has its roots in the thinking of the Enlightenment. He is eager to establish a progressive system of poor relief on his own and neighbouring lands. Unlike many less enlightened contemporaries, he does not hold the poor responsible for their plight. Instead of allocating blame, he wishes that the poor may be taught skills so that they may change their lot by virtue of their own diligence. The solution which he proposes to the problem of poverty is, in the best enlightened tradition, both effective and humane. Significantly, all improvements on the Colonel's estates are implemented from above. All his plans are designed to improve the lot of his tenants, yet we learn nothing of the tenants being permitted to participate in the decision-making. La Roche believes that everyone has his divinely-ordained place in the feudal hierarchy. If the peasant is prepared to do his duty, he will be cared for from from the cradle to the grave. Thus the ideal of social life is propagated by the Colonel and, through him, La Roche herself has much in common with the thinking of the so-called enlightened despots. It takes the form of a real desire for reform of a sometimes quite radical nature, but always initiated from those in positions of authority

as dictated by their birth.

The colonel is of the opinion -- an opinion derived from the economic theories of the Enlightenment -- that he too will benefit in financial terms if his peasants are content:

Was ich ihnen anfangs gebe, trägt mir mit der Zeit die vermehrte Zehnte ein und die guten Leute werden durch die Erfahrung am besten überzeugt, daß es wohl mit ihnen gemeint war [p.46].

Like Gellert, La Roche believes in enlightened self-interest, that philanthropy is to be recommended not least because it pays good dividends. Sternheim directs matters on his estates in a spirit of enlightened or benevolent despotism: the miniature state of which the Colonel is "ruler" even has its own laws. Drunkards, gamblers and idlers are punished for their misconduct either by the imposition of a fine or by being obliged to work without payment for the benefit of the community.

The Colonel's dedication to progressive reform is typical of the *Aufklärer*, as is indeed his belief in the power of a progressive form of education to shape a population worthy of the new society and its ideals. La Roche shares the Enlightenment's belief in the perfectibility of the human race. She is convinced that education can produce some quite radical changes in society. Like Gellert's model characters, her Colonel Sternheim is an active pedagogue. His pedagogical efforts are approved and assisted by the more enlightened members of the community. His aristocratic neighbours urge him to take into his house young men just returned from their travels, in order that he may acquaint them by theory and example with the best method of managing their estates. In accordance with La Roche's profound respect for learning, Sternheim also encourages his pupils to read -- above all books of a scientific or historical nature. For La Roche's characters knowledge is a source of supreme contentment. As Touaillon comments, "Glück, das von ihrem Schicksal unabhängig ist, schöpfen ihre Gestalten nicht allein aus dem Gefühl, sondern auch aus dem Wissen"<sup>8</sup>. The religious views expressed by Colonel Sternheim also owe much to the Enlightenment. Directly following his marriage he



elucidates these in some detail to his wife. It is his belief that the teaching of the principles of enlightened Christianity should form an integral part of any programme of reform. Colonel Sternheim has no sympathy for those who regard Enlightenment in religious questions as the prerogative of the privileged classes and who would seek to maintain the existing social order by keeping the masses in ignorance and superstition. La Roche is convinced that the spread of knowledge can only benefit the community, since increasing enlightenment must serve to impress upon the common man his duties towards himself and his neighbours. It is a view she shares with relatively few contemporaries. As Sir Leslie Stephen has pointed out, in the eighteenth century scepticism often went hand in hand with pragmatism:

The English sceptic of the upper classes... had no desire to propagate his creed, still less to attack the Church, which was a valuable part of his property... Voltaire was not intentionally destructive in politics, whatever the real effects of his teaching... Hume, the great English sceptic, was not only a Tory in politics, but had no desire to affect the popular belief. He could advise a clergyman to preach the ordinary doctrines because it was paying far too great a compliment to the vulgar to be punctilious about speaking the truth to them. A similar indifference is characteristic of the whole position. The select classes were to be perfectly convinced that the accepted creed was superstitious, but they were not for that reason to attack it. To the statesman, as Gibbon was to point out, a creed is equally useful, true or false.<sup>9</sup>

Believing as he does in the natural goodness of man, the Colonel rejects entirely the orthodox concept of original sin:

Ich habe mich gründlich von der Güte und dem gutem Nutzen der Wahrheiten unserer Religion überzeugt; aber die wenige Wirkung, die ihr Vortrag auf die Herzen der größten Anzahl der Zuhörer macht, gab mir eher einen Zweifel in die Lehren als den Gedanken ein, daß das menschliche Herz durchaus so sehr zum Bösen geneigt sei, als manche glauben [p.43].

This emphasis on the "usefulness" of religion is typical of Enlightenment thinking, and reminiscent of Gellert's standpoint. Gellert, however, at no point mentions the possibility of doubting the truth of established Lutheran dogma. La Roche does not develop this line of thought; she does not attack the doctrine of original sin with the righteous indignation of a Nicolai. Yet the Colonel's belief in Man's intrinsic goodness, we must



assume, corresponds to her own view -- Sternheim is after all an ideal figure, intended to serve as a model for our reader. Colonel Sternheim asserts that the truths of enlightened Christianity can best be communicated to the common people if their relevance to everyday life is made apparent. Meditations on the natural world are, he believes, particularly well suited to impress upon a rural population the goodness of God the Creator. A good pastor will, therefore, be one who concerns himself with the day-to-day needs of his flock. Questions of dogma are, he maintains, much less important. He outlines the role of the pastor as follows:

Der Weg zu ihren Herzen [the reference here is to the peasants on Sternheim's estates]... könne man am ehesten durch Betrachtungen über die physikalische Welt finden, von der sie am ersten gerührt werden, weil jeder Blick ihrer Augen, jeder Schritt ihrer Füße sie dahin leitet... Wenn er [the pastor] die Besserung der Gemüte nur durch sogenannte Gesetz- und Strafpredigten erhalten will... so wird er auch nicht mein Pfarrer sein. Wenn er aufmerksamer auf den Fleiß im Kirchengehen ist als auf die Handlungen des täglichen Lebens, so werde ich ihn für keinen wahren Menschenfreund und für keinen guten Seelsorger halten [p.44].

La Roche's conviction that the ideal pastor must play the part of a general educator in the community is one we will encounter again in connection with Friedrich Nicolai's *Das Leben und die Meinungen des Herrn Magister Sebaldus Nothanker*.

The religious views presented by the exemplary Sternheim as worthy of adoption by La Roche's readership are very much those propounded by the Enlightenment. Walter Gebhardt's assessment of Neologist Christianity also provides a fitting description of the position advocated by the Colonel:

Gott ist in erster Linie nur noch der Belohner und Richter unserer Taten, und zwar Richter nach bürgerlich-vernünftigem Maß, Sünde oder Verdienst sind schon hier auf Erden vernunftgerecht und einleuchtend zu erkennen und abzuwägen. Daß man ein Sünder von Geburt an sei, ist dem Bürgermenschen eine abstruse Behauptung, die nicht widerlegt zu werden braucht. Der Mensch ist ihm ein unbeschriebenes Blatt, auf das im Laufe des Lebens Tugend und Laster eingetragen werden. Und das Böse braucht man auch nicht so schwerwiegend zu beurteilen als Beleidigung Gottes und Weg zur Hölle. Wie Leibniz das Übel in der Welt als ein Negativum, ein nicht Existierendes, ein Fehlen des Guten erklärt hatte, so denkt jetzt die populäre Ethik die Sünde als ein unvernünftiges Handeln aus Mangel besserer Einsichten. Ein aufgeklärter

Verstand nimmt von selbst von solchen Torheiten Abstand.<sup>10</sup>

Sophie Sternheim too has many ideas and convictions which show clearly the influence of the Enlightenment, and since she, even more than her father, is conceived as the role-model for the reader, it is evident that these ideas and convictions are those which La Roche is seeking to propagate by means of her novel. Sophie is an avid reader. As Derby remarks: "das Fräulein Sternheim liebt Verstand und Kenntnisse" [p.104]. She concerns herself only with "instructive" reading-matter, for the utilitarian principles of the Enlightenment are never far from her mind. She is convinced, as is Colonel Sternheim, that knowledge -- practical, useful knowledge -- is capable of reshaping society fundamentally and for the better. Herr R., the author, understands her well:

Mit aller Freimütigkeit sagte er mir einst: Ob sich schon Fähigkeiten und Wissensbegierde in beinahe gleichem Grade in meiner Seele zeigten, so wäre ich doch zu keiner Denkerin geboren: hingegen konnte ich zufrieden sein, daß die Natur durch die glücklichste Anlage, den eigentlichen Endzweck unseres Daseins zu erfüllen, dafür entschädigt habe: dieser bestehe eigentlich im Handeln, nicht im Spekulieren [p.109].

It is, of course, Sophie's ability to direct her energies into purposeful activity which enables her to cope with the distress of being deceived, humiliated and abandoned by the infamous Derby. In helping others she finds an anchor in trouble and a reason for living. Religious faith alone can no longer supply this *raison d'être* for La Roche's characters. For Sophie Sternheim active philanthropy becomes a substitute for faith. Sophie is not alone in finding consolation in social activity of this kind. Walther Gebhardt sees La Roche's proposed answer to the problem of finding a meaning and purpose in life as being entirely typical of bourgeois attitudes of the time:

Er [the new enlightened citizen] hat noch Fühlstärke und Empfindungsfähigkeit und das Bedürfnis nach einer Sinngebung für seine Gefühle. Sie in der Religion, im Glauben zu finden, dazu ist er zu aufgeklärt, vielmehr schafft er sich nun neue Götter, neue Idole, die er mit gefühligter Innbrunst lieben kann. Etwa das Ideal der Menschheitsvervollkommnung oder der Tugenderziehung.<sup>11</sup>

Sophie Sternheim and her father both have a typically Enlightened view of Nature. For them contemplation of the natural world is valuable because it serves as an exhortation

to thoughts of the Creator. Sophie learns to venerate the power and vision of God through admiring the splendour of the universe.

Es ist eine Pflicht des guten Geschöpfs, die Werke seines Urhebers zu erkennen, von denen wir alle Augenblicke unseres Lebens so viel Gutes genießen: da die ganze physikalische Welt lauter Zeugnisse der Wohltätigkeit und Güte unseres Schöpfers in sich faßt, deren Anblick und Kenntnis das reinste und vollkommenste, keinem Zufall, keinem Menschen unterworfenen Vergnügen in unsere Seele gießt [p.140].

The ideal course of study which Sophie prescribes for the children of Rat T. includes instruction in geography and in the natural sciences. "Je mehr Geschmack ihre Kinder an der natürlichen Geschichte unsers Erdbodens, je mehr Kenntnisse sie von seinen Gewächsen, Nutzbarkeit und Schönheit erlangen, je sanfter werden ihre Gesinnungen, Leidenschaften und Begierde" [p.140]. Sophie loves Nature less because it is beautiful than because it is conducive to moral improvement. She sees in the natural world a pattern and a purpose, since God has created all in accordance with the principle of utility. Her viewpoint is teleological, typical of Wolffian rationalism.

Wie einnehmend bewies mein Papa mir diesen Grundsatz, da er mich in dem Naturreiche auf den Gedanken führte, daß die Gattungen der Blumen, welche nur zur Ergötzung des Auges dienen, viel weniger zahlreich und ihre Fruchtbarkeit weit schwächer wäre, als der nützlichen Pflanzen, die zur Nahrung der Menschen und Tiere dienen [p.94].

Here the influence of Enlightenment thinking is of course clearly evident. Yet Sophie von La Roche's attitude to Nature would also appear to have been influenced by Rousseau's ideas on the power of civilisation to corrupt. Sophie Sternheim believes that man has been increasingly corrupted by urban -- and, in particular, court -- society, as he becomes increasingly alienated from the natural world. Society, La Roche argues through her heroine, is no longer governed, as is everything in the world of Nature, by the instinct for what is right.

Die ganze physikalische Welt bleibt diesen Pflichten getreu... nur die Menschen arten aus und löschen dieses Gepräge aus, welches in uns viel stärker und in größerer Schönheit glänzen würde, da wir es auf so vielerlei Weise zeigen könnten [p.175].

La Roche sees Man as one small part of the general harmonious pattern which is Nature.

Precisely Man, who could be the pride of this creation, insists on going his own way and destroys the harmony. "Warum [Sophie asks] ist die moralische Welt ihrer Bestimmung nicht ebenso getreu als die physikalische?" [p.196]

Thus, La Roche's view of Nature -- for here, as elsewhere, Sophie Sternheim speaks for the authoress -- is eclectic almost to the point of being self-contradictory. The influence of the Enlightenment, here as elsewhere, is unmistakable. Yet it is not the sole influence at work. Sophie's hostility towards the society of the town and the court would rather seem to point in the direction of Rousseau and of Sensibility. We must now examine in some detail La Roche's attitude to *Empfindsamkeit*. As was clear from our brief consideration of the reception of the novel, one of the principal reasons for the popularity of the book was the fact that its heroine was seen as a person of exemplary sensibility.

Even Colonel Sternheim, in many ways the prototype of an *Aufklärer*, owes much to the cult of sensibility. Important here is the Colonel's attitude to love and friendship. He cultivates a typically sentimental friendship with Baron von P. The two men are almost inseparable, confidants in everything, each prepared to make any sacrifice if it will contribute to the happiness of the other. The greatest pleasure they know is "das ruhige Vergnügen der Freundschaft" [p.26]. In La Roche's novel friendship is valued not least because it is *ruhig*. Her characters are anxious to avoid all that is harsh, strident or in any way overwhelming. Hence the model characters -- Sophie, her parents, her uncle the Baron -- all try to preserve some degree of control over their personal relationships: an excess of feeling would threaten the balance and restraint they so much value. Friendship is by its very nature more amenable to control than love.

The course of the relationship between Sternheim and the young Sophie von P. is in many ways typical of *Empfindsamkeit*. Sophie loves the Colonel even before she has

seen him. Her brother's eulogistic description of the Colonel's character, the perusal of Sternheim's letters to his friend is sufficient to convince her that he is a man of exceptional worth. Her enthusiasm for Sternheim's moral qualities soon develops into enthusiasm for the man himself. Such is her love for virtue in the abstract that she can love only that man who is an embodiment of her ideals. She loves the Colonel because he deserves to be loved. At first sight emotion as such would seem to have very little to do with the matter. Yet both Sternheim and his future wife react to these new experiences in a manner which can only be described as sentimental. Both become lachrymose and unsociable. Neither dares to express his or her feelings, still less to hope that these may be returned. Unable to take any decisive action, they derive a kind of pleasure from their sufferings. Indeed, even on learning that he is loved, Sternheim is ready, even eager, to renounce all hope of happiness. "Sophie mein? Mit einer freiwilligen Zärtlichkeit mein? Es ist genug. Sie geben alles. Ich kann nichts tun, als auf alles freiwillig entsagen" [p.36].

It is not insignificant that Sternheim marries the sister of his best friend, his "brother". According to Ladislao Mittner, this triangle was a recurrent motif in the literature of Sensibility:

Es war eine geradezu tyrannische Konvention, eine Art soziales Gesetz, aber auch ein Zeichen besonderen Gefühlsadels und erlesener Sensibilität, sich in die Schwester des Freundes oder auch -- das jedoch weniger häufig -- in die Freundin der Schwester zu verlieben. Durch die Liebe zur Schwester des Freundes wurde den Bund mit dem Freund, dem idealen Bruder sozusagen auf dessen Schwester ausgedehnt. Tatsächlich wurde die Schwester meistens geliebt, weil sie die Schwester des Freundes war: oft zeichneten sich die Gespräche zwischen dem Jüngling und der Geliebten sofort durch eine hohe Intensität des Gefühls aus.<sup>12</sup>

We shall encounter this theme again in Johann Martin Miller's *Siegwart*.

If Sophie's parents owe something to the conventions of Sensibility, the heroine herself is distinguished precisely by her capacity for feeling, her conviction that the ability to experience emotion is the hallmark of a noble character. Indeed, the whole course of



Sophie's fate is determined by this aspect of her character. The *âmes sensibles* are by their very nature incapable of disguise and deception, and are therefore very much at the mercy of the hypocrites -- they cannot conceal their feelings. Every thought finds expression, either in words or by means of a tear, a pale cheek or a sigh. The *Empfindsame* cannot comprehend that others may be able to simulate emotion they do not genuinely feel. Since they are themselves pure at heart, they are seldom distrustful and as a result they often fall victim to intrigue. Of course, their opponents and opposites -- the cynical, unfeeling men and women of the world -- know how to exploit this innocence for their ends. This is Sophie's fate. She shares with the *Empfindsame* an inability to disguise her feelings, hence Derby has no difficulty in divining the course of action she is likely to take in any given circumstances. Sophie is powerless to defend herself against his evil machinations, since she would have had to be wicked herself in order to suspect that his virtue is merely a pretence, adopted for the express purpose of winning her favour. "O Gott! wo soll ein Herz wie dies, das Du mir gabst, wo soll es den Gedanken hernehmen bei einer edlen, bei einer guten Handlung böse Grundsätze zu argwohnen?" [p.184]

The *âmes sensibles* select their friends with care. They can feel only for those they recognise at once as kindred spirits. As is entirely typical of the protagonists of the novel of *Empfindsamkeit* (compare especially Werther and Siegwart) Sophie is prone to judge those she meets according to sudden sympathies and antipathies. The briefest acquaintance is sufficient to convince her that she and her aunt Countess Löbau can never mean anything to one another. "Die Gräfin Löbau ist nicht meine Verwandtin; ihre Seele ist mir fremde" [p.56]. Blood relationships she believes to be without significance unless they be sanctioned by the bonds of friendship and instinctive understanding. In the sentimental friendships of the time, the first moment of meeting was often decisive. A single glance was often enough to establish a love relationship. Thus there is no need for Seymour to speak for Sophie to know that he is of her kind. The *âme sensible*



communicates his entire emotional life through the eloquence of facial expressions; indeed, he cannot but do so, for he is incapable of disguising his feelings.

Mylord machte nichts als eine Verbeugung; aber seine Seele redete so deutlich in allen seinen Mienen, daß man zugleich seine Achtung für alles, was das Fräulein C. sagt, und auch den Beifall lesen konnte, den er ihrer Freundin [Sophie] gab. [p.66]

And further:

Was ich Ihnen von ihm geschrieben, war nichts anders, als daß ich alles Edle, alles Gute, so mir das Fräulein von ihm erzählt, in seiner Physiognomie ausgedrückt sah. [p.67]

One of the most salient features of *Empfindsamkeit* was preoccupation with thoughts of death and the grave. One need only think of Young's *Night Thoughts* and their enthusiastic reception in Germany; of Luise von Ziegler who had a grave dug in her garden and found considerable pleasure in lying down in it to imagine how it must be to be dead<sup>13</sup>; the Sterbegrab in T.G. von Hippel's *Lebensläufe nach aufsteigender Linie* who filled his house with the mortally sick, in order to observe the progress of their disintegration. Equally common was the practice of consecrating hills, rocks or trees to one's own memory, even when one had no thought of dying for years to come. Caroline Flachsland and Luise Ziegler both did so, as did Goethe while on a visit to the court at Darmstadt. Sophie Sternheim thinks with pleasure of her own death. Confident that neither her virtue nor the intensity of her suffering will be forgotten, she imagines how her friends will mourn her. She writes to Emilia:

Pflanzen Sie, meine Liebe, in Ihrem Garten eine Zypresse, um die ein einsamer Rosenstock sich winde, an einen nahen Felsstein. Weißen Sie diesen Platz meinem Andenken; gehen Sie manchmal hin, vielleicht wird es mir erlaubt sein, um Sie zu schweben und die zärtliche Träne zu sehen, mit der Sie die abfallende Blüte der Rose betrachten werden. [p.257]

Sophie goes frequently to visit the grave of her parents. No sooner has she married Seymour than they undertake together a journey to this beloved spot. These visits move Sophie profoundly; yet her object is not only to mourn the dead. The memory of the exemplary lives lived by her parents will lend her, she hopes, the necessary moral

strength to retain her integrity in the corrupt atmosphere of D. It is in this spirit that she gathers a handful of earth from each of the graves, before giving herself up to the new world she both fears and despises. As ever in La Roche's novel, when Sensibility is presented as deserving of the reader's commendation, it is Sensibility which has been tempered and restrained by a moral imperative.

Sophie Sternheim's concept of love merits consideration in any discussion of the role of Sensibility in the novel. As was entirely typical of Sensibility, Sophie believes friendship to be superior to love. This is her reason for rejecting the proposal of marriage made to her by Lord Rich: "Teurer Lord Rich, Sie betrügen sich; niemals hat die Vernunft für die Liebe gegen die Freundschaft gesprochen" [p.235]. As in every other aspect of life, Sophie has been profoundly influenced in her attitude to love by the principles and inclinations she has inherited from her parents. She has her mother's sensitivity, and like her mother she can love no man whose enthusiasm for virtue does not equal her own. The misfortunes of others move her to pity, but she is capable of love only when she sees in another the embodiment of her own principles. Colonel Sternheim had recognised this at an early age:

Besonders wird die Liebe, bei aller der Zärtlichkeit, die sie von ihrer würdigen Mutter geerbt hat, wenig Gewalt über sie erhalten; es müßte denn sein, daß das Schicksal einen nach ihrer Phantasie tugendhaften Mann in die Gegend ihres Aufenthalts führte. [p.52]

It is significant that Derby accuses Sophie of something to which scholars have often taken exception when discussing the concept of love peculiar to Sensibility<sup>14</sup>:

Ich sehe wohl..., daß sie das Glück meiner Liebe und meines Herzens niemals in Betrachtung gezogen, indem sie mir nicht den geringsten Zug meines eigenen Charakters zugut gehalten und mich nur dann geachtet habe, wenn ich mich nach ihren Phantasien gebogen und meine Begriffe mit ihren Grillen geputzt. [p.186]

In other words, Sophie cannot love a unique and imperfect human being, simply a set of abstract ideas and virtues. Lothar Pikulik's analysis of the treatment of love in the *Rührende Komödie* also shed light on the novel of *Empfindsamkeit*:

Es fällt auf, daß überall... wo das Thema Liebe behandelt wird, auch immer von Tugend die Rede ist, und meist offenbart sich dabei, daß das, was die zärtlichen Liebhaber an ihren Partnern lieben, nur dessen sittlicher Wert ist. Sie lieben den anderen nicht ganz, mit allen seinen Eigenschaften, sondern vornehmlich und in den meisten Fällen ausschließlich seine Tugend. Deshalb erscheinen Liebeserklärungen so häufig als Ausdruck gegenseitiger Wertschätzung. Liebe kann man also verdienen, wenn man nämlich seinen Wert erweist... Man kann sie aber auch verlieren, wenn man seinen Wert einbüßt.<sup>15</sup>

Such is precisely the course taken by the relationship between Sophie and Lord Seymour. For Gellert's characters, too, love was dependent on virtue; mutual respect was thought to be the most essential prerequisite for a happy marriage. The same is true for the figures in La Roche's novel -- but here the presence of virtue is a still more necessary ingredient in love relationships, because the authoress (unlike Gellert) strongly disapproves of the erotic form of love.

No discussion of La Roche's attitude to *Empfindsamkeit* would be complete without detailed examination of the character of Lord Seymour, an *âme sensible par excellence*. He has some of the characteristics we noted in Gellert's Herr R., the same tendency to melancholy, the same unsociability and preference for solitude. Sophie notices at once the "durch etwas Melancholisches gedämpfte Feuer seiner schönen Augen" [p.66]. Seymour's natural inclination towards melancholy is not, as is the case with Herr R., held in check by reason. Seymour is turned in upon himself -- inevitably so, for his enthusiasm for the ideal of virtue does not find expression in practical activity until after his marriage to Sophie at the end of the novel. Seymour positively indulges in his melancholy and despair. Like his successors Werther and Siegwart, instead of struggling to overcome his unhappiness, he allows himself to sink ever deeper into gloom and despondency. When he begins to fear that Sophie may be dead, he returns to his mother at Seymour House, not in the hope that time will heal his wounds, but expressly "dem Übel meines Körpers and meiner Seele nachzuhängen" [p.258]. Just as he had expected perfect happiness -- claimed it as his right -- so he now believes himself to have been singled out for absolute and eternal misery. Seymour is very well aware that he

possesses an unusual capacity for feeling. In conversation, as in his correspondence, he rarely misses an opportunity to stress the difference between himself and "others". His sensibility is an end in itself; it is not subordinated to a moral system, as it is in Sophie's case. Unlike Sophie, he is not actively concerned with the welfare of his fellow men, hence he can have real communication only with those few *âmes sensibles* whom he acknowledges as kindred spirits.

Seymour suffers from *spleen*. He is unhappy without knowing precisely why, and despite all the advantages afforded him by birth, wealth and personal merit. He feels that the world is not quite as it should be. He cannot accept it as it is, but knows that he can do little to change it. The extent and nature of his alienation become apparent when we compare him with his brother, Lord Rich. Rich is a philosopher, a man of the world, who has suppressed all inner conflict and attained the state of *Gelassenheit*. Without being unfeeling, he is calm, rational, moderate and therefore capable of living in peace and contentment in a less than perfect world. He has a profound understanding of the psychology of Sensibility. He recognises that Seymour and those like him are by their very nature incapable of accepting compromise. Such a man, Rich realises, cannot moderate his wishes or resign himself to an imperfect world. For him there can only be extremes, no half-measures; whatever is not perfect he must reject as worthless. And if, Rich maintains, this man fails to attain his ideal in life, then life itself will become intolerable to him and he will long for death. The philosopher Rich is less demanding, less presumptuous. Because he has learnt to content himself with a less than perfect happiness, Rich is able to renounce his hopes of marrying Sophie.

Wie unermeßlich wäre meine Glückseligkeit gewesen. Aber ich ersticke meine Wünsche auf ewig. Mein Bruder soll leben. Seine Seele kann den Verlust ihrer Hoffnungen nicht noch einmal ertragen; meine Jahre und Erfahrung werden mir durchhelfen. Seymour muß das Maß der Zufriedenheit voll haben, sonst genießt er nichts, mir reicht ein Teil davon zu, dessen Wert ich kenne. [p.271]

Typical of *Empfindsamkeit* is Seymour's antipathy to active involvement in political life.

Like Werther he is secretary to an ambassador, whom he dislikes. Like Werther, he experiences considerable difficulty in suppressing his feelings when professional considerations would normally require him to do so. He feels that he is completely unsuited to the demands of a diplomatic career. He is not ambitious; not even the desire to do good would make him so. Seymour could have a brilliant career as an ambassador or minister if he wished. He is not only of noble birth, even with the best of connections (his immediate superior is his uncle): he is also an Englishman, and La Roche is so enthusiastic in her praise of England not least because she believes that country's social and political circumstances to be such as to enable every man of merit and integrity to accomplish much good, if only he is willing. Seymour refrains from active involvement in political life, not because those in power refuse to allow him to participate, but because his sensibilities are too tender and his nerves too weak, because he considers the analysis and cultivation of his own personality to provide the most worthy employment for his more than ordinary talents. La Roche's presentation of Seymour reveals the erroneous reasoning of the Marxist interpretation of *Empfindsamkeit*. I quote Wolf Lepenies as an exponent of this narrowly sociological standpoint:

Im Gegensatz zu Frankreich, wo der Beamtenadel neben den Hof und Landadel tritt, wird in Deutschland die Aristokratie selbst zum Beamtenadel, und das Bürgertum muß sich mit den subalternen Positionen bescheiden. Daher rührt seine Passivität, und weil die Intelligenz sich aus den mittelständischen, eben ökonomisch schwachen Bürgern zusammensetzt, greift diese Passivität auf das ganze Kulturleben über und führt zur totalen Trennung von Privatheit und Politik. Ausschluß von der realen Machtausübung und der daraus resultierende Druck zur Rechtfertigung der eigenen Situation erzeugen Weltschmerz, Melancholie, Hypochondrie.<sup>16</sup>

As Seymour's example proves, the truth is in fact rather the reverse. Seymour does not become (over-) sensitive because participation in political affairs is denied him. On the contrary, he holds himself aloof from politics because he wishes to have sufficient leisure to lead a purely private, reflective life: "Innerlichkeit und Leiden sind bei den Empfindsamen nicht Folge des Mangels an Aktivität, sondern dessen Ursache."<sup>17</sup>



Although he is aware that Sophie is in considerable danger, at the mercy of her intriguing, self-seeking family, Seymour makes no attempt whatever to come to her assistance. He does pity her and the prospect of her humiliation does cause him intense personal anguish; yet he does nothing. The motives for his silence are not entirely clear. It is possible that he is incapacitated by the typically *empfindsam* tendency towards apathy and procrastination, which values thought above action; perhaps also because he is eager that the steadfastness of her principles should be put to the test. It would seem to be more important to him that he win a wife whose exceptional virtue has been proved to the world than that Sophie should be preserved from peril and suffering. Seymour adheres to the Richardsonian concept of Woman, according to which her worth is determined by her chastity, and by that alone. He appears to feel more for himself than for Sophie. When he believes she may be in danger of succumbing to the machinations of the courtiers, his thoughts are all for the distress this spectacle must occasion to himself. The egoism which would rather inflict suffering upon a beloved friend than compromise an ideal or forgo the pleasure which may be derived from witnessing the spectacle of a few moving scenes, is typical of sensibility in its more extreme form of *Empfinderei* or *Afterempfindsamkeit*<sup>18</sup>. Merciless in his dealings with Sophie, Seymour shows no indulgence for natural human weakness. No sooner had he formed the suspicion that she may be favourably disposed towards the Prince, than he begins to despise her as exclusively and as intensely as he had hitherto loved her. The possibility that some mistake or misunderstanding may have prompted him to pass an unjust or over-hasty judgement on Sophie does not occur to him. He requires that Sophie correspond to his ideal of perfection, for he will admit of no compromise here or elsewhere. For Seymour, Sophie must be either an angel of virtue, or the most degenerate and shameless of women. He feels

die heftigste äußerste Verachtung über ihre vorgespiegelte Tugend, und die elende Aufopferung derselben, über die Frechheit, sich vor dem ganzen Adel zum Schauspiel zu machen und die vergnügteste Miene dabei zu haben. [p.117]



Count R.'s reproachful words to Seymour are surely entirely justified:

Wie konnte ein Mann, dem die weibliche Welt bekannt sein muß, dieses auserlesene Mädchen mißkennen und den allgemeinen Maßstab vornehmen, um ihre Verdienste zu prüfen? [p.214]

La Roche clearly does not intend to set Seymour up as a model of exemplary conduct. His failings are made obvious to the reader and even to Seymour himself -- Rich, Colonel Sternheim, Sophie's uncle, Count R. all supply a corrective. They do not have Seymour's sensibility, but neither do they have his egoism or indecisiveness. Seymour's sensibility is questionable because it is feeling for himself and not for others. La Roche and her heroine can countenance only altruistic sensibility:

O, wie sehr habe ich den Unterschied der Wirkungen der Empfindsamkeit für andere und der für uns allein kennengelernt! [p.174]

Seymour possesses many of those failings most often singled out by the critics of *Empfindsamkeit*.

Nicht stoische Gefühllosigkeit wird gewünscht, sondern temperiertes Mitempfinden. So macht man dem Empfindsamen auch weniger sein Gefühl als den Mangel an innerer Festigkeit zum Vorwurf, das Schwanken zwischen extremen Äußerungen.<sup>19</sup>

Salvation comes for Seymour only with his marriage to Sophie. Under her influence he learns to moderate his feelings, he becomes calm and content and dedicates himself to social and agricultural reform. Once convinced of Sophie's innocence, Seymour again swings to the opposite extreme and, instead of despising her utterly, now venerates her almost as a supernatural being. He indulges in what amounts to a cult of her memory -- for he derives a bitter pleasure from imagining her dead -- in a manner entirely typical of *Empfindsamkeit*:

Ich nahm das Zimmer ihrer Jungfer, weil ich darin den Platz bemerkt hatte, wo sie gekniet, wo sie den unaussprechlichen Schmerzen gefühlt hatte, betrogen und verlassen zu sein. Trostlose Zärtlichkeit und ein Gemische von bitterm Vergnügen bemächtigten sich meiner mit der Empfindung, welche mir sagte: hier lag das lebenswürdige Geschöpfe, in dessen Armen ich alle meine Glückseligkeit gefunden hätte; hier beweinte ihr blutendes Herz die Treulosigkeit des verruchtesten Bösewichts!... Vergnügen, ja ein schmerzhaftes Vergnügen genoß ich bei dem Gedanken: daß meine verzweiflungsvolle Tränen noch die Spuren

der ihrigen antreffen und sich mit ihnen vereinigen würden. Ich stand auf, ich kniete auf dem nämlichen Platz, wo der stumme, zerreiende Jammer ber ihre Erniedrigung sie hingeworfen hatte. [p.212]

Seymour wishes to experience Sophie's grief vicariously. He wallows in thoughts of her sufferings in a manner reminiscent of the Pietistic cult of Christ the innocent lamb brought to the slaughter. He experiences at one and the same time pity, repentance and satisfaction that his sensitive soul is permitted to taste such exquisitely intense pain.

Balet and Gerhard summarise this situation thus:

Das Lustvolle war... gerade das Leidvolle, weil das Leid begreiflicherweise die tiefsten Rhrungen und Erschtterungen hervorzurufen imstande ist. Man whlte denn auch damals frmlich im Leid herum. Bewut malte man sich das wirkliche Leid in grelleren Farben aus, als es in Wirklichkeit besa. Und wenn sich nichts Qualvolles ereignete, dachte man sich irgendein mgliches Leid aus, steigerte sich dieses Phantom malos, um sich an der wohligen Wollust des Fhlens hingeben zu knnen.<sup>20</sup>

Christine Touaillon argues that La Roche's novel has in fact been influenced profoundly by Pietistic thinking:

Die nhere Betrachtung der Handlung zeigt, da sie auf theologischen Grundlagen beruht: im Leben der Heldin sind deutlich drei Stufen zu unterscheiden, nmlich Versuchung, Erniedrigung, Erhhung dieselben drei Stufen, welche schon die Grundlage des christlichen Mythos bilden... Die Seele der Heldin mu durch einen bestimmten Durchgangspunkt der Verzweiflung gehen, einen Bukampf erleben, dem... der Gnadendurchbruch folgt; und diese Stufenleiter entspricht der Lehre August Hermann Franckes, welche verlangt, da jeder, der zum wahren Christentum kommen wolle, zuerst verzweifeln msse wie der Verbrecher, den man zum Hochgerichte fhre.<sup>21</sup>

It is true that there are certain parallels here. Sophie's pride is succeeded by a fall, which in turn is succeeded by the triumph of her best qualities, by a new tolerance and humanity. However, the similarities with Pietistic thinking should not be overemphasised. We have no reason to suppose that in writing the novel La Roche deliberately set out to illustrate in the form of a parable the teachings of Francke, or of any other thinker for that matter. Touaillon greatly overstates her case: "Die ganze Luft, welche den Roman durchweht, ist pietistische Luft"<sup>22</sup>. The reality is considerably more complex.

Sophie shares with the Pietists a strong disapproval of everything frivolous. Life at the corrupt and immoral court at D. makes her very wary of dancing -- especially, of course, of the waltz -- and of the theatre and fine clothes. She regards the theatre as merely a source of entertainment, and hence as morally suspect. The possibility that it might also serve a didactic purpose never apparently occurs to her. She believes that the theatre is useless, and whatever is useless she condemns. Indeed, Sophie would appear to be indifferent to art in all its various forms. When asked for her opinion of a popular play she readily admits that she feels "nicht das geringste" [p.84] for the hero and heroine. The traditional Pietistic attitude to the arts tended to be one of scepticism, if not of outright hostility. Like the Pietists, Sophie disapproves of everything which merely serves as ornamentation -- in contrast to Gellert's characters, who welcome everything pleasant, including erotic love, as a gift from Heaven. We should no doubt be mistaken however to look for evidence of direct Pietistic influence here. Condemnation of the theatre, for example, could be heard as often from the representatives of orthodox Lutheranism as from the Pietists -- as is evident from the conflict between the young Lessing and his father. Indeed, we have no reason to suppose that La Roche's "Puritanism" has a religious basis. She rejects the frivolity of the court, not specifically because it is displeasing to God, but because it serves no useful purpose, because she believes that those who indulge in such a lifestyle would do better to devote themselves to study and charitable works. In short, her "Puritanism" is rooted in the idea of virtue. The reader must be prevented from laying the book aside in favour of something less obviously didactic. La Roche -- as the superior narrator -- need not have recourse to such tactics: the development of her plot is by no means lacking in interest, even suspense.

La Roche's portrayal of the court aristocracy is critical, even harsh, but without the sensationalism in which Hermes too frequently indulges. She can neither understand nor

excuse the frivolity and superficiality which she sees as an almost unavoidable aspect of court life. In seeking to portray a principle of evil over which Sophie's virtue can triumph, she selects the court and courtiers as the most suitable representative of a lifestyle devoted to nothing but intrigue, ease and empty pleasures. She is on the whole successful in avoiding the sensational or fantastic; thus her representation of the evils of aristocratic society is not unconvincing, the more so because she delineates a psychology of vice a good deal more credible than Hermes' simplistic polarities.

The Swedish Prince in Gellert's novel pursues the Countess because she is beautiful and he desires her. His motives are unambiguous. Derby, La Roche's villain, is rather more complicated. Clearly, he is a sensualist and a Don Juan. He lists his conquests with evident satisfaction. It is significant that he has devoted particular attention to proud, sagacious and pious women; a victory over Sophie's virtue he would consider his *tour de force*. Derby has obtained no real satisfaction from having seduced so many women. Sophie constitutes for him an entirely new experience -- or so he believes -- a welcome challenge in a life now lacking in excitement. "Das Mädchen macht eine ganz neue Gattung von Charakter aus" [p.121]. It has been remarked that Derby's wickedness is largely unmotivated wickedness for wickedness' sake.<sup>23</sup> It is true that he does give himself no end of trouble to obtain a pleasure which is by its very nature transitory and which in this case turns out to be no very great pleasure after all. The end, in short, would scarcely appear to justify the means. We ought perhaps to ask, therefore, whether Derby's aim is in fact simple physical fulfilment. Clearly, more is involved. He longs to humble Sophie's proud virtue, to destroy her self-sufficiency. In convincing himself that even the most indomitable virtue can be overcome, Derby perhaps hopes to justify his own predilection for vice; it is perhaps because he feels threatened by virtue that he

experiences the compulsion to destroy it. His attitude is certainly typical of the villains of the novel of *Empfindsamkeit* (again compare Hermes):

Die Lasterhaften handeln ebenso aus Prinzip wie die von ihnen Verfolgten. Das Prinzip des Bösen, das sie verkörpern, veranlaßt sie, die Tugend zu verfolgen, auch wenn sie nichts dabei zu gewinnen haben... die Schurken stellen der christlichen Moral der Guten ihren zynischen Materialismus entgegen und legen ihre Grundsätze wie jene ausführlich in Briefen nieder, nebst ihren verbrecherischen Plänen und Triumphen.<sup>24</sup>

Eva D. Becker's analysis of the traditional structure of the *Prüfungsroman* is valid for La Roche's novel, though it is worthy of note that Derby, somewhat unusually, is not shown to be wicked because he is an atheist or free-thinker. We are given no definite information as regards Derby's religious views -- in La Roche's novel vice, as well as virtue, exists independently of religious belief.

