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A STUDY OF GOETHE

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BY
BARKER FAIRLEY

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PREFACE

THIS book is the outcome of writing its predecessor, *Goethe as revealed in his poetry* (1932). At the end of this task I felt that I had come to the beginning of a larger one and ought some day to return to Goethe and try to deal with him more comprehensively. I was dissatisfied with the biographies of him and was convinced that there was something more to be said. It was in the Charlotte period, I believed, that the crux of the biography lay and it was here that the book began. The analysis I make of Goethe in Frankfurt and also of Goethe in Italy followed the analysis I first made of the intervening years.

In dealing with the documents bearing on Goethe, I took them for the most part² at their face value and avoided complicating the issue with questions of authenticity. It seemed better to give chapter and verse throughout and, thus safeguarded, to make what use I could of the record, always relying on accumulated evidence and not on single items. Least of all was I disposed to question the sincerity of the Goethe documents proper unless there was a specific reason for it. This is a different procedure from that recommended by Hume Brown when he points out near the beginning of his *Life of Goethe* that 'the fashion of giving exaggerated expression to every emotion was, in fact, the convention of the day, and we find it in all the correspondence of both the men and women of the time. That it was in large degree forced and artificial and must be interpreted with due reserves will appear in the case of Goethe himself.' Here there can be no criterion unless it is that of results. In other words, which of the two ways of interpreting him makes better sense?

The question whether Goethe is not more vitally related to his age, and to our age, than we usually think is one that forced itself on me in the last pages of the book, as I came to the end of writing. It is a question easier perhaps to ask than to answer. But if it helps to dispose of the old notion that Goethe stood above his age or outside it, with his feet on nothing, it is pulling in the right direction. Moreover, we have to remember that the individualism and

self-absorption which emerges as a problem in Goethe's early life was not peculiar to him, but was shared by other poets and artists who came during and after his time. The introspectiveness that he endured and finally mastered must not be regarded as the mark of a bygone day, but rather as the forerunner of an age not yet terminated in which introspectiveness was to be one of the characteristic trends. The special appeal in our time of abnormally introverted figures like Hölderlin, Rilke, Kierkegaard, Kafka, and others may serve to remind us how near we still are, whether we like it or not, to Werther and to Tasso. To this extent Goethe's problem is our problem or part of our problem; we cannot afford to ignore it. And a further question arises. If the malady of introspection, manifested in Goethe and in so many others, grows out of the period rather than simply out of the man, it cannot be unrelated to the period or the life of the period or the way men lived in it. In other words, there must be a connexion between the private problem and the public, between the personal problem and the social. And if the connexion is there, might it not be expected to come out more fruitfully in those who, like Goethe, lived to reach mature and positive conclusions than in those who in one way or another failed to do so? This is not a casual question. It is the nature of Goethe's conclusions which prompts us to ask it.

For readers who have no German or not enough, it should be said that the whole argument in these pages is presented in English and that the necessary clue or paraphrase to the German quotations is always provided beforehand, the reader may take them or leave them, as he prefers. If I have chosen in many cases to reproduce Goethe's original spelling and punctuation rather than to follow the normalized text, I did so because I believe it brings us closer to his state of mind without causing any new difficulty.

There are three previously published papers of mine on which I have had occasion to draw, sometimes heavily, sometimes lightly, and for the use of which acknowledgement is here due: 'Goethe and Wordsworth, a point of contrast' (*Publications of the English Goethe Society*, 1934); 'Goethe's Attitude to Science' (*Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 1936); 'The Chameleon Image, a note on Goethe's *animula vagula*' (*Monatshefte für deutschen Unterricht*,

PREFACE

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1945). My indebtedness to those who have written on Goethe before me, though not great enough, is as great as I was able to make it. If I were to single out a particular debt, it would be to Hanna Fischer-Lamberg for her essay 'Charlotte von Stein, ein Bildungserlebnis Goethes' (*Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift*, 1937).

B. F.

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I

BEFORE WEIMAR

Wo viel Licht ist, ist starcker Schatten.

I. STATING THE PROBLEM

READERS of Goethe are agreed that his works are deeply involved in his experience. The translation of life into literature, observable in varying degrees in other writers, is in his case so immediate, so habitual, and so complex as almost to place him in a class apart. He, more than any, is the empirical poet who must go through things in person before he can find in himself the means of expressing them. This can be verified so extensively in his writings, alike in the most prosaic and in the most exalted of them, that we need not hesitate to conclude that it holds good everywhere and that he was so constituted from first to last. The law of personal experience, thus formulated, is the law governing his whole activity as poet and thinker. The Germans have a special word for it and call him their 'Erlebnisdichter'.

It was Goethe who first invited us to read him in this way by referring in a famous passage in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* to his lifelong practice of converting 'whatever delighted or tormented or otherwise engrossed him' into an image or a poem. In saying this he was giving an obvious hint to his biographers, who in their turn were not slow to seize on it and use it according to their lights. It was perhaps inevitable that in doing so they should think first of places and people, because in the task of filling out the life-story it was places and people that had to be established. Whoever tried to retrace Goethe's footsteps in Frankfurt or in Alsace or in Weimar was bound to run into associations with the works as well as with the man and it was both fitting and desirable that they should be put on record.

In this way there arose the search for originals, harmless enough in its beginnings, that so frequently passed for criticism in the Goethe literature of the nineteenth century. It was especially in relation to Goethe's men and women and their supposed prototypes that the biographers went to excess. The knowledge that he not infrequently put himself into one of his characters seems to have led to the assumption that he put someone, either himself or

another, into each of them and that it was for the biographers to run down as many instances as possible. There must have been times when they seriously asked themselves whether Albert in *Werthers Leiden* was Kestner or Brentano, or whether Mephistopheles was Herder or Merck or, possibly, Behrisch. Characters as ideally conceived as Ottilie in the *Wahlverwandtschaften* or the Princess in *Torquato Tasso* were subjected to this sort of treatment and identified with characters in real life. The alternative to identifying character with character outright was to take traits of character from here and there and build a synthetic person out of them. But this was only going from bad to worse.

The triteness, the futility of this sort of research has long been recognized and its day is over. If a modern critic ventures into this precarious territory he does so with caution. Ernst Beutler recently unearthed a gruesome parallel to the Gretchen tragedy in the criminal records of Frankfurt in the seventeen-seventies, which students of Goethe will want to inspect. But after satisfying us that the trial was conducted in Goethe's circle and almost under his nose, Beutler is careful to remind himself and us that the true source of the Gretchen tragedy is not here but in the heart and mind of the poet. And in saying this he carries the modern reader with him.

This marks a considerable advance but it does not provide a stopping-place. If by transferring the problem to the heart and mind of the poet we are putting it out of reach, the gain is questionable. The older critics, it must be remembered, were not wholly at fault. They believed, as we do, that the life and the works were in some unusually intimate relation and they did what they could to explore it. The mistake they made was to study the relation externally in terms of persons and localities and to stop there, thus robbing the problem of its depth. The way to improve on what they did was not to reject the problem but to bring a sounder conception of biography to bear on it, since the need to make the life of Goethe illuminate the works remained as before.

But it was not on these lines that criticism proceeded. The critics who in recent times have gone farthest in the interpretation of Goethe are precisely those who have laid the biography aside and read their Goethe without it. It is as if, having seen what superficial results the biographical method was capable of producing, they had decided to dispense with it as nearly as possible and

write without its help. How else are we to understand a work like Simmel's which, profound as it is, takes virtually no account of time and place in Goethe's life but sees only the fixed and final deposit? Simmel writes of him as if he were a piece of ore that he had picked up and could hold in his hand, turning it this way and that till he had examined every crystal in it. And the same can be said of the work of Chamberlain and Leisegang and Cassirer, none of whom are really at home with Goethe till they have disengaged him from his biography and carried him off, as it were, by himself. Great as our debt must be to these critics, whose merit it is to have restored the interpretation of Goethe to the philosophical level at which it must be continued, we cannot consider their work as final, if for no other reason than that it disregards the primary law of Goethe criticism. If the life and the works are as closely involved in one another as Goethe made them out to be, there must be a way of involving both in our interpretation and of making them support one another in a fuller understanding of him.

Curiously enough, the biographers who have excelled in bringing Goethe to life are precisely those who are unable or unwilling to interpret him. We can see this in the life of Goethe by Emil Ludwig, or again in the more recent life by Lily Hohenstein. In both of these works the lay figure that we had come to accept in lieu of Goethe disappears and a living man emerges. But far from bringing out the significance of his life, they seem rather to diminish or to destroy it. The English life of Goethe by Hume Brown, while not open to this charge, is like them in its restricted purpose. It tells the life and tells it well, but makes little or no attempt to interpret it.

