

The Sorrows of Young Werther Study Guide

The Sorrows of Young Werther by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

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Plot Summary

"The Sorrows of Young Werther," in many senses a classic of the epistolary genre of novels, opens with the titular protagonist having just completed a move to a rural town made in order to escape a romantic entanglement with a woman named Leonora and her sister. Werther is positively enraptured with his new surroundings, and, at the cost of his artistic endeavors, he spends much time meandering the countryside and observing the peasants' lifestyle. At several points, he remarks approvingly that the simple and idyllic life of the country folk reminds him of the "patriarchal" society of the Bible. On his travels, he meets many peasants whose stories will develop alongside his own: the peasant brothers Hans and Phillip, their mother, and a servant in love with his widowed employer.

Werther soon discovers Wahlheim, a hamlet resting in the hills about an hour's walk from his residence, and is instantly taken with it and its people. It is in this village that Werther encounters the object of his adoration, the gracious, beautiful and kind Lotte. Although warned that the charming Lotte is spoken for, the emotional Werther is immediately taken with this young woman. This fateful encounter is the heart of the story. His fondness for Lotte is not based on logic or reality, rather it is rooted in passion and fantasy. Werther considers his passionate heart as his most laudable characteristic. His impassioned behavior, however, leads him down a dark path with tragic results.

Werther is able to believe in the possibility that he can win Lotte's heart until the return of her fiance, Albert. With the return of Albert who stakes his claim for Lotte, Werther is no longer able to ignore reality. His clinging and emotional dependence on Lotte compel Albert to eventually call for an end to his wife's friendship with Werther. While Lotte is not completely innocent—she does not want Werther out of her life—there is no hesitation in her ultimate decision to adhere to her husband's wishes.

After Werther embraces and steals a kiss from Lotte, her mixed feelings for Werther become apparent. If she is forced to give him up, she will have a hole in her heart. Though they do not openly discuss it, Lotte and Albert both know that for their relationship to survive, Werther must die. When Werther sends his servant with a note asking to borrow Albert's pistol, Albert and Lotte are well aware of its intended use—yet they do not stop him.

Werther kills himself with the pistol. In a farewell letter to Lotte, he tells her that they were meant for each other and that she belongs to him. He offers his certainty that they will reunite one day in heaven.



May 4, 1771

May 4, 1771 Summary

May 4, 1771

Werther is writing to a friend and boasting about romantically leading a young woman. He vows that he will begin to look on the bright side of things and leave the past in the past. He asks the friend to assure his mother that he is devoting himself to her business and will update her soon. Werther finds the aunt, who is in control of some inheritance money due his mother, to be engaging and is sure that the money matter will work out in his mother's favor. Werther touts the value of malice and cunning over misunderstandings and lethargy.

May 4, 1771 Analysis

Werther's vow to turn over a new leaf and adopt a positive attitude, is an admission that he lacked such demeanor in the past. Later he admonishes another young man for his dark moods while failing to discuss his own. Werther vows to keep the past in the past, which points to an incident or unpleasantry which immobilized him—the mysterious death of his friend, Lenore. Werther feigns sorrow for leading on a young woman romantically when he in reality seems to have relished it. Perhaps the experience served to feed the ego of a young man who was not typically successful with women.

Werther asserts his admiration for deceit and ill-will. Second to the virtues of those erstwhile evils, is the confusion caused by inaction or miscommunication. The ambiguous nature of Werther is revealed in these professions. Werther's failure to apply worth to truth and honesty and good works points to his depressed state from which he, in the space of the same letter, vows to recover.



May 10 through 15

May 10 through 15 Summary

May 10 through 12 - Werther is lost in the beauty of the nature contained in the region that Werther is visiting. He relates that his art (painting) has suffered from the distractions offered by the setting. He feels at one with God but inadequate to fully communicate his experience. He compares his new environment to Paradise. A cool stream and well are invigorating sources that seem to possess recuperative powers.

May 13 - Werther responds to his friend's question about his books. He does not want them sent—they will disturb his reverie. He does not need exciting narrative; rather, he needs a calming lullaby akin to Homer's works with which he always found respite. Werther reminds his friend that his heart is changeable on its own and does not need outside stimulation. His moods alternate between joy and sadness. He treats his heart like a sick child—giving it whatever it wants.

May 15 - Although the children in the town were at first rude to Werther, he feels they have grown to respect him. He attributes their attitude to the condescending attitude of those of the upper class to which the children belong. Werther points out to his friend that he helped a peasant girl with her water bucket.

May 10 through 15 Analysis

Werther is self-delusional in thinking the "Paradise" he is visiting will soothe his soul. He admits to mood swings which is an indication of a serious depressive disorder, perhaps bi-polar syndrome. He treats his heart like a "sick child," giving it whatever it wants. He fails to address his malady by presenting a facade—his "cure" lies in bending to the ebb and flow of his passions (sickness) rather than facing the steps towards true recovery.

The middle class Werther is sensitive to rejection and derision from the upper class. In a grandiose gesture, Werther boasts about helping a peasant girl. He fails to realize that his own patronizing attitude is akin to those behaviors he abhors in the upper class—another indication of Werther's self-delusion.



May 17 through 30

May 17 through 30 Summary

May 17 - Werther has made many acquaintances in the town however he does not feel close to anyone. When he allows himself, he does enjoy the conversation and good spirit of the people. Werther speaks of a female friend of his youth who has passed away. He mourns their special relationship, the fun they shared, the exchanges of their witty remarks. Werther meets the prince's steward who has nine children. The man's oldest daughter is mentioned by many of the townspeople. Werther accepts an invitation to the steward's house.

May 22 - Wilhelm is the name of the friend to whom Werther is writing the letters. Werther laments about man's lot—somewhat ascribing, perhaps wishing, that life was but a dream. He is able to smile at the world when he is asleep and dreaming. Man gets caught up in the mundane day to day life—often there is little meaning and direction in one's life. The most happy creatures on earth are children who can repeat the same actions day after day, fill their cheeks with cake and can only respond with a request for "more." Man deludes himself that he is free—he is weighted down under the burdens of living and is the farthest thing from free.

May 26 - Werther finds respite in a village located on the outskirts of town. There are not many people around—they work in the fields; Werther finds the environment conducive to art making. He is happy with a sketch he makes of two young peasant boys, Hans and Phillip. He tells Wilhelm that if one is smitten with a girl or with art, there is no way that he can withstand the constraints of society and split his time between his love (or art) and work. Doing so, he would lose his love or his art—both objects of passion.