Derby is very much a standard aristocratic villain, perhaps owing much to Richardson's Lovelace. He helps to convince the reader that the world of the great and powerful is one of immorality and corruption. Indeed La Roche is severe in her criticism of court and courtiers. As in Gellert's *Schwedische Gräfin* the criticisms here levelled at the court aristocracy carry all the more conviction for being voiced by a member of the ruling class, who has personal experience of life at court and whose disapprobation of court practices could scarcely be ascribed to envy. Sophie Sternheim has every opportunity to observe *die große Welt* at close quarters once she is obliged to take up residence with her aunt and uncle. From the outset her relations with this couple are fraught with tension. Sophie is critical of the Löbaus and their friends not least because she considers that they fulfil no useful function in society, their sole purpose in life being to amuse themselves. Sophie envies Emilia, the simple pastor's wife, because modesty, innocence and virtue are still respected in the middle-class society to which she is confined. Sophie would gladly exchange all the luxury and pomp of the court for this quiet existence. Count and Countess Löbau regard Sophie's belief in the superiority of merit over rank as a ridiculous eccentricity, a regrettable consequence of her middle-class heritage and a



betrayal of the aristocracy. They are anxious to see those middle-class ideas replaced by others more appropriate to her projected status as the Prince's mistress. It is their intention to convert her to "eine ihrem Stande gemäßigere Denkungsart" [p.92]. They likewise pour scorn on Sophie's taste for scholarship, something they, in common with many eighteenth century aristocrats, consider an unworthy pursuit for people of rank. If Sophie is to avoid the ridicule of her equals in D. she must strive to conceal the greatest part of what she has learnt; when she fails in this, her aunt reproaches her: "ich hätte einen schönen Beweis gegeben, daß ich die Enkelin eines Professors sei" [p.95].

The style of life which Sophie favours is indeed typically bourgeois. Although it would certainly be an over-simplification to equate morality with the middle class, it is nevertheless true that in the eighteenth century the bourgeoisie was particularly zealous in the pursuit of virtue. In fact, virtue and morality were seen by the middle class as qualities in which they could compete with and even outshine the aristocracy. Virtue and morality were, or were perceived as, bourgeois qualities and strengths. Moreover, the bourgeoisie of course in general lack the means to indulge in extravagant living, and the economic supremacy to which it aspired could only be assured if it practised temperance and thrift. Jürgen Jacobs has provided us with a plausible, if partial, explanation of the uneasy relationship between aristocracy and bourgeoisie.

Die bürgerliche Lebensform unterscheidet sich vor allem dadurch von der adligen, daß sie eine intime private Sphäre von der öffentlichen deutlich trennt. Diese Trennung ist der höfischen Aristokratie nicht vollziehbar. Berufs- und Privatleben können nicht auseinanderfallen, weil der Adel selbst als Beruf gelten kann und weil den Mitgliedern der Aristokratie die Betätigung in bürgerlichen Professionen wie Handel und Gewerbe verboten ist. Das Standesethos verpflichtet den Adel zu dauernder Darstellung des gesellschaftlichen Ranges und regiert auch solche Bereiche, die nach bürgerlichen Vorstellungen ganz privat sein sollen: die Heirat etwa dient vor allem der Stabilisierung des Ranges, den Glanz des Hauses, nicht der Begründung eines Lebensbereiches, in dessen vertrauensvollen, gefühlsgeladenen Intimität sich die Existenz erfüllen könnte.<sup>25</sup>

Despite her hostility towards court and courtiers, La Roche is favourably disposed to the



aristocracy as an institution. She is critical of the morals of the aristocracy because, like many of her contemporaries, she wishes to see this class return to its original "purity". "Man wollte, wie Klopstock zum Beispiel uns verrät, einen sittlichen Adel begründen, der den ständischen Adel überlegen war."<sup>26</sup> La Roche's ideal is similar: it is her wish that the actual aristocracy and the aristocracy of merit -- or of feeling -- may become one and the same. Contemporary aristocrats have, she believes, fallen short of the high standards of behaviour established by their ancestors and have thus proved themselves unworthy of their noble inheritance. Families were originally raised to the nobility as a reward for exceptional merit; La Roche argues that the class should endeavour to remain an ethical elite. It is with such thoughts in mind that Baron von P. defends the proposed marriage between his sister and Sternheim.

La Roche is severe in her criticism of court and courtiers, yet the Prince himself, as head of the feudal hierarchy of which she in principle approves, remains sacrosanct. Like the Prince in Lessing's *Emilia Galotti* (1772) he is not himself vicious. Both rulers are merely weak, at the mercy of their own sensuality and of scheming, self-seeking courtiers. It cannot be said that La Roche's apparent unwillingness to deliver an outright attack on an absolute monarch is due to the desire to escape censorship, since she never intended her novel for publication. We should rather look for an explanation in the fact that La Roche was very well aware of the advantages -- advantages to herself and others -- inherent in the prevailing social order. She wished to see this order improved -- not abolished. Seymour excuses the Prince's apparent insensitivity to the plight of his poorest subjects with the words: "Sie müssen den Fürsten nicht verurteilen, man unterrichtet die großen Herren sehr selten von dem wahren Zustande ihrer Untertanen" [p.72]. The Prince gladly makes use of the opportunity to do good, on those few occasions when others place such an opportunity before him.

Er versprach mir [Sophie] alles Gute, lobte mich wegen meinem Eifer und setzte hinzu, wie gerne er Unglücklichen zu Hülfe komme, aber, daß er wohl einsehe, daß diejenigen, die ihn umgäben, immer zuerst für sich und die ihrigen besorgt wären; ich würde ihm vieles Vergnügen machen,

wenn ich ihm noch mehr Gegenstände seiner Wohltätigkeit anzeigen wollte. [p.133]

It is also significant that as soon as he is enlightened as to Sophie's real character and principles, the Prince willingly renounces all claim upon her.

As we have seen, La Roche favours far-reaching changes in the life-style of the court aristocracy; she wishes virtue, usefulness and philanthropy to take the place of idleness and intrigue. She does not attack the nobility as an institution, merely its corruption and abuse by self-seeking opportunists. She wants no very radical changes in the structure of society. Indeed, her concern for reform is reminiscent of Maria Theresa's efforts to improve the morals of the Imperial Court; or of the opinions of Joseph II, who abhorred the debaucheries of Versailles not least because he recognised that the aristocracy must conform (at least to some degree) to generally accepted moral standards, if it was not to destroy itself.

Sophie argues that the poor should be content with their lot, since being poor they are spared many anxieties and responsibilities. She believes modest circumstances to be entirely compatible with happiness, albeit with happiness of a rather different kind from that generally enjoyed by the rich and powerful. She advises her protégé, Rat T.:

Die Geschichte der moralischen Welt sollen Ihre Kinder auch kennen: die Veränderungen, welche ganze Königreiche und erhabne Personen betroffen, werden sie zu Betrachtungen leiten, deren Wirkung die Zufriedenheit mit ihren eingeschränkten Umständen sein wird. [p.140]

The idea that the aristocracy had particular duties and responsibilities was not uncommon at the time. One need only think of Frederick the Great's definition of the ruler as the first servant of the state. Similarly, Joseph II believed that the aristocracy should, in accordance with its privileges and superior education, show an example to the

rest of society. Thus in Josephinian society members of the aristocracy tended to be punished more severely for breaches of the law than did the ordinary populace -- the reason being that Joseph believed that society might have been entitled to expect better conduct from the highest classes. In all her dealings with the poor, Sophie is concerned to instill in them the conviction that they have no reason to regret their modest position in the world. They have, she firmly believes, been placed in their respective stations by God, and they must accept their allotted places in the scheme of things with equanimity:

Ich stehe wirklich in dem Kreise armer und dienender Personen, also achte ich mich verbunden, diese durch Unterricht und Beispiel zu ihrem Maß von Tugend und Glück zu führen, wobei ich aber sehr vermeiden werde, ihnen Begriffe oder Gesinnungen einzuflößen, die meinen glänzenden und angesehenen Umständen gemäß waren, weil ich fürchten würde, daß aus der vermischten Denkensart vermischte Begierden und Wünsche entstehen möchten. [p.220]

La Roche would appear to regard poverty as some kind of metaphysical necessity.

Sophie believes it should be alleviated, not abolished completely:

Die bäuerliche Not... wird nicht als eigentliches soziales Phänomen gesehen und als solches auf die noch immer bestehende Leibeigenschaft, den Druck des Frontendienstes, der Steuern und Abgaben oder auf andere Relikte der überkommenen Feudalordnung zurückgeführt. Sie erscheint ihr... als Konsequenz natürlicher Umstände, d.h., als Teil der physikalischen Welt.<sup>27</sup>

That La Roche should adhere to this standpoint is, after all, scarcely surprising. Precisely what we should not expect from her is a revolutionary message. She had herself benefited in no small degree from her husband's good connections.<sup>28</sup> Frequent visits to the court at Mainz had familiarised her with the best which aristocratic circles had to offer in terms of intelligence, wit and cultivation. Moreover, one finds few voices in eighteenth-century Germany raised in favour of the abolition of all class distinctions. (Even Goethe's Werther, despite his radicalism in other areas, accepts that differences of rank are "necessary"). This evident conservatism cannot simply be ascribed to the restrictions imposed by censorship, or by the desire to avoid it. La Roche paints a somewhat idealised picture of rural poverty.

Die auf den Feldern sitzenden Kinder verleihen dem Bild der armen

Weiber eine versöhnende, rührende Komponente, und die gleiche Versöhnung wird auch geleistet durch die Beobachtung der geduldenden Gelassenheit der Bauern... es bleibt offen, ob die Relation von Leiden . und Geduld als adversative, additive oder gar kausale zu verstehen sei.<sup>29</sup>

La Roche's peasants are resigned, industrious and grateful for the assistance Sophie affords them; these commendable qualities of course form a marked contrast to the intrigue and self-indulgence prevalent at the court in D. Indeed, the peasants might be regarded as providing an example to be followed by the reader and by Sophie Sternheim herself -- Sophie too must learn to endure suffering and humiliation with patience.

It is scarcely surprising that La Roche concentrates on depicting rural, patriarchal society. Even in the 1770's feudalism was still widespread in Germany. Yet her portrayal of England -- where the process of industrialisation, with the accompanying general migration to the towns, was well under way -- is very similar. Here too it is country life which engages her interest. The role of the enlightened, progressive country squire, she believes, offers unique opportunities for involvement in good works and schemes of social improvement. No mention is made in the novel of the new and severe problems of urban poverty, overcrowding and public health. Poverty as La Roche describes it is always clean and tidy. As companion to Lady Summers and subsequently as mistress of Seymour House, Sophie enjoys a positively idyllic existence in rural surroundings. A country estate provides the perfect background for Sophie's reforming zeal: it is large enough to offer plenty of scope for improvement, small enough for her to establish a personal relationship with the tenants, to familiarise herself with their individual needs. The owner of such a property, we are led to believe, can find on his own lands sufficient work to engage his energies for a lifetime. If he feels himself compelled to involve himself in matters outside his own estates, he may try to persuade neighbouring landlords to follow his example in instituting agricultural reforms -- as Colonel Sternheim does and as Seymour learns to do. In involving himself fully in his own society, a landlord can quite easily forget the wider, much less idyllic world beyond

-- and this is precisely what La Roche's characters do. Even the vexed question of enclosures, a reform which threw countless dispossessed farmers into the most desperate plight, is not permitted to intrude on the idyll.

Wieland, as we have seen, took exception to what he termed Sophie Sternheim's "Prädeliktion für die Mylords" [p.24]. It is clear that La Roche indeed regards England as constituting an ideal society. Since at the time of writing her *Sternheim* she had no personal experience of English life, her favourable conception of the country and its population can only have been derived from secondary sources -- in particular from the literature of Sensibility, from the writings of authors such as Richardson, Young and Goldsmith. La Roche shares the then widely-held view that the English were a nation peculiarly prone to melancholy. Seymour speaks proudly of the "feurige Einbildungskraft" [p.81] which he believes to be characteristic of his compatriots. Sophie's English grandmother, we are told, is frequently sad for no obvious reason; she seeks solitude and cherishes a secret which is never disclosed to the reader. These character traits are inherited, albeit in a less pronounced form, by her daughter and granddaughter. Seymour, as we have seen, suffers from spleen. He feels thoroughly ill at ease in the world; he is weary of life, even before his love for Sophie brings him genuine distress. Sophie Sternheim is predisposed in favour of the English even before she has had an opportunity to determine whether their conduct actually corresponds to the ideal of *Tugendempfindsamkeit* she holds so dear. She does not quite regard Englishness as a virtue in itself; she certainly does consider that in no other country are social and political conditions so conducive to the general increase of virtue, justice and tolerance. For La Roche's characters England represents naturalness, simplicity and freedom. They consciously believe it to be a land in which the bourgeoisie enjoys all the privileges which elsewhere would be restricted to the aristocracy. Seymour and his uncle are convinced that Derby would be brought to justice in England. Here one is tempted to ask whether, had such a case actually arisen, the reality would not in fact have been



very different. While Derby's talent for conceiving elaborate schemes of deception can scarcely have been commonplace, it seems probable that, should such an instance have come to light, its instigator would have been treated with some degree of indulgence, with the justification that a young man must be allowed to "sow his wild oats". It seems equally questionable whether unequal marriages were regarded in England with quite the degree of approbation La Roche's characters suppose. Even if some noblemen did marry middle-class girls, it seems probable that the prospect of material gain was more frequently instrumental in bringing about such matches than either love or esteem for exemplary virtue can have been. The middle classes were, after all, increasing in prosperity, while many members of the nobility were in desperate need of money if they were to maintain a luxurious, even extravagant, lifestyle. In short, real social conditions in eighteenth-century England were, for the bourgeoisie as for the urban and rural poor, a good deal less pleasant than a reading of La Roche's novel would suggest.

Sophie von La Roche is no theorist and no very careful or logical thinker. Her book is a novel of ideas in the sense and to the extent that her main purpose in writing is to inculcate in her readers -- for we must remember that, although La Roche did not intend to submit her novel for publication, she did wish copies to be distributed to those friends and acquaintances she believed would look favourably upon it -- a variety of ideas and ideals of which she approved. These various opinions could scarcely be said to constitute a philosophy of life which was systematic or even very coherent. If she had subjected her own world-view to rational analysis, La Roche might well have found that she possessed convictions which were, strictly speaking, mutually contradictory. She is an adherent at one and the same time of the Enlightenment and of *Empfindsamkeit* -- a position which, while not impossible in itself, was an uneasy one nonetheless.

In matters of religion La Roche -- and here her model characters, especially Colonel Sternheim and Sophie, speak for the authoress -- is in essentials very much on the side



of the *Aufklärer*. She shares the Enlightenment's traditional hostility towards dogma, in particular dogma which is destructive of the tolerance she would wish to see extended to all shades of religious belief. For La Roche, as for Gellert, religion is -- or should be -- above all a matter of practical ethics. She considers that no one, however poor or uneducated, should be denied access to the fundamental principles of an enlightened and rational Christianity. Yet neither would she have men's material needs neglected by a clergy too much occupied with metaphysical speculation. Her model characters insist that *Volkserziehung* constituted an essential part of that general responsibility which the educated classes naturally bear for the well-being of their "inferiors". It should not be overlooked that this very rejection of dogma in favour of practical morality and social reform was also characteristic of Pietistic thinking. Yet this and, still more strikingly, a belief in the paramount importance of individual emotional experience, should not blind us to the profound differences between La Roche's world-view and that of the Pietists. As I have already pointed out, La Roche's dislike of doctrinaire intolerance had its roots not in the Pietistic conviction that all genuine piety was worthy of respect, whatever the theological principles behind it, but rather in a distinct indifference to all points of theory and in a regard for human achievement typical of the *Aufklärer*.

If La Roche is a convinced adherent of the Enlightenment on all matters relating to religion and social improvement, within the sphere of personal morality and individual feeling her allegiances to many of the ideas typical of *Empfindsamkeit* becomes extremely clear. Sophie Sternheim's moral code is a subjective one, determined by deeply held personal convictions, without regard to and frequently in defiance of the ideas of most of those around her. In questions of ethics Sophie will not allow her actions to be regulated by any form of higher authority. Her insistence on moral autonomy would have been approved in principle by the *Aufklärer*, but it is significant that Wieland, as indicated in his introduction and footnotes to the novel, was disturbed by this refusal to correspond to the ideas favoured by the *große Welt*. Sophie holds fast

to her subjective understanding of morality, with supreme strength of feeling. Her emotions are ever strong, yet ever concentrated on the need to care for others; it is primarily for others that Sophie feels, seldom for her own sufferings. The type of sensibility in which she indulges gains the whole-hearted approval of the authoress, in contrast to the egoistical self-pity practised by Seymour.

Finally, the concept of society contained in the novel similarly reveals the double influence of Enlightenment and Sensibility. La Roche favours social reform provided it is contained within certain limits; the miserable conditions of the poor -- and in the context of La Roche's novel this invariably means the deserving poor -- are to be mitigated. The possibility of an eventual complete abolition of poverty is never discussed. While approving in principle the class distinctions governing contemporary society La Roche is dismayed by the thought of suffering in any form. Thus she at once commends all pedagogical efforts which will better fit the poor for earning their living, while at the same time being reluctant to see any man educated to the point where he becomes discontented with his station in society.

In general, it must be said that La Roche tends to hold the middle ground between the ideas of the Enlightenment and the emphasis on feeling which characterised *Empfindsamkeit*. She supports a religion which is irrational, which claims to remain as close as possible to the roots of the common people in everyday life and which sees its main *raison d'être* in the encouragement of its adherents on the path of exemplary virtue. This morality in turn always regards itself as following the dictates of reason but is at the same time prompted by an entirely emotional response.



1. Sophie Marie von La Roche, *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*, ed. Fritz Bruggemann. *Deutsche Literatur, Sammlung literarischer Kunst- und Kulturdenkmäler in Entwicklungsreihen. Reihe "Aufklärung"*. Volume 14, Leipzig 1938, p.20. All subsequent references to the novel are to this edition.
2. See Christine Touaillon, *Der deutsche Frauenroman des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts*. Vienna-Leipzig 1919, p.120ff.
3. *Johann Gottfried Herders Nachlaß*. Edited by Heinrich Duntzer and F.G.Herder. Frankfurt am Main 1857: vol.3, p.67.
4. Quoted in Wolfgang Schmitt, *Die pietistische Kritik der Künste. Untersuchungen über die Entstehung einer neuen Kunstauffassung im achtzehnten Jahrhundert*. Diss. Cologne 1958, p.23.
5. See Pamela Currie, "Moral weeklies and the reading public in Germany 1711-1750" in *Oxford German Studies*, 3, 1968, pp.69-86.
6. Jürgen Jacobs, *Prosa der Aufklärung. Moralische Wochenschriften, Autobiographie, Satire, Roman. Kommentar zu einer Epoche*. Munich 1976.
7. Sophie von La Roche, *Melusinens Sommerabende*. Edited by Christoph Martin Wieland, Halle 1806; quoted from Touaillon, *op.cit.*, p.100.
8. Touaillon, *op.cit.*, p.72.
9. Leslie Stephen, *English literature and society in the eighteenth century*. London 1904, p.104.
10. Walter Gebhardt, *Religionssoziologische Probleme im Roman der deutschen Aufklärung*. Diss., Gießen 1931, p.49.
11. Gebhardt, *op.cit.*, p.85.
12. Ladislao Mittner, *Freundschaft und Liebe in der deutschen Literatur des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts*. In *Stoffe, Formen, Strukturen. Studien zur deutschen Literatur. Festschrift für Hans Heinrich Borchardt*, Munich 1962, pp.97-139 (p.97).
13. Richard Friedenthal, *Goethe, sein Leben und seine Welt*. 13th edition, Munich 1983, p.1.
14. See above.
15. Lothar Pikulik, *Bürgerliches Trauerspiel und Empfindsamkeit*. Cologne-Graz 1966.
16. Wolf Lepenies, *Melancholie und Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt am Main 1972, p.83.
17. Pikulik, *op.cit.*, p.91.
18. See Gerhard Sauder, *Empfindsamkeit*, vol. 1, *Voraussetzungen und Elemente*, Stuttgart 1974.

19. Peter Uwe Hohendahl, *Der europäische Roman der Empfindsamkeit*. Wiesbaden 1977, p.87.
20. Leo Balet-E. Gerhard, *Die Verbürgerlichung der deutschen Kunst, Literatur und Musik im achtzehnten Jahrhundert*. Edited and introduced by Gert. Mattenklott. Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Vienna 1973, p.306.
21. Touaillon, *op.cit.*, p.104.
22. *ibid.*
23. See Greiner, *op.cit.*
24. Becker, *op.cit.*, p.71.
25. Jacobs, *op.cit.*, p.17.
26. Balet-Gerhard, *op.cit.*, p.228.
27. Burkhard Dedner, *Topos, Ideal und Realitätspostulat. Studien zur Darstellung des Landlebens im Roman des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts*. Tübingen 1969, p.64.
28. For information on La Roche's biography see the following:
- Johann Wilhelm Appell, *Sophie von La Roche*. Frankfurt am Main 1858;
- Ludmilla Assing, *Sophie von La Roche. Die Freundin Wielands*. Berlin 1859;
- Werner Milch, *Sophie von La Roche, die Großmutter der Brentanos*. Frankfurt am Main 1953;
- Kuno Ridderhoff, *Sophie von La Roche und Wieland. Zum hundertjährigen Todestage der Dichterin (18. Februar 1805)*, Hamburg 1907.
29. Dedner, *op.cit.*, p.60.

**4. FRIEDRICH NICOLAI, DAS LEBEN UND DIE  
MEINUNGEN DES HERRN MAGISTER  
SEBALDUS NOTHANKER**



*Die gesunde Vernunft Nicolais [war] weder abstrakt-philosophischer Intellektualismus noch enghorizontige Gewohnheitsweisheit, sondern eine klare, selbstbegründete und weitblickende praktisch-sittliche Weltanschauung.<sup>1</sup>*

If we remember Friedrich Nicolai today, it is principally on account of his apparent inability to recognise any merit either in Weimar Classicism or in Romanticism; and of the ridicule to which adherents of both movements consequently subjected him<sup>2</sup>. We know him as the parodist of Goethe's *Werther*, as the determined if unequal opponent of Kant, as the *Proktophantasmist* of the Walpurgisnacht in *Faust*. This view of Nicolai and his achievements, while it is not without some basis in fact, is incomplete. Goethe's and Schiller's opinions of Nicolai are no more deserving of unquestioning acceptance than is Nicolai's view of them. Undoubtedly Nicolai has suffered by comparison with his contemporary Lessing, with whom he had so many ideas in common.

Hättest du Phantasie und Witz und Empfindung und Urteil,  
Wahrlich dir fehlte nicht viel, Wieland und Lessing zu sein.<sup>3</sup>

Such at least was Goethe's judgement in the *Xenien*. Lessing had indeed the more powerful intellect, to say nothing of "imagination" and "wit"; but Nicolai was not Lessing and he ought to be assessed according to his own merits and capabilities -- rather than to be blamed for being as he was. Instead of castigating Nicolai for his lack of æsthetic sensitivity<sup>4</sup>, we ought rather to ask how and to what extent he was representative of his time -- what his writings can tell us about the literary, intellectual and social climate of the age. An *Ehrenrettung* of Nicolai's novels lies outwith the scope of this thesis; it is to be hoped, however, that our discussion of Nicolai's contribution to the intellectual life of his time may go some way towards a fairer and more balanced appraisal of his literary output than those to which we have been accustomed.

Nicolai's novel *Das Leben und die Meinungen des Herrn Magister Sebaldus Nothanker* was first published in three volumes, successively in 1773, 1775 and 1776. By eighteenth-century standards the work proved to be a very considerable success<sup>5</sup>. Even before the second volume was issued in 1775, a second edition of the first volume had become necessary. Within a very few years four editions had appeared. Translations

were made into French and Danish during the three years after the initial publication, soon to be followed by editions in English and Dutch. In the space of a few years 12,000 copies had been sold -- and the actual number of readers was about ten times that figure<sup>6</sup>, since many of those 12,000 copies would have been purchased by lending libraries and *Lesegesellschaften*, and others by private individuals who would then lend them out among family and friends. It may be regarded as a tribute to the immediate popularity of the novel that a literary opportunist courted public favour by producing the alleged second volume before Nicolai himself had found time to do so! A book purporting to contain the sermons of Sebaldus Nothanker also appeared and was widely considered to be genuine, until Nicolai revealed the fraud in his own second volume<sup>7</sup>. Equally indicative of the power of the book is the fact that it was at once fiercely attacked by the orthodox Lutheran Church: a Nürnberg pastor warned of its dangers from the pulpit, and in Holland the work was banned by the Church authorities.<sup>8</sup>

A number of factors may be said to have contributed to this success. The theological content of the novel was calculated to engage the interest of scholars, amateur *philosophes* and the *Aufklärer*. The romance between Marianne and Säugling, "ein Vorläufer des englischen Gouvernantenromans"<sup>9</sup>, would please the *Frauenzimmer*, who formed so large a section of the eighteenth-century reading public. Even those who read simply for the excitement and suspense of the traditional novel of entertainment were unlikely to be bored, since Nicolai's plot is by no means lacking in unexpected and dramatic developments.

Many readers were no doubt gratified by the circumstance that *Sebaldus Nothanker* was a *Gegenwartsroman* -- set almost entirely in Germany, with one fairly brief interlude dealing with the hero's shipwreck off the Dutch coast and subsequent persecution by intolerant clerics in Holland. The various settings -- Holstein and above all Berlin --

were immediately recognisable; there was plenty of local colour. Critics of the *genre* were calling for just such a "German" novel, while it seemed that the German novelists could only produce fiction in which the setting was "entweder ausländisch oder antik oder utopisch"<sup>10</sup>. The message from the critics was unambiguous: "teutsch, teutsch, teutsch müssen Eure Produkte seyn"<sup>11</sup>.

Some of the characters in Nicolai's novel were as recognisable as the places. In the literary world of the eighteenth century, everybody knew everybody else -- if not in person, then at least by repute. Thus Säugling was soon identified as Johann Georg Jacobi<sup>12</sup>, the author of a number of well-known poems and an *Empfindsamer par excellence*. Nor was it difficult to recognise the Superintendent Stauzius as a caricature of Hauptpastor Goeze of Hamburg. The social conditions portrayed in *Sebaldus Nothanker* were no doubt familiar to the reader from his own experience; the issues raised in the novel were those issues which occupied the reader's mind.

A strong current of nationalism runs through the novel, something which would commend it to many readers. The excellent Sebaldus is a veritable Francophobe. He cannot think of Paris (a city he has neither seen nor wished to see) without a kind of dread, even horror. He goes so far as to believe the Book of Revelation to contain a symbolic representation of the history of the French nation, and spends many years and much intellectual energy in trying to prove his case to the world. Clearly there is a conscious attempt at comedy here; yet both Sebaldus and Marianne are in their different ways personifications of all that was then believed to be best in and most typical of German culture and German values. The representatives of French culture in Nicolai's novel are without exception vain, frivolous and very silly. To Nicolai's mind, "German" was in effect synonymous with "middle-class"; since his public would have been drawn largely from the bourgeoisie, we may safely say that the majority of his readers would

have been likely to find his preference for "German" values thoroughly congenial.

As a publisher and book-seller by profession, Nicolai doubtless knew very well which features of content or style could be relied upon to commend a work of fiction to the public. His experience of the world of book-selling may well have prompted him to introduce his own novel as a sequel to Moritz August von Thümmel's highly successful *Wilhelmine oder der verliebte Pedant* (1764). Several of Thümmel's characters do indeed appear in Nicolai's novel, albeit in scarcely recognisable form -- the arch-villain, Stauzius, was originally an amiable philanthropist -- but in the main the links between the two works are tenuous. The device of presenting his novel to the public as a sequel to *Wilhelmine* was surely speculation on Thümmel's success, a strategy calculated to arrest the attention of the potential reader.

It is scarcely to be expected that *Sebaldus Nothanker* would be of interest to any reader but the scholar today. It contains too many references to contemporary events and contemporary personalities to be comprehensible to a wider public without the benefit of exhaustive commentaries. Some considerable knowledge of eighteenth-century theology is essential if Nicolai's satire is to be appreciated. Not only is this specialised knowledge lacking in the average modern reader, but the degree of interest he is likely to show in theological questions is considerably less than that which his eighteenth-century counterpart would have felt. Not only has religious belief declined in the past two centuries, in Nicolai's time the theological and social or political spheres were much more closely integrated than is the case today. The authority of the Church was tightly bound up with the authority of the State. It was widely held that if faith in religious authority were to decline substantially, secular rule too would be undermined; hence any theological statement also had political implications.

In theory, Nicolai could have chosen any one of a number of issues around which to construct the plot of the novel. His main aim is to promote the cause of intellectual independence. He demands that each individual be permitted to form his own views and make his own decisions without pressure to conform to a general pattern or submit to the dictates of some "higher authority". He could have taken some social or political question as his starting-point. That he did not do so -- believing that the struggle between the rationalist Christianity of the Enlightenment and dogmatic, intolerant orthodoxy constituted the most important case for discussion -- is sufficient proof that in the eighteenth century religion was still far-reaching in its effects:

eine Einübung in kritische Rationalität wäre ja grundsätzlich auf jedem Gebiet möglich gewesen. Sie ist aber auch dadurch motiviert, daß in der Theologie der Streit zwischen Autorität und Rationalität, zwischen Dogma und dem Prinzip des Zweifels, am stärksten entfacht war.<sup>13</sup>

We should not forget that in the 1770s Lutheran orthodoxy still maintained a strong hold on the lives of most ordinary people. Werner Schütz has outlined those factors which combined to sustain the authority of the Church:

Die Wirkung der radikalen freigeistigen Literatur auf das allgemeine Denken des Volkes ist [...] nicht allzu groß. Neben ihr gibt es auch in dieser Zeit eine weitverbreitete Literatur zur Verteidigung des Christentums. Allein 1770, dem Erscheinungsjahr von D. Holbachs *Système de la Nature*, sind in Frankreich neunzig Bücher apologetischer Art erschienen.<sup>14</sup>

In any case, it was but a small section of the population that could afford to buy books of a scholarly nature, since these would seem to have been extremely expensive in relation to wages.<sup>15</sup> It is true that there were some circles, particularly at some of the courts, where more radical views were fashionable; but such attitudes were unlikely to be transmitted to wider sections of the population. As Nicolai's friend Lessing discovered to his cost, the clerical and secular authorities were very well able to silence those whose opinions they considered subversive. In short, the Lutheran Church still maintained a strong influence over public opinion; and so the abuse of clerical power provided the



most obvious target for Nicolai's satire. Furthermore, the orthodox clergy were typical of the forces of reaction which he was eager to denounce.

Nicolai is concerned to prove that contemporary German society was greatly in need of reform. In order to prove this, he must provide his readers with an accurate reflection of that society. The representatives of corrupt and cynical Lutheran orthodoxy, or of narrow-minded self-regarding Pietism, must therefore be recognisable as common types; their deficiencies must be grave enough to shock and disturb, but not so extreme as to overstretch the reader's credulity. In his preface to the novel, Nicolai emphasises that his characters are not ideal heroes and heroines, but very ordinary people:

Alle Begebenheiten sind in unserer Erzählung so unvorbereitet, so unwunderbar, als sie in der weiten Welt zu geschehen pflegen. Die Personen, welche auftreten, sind weder an Stande erhaben, noch durch Gesinnungen ausgezeichnet, noch durch außerordentliche Glücksfälle von gewöhnlichen Menschen unterschieden. Sie sind ganz gemeine schlechte und gerechte Leute, sie strotzen nicht so wie die Romanhelden von hoher Imagination, schöner Tugend und feiner Lebensart, und die ihnen zustoßenden Begegnisse sind so, wie sie in dem ordentlichen Laufe der Welt täglich vorgehen.<sup>16</sup>

Nicolai avoids, therefore, the romantic adventure-story elements of the traditional novel form. His social criticism will, he hopes, have all the more force for being included in a realistic narrative. Nor are the events he portrays merely "probable"; Nicolai employs the conventions of the *genre* for his own purposes -- he is no less concerned with authenticity than are Gellert and La Roche: "In dieser wahrhaftigen Lebensbeschreibung [...] wollen wir nichts der Anmut oder des Wunderbaren wegen erdichten, sondern alles ganz einfältig erzählen, wie es vorgegangen ist" [p.19]. Nicolai claims that he is in a position to prove the authenticity of his narrative, for he is in the possession of a number of indisputably genuine documents: including the letters of Sebalduß, Wilhelmine, Marianne, Säugling and sundry other individuals -- to say nothing of Stauzius's sermons and Säugling's poems. So vast, indeed, is his resource of information that he can prove beyond doubt the truth of every word in the book: "An vollständigen, diplomatischen

Beweisen wird diese Geschichte keiner anderen nachzusetzen sein" [p.20]. It is difficult to take such assurances entirely seriously: Nicolai would appear to be indulging in just a little irony at his readers' expense (and at the expense of those other authors who were so much concerned to give their novels the appearance of authenticity); without, it must be added, himself renouncing the very considerable advantages to be obtained from adherence to that convention.

It is interesting to note that Nicolai, according to his preface, had a very specific public in mind when writing his novel. He was not writing for *die große Welt*, but:

deutsch heraus zu reden -- nur für Gelehrte von Profession... Wir hoffen nicht, von der halbunangekleideten Schönen am Nachttische gelesen zu werden... nicht von dem piruettierenden Petit-maître... nicht von dem Hofmanne, der den Wink des Fürsten und des Ministers zu studieren versteht; nicht von dem Spieler; nicht von der Betschwester [p.21].

The assumption -- and the apparent regret -- that he cannot hope to engage the interest of these sections of the reading public is unmistakably ironic; for not only might they have disdained his book, he would have been at least as contemptuous of them as they could have been of him. Large sections of the novel are given over to biting satire on what Nicolai regards as the false pride and shallow sophistication, the self-seeking opportunism or bigoted hypocrisy of precisely those categories of readers.

*Sebaldus Nothanker*, Nicolai claims, is destined for quite a different public:

Ist aber irgendwo ein hagerer Magister, der das ganze unvermeßliche Gebäude der Wissenschaften aus einem Kapitel seines ontologischen Kompendiums übersieht; ein feister Superintendent, der alle Falten der Dogmatik aufhebt, worin eine Ketzerei verborgen sein könnte; ein weiser Schulmann, der auf Universitäten die Kunst aus dem Grunde studiert; ein belesener Dorfpastor... so mögen sie herzutreten und sich an dem Mahle weiden, welches hier ihrem Geiste aufgetischt wird [p.22].

In urging the "feister Superintendent" to read his novel, Nicolai is (it would appear)

openly inviting the clerical authorities to condemn a work in which heresies are not concealed, but resolutely proclaimed to all who care to read. Moreover, Nicolai can scarcely have coveted the good opinion of the academic world. Indeed, he positively scorns that type of scholarship which neglects vital practical matters in order to pursue points of theory -- theory often consisting, for Nicolai, of irrelevant trifles. The fact that Sebaldus is so exclusively concerned with intellectual pursuits is the chief cause of his miserable plight; had he a stronger sense of reality, he might be rather better equipped to contend successfully with his many persecutors. In short, Nicolai cannot but have been aware that his book would provoke the wrath of the theologians -- of the orthodox Lutherans and the Pietists -- and even if the novel were to be approved by the professional scholars, he would care but little for their praise. Clearly there is irony here; but irony to what purpose?

It was far from uncommon in the eighteenth century, when theological questions were under discussion, to urge that debate be restricted to the ranks of the clergy and professional scholars -- since these men, unlike the *Pöbel*, could be relied upon not to extend their radicalism to the political sphere. Even Kant<sup>17</sup> took the view that, while a clergyman should be free to debate points of dogma with his colleagues, he should take care to preach to his flock only official Church doctrine. In stating so firmly that his novel is designed for the perusal of scholars alone, Nicolai is perhaps using this traditional argument for reasons of his own. While *die große Welt* might indeed choose to ignore the novel, the success of the book indicates that it must have engaged the interest of a substantial section of the bourgeoisie. We have already noted that discussions of theological issues, which today would be of interest only to a small minority of specialists, would in the 1770s have been considered important by a broad cross-section of the public. Nicolai's novel would not be read merely by scholars, as he well knew. His intention in stating the contrary may perhaps have been (among other things) to shield

himself from accusations of demagoguery.

It is only when we have understood Nicolai's attitude to novel-writing -- for Nicolai, much more a matter of pleading a case than of telling a story or analysing character -- that we are in a position to consider the work in its intellectual context. A consideration of the author's approach to the portrayal of character reveals that his principal concern was not to create a work of art; it was rather to convince his readers of the validity of the philosophical and (above all) the moral and social ideas of the Enlightenment.

To a considerable extent, Nicolai's characters are mere types. We encounter Stauzius -- the hypocritical, bigoted representative of all that was worst in eighteenth-century Lutheran orthodoxy; the Pietist, who (despite widely differing views) strongly resembles Stauzius in character and is only prevented from doing an equal measure of harm by the circumstance that he has less power; we meet Frau von Hohenauf, the personification of Frenchified German aristocratic culture. With the exception of Säugling -- who undergoes an entirely unconvincing transformation from effeminate versifier to dedicated agriculturist and prudent *père de famille* -- the characters are at the end of their various experiences precisely what they were before them.