The evident rift in Goethe criticism which tends to take his biographers in one direction and his interpreters in another is not what Goethe would have desired, nor is it in accord with our deepest convictions about him. The aspect of him that suffers most in this conjuncture is what we may call his inner biography, the account of what went on in his mind in its progress from immaturity to maturity. It is this aspect of Goethe that now calls for attention.

II

EARLY CLUES

THE first clue to Goethe's inner life is one that he gives us himself. The circumstances are trivial and mildly amusing. He was applying at the age of fourteen for membership in an exclusive boys' club in Frankfurt, organized on the lines of a secret or Masonic lodge and calling itself the Philandrian Arcadian Society. The rules of the society required him to submit a statement of his character, which he did in a couple of letters that happen to have been preserved. They are the earliest we possess, dated 23 May and 2 June 1764. The first letter does not take us very far. He merely says that he is impatient, quick to take offence, and quick to forgive. But the second is more arresting. We may suspect that he had been thinking about himself in the interval and looking for something less obvious. He begins by referring to a mutual acquaintance, here called Alexis, as a reliable source of information about him, and then goes on to say a word of his own:

Alexis is one of my best friends. He can tell you enough from experience. I have urged him to let you know everything and neither to keep back any of my defects nor conceal my good points. But over and above this I would like you to go to the trouble of testing me yourself, for, shrewd as Alexis is, he may have failed to notice something in me that would not be to your liking. I am something of a chameleon—Ich gleiche ziemlich einem *Camaeleon*. Can you blame Alexis if he has not yet seen me from every side?

We know that the chameleon image which he uses here stuck in his mind, because we soon find him using it again. First in a Leipzig poem called 'Die Freuden', written not later than 1768; and next and more significantly in *Gotz von Berlichingen*. The poem is unimportant, but it serves to show that he liked the image. The French original that he is adapting turns on the theme of the butterfly which loses its beauty when it is handled, and Goethe's only innovation is to turn the butterfly quite unnecessarily into a dragonfly with colours that change like those of the chameleon:

Da flattert um die Quelle
Die wechselnde Libelle,
Der Wasser Papillon,
Bald dunkel und bald helle,
Wie ein Camaleon.

The reference in *Götz* is more revealing. It comes in the first version, written late in 1771, in the scene in the second act in which Adelheid, the adventuress, is reproaching Weislingen, the villain, with inconstancy. As her most cutting term of abuse she dubs him a chameleon, at which he promptly demurs:

Weislingen Ihr verkennt mich.

Adelheid: Ich nehm euch, ~~was~~ ihr euch gebt.

Weislingen: Das Ansehn trugt.

Adelheid: So seydt ihr ein Camäleon.

Weislingen: Wenn ihr in mein Herz sehen konntet.

Adelheid Schöne Raritäten wurden mir vor die Augen kommen

Now since Weislingen is prominent among those dramatic characters of Goethe's that are known to mirror some aspect of himself, in this case an imputed fickleness in love, the connexion between the chameleon in Weislingen and the chameleon in himself, is not far to seek. There is no reason why Goethe should be thinking of himself in Weislingen at every word, but at these words he cannot fail to have done so. Thus we find him at twenty-two hinting in thin disguise at a conception of himself that he had reached more than seven years earlier.

When George Henry Lewes, an early biographer, compared the 'strange impressibility' of his nature with the 'fabled chameleon' which takes colour from every tree, he was only elaborating a comparison that Goethe had made first. But there is a difference. Lewes was writing in the eighteen-fifties with Goethe's life-work spread before him and was thinking partly about his poetry, whereas Goethe was at the beginning of his career and was thinking about his mind or his temperament, regardless of poetry. If we compare him with Keats at this point, the distinction comes out more clearly. Keats in his well-known letter on the 'chameleon poet' is referring solely to the creative process and its relation to environment. The poet, he says, takes colour from his environment and so surrenders to it; his personality is eliminated and his vision thus objectified. Goethe, on the other hand, makes no reference to environment. He simply finds, when he looks into himself, that he is changeable, lacking in steadiness of mood or thought, and he uses the suggestive chameleon image to describe his condition. His attitude is, if anything, moral, where Keats's is aesthetic. At least we can see in two of the three cases that he is uneasy about himself. In the first case he attaches a moral query, saying to his correspondent, 'You may find

something in me that you won't like'—das Ihnen unangenehm seyn möchte. In the last he is frankly censorious; every reader dislikes Weislingen and agrees with Adelheid.

This does not add up to any clear judgement; it leaves us rather with a question-mark. There can be no doubt, however, that, indeterminate or not, these chameleon passages point to something very real in Goethe and very characteristic of him. If the condition they indicate were merely fugitive, here to-day and gone to-morrow, we should scarcely have the word of so many of his contemporaries to bear witness to it. We find on inquiry that no matter what their relation to him, friendly or unfriendly, near or remote, in point of changeableness they all have much the same thing to say. Probably the most considered and reliable opinion of all is the one we get from Wieland, and on this score he is very explicit. It was in Weimar that he and Goethe met for the first time. Goethe had just gone there in 1775 and the new environment had not yet greatly altered him. The two at once became friends, though Wieland, remembering Goethe's recent satire of him, had good reason to be chilly. In the enthusiastic references to Goethe that come in Wieland's letters it is above all the quick shifts of mood that catch his attention, as for example when he writes in May 1776 that Goethe is scattering rain and sunshine in turn—Goethe lebt und regiert and wutet, und gibt Regenwetter und Sonnenschein tour à tour comme vous savez. And when he came to sum up his impressions, as he did in the poem 'An Psyche', it was the shifts of mood that he emphasized. He had been spending a high-spirited evening in company with Goethe and others; Goethe had let himself go and had read scenes from his *Faust* manuscript and held the company spellbound. Wieland went home full of the magic and, above all, the variability of his person, and lost no time in commemorating it. 'When we thought we had got hold of him', he says in the poem, 'how quickly he changed, slipped away and came back again in another form, always remaining completely himself in the thousand disguises.' It is the chameleon image again in everything but the name.

Und wenn wir dachten, wir hätten's gefunden
 Und, was er sei, nun ganz empfunden,
 Wie wurd' er so schnell uns wieder neu!
 Entschlupfte plötzlich dem satten Blick
 Und kam in andrer Gestalt zurück;

Liess neue Reize sich uns entfalten,
 Und jede der tausendfachen Gestalten
 So ungezwungen, so vollig sein,
 Man musste sie für die wahre halten!
 Nahm unsre Herzen in jeder ein,
 Schien immer nichts davon zu sehen.

This, then, is the impression Goethe made on a much older person, sixteen years older, who was only now making his acquaintance. But he appeared in much the same light to younger men and to those who knew him well. The impression of changeableness did not wear off on better acquaintance, it remained as vivid as ever both for those who liked it and for those who didn't. Johann Adam Horn, a fellow-townsmen and exact contemporary, who associated with Goethe in Frankfurt and again in Leipzig when he followed him there in 1766, has the honour of being the first to record his exasperation with him. Writing to a mutual friend in the August of this year, he exclaims, 'Regarding our friend Goethe! He remains the same conceited and crazy fellow—der stolze Phantast—that he was when I arrived. If you could just see him you would either go mad with rage or split with laughing. I simply can't see how anyone can change so quickly.'

From the context it would seem that Horn is not referring to the momentary transitions that Wieland noted, but rather to a change in him that lasted for a while, presumably some putting on of airs in this new and sophisticated environment. Horn goes on to say that his whole bearing is as different as possible from his former bearing, meaning, no doubt, his life in Frankfurt. Nevertheless, the two comments, Horn's and Wieland's, accord sufficiently well together to be phases of one and the same comment. Both observers are chiefly impressed with a discontinuousness in him of mood or of behaviour singling him out from the generality of their acquaintance. Wieland is delighted with it; Horn is inclined to be annoyed: 'Wherever he goes', says Horn, 'he makes himself more ridiculous than agreeable.'

The evidence of the intervening ten years is all in accord with what these two have to say. At every turn we find his friends and acquaintances of either sex commenting on his fickleness and his sudden turns of mind. Caroline Flachsland, who, like others of the Darmstadt coterie, was emotionally very much at Goethe's mercy, reflects this most aptly when she describes her helplessness in his

presence by saying that it made her feel like a ball that is pushed about on the floor, often very near to him, then far, far off. Herder, to whom these words were addressed on 19 April 1773, had put the same thing to her a year before in his unsparing way, saying (21 March 1772) that Goethe, while fundamentally sound, was far too flighty and sparrow-like—*nur ausserst leicht und viel zu leicht, und Spazzenmassig*—an epithet that fits the picture admirably, though some have found it puzzling. Georg Jacobi in 1774 mentions among other things his impulsiveness, his '*rasche Laune*'. Kraus, the painter, in 1775 says that he was as moody as ever and that in the middle of a heated conversation he might take it into his head to jump up, run away, and not come back. Bodmer in the same year puts it in a word, a *harum-scarum*, a '*Schwindelkopf*'.