May 27 - Werther befriends the mother of the children in his sketch. He feels sorry for the woman who lives such a meager existence—one day to the next are all the same. He is generous and is in the habit of giving each of her three children a coin each Sunday. Werther seems to enjoy being around them. The woman's husband is off on an inheritance quest much like his own mission.

May 30 - Werther views "literature" as an "art" asserting that only a few words are necessary to convey a beautiful message. Werther tells Wilhelm about a peasant lad he met in the village of Wahlheim. The young man reveals that he is in love with a widow whose first husband did not treat her lovingly. She is not young but the man is very much in love with her and finds her beautiful despite her age. Werther is confounded by this love. The young man loves her so genuinely and deeply that her age matters not. Werther envies the love the man feels for the woman. Werther chooses not to meet her, fearing that her appearance will ruin the beautiful picture of love he has in his mind.



May 17 through 30 Analysis

Werther is once again pulling the class card in not allowing himself to become too close to the peasantry. He laments the death of Lenore who was witty and charismatic. His thoughts of this woman are juxtaposed against mention of the daughter of the prince's steward who everyone "talks about." Goethe is raising the specter that this woman may be worthy, in Werther's eyes, of his attentions. Werther's mental state is at the forefront as he is often depressed, only happy when he is asleep. He longs for the happiness of a child who wants for little other than "more" biscuits.

Werther cannot fathom splitting his time between either a woman he loves or his art which he has passion for and mundane, everyday work. By placing the two idolatries in somewhat the same category, Werther reveals that he chases only that which is subjective and fleeting. Once again, he does not face up to real life. Werther is confounded by the love a young man has for an older woman. How can this young man love the older woman? Werther longs for the pure love that this man holds for the woman. However, Werther shows he is shallow and lacks the character necessary for such a deep love when he chooses not to meet the older woman because her appearance would ruin the beautiful picture of love he has in his head.



June 16 through July 24

June 16 through July 24 Summary

June 16 through 19 - Werther meets one of "the most charming creatures," in the form of the beautiful Charlotte, or Lotte, who is the eldest daughter of the prince's steward. It is love at first sight for Werther. Prior to meeting her he is warned by one of the ladies in the town, who is well aware of Lotte's charms, to not be taken with Lotte because she is spoken for. Her betrothed is away on an estate issue but will soon return.

The warning does not take hold as Werther cannot keep his eyes off the charming Lotte. He hangs on every word she utters. At the party, Lotte and Werther are the only two who know how to do the German dance so they become partners. Werther is in ecstasy until a woman reminds Lotte about "Albert," who is Lotte's fiance. Werther senses that Lotte holds an attraction for him. Werther begins visiting Lotte on a daily basis. He is completely enraptured with her.

June 29 - Werther visits Lotte and plays and romps with her little sisters and brothers. Children are the dearest things to Werther's hearts. He asserts to Wilhelm that they should not be treated as inferiors and should not be expected to have no will of their own. In heaven God sees only young children and old children—in heaven there is no distinction.

July 1 - Lotte visits several sick people in the town. Her presence uplifts their spirits. Werther is annoyed by Herr Schmidt, the suitor of Friederike, the sick man's daughter. Schmidt is a sour person with an obviously dour outlook on life. At dinner, Werther broaches the subject of ill-tempered people. He indicates that one's attitude is within each person's control. Schmidt disagrees with Werther's assertion that displaying a bad mood is a vice. It is a vice, according to Werther, in that it disheartens those around the person. If a friend lies dying, one must be able to provide some courage and comfort. With these words, Werther becomes emotionally disturbed as he recalls a similar scene in his own life. Lotte scolds him for becoming too emotional, warning that it will destroy him. He writes to Wilhelm that he will stay alive only for her.

July 6 - Werther takes a long walk with Lotte and two of her younger sisters, Marianne and Malchen. In his exuberance for children, he picks little Malchen up and kisses her all over her face. Lotte tells him he was wrong to do that and has Malchen wash her face in the nearby stream. Werther understood that Lotte was attempting to purify the child. Later, a man who he trusted, tells him that Lotte was wrong to bring suspicion into the mind of a child.

July 8 through 13 - Werther is reduced to feeling like a child when he silently pleads for Lotte to look at him but she avoids his eyes. Werther is disturbed whenever someone asks if he likes Lotte. "Like" is not a strong enough word when speaking of Lotte. Werther writes to Wilhelm that he is sure Lotte loves him—he can see it in her eyes. Yet



when she mentions her fiancé, she speaks with love and warmth. At those times, Werther feels like a soldier stripped of his sword.

July 16 through 19 - The slightest, innocent touch of Lotte sends Werther into ecstasy. When in a dark mood and ready to put a bullet in his head, Werther is revived by a simple tune Lotte plays on her clavier. The song takes away the darkness and confusion in Werther's soul. When Werther cannot attend a gathering where Lotte will be, he sends his manservant in his place. When the servant returns, Werther is ecstatic just to be near him because he was in the company of Lotte. All Werther wants out of each day is to see Lotte.

July 20 through July 24 - Werther is resisting his mother's suggestion that he accompany an ambassador to specific, though unnamed, destination. Werther responds to Wilhelm's urging that he not forget his painting by explaining that he has recently begun a few drawings but has failed in completing them.

June 16 through July 24 Analysis

Werther meets the glorious Lotte with whom he becomes immediately transfixed. By ignoring another woman's warning that he not become drawn to her because she is engaged, Werther reveals his tendency to deny reality. Werther tries to endear himself to Lotte by showing affection towards her younger siblings. This tact fails him when Lotte is angered by his excessive kissing of a younger sister. She makes the child wash her face in the stream thus signaling her true feelings—perhaps she considers him tainted, not worthy of her love.

Although Werther admonishes Herr Schmidt for his dour attitude, he feels rescued from his own "dark and confusion" by Lotte's song. He is exuberant in one instance with the certainty of Lotte's love, while in the next he is ready to shoot himself in the head. His roller coaster moods and overreaction to Lotte's every word and gesture, point to his questionable mental state. Even though Werther asserts to Wilhelm that Lotte loves him, he is instantly destroyed when she speaks lovingly of her fiancé. When she mentions her fiancé, he feels stripped of his "sword," a symbol of his emasculation.

Werther has the recollection of a scene when his friend, Lenore, died. The thought of that tragedy still brings tears to his eyes. Is Lotte perhaps a replacement, distraction, for the other young woman who died? Does Werther feel some guilt over her passing—guilt that feeds the continuing decline of his emotional state?

July 26 through September 10

July 26 through September 10 Summary

July 26 - He asks that Lotte not sprinkle her notes to him with sand. He raised one to his mouth and got sand in his teeth. Werther vows to stay away from Lotte but the next day he again finds himself there with her.