We learn little or nothing of their inner lives. It is their ideas with which Nicolai is concerned, not their emotions. We are given little insight into Sebaldu's feelings on the deaths of his wife and younger daughter. The treatment of Marianne's emotional life is equally sketchy; little is said of the nature or development of her love for Säugling. Nicolai instead concentrates almost entirely on the external circumstances which affect the course of this relationship, on the machinations which separate, and the co-incidences which finally re-unite the lovers. It seems unlikely that such omissions are due solely to Nicolai's limitations as an artist -- or even to a caution or reticence that might have

resulted from awareness of such limitations. Heinz Stolpe argues with some justice that Nicolai avoids the portrayal of strong emotions as a matter of principle:

Nicolai [befindet] diese Kargheit offenbar für ganz in der Ordnung, polemisiert er doch... mehrfach direkt und indirekt gegen das, was ihm bei anderen Autoren schädlicher Gefühlstüberschwang zu sein scheint, wobei er verständnislos den entscheidenden Unterschied verwischt zwischen der tändelnden Rokoko-Sentimentalität eines Johann Georg Jacobi und den ernstesten Bemühungen Goethes und Herders, dem Gefühlsleben in Kunst und Wissenschaft endlich stärker Rechnung zu tragen.<sup>18</sup>

The conviction that the novelist ought to avoid depicting an excess of feeling produces a tendency to the opposite extreme: Nicolai's polemic against the theory and practice of Sensibility gives the appearance of artistic incapacity; a philosophical viewpoint takes precedence over formal considerations.

Nicolai does make his point rather too insistently. The novel contains numerous repetitions or near-repetitions of scenes, countless variations on the theme of the intolerance, dogmatism and hypocrisy of the orthodox Lutherans and of the complacency and inhumanity of the Pietists. The inevitable result is to render the plot of the novel not merely unbelievable but increasingly tedious. As with the depiction of character, æsthetic considerations are subordinated to Nicolai's principal aim -- the communication of the belief that contemporary society is greatly in need of reform, as regards both social conditions and human attitudes.

The representatives of Lutheran orthodoxy in Nicolai's novel -- above all, of course, Superintendent Stauzius, as corrupt and self-seeking a caricature of Hauptpastor Goeze as is the Patriarch in Lessing's *Nathan der Weise* -- are not so much irrational as indifferent to reason. Sebalduß Nothanker naïvely believes that if he can only succeed in engaging them in honest argument, he will be able to refute the case for authority and even convert the orthodox clergy to his own ideals of reason, tolerance and humanity. In this attempt he is wholly unsuccessful, since his powerful adversaries refuse to admit that there may



be grounds for discussion. No response would be more likely to earn the contempt of the *Aufklärer* than this unwillingness to debate the issues, indicative as it is that the creed founded on authority and tradition will scarcely stand up to critical examination.

Im *Nothanker* geht es um die Aufhebung allein durch Tradition legitimierter Herrschaft im Medium vernunftgeleiteten Rasonnements; auch in ihm leuchtet der aufklärerische Glaube an die Konvergenz öffentlicher Diskussion mit Vernunft auf.<sup>19</sup>

The Lutheran Church is presented in Nicolai's novel as an institution jealously guarded in a state of petrification. The orthodox clergy will not allow what progress is possible; they insist that all points of dispute have long since been settled, all those new opinions of which the Neologists are so proud have long ago been refuted. Regarding themselves as custodians of a constant, unchanging canon of beliefs, they see every attempt by the Church to adapt itself to meet the needs of the new *Zeitalter der Aufklärung* as an inadmissible -- even sinful -- concession to the forces of materialism and atheism. It need hardly be pointed out that such dogmatists believe all men of enquiring minds to be dangerous -- potential, if not actual, atheists. Their understanding of their own role in the scheme of things is conservative in the extreme. "Man muß keine Neuerungen gestatten" [p.211]: such is the principle according to which all religious questions are judged. Sebalduis is urged to curb his inclination to question the sacred tradition: "Auf die Vernunft müsse man in Glaubenssachen gar nicht achten. Man müsse sich dem fügen, was die Voreltern festgesetzt haben" [p.211]. Of course this conservatism has a clearly discernible political basis. One must avoid "unchristliches Vernünfteln" [p.213], for "Es muß ein Glaube, ein Hirt und eine Herde im Lande sein, sonst kömmt alles in Verwirrung" [p.213]. The authorities, both clerical and secular, have a panic fear of confusion.

For Stauzius and those like him, Christianity is very much a matter of *Realpolitik*. They benefit to no small degree from the prestige and material prosperity which their



respective positions in the orthodox hierarchy afford them, and they seek to safeguard these benefits by insisting that their authority and the foundation on which it rests must never be subjected to criticism. The Lutheran clergy as depicted by Nicolai is quite indifferent to the moral welfare of the populace; provided only that they may exercise power, they are content. They are certainly indifferent to human suffering; and very often accomplished hypocrites. Continuing respect for the Church among the common people leaves the clergy free to do as it pleases; the semblance of propriety alone is sufficient to sustain its authority. When Sebaldus' newly appointed successor comes to evict the Nothanker family from their home, having given no prior warning and despite having been informed that Wilhelmine is ill, he passes the time while waiting for them to remove themselves and their possessions into the street in writing his sermon for the following Sunday.

Nicolai deploras the inhumanity of those who neglect their fellow human-beings in order to perform what they consider to be their duty to God -- if indeed they are sincere, which his orthodox characters rarely are. Thus Stauzius, instead of employing men and resources to build homes for those who have lost theirs in a fire, insists that the town's first priority must be the building of a large and splendid church. Those left destitute by the fire and now abandoned by the authorities are forced to emigrate to Russia as colonists. Those occasions on which the orthodox clergy are truly zealous in the performance of their duties are generally occasions when they will be well rewarded for their zeal. Sebaldus' successor is Christian enough to be able to overcome his natural feelings of hostility towards the family of heretics and declare himself ready to preach at Wilhelmine's funeral, but only if Hieronymus is prepared to pay his fee.

Superintendent Stauzius has almost an allegorical significance. He has every conceivable fault and no redeeming virtues whatsoever. When he shows himself other than arrogant,

cruel and vindictive, then it is only in the hope of increasing, by a hypocritical display of benignity, his own wealth and prestige. He has attained the status and enjoys the privileges of a Generalsuperintendent by virtue neither of superior intellect nor of exemplary dedication to the performance of his clerical duties, but merely by marrying his predecessor's widow. He is not alone in gaining promotion by dubious means. Sebaldu's successor is engaged to be married to Demoiselle Stauzius: Frau von Hohenauf promises that Rambold -- and a less suitable candidate for the ministry can scarcely be imagined -- will be rewarded with a comfortable living if he can induce Säugling to satisfy his aunt's ambition by marrying Fräulein von Ehrenkalb.

Nicolai's novel is thoroughly polemical. Unlike Gellert and La Roche he seldom seeks to influence the reader by providing him with models of exemplary conduct. Instead, he warns him through the medium of satire and caricature against particular tendencies and ideologies. By means of observation of the cruelty and corruption of which orthodox churchmen such as Stauzius are capable, the reader is enabled to construct for himself a pattern of thought and behaviour worthy of emulation.

There is of course much that is exemplary in the life and in the opinions of Sebaldu Nothanker. In contrast to the representatives of Lutheran orthodoxy, Sebaldu is a true friend to his parishioners, and a wise counsellor in all matters which affect their welfare. He is a trusted conciliator and valued comforter, a frequent and always welcome visitor in the homes of the peasants. Like La Roche, Nicolai considers that the clergy are ideally situated to act as the educators of the common people. They should not, both authors suggest, be content to give instruction in religion, or even in morality: a good pastor should be able to deal with any problem, be it theoretical or practical, which may arise in his parish. By setting up the modest, retiring and sympathetic Sebaldu as a model, Nicolai is attacking the arrogance and inordinate pride in their station which he believes

to be characteristic of the orthodox clergy. His representatives of orthodoxy are excessively haughty individuals -- it is only Sebaldu who regards his calling not as an opportunity to gain power and prestige, but as a responsibility, as a chance to serve his fellow men in a variety of ways.

Yet Sebaldu is by no means an ideal character in the sense in which Gellert's Countess or the Fräulein von Sternheim are ideal. We can by no means identify Nicolai too closely with his character. Sebaldu is unworldly in the negative as well as in the positive sense. He is generous, unselfish and foolishly trusting. His experience of the worst in human nature -- sufficient, one would have thought, to make a misanthropist of any man -- does nothing to daunt his naive optimism, does not render him suspicious or even cautious in his dealings with strangers. Each new betrayal of trust, each new encounter with intolerance, avarice, cruelty takes him by surprise, like Voltaire's *Candide*; so much so that in wondering at the inhumanity of which man is capable, he quite forgets to regret his own distress, and certainly does nothing to improve his lot. That he does not entirely starve is due to chance -- or to Providence -- rather than to his own efforts. He has his hobby-horse too, in the manner of Sterne's heroes. It is in Sebaldu's case the Book of Revelation on which he is writing an exhaustive commentary. (It is of course ironic that Sebaldu -- a convinced rationalist and in all matters not affecting his own well-being a thorough pragmatist -- should have a passion for the Book of Revelation). These studies, by making him forget more immediate concerns, involve him in no end of trouble. Sebaldu is as much a comic figure as he is a traditional hero. His absent-mindedness is largely responsible for the entertainment value of the novel. It is in his philosophical convictions that he is close to Nicolai, in his spirited defence of the ideals of the Enlightenment. In standing up for the ideals of tolerance and humanity, Sebaldu is very much Nicolai's mouthpiece, while his complete inability to defend his own rights at once increases the comic effect of the book and makes his orthodox persecutors, of whose

machinations he is a very passive victim, appear all the more despicable.

In the light of Nicolai's reputation as a narrow and inflexible rationalist, it is perhaps somewhat surprising that his objections to Lutheran orthodoxy are by no means exclusively of a rationalistic nature. He has, rather, a two-fold aim; he wishes to promote a Christianity at once more rational and more humane. He is repelled by the doctrine of eternal damnation because it is so obviously incompatible with the belief in a good and loving God. When interrogated by his superiors on this crucial point, Sebaldus "antwortete ganz gelassen, Er glaube nicht, daß es Menschen gezieme, der Güte Gottes Maß und Ziel zu setzen" [p.38]. He believes that God loves all good men equally well, irrespective of creed, and that He will judge them according to their actions, not according to their beliefs. Nor can Nicolai-Sebaldus accept that the heathen will be damned without exception, for many alleged heretics and infidels have, it is argued, led more virtuous lives than many who profess themselves Christians.

The doctrine of eternal damnation is not, Nicolai believes, merely inhumane in itself, it is also liable to be abused by the clergy. His orthodox figures look upon hell-fire as the only fitting end for their personal enemies. Secure in the knowledge that everlasting punishment awaits those who have refused to submit to clerical domination, they are content to forego vengeance in this world. Thus the father of the *Kandidat* looks forward with evident satisfaction to the inevitable fate of his atheistic neighbour, not the least of whose crimes was to win a lawsuit, thereby inflicting financial loss on his God-fearing adversary. The established clergy largely derive their authority from their skill in exploiting the natural fear of death -- Stauzius, entirely without scriptural authority, proclaims that all who will not assist in the building of his new church will be consigned to Hell. Walther Gebhardt rightly points out that only by capitalising on the basic human fear of death and of what may lie beyond it was the Church able to maintain the full

force of its authority in an increasingly secular society:

Ein Gedanke nur, den man möglichst zu verdrängen sucht, macht Unbehagen: die Zeitlichkeit seines Glückes, das Ende durch den Tod. In dem Punkt geht alle Philosophie und Selbstsicherheit in eine ungewisse, unheimliche Furcht über, hier liegt seine schwache Stelle, über der ihn alle Vernunft nicht weghelfen kann. Und das erkennt die Kirche wohl und benutzt diese Schwäche als Einfallstor in des Bürgers Seele.<sup>20</sup>

In the 1770s the power of the clergy was still considerable, yet the tide was against such men as Stauzius, particularly in the upper ranks of society. In order to sustain the attention of a courtly audience and to preserve his own prestige, Stauzius must have recourse to such tales of horror: if his listeners were as yet little inclined to radicalism, they were at least in danger of becoming indifferent to religion.

Nicolai regards freedom for the individual to determine the content of his own creed as perhaps the most essential feature of the Protestant heritage and as a right which must be zealously defended against the onslaught of orthodox authoritarianism. Herein lies his principal objection to the unquestioning acceptance of the *Symbolische Bücher*.<sup>21</sup>

Nicolai is opposed to Lutheran orthodoxy not least because he values, or professes to value, differences of opinion for their own sake. He is contemptuous of the mindless rigidity which Stauzius demands. Stauzius governs his subordinates

wie ein Hauptmann bei einer wohleingerichteten Kompagnie Soldaten, bei der jeder Rock so lang als der andere, jeder Zopf so dick als der andere, jede Stiefelette so lang aufgeknüpft ist als die andere, und die sich nie nach ihrem eigenen Willen, sondern bloß nach dem Wink ihrer Obem beweget [p.37].

Nicolai differs from the orthodox Lutherans in that he is reluctant to accept the Bible as the highest spiritual authority and only means to salvation -- and for two different reasons. In the first place the Scriptures, having been written in an age now long past, are no longer obviously applicable to modern circumstances. The Bible must therefore be submitted to critical examination and, if need be, to reinterpretation. Since this is so



manifestly the case, it would be illogical to maintain, as the orthodox do, that the Bible is the inspired word of God; and if it is not the inspired word of God, it cannot be an infallible authority:

Gott hat weder das alte Testament noch das neue Testament selbst unmittelbar aufgezeichnet. Er hat gute Leute ausersehen welche Bücher geschrieben haben, die durch verschiedene Vorfälle... bei einem großen Teile des menschlichen Geschlechts in solches Ansehen gekommen sind, daß es aus denselben seine Pflichten hat kennenlernen wollen [p.254].

Nicolai believes that modern man can scarcely regard the Bible as anything more than a moral text-book. The matter is complicated still further by the fact that unscrupulous scholars apply to the interpretation of Scripture a variety of dubious techniques which in reality enable them to make the Bible mean whatever they want it to mean. The *Symbolische Bücher* too have become largely irrelevant:

Ich dünke, kein vernünftiger Mensch würde blindlings einem Wegweiser folgen, der vor mehr als 200 Jahren gesetzt worden; er würde bedenken, durch wieviele Vorfälle der Wegweiser seit 200 Jahren könne verrückt, oder der Weg geändert worden sein... Die symbolischen Bücher sind für die Zeit und unter den Umständen, unter denen sie gemacht worden sind, sehr gute. Aber wenn wir denselben beständig anhängen wollten, so befürchte ich, daß sich seitdem Regierungsreform, Wissenschaften und Sitten gänzlich geändert haben, wir würden endlich eine Theologie bekommen, die sich für die Zeit, in der wir leben, auf keine Weise schicken würde [pp.152-3].

Nicolai adheres to the three basic principles of natural religion, believing in God the Creator, in a beneficent Providence and in the immortality of the soul. If he also believes in the divinity of Christ we learn nothing to this effect. In short, he ignores "das Wesentliche, wenn nicht das Einzige, was das positive Christentum von der natürlichen Religion unterscheidet."<sup>22</sup> Sebaldus Nothanker is in his practical concern for his parishioners the ideal pastor, despite his scholarly obsession over the Book of Revelation. Throughout his distressing experiences he demonstrates exemplary moral qualities. Yet his character would appear to be lacking in all specifically religious traits. He is an exceptionally honest, sincere and benevolent man; yet we would scarcely call him pious. Karl Aner misses in Nicolai's novel



das Erzittern einer zart gestimmten Seele in Bewußtsein eigener Schuld,  
das Emporrecken der Arme nach dem Licht der Erlösung und das  
Aufjauchzen des Herzens, wenn es den Grund gefunden hat.<sup>23</sup>

Aner's analysis certainly implies a value-judgement; he regards Nicolai's evident lack of piety as a serious limitation. While it is not the purpose of this thesis to pass judgement on Nicolai's religious experience, Aner's argumentation is nonetheless deserving of consideration, relevant as it is to the question of Nicolai's allegiance in the conflict between Christianity and Deism. We should remember also that the only obviously pious character in the novel, the Pietist Sebalduß encounters on the road to Berlin, is portrayed as a fanatic and a hypocrite. In the religion of the other characters, emotional commitment, real or feigned, has no part to play.

It would, I believe, be wrong to deduce that because Nicolai is apparently lukewarm in his feelings towards the specifically religious as distinct from the ethical content of Christianity, he must therefore have been an unacknowledged Deist. There is no real evidence that this was the case, and we should be wary of drawing positive conclusions from merely negative evidence. The influence of Nicolai's personality is clearly discernible here. It was in his nature to distrust unbridled emotion: "Unter der Maske dunkler Gefühle schien ihm der Aberglaube einzuströmen und die geistige Freiheit zu bedrohen."<sup>24</sup> His personal experience of Pietism as a boy in the orphanage in Halle had been sufficient to make him for ever after suspicious of unrestrained irrationalism in the realm of religion; his extreme coolness may perhaps be seen as a reaction against what he regarded as Pietistic excesses (see below). Moreover as a citizen of liberal Berlin (liberal at least in religious matters) and as an independent businessman, Nicolai had no very real reason to conceal his opinions, be they ever so controversial. He might find it advantageous to sales to temper his satire with a little romance and more than a little innocent humour, to amuse himself with the convention of "authenticity", he might even hope to outwit his critics by announcing in his preface that his novel was for the perusal

of none but theologians and ecclesiastics -- in reality, he had no overpowering reason to disguise his actual convictions. Such concealment would in any case scarcely have accorded with his typically enlightened passion for the pursuit of truth.

Gustav Sichelschmidt has suggested that Nicolai's novel should be seen as an attempt to reconcile Christianity with rationalism, an attempt undertaken in the hope of holding up the advance of materialism and atheism:

Nicolai empfand es wie wenige, daß die Zeit vorüber war, in der man an die blinde Glaubensbereitschaft der Menschen appellieren konnte. Da für ihn mit der Existenz des Christentums aber die abendländische Kultur stehen oder fallen mußte, setzte er alles daran, den drohenden Agnostizismus durch die Verteidigung eines positiven Christentums abzufangen, das auch den Argumenten eines analysierenden Verstandes standhielt.<sup>25</sup>

Sichelschmidt perhaps exaggerates Nicolai's fear of agnosticism; there were, after all, more immediate threats to enlightened Christianity, in the shape of Lutheran orthodoxy and of the more extreme forms of Pietistic irrationalism. He is, however, entirely correct in emphasising the ethical aspect of Nicolai's Christianity. As indicated above, Sebaldus' religion has a firm foundation in practical ethics. He believes that men should do good not so much because it is God's will -- though God, being a beneficent and loving God, can will only that which is good -- but also because the general well-being of all men in society is a desirable end in itself. In support of Sichelschmidt's thesis, one might cite the example of Sebaldus' speech to the dying Major. The Major is a man of courage and of principle, who believes in God the Creator and in beneficent Providence -- but not in the immortality of the soul. Sebaldus is eager to convince him that a belief in eternal life is necessary if men are to be virtuous. If, he argues, there were no certain prospect of reward or punishment beyond the grave, neither would there be any very compelling reason to lead a virtuous life. Every man could -- and would -- be as wicked as he pleased. Unlike Lessing, Nicolai is far from supposing that man is ever likely to reach a stage in his development at which he would be capable of altruistic good, of performing

just and benevolent actions out of inner conviction, without reference to some superior authority. Nicolai, so much an adherent of the Enlightenment in other respects, has surprisingly little faith in the natural goodness of human nature.

Naturally enough, Nicolai is a fierce critic of the Pietists' pronounced irrationalism. The Pietistic concept of faith leaves no room for reason. They do not, in contrast to the men of the Enlightenment like Sebalduß, believe illumination to be the fruit of mature reflection -- rather they consider it a gift from God. There is nothing man can do in order to obtain wisdom, they argue; one must wait for God to enlighten one in his own good time. "Laß dich von der alleinwirkenden Gnade ergreifen. Laß dich von der Kraft des Bundesblutes anfassen" [p.120], urges the Pietist. Many Pietists believed the all-important moment of illumination, the *Durchbruch der Gnade*, to be a definite happening, an experience which could be reliably reported to have taken place at a precise point in their lives. Nicolai exploits this idea for reasons of satire, by taking it to its logical extreme. His Pietist is able to name the day and even the hour of his rebirth: "vor drei Jahren, den elften September nachmittags um fünf Uhr" [p.121]. This "grace" produces a state of *Gelassenheit* which for Nicolai is synonymous with spiritual and intellectual inertia: "Wer in der Gnade ist, der ist so ruhig, der erträgt alles, der stellet alles Gott anheim" [p.123]. As things turn out, the Pietist's *Gelassenheit* is in any case mere rhetoric, for on the appearance of a band of robbers, just when he has completed this homily, his fear is only too evident, and contrasts sharply with Sebalduß' quiet resignation. When all else fails, he even takes to cursing the culprits, until embarrassed by Sebalduß' gentle rebuke. Nicolai believes that in denying reason the Pietists would rob man of his highest faculty, limiting his freedom to improve and develop -- an error which has disturbing implications for the entire life of society, since men who will not think and argue are an easy prey to deception, in the Church and out of it.

Der Pietismus war in den siebziger Jahren des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts

sowohl wegen seiner immer deutlicher zutage tretenden Vernunftfeindschaft als wegen seiner Leugnung jeglicher Verantwortung des Individuums und damit im Grunde der Menschenwürde zu einem womöglich noch bössartigerem Widersacher der bürgerlichen Emanzipationsbewegung geworden als es die damaligen altlutherischen Orthodoxen... waren.<sup>26</sup>

Nicolai's Pietists abuse the doctrine of *die alleinwirkende Gnade*, making it an excuse for idleness and indifference to the needs of others. Such an attitude, which undermines energy and the desire for self-improvement, deprives man of the will to act and hence also, Nicolai believes, of his natural dignity. Sebaldus will not swerve from the conviction that since God has given man the precious faculties of reason and will, to say nothing of the passions, it is man's duty to use these powers to do as much practical good as he can. "Wir besitzen Kräfte zum Guten. Wer dieses leugnen wollte, würde Gottes Schöpfung schänden, der uns so viele Vollkommenheiten gegeben hat."

The Pietist is very fond of singing hymns, especially those in which the torments of the damned are depicted in horrifying detail. He obviously derives distinct pleasure from the thought that this is the fate awaiting so many of his fellow men, while he himself has been "saved" to enjoy eternal bliss. The consciousness of his own happiness is all the more delightful for the contrast it forms with the sufferings of the wicked. Nicolai satirises in this figure the excessive asceticism of the more rigid Pietists, who were likely to condemn even the most innocent pleasure as a sin deserving hell-fire. According to such thinking, every action which is not performed in the service of God is necessarily sinful; all time which is not devoted to the generally unavoidable business of earning a living should be taken up with prayer and worship.

Equally abhorrent to Nicolai is the substantial element of sensuality typical of Pietism and particularly manifest in the Cult of the Lamb. The Pietists certainly did tend to indulge in what we might consider to be an unhealthy preference for the bloodier aspects of Christianity. A glance at those hymns written and sung by the Pietists should be

sufficient to convince us of this: the wounds of the crucified Christ form the content of many ecstatic poems and songs. This cult was frequently taken far beyond the limits of good taste: "Denn ich will stets ein Bienenlein / Auf des Lammes Wunden sein" [p.121], sings Sebaldus' travelling companion, comforted by the knowledge that even in atheistic Berlin there are

einige erwählte Seelen, die bis über den Kopf in den Wunden des Lammes sitzen, die zu einem Püncklein, zu einem Stäublein, zu einem Nichts geworden sind und sich in das blutige Lamm verliebt haben [p.129].

Yet Pietism was by no means the antithesis of the Enlightenment Nicolai wishes to popularise. However different the philosophical basis of the two movements may have been, they had more than one idea in common. Pietism, like the Enlightenment, had as one of its aims the liberation of the individual from the constraints imposed by authority and tradition: both movements were concerned that man might attain greater intellectual and emotional independence. Both, furthermore, laid particular emphasis on good works. Distrusting *a priori* reasoning, aware that they could do much to alleviate suffering in this world, *Aufklärer* and Pietists alike valued and practised philanthropy. Walther Gebhard rightly points out that the Pietists' preoccupation with practical ethics was one of the most important factors which separated Pietists and orthodox Lutherans and linked the former with a movement towards a more secular society.

Entscheidend war hier, daß man... das Tun des Worts höher schätze als das Bekennen mit dem Munde. [Des Pietisten] Streben nach praktischem Christentum hatte ihn von der Orthodoxie abgelöst und führte ihn immer ausschließlicher zu der Anschauung, daß allein die Bewährung im Leben, die edlen Taten und Gesinnungen der Menschenliebe ein Kriterium für das wahre und richtige Christentum sein können.<sup>27</sup>

If Nicolai was aware that at least the original aims of Pietism were very close to his own aims, he fails to make this explicit. Yet the early Pietists had tried, as Nicolai believed the Church must try, to travel further along the path on which Luther had set out. Taking his ideas as their starting-point, they adapted and developed Luther's original teaching to



meet the needs of a new age. They adhered to the spirit of Lutheranism rather than, as orthodox Lutherans tended to do, to the letter:

Der Grundgedanke, um den sich seine [des Pietisten] Ideenwelt dreht, [ist] der Kerngedanke des Luthertums, die Sündenüberwindung durch die Glaubensgerechtigkeit. Er drängt auf die tiefste Empfindung des Sündenelends und der Ohnmacht des natürlichen Menschen, auf innere Gewißheit der Gnadenannahme bei Gott, die jeder selbst ohne Priester und kirchliche Vermittlung aus eigener Lebensberührung mit Gott gewinnen muß. Er empfindet die unmittelbare Nähe und Gegenwart... der... Liebe offenbarenden Leiden... ähnlich wie Luther von dem Einswerden mit Christo, von der Welt in Christo und der Welt außer Christo gesprochen hatte.<sup>28</sup>

Ernst Troeltsch argues with some justice that the difference between Luther's Christianity and Pietism were less differences in content or dogma than in expression, Luther's faith being expressed with "männlicher Kraft und Keuschheit"<sup>29</sup>, while the Pietists could not affirm theirs but with "allerhand tändelnden Bildern".<sup>30</sup> It was precisely this *Tändelei*, this combination of sentimentality and sensuality, which Nicolai so disliked. And it was perhaps this dislike which blinded him to the fact that the Pietists, in theory at least, were committed to some of the ideas, tolerance, philanthropy and the liberation of the individual from ecclesiastical tyranny, which were closest to his own heart.

At the same time we must remember that the Pietists of the 1770s were in many ways different from the Pietists of Francke's day. Nicolai believed contemporary Pietists to be just as rigidly dogmatic as were the orthodox Lutherans. Before the movement had become firmly established, its members had preached and practised tolerance of all branches of the Christian church; provided only genuine piety and personal commitment were present, they believed, then the dogmatic differences between Lutherans, Calvinists and other Protestant groups were of very little importance. But as the sect grew stronger and more self-confident, its members also became less tolerant of other creeds. If it did not evolve a hierarchy on the model of the orthodox Lutheran church, its adherents did sometimes fall victim to pride and self-conceit, regarding themselves as "saved" and all



those who did not share their views as irretrievably damned. From here it was but a short step to blaming those others, to despising them rather than merely pitying them. It was, of course, Pietistic dogmatism which contrived the expulsion of Christian Wolff from Halle in 1723, when he dared to challenge the assumption that the heathen were incapable of disinterested virtue. Nicolai's Pietist is not merely dogmatic, he is also a hypocrite, utterly selfish and unfeeling. It seems unlikely that the Pietists were any more prone to such basic human failings than any other group of people. Nicolai's success as a satirist -- for satire need not be just -- is determined at least in part by this confusion of faults specific to religious fanatics and those natural to human beings of all shades and varieties of belief. He refuses to recognise that the moral worth, or lack of moral worth, of individual Pietists provides not the slightest proof of the objective truth or fallacy of Pietistic teaching; the success or failure of his satire is dependent on his ability to render his readers equally forgetful of this distinction.

Nicolai's portrayal of Pietism is very much a caricature. It is neither fair nor intended to be fair. Those aspects of the teaching and the practice of the movement which conflict with Nicolai's own world-view he exaggerates and distorts. Those aspects -- above all the emphasis on practical ethics which for example led to the founding of schools, hospitals and orphanages, where he might have been thought to share common ground with the Pietists -- he chooses to ignore. Great as may have been the failings of the Pietistic movement and of some of its adherents, there was also, surely, much that was good: if there was complacency and hypocrisy, there was also much genuine piety. Nevertheless, Nicolai's position is an understandable one. His novel is a piece of satire: as such it was designed to focus attention on all that was undesirable in contemporary society, in the sphere of religious as of social life, and by so doing to convince the reader that he ought to lend his support to Nicolai's ideals of tolerance and humanity. In short, Nicolai uses exaggeration, distortion and the unfairness resulting therefrom to provoke laughter and

reflection and hence to prove a philosophical point.

Before leaving the subject of Pietism, we ought to make some mention of the reception of *Sebaldus Nothanker* among Pietistic critics. These were no more favourably disposed towards the work than were their orthodox counterparts. Karl Aner has dealt with this question in some detail; it may suffice here therefore to cite the response of Jung-Stilling as being typical of the dismay which the book occasioned in Pietistic circles. Jung-Stilling feels sufficiently confident of the strength of his argument to select as his spokesman none other than God himself:

Du hast ein Buch geschrieben. Die Ursache war, deinen Witz, deine Kunst zu zeigen, ein berühmter Autor zu sein. Die Materie dazu nahnst du nach dem herrschenden Geschmack deiner Zeit aus der schwachen Seite meiner Anhänger, es waren doch meine Knechte und Diener, wie verdorben sie sein mochten; denn sie bekannten sich zu mir. Tausende Jünglinge und Jungfrauen machtest du lachen, freutest dich mit ihnen, daß mein Reich so schwach und schlecht aussähe, verdarbst vollends die zarten Keime zukünftiger Besserung des Geistes nach meinem Sinne und machtest also mein Heiligthum zugleich lächerlich. Weiche von mir, du gehörst in mein Reich nicht.<sup>31</sup>

Nicolai was, at least in theory, prepared to tolerate any shade or variety of belief; but he would not tolerate intolerance. This was the inevitable stumbling-block in his relations with the Pietists, no less than with the orthodox Lutherans. The insistence of both groups that they alone were in possession of the complete and absolute truth incensed him to such a degree that he became incapable of recognising that he had any ideas in common with either. Nicolai was in fact a good deal less tolerant than his enthusiasm for tolerance might lead us to suppose:

Er steht der orthodoxen Psyche gar nicht so fern. Auch ihn haftet etwas Starres, dogmatisch Rationalistisches an, das ihm ein Verstehen Andersdenkender unmöglich macht. So hat er eigentlich nur die so heftig bekämpften Verhältnisse umgekehrt. Jetzt vertritt er starr und streng seinen Standpunkt und will die Gegenpartei nicht dulden: in seinem Himmel ist für Orthodoxen und asketische Pietisten kein Platz. So wird seine eindringliche Toleranzpredigt selbst zur Intoleranz.<sup>32</sup>

Nicolai is scathing in his attacks on what he considers to be Catholic superstition and

irrationalism, particularly in his *Reise durch Deutschland und die Schweiz*.<sup>33</sup> he contemptuously ridicules Catholic pomp and pageantry, being either unwilling or unable to admit that where he sees only empty ceremony others may be moved to genuine reverence. In effect, he is himself tolerant only of Neologists, deists and free-thinkers, perhaps understandably so, since precisely these groups were most in need of his support, their views being least likely to be tolerated in the prevailing circumstances.

It is significant that Nicolai's Pietistic critics, notably Jung-Stilling, base their objections to the novel on the assumption that genuine piety and tolerance are incompatible: they equate tolerance with indifferentism, with an opportunistic vacillation between belief and scepticism. Christianity, they insist, must claim supremacy over all other systems of thought -- otherwise it is worthless. According to strict logic, they are quite right:

"Dogmenglaube und Toleranz können nicht nebeneinander existieren, weil diese immer schon ein relativiertes Religionserlebnis voraussetzt."<sup>34</sup> Such is Jung-Stilling's line of argument:

Es gibt kein Mittel, das Christentum mit dem Deismus zu vereinigen, weil eins den anderen gerade widerspricht. Es ist deswegen vergebliche Arbeit, wenn man nachgibt, den Sozianismus unterstützt, bloß die Sittenlehre treibt und also eines mit dem anderen vermischen will. Wir müssen entweder Christen sein, oder wir müssen Deisten sein. Diejenigen welche zwischen beiden den Mantel nach dem Winde hängen wollen, sind Nothankers.<sup>35</sup>

Jung-Stilling believes that Nicolai is reluctant to decide conclusively in favour either of Christianity or of Deism, probably because he hopes to benefit from the supposed "advantages" of free-thought, at the same time enjoying the reputation of a good Christian. This, however, is by no means the case. Nicolai was sympathetic to the principal aims of the Neologists, namely the harmonious reconciliation of Christianity and rationalism, theology and philosophy. Yet there is nothing vague or inconsistent in his standpoint. He believes firmly in the right of every individual to formulate his own creed, without interference from any supposed "higher authority". He remains loyal to

Christianity, but only to that form of Christianity which is tolerant and undogmatic, rational and free from superstition.

Nicolai's novel also contains a substantial element of social criticism, again chiefly in the form of satire. Like Gellert and La Roche he condemns the luxury, decadence and immorality which characterised life at many of the German courts, the idleness of the aristocracy, its false pride and slavish imitation of French culture and French fashions. Sebaldu's wife Wilhelmine is pained by the fickleness of friends made at court, when following her departure into the country she discovers "daß man sich am Hofe um die nicht bekümmert, die man nicht braucht" [p.23], until she learns to appreciate her honest, unsophisticated husband as he deserves and in her new independence ceases to regret the pleasure of looking on while others amuse themselves. Numerous telling details combine to create the impression of a society governed by grace and favour, prejudice and corruption. Through his parents' connection with the *Hofmarschall*, the Nothankers' son is able to obtain not one scholarship to study at the university, but two. The consequences may easily be imagined; the young man is enabled to pursue his studies in the coffee houses and village inns and "überhaupt kavalierenmäßig in der großen Welt" [p.29].

When Sebaldu suddenly finds himself deprived of his clerical office and miserably poor, those who had previously treated him with respect now subject him to all manner of indignities. Everyone to whom he applies for assistance keeps him waiting unnecessarily: Stauzius uses the familiar *Er* form of address, instead of the more formal *Sie* appropriate for a man of education. It is revealing that while Sebaldu and his family are facing destitution and the very real prospect of starvation, Count von Nimmer, instead of offering to help them, is deploring the state of his digestion. No doubt on account of having over-indulged his appetite in the past, the Count now finds that he no longer enjoys his food as he once did. He is obliged, therefore, to have his favourite dishes

transported from Hanau and Frankfurt am Main. Instead of assisting Sebaldus to acquire the basic necessities of life, he offers him a lunch of caviar and truffles -- one is inevitably reminded of Marie Antoinette's famous remark.

Nicolai's aristocrat *par excellence* is aptly named Frau von Hohenauf. Frau von Hohenauf cares for nothing in the world more than for the noble ancestry and connections of the family into which she has married, despite the fact that her own father was merely a tenant farmer. Her own humble origins do not prevent her regarding all members of the bourgeoisie as "Geschöpfe von einer anderen Gattung" [p.93]. The plan which Frau von Hohenauf envisages for her daughters' education contains in essence all that Nicolai finds most objectionable in court life. The young ladies are to read only French, "denn das deutsche Zeug nützt den Fräuleins nichts, wenn sie nach Hofe kommen... Wahrhaftig, ich bekomme Vapeurs wenn ich nur die gothischen Buchstaben von ferne sehe" [p.91]. Marianne as the governess must never forget that these young ladies are persons of rank. She must never scold or command, Frau von Hohenauf insists. She must be respectful and indulgent of their faults. Above all she must instil in them a true sense of their own worth. Their intellectual powers are not to be overtaxed, the sole purpose of intellect being, in their mother's opinion, to deduce the optimal method of pleasing the gentlemen of the court and -- following success -- to decide "ob die eroberten Herzen behalten, oder ob sie, nachdem damit eine Zeitlang wie mit einem Balle gespielt worden, in dem Winkel geworfen werden sollten" [p.94]. Marianne in her naïvety attempts to model her pupils' education on the "bourgeois" principles of modesty, benevolence and philanthropy. All such attempts she must endeavour to conceal from her employer, for Frau von Hohenauf is horrified by her daughter's suggestion that the middle classes (*Lumpengesindel* is her customary word for them) might be "Gottes Geschöpfe, Menschen wie wir" [p.104]. Such figures are obviously caricatures, designed to amuse the reader as much as to provoke his righteous indignation. At the same time, Nicolai does



have a very serious point to make. Frau von Hohenauf and her kind are foolishly pretentious, but their very frivolity makes them relatively harmless. Others are clever enough and serious-minded enough to cause great suffering to entire sections of the population. Herr F. has learnt through bitter experience to fear all those who wield power:

Die Könige und die Priester haben den Erdkreis unter sich geteilt, so daß nichts mehr übrig ist. Auf dem Flecke, auf dem ich atme, regiert jemand, wohin ich mich wenden könnte, wird ein anderer regieren. Sowenig ich für mich unabhängig bestehen, ohne Regenten sein, oder mir Regenten und Regierungsform nach meinem Gefallen einrichten kann, ebenso wenig kann ich für mich allein mit meiner besondern Religion leben... Ich kann... in die ganze weite Welt laufen, aber wohin ich trete, bin ich im Zaune einer anderen [Religionspartei], die mich wieder ausstößt. Wohl denn. Ich will bleiben, wo ich bin, und dulden, was ich nicht ändern kann.  
[p.145]

After much suffering, Herr F. arrives at the conclusion that since he is powerless to resist the tyranny of the Church authorities, he must submit and accept -- or appear to accept -- all Lutheran dogma, however irrational or inhumane. He must try to find fulfilment in the purely private sphere of personal relationships. The withdrawal from public life, prompted by the realisation of political weakness, is believed by some scholars to constitute one of the principal sources of *Empfindsamkeit*. This argument I consider largely irrelevant to the novels of Gellert and Sophie von La Roche. Yet it does seem to have some bearing on the rationalist Nicolai. The recognition that the individual could do little or nothing to change society did not produce Sensibility in any recognisable form, but it certainly did produce very real despair. Herr F. is not Nicolai's spokesman -- the fact that Nicolai constructed an entire novel with the aim of convincing his readers of the need for change indicates that he by no means shares Herr F.'s conviction that change is impossible -- yet he clearly does have some sympathy for this pessimistic outlook.