This is enough already to warrant the suspicion that Goethe's shifting state of mind, his lability or volatility or whatever we care to call it, a state of mind in which the mood of one moment gave no certain clue to the mood of the next, was not merely occasional or recurrent in him in these early years, but was with him all the time. The kind of behaviour that Kraus and Caroline Flachsland noted in him was not just something that he yielded to under the pressure of disturbing circumstances, such as falling in love, or being excited by some poem that was coming, or tormented by uncongenial company, but it was habitual with him, characteristic of him always, day in and day out, year in and year out. He must have been like this all the time, for the signs of it are everywhere. Everywhere we find this disconcertingly rapid and irregular tempo, as if his mind were set at too fast and too uncertain a pace for others to keep up with it. Nothing ever seems to retard him; on he goes at high velocity, flitting incessantly from mood to mood. Even the physical breakdown which brought him from Leipzig to Frankfurt again to spend a year at home convalescing did little to curb him. In November 1768, not long after his return, he wrote a rhymed letter to Friederike Oeser in which he confessed to being 'as peevish as a teething child, now timid like a merchant being dunned, now quiet like a hypochondriac, decorous like a Mennonite, dutiful like a lamb, merry like a lover':

So launisch, wie ein Kind das zahnt;
 Bald schuchtern, wie ein Kaufmann den man mahnt,
 Bald still, wie ein Hypochondrist,
 Und sittig, wie ein Mennonist,

Und folgsam, wie ein gutes Lamm;
Bald lustig, wie ein Brautigam

Similarly, on 31 October 1773, five years later as it happens, he writes to Johanna Fahlmer that he is changeable in his moods 'as usual'—ich wie immer binn wechselnden Humors—and on November 23 of the same year he tells her that he is, again 'as usual', fit to live with at one moment and not fit to live with at the next—Ich binn wie immer bald leidlich bald unleidlich

It was always in this disjointed way that he saw himself in these years, always in motion, drifting, fluctuating, never secure, never or hardly ever at rest. The chameleon image, we find, is only one of the various mobile images that he applies to himself. In greater agitation he turns for preference to the weathercock, or the ship in storm, or the charioteer behind a galloping team 'A weathercock that twists and twists',—Eine Wetterfahne die sich dreht, immer dreht—so he describes himself in one of his moody letters (2 November 1767) to Behrisch, 'meine launischen, narrischen Briefe', as he calls them. At a later date in letters to Salzmann from Sesenheim, Friederike Brion's village, in the early summer of 1771, it is the weathercock image again that helps him to express his inner commotion. 'My head is like a weathercock, when a thunderstorm is coming up and the wind is gusty and shifting'.¹ This is on 29 May.

On 12 June he snatches yet again at the same image in words that call up Sesenheim and his feelings there as well as anything, prose or verse, that has come from his pen 'It is raining outside and inside', he says, 'and the wretched evening winds are rattling in the vines at my window, and my *ammula vagula* is like the weathercock over there on the church-tower, twist, it says, and twist, the livelong day.'²

The ship in storm and the charioteer come into his mind just as readily. The two images follow one another in quick succession in his notable letter to Herder on 10 July 1772 'I am still out at sea in my little boat and when the stars are hidden I float in the hand of Fate, and courage and hope and fear and repose succeed one

¹ Der Kopf steht mir wie eine Wetterfahne, wenn ein Gewitter heraufzieht und die Windstosse veränderlich sind

² Es regnet draussen und drinne, und die garstigen Winde von Abend rascheln in den Rebblättern vorm Fenster, und meine *ammula vagula* ist wie's Wetter-Hähngen druben auf dem Kirchthurm, dreh dich, dreh dich, das geht den ganzen Tag.

another in my heart.' So the letter begins, but soon the mention of Pindar whom he has been reading in his almost desperate state of confusion—es geht bey mir noch alles entsetzlich durch einander—leads him into the more energetic chariot image and plants him behind rearing and unruly horses—Wenn du kühn im Wagen stehst, und vier neue Pferde wild unordentlich sich an deinen Zugeln baumen. The image so impressed itself on him that he drew on it again, though more rhetorically, for a passage in *Egmont*.

But we are not dependent on figures of speech alone. Goethe was fully alive to his condition and describes it in the plainest of terms. Thus he tells Auguste Stolberg that what is going on in him is 'incredibly subtle and swift'—Bey Gott was hier vorgeht ist unaussprechlich fein und schnell. And while this remark comes at a time of greater crisis, in September 1775 shortly before his going off to Weimar, it differs very little from what he says about himself at other times. Writing to Salzmann on 28 November 1771, almost four years before, he refers to the enormous amount of paper that would be needed to record the 'diary of his mind'—*Diarium meines Kopfs*—for a single week; and three months later, on 3 February 1772, he says to him in precisely the same terms that it would be impossible for the quickest of clerks to write all his doings down—*Das Diarium meiner ubrigen Umstände, ist wie Sie wissen für den geschwindesten Schreiber unmöglich zu führen*. As this can only refer intelligently to his inner life and as he and Salzmann had not met for months, we can satisfy ourselves that he is describing a chronic or a constantly recurring mental state and not a passing one. A letter from Friedrich Jacobi on 21 August 1774, arriving at the end of a dull afternoon—*Nach einem durren Nachmittag*—floods his mind with a riot of thoughts—*hundert Ideen in Cirkulation*. Reading Justus Moser's *Patriotische Phantasien*, which he is carrying about with him, he says in similar vein (28 December 1774) that if he opens the book, no matter when or where, he finds countless wishes, hopes, projects, unfolding within him—*Ich trag sie mit mir herum, wenn, wo ich sie aufschlage wird mirs ganz wohl, und hunderterley Wünsche, Hoffnungen, Entwürfe entfalten sich in meiner Seele*.

Not only does he record this condition in the present, as here, but he recognizes how habitual it is and can look either back or forward at it. In another of his Sesenheim letters (June 1771) he says to Salzmann: 'Be prepared when I see you for a crazy hotch-potch'

—ein abentheuerlich Ragout—and similarly in a little epistolary poem to Merck in 1774 he reminds him of his 'dizzy head' at the mercy of its illogical impulses:

Und dencke mein wenns um dich schwebt
Wie es in Sympatien hie
Um mein verschwirbelt Hirngen lebt

—a phrase which Merck seems to be echoing when he writes to Nicolai, the year after, that Goethe's head is always in a whirl with new ideas—weil sein Kopf voll immer neuer Träumereyen schwirbelt.

III

EMOTION RUNNING RIOT

WHEREVER we look in the early writings of Goethe, whether among letters or poetic compositions, it is the same. Everything goes to show that this excited, irrational, mercurial mood was Goethe's prevailing and determining mood before he went to Weimar. Indeed in these early years there is nowhere to draw the line. Letters, as we have seen, shade off into poems, poems shade off into plays, all coloured by this ruling idiosyncrasy and all testifying to it. The idiosyncrasy shows in his work almost as soon as he begins to try his hand. Among the very few pieces of juvenile verse that escaped destruction there are a few lines written on his sixteenth birthday, the only lines from pre-university days that have anything to tell us about him, in which he describes the world kaleidoscopically as a number of unrelated things one after another, a den of murderers, a student's room, an opera-house, a university dinner, a poet's brain, or a peep-show:

Dieses ist das Bild der Welt,
Die mann für die beste halt,
Fast, wie eine Mordergrube,
Fast, wie eines Burschen Stube,
Fast so, wie ein Opernhaus,
Fast, wie ein Magisterschmauss,
Fast, wie Köpfe von Poeten,
Fast, wie schöne Raritäten

This jumping about from item to item in a jumbled catalogue, as in the rhymed letter to Friederike Oeser, would be a mannerism if it were not so deep-seated in him and, as Wieland saw, so natural, so 'ungezwungen'. He does exactly the same thing again in 'Genialisch Treiben', another of his capering rhymes, the date of which is uncertain, though, text and title together, it can only refer to these years. Here he says that the life he leads makes him think of Diogenes 'rolling his tub' and never getting a rest, in a world that is now comic, now serious; now love, now hate; now this, now that; now nothing, now something:

So waltz' ich ohne Unterlass,
Wie Sanct Diogenes, mein Fass.
Bald ist es Ernst, bald ist es Spass;

Bald ist es Lieb, bald ist es Hass;
 Bald ist es diess, bald ist es das;
 Es ist ein Nichts und ist ein Was.

We shall never know how many such nonsensical snatches he wrote. In yet another that has been preserved he says that life is a little crooked, and a little straight, and a little round and round:

Auch ~~was~~ die Quer,
 • So gehts auf der Welt her.
 Auch etwas grad
 Wie die Allee im Bad.
 Auch etwas ringsherum,
 Geht alles um und um.