July 30 - Albert, Lotte's finance, returns. Albert is a decent fellow and always in a good mood—a trait that is important to Werther. Albert seems to admire Werther for his intelligence and does not seem to be jealous of his friendship with Lotte. Werther admits to Wilhelm that if the situation were reversed, he would be jealous of Albert. He hates seeing Albert and Lotte together. He becomes so distraught that at one point, he exhibits such raucous behavior that Lotte asks him to calm down—he is frightening her.

August 8 - Werther responds to Wilhelm's urging that he see the situation with Lotte realistically. Wilhelm asserts that either he has a chance with her or not; if there is no chance, he should free himself of the situation. Werther asserts that the emotions that are sapping his energy do not allow him the strength to rid himself of the predicament. Werther cites his diary whose entries reflect that he understood his situation from the very beginning yet has willingly been seduced by emotions.

August 10 - Werther reports to Wilhelm that his relationship with Albert has become very friendly. Werther understands the irony of his situation which privately brings him to tears. Albert never fails to show love and respect for Lotte whom he holds in the highest esteem. Albert has received a position from which he will gain a healthy income.

August 12 - Werther plans on taking a hike in the mountains. He asks Albert if he can borrow his hand pistols. Albert agrees to loan him the weapons but notes that they are unloaded. Albert relates that an unfortunate incident happened when a loaded gun went off accidentally and wounded a maid. Since then, he makes sure the guns are unloaded.

Werther takes one of the empty guns and holds it to his temple. Albert reacts with horror, quickly taking the gun from him. Even though it is unloaded, Albert insists that Werther should never display such behavior. No matter what excuse Werther may offer for holding the gun to his temple, Albert maintains the assertion that it is a depraved act. While Albert thinks it reasonable to protect one's family with a gun; he believes that an act of passion is insane. Werther defends the passions of men who have taken mankind onto greatness. Albert dismisses Werther's argument—one cannot compare the cowardly act of suicide with greatness.

Werther argues that once passion takes over one's being, no outside person not thus afflicted can impart upon him a cure—just as a healthy man cannot give a dying man renewed life. Werther refers to a girl recently found dead. The man in whom she had



placed all her hopes abandoned her. She destroyed her torments when she jumped off the cliff. Such a person must die in order to escape the labyrinth of confusion. No one could have convinced the girl that her love life would ever recover. Albert responds that the girl was naïve—any experienced, educated adult would not behave thus. They part, neither man understanding the other. Albert will not acknowledge that passion raging out of control can occur within anyone's heart.

August 18 and 21 - The beauty of nature that Werther had so enjoyed when first arriving at the town now has turned on him. He sees it as an all-consuming beast, undermining Werther's heart. He sleeps and dreams of Lotte. When he is still groggy from sleep, he reaches for her. Once awake, he is sobbing, overcome with the reality that she is not there. All he has to look forward to is a dark future with no chance of consolation.

August 22 - Werther considers taking on work that will keep him busy, not allowing time to dwell on his misery. However, he tells Wilhelm that his despair will follow him no matter where he goes.

August 28 - It is Werther's birthday. Albert gifts him with a two-volume set of Homer. The books are wrapped with red ribbons that Lotte had worn when Werner first met her. He kisses the ribbons a thousand times and thinks back to those early days with her.

August 30 - Werther tells Wilhelm he is miserable without Lotte but is no longer content to be in her presence as he is constantly fighting off the strengthening urge to tell her of his desolation. He can only see solace in a grave.

September 3 - Werther writes Wilhelm that he has decided to leave Lotte and Albert.

September 10 - Werther meets with Lotte and Albert one last time before his departure. Werther assures Lotte that they will meet again. He kisses her hand and wets it with his tears. As Albert and Lotte walk away, Werther falls on the ground, sobbing.

July 26 through September 10 Analysis

Werther spirals into a deeper depression with the return of Lotte's fiancé, Albert. Werther's manic behavior is intensified with the added pressure of seeing Albert and Lotte together. As much as Werther has tried to fend it off, Werther must finally give reality its due.

Werther is contemplating suicide which is evidenced when he asks to borrow Albert's pistol and places the empty weapon to his temple. Although the gun is indeed not loaded, Werther in dramatic desperation tries to convey to his (secret) competitor that his passions are leading him to his demise. Werther is hoping that Albert somehow understands that the source of his despair is his unrequited love for the Lotte. He fantasized that Albert, whom Werther views as a temperate man of considerable character, to save Werther's life, will step aside and allow Werther and Lotte to be together. In a grandiose attempt to justify his thoughts of suicide, Werther equates such acts with ones of greatness. In a lame attempt to feel superior to Albert, the man whom



Lotte loves and will marry, Werther touts as a virtue his raging passion which Albert neither possesses nor understands.

Werther's emotional state has reached its nadir—he is miserable with or without Lotte. He misses her when she is not there but when he is with her he can hardly control himself from confessing his secret misery to her. He finds comfort only in the vision of a grave. Although by the end of this segment, Werther has decided to leave Lotte, he is sobbing uncontrollably and does not appear to be heading for a recovery in his change of venue.



October 20 through December 24

October 20 through December 24 Summary

October 20 through November 26 - Werther has left the town where Lotte and Albert live. He mentions traveling with a cantankerous ambassador with whom he has gained employment. He attributes his lack of self-worth to a society where one compares himself to his surroundings and those with whom he associates. In these comparisons, it is difficult not to find oneself lacking.

November 26 - In his new destination, Werther has impressed a count with whom he has become acquainted.

December 24 - Werther is growing further dissatisfied with his ambassador who is unreasonably demanding upon him. The ambassador seems to resent the solid relationship that Werther has formed with the count who does not seem to like the ambassador. Werther finds the rest of the townspeople less than appealing. However, he has met a charming young aristocratic woman. The young woman lives with her old aunt who is condescending toward the middle class. The aunt reportedly was beautiful in her youth but has frittered away her life and now finds herself alone other than visits from those attracted by her young niece.

October 20 through December 24 Analysis

October 20 through December 24

Werther's hope that by leaving the town where Lotte lives he will forget her is soon quashed. He grows restless with the job he takes on with the ambassador. His only solace is a young aristocratic girl he meets who reminds him of Lotte, symbolic of Werner's inability to forget her. Werther's lack of depth is once again revealed when he takes note of the girl's old aunt who "was beautiful in her youth."

That Werther now prefers Ossian poetry—often depicting death and graves—over the milder Homeric works is a sign that Werther's mood is continuing to darken.