Nicolai's dislike of the *Empfindsamen* is well-known. His objections to the movement are clearly spelt out in his *Freuden des jungen Werthers* and *Leiden und Freuden Werthers*



*des Mannes* (1775). His portrayal of Herr Säugling in *Sebaldu Nothanker* is similarly intended as satire on the more frivolous aspects of Sensibility, its sweet sentimentality, its Rococo superficiality, its *Tändelei*. Säugling is vain as regards both his person and his poems, his "kleine Dingerchen" [p.187]. He is extremely susceptible to flattery, especially from the young ladies in whose society he feels much more comfortable than in that of his own sex. The word Nicolai most frequently uses to describe Säugling is "klein". This epithet is by no means exclusively applicable to his person -- though his appearance does betray his character -- mention is even made of Säugling's "kleines Herz" [p.112].

Säugling has the egotism we discerned in some of Gellert's characters and, in heightened form, in La Roche's Seymour. He is incapable of real communication with others, for he is too self-engrossed to care to distinguish the motives which govern their actions. As a result, he generally misinterprets their words and their behaviour to himself; their behaviour to others does not interest him. Provided only they will appear to admire his person and his poems he will ask no further questions, make no further demands. The portrayal of Säugling suggests that Nicolai was at the very least suspicious of that kind of literature which does not serve a moral or otherwise useful purpose. Säugling serves as a warning example of the dangers of indulging a predilection for the literature of *Empfindsamkeit*.

Nicolai satirises what he regards as the excesses of *Empfindsamkeit*, its tendency to encourage weakness and self-indulgence. He was no more opposed to feeling as such than were Lessing, Mendelssohn or any of the other Enlightenment thinkers. In principle all -- *Aufklärer* and *Empfindsame* -- were agreed that there was a distinction to be drawn between true and false Sensibility; differences only occurred when it came to deciding precisely where the dividing-line should be drawn. Nicolai was hostile towards the outward forms of *Empfindsamkeit* rather than towards its philosophical basis.

His disapproval of certain features of *Empfindsamkeit* does not prevent Nicolai adopting some of the conventions of the novel of sensibility. The hard-luck stories so characteristic of this type of fiction abound in *Sebaldus Nothanker*. Every probable and improbable misfortune befalls Sebaldus; Marianne too, until some fortunate coincidences combine to ensure her happiness, is constantly crossed by Fate; in the course of the novel both she and her father encounter people who have suffered persecution and humiliation at the hands of the clerical and secular authorities. As in the novels of Gellert and La Roche, one is left with the impression that the wicked invariably prosper, while the virtuous are inevitably condemned to suffer. Nicolai, however, unlike Gellert and La Roche, does not intend that such sad tales should merely move his reader to tears of pity. The cumulative effect -- and surely also the intention -- of these hard-luck stories is rather to convince the reader that no society should permit such injustices; Nicolai's intention, here as elsewhere, is not sentimental but satirical.

A further feature of the novel of *Empfindsamkeit* which Nicolai has taken over and adapted to suit his own purpose is the polarisation of his characters into exemplary and villainous types. If his caricatures of the orthodox Lutherans are readily explicable as satire, as a critique of contemporary society, then the portrayal of the more than human gentleness and goodness of Sebaldus, the self-sacrificing generosity of the poor farmer who cares for the Nothanker family in his own home when they lose theirs, bring to mind the model conduct, the complete self-forgetfulness of Gellert's characters. Yet in Nicolai's novel we find none of the vaguely disturbing egotism, which seems to delight in doing good less for its own sake than to produce the pleasant consciousness of one's own superior virtue. Nicolai's characters do not speak of virtue, they practise it, quietly doing whatever is necessary, without thought of material reward, or even of reward in the form of gratitude from those they have assisted. Thus Hieronymus, on the death of Wilhelmine, offers sound practical advice and concerns himself with the physical well-

being of the despairing Sebaldus and Marianne. He tries to persuade them to moderate their grief, to accept what they cannot change and to hope for a brighter future. They typical *âme sensible* would rather have participated in, and thereby increased, their sorrow.

Here, in Nicolai's treatment of *Empfindsamkeit*, we may observe in condensed form the various elements which make up his world-view. At the heart of Nicolai's thought lies a typically Enlightened dislike and distrust of philosophical theories which have no firm foundation in practical life. For Nicolai, as for his friend Lessing, the path to truth did not involve speculation; hence they were alike suspicious of academic scholarship at its most abstruse and of the dogmatic aspects of all contemporary movements, from the sphere of religion as of practical morality and what might be called the theory of feeling. To Nicolai, *Empfindsamkeit*, Pietism and Lutheran orthodoxy were each too far removed from the solid realities and inner essentials of everyday life. His rejection of all three and the basis of his polemic lies in the conviction, so fundamental to the Enlightenment, that man could find the right way if he would only follow his own native good sense.

1. Karl Aner: *Der Aufklärer Friedrich Nicolai* (Gießen, 1912), p.53.

2. A good many of Goethe's *Xenien* refer to Nicolai. Let me quote two examples:

Nicolai reiset noch immer -- noch lang wird er reisen,  
Aber ins Land der Vernunft findet er nimmer den Weg.

(Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Gedenkausgabe der Werke, Briefe und Gespräche*; edited by Ernst Beutler, Zürich 1962: II, p.467, n°.184.)

Willst du alles vertilgen, was deiner Natur nicht gemäß ist,  
Nicolai, zuerst schwöre dem Schönen den Tod.

(*Ibid.*, II, p.468, n°. 188.)

The Romantics too inclined to this view. Eichendorff maintains that Nicolai "hielt sich in vollem Ernste für berufen, dafür zu sorgen, daß die Bäume nicht zu ganz unpraktisch in den Himmel wüchsen", and that he had "in der Tat ein allmählich mit sich selbst höchst zufriedenes Reich der Mittelmäßigkeit zustande gebracht".

(Joseph Freiherr von Eichendorff: *Der deutsche Roman des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts in seinem Verhältnis zum Christentum*, in Eichendorff: *Sämtliche Werke, Historisch-kritische Ausgabe*, vol.8, Regensburg 1965, pp. 113f.)

3. Goethe, *Gedenkausgabe* II, p.444 (n°. 10).

4. See (e.g.) Hans Heinrich Borchardt: *Geschichte des Romans und der Novelle in Deutschland* (Leipzig, 1928), p.291.

5. See Jochen Schulte-Sasse, "Friedrich Nicolai", p. 331, in *Deutsche Dichter des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts. Ihr Leben und Werk*, edited by Benno von Wiese (Berlin 1977), pp. 322-339.

6. See Helmuth Kiesel and Paul Münch, *Gesellschaft und Literatur im achtzehnten Jahrhundert. Voraussetzungen und Entstehung des literarischen Marktes in Deutschland* (Munich 1977), p.159.

7. For further details on the reception of *Sebaldu Nothanker*, see Gustav Sichelschmidt, *Friedrich Nicolai. Geschichte seines Lebens* (Herford 1971), p.81.

8. Aner, *op.cit.*, gives details of the reception of the work by the Lutheran Church; see especially p.164.

9. Sichelschmidt, *op.cit.*, p.89.

10. Johann Heinrich Merck, "Über den Mangel des epischen Geistes in unserem lieben Vaterland", in Merck, *Schriften und Briefwechsel* (2 vols: Leipzig 1909), I, p.188.

11. Merck, *ibid.*, p.189.

12. Johann Georg Jacobi (1740-1814), *Poetische Versuche* (1764); *Die Winterreise* (1769); *Die Sommerreise* (1770).
13. Schulte-Sasse, *op.cit.*, pp.3-9.
14. Werner Schütz, "Die Kanzel als Katheder der Aufklärung", p.138, in *Wolffenbüttler Studien zur Aufklärung*, I (1974), pp. 137-171.
15. See Kiesel and Münch, *op.cit.*, p.163.
16. Friedrich Nicolai, *Das Leben und die Meinungen des Herrn Magister Sebaldus Nothanker = Deutsche Literatur in Entwicklungsreihen*, Reihe "Aufklärung", volume 15 (edited by Fritz Brüggemann, Leipzig 1938), p.21.
17. "Ebenso ist ein Geistlicher verbunden, seinen Katechismusschülern und seiner Gemeinde nach dem Symbol der Kirche, der er dient, seinen Vortrag zu tun; denn er ist auf diese Bedingung angenommen worden. Aber als Gelehrter hat er volle Freiheit, ja sogar den Beruf dazu, alle seine sorgfältig geprüften und wohlmeinenden Gedanken über das Fehlerhafte in jenem, Symbol und Vorschläge wegen besserer Einrichtung des Religions- und Kirchenwesens dem Publikum mitzuteilen." Immanuel Kant, "Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?" in *Was ist Aufklärung? Thesen und Definitionen*, edited by Ehrhard Bahr, Stuttgart 1974, pp. 9-17; here, p.12.
18. Heinz Stolpe, Afterword to Friedrich Nicolai, *Das Leben und die Meinungen des Herrn Magister Sebaldus Nothanker*, Berlin 1960, p.259.
19. Schulte-Sasse, *Friedrich Nicolai*, p.332.
20. Walter Gebhardt, *Religionssoziologische Probleme im Roman der deutschen Aufklärung*. Diss., Giessen 1931; p.67.
21. "Die Absetzung des Sebaldus stützt sich auf den Umstand, daß er sich bei seiner Einführung in das Pfarramt zu allen Dogmen der lutherischen Kirche, wie sie im letzten Drittel des sechzehnten Jahrhunderts in den sogenannten symbolischen Büchern oder dem Konkordienbuch zusammengestellt worden waren, hatte bekennen müssen, ungeachtet, daß diese zum Teil schon im siebzehnten Jahrhundert in krassem Widerspruch zur Natur- und Welterkenntnis standen, die die Aufklärung gezeitigt hatte. Die Bindung an die symbolischen Bücher hatte daher einen ungehörten Gewissenszwang dargestellt, der auf das gröbste gegen den Geist des Protestantismus verstieß." Fritz Brüggemann, introduction to Nicolai, *Sebaldus Nothanker*; see note 17 above, p.11.
22. Aner, *op.cit.*, p.78.
23. *ibid.*, p.83.
24. *ibid.*
25. Sichelschmidt, *Friedrich Nicolai*, p.25.
26. Stolpe, afterword to Nicolai, *Sebaldus Nothanker*, p.503.
27. Gebhardt, *op.cit.*, p.43.

28. Ernst Troeltsch, "Leibniz und die Anfänge des Pietismus" in Troeltsch, *Aufsätze zur Geistesgeschichte und Religionssoziologie*, edited by Hans Baron, 3 vols. Tübingen 1925, vol.1, p.520.

29. *ibid.*, p.521.

30. *ibid.*

31. Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling. *Schleuder eines Hirtenknaben gegen den hohnsprechenden Philister, den Verfasser des Sebaldu Nothanker* (1775-6). Quoted from Aner, *Der Aufklärer Friedrich Nicolai*, p.164.

32. Gebhardt, *op.cit.*, p.79.

33. Friedrich Nicolai, *Reise durch Deutschland und die Schweiz im Jahre 1781*.

34. Gebhardt, *op.cit.*, p.46.

35. Jung-Stilling, *Schleuder eines Hirtenknaben*. Quoted from Aner, *op.cit.*, p.164.



**5. JOHANN WOLFGANG GOETHE, DIE LEIDEN DES  
JUNGEN WERTHERS**

*Ein Befreier war er wie jeder Dichter und Schriftsteller durch die Erregung des Gefühls und durch die analytische Erweiterung des Wissens vom Menschen.<sup>1</sup>*

In terms of sales, the novel *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* was Goethe's greatest popular success. Between the initial publication of the first version in 1774 and that of the second version in 1787, no fewer than thirty editions appeared; while some twenty-five editions of the revised second version were issued between 1787 and Goethe's death in 1832.<sup>2</sup> The response of the public to this work -- the phenomenon of *Wertherfieber*, as contemporaries termed it -- has been too well documented to merit much discussion here.<sup>3</sup> The precise incidence of the wearing of Werther costume or the perfume *Eau de Werther*, or the giving of the name "Wertherie"<sup>4</sup>, can in any case shed little light on the exact reasons for the effect of the novel on contemporary sensibilities. It is, moreover, scarcely possible to determine how many of the suicides allegedly inspired by a reading of *Werther* may have been really attributable to this cause. What is evident is that Goethe's novel was immediately much read; and much feared. The angry response which the work provoked in some quarters provides sufficient indication that its supposed message was widely believed to constitute a serious threat to the moral fabric of society. The Theological Faculty at Leipzig successfully campaigned to have the book banned there; the ban on sales of the novel, as on the wearing of Werther costume, remaining in force as late as 1825.<sup>5</sup> In Copenhagen, likewise, a Danish translation was forbidden by the Church authorities.<sup>6</sup> The reaction from those who regarded themselves as the custodians of Christian morality amounted to little short of panic. Klaus Scherpe writes:

Zeitgenössische Dokumente zur Werther-Rezeption erwecken den Eindruck, als hätte die nachhaltige Wirkung des kleinen Romans den Zusammenbruch aller geordneten Verhältnisse und die Zerstörung aller Errungenschaften des menschlichen Geistes zur Folge gehabt. Durch die Beschwörung der Gefahr versuchte man, den Folgen zu wehren.<sup>7</sup>

Wolfgang Doktor, in his analysis of the contemporary criticism of *Empfindsamkeit*, argues with some conviction that around the year 1775 the content and tone of this criticism underwent a profound change. At this point (we are told) polemicists began to see in *Empfindsamkeit* not merely a passing fashion -- which despite some (it was

confidently hoped) temporary adverse effects on the more highly strung, need not be taken too seriously -- but a positive threat to the general well-being of the community.

Eine prinzipielle Auseinandersetzung mit der Empfindsamkeit selbst findet noch nicht statt, sie steht weiterhin über der Kritik, im Gegenteil kritisiert wird das, was sich den Anschein gibt, empfindsam zu sein, diesen Anspruch aber nicht genügt... Diese Einstellung hält sich bis etwa 1775, bis die empfindsame Bewegung derartige Ausmaße erreicht hat, daß eine ernsthafte Erörterung unumgänglich wird. Man spricht jetzt nicht mehr von modischer Manier, harmloser Sekte und literarischer Spielerei, die mit einem Lächeln hingegenommen werden kann, sondern von einer gefährlichen Epidemie, von einer zerstörenden Seuche, der Einhalt geboten werden muß. Die Toleranzschwelle ist überschritten.<sup>8</sup>

Clearly, Goethe's novel was instrumental in alerting the public to some of the dangers inherent in unrestrained emotionalism. It would however scarcely be possible to determine to what extent *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* was actually responsible for (rather than merely a response to) a mood prevalent within certain circles in the early 1770s. Some consideration of the case against the work may help in answering this question. Hauptpastor Goeze's criticisms, as contained in the *Freiwillige Beiträge zu den Hamburgischen Nachrichten*, may be regarded as typical. *Werther* must, Goeze claims, be numbered among those works which have contributed to bring about the moral decline of society.

Natürlich kann die Jugend keine anderen als diese Lehren daraus ziehen: folgt euren natürlichen Trieben. Verliebt euch, um die Leere eurer Seelen auszufüllen. Gaukelt in der Welt herum, will man euch zu ordentlichen Berufsgeschäften führen, so denkt an das Pferd, das sich unter den Sattel bequemte und zu Schanden geritten wurde. Will es zuletzt nicht mehr gehen, wohlan, ein Schuß Pulver ist hinlänglich, aller eurer Noth ein Ende zu machen. Man wird eurer Großmuth bewundern, und den Schönen wird eurer Name heilig sein. Und was ist zuletzt das Ende von diesem Liede? Dieses: lasset uns essen und trinken und fröhlich seyn, wir können sterben, wann wir wollen. Ungefähr sind wir geboren, und ungefähr fahren wir wieder dahin, als wären wir nie gewesen.<sup>9</sup>

Goeze even goes so far as to argue that if suicide is condoned, it is then no very great step to the affirmation that there is no great harm in similarly terminating the lives of those we dislike.<sup>10</sup>

This indictment of Goethe's novel, at first sight narrow-minded to the point of absurdity, becomes rather more comprehensible when we take account of the fact that the reading public of the 1770s was accustomed to find in its fiction a clear didactic purpose and models of exemplary conduct which it was explicitly encouraged to emulate. Such readers were inevitably unprepared for a novel in which the familiar moral element had given way to æsthetic considerations; in which "instead of a moral warning... we have an æsthetic enticement"<sup>11</sup>. Few critics were prepared to recognise, as Blanckenburg did, that "der Dichter ist nicht verbunden, uns immer ein s i t t l i c h e s Buch zu geben"<sup>12</sup>. Even Lichtenberg, who is scarcely to be identified with the forces of political, clerical or æsthetic reaction, rejected Goethe's novel on the grounds that it made no contribution to the improvement of the human race. "Wer seine Talente nicht zur Belehrung und Besserung anderer anwendet, ist entweder ein schlechter Mann oder ein äußerst eingeschränkter Kerl. Eines von beiden muß der Verfasser des leidenden Werthers sein."<sup>13</sup>

In the character of Werther there was much that was familiar; and much that might indeed appear exemplary -- which could not but appear so to a public accustomed to equate an unusual capacity for feeling with an unusual degree of moral worth.<sup>14</sup> There was clearly a good deal in Werther of which even the *Aufklärer* might approve: his love for Nature, for children and for simple folk; his enthusiasm for traditional German domestic values. All this was both familiar and acceptable. Werther's attitude to life -- and it was to this aspect of the novel that critics and admirers alike devoted the most attention -- had been evolved in accordance with the most basic doctrine of the Enlightenment: namely, the belief that the individual should be free to develop his own capacities in whatever fashion he himself might consider best. Werther differs from the *Aufklärer* only in that his desire for intellectual and emotional liberty is tempered and restrained by no utilitarian thinking or sense of any obligation towards

society as a whole. At first sight Werther seems little different from many young men of his time, in literature and in life. As Hans Reiss has pointed out,<sup>15</sup> he is accepted on equal terms by bourgeois society. He is liked by people of all classes; even the Prince and the Minister are apparently eager to cultivate his acquaintance. The *Amtmann* has a sufficiently high opinion of his merits to welcome him into his family circle. We have no reason to believe that Wilhelm treats Werther as an incurable neurotic, despite taking issue with him on some points. Even Werther's continuing attachment to Lotte after her marriage, "dangerous" as it was, was not without a precedent in Rousseau's *La nouvelle Héloïse* (1761), in which just such a potentially disastrous situation is used to demonstrate the triumph of duty over passion. Furthermore, the growth of *Empfindsamkeit* had hitherto produced effects of which bourgeois society could approve. In the shape of *Tugendempfindsamkeit* it had helped to create a climate conducive to mild social reform and to the performance of good works.

The type of morality preached by Gellert and La Roche exemplified the acceptable face of *Empfindsamkeit*. Some critics might find Sophie Sternheim's moral fervour exaggerated, even ridiculous; yet La Roche's intention in writing her novel could be recognised by all as entirely commendable. To those readers acquainted with the fiction of Gellert and La Roche, *Werther* must have appeared at once familiar and unfamiliar. Clearly Werther was not a villain; his sensibility tended rather to distinguish him as a figure worthy of emulation. The contemporary reader was therefore faced with a choice. On the one hand he could concentrate his attention on what he recognised as Werther's moral failings; in this case he might well feel indignant that Goethe, by adopting the familiar form of the epistolary novel, had raised expectations of a moral tale only to disappoint them. As Scherpe has observed, "Die Reaktion war umso heftiger, da man sich düpiert fühlte"<sup>16</sup>. Alternatively, the reader could overlook Werther's obvious indifference to the familiar concept of virtue,



allowing himself to be intoxicated (as it were) by the power of the narrative and the seductiveness of the language. The latter response was not exclusively æsthetic.

Sympathy for Werther, prompted by receptivity to his unusual eloquence, could easily become admiration; and the reading public of the 1770s was accustomed to imitate whatever it admired.

Not only did the authors of sentimental fiction recommend that the characters be accepted as models of exemplary conduct; the whole pattern of contemporary reading-habits favoured such a response. Even as late as the 1770s people tended to read a small number of books a good many times over, - rather than a large number of books only once or twice over, as most of us do today.<sup>17</sup> It seems that the continuing high price of books was a determining factor here; though, given the incidence of public libraries and *Lesegesellschaften*, we ought perhaps to emphasise the effect of custom or tradition, which inclined to accord some books quasi-biblical status.<sup>18</sup> Such books -- whether practical or devotional in content -- were then consulted in times of trouble, their advice taken, their message welcomed as spiritual sustenance.

A discerning critic such as Lessing might well fear that some readers would confuse the æsthetic merit of the novel with a supposed moral superiority of the hero; the more easily so, since the author/narrator nowhere distances himself explicitly from the character's view of the world.

Wenn aber ein so warmes Produkt nicht mehr Unheil als Gutes stiften soll; meinen Sie nicht, daß es noch eine kleine kalte Schlußrede haben mußte? Ein paar Winke hinterher, wie Werther zu so einem abenteuerlichen Charakter gekommen, wie ein anderer Jüngling, dem die Natur eine ähnliche Anlage gegeben, sich dafür zu bewahren habe. Denn ein solcher dürfte die poetische Schönheit leicht für die moralische nehmen und glauben, daß der gut gewesen sein muß, der unsere Teilnahme so stark beschäftigt... Also lieber Goethe, noch ein Kapitelchen am Schlusse, und je zynischer, je besser.<sup>19</sup>

The form of Goethe's novel indeed is such as to encourage identification with Werther. The conciseness of the work -- it is, of course a good deal shorter than the

novels of Richardson, Rousseau and Hermes -- together with a dearth of action or conventional "adventure", lend to it a peculiar intensity. Werther's point of view has, as it were, a monopoly of the reader's attention; the convention of the epistolary novel hitherto had been to include the letters of a number of correspondents, thereby presenting various perspectives on the action. Werther writes to Wilhelm and on occasion to Lotte, yet their replies to these letters are not made available to the reader. We may deduce that Wilhelm is far from sharing Werther's ideas on certain important questions, but his critique of Werther's outlook is rarely made explicit. As a result, the hero's subjective perspective is invested with the authority of a single unchallenged voice. Even when Werther's letters are interrupted by the "report" of the "editor", this "editor" does not (as Lessing and other critics would have wished him to do) present Werther as a warning example to similarly disposed readers. He does not present Werther's suicide as a sinful, immoral or even foolish act.

The editor's preface would appear to place the novel fairly firmly in the tradition of *Empfindsamkeit*. Goethe establishes an atmosphere of friendly intimacy, by addressing his readers in familiar *ihr* form, as kindred spirits of whose sympathy for Werther he may be assured. The public will not withhold from Werther (the "editor" is confident) its admiration and love.<sup>20</sup> The "editor's" attitude to Werther is in fact highly ambiguous. He both refers to his suicide as "die schreckliche Tat" [p.357], a term which clearly implies both horror and disapproval, and presents it (or so it seems) as the result of sufficient cause:

Der Verdruss, den er bei der Gesandschaft gehabt, konnte er nicht vergessen... [Er] überließ sich ganz der wunderbaren Empfind- und Denkensart, die wir aus seinen Briefen kennen, und einer endlosen Leidenschaft, worüber noch endlich alles, was thätige Kraft in ihm war, verloschen mußte. Das ewige Einerley eines Umgangs mit dem lebenswürdigen und geliebten Geschöpfe, dessen Ruhe er störte, das stürmende Abarbeiten seiner Kräfte, ohne Zweck und Aussicht, drängten ihn endlich zu der schrecklichen That [p.357].

Schiller, one of the more discerning critics,<sup>21</sup> certainly considered that Goethe had so

structured the novel as to make Werther's suicide appear inevitable:

Es ist interessant zu sehen, mit welchem glücklichen Instinkte alles, was dem sentimentalen Charakter Nahrung gibt, im Werther zusammengedrängt ist: schwärmerische, unglückliche Liebe, Empfindsamkeit für Natur, Religionsgefühle, philosophischer Contemplationsgeist, um nichts zu vergessen, die düstere, gestaltlose ossianische Welt, rechnet man dazu, wie wenig empfehlend, ja wie feindlich die Wirklichkeit dagegen gestellt ist, und wie von außen her alles sich vereinigt, den Gequälten in seine Idealwelt zurückzudrängen, da sieht man keine Möglichkeit, wie ein solcher Charakter aus einem solchen Kreise sich hätte retten können.<sup>22</sup>

The portrayal of Werther's actual death is surely also relevant to the question: To what extent does Goethe explicitly or implicitly distance himself from his hero's emotionalism? The slow process of Werther's dying is related in the most disturbing detail:

Als der Medikus zu dem Unglücklichen kam, fand er ihn an der Erde ohne Rettung, der Puls schlug, die Glieder waren alle gelähmt, über dem rechten Auge hatte er sich durch den Kopf geschossen, das Gehirn war herausgetrieben. Man ließ ihm zum Überflusse eine Ader am Arme. Das Blut floß, er holte immer noch Athem. Aus dem Blut auf der Lehne des Sessels konnte man schließen, er habe sitzend vor dem Schreibtische die That vollgebracht. Dann ist er heruntergesunken, hat sich konvulsivisch um den Stuhl herum gewälzt, er lag gegen das Fenster entkräftet auf dem Rücken, war in völliger Kleidung, in blauem Frack und gelber Weste [p.381].

This description would scarcely have been expected to encourage the reader to follow Werther's example, as some idealised account might conceivably have done. Benjamin Bennett has rightly drawn attention to the "utter useless disorder of Werther's twelve hours of dying";<sup>23</sup> while Eric Blackall, the first critic to base a substantial part of his argument precisely on this aspect of the novel,<sup>24</sup> perhaps takes this interpretation rather too far. Nonetheless, Blackall does deserve credit for emphasising the discrepancy between heroic intention and pitiful execution in Werther's final hours. This contrast, he suggests, is "all the more striking when we consider how carefully he had himself stage-managed his death-scene. The act itself does not live up to expectations raised by the preparations. It is somehow weak. There is irony here, a conscious and purposeful irony."<sup>25</sup> The purpose of this irony is to establish a critical distance

between narrator and character; hence also, if the reader is sufficiently discerning to recognise the irony for what it is, between reader and character.

The real difficulty raised by Werther's suicide does not spring from any intention on Goethe's part to make the deed heroic, still less worthy of imitation; but from the fact that the reader of the 1770s was quite unprepared to see suicide (especially suicide for reasons such as Werther's) depicted in the first place. The literature of Sensibility in Germany was permeated with a vague longing for death, but this general weariness of life was never shown to result in any positive action to terminate it. The *Aufklärer* might no longer be influenced by the specifically religious argument against suicide; they might even countenance it -- as Gottsched had done in his drama *Der sterbende Cato* (1732) -- if it could be shown to serve the common good. Suicide prompted by "mere" personal unhappiness, however, they scorned as revealing a deplorable lack of moral courage. Such was Lessing's view of Goethe's *Werther*:

Glauben Sie wohl, daß je ein griechischer oder römischer Jüngling sich so und d a r u m das Leben genommen? Gewiß nicht... Solche kleingroße, verächtlich schätzbare Originale hervorzubringen, war nur der christlichen Religion vorbehalten, die ein körperliches Bedürfnis so schön in eine geistige Vollkommenheit zu verwandeln weiß.<sup>26</sup>

Nevertheless, traditional Christian teaching abhorred suicide on account of its being the one sin of which no one can repent.<sup>27</sup> This sin (it was widely believed) could not be too strongly condemned, for it contravened both God's law and the principle of mutual co-operation upon which society was built. Only God (it was said) had the right to take away life, since only God could bestow it. It was, according to this thinking, man's sacred duty to use the gift of life to the greater glory of God and for the greater benefit of society.

Of course there were other grounds, quite apart from the suicide issue, on which Goethe's novel might be considered dangerous. In *Werther*, the hero is no more

favourably disposed towards the fictional upholders of conventional moral values than their real-life counterparts were to be towards the novel. He is explicitly critical of those notions on which bourgeois self-esteem was founded: namely, devotion to duty, to hard work, and (by means of conscientious striving) to the attainment of wealth and prestige. "Alles in der Welt läuft doch auf eine Lumperey hinaus, und ein Kerl, der um anderer willen, ohne daß es seine eigene Leidenschaft ist, sich um Geld oder Ehre oder sonst was abarbeitet, ist immer ein Thor" [p.299]. Werther propounds the view that the individual exists in order to realise his potential: to develop his capacities -- especially his capacity for feeling. In writing to Wilhelm, he is also challenging the reader to accept or refute his argument. Werther's style of living might perhaps be seen as constituting a challenge to the bourgeois work ethic, of which he is positively contemptuous: "Es ist ein einförmig Ding um's Menschengeschlecht. Die meisten verarbeiten den größten Teil der Zeit, um zu leben, und das bißgen, was ihnen von Freizeit bleibt, ängstigt sie so, daß sie alle Mittel aufsuchen, um's los zu werden" [p.273].

Without being a member of the traditionally leisured aristocracy, Goethe's hero for most of the novel engages in no recognisable form of employment. His attempts at philanthropy are too haphazard to represent a generally acceptable substitute for a conventional career. Nor does he embark on any very consistent programme of personal study. Were it indeed the case that Werther was designed to provide the reading public with a model of exemplary conduct, the novel would in effect constitute an enticement to subordinate professional obligation to personal caprice -- as Goeze believed that it did.

Werther has excellent career prospects. He is financially independent; he has good social contacts, many of those in positions of authority being favourably disposed towards him. The fact that he nevertheless fails to make his way in the world may be



attributed to his disdain for professional success, rather than to any lack of opportunities for advancement. He allows himself to be manoeuvred into his situation in the *Residenz*; just as passively, he drops out of it again at the earliest opportunity.<sup>28</sup> He can value work only as a narcotic, as a temporary and illusory means of escape from his too oppressive awareness of the meaninglessness of life:

Manchmal wünscht' ich, ein Tagelöhner zu sein, um nur des Morgens beim Erwachen eine Aussicht auf den künftigen Tag, einen Drang, eine Hoffnung zu haben. Oft beneid ich Alberten, den ich über den Ohren in Akten begraben sehe, und bilde mir ein, mir wär's wohl, wenn ich an seiner Stelle wäre [p.317].

Werther knows very well that this passing inclination for purposeful activity has its roots in something other than a typical bourgeois belief in the value of work for its own sake or for the sake of material reward. "Ist nicht das Sehnen in mir nach Veränderung des Zustandes eine innere unbehagliche Ungeduld, die mich überallhin verfolgen wird?" [p.317]

Such opinions must inevitably disturb many members of a society which felt itself to be dependent for its very existence on the readiness of each individual to work for the common good. Klaus Scherpe has analysed this attitude in some detail:

Die dem Einzelnen gewährte Freiheit des Erwerbs von Bildung und Besitz verpflichtet ihn, sich durch erfolgreiche Tätigkeit als nützliches Mitglied der Sozietät auszuweisen. Seine Individualität wird funktional begriffen, nach dem, was er leistet und produziert...

Arbeit gilt als Wert an sich. Sie wird um ihrer selbst willen geleistet und unter Berufung auf ihre Gottgefälligkeit aus sich selbst gerechtfertigt. [...] Werther beschreibt den Zwang bürgerlicher Erwerbstätigkeit als Unterordnung der menschlichen Natur; um seine materiellen Bedürfnisse zu befriedigen, muß der Mensch seine persönlichen Ansprüche zurückstellen und seine Natur verleugnen. Beugt er sich diesem Zwang, so trennt er sich unweigerlich von seinen Ansprüchen und empfindet seine ursprünglichen Rechte nur noch als Last.<sup>29</sup>

For all that he has been celebrated as a partisan of progressive middle-class values, it is characteristic of Werther that, in direct defiance of contemporary bourgeois thought, he lacks respect for Man in his social function. For the solid middle-class citizens



who are his equals in rank, he feels mingled pity and contempt. It must therefore seem to many readers as though Goethe wishes to expose to ridicule values to which they themselves clung; clung all the more tenaciously for being well aware that their advancement -- social, political and economic -- was under threat. That threat came not only from aristocratic power; it was also perceived as coming from those inclined to be sceptical about the real value of the progress achieved by the generation of the *Aufklärer*.

Werther's attitude to life is largely conservative. "Ich weiß wohl, daß wir nicht gleich sind, noch seyn können" [p.272]. At times, indeed, he comes uncomfortably close to obscurantism. He is far from sharing the view of the *Aufklärer* that it is sufficient for the triumph of evil for good men to refuse to think. Werther is (albeit for different reasons) just as distrustful of thinking as are Nicolai's orthodox-Lutheran clerics. While we would be wrong in assuming that Werther's views here are necessarily also Goethe's, we may nevertheless say safely that Werther's ideas are ideas which Goethe believes to be at least deserving of the reader's consideration. Gellert, La Roche and Nicolai had each shown that the intellect might serve as a support in times of trouble; their model characters found consolation, a reason for living in the acquisition of knowledge. For Werther, this can never be the case. He sees in knowledge only a source of unhappiness: this not merely because too much education might make the poor discontented with their lot, but because Werther prefers a state of complete intellectual numbness to any too painful self-awareness. If knowledge is destructive of happiness, it follows that as many as possible should be allowed to remain in a state of unquestioning ignorance. "Wir sollen es mit den Kindern machen wie Gott mit uns, der uns am glücklichsten macht, wenn er uns in freundlichem Wahne hintaumeln läßt" [p.298].

Werther even feels some degree of envy -- an envy, it is true, not altogether free

from condescension -- for the simple, uneducated common people:

Ich sage dir, mein Schatz, wenn meine Sinnen gar nicht mehr halten wollen, so lindert's all den Tumult, der Anblick eines solchen Geschöpfes, das in der glücklichen Gelassenheit so den engen Kreis seines Daseins ausgeht, von einem Tag zum anderen sich durchhilft, die Blätter abfallen sieht und nichts dabey denkt als daß der Winter kommt [p.279].

Were such opinions to find universal support, the community as a whole would scarcely benefit thereby (as those of Goethe's readers influenced by the ideas of the Enlightenment could not have failed to observe). If the uneducated poor were to be left in their natural state, this might indeed satisfy the æsthetic sensibilities of the *Empfindsamen*; but the way would be left open for an educated minority to exploit the ignorant to whatever extent and for whatever purpose might please them.

In declaring his allegiance to these conservative values, Werther is in effect challenging the principles not only of the Enlightenment, but also of the entire bourgeois culture which had given birth to Sensibility. Gellert and La Roche had defended ideals which were essentially middle-class: the ideas of virtue, benevolence and rational pragmatism were tightly bound up with both authors' concept of Sensibility. For La Roche as for Gellert, self-awareness too had an entirely positive function: far from destroying feeling, it was thought rather to increase it. This was because reflection and analysis could alert the *âme sensible* to hitherto unsuspected aspects of his own personality -- familiarise him with new outlets for his talents (and his feelings) in philanthropic projects of benefit to the community as a whole.

Goethe's novel presents to the reader a world in which, for the first time, Sensibility is made independent of the bourgeois ideals of virtue, benevolence and intellectual freedom. Sophie Sternheim's sensibility had been attributed explicitly to her middle-class heritage; it was moreover inseparable from (perhaps even a product of) her exemplary zeal for the ideal of virtue. Goethe's hero cares little for traditional

bourgeois concepts of virtue, still less for bourgeois consciousness. The representative of middle-class ideas in Goethe's novel is no longer an exemplary figure, whom the reader is urged to emulate. The upholder of bourgeois values is not Werther but Albert: the man of restrained, indeed limited emotional capacities -- in Werther's view at least, the near-philistine. Of course, Albert is by no means totally devoid of feeling. He is genuinely devoted to Lotte, devoted also to the memory of Lotte's mother. He is not even averse to sentimental conversation in the moonlit garden in Lotte's and Werther's company. Lotte, for her part, reads Klopstock, weeps over Ossian and speculates on reunion beyond the grave; apparently finding in Werther a friend uniquely capable of satisfying a profound emotional need. Yet Lotte's and Albert's sensibility, in contrast to Werther's, is never such as to pose a real threat to their psychological well-being. They are able to call upon sensibility as and when they wish, regarding the cultivation of feeling as a pleasant pastime for their leisure hours. For Lotte especially, in her active love for her family, virtue and sensibility are still very much two facets of one whole. In these two characters, Goethe depicts the kind of sensibility of which bourgeois society could approve -- a kind of sensibility of course very different from Werther's.

Theirs is an attitude which Werther finds essentially limited. It will, he believes, involve those who adhere to it in no great conflict, sorrow or guilt, but it will at the same time correspondingly fail to expand their emotional capacity to the point where moral and artistic greatness becomes possible (see esp. letters of 26th May and 18th August). Werther is at once attracted and repelled by middle-class life, soothed and delighted by Lotte's serene domestic world, yet at the same time suspicious of, even hostile towards, those who structure their lives in accordance with convention. It cannot be stated too emphatically that Werther is not Goethe; Werther's views certainly do not correspond in every detail with those of his creator. Werther presents a critical appraisal of bourgeois *Tugendempfindsamkeit* -- and an alternative to it. This

alternative is not one of which Goethe could approve in its totality -- for in adopting it Werther sets the seal on his own destruction -, but one which he did consider to be worthy of discussion, deserving of interest and sympathy, if not of admiration and emulation.