Of his more extended pieces the most revealing, because, it would seem, the most rapid in execution, are those of the casual and fragmentary sort that he produced at any time of day, as if from nowhere. We can take our choice among such things as 'Kunstlers Morgenlied' with its almost unbelievable changes of mood from stanza to stanza; *Concerto Dramatico*, a mad libretto in rapidly shifting time; *Satyros*, a fantastic mixture of sane and absurd, *Das Jahrmachtsfest zu Plundersweilen*, a sketch of a village fair with all its motley, or *Hanswursts Hochzeit*, a bout of ribaldry written, as he told Eckermann years after, on 6 March 1831, in an access of high spirits—einen Gipfel von Mutwillen—which came and went in a flash. There are more of them, and there are some wild bits of reviewing in the *Frankfurter Gelehrte Anzeigen* which may be put in their company. To go by Goethe's words on 28 January 1775 to Georg Jacobi, editor of *Iris*, there must have been times when he had several of these mad schemes raging in his head at one and the same moment; at least he speaks here of sitting on a brood of eggs and hatching queer monsters, not suitable for Jacobi's journal—Weilen ich uber allerley Eyern Brute, worunter auch freylich Guckucke u. Basiliken flick werden, welche fur Ihre Menagerie nicht taugen. In any case the number of such flings that he indulged in can only be conjectured; some survived, others, like his skit on the brothers Jacobi, were lost. It was more a matter of chance than of intention; thus, according to Goethe's letter of 11 January 1808, it was only because Friedrich Jacobi had kept a copy of *Satyros* that it was preserved at all. The *Prometheus* fragment, the drama, not the lyrical monologue, was lost sight of for more than half a century and would have been lost

altogether if it hadn't turned up in other hands. 'You talk as if there was a large number of them', says Werner to Wilhelm Meister about his literary effusions in an evidently retrospective passage written around 1778 'Were there really so many? It didn't seem to anyone that you had been working hard.' And Wilhelm answers, 'I was planning things all the time—wo ich ging und stund, machte ich Plane—and whenever I could steal aside I wrote verses. You won't find more than three or four things carried to a finish, but you will find several of them carried a long way and, as I told you, a whole crowd—eine ganze Schar—begun.'

It was in this wildly spontaneous way that Goethe usually wrote, not caring whether what he wrote had any value or whether he was being creative or not, and we can see at once without looking for further proof that this was the way of writing that accorded best with his volatile nature and expressed it most easily and frankly. The more undisciplined the writing, the more variety in the mood; the faster he wrote, the surer he was to catch the quick transitions. Albert Koster pointed out long ago the frequent changes of key in these early fragments. Writing on this phase of his work he says that Goethe can sound every note and that his transitions from the jocular to the profound, from the lofty to the burlesque, come off most easily inside the one poem, the one scene, the one speech. A true observation. But when he goes on to ask why this poet can successfully take liberties that others dare not take and gives the answer that it is because Goethe never loses the ground under his feet, he is misleading us. The reason why Goethe could pull off these sudden contrasts where another would fail is not that he was surer of himself but that he lived in such contrasts all the time and was in no need of inventing them. It was only because they came so naturally that they came at all.

None but an incorrigibly wayward mind could have written such a piece as *Satyros*, an outburst so capricious and incalculable that it eludes description, unless we fall back on the 'Corydon und dementia'—O Corydon, Corydon, quae te dementia cepit—which reminded an early acquaintance, Meyer von Lindau, of Goethe's pranks and vagaries. The theme of the piece, if we can speak of a theme where all is so fitful, is that of a satyr walking out of the woods into the eighteenth century, preaching Rousseau and a diet of raw chestnuts, setting up a violent quarrel among his sentimental followers, then suddenly leaving them to their own devices.

Incoherent the work may be, but it is Goethe through and through; we should know it for his by the very abruptness with which it shifts from mood to mood, the tender, the dynamic, the satirical, the sublime, all at a breathless and uncertain pace, the comic and the tragic tumbling over one another as the poem rushes to its illogical ending. Nothing could be closer to the Goethe of whom Friedrich Stolberg wrote to Klopstock in December 1775: 'How often have I seen him melting and raving—schmelzend und wutend—inside a quarter of an hour.' Stolberg might have been speaking of the poem instead of the poet.

Even more chaotic than *Satyros* is the fragment *Der ewige Jude*, which Goethe aptly and amusingly describes as a first shred or tatter—Erster Fetzen. Here he begins by saying that he has jumped out of bed at midnight like a madman, so full is he of what he has to tell—

Um Mitternacht wohl fang ich an
Spring aus dem Bette wie ein Toller
Nie war mein Busen seelevoller;
Zu singen den gereisten Mann,

—and seizing, as he says, a broomstick instead of a pen, he bids us take the tale just as it comes in all its crudeness:

Und ich mir fehlt zu Nacht der Kriegl
Ergreiff wohl einen Besenstiel.
Drum hor' es denn, wenn dir's beliebt,
So kauderwelsch wie mir der Geist es giebt.

This passage was written with such dash that the lines lie slanting across the page. He has told us himself in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, and also in talks with Soret, Eckermann, and others, that in his early days the poetic gift expressed itself most joyously and lavishly when it came unexpected and even undesired, and forced itself on him or, as he puts it in *Der ewige Jude*, when the pressure was there and he had to obey it—Denn es ist Drang und so ist's Pflicht. This, he tells us, would sometimes happen to him when he woke up in the night, and he often wished he had some quicker means of writing down the things that came to him thus in the dark. If he hesitated or was interrupted he might lose everything; there were times when he ran to his desk and wrote diagonally on the paper before him, as he did in this case, not taking time to straighten it out, and even using pencil rather than pen for fear the scratching of the quill would wake him out of his rapt condition.

Without asking for proof in each case we can see that, by and large, it was in this uncontrolled way that Goethe's various fragments and snatches of poetry, dramatic, narrative, or lyrical, got written, and that the state of mind in which they were conceived and set down was exactly like the state of mind we have been finding everywhere, which means that his creative life was all of a piece with his uncreative and that there was no clear line to be drawn between them. In these overflowing years he seems to have been continually on the verge of creativeness, so that he could truthfully refer to his youth as a time when a wellspring of song poured out of him uninterruptedly—

Da sich ein Quell gedranger Lieder
Ununterbrochen neu gebar

—and yet to have been so excessively impressionable that his creativeness could be frustrated from second to second, exactly like Werther, who said in his letter of 10 May that he could not draw a line now, but was never a greater artist than at such moments. The mood in which Goethe wrote *Satyros* or *Der ewige Jude* or for that matter any of the other flings and fragments was only removed from Werther's mood by a hair's breadth. It was a toss-up whether they got written or not; they exist, so to speak, by accident. Countless others must have welled up in this cauldron of a mind and disappeared like bubbles as quickly as they came to the surface.

If on occasion he extemporized in the presence of others, he would do so without effort, by simply, as it were, turning on a tap that was ready to run at any moment. We have no reason to disbelieve Gleim's account of an evening he spent with him in June 1777, in which he turned out poems one after another in every metre, like a conjurer shaking tricks out of a hat—Hexameter, Jamben, Knittelverse und wie es nur immer gehen wollte. Alles unter- und durcheinander, wie wenn er es nur so herausschüttelte. He ended up, we are told, with an extemporized fable in rhymed couplets about Gleim himself—einer kleinen ex tempore in Knittelversen gedichteten Fabel—which capped everything. Wieland, who was present on this occasion, is credited with saying about this time that some of Goethe's orally improvised pieces surpassed his written ones; and, while we are not in a position to verify this claim, we can recognize it as a probably truthful statement of the

impression Goethe made. Wilhelm Meister, it may be remembered, composed a whole play, acts and scenes and stage-sets and everything, while riding in a carriage. 'In those days', said Goethe to Friedrich von Muller on 1 March 1830, looking back on his earlier life, 'there was more in my head than I had room for and motifs by the hundred.'

The importance of these early sketches, written for the most part in Frankfurt between 1772 and 1775, lies less in their intrinsic worth, though there are wonderful moments in them, than in the light they throw on the man who made them. But from this point of view they are invaluable. Here, not less surely than in his most intimate correspondence, we catch the flow of his mind and discover the same sudden incalculableness that his friends discovered in his daily life. Instead of encountering the usual discrepancy, familiar to all students of literature or of any of the arts, between the social personality and the creative, we find almost an identity. The part of Goethe that wrote or indited is indistinguishable from the part of him that acted and spoke; the mind that shifted moment by moment to the delight or the dismay of those about him is the mind that wrote all the incidental poetry of these years.