January 8 through September 3, 1772

January 8 through September 3, 1772 Summary

January 8 - Werther laments about the upper echelon asserting that it is often the underlings who actually are behind their successes.

January 20 - Werther writes this time to Lotte. He tells her how he misses her and that he has spoken highly of her to his new young female friend. Werther tells Lotte how he cannot get up in the morning and stays in bed and misses the sunset. He asks if Albert is still with her.

February 8 and February 17 - Werther finds the weather and the narrow-minded people he now finds himself with, especially the ambassador, almost unbearable. Werther's outspokenness landed him a rebuke by the Minister. Werther was deemed to be too emotional and inappropriately proud of his work, traits the Minister attributed to his youth.

February 20 - Werther scolds Albert in a letter for not telling him in advance about their wedding. He bids farewell to both Albert and the angel in heaven, Lotte.

March 15 - Werther scolds Wilhelm about his state of affairs. He blames Wilhelm and others who told him that taking a job and keeping busy would distract him from his emotional woes. He is forced to attend a dinner with the condescending aristocrats whom he despises. Werther is heartened when the young woman he was attracted to, whom he refers to as Fraulein B, appears at the party. However, she seems distant and remote toward him. Is she too embarrassed to acknowledge him in front of the aristocracy to which she belongs? Is she like the rest of them? Others at the party are whispering and the Count reluctantly tells Werther that the others do not feel comfortable with him there. Werther becomes a figure of scorn by some for having tried to elevate himself socially. Others pity him for the humiliating experience he encountered at the party.

March 16 - Werther encounters Fraulein B who is genuinely sorry for the treatment that Werther received at the party. She tells Werther more than he wants to know—many people were delighted that he was humiliated. Her aunt scolded her about her association with him. Werther feels wounded and has a rage growing within his soul. Werther at once thinks of driving a dagger through someone else's heart and through his own.

March 24 through May 5 - Werther tells Wilhelm that he has resigned his position with the ambassador. He knows his mother will be hurt by this action but he can no longer bear the circumstances. A prince he recently met thinks a lot of him and has invited him to spend the spring with him. Werther's resignation is accepted by the Minister. He



leaves for the Prince's estate but first heads to the hometown of his birth. He recalls being with his mother after his father's death.

May 9 - Werther revisits many familiar places of his childhood. He sees the schoolhouse where he endured many unhappy and anxious times. He finally arrives at the Prince's hunting lodge for his stay but soon does not feel comfortable—the Prince seems to surround himself with dishonest people. The Prince admires Werther's intelligence and talents but fails to recognize that his heart, his passion is his greatest gift.

June 11 through 18 - Werther has grown disenchanted with the Prince and plans to leave soon. The Prince has disappointed Werther with his lack of appreciation for art. Werther confesses that all he wants is to see Lotte again.

July 29 through September 3 - Werther envisions himself married to Lotte. He is more suited to be her husband than Albert who has no understanding about the passion in one's heart. Werther muses what would happen if Albert were to die. However, how would Werther react—would he chase the illusive Lotte and then retreat trembling when he finally caught her? How can anyone else love Lotte when he loves her so much? In his life, there is only Lotte to love—there is nothing else for him to have or hold.

January 8 through September 3, 1772 Analysis

Werther has more encounters with one of his nemeses—classism. His resentment is clear when he self-indulgently asserts to Wilhelm that the aristocracy is successful only due to the work and talent of its underlings. As much as he protests, Werther seems to seek the company of the higher class. He boasts to Wilhelm that the count and the prince both admire him and seek his counsel and company. One must question the veracity of those claims and assume that Werther's point of view is skewed by his emotional state. His social climbing behavior gets a shot across the bow when several aristocrats become nervous with his presence at one of their parties. In humiliation, he is forced to leave. Werther is in such rage over the incident that he has thoughts of murder and suicide. Werther maintains a micron of his ego by asserting to Wilhelm that the aristocrats lack the most important attribute—passion.

Werther's misery is confounded by the absence of Lotte. He still loves her and opines that he would be better suited husband for her than Albert. He daydreams about what would happen if Albert were to die. Death is never far from Werther's mind. He has a difficult time with his new surroundings and does so poorly at his new job that he is rebuked by the Minister. He is in despair when he receives word of Lotte's marriage to Albert. This harsh reality causes Werther to all but give up. He quits his job and heads to his childhood home to a time and place before Lotte. However, since his recollection of his school years summons up old pains and sadness, it is clear that Werther's troubles did not just begin when he encountered Lotte.



September 4 through November 26

September 4 through November 26 Summary

September 4 - Werther encounters a peasant man he knew in a village near Wahlheim. The man confesses to Werther that he had intimate relations with a widow woman for whom he did work as a farmhand but was later banned from seeing her again by her brother. The man heard that she is set to marry someone else. Werther relates the story of the peasant, telling Wilhelm that the story of the man is his story as well.

September 5 - Werther learns that Albert will be away for a while. He has a new coat made that is identical to the one he wore when he first met Lotte. Werther visits Lotte who has a new pet canary. The canary gently pecks her lips and takes crumbs from them. Werther can hardly stand the images of the bird gently pecking her moist and open mouth.

September 15 through October 12 - Werther is extremely upset that a giant walnut tree where he sat with Lotte near the pastor's residence was hacked down by the new pastor's wife. Werther is entranced by Lotte's black eyes, sensing that Albert is not as taken as he. The works of poet Ossian have replaced Homer's poetry in Werther's heart and mind. Ossian opens a new world for Werther as the poetry focuses on death and graveyards and those left behind by their beloved.

October 19 through 30 - Werther dreams of holding Lotte just once. Werther wonders how long he would stay in Lotte's memory if he were to disappear. He confirms over and over to himself that he is nothing without Lotte. She is his everything—he wants to reach out and hold her. Does not that simple invention of God, a child, reach out for that which draws his attention?

November 3 through 15 - Werther often goes to bed at night hoping not to wake again. His heart is dead and his eyes are dry. He prays to God for tears but they are not forthcoming. Lotte admonishes him for drinking too much—he should think of her. Think of her! That is all he does. Wilhelm offers his support and advice but Werther begs he allow him to let his fate play out. He appreciates that Wilhelm allows him to pour his heart out but he must drink of the cup that has been prepared for him.

November 21 through 26 - Werther catches every look from Lotte, interpreting it as compassion and caring. She bids him goodnight by saying "Adieu dear Werther." "Dear," "dear." He repeats the word a hundred times. He refuses to pray to have her—she belongs to someone else. He can barely look at her sweet lips knowing he will never kiss them. Perhaps he should consider himself special in surely no one has ever been as tormented as he.