It is profoundly ironic, symptomatic of the moral ambiguity and of the existential unease at the heart of the work, that Werther's unusual gifts are directly responsible for his downfall; his strength and his weakness have a common source. A less vulnerable and sensitive man, without Werther's exceptional emotional energies, a cynic or a sensualist, would, were he inadvertently to find himself in Werther's predicament, certainly be capable of disentangling himself without thereby seriously endangering his emotional equilibrium. Similarly, everything which at first contributes to bring Werther real, if temporary, happiness subsequently involves him in intense misery, as he sees very clearly: "Mußte denn das so seyn? Daß das, was des Menschen Glückseligkeit macht, wieder die Quelle seines Elends wurde?" [p.314]

And:

O, daß ich launisch seyn könnte, könnte die Schuld auf's Wetter, auf einen Dritten, auf eine fehlgeschlagene Unternehmung schieben, so würde die unerträgliche Last des Unwillens doch nur halb auf mir ruhen. Weh mir, ich fühle zu sehr, daß an mir allein alle Schuld liegt -- nicht Schuld. Genug, daß in mir die Quelle alles Elends verborgen ist, wie es ehemals die Quelle aller Seligkeiten war [p.346].

This is true above all of Werther's love for Lotte, as also of his experience of God/Nature. Goethe presents his readers with two opposing possibilities, two modes of existence with their advantages and disadvantages -- on the one hand the moderate happiness of Albert's bourgeois world, which for Werther means an intolerable state of indifference, or Werther's own vacillation between the extremes of rapture and despondency. Those who are endangered, who incur guilt, and provoke hostility and rejection, are, Werther believes, those who have the noblest and purest intentions [p.307].

Werther's moral relativism is not necessarily Goethe's, yet the subsequent fate of his hero does suggest that Goethe saw some validity in Werther's conclusions, particularly as he himself drew attention to the ambiguity of the character in a letter to

Schönborn:

Allerhand neues hab ich gemacht: Eine Geschichte des Titels die Leiden des jungen Werthers, darinn ich einen jungen Menschen darstelle, der mit einer tiefen reinen Empfindung und wahrer Penetration begabt, sich in schwärmende Träume verliert, sich durch Spekulation untergräbt, bis er zuletzt durch dazutretende unglückliche Leidenschaften, besonders eine endlose Liebe zerrütet, sich eine Kugel vor den Kopf schießt.<sup>30</sup>

In the less complex and bewildering world of Gellert and La Roche, unhappiness principally arose when certain individuals, out of selfishness or from pure wickedness for wickedness' sake, interfered with the natural course of events. Happiness for Gellert's model characters, as for La Roche's Sternheim -- and even for Nicolai's Sebaldu Nothanker -- could be assured once they had found some means of protecting themselves from the machinations of their various enemies. Provided no untoward circumstances intervened, all would necessarily be well. The world of Goethe's *Werther* is a good deal less comfortable. Now happiness is no longer the natural inevitable consequence of a virtuous life; happiness, like virtue, has become problematic:

Erst wo... das Maß des Glückes nicht mehr von moralischen, sondern von physischen und psychischen Gründen abhängig gemacht wird, schwindet jene Sicherheit im Umgang mit dem Glück, die geradezu rezeptartige Versicherungen und Garantien für die Glückseligkeit der Menschen anzubieten wußte.<sup>31</sup>

Here we have no villain, no guilt without mitigating circumstances. "Werther geht zugrunde an den besten Kräften seines Wesens", Schöffler writes, "weil die Ehe Anderer ihm heilig ist."<sup>32</sup> Whatever may be his reasons for so long remaining silent about his love for Lotte, he is certainly not constrained by conventional -- or Christian -- morality. The ambiguity Schöffler detects here is rather more complex than might at first appear; the impulse which inspires Werther's love for Nature, for



literature, for the peasants and their simple way of life, while good in itself, becomes fatal because its very strength prevents concentration on the experience of only pleasant, positive emotion.

In Goethe's novel we find much that is reminiscent of conventional *Empfindsamkeit*. It is surely significant that *Werther* was frequently named by contemporaries in conjunction with Martin Miller's *Sieewart, eine Klostergeschichte* (1776), the work which came closest to rivalling the popular success of Goethe's novel, as examples of the novel of *Empfindsamkeit*. The term *Sieewartfieber*<sup>33</sup> was coined on the model of the *Wertherfieber* which had preceded it. It may be assumed that eighteenth century readers tended to emphasise those aspects of *Werther*, above all the sentimental and rather banal love story, which it shared with inferior works such as *Sieewart*. Few of the traditional motifs of *Empfindsamkeit* are in fact lacking in *Werther*. Goethe's hero is in many ways typical of *die Empfindsamen* -- in his dislike of town life, in his preference for the English style of gardens, in his fondness for solitary walks by moonlight. He weeps "manche Thräne" [p.279] for the dead Graf von M., though we are not told that they enjoyed a particularly close relationship. Indeed, we do not even know whether they met in person; it is possible that Werther's tears are prompted solely by the supposition that the Count must have once had feelings similar to those Werther now experiences while walking in his garden. Werther has a thoroughly sentimental attachment to the scenes of past emotions, to his favourite spot under the linden tree at Wahlheim, to Lotte's garden and to the garden of the *Pfarrhaus*, above all to his childhood home. Like Sophie Sternheim, he undertakes a pilgrimage to the scene of his happiness as a child: "Ein Pilger im heiligen Lande trifft nicht so viele Stätten religiöser Erinnerung, und seine Seele ist schwerlich so voll heiliger Bewegung..." [p.337]. Werther has in common with Sophie Sternheim and with the Sophie of Miller's *Sieewart* a distinct fascination with his own death; in a manner characteristic of *die Empfindsamen* in literature as in life, he takes pleasure in



imagining how his friends will conscientiously keep alive his memory, weep over his grave and visit the places he loved best [p.361ff].

In Goethe's novel music has an important part to play in creating an atmosphere conducive to the experience and the expression of feeling. Werther's response to music is characteristically emotional -- characteristic, that is, both of Werther himself and of *die Empfindsamen* as a group (see esp. chapter on Miller's *Siegwart*). Werther cares little for technical skill or virtuosity -- whether Lotte is an accomplished pianist is a matter of indifference to him; her playing moves him so deeply simply because it is hers. Equally characteristic of *Empfindsamkeit* is the fact that a bond is created between Werther and Lotte by their mutual spontaneous association of the end of the storm with the name of Klopstock. The novel of the time contains numerous examples of romantic love nourished and sustained by the shared enjoyment of literature -- especially, of course, the literature of *Empfindsamkeit* (compare Miller and Jacobi). Werther's attitude to literature is as subjective and emotional as is his attitude to music. He and Lotte identify with the characters in the works they read, even if this necessitates a mis-reading of certain authors. Their response to *Ossian* is characteristically intense: "Die Bewegung beider war fürchterlich. Sie fühlten ihr eigenes Elend im Schicksal der Edlen, fühlten es zusammen und ihre Thränen vereinigten sie" [p.371]. Werther's and Lotte's reading of literature, which is mainly a personal, rather than an æsthetic response, foreshadows the contemporary public's reception of Goethe's novel, a fact that makes it all the more puzzling that Goethe was apparently so totally unprepared for the phenomena of *Wertherfieber*.

This subjective attitude is of course very different from that demonstrated by the characters of Gellert and La Roche. For these authors literature had always to have a didactic purpose if it was to be justified at all; its function, they believed, was to give instruction, most often moral instruction. The reader was therefore placed in the

position of a pupil of inferior understanding who, while free to exercise independence of judgement, was nevertheless obliged to recognise that he had much to learn and that good books had much to teach him. Werther manifests no such willingness to be taught. He is entirely sceptical about the value of academic learning [p.274] and convinced that, whatever may be the limitations of his knowledge, no man is superior in feeling, and feeling is the sole faculty he cares to cultivate: "Ach, was ich weiß, kann jeder wissen -- mein Herz hab ich allein" [p.338]. Nor, for that matter, does Werther display the pedagogic tendency manifested by the characters of Gellert and La Roche, just as Goethe sees it as no part of his function as a novelist to further the specifically moral education of his reader. Werther attempts to reconstruct the Patriarchal society he finds in the Bible and in "his" Homer in the very different social conditions of Rococo *Empfindsamkeit* for which Sophie Sternheim too had so marked a predilection. He does not merely, like Haller or Gessner for example, praise simpler, still existing lifestyles of rural communities; instead he idealises his surroundings to the point where he can see in contemporary rural society the near equivalent of a way of life long since gone for ever. He even tries to convince himself that he too may achieve such unselfconscious simplicity. As he sits preparing his own dinner and reading in his Homer, his feelings are represented thus:

Da fühle ich so lebhaft, wie die herrlichen, übermüthigen Freyer der Penelope Ochse und Schweine schlachten, zerlegen und braten. Da 'ist nichts, das mich so mit einer stillen, wahren Empfindung ausfüllte, als die Züge patriarchalischen Lebens, die ich, Gott sey Dank, ohne Affektation in meine Lebensart einweben kann [p.291].

It is to be doubted whether Werther's lifestyle is quite so free from affectation as he apparently believes. There is something very contrived in this cultivation of simplicity. His fondness for literary allusions and parallels -- in itself typical of *Empfindsamkeit* -- is indicative of his inability to refrain from reflection and self-analysis. He tries to live as the Homeric heroes did; yet in attempting to order his existence in accordance with a pre-conceived pattern, he inevitably recedes further and further from his ideal of spontaneity. The reader can scarcely fail to observe that Werther's conception of

his own manner of living is largely founded on an illusion. Werther's position is very close to that of Rococo *Empfindsamkeit*;<sup>34</sup> he cultivates an ideal of simplicity and rural innocence which he himself can never realise, since every attempt to bring it into being will inevitably be self-defeating, producing at best an artificial approximation of Homeric society.

One of Werther's most pronounced characteristics is a peculiarly powerful and active imagination, something we have already observed in La Roche's *Empfindsamen*. Both Sophie Sternheim and Lord Seymour indulge in unrestrained and usually painful imaginings, most often relating to their own or to one another's deaths. Events which are as yet mere possibilities they turn over and over in their minds until these appear in vividly disturbing detail as unalterable certainties. Werther's imaginative powers are such that he is able -- one ought perhaps to say: he is compelled -- to empathise with the real or imagined sufferings of real or imagined people, to such an extent that he experiences vicarious but nonetheless very genuine mental anguish. Such is the case in his debate with Herr Schmidt on the evils of ill-humour (see letter of 1st July 1771). Such too is his reaction on hearing Lotte and her friend discuss more thoughtlessly than callously the deteriorating health of a mutual acquaintance (see letter of 26th October 1772). Clearly this vicarious suffering is occasioned by the enjoyment of feeling for feeling's sake; it is the "joy of grief" so characteristic of *die Empfindsamen*.

We should be wary of suggesting that *die Empfindsamen*, a group of people only loosely bound together by shared opinions and tastes, possessed the faculty of imagination -- in Werther's case, of course, very much a mixed blessing -- to a degree denied to those of their contemporaries who espoused different ideas on art and feeling. Yet perhaps it might be said that *Empfindsamkeit* predisposed its adherents to cultivate this faculty, concerned as the movement so intensely was with

self-analysis. By dissecting their varying states of mind, manufacturing emotions if none sufficiently interesting presented themselves in the normal course of events, *die Empfindsamen* gave themselves a thorough training in the uses of the imagination. If this imaginative activity only rarely bore fruit in the form of artistic creativity -- and curiously enough Werther eliminates the imaginative element as far as possible from his painting, striving instead to produce a faithful representation of nature as he sees it -- if it did not necessarily make its adherents more considerate or humane in their treatment of others, it could (and in Werther's case arguably did) give them unusual flashes of insight into the workings of the human psyche. The empathetic understanding of others' experiences colours Werther's attitude to many aspects of life, in particular to all aspects of morality.

Werther personifies a type of *Empfindsamkeit* very similar to that which we observed in La Roche's Seymour. Like Seymour he is no stoic. Neither character makes the least attempt to combat despair. Feeling no moral obligation to restrain their emotions or to endure patiently whatever Providence has ordained, regarding personal happiness as the measure of all things, they abandon themselves entirely to the enjoyment of their grief: "Auch halte ich mein Herzgen wie ein krankes Kind, all sein Wille wird ihm gestattet" [p.272] -- this where those who were, like Gellert's Countess, more influenced by the ideas of the Enlightenment called upon reason, virtue and their very vague "religion" to sustain them in their troubles. For Werther and for Seymour -- and this is an attitude which neither Goethe nor La Roche would condemn -- personal happiness is a right, and those to whom it is denied have a right to feel bitter.

Goethe's portrayal of Werther's love for Lotte similarly owes much to the tradition of *Empfindsamkeit*. Like Seymour, but unlike Gellert's model characters, Werther is unable to regard love as just one of many aspects of life, - as something to which rather less significance should be attached than to the performance of one's duty to

society, as something which may be dispensed with (albeit reluctantly) should circumstances so require. Seymour and Werther feel that love is all-important, that if fulfilment is not found here it is to be found nowhere. Werther finds the entire purpose of his life in Lotte:

Ich werde sie sehen, ruf ich morgens aus, wenn ich mich ermuntere, und mit aller Heiterkeit der schönen Sonne entgegen blicke. Ich werde sie sehen, und da hab ich für den ganzen Tag keinen Wunsch weiter. Alles, alles verschlingt sich in dieser Aussicht [p.302].

Here there can be no question of finding an adequate measure of contentment in study or philanthropic activity.

Werther is however, quite unlike Sophie Sternheim and Gellert's various model characters, in that his love for Lotte is not dependent on any exemplary moral qualities she may have: it is not a reward for good conduct, which could and would be withdrawn should the slightest doubt be cast on the seeming irreproachable virtue of the beloved. Werther clearly does not love Lotte on account of the virtue which was of such importance in the novels of Richardson, Gellert, Hermes and La Roche. Of course he recognises from the outset that Lotte is dutiful, considerate and loving towards family and friends; he is charmed by her role as devoted, supremely practical "mother" to her young brothers and sisters. Yet Werther is altogether less decided as to his reasons for loving Lotte than were the protagonists of earlier novels. In attempting to communicate his feelings to Wilhelm he must resort to the so-called *Unsagbarkeitstopos*: "Kurz und gut, ich hab eine Bekanntschaft gemacht, die mein Herz näher angeht. Ich habe -- ich weiß nicht" [p.280].

Nor does Werther love with any definite aim in mind, certainly not with the intention of establishing a long-term partnership with Lotte. In the novels of Gellert, La Roche and Nicolai, love relationships always tended toward marriage, marriage being thought to possess a social as well as a personal function, or at least a social effect beyond



itself. It formed a solid base, not merely for the education of children, but also for the performance of various duties towards the poor and needy. Once married, Gellert's Countess and alternately the Count and Herr R., Lord and Lady Seymour, Säugling and Marianne are in a good position to work actively for the welfare of their fellow human beings. It is difficult to conceive of Werther ever becoming involved in such a relationship, even if circumstances were to favour his suit. He clearly relishes the very painful intensity of his -- by any conventional standards highly unsatisfactory -- relationship with Lotte. It is the degree of any given feeling which is important to Werther; whether that feeling is pleasurable or otherwise concerns him but little. Intense unhappiness he evidently prefers to the modest contentment which presumably would soon have resulted from marriage to Lotte. Werther fears and despises nothing more than such states of near-indifference. In this he has adopted an attitude very far from the *Tugendempfindsamkeit* espoused by the model characters I have hitherto analysed. These characters were prepared, to a greater or lesser extent, to take whatever course of action might ensure not only their own personal happiness, but also contribute to the general well-being. Werther departs very markedly from this position. He refuses to sacrifice any of his own wishes, however much his doing so might benefit others, while his wishes no longer coincide with what would be right and proper in a wider social context. And where the characters of Gellert, La Roche and Nicolai found their purest enjoyment of feeling in doing good, Werther's sensibility has become entirely divorced from morality; he does not experience emotion as having anything to do with virtue. Virtue concerns him but little. In so far as it impinges on his life it is as a concept dear to others or admirable in others, but likely to interfere with his own emotional gratification. In La Roche's novel as in Gellert's we noticed that those characters portrayed as representatives of *die Empfindsamern* tended to enter into relationships with people as like themselves as possible. A prospective marriage partner, even a friend, must share entirely all their principles, tastes and enthusiasms. For those unlike themselves they had, on the



whole, very little interest or sympathy. Werther's position is quite different. Lotte is everything he is not - tranquil, sociable and self-assured, at home in her own small world and desiring no other. She possesses precisely that quality which attracts Werther to children and simple folk: "die naturhafte Selbstverständlichkeit des Lebens",<sup>35</sup> as Ernst Feise has termed it, the easy, apparently unthinking acceptance of life as it is, the unproblematic acceptance of oneself which is not undermined by self-analysis and attendant self-disgust. Werther would -- at times -- wish to be like Lotte. Gellert's Countess and her friends, still more so Sophie Sternheim, were well satisfied with their own merits. Had they been dissatisfied they would have undertaken -- no doubt successfully -- to correct their faults, believing as they did that "virtue" was largely dependent on rational insight, on the acceptance and consequent implementation of some few moral principles. We would look in vain for any such optimism in Goethe's novel. *Werther* was revolutionary not least because it implied that the intellectual perception that a particular course of action is prescribed by self-interest is entirely compatible with the pursuit of quite the opposite course. Werther is well aware of his own capacity for self-destruction, but he at no time seriously considers trying to change. "Er sieht, daß sein Weg ihn ins unvermeidliche Verderben führt, aber er setzt ihn doch ruhig fort."<sup>36</sup> In other words, Man was not as rational or as exemplary as many previous writers had supposed. It is enough for Werther that he may admire in others, primarily in Lotte, all those excellent qualities he does not himself care to cultivate. Thus his love for Lotte is in more than the obvious sense love for the unattainable. It is part of his nostalgia for the innocence to which he can never return.

As we observed in relation to La Roche's novel, the kind of love most characteristic of *Empfindsamkeit* is almost entirely lacking in eroticism. Sophie Sternheim shrinks from anything approaching sexuality with obvious hostility and dread. Similarly, Miller's Siegwart has only the purest feelings for his Marianne. It costs him no inner

struggle to transfer his emotional commitment from the Catholic Church -- he had long wished to enter a monastery -- to this new beloved. The very intense relationship between Jacobi's Woldemar and Henriette resembles that between an unusually close brother and sister; he calls her *Bruder Heinrich* and laughs derisively at the suggestion that they might marry. In the novel of *Empfindsamkeit* friendship is valued a good deal more than love, and consequently the love which receives most approval is that which most closely resembles friendship, which is altruistic, spiritual, "pure". To some extent Werther's love for Lotte does correspond to this pattern. He feels for her, it would appear, something very like religious devotion. Like Lord Seymour, he evolves a curious, quasi-idolatrous cult of the distant or otherwise unattainable beloved. Every detail of the appearance of Werther's servant becomes charged with significance, becomes sanctified, "heilig" [p.302] because he has been admitted to Lotte's presence. The blue frock-coat and yellow waistcoat in which Werther first danced with Lotte also become holy [p.380]. He has an identical suit of clothes made when these wear out, and it is thus attired that he wishes to be buried, with one of Lotte's bows in his pocket. When Lotte sends Werther some flowers he spends "die halbe Nacht" on his knees before them [p.374]. He takes Albert's pistols "mit Entzücken" [p.377], when he learns that they have passed through Lotte's hands. "Alle Begier schweigt in ihrer Gegenwart" Werther writes to Wilhelm [p.301]. "Ich habe kein Gebet mehr als an sie, meiner Einbildungskraft erscheint keine andere Gestalt als die ihrige, und alles in der Welt um mich her sehe ich nur im Verhältnisse mit ihr" [p.318]. Such assurances bring to mind the conventional pattern of love relationships among *die Empfindsamen*, and for this reason their significance should not be overrated. As Claus Lappe has pointed out, "Alles was den Empfindsamen wert und teuer ist, ist heilig, heiligst, geheiligt."<sup>37</sup>

In any case, Werther's love for Lotte differs considerably from the extreme spirituality of the emotion common among *die Empfindsamen*. It is true that Werther's conduct is

entirely honourable. He never abuses the intimacy which Lotte naïvely -- or not so naïvely -- permits. He is not, he declares "So verderbt" [p.327] as to take advantage of her apparently thoughtless playfulness. Yet the possibility that he might do so is clearly present in his mind. He is thrilled by the mere touch of Lotte's fingers, by the contact of their feet under the table -- "Ich ziehe zurück, wie vom Feuer, und eine geheime Kraft zieht mich wieder vorwärts. Mir wirds so schwindlig von allen Sinnen" [p.301]. This passage seems all the more significant when we consider that *die Empfindsamen* in life as in literature were accustomed to exchange warm and frequent demonstrations of affection, often in the context of large social gatherings, without too much meaning being attached to these. Werther's dreams of Lotte are turbulent, feverish. He allows himself to indulge in the most violent imaginings. He even wonders whether he could not solve the dilemma by murdering Albert, or perhaps Lotte herself. Werther's evident violent tendency is surely attributable at least in part to frustrated sensuality, sensuality which for want of any other outlet has turned to anger, just as the cult of pure friendship inaugurated by *die Empfindsamen* was not least a disguised expression and a sublimation of desires which would have been morally unacceptable in any other form. Friendship, no less than love, has become a problematic concept in Goethe's novel. Werther has very little real communication with the rest of the world. His relationship with Wilhelm is symptomatic in this respect. Wilhelm is frequently addressed in terms reminiscent of the cult of friendship fundamental to *Empfindsamkeit*. He is "Bruder" [p.315], "Lieber" [p.324], "mein Schaz" [p.279], "lieber Schaz" [p.79]. In reality Wilhelm is little more than the passive recipient of Werther's confidences. Werther writes to him, so it seems, not to obtain replies, but for the release of self-expression. "O daß ich nicht an deinen Hals fliegen, dir mit tausend Thränen und Entzückungen ausdrücken kann, mein Bester, all die Empfindungen, die mein Herz bestürmen", he writes [p.311]. Ernst Feise has rightly drawn attention to Werther's "Eigenschaft... immer mit sich selbst zu sprechen, sich an den Menschen vorbei sich selbst bekämpfend oder bestärkend in seinen

Ideenkreis hineinzuspinnen".<sup>38</sup> This is certainly the course taken by many of Werther's conversations. He does not discuss the question of suicide with Albert; he simply pours out his own feelings on the subject and by so doing succeeds in intensifying these feelings. In persuading Herr Schmidt of the evils of ill-humour, he is in fact attempting to satisfy himself of his own ability to control his emotions. Such too is, very largely, his aim in writing to Wilhelm. He is thereby able to justify himself to himself and to obtain some relief from his desperate loneliness.

Werther needs an intimate friend, a brother in feeling, and he has consigned Wilhelm to this role. We learn, however, of no return of confidences, that most essential ingredient of friendship among *die Empfindsamen*. Werther's responses to Wilhelm's letters are scarce and when these come it is in the form of vaguely surprised remonstrances that Wilhelm does not understand the peculiar nature of Werther's predicament. It is true that Wilhelm does offer more or less sound practical advice, but it is advice which Werther must reject as being entirely irrelevant to his situation. Wilhelm is obviously well-meaning, but essentially uncomprehending and, viewed from Werther's perspective at least, emotionally limited.

Whereas in Gellert's novel *die Empfindsamen* had formed a separate community within society, Werther is very much alone. There is no one person who truly understands and sympathises with him, still less an entire group of people. In Gellert's novel all experiences could be shared. The single explanation "O Bruder" was often sufficient to establish the most immediate and complete affinity. Those who did not share the ideals of "die wenigen Edlen" did not matter -- they were thought to be a different breed, scarcely worthy of the name of men. Werther, however, finds he cannot avoid the conclusion "Mißverstanden zu werden ist das Schicksal von unser einem" [p.273]. It is a situation he cannot easily accept.

Ich möchte mir oft die Brust zerreißen und das Gehirn einstoßen, daß

man einander so wenig seyn kann. Ach, die Liebe und Freude und Wärme und Wonne, die ich nicht hinzu bringe, wird mir der andere nicht geben, und mit einem ganzen Herzen voll Seligkeit werd ich den andern nicht beglücken, der kalt und kraftlos vor mir steht [p.345].

Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, given their position as unacknowledged rivals and their radically differing temperament, Werther also maintains some semblance of friendship with Albert. In the literature of *Empfindsamkeit*, of course, such triangles are not uncommon, but often function most harmoniously, love for *die Empfindsamen* necessarily precluding the unworthy passion of jealousy. Goethe's own *Stella* provides one such instance, Jacobi's *Woldemar* another, Jacobi's own domestic circumstances a third. It is to be doubted whether such relationships, when they did occur, were in fact quite as free from tension as these authors suggested. Goethe's depiction of the eternal triangle in *Werther* is a good deal less simplistic. Albert becomes increasingly irritated as Werther's daily visits continue after Lotte is married. He becomes curt and cold towards Werther and even towards his wife.

No real communication is possible between Werther and Albert. They do no more than observe the outward forms of friendship: "Wir gingen auseinander ohne einander verstanden zu haben. Wie denn auf dieser Welt keiner leicht den anderen versteht" [p.315]. With whatever degree of conscious intention, Goethe has supplied a corrective to the idealised cult of friendship central to *Empfindsamkeit*. It is, of course, deeply ironic -- and symptomatic -- that for all the intensity of feeling evident in the conversation of 10th September 1771, Werther and Lotte are talking at cross purposes, that they so conspicuously fail to understand one another; she, knowing nothing of his plan to leave the next day, little suspects the real significance of all their talk of parting and reunion. The community of spirit between them is not so great after all -- not altogether surprisingly, since in one sense Lotte is almost an arbitrary object of Werther's love. Goethe's characters achieve no more than the appearance, the illusion of the easy, instantaneous sympathy enjoyed by Gellert's Countess and her friends, or



by Miller's Siegwart, Kronhelm and Therese.

For a time it seems as though Werther may be able to attain the intimacy and mutual understanding he so desires with the Count von C. As is characteristic of first meetings among persons of sensibility, they immediately recognise one another as kindred spirits -- or so Werther believes: "Er nahm Theil an mir, als ich einen Geschäftsauftrag an ihn ausrichtete und er an den ersten Worten merkte, daß wir uns verstanden, daß er mit mir reden konnte, wie nicht mit jedem" [p.325]. Yet once again Werther's hopes are frustrated: circumstances, prejudices, differences in rank, "die fatalen bürgerlichen Verhältnisse" [p.327] intervene to cut short the hoped-for intimacy.

Finally, Werther finds in Fräulein von B., if not a substitute for Lotte, then certainly some consolation for her loss. Wolf Christian Zimmermann somewhat misconstrues the nature of this relationship: his regret that Werther fails to induce Fräulein von B., who according to Zimmermann would require but little persuasion, to become his wife, is surely out of place.<sup>39</sup> There is no evidence that Werther is impeded here only by an excess of inhibition, by a feeling that as a *bourgeois* he cannot aspire to the hand of an aristocrat. A good part of Fräulein von B.'s attraction for Werther lies in her willingness to talk to him about Lotte, her eagerness to "love" Lotte, whom of course she has never met: "Sie sehnt sich aus dem Getümmel [of high society] und wir verphantasieren manche Stunde in ländlichen Szenen von ungemischter Glückseligkeit, ach, und von Ihnen. Wie oft muß sie Ihnen huldigen. Muß nicht, that's freywillig, hört so gern von Ihnen, liebt Sie" [p.329]. Typical of *Empfindsamkeit* is not only this willingness to love at a distance, without benefit of personal acquaintance, but also Werther's evident need for a friend who will listen to his complaints and sympathise with his unhappiness. Yet once again events take a course which must sadly disappoint Werther's hopes, again it becomes apparent that the ideal



of friendship cherished by the *Empfindsamen* cannot be realised. Werther and Fräulein von B. allow themselves to be driven apart by force of circumstances; their common belief in the power of feeling is insufficient to enable them to overcome convention and prejudice.

A comparison between Goethe's novel and earlier works of fiction in the tradition of *Empfindsamkeit* would be incomplete without some consideration of Goethe's treatment of religious questions, an area in which he differs from his predecessors no less markedly than in his attitudes to society, to virtue and to sensibility.

Werther's world view is scarcely Christian in any sense. He makes no distinction between accepted religious practice (i.e. the sacraments) and what would generally be regarded as superstition (compare the episode of Lotte and Malchen at the well [p.297ff]). He uses Christianity as suits his own intellectual and emotional needs, taking over those ideas he finds congenial, ignoring, rejecting, modifying, or distorting the rest. Moreover, his pessimism is very different from the Christian conception of earthly existence as a vale of tears: Werther's sense of hopelessness does not spring from any belief in the natural depravity of man. Sin is something which appears to puzzle him, while original sin is for him an irrelevance.

His vision of the after-life, too, is far from orthodox. Heaven will be Heaven for Werther primarily because Lotte will be there with him; he anticipates in Paradise neither more nor less than the eternal continuation of the pleasures of life, and particularly of love, on earth:

Keine Ewigkeit soll das glühende Leben auslöschen, das ich gestern auf deinen Lippen genoß, das ich in mir fühle. Sie liebt mich... sie ist mein, du bist mein, ja Lotte, auf ewig. Und was ist das? Daß Albert dein Mann ist. Mann? Das wäre denn für diese Welt -- und für diese Welt Sünde, daß ich dich liebe, daß ich dich aus seinen Armen in die meinigen reißen möchte? Sünde? gut, gut, und ich strafe mich davor: ich habe sie in der ganzen Himmelswonne geschmeckt, diese Sünde, habe

Lebensbalsam und Kraft in mein Herz gesaugt, du bist von dem Augenblicke mein. Mein, O Lotte. Ich gehe voran, gehe zu meinem Vater, zu deinem Vater, dem will ich klagen und der wird mich trösten, bis du kommst, und ich fliehe dir entgegen und fasse dich und bleibe bey dir vor dem Angesicht des Unendlichen in ewigen Umarmungen [p.374].

In Goethe's novel personal immortality is not anticipated as a certainty as it was by Gellert and La Roche and even by the rationalist Nicolai. It has now become a matter for discussion and speculation: "Wir werden seyn... aber, Werther, sollen wir uns wieder finden? und wieder erkennen? Was ahnden Sie? Was sagen Sie?" Lotte asks [p.321]. This uncertainty as to the destiny of the soul is all the more striking when we consider that a belief in the reward or punishment beyond the grave constitutes an essential feature of natural religion as of Christianity. Gellert, as we have seen, doubted whether life could be endured at all, if there were no certain prospect of future recompense for present trials. Nicolai, for his part, insisted that only the knowledge that their future fate was dependent on their present conduct was sufficient to induce men to forsake vice for virtue. In Goethe's novel, personal immortality is no longer "necessary" in quite this way, since virtue is no longer regarded as the measure of all things. Werther promises himself eternal life, at the same time admitting -- unrepentantly -- that he has been and will be guilty of sin. By "sacrificing" himself for Lotte, he is in fact seeking to atone for one sin with another. In other words, Christianity for Werther means precisely what he wants it to mean. The reader acquainted with the content of Christian dogma as with Werther's re-interpretation of it cannot fail, in comparing the two, to observe this discrepancy and to draw his own conclusions regarding Werther's sense of reality. There is irony here, as always when Werther's professed understanding of an idea is at variance with the actual content of that idea.

Nor does Werther assess Christianity according to the objective truth of its doctrine -- he is insufficiently interested in objectivity as such for that to be the case -- but

rather according to its results, its efficacy or lack of efficacy in comforting and sustaining him in his distress.

Ich ehre die Religion, das weißt du, ich fühle, daß sie manchem Ermattetem Stab, manchem Verschmachtendem Erquickung ist. Nur, kann sie denn, muß sie denn das einem jeden seyn? Wenn du die große Welt ansiehst, so siehst du Tausende, denen sie's nicht war, denen sie's nicht seyn wird, gepredigt oder ungepredigt, und muß sie mir's denn seyn?  
[p.339]

According to strict logic, this position is untenable: if religion is accepted at all, it can, logically speaking, only be as an absolute. Werther could be assured of the beneficence of divine Providence only if he might be permitted to enjoy happiness with Lotte. His obedience is conditional upon God's giving Lotte to him. "Ich, ihr Mann! O Gott, wenn du mir diese Seligkeit bereitet hättest, mein ganzes Leben sollte ein anhaltendes Gebet seyn" [p.339].

The God Werther envisages -- one can scarcely say worships -- is fundamentally sympathetic to the human predicament. He is a God of love and forgiveness, not of anger, scarcely even of justice. He is not even a God who will rebuke those of His creatures who do their own will in preference to His. Werther is confident that when he meets his "Father" he will be comforted for all his sufferings, and pardoned for his precipitation in destroying the life God had given him. Werther believes in neither Christianity nor natural religion, but a confused creed of his own making, a creed which he barely finds satisfying:

Il peut bien évoquer ou invoquer pour se justifier des souvenirs chrétiens. Il est trop prisonnier de sa subjectivité pour en tirer des leçons de vie et il n'est pas assez assuré pour s'en passer; il n'est plus chrétien et il n'est rien d'autre. Vraiment et pleinement, il persiste dans la confusion d'une alternative irresolue.<sup>40</sup>

For Werther in his more serene moods, God is "der Alliebende, der Ewigschaffende", a power very like the creating and all-sustaining force envisaged by the Deists. Personal communication between the infinite and the finite, the eternal and the temporal he does, however, believe to be possible, at least in theory.

Yet as his mental suffering increases, Werther comes to feel that Nature, no less than human society, is governed by the forces of destruction. La Roche had seen in Nature harmony, utility, almost an awareness of purpose lacking in Man, and had concluded that Man could learn much from the observation of the natural world. Werther, in his increasingly morbid subjectivity, comes to experience Nature as disharmonious, purposeless, even malevolent.

Da ist kein Augenblick, der dich nicht verzehrte und die deinigen um dich her, kein Augenblick, der du nicht ein Zerstörer bist, seyn muß. Der harmloseste Spaziergang kostet tausend armen Würmgen das Leben, es zerrüttet ein Fußtritt die mühseligen Gebäude der Ameisen und stampft eine kleine Welt in ein schmähhliches Grab. Ha, nicht die große, seltene Noth der Welt, diese Fluthen, die eure Dörfer wegsülen, die eure Städte verschlingen, rühren mich. Mir untergräbt das Herz die verzehrende Kraft, die im All der Natur verborgen liegt, die nichts gebildet hat, was nicht seinen Nachbar, nicht sich selbst zerstörte [p.316].

This is a world which has been forsaken by a loving God. Werther's religious feeling is completely divorced from the ethical content of Christianity. His religion is a "Religion ohne Moral, woraus bereits erhellt, daß sie nicht biblisch-christlicher Art sein kann."<sup>41</sup> He feels no obligation to become better than he is: the laws of Christianity mean no more to him than do the conventions of bourgeois society -- "Es fehlt hier das Gefühl der Verantwortung dem Gotteswillen gegenüber, dem Gehorsam zu leisten ist. Es ist bezeichnend, daß das Wort Sünde zweimal mit einem Fragezeichen vorkommt."<sup>42</sup> Nor does he derive any comfort from faith. His religious impulses are too entirely dependent on his changing moods for that. His religion does not influence his state of mind: it is his vacillating emotions which determine the course to be taken by his religious sensibilities.

These sensibilities are tightly bound up with Werther's general frustration, his lack of purpose and fulfilment. He experiences a vague longing, above all a longing to achieve communion with God, the creative force in Nature. "Man möchte zum Mayenkäfer werden, um in dem Meere von Wohlgerüchen herumzuschweben und alle

seine Nahrung darinne finden zu können" [p.269]. Yet in his state of *Einschränkung* [p.275] Werther is very well aware that his yearning must remain unsatisfied. Werther is lacking in humility, surely one of the most basic ingredients of any Christian experience. He cannot accept human fallibility or human limitations, nor be content merely to wonder at the power of God/Nature. Instead he strives to become as it were a participant in the life-giving activity of the natural world:

Wie oft hab ich mit Fittigen eines Kranichs, der über mich hinflieg, zu dem Ufer des ungemessenen Meeres geseht, aus dem schäumenden Becher des Unendlichen jene schwellende Lebenswonne zu trincken, und nur einen Augenblick in der eingeschränkten Kraft meines Busens einen Tropfen der Seligkeit des Wesens zu fühlen, das alles in sich und durch sich hervor bringt [p.337].

This impulse to abandon all individuality in the experience of God corresponds to the mystic's -- in the German context particularly of course the Pietist's -- wish for self-surrender, even self-abnegation. Werther's subjective, thoroughly undogmatic religiosity does have something in common with Pietism: he shares with the Pietists the very sensual experience of religious emotions and in accordance with the mystical tradition he uses the language of erotic love to communicate his conception of God in Nature [p.270]. Like many Pietists, Werther is overwhelmed by his own enthusiasm -- "gepackt", "ergriffen", feeling himself to be the passive recipient of divine grace: "Ich gehe darüber zugrunde". He writes: "Ich erliege unter der Gewalt der Herrlichkeit dieser Erscheinungen" [p.271]. And again like the Pietists<sup>43</sup> Werther vacillates between the extremes of exultation and despair, between abundance of feeling and the dreaded consciousness of having been deserted by feeling: as, inevitably, the mood of euphoria cannot long be sustained -- when, worn out by the intensity of his own emotions, the enthusiast falls from bliss to apathy. Of course there is also a link with the psychology of the *Empfindsamen* here. As Eva D. Becker has pointed out, "Da die Selbstbewertung der Empfindsamen von ihrer Fähigkeit zu empfinden abhängt, fürchten sie nichts mehr, als daß ihr Gefühl nicht mehr funktioniere."<sup>44</sup> Werther is familiar with this much-feared state of mind: "Ich habe mich so oft auf dem Boden



geworfen und Gott um Thränen gebeten wie ein Ackermann um Regen, wenn der Himmel ehern über ihn ist und um ihn die Erde verdürstet". He has become "ein versiegter Brunnen... ein verleckter Eimer" [p.346].

Similarly reminiscent of Pietism is Werther's feeling that he is somehow uniquely close to God -- and this on account of his unusual emotional capacities. He may therefore number himself among the saints. "Ich lebe so glückliche Tage wie Gott sie seinigen Heiligen ausspart" [p.290]. Werther does not regard nearness to God as being dependent upon exceptional moral purity. It is granted, he believes, with all the attendant ecstasy and misery, not to unusually good men -- we have seen that Werther prefers as far as possible to abstain from passing moral judgments -- but to the *Gefühlsaristokratie* of those who feel most and most intensely. Correspondingly -- and this is entirely typical of *Empfindsamkeit* -- Werther believes that an extraordinary capacity for feeling is the distinguishing mark of an exceptionally noble soul, of a soul worthy of enjoying especial closeness to God.