It is easy to proceed from the more casual works to the less casual, the *Werther* of 1774, for example, or the *Faust* manuscript that went to Weimar with him in 1775, and observe the same mood, the same temperament, as before. There can be no doubt whatsoever that *Faust* originated in the same haphazard fashion as sketches like *Satyros* and *Der ewige Jude*, which at many points it so closely resembles, and that in its first stages it was simply another of them. We know that several large themes went through his head at this time and were trifled with or even seriously started. In addition to *Der ewige Jude*, *Faust*, and *Prometheus* there was *Cesar*, *Sokrates*, *Mahomet*, and, we need not doubt, others that we have never heard of, for, as we have seen, his mind was a ferment of inventiveness, and new ideas for writing were awakening in him day and night. The difference between *Faust* and all his other beginnings is that *Faust* took a strong enough hold on his mind to come back to him at intervals, whereas other themes may have visited his mind once only and then left it for good. In this way, perhaps more as something begun again and again than as something continued with, it grew into the loosely knit sequence of

scenes that we find in the early manuscript. It is likely enough, though it cannot be proved, that Goethe flung off the famous opening monologue, spoken by Faust in his vaulted chamber, in the same sudden way as he flung off *Der ewige Jude*, say, in the dead of night with a full moon shining—

O sahst du voller Mondenschein
Zum letzten mal auf meine Pein

—and that then after a while, perhaps a short while, the theme returned and another piece got written, and so on, sometimes, it may be, with little sense of connexion, sometimes, as in the Gretchen scenes, with more, but always leaving a break between one piece and the next. There is not a single one of these swift scenes, one of which is only four lines long, and another six, that is not capable of being conceived and written separately in its own distinct onset of creative feeling. The early *Faust* is not a work that was planned or shaped; it is more like a series of spurts or snapshots, discontinuous, irregular, incalculable. Thus, in point of sensibility and mental habit, there is no difference between the Goethe who nonplussed his friends with his changes of mood and the Goethe who at favourable moments snatched these *Faust* fragments from himself. *Faust* at this stage is simply the emergence in inspired poetry of the spasmodic and unstable mood that ruled his life.

It follows from all this that Faust's inner ferment—das innre Toben—does not come from Goethe's imagination, but rather from the consuming unrest of the life he lived hour by hour. And it must be for this reason that the rendering of Faust's mood, so susceptible of exaggeration, is in his hands so convincing, so free from any forcing of the note. When Goethe lets Faust say that he has been leading his students these ten years by the nose this way and that way—Herauf herab und queer und krum—he is not being rhetorical or playful, though he might seem so to a careless reader; he is writing a line that is as real to him as any other. Its zigzag movement, its darting hither and thither, is a direct transcript of his mind and expresses it to a nicety. If we look up and down his verse in these years we come across many such lines. 'Herum, herauf, hinan, hinein', from his *Neueröffnetes moralisch-politisches Puppenspiel* is Faust's all over again. So also is 'Heruber, 'nüber, hin und her', from 'Der untreue Knabe'. Even Christ on a journey

from earth to heaven in *Der ewige Jude* cannot follow a straight course but has to bump his erratic way through the stars:

Da kam der Sohn ganz uberquer
Gestolpert uber sterne her.

It is the same irrationality visualized in the passage where Gretchen says that her thoughts are criss-crossing one another—

War ich der Gedancken los,
Dië mir ruber und nuber gehn

—or where Faust confesses that his emotions are a turmoil he cannot describe—

Wenn ich empfinde
Und dem Gefuhl und dem Gewuhl
Vergebens Nahmen such und keine Nahmen finde

—the mere association of 'Gefuhl' with 'Gewuhl' repeated unconsciously in Gretchen's

Wer fuhlet,
Wie wuhlet,

being itself a useful clue. Goethe's penchant for vocabulary of the same sort, colloquial words expressing confusion, comes obviously from this personal source. 'Ragout', 'Brimborium', 'Kribskrabs', 'zickzack', 'Wirrwar', 'hurrliburrl', 'vertripplstreichelt', and 'irrlichtelre' all find their way sooner or later into the *Faust* manuscripts, some of them more than once, and it is the same in the smaller pieces, where always the extremes are mixed and everything goes topsy-turvy, as it did with him.

Es geht, geht alles durcheinander
Wie Masedreck und Coriander,

as someone says in *Pater Brey*. 'So gehts mit mir immer unterst der oberst', says Goethe to Betty Jacobi on 6 February 1775.

There is nothing in the early *Faust* that cannot be explained or at least illuminated by this prevailing confusion. The sudden transitions in Faust's opening monologue, which come with a certain surprise to every new reader of the poem, have given rise to various conjectures as to the times at which the different parts of the monologue were written. This is a procedure which might be usefully applied to another work or another author, but it is wasted on Goethe here. When we remember that these sudden transitions are to be found everywhere in the record of his early life, poetic or otherwise, it becomes impossible to argue from them.

The interval in time which they denote might be long, it might be short; there is no knowing. The unexpected darting of Faust's mind from his study to the moonlit landscape and back again to his study is simply Goethe's mind darting in its usual way, and the text must be interpreted accordingly.

Read in this light we find that there is no overstatement in *Faust*, even at its extreme moments. Far from trying to go one better than himself in this most challenging poem, Goethe seems to slow himself down and, if anything, to moderate his violence. Writing to Auguste Stolberg on 3 August 1775, he tells her that his mood changes a hundred times a day—Hundertmal wechselt mit mir den Tag—and the rest of what he says to her shows us a man almost beside himself with conflicting excitements. If he had written his *Faust* at this pitch it would have been incoherent, as some of the letters are; he had to steady himself to write it. Turbulent as much of it is, it is not a work of imaginative distortion or excess; it is a true rendering of his inner life, just sufficiently controlled and restrained to make it lucid. Gretchen expresses it beautifully for him in her song at the spinning-wheel with its refrain that never comes to rest—Meine Ruh ist hin—and its note of confusion, if not of chaos:

Mein armer Kopf
Ist mir verrückt,
Mein armer Sinn
Ist mir zerstückt.

It is the same with *Werther*. The more we read *Werther* and the documents that pertain to it, especially the letters to Kestner, the more independent it becomes of any plot or sources of plot, the closer it brings us to a deep-seated attitude in Goethe. The inveterate moodiness that pervades this work is much more nearly a reflection of Goethe's everyday mind, in other words much less induced by peculiar circumstances, than we are usually given to understand. Almost any page or any letter will serve for illustration. This is how Werther writes to his friend Wilhelm after his first meeting with Lotte:

What I have been saying about her is all wretched stuff, poor abstractions which tell you nothing of what she is really like. I'll tell you another time. No, not another time, I'll tell you at once. If I don't tell you at once I might never tell you. For, between ourselves, since

beginning to write I have already been three times on the point of putting down my pen, saddling my horse, and riding out there. And yet I swore to myself this morning that I wouldn't, and still I go to the window every few minutes to see how high the sun is.

What could be more like the Goethe we have been looking at? It was exactly in this way that he tacked and veered from morning till night and from night till morning. 'You have never seen anything so unequable, so fickle—so ungleich, so unstet—as this heart of mine', says Werther in another letter (13 May) and what else are we to say of Goethe who, in his letter to Auguste Stolberg on 3 August 1775, paused for a brief while and then went on: 'I have been drawing dashes on the paper for you. I sat for a quarter of an hour thinking and my spirit ranged about over the whole inhabited world'—*mein Geist flog auf dem ganzen bewohnten Erdboden herum*—or who wrote to Sophie von La Roche, in August of the year before, that unrest and uncertainty are our earthly portion—*Die Unruhe u. Ungewissheit sind unser Theil*.

Werther's lightheadedness comes out in everything he does or says. When he looks back on going out to see Lotte the journey itself disappears in the sudden impulse that prompted it and all he remembers of it is a sort of 'Presto' or 'Lo and Behold'—'*Zuck! so bin ich dort*'—and again—'*wutsch! bin ich draus*'. Not from one moment to the next can he count on himself, he changes in a flash—*Wie man eine Hand umwendet, ist's anders mit mir*. The act of writing a letter is so uncontrolled that he cannot find words sloppy enough to describe it; '*strudele und sudele*' is all he can say, meaning much the same as Goethe meant when, in his letter of 23 November 1773, he said: '*Ich saue das so in der Eil*.' And this excessive mobility of spirit in Werther, far from yielding at the last to an *idée fixe*, as we might expect, continues unabated on the last day of his life. Even after he has made up his mind to end it once for all, when it is only a matter of a few hours and he will be no more, he says that countless projects and countless prospects were raging through his mind—*tausend Anschläge, tausend Aussichten wütheten durch meine Seele*—using almost exactly the words already quoted that Goethe used to describe his experience of reading Justus Möser. At such moments the line between Goethe and Werther, flimsy at best, may be said to disappear altogether.