September 4 through November 26 Analysis

Two of Werther's personal demons merge when he encounters a peasant man who has lost at love. That he has so much in common with a peasant pours salt in his wounded heart and fragile ego. In an effort to recapture the beginning of his relationship with Lotte and perhaps have a chance to begin anew, Werther has a new coat made that is identical to the one he wore when he first met her.

Werner's thoughts of death and dying are becoming more dominant. He wonders how long it would take Lotte to forget him if he would die. When Werther writes that his heart is dead and his eyes can no longer cry, Goethe is signaling his imminent demise. Werther's obsessive behavior is crystallized when he repeats and repeats "hundreds of times" the endearing term used by Lotte once in referring to him.



November 30 through December 6

November 30 through December 6 Summary

November 30 - Werther is finding the outdoors unappealing, dank and cold. On a walk, Werther encounters a man who seems to be in search of something in the damp rocks. Werther asks the man, who appears to be a peasant, what he might be looking for. The man responds that he is looking for flowers. Impossible—there are no flowers in this weather. An older woman approaches who is the man's mother. She explains that her son is insane. He had been chained up in a madhouse for six months but was released and is better. Werther presses a coin in the old woman's hand.

Werther almost envies the man. Tomorrow he will repeat his same quest and will not be aware of his dismal existence. Werther, on the other hand, is all too sadly aware of his tragedy. Indeed, who is really mad? While Werther blames God for his fate, he prays that He "Call me to You."

December 1 through December 6 - Werther writes Wilhelm that the young peasant who was hunting flowers in the damp rocks was driven mad by none other than the lovely Lotte! Werther's angst is at such a state that he flares up at Lotte who tells him he is ill and that he should calm himself. As Werner closes his eyes, he still sees Lotte's dark eyes. Just when man needs the most strength, he is abandoned by his impassive consciousness that will not allow him to forget.

November 30 through December 6 Analysis

Werther's chance encounter with an insane man in the woods convinces him that to be mad would be a blessing, envying the madman's oblivion to his own tragedy. Contrarily, Werther is astutely aware of his misery. Rhetorically, he asks who then is truly the mad man? Werther has given up on Lotte and thus on life. He is not only prepared to die, he is praying for his end. His angst and wish to end his life are evidenced in his demand to God to "Call me to You."



The Editor to the Reader

The Editor to the Reader Summary

Werther is dead. An editor who is producing a narrative of Werther's story tells the reader of the careful steps he is taking in the compilation of all the documents that remain from the departed. These documents include unsent letters and notes found in his personal affects. The editor also talked with some of Albert's friends to confirm details of Werther's final days.

A murder has taken place in Wahlheim—the farmhand of a local lady has been found dead. Werther suspects the murderer to be the ex-farmhand who was in love with the widowed lady. Werther goes to investigate and finds that he is correct. As they are taking the ex-farmhand away, he tells Werther that if he could not have her then she could have no one else. Werther relates to the man's plight and vows to defend him. He pleads with the steward, Lotte's father, to free the man but the steward refuses saying that the "wretch will not be saved" which sentence Werther absorbs on a personal level.

Albert tells Lotte to limit visits with Werther—people are starting to talk. He asks that she turn her relationship with Werther in a different direction. Werther never recovers from the murder nor his strained relationship with Albert. He allows depression and sadness to triumph.

December 12 and 14 - Werther tells Wilhelm of his fragile emotional state. He feels that he has been possessed by devils. A flood ravishes the meadow leaving Werther wishing he were washing away with it. Werther dreams of holding Lotte but knows there is no hope. He would be better off not there.

The editor found an undated note that confirmed Werther's plans to end his life.

December 20 - Werther replies to Wilhelm's offer to travel there and accompany him home. Werther asks Wilhelm for another two weeks and to not come for him until he sends word.

The editor learns from friends that Lotte, at her husband's urging, was determined to curtail her relationship with Werther. She felt much sympathy for him but wanted to conform to her husband's wishes. The Sunday before Christmas, Lotte invites Werther for Christmas Eve. She tells him not to come back before then—that "It can't go on this way." She tells him to go away, find a girl he can love and return so they can have a true friendship.

Werther leaves a letter for Lotte that is found after his death. He tells her he wants to die. After she tells him to stay away until Christmas Eve, his spirits sink to new lows. He confesses in his letter that he thought of killing her, Albert and himself many times. The only solution to the situation, is for one of the three to die—he has decided that it is he



who must go. He finishes the letter to Lotte telling her she will be crying and trembling on Christmas Eve when she reads this letter.

Lotte is having misgivings about ending her relationship with Werther. She feels his absence will cause a hole in her heart. She wishes she could make him her brother. In the past, she had tried to think of women to introduce him to but none were ever suitable in her view. She understands now that she always wanted Werther to herself, even though she was happy and content with her marriage. Werther comes by and reads a long translation of some Ossian's songs. After his emotional reading, Werther throws himself at Lotte's feet. They caress and she places his hand on her breast. He kisses her trembling lips. Lotte pushes him away and tells him he will never see her again.

Werther continues his letter to Lotte, telling her that he will kill himself that night. He asks for her forgiveness but is thankful he got one kiss which is still burning on his lips. Werther tells Lotte that she is his forever and that they will reunite in heaven. Werther sends a note to Albert asking to borrow his pistol.

In the meantime, Lotte is questioning her feelings. Was she insulted by his brash behavior or was that burning in her breast the lingering fire of Werther's embrace? How can she confess to her husband what just transpired? She worries about Werther—might he try to take his life? Albert had brought the subject up before but did not truly believe that Werther would end his own life. After Albert returns, Werther's servant appears with the note asking for the pistols. Albert says, "I wish him a pleasant journey" and tells Lotte to give the guns to the servant. Lotte dusts off the guns and gives them to the servant. She is horrified but she cannot bring herself to confess to her husband or plead with him to talk to Werther.

Werther learns that Lotte handed the guns to his servant which he includes in his letter to her. He writes Wilhelm a last letter saying good-bye and confirming that his affairs are in order. He asks Wilhelm to express his sorrow to his mother. He writes to Albert, apologizing for upsetting his house and wishing he and the angel happiness.

Werther finishes the letter to Lotte. He asks that her father see that he is buried in the churchyard. He wants to be buried in the clothes he is in because they touched her. The red ribbons that she wore when they first met are to be buried with him. He says a final farewell to his beloved Lotte.