Since the publication of Herbert Schöffler's study of *Werther* it has been generally accepted that Werther's letters contain unmistakable echoes of the last days of Christ, as described by St John<sup>45</sup>. Schöffler perhaps over-emphasises the part played by secularisation in Goethe's novel. It is an over-simplification to suggest that the decline in religious belief which the Enlightenment had brought about may be held directly responsible for Werther's emotional lability, still less for the entire phenomenon of Sensibility -- as Schöffler claims:

Und mit allem Nachdruck sei auf eines hingewiesen, die Gründe für die seelische Erregbarkeit jenes ganzen Zeitalters, für die Reizbarkeit, Empfindsamkeit, den Weltschmerz zweier Generationen sind nicht in der Ebene des Ästhetischen zu suchen -- diese liegt nicht tief genug. Der Zerfall der alten Gottesidee läßt plötzlich den Menschen allein im Kosmos zurück... Durch Jahrtausende war der Mensch von Göttern, von einem Gott geführt worden, der immer gütigere Züge angenommen hatte -- jetzt plötzlich findet er sich allein im Gefühl kindlicher Ohnmacht und er tut, was das plötzlich allein gelassene Kind immer getan hat: er



weint.<sup>46</sup>

This argument is clearly in need of some modification. It is scarcely true that the other characters share Werther's sense of alienation, despite the fact that they too apparently have no religious commitment. We cannot say that *Empfindsamkeit* was "caused" by the decline in Christianity -- not, at least, in the sense Schöffler suggests. Rather we might concede that *Empfindsamkeit* constituted some kind of substitute for religion, providing as it did an outlet for emotional energies no longer directed toward the traditional faith. Schöffler fails to bring out the full implications of Werther's identification with Christ. More interesting perhaps than the mere fact that Werther draws such parallels is the way in which he alters -- or distorts -- Christianity to suit his own case. Werther takes a "last supper" of bread and wine [p.377], commends his mother to the protection of his friend [p.378], as Christ had done, even exclaiming "Mein Gott, mein Gott, warum hast du mich verlassen?" [p.348], all in conscious and deliberate imitation of Christ, all serving, so Werther believes, to proclaim his death a noble act of self-sacrifice for Lotte's happiness. The real effect is rather more ambiguous. As we have seen, Werther's suicide is portrayed with some irony. We observed that this irony is present in the discrepancy between heroic intention and pitiful execution in Werther's suicide; there is irony too, in Werther's attempt to lend to his sufferings in love the tragic and the transcendental dimensions of Christ's Passion. There are very great differences between Werther's death and the death of Christ; his notion that he is dying for Lotte's sake is a mere illusion, a feeble attempt at self-justification. His suicide cannot possibly restore Lotte's peace of mind -- a point clearly borne out by the editor's observation "Man fürchtete für Lottens Leben" -- nor is it at all likely to re-establish marital harmony between Lotte and Albert. Both must inevitably be left with a sense of guilt; they may even be inclined to reproach one another.

Werther's death would rather appear to be calculated to destroy their domestic

happiness entirely; he almost seems to be punishing Lotte for her neglect of him. Moreover, Christ, with humility Werther never demonstrates, did His Father's will on earth and returned to Him at the appointed time. Werther renounces life when he finds it no longer endurable, entirely in accordance with his own, not with God's will, yet still, as we have seen, in the confident expectation of attaining to divine forgiveness and eternal bliss with Lotte. The effect of this very stark contrast, far from increasing the significance of Werther's very unnecessary suicide, is rather to detract from it. Werther, contrary to his manifest intention, appears to the reader to be the victim of self-delusion. His view of himself is counter-balanced by a more objective standpoint, by implicit criticism. Goethe indulges in no facile condemnation of Werther's "sin". He merely provides the reader with Werther's assessment of his own actions and at the same time, through the medium of irony, suggests that another opinion is equally possible.

1. Thomas Mann, *Goethes Laufbahn als Schriftsteller*. In: Mann, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol.9, *Reden und Aufsätze*; Frankfurt am Main, 1960, pp.333-362, here p.344.
2. See Kurt Rothmann (editor), *Erläuterungen und Dokumente zu Goethes Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*. Stuttgart 1980, p.129.
3. See the following:
  - Johann Wilhelm Appell, *Werther und seine Zeit. Zur Goetheliteratur*. Leipzig 1865;
  - Stuart Atkins, *The Testament of Werther in Poetry and Drama*. Cambridge, Mass. 1949;
  - Louis Hermenjat, *Werther et les Frères de Werther*. Diss., Lausanne 1892;
  - William Rose, *The historical background of Goethe's Werther*. In: Rose, *Men, myths and movements in German literature. A volume of critical and historical papers*, London 1931, pp.125-155;
  - Klaus R. Scherpe, *Werther und Wertherwirkung, Zum Syndrom bürgerlicher Gesellschaftsordnung im achtzehnten Jahrhundert. Mit einem Anhang: Vier Wertherschriften aus dem Jahr 1775 im Faksimiledruck*. Bad Homburg-Berlin-Zürich 1970.
4. Rose, *op.cit.*, p.148.
5. See Atkins, *op.cit.*, p.89.
6. *ibid.*, p.89.
7. Scherpe, *op.cit.*, p.72.
8. Wolfgang Doktor, *Die Kritik der Empfindsamkeit*. Diss., University of the Saarland. Berne-Frankfurt am Main 1975, p.16.
9. Johann Melchior Goeze, *Freywillige Beyträge zu den Hamburgischen Nachrichten aus dem Reiche der Gelehrsamkeit*, 21st March 1775. Quoted from Rothmann (ed.), *Erläuterungen und Dokumente*, p.126.
10. Goeze, *Freywillige Beyträge*, 7th April 1775. Quoted from Rothmann (ed.) *Erläuterungen und Dokumente*, p.128.
11. Anthony Thorlby, "From what did Goethe save himself in *Werther*?" In *Versuche zu Goethe. Festschrift für Erich Heller*, edited by Volker Dürr and Géza von Molnár, Heidelberg 1978; pp.150-166, here p.165.
12. Friedrich von Blanckenburg, Review of Goethe's *Werther*. In: *Neue Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften und der freyen Künste*, Leipzig 1775, vol. 18, pp.46-95. Quoted from Hermann Blumenthal (ed.) *Zeitgenössische Rezensionen und Urteile über Goethes Götz und Werther*, Berlin 1935 = *Literarhistorische Bibliothek*, 15, p.93.
13. Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, *Aphorismen*. Quoted from Blumenthal, *Zeitgenössische Rezensionen*, p.72.

14. See Helmuth Kiesel and Paul Münch, *Gesellschaft und Literatur im achtzehnten Jahrhundert. Voraussetzungen und Entstehung des literarischen Marktes in Deutschland*, Munich 1977, p.178.
15. Hans Reiss, *Goethes Romane*, Berne-Munich 1963, p.25.
16. Scherpe, *Werther und Wertherwirkung*, p.24.
17. Kiesel and Münch, *Gesellschaft und Literatur*, p.170.
18. Georg Jäger, *Empfindsamkeit und Roman. Vorgeschichte, Theorie und Kritik im achtzehnten und frühen neunzehnten Jahrhundert*, Stuttgart 1969, p.94.
19. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, letter to Johann Joachim Eschenburg, 26th October 1774. In: Lessing, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Paul Rilla, Berlin 1957; Vol. 9, *Briefe*, p.614.
20. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*. In: Goethe, *Gedenksausgabe der Werke, Briefe und Gespräche*. Edited by Ernst Beutler, vol.9, Zürich 1949, p.268. All subsequent references are to this edition.
21. For information on contemporary reception of the work, see Blumenthal, *Zeitgenössische Rezensionen*.
22. Friedrich Schiller, *Die sentimentalischen Dichter*, in: Schiller, *Die Horen III* 22, p.35ff.
23. Benjamin Bennett, "Goethe's *Werther*: double perspective and the game of life." In: *The Germanic Quarterly*, 53, 1980; pp.64-91, here p.73.
24. Eric Blackall, *Goethe and the novel*, Ithaca-London 1976. Blackall's comparison between Werther's suicide and those of Empedokles and Hedda Gabler is scarcely helpful. The fact that Hedda's shot is immediately effective does not, after all, make her death any more heroic [p.38].
25. *ibid.*
26. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, letter to Eschenburg, 26th October 1774. In: Lessing, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol.9, p.615.
27. Compare Schiller, *Kabale und Liebe*, Act V, scene 1.
28. Compare Gerhard Kluge, "Die Leiden des jungen Werthers in der Residenz. Vorschlag zur Interpretation einiger Wertherbriefe." In: *Euphorion* 65, 1971, pp.115-131.
29. Scherpe, *Werther und Wertherwirkung* pp.15 and 38
30. Goethe, letter to C.F. Schönborn, 1<sup>st</sup> June 1774.
31. Kluge, *op.cit.*, p.123.
32. Herbert Schöffler, *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers. Ihr geistesgeschichtlicher Hintergrund* In: Schöffler, *Deutscher Geist im Achtzehnten Jahrhundert. Essays zur Geistes- und Religionsgeschichte*. Second edition Göttingen 1967 p.155-181

33. See Edmund Kamprath, "Das Siegwartfieber". In: *Program des k.k. Staatsgymnasiums zu Wiener Neustadt. Zum Schlusse des Schuljahres 1876/77*. Wiener Neustadt 1877, pp. 3-26.
34. Compare Gerhard Sauder, *Empfindsamkeit*, vol. 1, *Voraussetzungen und Elemente*. Stuttgart 1974, p.250ff.
35. Ernst Feise, "Goethes Werther als nervöser Charakter." In: *The Germanic Review*, 1, 1926, pp.185-263; here, p.210.
36. Gottfried Fittbogen, "Die Charaktere in den beiden Fassungen von Werthers Leiden." In: *Euphorion*, 17, 1910, pp.556-580, here p.579.
37. Claus Lappe, *Studien zum Wortschatz empfindsamer Prosa*, Diss. University of the Saarland, 1970, p.205.
38. Feise, *op.cit.*, p.210.
39. "Aber Werther steht sich selbst im Wege... gegenüber Lotte sind es Skrupulosität und Pietät, die ihm die natürlichen Reaktionen zerschlagen; gegenüber dem Fräulein von B. wird seine Liebe von innerer Unsicherheit und daraus folgender Empfindlichkeit überlagert." Wolf Christian Zimmermann, *Das Weltbild des jungen Goethe. Studien zur hermetischen Tradition des deutschen achtzehnten Jahrhunderts*. 2 vols; vol.2, *Interpretation und Dokumente*, Munich 1979, p.193ff., here p.193.
40. J.-J. Anstett, "La crise religieuse de Werther". In: *Etudes Germaniques*, 4, 1949, pp. 121-128; here p.126.
41. August E. Hohler, *Das Heilige in der Dichtung. Klopstock, der junge Goethe*. Zürich 1954, p.154.
42. Else Köppe, *Das Verhältnis der jungen Goethe zum Christentum*, Berlin 1939 = *Germanistische Studien*, 26, p.49.
43. For further information on the psychology of Pietism see the following:
- Hans R.G. Günther, "Psychologie des deutschen Pietismus". In: *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 4, 1926 pp.144-176;
- Gertrud Wagner, *Die Entstehung des psychologischen Romans in Deutschland von der Mitte des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts bis zum Ausgang der Romantik*, Diss., Vienna 1965.
44. Eva D. Becker, *Der deutsche Roman um 1780*, Diss. Heidelberg 1963, Stuttgart 1964, p.86.
45. See also Richard Brinkmann, "Goethes Werther und Gottfried Arnolds Kirchen- und Ketzerhistorie. Zur Aporie des modernen Individualitätsbegriffes". In: *Versuche zu Goethe. Festschrift für Erich Heller*. Edited by Volker Dürr and Géza von Molnár. Heidelberg 1976, pp.167-189. As Brinkmann points out, it is surely significant here that Goethe makes use of the fourth Gospel, which has traditionally been invoked by mystics and by religious sects of all kinds; see especially p.178.
46. Schöffler, *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*, p.175.

**6. JOHANN MARTIN MILLER: SIEGWART, EINE  
KLOSTERGESCHICHTE**



*Nicht wenigen Zeitgenossen gilt Miller gleichsam als Initiator der empfindsamen Periode überhaupt, jedenfalls was den Publikumsgeschmack an empfindsamer Romanlektüre betrifft. Empfindungen à la Siegwart und weinerliche Empfindsamkeit, siegwartisieren und empfinden verschmelzen zu synonymen Begriffen.<sup>1</sup>*

The novel *Siegwart, eine Klostergeschichte* by Johann Martin Miller, first published in 1776, enjoyed a success among eighteenth-century German readers surpassed only by Goethe's still more popular *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (1774). It was reprinted in many subsequent editions, the first as early as 1777, and the work was translated into almost all European languages<sup>2</sup>. The phenomenon of *Wertherfieber* was succeeded by *Siegwartfieber*; the latter was distinguished from the former chiefly by its still more pronounced tendency towards lachrymosity or *weinerliche Empfindsamkeit*. To a considerable extent, of course, Miller could capitalise on the success of *Werther*, since Goethe's novel had created a particular receptivity to sentimental fiction of precisely this kind<sup>3</sup>. At the same time the popularity of *Siegwart* undoubtedly owed much to the fact that it was a good deal less controversial, indeed less shocking than *Werther* had been. Most obviously (as Günter Erning has pointed out) the ending selected by Miller, however banal, did at least have the advantage that it carefully avoided the question of suicide -- thus sparing the sensibilities of those readers who would have been roused to strong disapproval by the manner of Werther's death. Thus as Erning rightly argues, "dem Leser des *Siegwart* wurde durch den natürlichen Tod des Helden kein ethisches Urteil abgefordert; um so leichter wurde sein Mitleid und Mitempfinden erregt"<sup>4</sup>. A similar point is made in Kunze's analysis of the novel:

Im Gegenteil zu Werther liebt Siegwart tugendhaft... wie er überhaupt viel braver und alltäglicher ist als Werther. Aber dies ist für seine Verbreitung ausschlaggebend gewesen, so daß er viel tiefer in die literarischen Unterschichten eindringen konnte als der geistige Werther.<sup>5</sup>

In short, Miller's novel was so popular largely because it combined what had been the most successful aspect of *Werther* -- namely, the sentimental love-story -- with a moral innocuousness which to many readers must have been a welcome relief after the piquant gallantry of the courtly novel, the ambiguity of *Hermes*<sup>6</sup> and the challenge to traditional bourgeois concepts of virtue posed by *Werther*.

Dr Johnson said of Richardson, "... if you were to read Richardson for the story, your patience would be so much fretted that you would hang yourself. You must read him for the sentiment, and consider the story only as giving rise to the sentiment"<sup>7</sup>. Much the same judgement might be made on Miller's *Siegwart*. It needs scarcely be pointed out that the work possesses no great æsthetic merit. The characterisation is weak -- the characters being little more than implausibly motivated types, crude representatives of virtue and vice. Miller's use of language and imagery is uninteresting, his attempts to create dramatic tension largely ineffectual. Neither the plot, which is at once tedious and improbable, nor the depiction of the characters' inner life, are such as to be capable of sustaining for very long the interest of the modern reader.

Alain Faure suggests with some justification that Miller, rather than being unable to portray psychologically credible characters, is in fact prevented from doing so by his particularly rigid moralistic thinking: "Son vertuisme se fonde sur une croyance profonde à l'existence d'êtres sans défauts".<sup>8</sup> Faure argues that Miller's preoccupation with the moral education of his readers imposed certain unavoidable limitations on his artistic development, his primary intention being not to produce a work of art, but a veritable *Rath- und Hilfsbüchlein* which would offer guidance on all subjects, moral and practical.

Le romancier préoccupé de la vertu de ses lecteurs et du salut de son âme doit exercer sur ses contemporains une action directe et immédiate. Il est nécessairement lié à son temps. Ainsi Miller ne prétend-il point à l'immortalité, professant au contraire à l'égard de la postérité un mépris qu'elle lui rendit bien.<sup>9</sup>

Miller's artistic failings should nevertheless not be overlooked on account of his didactic purpose. Indeed, it is precisely these æsthetic deficiencies which often make the novel appear so excessively sentimental. Miller is obliged to resort to a number of very

obvious devices in order to create the dramatic tension which would otherwise be lacking. Thus he introduces various unnecessary and entirely gratuitous accidents and illnesses. Pater Philipp falls seriously ill, merely in order that the reader may participate with Siegwart and Kronhelm in the edifying spectacle of his protracted demise. Equal edification and emotional tension are to be derived from the prospect of the imminent death of Siegwart's much-loved father. Like Pater Philipp, old Siegwart makes an unexpected recovery purely so as to ensure that the emotional high point of his first illness may be surpassed by his subsequent final decline. The intention is clearly that old Siegwart's death should gain added poignancy by virtue of its being unexpectedly postponed. In fact, however, the effect is to trivialise both the death itself and the emotions to which it gives rise in the other characters. Very much the same is true of the multiplicity of accidents which occur in the course of the novel. The overturning of the carriage conveying Siegwart, Kronhelm and Therese; Kronhelm's fall and injury to his hand; to say nothing of the thunderstorms which accompany almost every dramatic scene between the young lovers: these serve no purpose other than to detract from the power and immediacy of the characters' emotional responses. Miller mistakenly assumes that emotion will be all the more eloquent, convincing and genuinely moving if its expression is often repeated.

Yet, as Miller makes entirely explicit in his preface to *Siegwart*, he by no means regards the specifically sentimental content of the novel as an end in itself. He borrows the standard ingredients of the sentimental tradition very much as a means to an end. He aims to instruct his readers; his view of human nature and his understanding of contemporary literary fashions alike require him to disguise his didactic intentions within the popular novel form. A moral message will, he asserts, be all the more readily

grasped if it is presented not as abstract theorising, but in the form of a story in which moral precepts are embodied by model characters:

Fast jeder Schriftsteller, und der Dichter besonders -- dessen Beruf ich für einen der erhabensten halte -- sollte hauptsächlich auf das Herz seiner Leser Rücksicht nehmen. Dadurch bahnt er sich am leichtesten den Weg zum Unterricht und zur Belehrung. Wer Empfindungen erhöht und bessert, der erreicht gewiß einen ebenso erhabenen Zweck, als der, welcher bloß für den Verstand sorgt. Der letztere Schriftsteller kann auch nicht so ausgebreitet wirken. Er hat immer nur eine kleinere Anzahl von Lesern, weil er Menschen voraussetzt, die schon in den Wissenschaften geübt sind.<sup>10</sup> [p.1]

For Miller it is of paramount importance that his books should achieve such a wide-ranging effect or influence. His idea of the novelist's role is very close to that envisaged by Hermes, whose *Sophiens Reise* contained instructions relating to every conceivable aspect of life, from the most exalted morality to advice on cooking. The novelist, Miller, believes "sollte so viel als möglich Allem alles werden. Daher muß sein Unterricht mannigfaltig, und an keine gewisse Form gebunden seyn" [p.2].

Some explicit narratorial comment provides us with information regarding the reading public Miller had in mind. His readers are in need of instruction, of moral guidance; themselves lacking experience of the world (and in particular of its darker aspects) they are scarcely in a position to form their own moral principles and assessments, unaided by Miller and similar instructors. Miller's readers are, he assumes, fundamentally innocent, unfamiliar with the evil of which human nature is capable, more likely to be distressed than corrupted by any insight he may give them into the extent of human depravity. "Wohl euch, edlen, unschuldsvollen Seelen" he writes, "denen das Laster unbegreiflich und der Gang einer boshafte Seele unerforschlich ist. Möchtet ihr immer bey eurer unwissenden Einfalt bleiben" [p.2]. It is interesting to note that this is precisely the reverse of Gellert's view of his readers. Gellert had taken for granted that

his public would be basically hostile to the *Tugendempfindsamkeit* for which he wished to win their approbation and sympathy. With expectations formed by familiarity with the gallant novel, they would be likely to regard with scepticism any attempt to inspire them with enthusiasm for the bourgeois ideal of virtue. Miller, on the contrary, assumes that his readers are already well acquainted with middle-class Sensibility, that they have, indeed, made it very much their own. They are not, therefore, in need of conversion to Miller's way of thinking; rather they merely require instruction in the details of virtuous living, on the choice of a university, a profession, a wife. In short, in the three decades between the publication of Gellert's novel and Miller's, Sensibility had become an accepted, one might even say an essential component of bourgeois culture.

Miller adheres to the more traditional method of instructing his readers -- he presents them with the example of a character who embodies all conceivable virtues. Such a model figure is Siegwart. He is at once introduced to the reader as an "edelgesinnter Jüngling" [p.3]. He possesses all manly, scholarly and artistic accomplishments. From an early age he has shown a marked interest in the skills of the warrior and hunter, while at the same time being a talented violinist and singer.<sup>11</sup> For all his sensibility he never appears weak or effeminate, in his early boyhood at least. His enthusiasm for outdoor pursuits is no less great than is his predilection for graveyard poetry. The result is a very favourable combination of characteristics: "Obwohl Siegwart für das Männliche und Charakteristische der Deutschen geschaffen war, so liebte er doch auch das Sanfte und die schöne stille Natur. Beydes ist sehr oft beisammen, und bildet einen liebenswürdigen, für die Welt sehr brauchbaren Charakter" [p.9]. In most essentials Siegwart corresponds to the early ideal of *Tugendempfindsamkeit* as contained in the novels of Richardson, Gellert and La Roche. For him, as for the Swedish Countess and



the Fräulein von Sternheim, virtue and sentiment are inseparable.

At the same time, Siegwart has much in common with Werther. Like Werther he is the victim of extreme emotional instability, vacillating continually between exaltation and despair, rarely experiencing either moderation or tranquillity. From Siegwart's earliest childhood it has been apparent that, perceived from any objective standpoint, he possesses a dangerous tendency to indulge in fervent unrestrained imaginings. Lacking stability, he is prone to switch allegiance from one overwhelming enthusiasm to another without benefit of much reasoned reflection. Thus he is easily influenced to abandon all thought of leading the active, outdoor life for which he is apparently so well suited, in favour of the monastery. Nor is his assessment of the relative advantages of the monastic life made on rational -- or for that matter specifically religious -- grounds. He does not debate the issue with himself with the intention of arriving at an informed conclusion. His first brief visit to the Kapuziner inspires him with a fervent appreciation of the æsthetic and atmosphere of their way of life, an appreciation which is almost entirely sentimental or nostalgic, and necessarily superficial. From this episode the reader may draw the conclusion that Siegwart's fiery temperament, which is kept in check by little of Kronhelm's quiet good sense, poses a threat to his ultimate happiness, perhaps even to his psychological health. There is some truth in Schönsee's assertion "Die Jugendgeschichte steht so ausführlich... um das Scheitern einsichtig zu machen."<sup>12</sup>

In one important respect Siegwart corresponds to the classic type of the melancholic. He is subject to fits of unaccountable sadness, to unspecified longings, to the vague sense that the world in which he finds himself is far from perfect, but such that he is powerless to alter it. He experiences mingled joy and despair, exultation and unease, the

intense satisfaction which *die Empfindsamen* derive from any intense emotion and a curious lack of fulfilment at one and the same time. Such is his reaction to the growing attachment between Kronhelm and Therese: "Siegwart fühlte in seinem Herzen eine nie empfundene Sehnsucht, die er nicht erklären konnte. Ein paarmal hob ein unwillkürlicher Seufzer seine Brust, es war ihm wohl und weh" [p.317].

We are told "Siegwart bekam immer mehr einen männlichen und festen Charakter", yet in the course of the narrative, whatever his natural physical courage, we see little evidence of such emotional stability [p.180]. Indeed, Miller makes it clear to the reader that Siegwart's superiority, his exceptional capacity for feeling, is responsible for his eventual unhappy fate. As is also the case with Werther, Siegwart's absolute desires prove to be irreconcilable with imperfect reality. This, Miller suggests, is the inevitable lot of such characters. "Kein Herz ist mehr zur Schwärmerey geneigt, als ein solches, das bei einer lebhaften Einbildungskraft ein zartes moralisches Gefühl hat, und es mit den Menschen, seinen Brüdern, gut meynt" [p.45].

As in Gellert's novel, in La Roche's and so some extent also in Goethe's, the characters in Miller's Siegwart are divided schematically into two groups: *die Empfindsamen* and the others, their opposites and natural adversaries. To this latter group belong all the cynical and materialistic men and women of the world, the rationalists, pragmatists and crude pleasure-seekers who have no inclination to cultivate their emotions, who know precisely how they should live to secure their own maximum advantage (whatever the cost to others). It is characteristic of these "others" that they are accomplished diplomatic masters in the art of dissimulation. It need scarcely be stressed that *die Empfindsamen* wish to have as little as possible to do with such people. Since they

generally succeed in gathering around them at least a small group of like-minded souls, the avoidance of these opponents usually presents no great difficulty. When such cynics do intrude into the select circle, they are generally ignored. Siegwart's brothers may therefore be dismissed each with two words of condemnation. Carl is "stolz und geizig" [p.99], Wilhelm "phlegmatisch und träge" [p.99]. Therese's attitude to them corresponds exactly to the attitude of *die Empfindsamen* -- "die wenigen Edlen" -- to the "others". We are told "mit beyden machte sie sich also nicht zu viel zu schaffen, und gab ihren Schwachheiten soviel als möglich nach" [p.99]. She can feel no sympathy for those so completely unlike herself, at best an indulgent condescension.

Furthermore, the portrayal of family relationships in Miller's novel was evidently profoundly influenced by the ideas of *Empfindsamkeit*. The relationship between Therese and Siegwart, her "Herzensbruder" [p.29] is particularly close, as is the understanding between both children and their father. Old Siegwart represents a model father in the new sentimental mould, one who will not sacrifice the happiness of his children to wealth or prestige: "Ich will meine Kinder zu keiner Sache zwingen, am wenigsten zur Wahl einer Lebensart, von der ihr künftiges Glück oder Unglück abhängt" [p.109]. Such sentiments, it should be remembered, were by no means commonplace in the eighteenth century.<sup>13</sup> This new kind of family relationship is based on feeling, rather than on obedience to parental authority as had hitherto tended to be the case. Siegwart, Therese and their father enjoy a very real intimacy and mutual trust. Therese especially is as much an equal and companion as she is a daughter. Old Siegwart discusses all family problems with her and values her advice as he would that of a contemporary. It is now assumed that there exist between parents and children reciprocal duties and responsibilities. It is no longer the prerogative of the parent to command, however

unreasonably or unfeelingly, or of the child to obey without question or demur. Veit Kronhelm and Hofrat Fischer are presented to the reader as entirely deserving of condemnation in their lack of affection for their offspring.

Indeed, we find in Miller's novel most of the familiar features of the *Empfindsamkeit* tradition. Critics have frequently drawn attention to the vital role played by tears in Miller's narrative. As we have seen, the characters in earlier novels of the sentimental school wept frequently and at the slightest provocation. Tears were for them not merely a sign of an entirely positive and desirable receptivity to emotion, but less obviously they were also proof of exemplary virtue. Only the model characters can weep at all; their harsh, egotistical opponents are incapable of it. The return of the ability to weep is widely regarded as certain proof of conversion to the path of virtue (compare Mellefont in Lessing's *Miss Sara Sampson* and Miller's *Gutfried*). It is significant that tears are still more frequent in Miller's novel than in Gellert's *Swedische Gräfin*, where they were on the whole reserved for moments of particular emotional tension, or even in La Roche's *Sternheim*. (Sophie Sternheim, we should remember, does have more reason for distress and even for self-pity than do most characters in the novel of *Empfindsamkeit*). Martin Greiner has made some exact calculations as to the incidence of tears in the three volumes of Miller's *Siegwart*.<sup>14</sup> The conclusion would appear to be that Miller became intoxicated by his own lachrymosity to such an extent that having expended his characters' tears for the most trivial causes, he is obliged to increase the intensity of the pathos at ever shorter intervals, if the emotional tension of the narrative is not to be lost completely.

It is difficult to conceive of a reaction adequate to a genuine calamity, such as the death

of a beloved parent, when so many tears have already been shed over the sentimental enjoyment of Klopstock and Kleist. Miller's response to this problem is interesting. As Greiner points out,<sup>15</sup> sentences such as "er hatte keine Thränen" are employed to convey "ein Maximum an Hoffnungslosigkeit... und gleichsam den Zustand einer bestürzenden seelischen Impotenz." At the same time it should not be forgotten -- though Greiner does appear to have overlooked this fact -- that if tears are more frequent in the final volume of the novel, so also are reasons for tears. In the first volume, especially, the characters are often very merry, even humorous. In lamenting, and mocking, the lachrymose tendency of Miller's novel, critics have conspicuously failed to do justice to its lighter aspects. It cannot really be said that his characters find such pleasure in weeping that they deliberately seek out situations which will give rise to grief, simply in order to create opportunities for intense emotional experience. When there is cause for laughter rather than tears, Miller's characters, for all their sensibility, can and do laugh very gaily. They are repeatedly said to be "vergnügt" [p.305]. The married life of Therese and Kronhelm indicates that when life offers them the possibility of happiness, they enjoy it to the full. Old Siegwart, for all that he is the prototype of the "empfindsamer Vater", has wept only twice in his whole life, once on the death of his wife and now when Xaver sets out to study in Ingolstadt [p.142].

Greiner argues that Miller's characters, not least because of their tears, are entirely banal and undeserving of our interest:<sup>16</sup>

Das stereotyp wiederkehrende "und weinte" ist die charakteristische Wendung, gleichsam der Schlüssel zu dem ganzen Werke. Er schließt die Einsicht auf, das hier gar nicht von besonderen Ausnahmenaturen, von genialischen Menschen die Rede ist, sondern von recht durchschnittlichen und alltäglichen sogar, die außerdem weinen.

This analysis is less than helpful. Miller nowhere claims to be dealing with "genialischen

Menschen"; his characters are, surely, conceived very much as representative types, as young men and women in very average circumstances and of very limited ambitions, whose interests are confined almost entirely to the private sphere of family and personal relations. The depiction of the larger-than-life figures Greiner envisages would in fact be incompatible with Miller's avowed aim of providing his readers with detailed advice on how best to conduct their lives. His readers would on the whole be young people of middle-class birth and very average education. If they were to accept exemplars, then these must be at once sufficiently average for a parallel with the reader to be apparent and sufficiently exceptional to serve as models. Miller's characters display the desire to escape from the world which we observed in the novels of Gellert and La Roche. The most obvious example of this tendency -- a tendency entirely typical of *Empfindsamkeit* -- is Siegwart's wish to enter a monastery. This resolve is by no means prompted solely by piety or by a determination to devote his life to the service of God. Attractive as is the tranquillity of the monastery, its ceremony, even the opportunities it provides for useful practical work, Siegwart's resolve is motivated primarily by his general sense of dissatisfaction, his world-weariness before he has acquired the experience necessary for a balanced appraisal of the world. One is reminded of Werther's vague longing for security in limitation ("Einschränkung"), of Sophie Sternheim's fear of the fashionable world of the *Residenz*, of Gellert's Countess and her friends in their desire to retreat into quiet bourgeois domesticity. Even Kronhelm and Therese, in other respects thoroughly cheerful and positive in their attitudes, delight in constructing a shared dream-world as a means of escaping from the difficulties of life. Their ideal is to live as hermits, far from refined society in peace and quiet, visited only from time to time by a few like-minded friends. It almost seems that Miller's characters are largely negative in their response to life, that their desire to flee the world has its



roots in fear of that world. Kronhelm writes to Therese, "Ach Therese, laß uns eilen an den Ort, wo keine Menschen sind. Denn der Mensch ist kalt und grausam" [p.335].

The ultimate extension of this attitude is an indifference to life itself. Kronhelm makes this life-denying stance explicit [p.337] "Man muß aufhören, ein Mensch zu seyn, wenn man glücklich werden will". When it becomes apparent that Siegwart does not return her love and will never do so, Sophie too longs for death:

Ach, ich hatte einst eine Schwester, sie ist nun bey Gott. Sie war mein Alles, meine innigst vertraute Freundin. Sie starb in meinem Arm. Ach, wenn ich nun schon bey ihr wäre. Sie ist glücklich, über alles glücklich. Und auf Erden kann man's nicht seyn [p.356].

The unfamiliar experience of love has a similar effect on Siegwart: "Er fühlte eine dunkle Sehnsucht, sich hinzulegen und zu sterben" [p.422]. It is not difficult to detect here evidence of the preoccupation with death and dying so central in the cult of Sensibility. Moreover, Miller shares the predilection we observed in the novels of Gellert, La Roche and Goethe for the portrayal of moving and edifying death-bed scenes. One such instance is provided by the death of Pater Joseph, which Pater Anton later describes in some detail to Siegwart: "Ach, du hättest ihn sehen sollen, wie er starb, mit welcher Ruhe, mit welcher Heiterkeit. Aber so ein Leben war auch eines solchen Todes wert" [p.21]. Siegwart and Kronhelm derive similar moral advantages from the death of Pater Philipp: "Die beyden Jünglinge waren unaufhörlich um ihn und lernten aus seinem Munde tausend weise Lehren, denn nichts ist lehrreicher als das Krankenbette eines weisen Christen. Nirgends dringen die Lehren tiefer ein" [p.264]. In Miller's novel, death-bed scenes serve a double purpose: "Die Bewegung der Seele wird zum Selbstzweck, und fast jedes Mittel ist recht, das geeignet ist, die Seele zu rühren. Darum -- und nicht nur aus didaktischen Gründen -- sind Sterbeszenen so ungemein beliebt, denn der Tod ist weniger schrecklich als die Austrocknung der Seele".<sup>17</sup> These two elements, the sentimental and the didactic, are developed throughout the novel, as

separate but related phenomena. The specifically sentimental element has kept pace with contemporary literary fashions, while the didactic aspect looks back to the *Tugendempfindsamkeit* of Gellert. It is significant that Miller's characters show no interest in the writings of the Stürmer and Dränger, preferring to weep over Klopstock, Kleist, Gellert and Gessner. Their preoccupation with virtue, as with tranquil family life, point back to a more secure and complacent world-view than that portrayed in Goethe's *Werther*. As Carl Heine and Hans Heinrich Borchardt have pointed out, Miller has depicted an ideal of innocence and moral purity specific to the early eighteenth century.<sup>18</sup> Miller's ideal is very far from the unrestrained emotionalism which many critics believed to be synonymous with *Empfindsamkeit*.<sup>19</sup> His characters do not strive after intellectual or emotional freedom; for them limitation (*Einschränkung*) is always desirable.

This point is best illustrated by reference to the depiction of Therese. Therese is the personification of quiet, domestic bourgeois values, susceptible to feeling, yet at the same time free from all excessive sentimentality, all over-cultivation of emotion or intellect.

[Sie war] ein rasches, naïves Landmädchen, mit einem runden, vollen Gesicht, das von der Farbe der Gesundheit glühte.- In ihren Reden war sie schnell und heftig, ihr Witz war immer neu und lebhaft. Munterkeit erwachte, wo sie hinkam und sie lachte gern aus vollem Herzen... Nichts liebte sie mehr als Geschäftigkeit, und besonders häusliche Beschäftigungen [p.98].

Therese prefers the performance of domestic chores to attendance at social functions. Significantly, her favourite attire is that of the Arcadian shepherdess [p.105]. She is frequently contrasted with her sister, Salome, who is sufficiently condemned by the fact that she chooses to live, not in her native Swabian village, but in fashionable Munich where she can enjoy the admiration of "Hofkammerdienern, Läufern und dergleichen

Leuten" [p.101]. It is to the credit of Therese, Miller implies, that she was unhappy in the town and longed to return to "die einfältige, ungekünstelte Natur" [p.102]. As in La Roche's novel, the rivalry between town and country is depicted largely as a conflict between differing moral standards. Werther, it should be remembered, is captivated above all perhaps by Lotte's exemplary performance as housekeeper and substitute mother. Kronhelm, similarly, is delighted by the spectacle of Therese performing with supreme skill and diligence all those tasks necessary to the well-being of her family. His love for her increases when he observes her in earnest and respectful conversation with the vicar of Windenheim, or playing with his little niece. It seems likely that this picture of domestic, contented womanhood was one which had considerable attraction for the contemporary public -- as is indeed evident from the popularity of the scene depicting Lotte cutting bread for her little brothers and sisters. Therese, like Lotte, conforms to an ideal of the time.<sup>20</sup> While fitting into this pattern, Therese is also intended as a model to the reader, just as Siegwart is conceived both as a response to the mood of the time and as a guide in all matters of good conduct. There is in Therese none of the almost hysterical, often merely affected sensibility deplored by the critics of *Empfindsamkeit*. She is, rather, a healthy country girl, healthy in mind as in body, lacking in finesse perhaps, but more than compensating for this deficiency -- scarcely a deficiency in Miller's perception or in that of his similarly-minded reader -- by her simplicity, spontaneity and naturalness, her devotion to father and brother, her zeal for domestic chores. It is not least on account of these qualities that Kronhelm loves her, and rightly so, Miller implies. Therese responds in the most commendable manner possible to every situation, in such a manner moreover as to ensure the affection and good opinion of all those around her, including the discerning uncle who is able to reward her with Kronhelm's hand. It is the strongest possible recommendation to the reader both of

Therese's conduct and of Kronhelm's choice of a wife that their happiness is at last secured despite all difficulties.

Therese, in short, is no fine lady. Indeed, Miller's exemplary characters view with suspicion anything which might be regarded as betraying an excess of cultivation or finesse. Like La Roche's Sophie and Goethe's Werther, they value rustic simplicity. The most socially accomplished figures in the novel -- Kreutzner, the Lieutenant, Hofrat Fischer -- are also the most suspect, even degenerate, all the more dangerous because they conceal their vicious tendencies under a veneer of sophisticated gallantry. Pater Philipp explicitly warns Siegwart and Kronhelm against those who are all too obviously courteous: "die gar zu höflichen Leuten kann ich für den Tod nicht ausstehen. Sie haben immer so ihre Ursachen und Nebenabsichten dabey, warum sie es sind. Da wer's gut meynt, geht grad heraus und sagt ohne Umschweife, was er denkt" [p.165]. This emphasis on simple unaffected manners corresponds to Miller's general insistence on the superiority of the quiet rural way of life over the shallow sophistication of the town. Like Gellert, La Roche and indeed Goethe, Miller is openly contemptuous of the gallant, courtly ideal. The values he would substitute for this ideal are simplicity and innocence. Particularly in the case of Siegwart, this innocence often amounts to an extreme -- so extreme as to be almost incredible -- naïveté. Like La Roche's Sternheim he is an easy victim for all those with some skill in deception. He is himself so innocent and pure in heart that he can scarcely conceive that others may be capable of lying. However unlikely Kreutzner's inventions become, he will believe the worst tales of Kronhelm and Pater Philipp rather than suspect his friend of deceit. As in La Roche's novel, this extreme gullibility is intended as a further proof of the exemplary virtue of the hero, since it is axiomatic among *die Empfindsamen* that those who can suspect others of evil

must themselves be capable of it.