As with *Faust* we come to the conclusion that there is no heightening of experience here, but a true record of it; if Werther

is different from Goethe, the difference is one of unessentials or externals only. And this will be found to hold good everywhere in the writings of the pre-Weimar years. There is no satisfactory exception to the rule binding the sensibility of the life to the sensibility of the works. Even *Stella*, a work that almost out-*Werthers Werther* in its emotional excessiveness, will be found to stay well within Goethe's range and to contain nothing that cannot be matched elsewhere. *Stella's* trembling words about awakening on a spring morning and finding herself happy in spite of fears are pitched exactly in the mood of Goethe's letter to Kestner on Christmas Day, 1772: 'I had a good day yesterday, I was apprehensive for to-day, but it too has started well and now I am not afraid of the rest.' All *Stella* does is to take us a little farther into the state of feeling that Goethe touches on, in which all is so palpitating, so precarious, and the heights of joy and the depths of suffering equally near, equally possible, at any moment. This was *Stella's* condition and it was a condition that Goethe knew and knew too well. And this is why he can sweep *Stella* from the top of the scale to the bottom without any strain or sense of unreality. The spring morning on which *Stella* awakens to find herself at peace sees her plunged into despair before the peace has really been hers to taste. And so we get, first, her overflowing happiness with all pain lifted and the sun lying on the blossoming trees.

Und dann doch, wenn mir's gluckt, wenn eine gute Gottheit mir an einem heitern Fruhlingsmorgen den Schmerz von der Seele weggehoben zu haben scheint, wenn ich ruhig erwache, und die liebe Sonne auf meinen bluhenden Baumen leuchtet, und ich mich thatig, munter fuhle zu den Geschäften des Tags, dann ist mir's wohl, dann treib ich eine Zeitlang herum, verrichte und ordne, und fuhre meine Leute an, und in der Freyheit meines Herzens danck ich laut auf zum Himmel fur die glucklichen Stunden

And then, almost without warning, her lapse into anguish and despair blacker than night:

O wenn ich manchmal von Gedancken in Gedancken sincke, freundliche Traume der Vergangenheit vor meine Seele bringe, hoffnungsvolle Zukunft ahnde, und so in des Mondes Dammerung, meinen Garten auf und ab walle; dann mich's auf einmal ergreift! ergreift, dass ich allein bin; vergebens nach allen vier Winden meine Arme ausstrecke, den Zauber der Liebe vergebens mit einem Drang, einer Fulle ausspreche, dass ich meine ich musste den Mond herunter ziehen!

So sharp a revulsion of feeling is not easy to accept. But when we remember that its author was a man whose joys and sorrows were so intense and so mingled that his days, as he said to Henriette von Knebel on 3 May 1775, were a continual vortex of pleasure and pain—Ich lebe wie immer in Strudeley, und Unmasigkeit des Vergnugens u. Schmerzens—we know at least where it comes from. Stella, for that matter, is by no means alone in her conflicting emotions. Werther is in similar plight, flitting disconcertingly up and down the emotional scale with such rapidity that we are at a loss to say at any moment whether he is happy or unhappy. He is both at once, happy everywhere and happy nowhere, as he says in his letter of 14 December—Ich bin nirgend wohl und uberall wohl—or he is both in such rapid succession that he seems to be both at once, much as Stella does. And this is how Goethe saw him when he looked back at him. When an Italian translation of *Werther* came into his hands in 1781, he failed to find in it, so he wrote on 13 December, the vortex of pain and joy incessantly burning one another up that he remembered in the original—der gluhende Ausdruck von Schmerz und Freude, die sich unaufhaltsam in sich selbst verzehren.

The same emotional predicament can be found everywhere in Goethe's early works. We have only to think of Psyche in the arms of Satyros, feeling joy and pain in one—Lasst ab, mich schauderts, Wonn und Weh—or Wilhelm in *Die Geschwister* in his blissful wretchedness—selig-elend—or Klarchen in her hovering torment—in schwebender Pein—now in the seventh heaven, now in despair:

Himmelhoch jauchzend,
Zum Tode betrübt.

There is no distinction here between Goethe and his characters. In a letter of January 1775 to Auguste Stolberg he tells her that he has all the deeps of joy and pain indwelling in him—so wohnt wenigstens all das tiefe Gefühl von Freud und Leid in mir—and in his Swiss diary of the following summer he comments again, but this time more boisterously, on the inseparableness of high spirits and low spirits—Dass es der Erde so sauwohl und so weh ist zugleich. Even as late as 1 September 1780, after five years in Weimar, we find him telling his old friend, Sophie von La Roche, that he is the same paradoxical mixture of gay and serious, hot and cold, that he always was—ich bin wie immer der nachdenckliche Leichtsinn und die warme Kalte.

Perhaps the climax of all this oxymoron is to be found in Faust, who not only has his rapturous dread—Wonnegraus—like the rest of them but after his encounter with the *Erdgeist* was so close to either extreme—so klein, so gross—that Goethe was able to change a line saying that he was moving in the depths of misery to another saying that he was coming down from the zenith of happiness, the one reading being just as good as the other—Nun werd ich tiefer tief zu nichte—or as the line now reads—Es wird mein schonstes Glück zu nichte This, moreover, was the mood that Goethe had to draw on when he came later to compose the great wager scene in which Faust swings titanically between idealism and despair and alternately curses life and glorifies it

The remaining works of the early period, some of them written with greater sobriety or coolness than those we have examined thus far, are not without their supporting evidence. *Gotz von Berlichingen*, a work more of delight than of depth, cannot fail to impress us as being clearer, more practical, further removed from the prevailing irrationality, than *Faust* or *Werther*, but for all that it shows little or no regard for the logic of playwriting and it ends by being as piecemeal and disorderly a treatment of the Shakespeare tradition as any we know. In deference to his ruling tendency Goethe goes as far as he can, especially in the first and more temperamental version, towards making his quasi-Shakespearean work into a broken series of short scenes, jumping from setting to setting and from mood to mood, a thing of spurts and dashes like so much else in these years. It was most characteristic of Goethe to seize, as he did, on the peep-show notion of Shakespeare—Schackespears Theater ist ein schöner Raritäten Kasten—and to carry out his chronicle-play in this spirit, the peep-show, a favourite word of his, being, if anything, a more exact image of his quickly flitting, jerky habits of mind than even the weathercock, the ship in storm, or the chameleon. *Gotz von Berlichingen* may tell us less about Goethe than *Das Jahrmarktsfest zu Plundersweilen*, a work in which the peep-show technique and even the peep-show itself becomes explicit, but nevertheless the idiosyncrasy is there to give the work its specifically Goethean flavour. Looking back on it in later life, he thought it youthful and irresponsible like everything else. 'I didn't know any better,' he said to Heinrich Voss in 1804, 'and just wrote down what came into my head'—und schrieb hin, was mir in den Sinn kam.

The only works that conflict with or fail to support the general contention are either relatively early like *Die Laune des Verheubten*, a smooth little pastoral more derivative than original and not to be compared with the turbulent works that were soon to follow, or relatively shallow like *Clavigo*, which may be a competent bit of stage drama but is decidedly inferior in its grasp of life. Where all is superficial it is useless to look for depth; yet even here the volatile feeling peeps through, as when Clavigo complains of his inconstancy—Dass man so veränderlich ist—or says that he is thrown unexpectedly from one situation to another like a man in a dream—So unerwartet aus einem Zustand in den andern. Man taumelt, man träumt.

We can see then that this unstable mood never or hardly ever disappears in the early writings and that it usually predominates. Goethe, it would seem, was like this from the start. His restless, ever-changing, irrational mental life was not something that he picked up from Herder or Lavater or any other of his emotional contemporaries; it was his before he met them. He calls himself a chameleon at fourteen, obviously sensing his true condition; within a year or so he goes to Leipzig where, notwithstanding the fluent and unruffled character of much that he wrote there, his light plays and meaningless love-poems, the disorderliness of his mind is fully shown in his letters, which are as confused and excited as any he wrote later. We have only to compare those he wrote to Behrisch in Leipzig in 1767 with those to Auguste Stolberg, the most favoured of his correspondents in 1775, to see the same temperament in both, venting itself in a more physical and elementary way in the earlier batch, more subtly and spiritually in the later, but always showing him in wild commotion, incalculable from moment to moment. Rereading one of his own half-written letters to Behrisch in October 1767 he comments on the picture of himself that he finds there. 'this violent desire, this violent repulsion, this raging, this rapture'—Dieses heftige Begehren, und dieses eben so heftige Verabscheuen, dieses Rasen und diese Wollust—words as desperate and convulsive as any he wrote in the years that followed.

This picture of a mind in commotion and never coming to rest, a mind, it would seem, quite without stay or abiding-place, is the essential picture of Goethe's mind from the time we first come to know him to the time he went to Weimar or thereabouts, after which the picture changes. From 1765 to 1775, from his sixteenth

year to his twenty-sixth, he continued in this flighty and erratic course; nothing that he did, nothing that happened to him in all these ten years, ever served to control or to change him. The condition is one that others may have experienced in some degree, but it may be doubted whether any of them lived in it so intensely, so continuously, and so long. In Goethe the habit of restlessness was so persistent that if at rare moments a mood of quiet came over him he at once suspected it, like the Tasso he created at a somewhat later date, who said that he was never so uneasy as when he was at rest:

Mir lasst die Ruh

Am mindsten Ruhe.