A neighbor witnesses the flash of the gunpowder and hears the shot. Werther's servant finds him on the floor the next morning. The servant sounds a bell for help. The doctor finds that Werther still has a pulse, but his body is paralyzed. He shot himself over the right eye where now part of his brain is protruding. He is gasping for air. The steward rushes in to be with him. His oldest son kisses Werther until he dies. The steward accompanies Werther to the burial site he chose. Albert cannot bring himself to attend. Lotte fears for her life. Artisans act as his pall bearers—no clergymen attend.



The Editor to the Reader Analysis

Several events set in motion the suicide of Werther. He shares a bond with a peasant who recently murdered the fiancée of the woman he wanted to marry himself. Werther begs the steward to free the man but he refuses—saying that the "wretch must not be saved" which fate Werther takes as a sign of his own impending fate. Another key element in Werther's final act is Albert's insistence that Lotte end all contact with Werther. Lotte softens her husband's message by telling Werther not to visit her as much but still it drives a dagger in Werther's heart.

Werther was never to know the mixed emotions Lotte had for him. Moreover, he died not knowing how self-centered the "selfless" Lotte had been in her relationship with him. She was well aware that he loved her and just as cognizant of the inherent dangers in such a situation. Yet, she allowed the relationship to endure—Werther falling more deeply in love with her while Albert was becoming increasingly uncomfortable with Werther's presence.

After Albert insists that she curtail her time with Werther, Lotte does some soul searching. She does have feelings for him. If he is not in her life, she will have a hole in her heart. She had never wanted their relationship to end. When he finally mustered the courage to kiss and embrace her the last time they were together, Lotte had to face her passionate reaction to his touch; however, her own status in life proves to be of ultimate importance to her.

Werther sends his servant to Albert to borrow his pistols. By instructing Lotte to retrieve the guns for him, the passive Albert is punishing Lotte for her role in the tragedy. He forces her to give Werther the instruments of his death. Lotte, who knows what the guns are for, does not try to put a stop to Werther's plans. Rather, she is allowing Werther's impending death to bring resolution to her guilt and conflict.

In his suicide note to Lotte, he professes his love for her and asks for her forgiveness. However, ever the romantic dreamer, Werther writes that they were meant to be together and will reunite in heaven. He bids Lotte farewell. In his impassioned, distorted way of thinking, Werther feels he has won.



Characters

Werther

Werther is the young man whose letters comprise the story of his ill-fated love for the beautiful Lotte. Werther is dispatched by his mother to an unnamed town to represent her in a disputed inheritance matter. There is duplicitous purpose for his travel, however, as he is running from the tragic and mysterious death of his friend, Lenore. Werther writes his friend Wilhelm frequently—first with updates about the inheritance issue and the beauty of nature that surrounds the town in which he finds himself.

However, soon after his arrival, Werther meets the lovely Lotte. Lotte, another woman warns, is not available and is engaged to another man, and therefore Werther should not allow himself to be attracted by her charms. However, she is beautiful, kind, gracious and totally captivating and Werther cannot resist her.

Throughout Werther's letters to Wilhelm are interspersed indications that Werther is victim to a serious emotional problem—specifically he has vast mood swings signaling that perhaps a bi-polar disorder has beset the young man. Werther's existing emotional condition is further compromised when he meets Lotte. She is kind to him and pays him, it seems, special attention. Lotte's behavior is misinterpreted by the fragile Werther who begins to think, per his letters to Wilhelm, that she loves him.

When Albert, Lotte's fiance, returns to the scene, Werther sinks further into despair. While Albert was not present, Werther was temporarily buoyed by the pretense that he could win the heart of Lotte. However, after Albert's return, reality refuses to be ignored any longer. References by Werther to suicide, dark thoughts and finding solace only in the grave portend tragedy for the young man.

Lotte

The gracious beauty Lotte is the object of young Werther's affection. Lotte is the eldest child of the widowed prince's steward. She has eight younger siblings whom she has cared for after her mother death. Lotte is not only physically appealing with her "black eyes" but she is kind and generous to everyone. She cuts the evening bread for her siblings in the exact size each one needs—the children are so attached to her that they will only take their food from her.

Werther is visiting the town in which Lotte lives. On the way to a town gathering, a woman who is fully aware of Lotte's appeal, warns Werther not to become drawn to her. She is betrothed to Albert who is currently out of town. Young Werther, however, cannot resist her charms. He is immediately taken with her. His love for Lotte grows throughout the tale, even though there is no possibility that Lotte will ever return his affections.



Although the story is written from Werther's point of view, there are indications that Lotte is aware of Werther's obsession with her. Since she is presented as a kind and sympathetic character, it follows that she would have concern for Werther, though not romantic passion. In Werther's emotionally-charged state, he, at times, misinterprets her actions as something beyond friendship. When she refers to him as "Dear Werther," Werther later in euphoria repeats the term of endearment "100 times."

Although she seems aware of the misery she is causing Werther, Lotte follows her heart and marries Albert—a harsh reality for young Werther. As the emotional Werther becomes a thorn in Albert's side, he insists that Lotte curtail her relationship with him. Lotte does some soul searching and confesses, at least in her own mind, that she does not want to let go of Werther—that there will be a hole in her heart. If she could make him her brother, she would not hesitate. None of her friends does she deem good enough for Werther. She wants him in her life but not in the coveted position that Werther desires.

Wilhelm

Wilhelm is the friend that Werther writes his letters to. The character never appears and the reader never sees any letters written by Wilhelm; however, Werther addresses questions and comments from Wilhelm in his responses.

Albert

Albert is first introduced as Lotte's fiancé. Later the couple marry. At one point Albert has a friendship with Werther but ultimately insists that his wife cease contact with the emotionally wrought Werther.

The Discharged Servant

Werther meets this young man who had fallen in love with his widowed employer early in the story. Later, it is revealed that, after a disastrous confession and subsequent dismissal, he murdered his replacement in a fit of jealousy.

The Mother in the Square

In his first days in Walheim, Werther encounters this peasant woman and her sons. He becomes somewhat of a patron to the boys, and gives them pennies on Sundays. Towards the end of the story, Werther again chances upon her to find that her youngest child, Hans, has died, and the family has been plunged into poverty.



The Count

The Count is an aristocratic friend of Werther's during his brief period of work in civil service. The Count is not pompous regarding his social station but, when he delicately asks Werther to leave a nobles' gathering at his home, he humiliates the sensitive young man into resigning his position and returning to Walheim.

Heinrich

Heinrich is a young man Werther encounters trying to pick flowers on the riverbank in the middle of winter. The boy was once a servant of the bailiff S., Lotte's father, but became deranged by his unrequited love of Lotte.

The Editor

The editor is the otherwise unnamed author who takes over narration in the days leading up to Werther's suicide. He offers the only view we have of Werther from another's perspective.