It is significant -- and appropriate -- that in Miller's novel as elsewhere *die Empfindsamen* are invariably young. Schragger, the husband Hofrat Fischer intends for his daughter, is an outsider not least on account of his age (he is around thirty), something which is itself regarded as proof of his lack of sensibility. By contrast, Siegwart and Marianne, Kronhelm and Therese are as yet only on the brink of life, manifestly still "Jünglinge" and "Mädchen". Sensibility, particularly as it becomes evident in the experience of love, is in the latter part of the eighteenth century very substantially the prerogative of the young. It is true that in the literature of Sensibility we also encounter the type of the "empfindsamer Vater", while the "ehrwürdiger Alter" combines popular wisdom with an element of sentimentality. Yet it is on the whole the very young who constitute the heroes and heroines of sentimental fiction and drama, those who do not yet require to sacrifice the cultivation of emotion to the attainment of prosperity or success. Contempt for the professional world -- the world of an Albert or a Schragger -- is an essential part of the ethos of Sensibility.

The characters' experience of music and literature is very much in the tradition of *Empfindsamkeit*. Indeed, Miller accords to music specifically a degree of significance which would appear to look forward to the Romantics. He writes of "Trauermusik, die die Seele durch dunkle, menschenleere Wüsten bis ans Grab hinführte, und sie von der Verwesung des Körpers zurückschauern machte" [p.76]. Siegwart and Kronhelm frequently play their violins together in a deliberate attempt to create an atmosphere of quiet pathos: "Und nun spielten sie so schmelzend, so bebend und so wimmernd, daß ihre Seelen weich wie Wachs wurden" [p.239]. It is of course entirely typical of *die*



*Empfindsamen* that Siegwart and Marianne first come to an understanding about their feelings for one another while making music together -- music, like literature, it was believed, tending to produce an emotional or sentimental ambience. It is the model characters, *die Empfindsamen*, who appreciate music. Veit Kronhelm is adequately characterised by the fact that he detests it. It goes without saying in this context that music must serve an emotional rather than an æsthetic purpose. Music is important not in so far as it pleases the ear -- this is a secondary consideration only -- but when it touches the heart and inspires the listener to new heights of sensibility. Siegwart, Kronhelm and Therese, the circle of *die Empfindsamen*, structure their lives -- and above all, of course, their personal relationships -- around the shared experience of literature. They have no aims which could properly be called scholarly; like Werther and Lotte they have a personal and subjective attitude towards literature. In literary texts they look for and indeed find parallels to their own experience, reflections of their own emotional states. The works which they prefer are those which offer most scope for such identification, such stimulation of their feelings. At moments of particular tension, as for instance before a parting, Miller's characters will inevitably turn to the literature of Sensibility. Most frequently consulted at such times is Klopstock's *Messias*. Therese explains: "Klopstock ist auch ein Freund der Leidenden. Er entzückt mich oft. Nun [when she has reached the point of despair and -- she believes -- imminent death] kann ich ihn erst ganz schätzen. Denn im Leiden sieht man, was ein Freund ist; und das ist er über alle Maßen, Gott und er" [p.351]. It is scarcely surprising that the characters' reading-patterns are intensive rather than extensive.<sup>21</sup> They revel in their familiarity with the canon of sentimental literature. Kronhelm and Therese plan to begin their new life as hermits with only a very few books. Klopstock, Kleist, a minimum of others they must have; all the rest may be safely consigned to the flames. Klopstock and Kleist have



in effect rendered all other works superfluous [p.305]. This canon is to be consulted religiously at every time of trial or crisis, less because it can provide readily applicable advice than because emotion is intensified (for *die Empfindsamen* always a desirable end); at the same time rendered more endurable by the knowledge that it constitutes a part of the general burden of suffering which must be borne by "die wenigen Edlen". *Die Empfindsamen* find in their reading the assurance that they are exceptional, an emotional and spiritual elite. At the same time they may draw comfort from the certainty that they are not alone in their sorrows. This latter assurance does not inspire them with confidence in a happier future, it merely renders the inevitable resignation and renunciation more intensely satisfying, at once more painful and more pleasurable; for, as we have seen, for *die Empfindsamen* the nature of any feeling, whether it be painful or pleasurable, is of considerably less importance than its intensity. Since so much emotional and moral sustenance is to be derived from a few works of literature, *die Empfindsamen* are able to recognise one another by the conformity of their literary tastes. This is certainly the case with Kronhelm and Therese. "Therese hatte große Stellen aus dem *Messias* und aus Kleist, die ihr vorzüglich gefielen, und die auch in der Tat die besten waren, abgeschrieben. Kronhelm las sie vor; ihre Empfindungen waren fast immer dieselben, und oft riefen sie zur gleichen Zeit vor Bewunderung aus, wenn sie eine Stelle vorzüglich rührte" [p.294].

The cult of friendship has a vital role to play in Miller's novel. As is typical of *die Empfindsamen* -- compare Werther and Wilhelm -- Siegwart and Kronhelm consistently address one another as "Bruder". In their years at school and university they are virtually inseparable, confidants in everything. When Siegwart falls in love, the friends spend hours sitting together in the dark, either completely silent or playing together mournful

music -- "wehklagende Stücke" [p.418]. When Siegwart discovers Kreuzner's treachery and is reconciled to Kronhelm, their reconciliation resembles that after a lovers' quarrel. Moreover, many friendships in the novel correspond to the sentimental pattern in that they are instantly contracted between virtual strangers. Thus Pater Philipp is favourably disposed towards Siegwart from their first moment of meeting. Similarly, Marianne at once loves Therese as a sister simply from Siegwart's description of her, a sentiment which comes to her all the more readily because the two girls, both examples of *Empfindsame*, are very similar in character. It should be remembered that in loving others *die Empfindsamen* often love the reflection of their own merits -- and especially of course the reflection of their own capacity for emotion. As Balet and Gerhard have pointed out, "Es ging bei den Freundschaften... nicht um das Objekt, nicht um den Freund, sondern einzig und allein um das subjektive Gefühl. Was damals Freundschaft hieß, war in den meisten Fällen nur Selbstberauschung am Freund".<sup>22</sup> However, the theme of sentimental friendship is given a slightly different treatment by Miller from that which we observed in the novels of his predecessors: Goethe's *Werther* had already implied scepticism over the efficacy of such close friendships, and Miller is explicitly critical of those sentimental idealists who mistakenly suppose that a single meeting, even a single moment, is sufficient to establish conformity of tastes, ideas and feelings. True friendship, *empfindsam* in the best sense, is demonstrated by Kronhelm:

Er blieb sich in allen Lagen immer gleich, und wen er einmal liebte, von dem war sein Herz nicht mehr abzuziehen, sein Freund müßte denn lasterhaft gewesen seyn [there is in virtuous friendship as in virtuous love always this reservation]. Dies war ihm aber niemals noch begegnet, denn er war in der Wahl seiner Freunde vorsichtig und langsam. Er machte keine Freundschaftsversicherungen, und bot seine Dienste niemals an, aber, sobald sein Freund sie nöthig hatte, half er ihm, ohne was davon zu sagen [p.181].

Miller's portrayal of love also owes much to traditional *Empfindsamkeit*. Kronhelm's

love for Therese, despite the fact that it is requited and eventually results in marriage, closely conforms to the pattern of Werther's sentimental passion for Lotte. His feelings, like Werther's, are sacred to him. His beloved is enveloped in an aura of holiness, as is everything pertaining to her. As Werther had also done, Kronhelm religiously guards a bunch of flowers given to him by Therese, quite simply "weil er sie von Theresen empfangen hatte" [p.309]. Like both Seymour and Werther, Kronhelm assiduously creates a veritable cult of the beloved. Among his most treasured possessions he numbers a bow from Therese's dress, a motif already familiar to the reader of *Werther*. "Sie war ihm so heilig wie eine Reliquie, und er sah sie nachher oft halbe Stunden lang an, und drückte sie an seinen Mund" [p.351]. Kronhelm insists that "Wer einmal liebt, liebt ewig" [p.404]. Unhappy in love, he reacts in the manner typical of the romantic hero, exhibiting a propensity to almost violent melancholy, more characteristic of Werther than of the gentle youth he would otherwise consistently appear to be.

Kronhelms Seele versank itzt nach und nach in die tiefste düsterste Melancholie. Sein ganzer Charakter bekam eine andere Wendung. Er ward heftig und auffahrend und über alles ärgerlich. Alles, was er sah und hörte und die ganz Welt ward ihn zuwider. Er verachtete das ganze Menschengeschlecht... Er las in seinen Büchern nichts als düstere, wehmütige Stellen. Die Musik ergötzte ihn auch nicht mehr. Nur zuweilen phantasierte er in lauten Dissonanzen und wimmernden Tönen. Die Einsamkeit war ihm das liebste, und sie lobte er allein. Oft pries er unsern Siegwart wegen des Entschlusses selig, die Welt zu verlassen [p.236].

Here Miller has adopted the conventions of later *Empfindsamkeit* not so much because in so doing he hopes to shed new light on the workings of the human psyche, or because he thereby hopes to influence his readers for good -- Kronhelm's extreme reaction did after all have its dangers, as Goethe's novel had recently demonstrated -- but rather because he has, with whatever degree of conscious intention, been influenced by new romantic ideas of love, derived very substantially from Goethe's *Werther*. Siegwart's relationship with Marianne has a similar aura of spiritual religiosity. It is symptomatic

that he first sees her in church, where he is overwhelmed by the spectacle of her kneeling in devout prayer. "War das ein Engel, oder war's Maria?" [p.411] he asks. For a long time Siegwart's meetings with his beloved take place in no other setting. It is entirely appropriate, therefore, that the lovers meet their fate behind convent walls. The narrator adheres to the convention of *Empfindsamkeit* and describes Marianne as "schön und heiter wie ein Engel Gottes". Typically also Marianne's various youthful admirers fail totally to regard her as a physical being. The sensual element is entirely lacking in their appreciation of her; Gutfried makes this clear:

Aber sie war doch für mich zu heilig; ich sah zu ihr hinauf wie zu der Mutter Gottes, und wünschte nichts als einen einzigen Gnadenblick von ihr. Einmal sah ich sie am Allerheiligen in der Kirche. Ihr Aug und Herz bebeten vor Andacht. Nun wagt ich's doch zum ersten Mal wieder, meine Augen aufzuheben und Gott um Erbarmung anzuflehen [p.462].

The sight of Marianne at prayer is sufficient to convince the hitherto irreligious Gutfried of the error of his ways. From this crucial moment onwards, he is a devoted and resolute convert to virtue. Thus Marianne indeed takes on the traditional role of the angel. Siegwart, like Gutfried, is for a long time paralysed by his feelings of veneration for Marianne. When he does act, it is only to ensure that he obtain an opportunity for continuous undisturbed observation of the object of his affections. As Gutfried had already done, he rents a room with a view over Fischer's house. His extreme respect for Marianne and the timidity this engenders will not permit him to approach nearer. Perhaps one might also see in this hesitancy evidence of a general tendency to procrastination. Siegwart -- as reflective as Werther, if less original in his reflections -- shares with Werther a propensity to cultivate thought and feeling at the expense of action.

The Sophie episode provides a further instance of sentimental love. When Sophie is

dying she bequeaths to Siegwart a diary chronicling the course of her unrequited love for him. It is disappointment in love which induces Sophie to take refuge in religion. Religion is for her a substitute for love. She pours out her feelings for Siegwart, her "bridegroom" and looks forward to reunion with him in Heaven, a reunion which, having forsworn earthly love, she has no theological right to anticipate. The imagery she employs in her descriptions of Siegwart is reminiscent of the mystical tradition of the Song of Songs:

Schön bist du, mein Geliebter, blühest wie die Rose, die am Morgen aufwacht in Thau. Schön bist du, mein Bräutigam. Deine Wangen sind rosenrot. Blau ist dein Auge wie der Mittagshimmel; mild dein Lächeln wie die Abendsonne, golden sind deine Haare, wie die goldbeschaumten Wolken, wenn die Sonne sinkt. Der du itzt schon so lieblich bist, wie wirst du einst beschmückt sein in den Tagen der Belohnung. Wie einhergehen unter Engeln und Gerechten [p.377].

Such protestations do not add up to a coherent view of life or of love. Sophie at one and the same time addresses Siegwart as her "Bridegroom" and assures him "Ich will eine Braut des Himmels seyn" [p.337]. This confusion is in itself perhaps less surprising than is the fact that Miller has his character -- an innocent young girl -- express her feelings for her beloved in such explicitly erotic terms. It is Siegwart's physical beauty on which Sophie concentrates, not, as the reader of sentimental fiction might have expected, on his moral perfections. This fact is perhaps best explained if we bear in mind that Miller was affected by the new Wertherian concept of romantic love more perhaps than he might have cared to acknowledge -- more even than he knew or would have considered desirable. While it remains indisputably true that Miller could approve and recommend to his readers only that love which was sanctioned by reason and virtue, he nevertheless sustains a distinct predilection for the sentimental, for the expression in intoxicating language of intense, self-indulgent emotion. This predilection involves him in certain dangers.



The issue of suicide is relevant in this context. Reminiscent of Goethe's *Werther* is the close association of love and death in Miller's novel, the idea that death may provide the only possible escape from unhappy love. There can be no question for Miller of a deliberate resolution of this conflict through suicide, that most sinful of actions, however great may be the suffering of the characters. Both Siegwart and Therese are designed as models, as exemplars; at no point therefore may they be permitted to overstep the bounds of virtuous conduct. The hero's death may offer proof of the intensity of his pain, thereby providing both edification and emotional satisfaction for the reader; but death cannot be administered by his own hand. For religious and moral reasons Miller must substitute death from a vaguely defined broken heart for the controversial, still largely unacceptable suicide.

One is tempted to ask whether by so doing Miller is not begging the following question. Suicide, one would have thought, must have been unacceptable to the eighteenth-century moralist largely because it constituted the most blatant denial of divine Providence, a denial of the value of human life. In this context, it is logically speaking, irrelevant whether the act of suicide is actually accomplished; the mere wish for death, one must have thought, must have precisely the same implications. By wishing to die -- as Siegwart, Marianne, Kronhelm and Therese all do wish at some time -- they are by implication rejecting the generally accepted law according to which the individual, every individual, will eventually secure his own greatest happiness if he is only prepared to wait patiently for the working-out of the ordained scheme of things. Miller is apparently aware of no conflict here. He intends his principal characters to serve both as paragons, instructing the reader in virtuous conduct, and as focal points of feeling -- themselves *âmes sensibles* living out their fate in such a way as to work to the highest possible



degree on the emotions of the reader. These two aims are in some measure irreconcilable. If Miller's characters can be seen to endure almost unendurable suffering, this can best be made apparent if their suffering is so great as to make them weary of life; and yet, according to Christian doctrine as to the doctrine of traditional *Tugendempfindsamkeit*, despair is morally inexcusable, constituting as it does a direct denial of the belief in a beneficent Providence.

It is no longer assumed, as was the case in the novels of Gellert and La Roche, that love is merely a particularly valued form of friendship, respect to be granted almost automatically as a reward for exceptional merit. Indeed, Kronhelm explicitly distances himself from this view of love. When Siegwart urges him to declare his affection for Regine, Kronhelm excuses himself on the grounds that whatever regard he may feel for the young lady on account of her moral worth, this cannot be enough to induce love. He takes advantage of the situation to deliver to Siegwart, and to the reader, some advice on the correct conduct of relations between the sexes:

Man kann im Umgang mit Mädchen nicht vorsichtig genug seyn, jedes Wort muß man abwägen, sie legen gar zu gerne aus, und wir müssen keine Veranlassung dazu geben... Ich halte jeden für einen Feind des weiblichen Geschlechts, der den Mädchen nichts als Süßigkeiten vorsagt, alles an ihnen bewundert and ehrt, und ihnen unaufhörlich die Hände leckt. Die armen Geschöpfe wissen gar nicht, worauf es ausgesehen ist? Und ob man's aufrichtig mit ihnen meynt? Sie werden entweder Koquetten oder mißtrauisch und spröde [p.249].

Kronhelm has the discernment and practical sense to distinguish between genuine feeling and mere affectation. He sees in Regine something of the false sensibility (*falsche Empfindsamkeit*) to which so many critics took exception in contemporary literature and society.

We must remember that in the novels of Gellert and La Roche there was no very great

difference in kind or degree between love and friendship, or between the various forms of love. As Natalie Halperin has pointed out:

Es gibt wenige Abstufungen der Empfindungsstärke, je nach dem realen Wert des Objektes, auf das es sich bezieht, wenige Differenzen in den verschiedenen Beziehungsarten, zum Beispiel zum Freund, zur Braut, zum Meister usw. Es gibt nur ein empfindsames Gefühl, das gewaltig ausbrach und mit gleicher Stärke die verschiedensten Menschen umfing.<sup>23</sup>

Nor did Gellert's characters experience any great difficulty in transforming love into friendship, should duty so require. Love for Gellert's characters, as for La Roche's heroine, was morally inferior to friendship. It was a less important aspect of life, one without which life was entirely possible, useful and even pleasurable.

Therese makes some attempt at such self-sacrifice for her beloved Kronhelm. Since their marriage would appear to be impossible, she tries to convince herself that he at least may still hope to find happiness with another. There can be no question here of a continuing peaceful friendship between Therese and the newly married couple, no such relationship as is established between Gellert's Count and Countess, Caroline and Herr R. Therese does not expect to survive Kronhelm's marriage. Her sentiments are both similar to and different from those of the early *Empfindsame*. Like the model characters of Gellert and La Roche, she lacks all propensity to sexual jealousy. Her readiness to love Kronhelm's future wife is entirely typical -- and entirely sincere. Within the context of the novel of Sensibility it provides certain proof of her exemplary virtue. Jealousy conquers only weak, foolish characters such as Gellert's Marianne, or monsters such as Lessing's Marwood. For the virtuous *Empfindsame*, love is equivalent to altruism. For them any other reaction than unmitigated delight at the happiness in love achieved by a former suitor is both illogical and inconceivable. Therese loves Kronhelm because she has recognised his exceptional merits, not least of course his

exceptional sensibility. It is moreover typical of *Empfindsamkeit* that Therese already regards herself as loving someone -- Kronhelm's future wife -- whom she has never even met. She can be assured only that the young lady in question belongs to the extended family of *die Empfindsamen* which is in itself sufficient guarantee that she is worthy of Therese's affections.

To all appearances Therese accepts her fate with the exemplary *Gelassenheit* of Gellert's and La Roche's heroines. She will not complain, she writes, but submit to the decrees of Providence. Anything other than total submission, it is implied, would amount to unholy rebellion. But is Therese as resigned as she would have us believe? She wishes that it might be in her power to submit with something like patience, but she has no great hopes of being able to endure her lot. As we have seen, she anticipates speedy death as a certainty and a release. Thus we find in conjunction two attitudes which ought in strict logic to be mutually exclusive.

The theme of persecuted innocence, so central to the novels of Gellert and La Roche, appears again in Miller's narrative, albeit in modified form. Significantly, the specifically sexual element is absent in Miller's treatment of this question. We find none of the ambiguity inherent in Hermes' portrayal of imperilled virtue. Miller's readers are to remain as innocent as Siegwart and Marianne. Marianne, and to a certain extent also Therese, are persecuted; not, it is true, by seducers, but by proud, materialistic and (on occasion) violent fathers, who are anxious to prevent a *mésalliance* at all costs. It is surely significant that the violent actions of Veit Kronhelm and Hofrat Fischer are described in some detail. Here considerations of psychological plausibility are clearly secondary: if Veit's venomous and ultimately fatal rage at the prospect of a marriage

between his son and the humble *Amtmann's* daughter Therese is at least partly explicable with reference to the exaggerated pride of some aristocrats in lineage and station, the frantic insistence of Hofrat Fischer that Marianne should marry the entirely respectable but unprepossessing Schragger appears somewhat arbitrary, since the family is sufficiently well thought of in Ingolstadt society to be visited by aristocrats such as Kronhelm. One also wonders why the Hofrat had initially taken such pains to make the unworthy Siegwart so completely at home in his family circle, when he must surely (astute observer of human weakness that he appears to be) have suspected that his daughter was likely to form an attachment to a young and agreeable man, whose tastes, feelings and ideas harmonise so completely with her own. Miller makes no attempt to preempt such questions in the mind of the reader. It is sufficient for his purposes that both Veit and Hofrat Fischer should appear as villains, eager to thwart the entirely legitimate and suitable love of their unfortunate offspring. Whether they do so in the pursuit of some recognisable and logical end is of relatively little significance. By portraying such thoroughly evil characters Miller is able to increase the reader's natural sympathy for the young lovers. By this means he can arouse a variety of emotions -- pity, suspense, righteous anger. The more violent the response of the villainous fathers, the greater will the reader's sympathy for their victims be, the more admirable also will be the sustained dutiful endurance of Siegwart, Marianne, Kronhelm and Therese in the face of such apparently insurmountable opposition and relentless persecution. Miller's depiction of love has been aptly characterised by Alan Faure:<sup>24</sup> "*Siegwart* paraît se situer... entre le roman sentimental d'épreuves à la Richardson où tout s'achève par le mariage, et la conception Wertherienne et romantique de la passion fatale, où le héros est détruit par son amour même." As we have seen, Werther experiences love as an absolute. For him love constitutes the focal point of existence, without which no other

aspect of life can have meaning, without which life is worthless and can be thrown away. Miller has clearly taken account of this new romantic assessment of love. However great may be the influence on his writing of early *Tugendempfindsamkeit*, it cannot be maintained that he is entirely critical of the new Wertherian attitudes. It is true that Siegwart and Marianne perish because they refuse to compromise their ideal of love, but the effect of their deaths should not only be to increase the reader's sympathy for their suffering. As in Goethe's novel, the untimely death of the hero must be seen at least to some extent as constituting an unfavourable verdict by the author, since Siegwart's fate -- death from a broken heart -- is in fact a direct consequence of his extreme subjectivity. Yet at the same time Siegwart, more than Werther, is presented to the reader as a victim not only of his own feelings, but also of the callous manoeuvrings of others. He is a martyr to a feeling which is in itself entirely legitimate, often edifying and moreover inspired by the most suitable and worthy object. Like Werther, Siegwart "geht zugrunde an den besten Kräften seines Wesens".<sup>25</sup> His most noble emotions and impulses are directly responsible for his self-destruction.

We should not assume that Miller is here making any very profound philosophical point regarding the fundamental ambiguity of human existence. There is no indication that he sees Siegwart's relationship to Marianne in any such symbolic terms. Rather we must conclude that he is unsure in his own mind. On the one hand, he clearly recognises the dangers inherent in the emotional absolutism which defeats Werther and constantly threatens Siegwart. The moral imperative which precludes defiance of even the most unjust parental decrees also makes Miller suspicious of overpowering feelings as such. Pater Philipp warns Kronhelm against according too much and too exclusive attention to emotion in general and to love in particular, thereby neglecting his sacred duties towards

God and society:

Mach er die Liebe nicht zum Haupttriebfeder seiner Handlungen, und vergeß er seine übrige Bestimmung nicht darüber. Dies ist der gewöhnliche Fehler bey jungen Leuten. Sie glauben nur für ihr Mädchen allein geschaffen zu seyn und gegen die übrige Welt weiter keine Pflicht zu haben... Die Liebe sollte uns am meisten zur Vervollkommnung unserer selbst antreiben. Denn je mehr Vorzüge und innere Vollkommenheiten wir haben, desto glücklicher können wir einst den geliebten Gegenstand machen. Durch Kenntnisse und Wissenschaften bahnen wir uns den Weg zu Ehrenstellen, ansehnlichen Ämtern und Besoldungen. Und dann können wir mit gutem Gewissen einem Frauenzimmer unsere Hand anbieten. [p.314]

Here one is reminded of Werther's satirical depiction of that type of love which is compatible with good sense, good prospects, moderation in all things.

We would be wrong to assume that Miller's largely sympathetic portrayal of love constitutes nothing more than a concession to the tastes of his youthful, and no doubt substantially female, readership. It would rather appear to be the case that Miller, with some important reservations, accepts the Wertherian emphasis on the love relationship. He is certainly far from believing with Gellert and La Roche that love is by its very nature inferior to friendship; or that it must be possible for every virtuous and reasonable person to suppress his love, retaining only an altruistic affection for its object, should unsurmountable obstacles be placed in the way of its realisation. Both Therese and Kronhelm are in every sense of the word model characters. There is no situation to which they do not respond with exemplary moral rectitude, sensitivity and altruism. Yet both fail utterly in their attempts to turn their forbidden love for one another into pure friendship. If they do not openly resist or defy the misplaced pride of Veit Kronhelm, nor do they accept his judgement as final. They grow sad, weak and ill, looking forward to the apparently certain prospect of a speedy death with something like anticipation. In short, in Miller's novel it is no longer an essential feature of moral perfection that a



person be capable of accepting cheerfully the necessity of replacing love by friendship. Indeed, Therese's father scarcely expects that his daughter should accomplish such a feat of resignation, despite his advice that she endeavour to do so. One might also see here evidence of the influence of *Werther*, a novel in which the greater emphasis placed on romantic love was a substantially important factor in obscuring moral issues which had hitherto been both unambiguous and paramount. Beyond this merely literary influence, one can even look to the general movement towards increasing secularisation of society; to a shift in emphasis from the specifically religious, through the merely didactic, to a new state of subjectivity.

Siegwart is constantly urged by Marianne to place his trust in God, to wait patiently and passively for Him to resolve all their difficulties in His own good time. There can be little doubt that Miller would recommend this course of action to the young and inexperienced reader as that necessary if he is to perform his duties to God and society. The possibility that Kronhelm and Therese, or Siegwart and Marianne might actually defy the entirely unjust decrees of cruel and avaricious fathers is never raised. Their natural virtue is evidently such that they can have no plans which would conflict with the accepted moral code of the time -- a solution is sought not in defiance but in death. As Reinhard Schönsee makes clear: "Marianne beruhigt Siegwart immer wieder, daß Gott ihre Liebe segnen werde. Doch das Schicksal versagt das irdische Glück. Miller sucht den Widerspruch in der Theodizee, die scheinbare Ungerechtigkeit zu überspielen, indem er auf Ergebung hinweist"<sup>26</sup> -- this, of course, with conspicuously little success. Indeed, at the end of the novel this resigned stance can no longer be sustained, even as an illusion. The love of the model characters had throughout appeared legitimate, justified, deserving of sympathy and even of admiration; yet, in the end Miller tries to

convince the reader that personal feelings should be sacrificed to duty. Schönsee rightly suggests that the reader is left with a choice, since Miller is not in a position to resolve this apparent contradiction. "Je nach Perspektive, Gefühl und Anlage kann sich der Leser für Theodizee oder Tragik entscheiden, objektiv durchgeführt werden beide nur halb, weil Miller das eine möchte, ohne das andere zu gefährden."<sup>27</sup> A conventional happy end would detract from the pathos of the love story, would run counter to the expectations raised by Goethe's *Werther*. In order to win the greatest possible sympathy for his characters, Miller is obliged to deprive those characters of the happiness in love which their patient submission to the decrees of Providence ought in all justice to have earned for them.

Miller's characters inhabit a world which is in many ways simpler and more easily negotiable than is the world of Goethe's *Werther*. Great as are the obstacles they encounter in the shape of selfish, calculating parents and siblings, they are threatened by no inner conflicts. They always know what is right and hence they are never plagued by self-doubt. This being so, there is no danger of their feeling envy of those more secure and complacent than themselves, such envy as Werther occasionally feels for Albert. Nor do they experience the love which, like Werther's love for Lotte, has its roots in the realisation that another possesses qualities one would wish to possess oneself but to which one can never attain. Miller's characters experience no such complex relationships. They feel love and friendship for others like themselves, precisely because those others are so very like themselves. All those who do not feel as they do, they choose to ignore. The reaction to the gallant frenchified Lieutenant ("Man gab auf seine Reden aber wenig acht" [p.311]) is entirely characteristic.

The entire problem of evil Miller deals with in the most simplistic manner possible. If a beneficent Providence is to be seen to be at work in the universe, then all human suffering must be explained, resolved, in a sense removed. Miller attempts to do precisely this. In this scheme of things, everyone has his appointed place in which he must remain. Pater Philipp even believes that he has found a satisfactory explanation of the suffering of the sick and infirm:

Man leidet so viel, wenn man andere leiden sieht. Aber lieber Gott, wer wollte dich droben zur Rede stellen? Und dort, dort (indem er zum Himmel wies) gibt's keine Krüppel und Lahme mehr. Dies ist alles, was man sagen kann, und allenfalls daß dergleichen Leute nach dem Glück nicht so sehr schmachten, was sie nicht kennen, und mit kleineren Labsal vorliebnehmen, als wir. Vielleicht sind auch ihre Empfindungen schwächer. Das Beste ist, das Gute, was man hat mit Danck annehmen und genießen und dem Unglücklichen sein Elend so viel erleichtern als man kann [p.265].

As Marion Beaujean argues<sup>28</sup> Miller seems resolved to avoid conflict at all costs. No amount of suffering, whether experienced by himself or by others can induce Siegwart to question the existing order of things. It is evident from Siegwart's own case that the virtuous do not inevitably prosper, yet he nowhere expresses doubt in the beneficence of Providence.

Nie gerät er ernsthaft mit seiner Umwelt und seinem Gewissen in Konflikt. Er sieht zwar die Unzulänglichkeiten in der Ordnung der Welt, denn in exemplarischer Reihenfolge wird er mit Elend und Unglück konfrontiert. Er lernt die unchristliche Verachtung Andersgläubiger kennen, die unmenschlichen Methoden der Werber, das ungerechte Betragen adelsstolzer Herren ihren Untertanen gegenüber, er leidet mit seinem Freund, dem ein brutaler Vater aus Standesdünkel die Geliebte vorenthält... Aber so sehr seine Empfindsamkeit ihn auch zum Mitleiden prädestiniert -- es bleibt doch eben Mitleid, dem er sich zwar bereitwillig und ganz überläßt, das ihn auch zum hilfreichen Tun ermuntert, das ihn aber nie an sich selbst und an der Welt irre werden läßt... Bis zu einer Frage nach dem inneren Sinn allen Leidens verdichtet sich das Mitgefühl nie. Alle schmerzliche Erfahrung scheint nur da zu sein, um die eigene Empfindungsfähigkeit recht auszubilden; denn nur Empfinden ist höchste Lebensfülle.<sup>29</sup>

Miller's novel, like all those we have discussed, also contains an element of social

criticism. He attacks the manifestly unjust hunting laws which favoured the pleasures of the aristocracy at the expense of the peasants' very livelihood. The conversation Siegwart overhears between a group of peasants while on his way to Ingolstadt is radical in tone: "Denk dir einmal, wenn es dem Fürsten einfallen sollte, daß das Wasser auch für ihn allein geschaffen sey" [p.146], speculates one of their number, while another exclaims "Weiß Gott, wir sind doch auch Menschen und keine Hund'. Wollt' sehn, wo der Fürst blieb, wenn wir nicht wären, und uns schier zu Schanden arbeiteten" [p.146]. The portrayal of Kronhelm's father Junker Veit is a caricature of the boorish, scarcely literate *Landadel*. The reader is left in no doubt regarding the brutality of such men, who abuse their inherited prestige in a manner harmful to all those beneath them. Yet the recognition that social injustice exists, that it is even widespread, is insufficient to prompt Siegwart -- or Miller -- to question the social order as such. He is in principle entirely in favour of the existing order of things. He would wish merely that social relations might be governed by greater humanity, that there might in short be "une condescendance bienveillante de la part des grands, et de la part des humbles un attachement affectueux et fidèle à leurs maîtres".<sup>30</sup>

It is evident from the frequency of confessions and diary entries contained in Miller's novel that the work owes something to Pietism. This influence is discernible also in the various religious attitudes expressed by the model characters. Siegwart himself adheres to a simple and unintellectual faith. He is quite indifferent to theological argument, to dogma and doctrine, to everything other than pure feeling and the practical benevolence to which this feeling can give rise. As does Werther, he conceives of a God who represents the principle of loving and forgiving fatherhood. In the conception of the Deity, as in his quietistic resignation and passive trust, he is close to the Pietists. As

H.H. Borchardt has pointed out, for Siegwart "Gott ist das große Herz, dem man sich naht, indem man sich in die Tiefen der Seele versenkt... Edelmut und Geduld sind die Leitsterne des Lebens. Es sind die pietistischen Tugenden."<sup>31</sup> The simple piety of the village people constitutes a model for Miller's other exemplary characters. Thus Therese, despite a convent education and a lively interest in music and contemporary literature, is no scholar. She has no very definite aspirations to intellectual progress. She already knows everything she needs to know in order to perform her various duties as daughter, sister and housekeeper and has no thoughts of developing beyond the limits of this very restricted sphere. Her attitude towards Siegwart's newly acquired learning is one of mocking, if indulgent scepticism. To her brother's shocked insistence that she acquaint herself at once with the life and works of St. Francis she makes the playful retort, "Nur zu, ich werde doch ohn ihn selig werden können" [p.112].

Therese favours a more practical Christianity, such as is preached -- and practised -- by the vicar of Windenheim. This *Weltgeistlicher* corresponds to the Enlightenment's ideal of the humane and practical pastor, who is concerned for the material as well as for the spiritual welfare of his flock and fully aware of the specific needs of a rural community. Like his counterparts in the novels of La Roche and Nicolai, he conveys his spiritual message through the medium of familiar, usually concrete imagery drawn from the realms of everyday life and agricultural labour, just as -- Pater Anton draws Siegwart's attention to this fact -- Christ Himself had done. Here Miller may perhaps have been influenced by Johann Joachim Spalding's *Von der Nützlichkeit des Predigtamtes* (1773) or by the so called *Naturprediger*<sup>32</sup> at the basis of whose thinking was the notion that the role of the pastor was similar to that of a good schoolmaster or, in a modern context, even that of a social worker. An exemplary clergyman, it was thought, would be able

and willing to keep abreast of developments in contemporary life, be these intellectual, literary or even agricultural. While attacking the ignorance and suspicion of the intellect displayed by the Capuchins, Müller nonetheless praises their practical activities. Pater Anton is a worthy representative of his order because he is a humble and practical man who regards no task which will benefit others as beneath his dignity: as F.J. Schneider points out:<sup>33</sup>

Es ist vielleicht die höchste Ehre, die der protestantische Theologe den katholischen Ordensbrüdern erweisen konnte, daß er die auch bei den Göttingern noch beliebte Gestalt des ehrwürdigen Alten durch den Kapuzinerpater Anton, den milden Menschenfreund und Menschenführer verkörpern ließ.

Miller is ready to approve those orders which are actively engaged in the life of the community, making a positive contribution to the welfare of their fellow-men. It is undoubtedly true that he looks more favourably on monasteries than on convents of nuns not least because women, by being obliged to enter closed orders, were deprived of the opportunity of doing good to others.

On the whole Miller's portrayal of monks and nuns is less than entirely favourable. With some few noble exceptions such as Pater Anton and Siegwart's teacher Pater Philipp, they are shown to be for the most part selfish, avaricious and calculating. Whenever they face the prospect of enlisting to their number some newcomer, their conduct is beyond reproach, their welcome as warm as any novice might desire. Such friendliness, however, is displayed with one very definite purpose very much in mind. It is essential for the financial survival of each monastery that it obtain the largest possible number of novices, and the monks are prepared to employ any amount of hypocrisy in the hope of securing prosperity. Significantly, when Sophie's parents overcome their natural reluctance to consign their daughter to a convent, they do so on the advice of a priest



who, for reasons which have little to do with Sophie's welfare, persuades them that as dutiful Catholics they have no alternative [p.358]. Quite without justification, the monks are able to persuade old Siegwart that it is a matter of conscience (*Gewissenssache*) that he gives his son to God [p.108].

In the debate as to the relative advantages and disadvantages of the monastic life, Miller would appear to have a good deal of sympathy for the arguments put forward by the eminently sensible Therese. Therese, having attended a convent school, has first-hand experience of this way of life, something the enthusiastic Siegwart as yet lacks. She rejects monasticism on the grounds that it is fundamentally life-denying and is unjustifiably so, since God has created the world and all the good things it contains for the greater pleasure of his creatures. Like Gellert's model characters, and to some extent also La Roche's Sophie, Therese makes a plea for the virtuous and modest enjoyment of earthly pleasures, for the *Diesseitsfreudigkeit* which gladly accepts human love and even money as gifts from Heaven. Therese distances herself from Catholic -- and Protestant -- asceticism in favour of the Enlightenment's belief in "Irdisches Vergnügen an Gott". As Schneider has pointed out, to the new generation of *Sturm und Drang* writers, the denial of female sexuality involved in the maintenance of the convent system was particularly abhorrent<sup>34</sup> (compare Leisewitz, *Julius von Tarent* [1776]). One of the reasons for Miler's critical response to monasticism is his belief that celibacy is both contrary to nature and positively harmful. Siegwart's love for Marianne is itself proof that a young man should not abandon the world before he has gained experience of the range of human emotions. Kronhelm, joining Therese in her attempts to dissuade Siegwart from taking the decisive step, puts this case very succinctly: "Glaub mir, Siegwart, mit einem fühlenden Herzen in der Welt zu leben, und nicht fühlen zu dürfen, muß der größte

Schmerz seyn, der unsichtbar am Herzen nagt" [p.187]. Despite approval for the practical work of the Capuchins and admiration for the piety of some few individual monks, Miller subjects the content of Catholicism to some quite rigorous rational criticism. From his perspective there could scarcely be a more damning verdict on the monks than his observation that their library contains only works of legend and hagiography. From the same standpoint -- that of the *Aufklärer* -- Miller criticises the Catholic Church for the influence it accords to its priests. There is a danger, it is suggested, that those priests who are unworthy of their calling will make many people suspicious of religion as such. Miller believes with the Enlightenment that religious faith must be the product not of blind obedience to authority, but of independent and mature reflection. From the same perspective he exposes the absurdity of certain practices designed to mould the novice to unquestioning obedience. Siegwart and his companions are obliged to move piles of wood from one spot to another, only to return them immediately to their original position. Or again, they are presented with a dish of hot food, only to see this at once removed and replaced by a morsel of dry bread. Miller is contemptuous of the self-denial which has no purpose beyond itself. The Church as an institution has no part to play in Miller's novel -- surprisingly so, since its hero is for so long resolved on becoming a monk. There are plenty of references to God, but few to the Church as an entity. This may perhaps be explained with reference to Miller's lack of any very profound acquaintance with Catholicism, or perhaps seen as evidence of some considerable degree of suspicion of the Catholic theory and practice of religion. Curiously for a clergyman, Miller is largely indifferent to all questions of dogma. He presents the reader with only a very vague and partial analysis of his own theological position, a position which might perhaps be adequately characterised as moderately enlightened Protestantism, with a strong emphasis on practical ethics and some sympathy

for the specifically æsthetic appeal of Catholicism.