Goethe said to Auguste on one occasion in September 1775, 'I am calm to-day, but this usually spells trouble'—Heut bin ich ruhig, da liegt zwar meist eine Schlang im Grase. Peace of mind, we see, was completely wasted on him.

It was presumably the constant manifestation of this exciting volatility in Goethe that so impressed those who knew him when he was young. Even a modern reader, more alive than they were to what is problematic in such a condition, can be carried away by it. It is scarcely too much to say that, problem or no problem, he has presented us at this stage of his life with an ideal case of the young poet living in a continual state of inspiration, whether he was recording the inspiration or not, living under stress and even under trial but with an inner radiance and vitality shining through it all, the like of which we shall not easily find elsewhere. Again and again, as we read him in his Frankfurt days, we are dazzled by the pristine freshness of spirit that he carries about with him. He is for ever reminding us of his own Stella—Sie leben doch noch ganz in dem Gefühl der jüngsten, reinsten Menschheit—or of the earth at sunrise in *Kunstlers Erdewallen*, all reinvigorated in the growing light—Aurora wie neukrafftig liegt die Erd um dich.

This, no doubt, was the impression Heinse was surrendering to when he said in 1774 that Goethe was not only a genius from top to toe but that his powers were divine—Dass Goethe Gotterkraft hat in seinem Wesen, weiss jedermann. And this is the impression that still communicates itself to those who, not content with the masterpieces as we call them, read the whole of the early writings, the letters not less than the poems and the fragments not less than the finished works, and receive the full and immediate impact of his amazing personality.

IV

THE INTELLECTUAL HANDICAP

IT will be apparent, however, that Goethe's extreme volatility, like all extreme conditions, was not without its attendant dangers. The glory that lies about his early manhood must not blind us to the shadow. And the shadow is not far to seek. When Knebel said of him in December 1774 that he reacted so strongly to everything that he was in a perpetual state of conflict and commotion—Goethe lebt in einem beständigen innerlichen Krieg und Aufruhr, da alle Gegenstände aufs heftigste auf ihn wirken—adding that this drove him inevitably from one controversial position to another, he probably realized, as we do, that such a temperament had trouble in store. Christian Stolberg may also have had his doubts when he wrote to his sister on 12 May 1775 that Goethe was vivacious to the point of violence—bis zum Ungestum lebhaft—though never so violent as to belie his inner tenderness. We need not be surprised therefore if there were times when his friends were unable to judge him so dispassionately. On 8 June 1774, for example, we find Friedrich Jacobi, a close adherent though new to him as yet, saying in a letter to Wieland that we should not expect too much of Goethe since he was an unbridled and immoderate fellow and would remain so—denn er ist und bleibt ein zugelloser, unbandiger Mensch.

The problematic note that sounds in remarks like these can be heard clearly enough in many another place. It was not left to Goethe's friends and acquaintances to voice it, he voices it himself not less often than they. In his letters alone there are more passages than one which let us see how very dubious he was at times about himself. This comes out plainly in a letter to Johanna Fahlmer in March 1773, in which he tells her that he won't be of much use to her for a few days, apparently in the matter of English lessons he was giving her, because he is in a state of disturbance in which, in most people's opinion, it would not be good to die—Denn ich befinde mich in einem Stand von Perturbation in dem es den Seelen, sagen sie, nicht vorteilhaft ist aus der Welt zu gehn. A sinister thought, which he this time lightly, or with a pretended lightness, lays aside, saying that he accepts the condition since it seems to be without any really vexatious or disquieting symptoms.

But he was not always able to deal with himself in this way. Sometimes we can see him resisting the incubus like Werther, who often felt for a moment like jumping up and throwing it off—*ich habe manchmal so einen Augenblick aufspringenden abschüttelnden Muths*. At other times, as in his above-quoted letter to Sophie von La Roche, we can see him resigning himself to it. But whether he fights it or gives in to it, the dilemma remains, stated with the utmost clarity by Werther to Wilhelm in his letter of 22 August, when he asks whether the craving to change his condition will ever leave him or whether it will not pursue him to the end—*Und mein Lieber! Ist nicht vielleicht das Sehnen in mir nach Veränderung des Zustands, eine innre unbehagliche Ungedult, die mich überall hin verfolgen wird*. It was his sense of the futility of this constant motion without a goal that gave Goethe the image of the rocking-horse which rocks and rocks and never travels—*immer in Bewegung, immer in Arbeit, und nimmer vom Fleck* (27 June 1770) or, slightly before this in a letter to Langer on 29 April, that of the wheel-rim going round and round without ever getting nearer to the axle, which takes us straight to Gretchen's spinning-song.

For indications of a deeper concern with his own well-being we can take Goethe's word to Kestner on 25 September 1772 that the gods know all about punishing and about Tantalus, an image that he had used to Langer four years before on 8 September 1768. Or we can look again at his letter to Herder of 10 July 1772, in which he compares himself with the wounded Philoktetes. More revealing than either of these passages is the picture he gives of himself to Sophie von La Roche on 15 September 1774, as St. Sebastian, bound to his tree with the arrows sticking out of him—*dem heiligen Sebastian gleich an meinen Baum gebunden, die Pfeile in den Nerven*. But it was in 1775 that the torment was at its worst, and here the instances multiply. At one moment (17 August) he fears that the invisible scourge of the Eumenides will drive him, like his own Orestes, out of the land—*Vielleicht peitscht mich bald die unsichtbaare Geisel der Eumeniden wieder aus meinem Vaterland*; at another (March) he exclaims to Auguste that if he were not writing plays he could not endure—*O wenn ich ietzt nicht Dramas schriebe ich ging zu Grund*. To Johanna Fahlmer about the same time he goes so far as to say, in the blackest mood of all, that he is heading for certain disaster—*Mit mir nimmts kein gut Ende*.

When all allowance has been made for possible overstatement here and there in accordance with the fashion of the day, it will be plain that his condition of mind was far from reassuring, and indeed there were times when his friends feared the worst. It is not easy to determine how seriously we should take his remark to Kestner in June 1773, that people said he had the curse of Cain on him, but we know from more independent sources that they were capable of saying it, or of saying much the same thing in other words. Thus it is reported by Bottiger as early as the Strassburg days that Goethe would be so carried away with enthusiasm as to make Lese, who was intimate with him at this time, more than once fear for his reason. Schlosser, his brother-in-law, had similar fears in 1774; in a letter to Lavater of 10 June he said that while Goethe was hard to endure—Goethe ist mir zu stark—they were sure to come to a better understanding with one another, if he did not go to pieces in the next few years—Wenn er aber in den nächsten Jahren nicht ganz zerbricht. Friedrich Stolberg wrote to Klopstock in December 1775 that unless God did miracles with him he would be one of the unhappiest of mortals—der Unseligsten einer—and Bodmer on 4 September 1774 reported it as a matter of more than private opinion that the fire that was burning in Goethe might destroy him altogether—Man fürchtet, sein Feuer werde ihn verzehren.

The note of alarm that begins to sound in this analysis of Goethe, the possibility that he might break down in some way, perhaps mentally, or that he might fail to come to any satisfactory maturity, becomes the more insistent when we consider the paucity of evidence on the steady side of the account. If, as one would expect, it were possible to establish contact with Goethe's early mind in quieter, more reasonable moods and assure ourselves that the intellectual part of him was developing normally, there would be less ground for apprehension. But, as it turns out, it is extremely difficult to do this. The only state of mind we have any consistent record of in the early Goethe documents is of this one sort, impulsive and highly irrational. For indications of a mind operating coolly, logically, methodically, we have to search in holes and corners; the evidence is scanty in the extreme; everything or virtually everything points the other way. Goethe said himself in his Christmas letter to Kestner in 1773 that it was his inveterate habit to act solely on instinct—ich binn von ieher gewohnt nur nach

meinem Instinct zu handeln—and Merck, who knew him as well as anyone, corroborates this, saying to Nicolai on 19 January 1776 that he made no attempt to control his impulses but simply did as he felt—Er folgt ganz seiner Laune—exactly like Werther, we might add, who says in his letter of 13 May that he treats his heart like a sick child and follows its every wish—Auch halt ich mein Herzgen wie ein krankes Kind, all sein Wille wird ihm gestattet. Lavater, though we only hear this at secondhand, seems to have put it even more strongly than Merck, saying in 1775 that Goethe was all energy, feeling, imagination, and that he acted on this without knowing why or wherefore, as if swept in a strong current. 'Reflection', says Franz in the first version of *Gotz von Berlichungen*, 'is a sickness of the spirit and never leads to a right action'—Überlegung ist eine Kranckheit der Seele, und hat nur krancke Tahten getahn.