Fraulein B

Fraulein B is a young aristocratic woman to whom Werther is attracted. He meets her after he leaves the town where Lotte lives.

The Ambassador

In an attempt to escape his hopeless love for Lotte, Werther takes a job with an ambassador. He travels with the demanding and cantankerous ambassador for a short while before quitting his post.

The Prince

As in the case of the count, the unnamed prince finds Werther intelligent and seeks his counsel and company. He invites Werther to spend Spring with him at his hunting lodge.

Aristocratic and Peasant Classes

Werther, a young middle-class man, has dealings with people in classes both above and beneath him. He never arrives at a level of comfort in his associations with either class.



Objects/Places

Wahlheim

Wahlheim and the surrounding countryside is the site where most of the events in *The Sorrows of Young Werther* take place. It is a small quiet village for which Werther expresses much affection.

Germany

Germany was the home to author Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. While the country in the story is not specified, it is presumed to be Germany.

Werther's Letters

Goethe uses the letters written by Werther to his friend Wilhelm as the vehicle to gain insight into Werther's heart and mind.

Town that Werther Visits

Werther's mother has dispatched Werther to a small town in the country to represent her in an inheritance dispute. The town is never named.

Nature

Nature, to Werther, seems to include not simply the plants and animals of the world but all things not originating in human artifice. This includes emotion, inspiration, chance, and a host of other things in addition to the tangible world.

Homer

Homer is the author to whom the ancient Greek epic poems the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are attributed. In *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, these two works are often referenced as "my Homer."

Ossian

Ossian is the author that 18th century Scottish poet James Macpherson credited with a cycle of epic poems he supposedly found and translated from Gaelic. Macpherson is now believed to have constructed the Ossian works from a combination of existing Gaelic ballads and his own original compositions.



The Steward's Residence

The widowed steward to the prince lives with his nine children in a house near Wahlheim. Lotte is the eldest of his children.

The Flood

The valley in which Walheim is located floods due to a rapid thaw. Werther sees all the places he has shared time with Lotte submerged and considers suicide by throwing himself into the torrent.

Albert's Pistols

Werther borrows Albert's pair of pistols and uses one to shoot himself fatally in the head. Before his suicide, he remarks with approval that Lotte had touched them recently.

The Ball

Werther and Lotte are the only party-goers who know how to dance the German dance and become partners at the village ball.

The Cold Forest

Werther encounters an insane man who is trying to pick flowers from the frozen ground. Later Werther learns that the man went mad over his admiration for none other than Lotte.



Themes

Unrequited Love

If there was ever a case of unrequited love, the emotional tale of Werther in "The Sorrows of Young Werther" is the epitome. In fact, the novel by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe presents the genre in its extreme. Set in Germany in 1771, Werther is dispatched to an unnamed town to resolve a family matter. In a village nearby, he encounters the alluring Lotte who is betrothed to Albert. Werther is immediately taken with Lotte's charm. His love continues to grow for her throughout the tale even though there is never a possibility that she will return his love.

The reader gains insight into Werther's pain through the epistolary style of the tome which is segmented into letters Werther writes to his friend, Wilhelm. Werther overreacts to each and every word spoken or gesture made by Lotte. When she casually refers to him as "Dear Werther" he is launched into euphoria and later repeats the term of endearment to himself "100 times." When she writes a note to him, he asks her to not write it on the beach. In his fervor to share a shred of intimacy with Lotte, he inhaled sand from the envelope as he caressed it with his lips.

Werther, who is considered to be accomplished and intelligent, has a obsessive tendency and a manic-depressive personality. While not insane, Werther often refuses to look squarely at the reality of his situation, his perspective skewed by either irrational euphoria or undue despair. As the story runs to its conclusion, Werther envies a mad man, concluding that he would rather have the comfort of insanity than the lucid reality that he will never have Lotte's love. When the story concludes, there is no recovery for Werther. He chooses death over a life without Lotte.

Mental/Emotional Illness

There is much mention of Werther's mood swings, his failure to face reality and tendency to overreact—all indications of emotional problems. Rather than make a serious attempt to help himself out of the doldrums, Werther claims to treat his heart like a "sick child" giving it whatever it wants. He fails to address his malady by presenting a facade—his "cure" lies in bending to the ebb and flow of his passion (sickness) rather than taking rational steps towards true recovery.

Werther's mental and emotional states are always at the forefront of this story. As is common with depressed persons, Wilhelm admits that he is only happy when he is asleep. Werther can be exuberant and joyous in one instance while in the next he feels doomed and ready to shoot himself. His roller coaster moods and overreaction to Lotte's every word and movement point to his questionable mental state.

In a discussion with Albert, Werther's demented way of thinking is revealed. Werther poses that suicide based on passion can be an act of greatness. Werther feels that his



best quality is his "raging passion." Werther's emotional state reaches its nadir when he can neither stand life with or without Lotte. As his decline continues, Werther develops a fascination with death. He is drawn to Ossian poetry which often depicts death and graves. Werther envies an insane man because the poor soul is not aware of his tragic condition, unlike Werther, who is keenly aware of his despair. Werther poses the question: who is really the mad man?

Classism

The protagonist, young Werther, suffers from lack of self-worth at least partially rooted in the classism existing within the society in which he lives. Werther is described as middle-class and has awkward and strained interactions with both the classes above and beneath him. While he at times finds himself drawn to members of the peasantry, he holds back and resists getting too close or familiar with them. He deludes himself into thinking he is not condescending to the lower class. However, his grandiose patronizing of the peasantry is thinly-veiled and self-indulgent.

Werther has serious emotional problems to the extent that he is sometimes delusional. While he describes the "count" and the "prince" as in admiration of his intelligence and enjoying his company, one questions the veracity of those claims since he is not generally welcomed by the aristocrats. Perhaps his delusions have won him their praise. In an apparent social-climbing move, Werther attends a party given by a member of the aristocracy. Soon after his arrival, his very presence evokes resentment from some and he is asked to leave. When a friend fills him in on more details of the gossip about his imposition, his rage intensifies.

Although he seeks the company of the aristocrats, he is resentful of their place in life. He attributes their success not to their own abilities and talents but rather to their underlings who carry the water for them.

Had it not been for Werther's emotional battles, perhaps he could have thrived in life, and thus benefit from his apparent intelligence and ability. The treatment he received from the aristocrats at their party served to confirm the dismal self-image that had been formed in Werther long before.



Style

Point of View

There are two distinct points of view in "The Sorrows of Young Werther." The first point of view is seen only from that of the protagonist, Werther, through his letters. The second is the point of view of an unnamed individual who finds documents belonging to Werther after his suicide.