Religious tolerance is a distinct, if subsidiary, theme in Miller's novel. The author's own attitude towards Catholicism is by no means entirely dismissive. His message would appear to be that there is good and bad in all branches of the Christian family. His model characters are active in the cause of tolerance and brotherly love. Indeed, one is reminded in places of Lessing's *Nathan der Weise*, as when Therese naïvely remarks that her friend the Captain is worthy to be a Catholic: "Er ist doch so artig und hat ein recht gutes Gemüth, so gut als ein Katholik" [p.186]. Old Siegwart is similarly tolerant of the Lutheran Klopstock: "Er muß doch ein braver Mann seyn, den ich einmal im Himmel anzutreffen hoffe" [p.298]. The reader is presented with the ideal of the peasant woman who gives food to a starving Lutheran beggar, is beaten for it by her husband and vindicated by Pater Anton, who makes a touchingly simple plea for religious tolerance:

Scheint die liebe Sonne etwa nur in katholischen Dörfern, oder nicht auch in den lutherischen? Haben wir allein Wasser und Brot? oder haben's eure lutherischen Nachbarn nicht auch? Regnet's nur bey uns, wenn's nöthig ist, oder auch bey den Lutheranern?... Meynt ihr denn, Gott würde Menschen erhalten, wenn er sie nicht lieb hätte? [p.102].

It seems curious that Siegwart experiences no apparent inner conflict when he abandons all thought of entering a monastery and prays instead that God may grant him happiness with Marianne. He reverses his ideas on the relative merits of love and monasticism quickly and effortlessly. Miller nowhere suggests that this instantaneous reversal might be unworthy of a model hero. Siegwart's change of heart is psychologically thoroughly convincing, since his commitment to the monastic life would never appear to have been very profound, based as it was on fear of the unknown world outside and on an almost exclusively æsthetic appreciation of Catholicism. One can only assume that Miller, in

any case aware of the less acceptable aspects of Catholicism, must countenance Siegwart's preference for life in the outside world. Siegwart is inspired with youthful enthusiasm for monasticism. The mere thought that he may be permitted to participate in this idyllic life raises his spirits to fever pitch. "Seine Seele war von einem Taumel ergriffen, der ihn nichts hören und nichts sehen ließ, als nur das Kloster. Die ganze andere Welt war ihm nun verhaßt und öde. Er betrachtete sie nun als den Wohnplatz abgeschiedener bedauernswürdiger Seelen" [p.34]. Siegwart's first impressions of the monastery are personal, emotional, subjective. He does not observe according to rational criteria. "Seine Seele war jetzt weich wie Wachs; unwillkürliche Thränen, die das Mittel zwischen Wehmuth und Freude hielten [this "Wonne der Wehmut" is of course the sentimental emotion *par excellence*] glänzten ihm im Auge" [p.12].

Martin Greiner characterises the monastic life as portrayed in Miller's novel as "eine Art Zuflucht und Endstation für die am Leben Gescheiterten, insbesondere für die unglücklich Liebenden".<sup>35</sup> This assessment is correct only to a limited extent, for Greiner takes no account of the fact that Miller is far from condoning this attitude. By entering the monastery Siegwart could be assured of escaping danger and emotional turmoil. Miller, however, makes it clear that this escapism is not to be condoned. Siegwart had been mistaken, if not exactly at fault, in failing to take account of the importance to be accorded to natural human feelings such as love. Miller does not condemn monasticism or monks *per se*; merely those monks whose motivation is in some sense unworthy or inappropriate, who are materialists concerned more with the attainment of a comfortable lifestyle and with personal prestige than with devoting themselves wholeheartedly to the service of God, those who wish merely to escape from the hardships of life in the world and those who, like the very young Siegwart, are

seduced by the æsthetic appeal of Catholic ritual. From the narrator's perspective, for all that he is sympathetic to the plight of those whose legitimate feelings are thwarted by an unfeeling society, it is by no means to Siegwart's credit that he finally does retire to a monastery.

Miller's view of Catholicism and of the monastic life is not, therefore, wholly unambiguous. He is aware of the disadvantages and dangers of both, just as he is aware of the disadvantages and dangers inherent in *Empfindsamkeit*. His sympathies are always with *die Empfindsamen*; never with the others, their unfeeling and hence morally inferior adversaries. Yet at the same time he recognises the necessity of vigilance against superstition, obscurantism and excessive self-indulgent emotionalism. His readers (like the readers of Goethe's *Werther*) were no doubt too much inclined to stress the sentimental aspect of his work, its allegiance to *Empfindsamkeit*, thereby tending to underestimate or even ignore the element of rational didacticism it also contains.<sup>36</sup>

1. Wolfgang Doktor, *Die Kritik der Empfindsamkeit*, Diss., University of the Saarland, 1975; Bern, Frankfurt am Main, 1975; p.402.
2. See Günter Erning, *Das Lesen und die Lesewut. Beiträge zu Fragen der Lese-geschichte, dargestellt am Beispiel der schwäbischen Provinz*. Bad Heilbrunn, 1974; p.70.
3. *Ibid.*, p.72ff; also Horst Kunze, *Lieblingsbücher von Dazumal. Eine Blütenlese von den erfolgreichsten Büchern von 1750 bis 1860. Zugleich ein erster Versuch zu einer Geschichte des Lesergeschmacks*. Munich, 1965; p.87.
4. Erning, *op.cit.*, p.72.
5. Kunze, *op.cit.*, p.87.
6. See Georg Jäger, *Empfindsamkeit und Roman. Vorgeschichte, Theorie und Technik im achtzehnten und frühen neunzehnten Jahrhundert*. Stuttgart, 1969; p.74f.
7. James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, ed. B.Hill, vol.II, p.175; quoted from Lewin L. Schücking, "Die Grundlagen des Richardson'schen Romans", in *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift*, 12, 1924; pp. 21-42, 88-110 -- here, p.105.
8. Alain Faure, *Johann Martin Miller, romancier sentimentale*, Diss., Paris, 1973; p.210.
9. *Ibid.*, p.216.
10. Johann Martin Miller: *Siegwart, eine Klostersgeschichte*, 3 vols., Amsterdam-London, 1777; all subsequent references are to this edition.
11. See Martin Greiner *Die Entstehung der modernen Unterhaltungsliteratur. Studien zum Trivialroman des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts*. Edited and revised by There Poser. Reinbek bei Hamburg 1964, p.48
12. Reinhart Schönsee, *J.M. Millers Prosaschriften als Krisenphänomen ihrer Epoche. Ein Beitrag zum Problem der Trivialität und zur Geschichte des empfindsamen Romans im achtzehnten Jahrhundert*, 2 vols. Diss., Hamburg 1972.
13. See:
 

Hans Richard Altenheim, "Geld und Geldeswert. Über die Selbstdarstellung des Bürgertums in der Literatur des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts". In: *Das Werk der Bücher. Von der Wirksamkeit des Buches in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart. Festschrift für Horst Kliemann*. Ed. Fritz Hodeige, Freiburg im Breisgau 1956, pp.201-217.

Heinz Birk, *Bürgerliche und empfindsame Moral in Familienroman des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts*. Diss. Bonn 1964 (Bonn 1967).

Diethelm Brüggemann, *Die sächsische Komödie*. Cologne-Vienna 1970.



Walter Gebhardt, *Religionssoziologische Probleme im Roman der deutschen Aufklärung*. Diss. Gießen 1931.

14. Greiner, *Die Entstehung der modernen Unterhaltungsliteratur*, p.48. Greiner calculates that in the first volume of the novel the characters weep once every third page, in the second volume it is once every second page, and in the third volume it is once every one-and-three-quarter pages.
15. *ibid.*, p.49.
16. *ibid.*, p.61.
17. Eva D. Becker, *Der deutsche Roman um 1780*. Diss. Heidelberg 1963, Stuttgart 1964, p.86.
18. Hans Heinrich Borchardt, *Der Roman der Goethezeit*. Urach, Stuttgart 1949, p.98.
19. See Doktor, *Die Kritik der Empfindsamkeit*.
20. See Christine Touaillon, *Der deutsche Frauenroman des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts*. Vienna, Leipzig 1919.
21. See Helmut Kiesel and Paul Münch, *Gesellschaft und Literatur im achtzehnten Jahrhundert. Voraussetzungen und Entstehung des literarischen Markts in Deutschland*, Munich 1977, p.170.
22. Leo Balet/E. Gerhard, *Die Verbürgerlichung der deutschen Kunst, Literatur und Musik im achtzehnten Jahrhundert*. Edited and introduced by Gert Mattenklott. Frankfurt am Main-Berlin-Vienna 1973, p.310.
23. Natalie Halperin, *Die deutschen Schriftstellerinnen in der zweiten Hälfte des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts. Versuch einer soziologischen Analyse*. Diss., Frankfurt am Main, 1935, p.127.
24. Faure, *op.cit.*, p.462.
25. Herbert Schöffler, "Die Leiden des jungen Werthers. Ihr geistesgeschichtlicher Hintergrund". In: Schöffler, *Deutscher Geist im achtzehnten Jahrhundert. Essays zur Geistes- und Religionsgeschichte*. Second edition, Göttingen 1967, pp.155-181; here p.181.
26. Schönsee, *J.M. Millers Prosaschriften*, p.320.
27. Schönsee, *J.M. Millers Prosaschriften*, p.320.
28. Marion Beaujean, *Der Trivialroman in der zweiten Hälfte des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts. Die Ursprünge des modernen Unterhaltungsromans*. Bonn 1964, p.51.
29. *ibid.*
30. Faure, *Johann Martin Miller*, p.292.

31. Borchardt, *Der Roman der Goethezeit*, p.45.
32. *ibid.*, p.30.
33. See Ferdinand Josef Schneider, "Das Religiöse in Millers *Sieewart* und seine Quellen". In: *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, 64, 1939; pp.20-40, here p.31.
34. *ibid.*, p.35.
35. Greiner, *Die Entstehung der modernen Unterhaltungsliteratur*, p.48.
36. Edmund Kamprath, "Das Siegartfieber". In: *Programm des k.k. Obergymnasiums zu Wiener Neustadt. Am Schlusse des Schuljahres 1876/77. Wiener Neustadt 1877*, pp.3-26.

## 7. CONCLUSION.

*Aufklärung bringt Kälte, sagt der Eine - und Gefühlsflamme zeugt Schwärmerey, sagt der Andre, und beyde sagen wahr und falsch - wahr, wenn sie Aufklärung und Gefühl isolieren, jedes vom andern unabhängig, allein behauen, und ihren wechselseitigen Einfluß vernichten oder auch nur hemmen; falsch, wenn sie Aufklärung des Geistes und Erfahrung des Gefühls gegenseitig verbinden, beyde in Einklang stimmen und durch einander erweitern, festnen, reinigen.<sup>1</sup>*

It is my intention that the final chapter of this thesis should attempt to answer conclusively a number of questions which have arisen in the course of the preceding chapters. Firstly, I would wish to consider the relationship between the Enlightenment and the phenomenon of Sensibility as revealed in the novels I have analysed, in the hope of establishing the nature and the boundaries of German *Empfindsamkeit*. This will necessitate some consideration of the varying perceptions of different kinds of emotion - one must determine which feelings were in general to be cultivated and which rather avoided, to what extent this was the case, and on what grounds. Secondly, I would like to deal with the concept and practice of *Tugendempfindsamkeit* as depicted in the novel: precisely what was understood thereby, and how did perceptions of it change and develop in the course of the eighteenth century? How has scholarly research interpreted the relationship between *Empfindsamkeit* and virtue, and are the views expressed by scholars in need of modification? Thirdly, in accordance with the title of my thesis, the relationship between Sensibility and religion is also worthy of consideration. Hence we must analyse both Pietism and the more rationalistic school of eighteenth-century Christianity to determine how this relationship has traditionally been perceived, both by contemporaries and by historians of ideas. The two latter areas of discussion naturally lead on to a further question: how have scholars explained the rise of *Empfindsamkeit*? What factor or factors have generally been thought to produce it? Is this explanation adequate or can some further conclusions be drawn or, at least, suggestions made? Finally, it would perhaps not be out of place to put the following question: what were the results of *Empfindsamkeit*? did it produce lasting effects in literature and society, and if so, what were these?

Firstly, however, I would like to devote some attention to several other novels of the

time which have been mentioned in the course of this thesis, but to which no individual chapter has been devoted, largely on account of necessary limitations of time and space. These novels are deserving of more than a cursory mention since they were either extremely popular among the contemporary reading public or respected by subsequent generations; in either case they shed some light on the development of the *genre* and indeed on the phenomenon of *Empfindsamkeit* as such.

Much read at the time were the novels of Johann Timotheus Hermes (1738-1817). For much of the latter part of the eighteenth century, his *Sophiens Reise von Memel nach Sachsen* (1770-72), an epistolary novel in five volumes, was a favourite of the middle classes. That it sank into obscurity with the advent of the Romantic novel is scarcely surprising. An irrepressible tendency to instruct his readers at length on every subject which might arise, from sexual morality to the preservation of virtue and religion, from the necessity of an avoidance of too much scholarship in women to the detriment of housewifely skills, going so far as to include recipes for food and medicines -- all necessarily impede the progress of the narrative and render sententious and tedious a work which has the benefit of an engaging heroine and an exciting plot. Hermes' first novel *Geschichte der Miss Fanny Wilkes* (1766) was also much read, though perhaps less valued on account of its avoiding a German setting, in favour of the England made fashionable by Richardson. The influence of Richardson is particularly marked in this tale of persecuted virtue, which alternates between a tone of righteous moral outrage and scenes (for example one set in a brothel) which seem rather designed to titillate the senses of the reader.

Christoph Martin Wieland (1773-1813) has maintained his popularity since the



eighteenth century. He continues to be read for entertainment, to feature in literature courses in universities and to be the subject of scholarly research. At first sight, therefore, it may appear incongruous that I have not devoted a substantial portion of this thesis to a consideration of his novels. There are several reasons for this deliberate omission. Firstly, Wieland's novels do not deal directly with contemporary reality and with the depiction of life in society. They are not *Gegenwartsromane* and hence are of less obvious relevance in an analysis which has as its declared purpose to show how social realities and currents of thought are revealed in the novel of Sensibility. Wieland's settings are antique, or otherwise exotic. Secondly, Wieland cannot in any sense be called a novelist of *Empfindsamkeit* or even, as Nicolai is to some extent, a novelist who sets out to criticise or satirise the movement. Sensibility is not at the centre of his preoccupations. What concerns him far more is the problem of human irrationality, whether as stupidity and blind prejudice (as in his *Geschichte der Abderiten*) or as thoughtless gullibility and the unquestioning acceptance of tradition -- as in *Don Sylvio von Rosalba* (1764), where the hero accepts fairy tales as reality. These are much more obviously questions which lie at the heart of the thinking of the Enlightenment.

Wieland's novels did not enjoy the popularity of Goethe's *Werther* or Miller's *Siegwart* quite simply because they did not accord with the expectations of the contemporary public. This public had no real taste in literature for wit or irony (qualities which in any case might be decried as copying the tone of "decadent" aristocratic Francophile culture), while the charm of Rococo elegance and grace might be suspected of reviving the tendencies of the *galant* novel to frivolity and even licentiousness. Members of the public had in short come to expect and prefer novels which would make them weep rather than think. Of Wieland's novels the one which perhaps sheds most light on the

author's attitude to *Empfindsamkeit* and its adherents is his *Agathon*. Wieland was disappointed by the reception of the work, as once again it appeared to be ahead of its time; more precisely, perhaps, Wieland had been proved too optimistic in his hope that a novel so heavily laden with historical and literary references would achieve any real degree of popularity among a middle-class public insufficiently acquainted with the mainstream of European literature. The hero of the novel is a young man whose natural youthful idealism and purity of intention are exaggerated to a degree which prevents him from enjoying a normal sensual life. As his education or *Bildung* proceeds, Agathon comes to understand that he has been a prey to *Schwärmerei* or enthusiasm in a negative sense and that a life which answers best the claims of both happiness and virtue necessarily avoids all such extremes; in short, all excess of moral feelings must be tempered by reason.

Thus summarised, Wieland's view would appear to fall fairly clearly into the general pattern of the more sensible or restrained criticism of *Empfindsamkeit*. Yet, especially at the end of the work, it becomes apparent that Wieland is uncertain whether Agathon has not lost something precious in renouncing enthusiasm for the sake of a more coolly rational approach to life, whether after all some measure of *Schwärmerei* is not desirable. This *Schwärmerei* is a fundamental ingredient of Agathon's character and one which is perhaps the root of many of his best qualities: the mainspring of his virtue, and not merely (as in *Don Sylvio*) the product of erroneous thinking. As Hildegard Emmel has argued:

Der Ausweglosigkeit und der schwankenden Linienführung seines Argumentes gegen Ende des Romans ist Wieland voll bewußt. Er weiß, daß er keine logisch geordneten Gedanken entwickelt, sondern vielmehr das tut, was er bei seinem Helden verteidigt, er trifft Entscheidungen des Herzens, gegen die vernünftigerweise viel eingewandt werden könnte.<sup>2</sup>

In this novel Wieland wishes to convince his readers that reason is perhaps not the only or even the most important human faculty deserving of cultivation. The contribution which Agathon can make to society is very largely the result of his propensity to *Schwärmerei*, since herein lies the source of his insight and his motivation to virtue.

Where Hermes deliberately set out to create novels in the tradition of Richardson's very popular example, and Wieland strove to bring to bear the influence of the wider currents of European literature, himself inspired by the greatest novel to date, Cervantes' *Don Quijote*, Theodor Gottlieb von Hippel (1741-1796) wrote in the whimsical tradition of Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* and *Tristram Shandy*. The title of Hippel's *Lebensläufe nach aufsteigender Linie* (three volumes 1778-81) is deceptive, since one is led to expect a *Bildungsroman* with a possible moralistic bent. Only the first volume sustains any consistent attempt at a narrative; later the story-line is lost entirely in a fragmented and increasingly chaotic combination of digressions, in which Hippel tries to reflect the confusion of actual existence. It may be that Hippel, for some years mayor of Königsberg, was influenced by perhaps the second most important of its citizens: Hamann, with his philosophy of the irrational.

Another novelist whose work has definite philosophical implications, one who indeed was respected by contemporaries as a philosopher as well as a writer of fiction, was Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743-1809), brother of the sentimental poet Johann Georg Jacobi who inspired the Säugling of Nicolai's *Sebaldus Nothanker*. His two novels *Eduard Allwills Papiere* (1775-6, revised edition 1792) and *Woldemar* (1777-91, revised edition 1794) are primarily concerned with the problems of *Empfindsamkeit*, in particular with the problem of the *Empfindsamer*, the man who is prompted in all he says and does

by feeling alone. The question which causes serious heart-searchings to the characters as indeed to their author can be stated in the following terms -- how far is this reliance on emotion compatible with the claims of virtue? is it acceptable for a man to live thus or will he thereby cause too much harm to those around him?

*Eduard Allwills Papiere* delivers a largely negative response to these questions, as indeed its tone throughout is negative and even bitter. While the novel clearly reflects a general tendency in contemporary thought, it was also the product of a deeply-felt personal disappointment. Jacobi was by temperament and inclination suited to participation in the intense friendships so beloved of the *Empfindsamen*. He longed to unburden himself completely, to pour out his innermost thoughts to some like-minded soul, in return for equal confidence and in the happy expectation of complete mutual understanding. With much literary discrimination but (it proved) some lack of wisdom, Jacobi selected the young Goethe, then at work on his *Werther*, for his partner in such a friendship. In the event, Goethe proved less than receptive to Jacobi's overtures, unable and unwilling as he was to involve himself without reserve in such a relationship; and Jacobi took refuge in committing to paper in *Allwill* and *Woldemar* his feelings of frustration, rejection and anger. With little real skill as an artist, Jacobi proved quite incapable of disguising the nature and source of these feelings. The hero of the novel is based on Goethe as Jacobi in his disillusionment perceived him -- a man whose sense of himself is so strong and whose reliance on his own will is so absolute that he is incapable of love or disinterested friendship and hence a danger to those whose feelings are pure. Despite the personal invective which is responsible for the artistic inadequacies of the book, Jacobi's eloquence is such that the reader is led on to draw some general conclusions about the problematic nature of Sensibility and of the new cult of the *Genie*.

Both *Allwill* and the later *Woldemar* were very much respected by Jacobi's contemporaries, among them such discerning critics as Wieland and Lessing.<sup>3</sup> The reason for this success may perhaps lie in the fact that the books both contrive to shed some light on some of the most intensely felt issues of the time, while also (and more precisely) encouraging the reader to feel, rather than simply to understand; to experience in himself the conflict between head and heart, unselfish affection for others and the desire to fulfil himself, cost what it may.

It should be remembered -- and in so doing we should become aware that *Empfindsamkeit* was a fashion as well as an ideology, deliberately cultivated in many cases to earn for its adherents the reputation of being in the forefront of artistic and intellectual developments -- how far the movement was not merely a literary one, but manifest over the whole spectrum of the arts. Thus in painting, for example, the more intimate forms of the *genre* became fashionable, those best suited to the portrayal of emotional and usually domestic scenes -- such as the newly developed art of the silhouette, painting on porcelain and small-scale sculpture. Portraiture was particularly favoured, especially family portraits and the miniature. Miniatures, especially of course when the subject was a relative or *Seelenfreund*, were especially prized by the *Empfindsamen* and often worn set in jewellery. *Genre* paintings were also popular, as were idyllic or melancholy landscapes and literary or social themes likely to inspire emotion or familiar to the public as already forming part of the corps of "Sentimental" material; especially popular was the portrayal of any scene from Goethe's *Werther*.

In music, particular attention was devoted to the theory of Sensibility, in attempting to devise a comprehensive system of "objective" music, in which different tones could be

deliberately employed to convey specific feeling to the hearer. Two distinct tendencies developed which both showed the influence of *Empfindsamkeit* in music: on the one hand towards combination of music with the spoken word, more exactly poetry and drama on sentimental themes in song and in opera; on the other hand towards solo instruments or chamber music (especially favoured being the piano, harp and flute), since this kind of music was thought to reflect and promote an atmosphere of intimacy and domestic happiness.

I would now like to return to those novels which I have discussed in detail in this thesis, with the intention of summarising how an analysis of these texts has contributed to increasing our understanding of the phenomenon of *Empfindsamkeit*. In my introductory chapter I dealt briefly with the mass of material written by contemporary commentators on the subject of "Sensibility", very much of it critical or even hostile rather than merely analytical in tone. Sometimes amusing but less useful for our purposes are those texts in which the author is apparently swept along by the force of his own antipathy to indulge in blatant exaggeration and misrepresentation. Such critics castigate *Empfindsamkeit*<sup>4</sup> as a *Seelenkrankheit* or more elaborately as "eine jetzt umgehende Seelenseuche, welche unter allen Kräften unserer gesamten körperlichen und geistigen Natur zu recht sichtbarer Verminderung der Summe unserer Lebensfreuden seit einigen Jahren eine fürchterliche Verwüstung angerichtet hat".<sup>5</sup> Leaving such polemics aside, the consensus which emerges would appear to be that Sensibility is in itself desirable, but should always be tempered and restrained by reason. An excess of either is to be avoided in the pursuit of the middle ground wherein lies the path to virtue and happiness.

In an attempt to clarify the issue, most critics are concerned to establish two very



different categories of *Empfindsamkeit* and to define the boundaries of these. Thus some distinguish *wahre* from *falsche Empfindsamkeit*, while others are concerned to dissociate true *Empfindsamkeit* from *Empfinderei* or *Afterempfindsamkeit*, which has no rational foundation, no basis in virtue and hence no purpose. Joachim Heinrich Campe's view corresponds to that of many contemporary critics:

Der Empfindsame und der Empfindler unterscheiden sich erstlich durch die Arth, wie jeder von ihnen zu demjenigen, was er seine Empfindungen nennt, veranlaßt wird. Die wirklichen Gefühle des Ersten sind ihm natürlich, die wirklichen oder angeblichen Gefühle des Andern hingegen sind erkünstelt.<sup>6</sup>

Our understanding of the ideas of the time is greatly increased when we realise that the true *Empfindsamkeit* approved by even the most severe critics is equivalent to *Tugendempfindsamkeit*. Particularly among the earlier novelists I have studied this concept is of central importance. Critics and novelists are in agreement in their approbation of only that kind of feeling which has some useful purpose. It must be *tätige Empfindsamkeit*: not emotion as an end in itself, but with results in some definite action for the benefit of others. This might take the form of the *Gelassenheit* recommended by Gellert, where individual inclination is sacrificed to the greater good, or as in the novels of La Roche and Nicolai, of work for the benefit of the poor and needy. Indeed, Campe defines *Empfindsamkeit* as precisely "die Fähigkeit, sittliche Empfindungen zu haben, und in engerer und gewöhnlicherer Bedeutung eine hohe Empfänglichkeit oder Fertigkeit in lebhaften sittlichen Empfindungen."<sup>7</sup> And further he wishes to establish "Was das Wort Empfindsamkeit überhaupt sagen wolle, das nicht eine größere Fähigkeit zu jeder Arth von Empfindungen, sondern bloos eine größere Fähigkeit zu solchen Empfindungen, in denen etwas Sittliches ist".<sup>8</sup> Pedagogues are concerned to instruct the public, especially young female readers, on the necessity for active Sensibility:

Erinnern Sie sich, meine schönen Leserinnen, daß ihre feinen und zarten Empfindungen ihnen nicht bloß zum Schmucke gegeben worden, sondern Sie zu edlen und wohlthätigen Handlungen anzusporen. Das Mitleiden zum Beispiel ist dem menschlichen Herzen nicht eingepflanzt worden, um bloß ein schönes Gesicht mit sanften Thränen zu zieren, oder dem holden Auge eine schmachtende Anmuth mitzuthemen. Nein, es ist vom Schöpfer bestimmt worden, die eifrigsten Bemühungen zur Hilfe der Nothleidenden in unserm Busen zu erregen.<sup>9</sup>

Thus *Tugendempfindsamkeit* and *tätige Empfindsamkeit* are very closely related, if not exactly synonymous. This indeed is the only form and the only degree of *Empfindsamkeit* which the earlier exponents of the movement -- including Gellert, La Roche and the critical Nicolai -- could approve. It is important here to be entirely clear as to the meaning of "virtue", since, following Richardson who is generally cited as the first and most paradigmatic of the novelists of Sensibility, it has sometimes been thought that virtue in the eighteenth century means little other than the preservation of virginity until marriage. For Gellert, La Roche and Nicolai, sympathy or pity and benevolence are perhaps the most fundamental ingredients of *Tugendempfindsamkeit*. For their model characters, feeling should always be a matter of helping others.

It is here that we must mark the most crucial phase in the development of *Empfindsamkeit*. Contemporary readers and scholars of the period have always recognised a striking difference between the Sensibility espoused by the characters of Gellert and La Roche on the one hand and of Werther and Siegwart on the other. This is surely not, as has sometimes been assumed, merely a difference of degree. It is no doubt true that Siegwart weeps more frequently and more copiously than does Gellert's Countess, but this is not the crucial point. What is significant is the reason for their emotion. As Gerhard Sauder and Wolfgang Doktor argue:

Die Mängel bisheriger Untersuchungen der empfindsamen Tendenz lassen sich weitgehend auf das Nichterkennen der Dialektik von Selbst- und Mitgefühl zurückführen. Die Annahme, sowohl *Empfindsamkeit* als

auch Empfinderei seien einzig als egoistische und narzisstische Phänomene zu verstehen, ist falsch. Mitleid, Wohlwollen und allgemeine Sympathie als zentrale Elemente der Empfindsamkeit belegen ihre moralische und soziale Funktion nicht weniger deutlich als die stereotypen Aufforderungen ihrer Theoretiker zu einer "tatenreichen Empfindsamkeit."<sup>10</sup>

Equally relevant here is the consideration that *Tugendempfindsamkeit* is based on *sanfte Empfindungen*<sup>11</sup>. These feelings -- precisely benevolence and sympathy -- are by their very nature pleasant, gentle and productive. They do not involve any excess of suffering and hence do not lead to any suffering; they do not overwhelm and thereby render inactive. Later *Empfindsamkeit*, which Goethe influenced and by which he was influenced and of which Miller's *Siegwart* is most representative, differs here in that it does not stress this need for concentration on gentle emotions alone. On the contrary, both Werther and *Siegwart* are often violent in the strength of their feelings.<sup>12</sup> In a sense, feeling has now emancipated itself from virtue. It is considered to be desirable that emotion should be cultivated for its own sake, because it preserves an awareness of self which might otherwise be lost in the cares of everyday existence, or even because its intensity is in itself pleasurable, giving rise to a certain "joy of grief".

Neither Goethe nor Miller are concerned to cultivate only "unselfish" feelings. "Selbstgefühl", as Sauder defines it, is not so easily confined within the bounds of the more gentle emotions, and hence gives rise to spleen, to a general emotional distress and dissatisfaction with the world. This negative feeling clearly struck a chord with many readers -- a factor which helps to account for the immense popularity of both works -- but was vociferously deplored by the pedagogues and moral philosophers. Again, Campe states this position clearly:

leider wimmelt's in unsern verfeinerten Ständen von Unglücklichen dieser Arth, von Unglücklichen, die bei jedem Blick, den sie in die Welt werfen, die bei jedem Schritte, den sie thun, auf Dinge stoßen, vor denen

ihr Herz, wie bei einem elektrischen Schläge zusammenfährt, weil sie mit den idealen Empfindungen streiten, zu denen sie durch empfindsame Lektüre, Beispiele und Anführungen verwöhnt sind, Unglückliche, die überall Ursache zum Mißvergnügen, zur Traurigkeit, zum Schmerz, nirgends Ursache zu inniglicher Freude finden, weil sie das Ideal von sittlicher Volkommenheit, welches mit ihnen aufgewachsen ist, nirgends, das Gegenteil davon an allen Orten sehn.<sup>13</sup>

The presence or absence of this emphasis on virtue is also central to an understanding of attitudes to religion. In none of the novels I have analysed is there any evidence of conformity with orthodox Lutheranism: dogma is invariably either ignored or, in the case of Nicolai, explicitly rejected. Instead we find an insistence on the importance for true religion on the one hand of practical ethics and on the other of the emotional responses engendered by religious belief. As might be expected, in those authors whose ideal can be broadly defined as the cultivation of *Tugendempfindsamkeit* the balance tends to be in favour of the performance of good works, whereas in the novels of Goethe and Miller, religion is seen and experienced principally as a matter of feeling. Werther adopts a kind of Pantheistic Christianity of his own creation to suit his own emotional needs, while Siegwart is enthralled by the æsthetic and theatrical aspects of Catholicism, with little thought for the intellectual aspect.

All this might seem to suggest a close connection between *Empfindsamkeit* and Pietism. Indeed, there are some striking parallels here. The Pietists too were very much concerned with charitable works and practical goodness and of course their cultivation of the role of the heart, of direct emotional experience of God, constitutes their important and unique contribution to the development of religion at that time. Such similarities between the two movements have led scholars to define *Empfindsamkeit* simply as "secularised Pietism".<sup>14</sup>

Yet the issue is not quite so straightforward. It is always dangerous to assume that any historical event or intellectual movement is directly attributable to one single cause, and to over-emphasise the links with *Empfindsamkeit* is to show a somewhat limited understanding of Pietism. We have seen that *die Empfindsamen* cultivated feeling either because it provided a spur to the performance of good deeds for the benefit of others (*Tugendempfindsamkeit*) or because they valued emotion in itself and for its own sake. Of course, neither such approach had been adopted by, or could be approved by, the Pietists. Feeling for the Pietists had as its aim union with God in a state of rebirth of the soul. Essential to all their thinking was the hope of attaining communion with Christ -- and this is nowhere stated as a goal, either explicitly or implicitly, in the writings of *Empfindsamkeit*. Nor should it be forgotten that Pietism was by its very nature individualistic and disparate and hence at no stage constituted a unified phenomenon. As the ecclesiastical historian Kantzenbach points out "den Pietismus hat es eben nicht gegeben."<sup>15</sup>

Thus three main points about the nature and the origins of *Empfindsamkeit* emerge from this study. In the first place, while there are similarities with Pietism, we should not attempt to see the sources of *Empfindsamkeit* in Pietism (see my introductory chapter for a detailed analysis of the philosophical ideas which might be thought to have contributed towards the rise of the movement). Secondly, virtue is central to the development of *Empfindsamkeit*. In the earlier stages we can speak explicitly about *Tugendempfindsamkeit* -- that this influence later abated in favour of the cultivation of feeling for its own sake marks a crucial turning point in the movement. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, it is a cliché of scholarship and an assumption in need of radical revision that *Aufklärung* and *Empfindsamkeit* represent polar opposites. We

would be quite wrong to suppose that emotion played no part in the Enlightenment (again for further detail on this point see my introductory chapter). Moreover, both novelists and theorists on the subject are constantly concerned to point out that the ideal towards which all human beings should strive was a harmony or balance between head and heart.

It remains only to add a few words relating to the reception of *Empfindsamkeit*. The progress of the movement coincided with marked changes in the constitution and in the habits of the reading public. I have already dealt with this question in some detail and my conclusions might perhaps be summarised as follows. Whereas until the middle of the eighteenth century the middle classes read little other than works of a religious or explicitly moral nature, and indeed tended to pride themselves on their avoidance of the frivolous and "lying" novel form, the advent of the *Moralische Wochenschriften* and the development of novels which aimed to communicate a moral message encouraged much more widespread approval of the *genre*. In short, the novels of *Empfindsamkeit* were increasingly widely read as the century progressed. As the fashion became more firmly established, the moral message tended to become obscured by feeling for its own sake as in *Werther* and *Siegwart*. Perhaps because the absence of moralistic propaganda made these latter works more immediately appealing to a wide public, these novels enjoyed a degree of popularity far beyond that, for example, which Gellert would have envisaged for himself. Another change in the reading habits of this period which has been widely recognised is the movement away from the repeated perusal of a few treasured texts towards the increasing consumption of a large number of works, these perhaps being read only once. That this development appeared together with the novel of *Empfindsamkeit* is perhaps no coincidence. Thus we might not be mistaken in seeing in



the *Rezeptionsgeschichte* of the novel of *Empfindsamkeit* a forerunner of nineteenth and twentieth century romantic, sentimental and sensational fiction, in a word -- *Trivialliteratur*.

1. Johann Jacob Hottinger/Johann Rudolf Sulzer, *Brelocken an's Allerley der Groß- und Kleinmänner*. Leipzig 1778. Quoted from *Empfindsamkeit. Theoretische und kritische Texte*. Edited by Wolfgang Doktor and Gerhardt Sauder, Stuttgart 1976, p.33.
2. Hildegard Emmel, *Geschichte des deutschen Romans*, vol. 1, Berne 1972, p.132.
3. *ibid.*, p.160.
4. Carl Friedrich Pöckels, "Über die Verschiedenheit und Mischung der Charaktere". In: Pöckels, *Beiträge zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntnis, besonders in Rücksicht unserer moralischen Natur. I. Stück*, Berlin 1788. Quoted from Wolfgang Doktor/Gerhardt Sauder (ed.) *Empfindsamkeit. Theoretische und kritische Texte*. Stuttgart 1976, p.69.
5. Joachim Heinrich Campe, *Robinson der Jüngere, zur angenehmen und nützlichen Unterhaltung für Kinder*. Vol. 1, 1779. Quoted from Doktor/Sauder (ed.), *Empfindsamkeit*, p.71.
6. Joachim Heinrich Campe, *Über Empfindsamkeit und Empfindelei in pädagogischer Hinsicht*. Hamburg 1779. Quoted from Gerhard Sauder, *Empfindsamkeit*, vol. 3, *Quellen und Dokumente*, Stuttgart 1980, p.4.
7. *ibid.*
8. *ibid.*
9. Johann Georg Heinzmann, "Über die falsche Empfindsamkeit" In: *Die Feyerstunden der Grazien. Ein Lesebuch*, 1780. Quoted from Doktor/Sauder (ed.), *Empfindsamkeit*. p.48.
10. Afterword to Doktor/Sauder, *Empfindsamkeit*, p.206.
11. See Sauder, *Empfindsamkeit*, vol.1, *Voraussetzungen und Elemente*. Chapter 4.4 "Mitleid und die vermischten Empfindungen" and Chapter 4.5 "Zärtliche und moralische Empfindungen" -- *Tugend und empfindsame Aktivität*, p.183-211.
12. And in Werther's case, of course, this latent violence becomes actual.
13. Campe, *Über Empfindsamkeit und Empfindelei in pädagogischer Hinsicht*. Quoted from Sauder, *Empfindsamkeit*, vol. 3: *Quellen und Dokumente*, p.10.
14. Hans R.G. Günther, "Psychologie des deutschen Pietismus". In: *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift* 4, 1926, pp.144-176.
15. Friedrich Wilhelm Kantzenbach, *Protestantisches Christentum im Zeitalter der Aufklärung*. Gütersloh 1965 = *Evangelische Enzyklopädie* 516, p.50.

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