The first two sections of "The Sorrows of Young Werther" are presented in the epistolary genre in dated letters from young Werther to his friend Wilhelm. The point of view in these sections is restricted to that of an emotionally disturbed young man and therefore, the veracity of some of his professions deservedly come under some scrutiny. The letters are Goethe's mechanism to allow a peek inside Werther's head and heart. While the recipient of the letters, Wilhelm, is never seen nor directly heard from, Werther responds to concerns expressed by Wilhelm in unseen letters to Werther.

The third and last section of the novel entitled, "The Editor to the Reader," also begins in first person narrative but that of a different character—the fictional unnamed editor. This section contains the fact gathering process undertaken by the editor who has run across Werther's notes and unsent letters. He explains the care he has taken in maintaining the integrity and spirit of the documents.

The last portion of the third section contains the conclusion of Werther's story. In this portion, Goethe alternates between third person limited (narrative based on notes and unsent letters found in Werther's belongings) and first person narrative (the story as compiled from various sources by the editor).

Setting

The story of "The Sorrows of Young Werther" takes place in late 18th century Germany. At his mother's behest, Werther has traveled to a small town in the vast countryside to resolve a family matter regarding an inheritance. Outside the town, there is a small village called Wahlheim. In this small village surrounded by beautiful woods and meadows, Werther encounters the Prince's steward who has nine children. The eldest of these children is his daughter Lotte who becomes the object of Werther's affections.

When Werther first arrives in the region, he is lost in the beauty and grandeur of the surrounding countryside—the tall trees, lush meadows and invigorating spring water. It is so lovely, that Werther feels his art (painting) has suffered from the intrinsic distractions offered by the setting. Werther is so enraptured with the region that he feels he is becoming one with it—he even compares it to Paradise.

As Werther's emotional state diminishes throughout the story, he begins to loathe those same sumptuous surroundings as they are reminders of better times—before he



became obsessed with Lotte. The beauty of nature that Werther had so relished became his enemy—an all-consuming beast, undermining Werther's heart. When a horrific flood hits the area surrounding Wahlheim, Werther takes nature's watery vengeance as a sign heralding his suicide.

Language and Meaning

"The Sorrows of Young Werther" was written in German by Goethe in 1774. The English version of the novel is therefore a translation. The story is constructed in the epistolary genre with the letters written by Werther to his friend Wilhelm providing insight into the pain and despair of the young protagonist. Werther's letters provide him with the needed cathartic outlet for his pent up emotions and anguish over his ill-fated relationship with the beautiful Lotte. Much of Werther's words are emotionally charged and convey the despair of one who apparently suffers from mania and mood swings. Werther writes his impassioned lamentations in a consistently fervent manner. That he is cultured and well-educated comes across in his careful and discretionary wording.

The novel was a huge success when first published in Germany. In today's world, its success would be termed as "blockbuster." Young Werther is a book that through the ages has remained popular especially among the young. Part of the success of Goethe's "The Sorrows of Young Werther" can be attributed to its transitional nature. Werther's story is rooted in emotion and not, as novels preceding it had been, grounded in logic or rationalism.

Structure

"The Sorrows of Young Werther" by Johan Wolfgang von Goethe, is comprised of three large sections. The first two, "Book One" and "Book Two," are epistolary structures, segmented by dated letters. The letters are written from the protagonist, young Werther, to his friend Wilhelm. While there are several letters to others, Wilhelm is the recipient of the vast majority of Werther's letters. Although the reader does not see a letter from Wilhelm to Werther, the latter often writes in what is obviously a response to a comment or question from Wilhelm. The letters cover roughly a year and a half time range—from May 1771 through December 1772.

The third section of Young Werther is entitled, "The Editor to the Reader." This section is written in first person narrative and depicts the fictional editor who found the documents belonging to the departed young Werther. The editor explains his discovery of the documents and the lengths he went to in preserving their original meaning. The editor relies on some notes and unsent letters of Werther's, found among his personal effects, as well as first-hand verbal accounts from some of Albert's friends. The editor creates a compilation of the letters and provides the missing elements of the story, the conclusion of youth Werther's story.



Quotes

"And, dear friend, in this little transaction I have again discovered that misunderstandings and lethargy cause perhaps more confusion in the world than cunning and malice. At least, the least two are certainly more rare." (8)

"And then, hemmed in as he is, he still always holds in his heart the sweet feeling of freedom, and that he can quit this prison whenever he likes." (15)

"It is better for me to see her through the eyes of her lover; perhaps she would not appear to my own eyes as she now stands before me, and why should I spoil the beautiful picture?" (20)

"Every day I succumb to the temptation and make a sacred promise to myself: Tomorrow you'll stay away for once. But when morning comes I again find an irresistible reason, and before I know it I'm with her." (46)

"You exaggerate everything and are certainly wrong at least here, in comparing suicide, which is what we are talking about, with great deeds, since one cannot regard it as anything but a weakness." (53)

"Must it be, that what makes for man's happiness becomes the source of his misery?" (57)

"Of course, since we are so made that we compare everything with ourselves and ourselves with everything, happiness or misery lies in the objects we associate ourselves with, and in this there is nothing more dangerous than solitude." (71)

"I have so much, and my feeling for her swallows up everything. I have so much, but without her everything becomes nothing." (100)

"Father! Who filled all my soul and who has now turned His countenance away from me! Call me to You!" (108)

"You are not to be saved, wretch! I clearly see that we are not to be saved." (118)

"It is decided, Lotte, I want to die, and I write you this without romantic exaggeration, calmly, on the morning of the day on which I shall see you for the last time." (125)

"All is so quiet around me, and so calm my soul. I thank You, God, for giving me this warmth, this energy in these final moments." (146)

Topics for Discussion

What tragedy did Werther face prior to meeting Lotte? How did this experience possibly impact Werther's reaction to Lotte?

Why did Werther ask Lotte not to sprinkle any sand on letters she writes to him?

What are examples of Werther's obsessive behavior towards or about Lotte?

Describe the style of narration employed in this story and its purpose. Why the switch near the end?

What are Lotte's true feelings about Werther? How did her feelings potentially make Werther's suffering more severe?

What did Werther portend when he asked to borrow a pistol from Albert? What was Albert's reaction when Werther placed the unloaded gun to his temple? How did Albert's pistols play a pivotal role at the story's conclusion?

Werther reads the epic poems of Homer and "Ossian" throughout the story. Why does Werther's preference for Ossian poetry over his former favorite Homeric works foreshadow a dark future ahead for him?

What incident between Lotte and Werther preceded his suicide? How did he kill himself? Who saw to a proper burial for young Werther?