This irrationality is the more surprising when we consider his wealth of general education which, within the literary and humanistic limits of the eighteenth century, was enviable in its breadth, including, as it did, a working knowledge of half a dozen languages as well as a certain practice in the fine arts of music and painting, to say nothing of history, geography, and mathematics. One would expect some clarifying, stabilizing, or at least sobering, process to be set in motion by all this variety of study, yet there is little or nothing either in what he tells us or what others tell us about him to bear out the expectation. It almost seems as if the more he learned, the more excited he became. The trouble, if we may call it that, seems to have been that he learned too easily, too irresponsibly, to derive the formal and disciplinary values that are the reward of application. If, for example, he learned a foreign language, he did so with such facility that it contributed no more to the control or progress of his mind, in the mature sense, than he had gained from absorbing his mother tongue. He tells us in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* that he picked up Italian as 'an amusing variant on Latin' by overhearing the Italian his sister was getting while doing Latin exercises in the same room, and that he assimilated French during the French occupation of Frankfurt with such inspirational ease that people were amazed—so dass niemand wusste, wie ich auf einmal, gleichsam durch Inspiration, zu der fremden Sprache gelangt war. His advice to Sophie von La Roche on 20 November 1774 about teaching oneself Greek suggests that he thought nothing could be easier.

The general impression, as he tells us in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, is that he acquired a familiarity with several languages in a very informal and slap-dash way—ohne Regel und ohne Begriff—encouraged, no doubt, in his slovenliness by the circumstance that he received nearly all his pre-university education at home under the supervision of his father or of private tutors without ever being submitted for long to school routine. And what we are able to verify in respect of language work by examining his early exercise-books or his letters to his sister, in which he was fond of airing his French and his English, probably applies to the rest of his studies. The two things we can be fairly certain about in his education, whether at home or later at the university, where we can take it for granted that discipline was still further relaxed, are that everything was slipshod and that everything came easy. He tells us in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* that he was so quick at tackling a subject and digesting it that he soon out-grew all that his father and his tutors could do for him and yet was not really well grounded in anything—ohne dass ich doch in irgend etwas begründet gewesen wäre. He tells us further that he never truly applied himself and that he took no pleasure in anything that called for effort—Da nun Fleiss ohnehin meine Sache nicht war (denn es machte mir nichts Vergnügen, als was mich anflog). As regards his studies at Leipzig and Strassburg, he makes it abundantly clear that he played the free lance all the time and yielded to every whim.

Not even the study of law in which he was enrolled had, it seems, any formative effect on him. Yet here, if anywhere, he might have been expected to submit to discipline, especially as the subject was not of his own choosing but was insisted on by his father, who even gave him some preliminary instruction in it before despatching him to Leipzig. Nothing could be better calculated to shake him out of his dilettantism and put him on his mettle. But whether because the standard was set too low to tax him seriously or because he was simply incorrigible, he refused to let the legal faculty put him out of his stride and went his way as before, keeping his profession in a compartment by itself, as he told Knebel later on 21 November 1782, and not mixing it up with his poetic visions. And while he managed to scramble through an examination and become a lawyer of sorts, there can be no doubt that it all meant nothing to him and that it did nothing for him morally. When he returned home to practise, he seems to have leaned

heavily on his father and others; a more unlawyerlike lawyer can scarcely be imagined. So far was he from being interested in his profession that in all the long record of his early years we find only the most meagre references to it; and what little we find shows that he was under no illusions about it. Writing to Kestner in his Christmas letter of 1773 he says frankly that law is one of the least of his talents—unter all meinen Talenten ist meine Jurisprudenz der geringsten eins. Here, it would seem, as in all the rest of his training, he remains fundamentally untrained; his mental life is as chaotic and jumpy as before. We begin to ask how long the condition will last.

His closest approach to an orderly frame of mind is in one or two letters sent to less intimate friends with whom he has had some talk about books and pictures, such as Hetzler and F. E. Schönborn. His letter to Schönborn of June-July 1774, written at intervals during a period of about four weeks, is very revealing. It begins coolly with some account of his doings and writings and briefly characterizes *Werther*, *Clavigo*, *Gotz*, and other items; but when he takes up the letter a week later, instead of continuing it at this pitch, he leaps to the higher pitch that is congenial to him, enthusiasm for Herder's latest work, *Älteste Urkunde des Menschengeschlechts*, replaces the coolness with which he started, and from now on disorder prevails. It was obviously difficult, if not impossible, for him to sustain a letter at any rational level, otherwise he would surely have done it here. And even where, as in this case, he comes near to playing the critic, he is careful to disavow any critical attitude: 'I leave criticism severely alone', he says—mit Critick geb ich mich gar nicht ab. Writing to Hetzler on 14 July 1770, he advises him, in a passage touching on aesthetics, that it would be better to look for concrete examples of the beautiful than to attempt to define what beauty is.

This hostility to theory manifests itself in him at a very early date. As far back as 11 May 1767, we find him writing to his sister that he would rather be judged by a feminine reader than by a professional critic, and, while in saying this he was echoing a certain femininity in his generation, he was also recording an opinion that he seriously and consistently held as a young man. Warming to his theme in the same letter, he goes on to reject criticism outright, saying that he prefers to be left alone, that if he has genius he will become a poet without any man's help, and that, if he has no

genius, all the criticism in the world will not avail. In the following year, on 9 November 1768, he writes to his drawing-master Oeser in the same vein, saying, though more prudently and with more direct experience behind the remark, that the working studio does more than the lecture-room to develop the young poet or philosopher. Five years later sees him just as firm in his conviction; he tells Langer on 27 October 1773, with obvious satisfaction, that he has taken *Gotz von Berlichingen* over the heads of the critics and straight to the hearts of the people—Ich habe sogleich an die Herzen des Volcks angefragt, ohne erst am Stapel der Critick anzufahren—and he assures Roderer about the same time that what he has to say will make its appeal to young and ardent spirits—iungen warmen Seelen—that are not yet lost in the swamps of theory.

At every turn in these years we find him avoiding any rational or judicial position and clinging always, and quite indiscriminately, to emotion and to instinct. Wherever we turn prior to Weimar, we find this excessively unintellectual bias, unaccompanied by any desire, however slight, to correct or to counteract it. He told Anna Luise Karsch in a letter of 17 August 1775 that he cherished everything that came genuinely from the heart, no matter how uncouth it looked—mir ist alles lieb u werth was treu u. starck aus dem Herzen kommt, mag's ubrigens aussehen wie ein Igel oder wie ein Amor—and he insisted to Betty Jacobi in November 1773 that he had to write spontaneously to her—von Herzen—or not write at all. If he had to start pondering and studying and arranging his thoughts, she would never get a word from him—wenn ich erst nachdenken oder studieren und rucken sollte: was? kriegten Sie in Ewigkeit keinen Brief. 'It is impossible to describe one's feelings', he said to Auguste on 14 September 1775, 'save in the flash and fire of the moment'—mit dem Feuerblick des Moments.

This is not a phenomenon that we can set aside as pertaining to all young poets. When we come to look, it is not easy to find a similar case among poets of note, even in his own day. If we compare Goethe with such figures as Kleist or Hölderlin or Keats or Shelley, all of whom were his younger contemporaries and, like him, dangerously constituted, we find that their intellectual life, their power to think and argue coolly and logically, develops in a quite normal way, more or less parallel with, or in concert with, their imaginative life. Or at least it develops in them much earlier

than in Goethe. We can confirm this quickly by merely looking at their letters with the Goethe letters in mind. The letter Holderlin wrote to his mother in February 1791, before he was twenty-one, in which he refers to the question of proving God's existence in the abstract, may not impress us philosophically, but it shows a normal development of the ratiocinative faculty, it argues quietly and intelligibly. Granted that he seems to be arguing against the intellect as Goethe did, he is also, and here he is unlike Goethe, couching his argument in intellectual terms, using the intellect to maintain his position. A couple of sentences from the letter will serve to point the difference between the two:

I have been studying that part of philosophy dealing with the intellectual proofs of God's existence and with those properties of His that we must recognize in the world of Nature and I did so with a degree of interest that I am not ashamed of though I must confess that for a time it led me into ways of thought that might have distressed you if you had known of it. What I mean is that I soon saw that these intellectual proofs of God's existence and of immortality were so inadequate that an acute opponent would have no difficulty in refuting them either in their entirety or in their main contentions

We shall look in vain in the letters that Goethe wrote at the age of twenty or, for that matter, even at the age of twenty-five, for this degree of logic and of mental sobriety. Or again, consider Shelley's letter to Hogg on 3 January 1811, when he was under nineteen, on a related topic, beginning: 'Before we deny or believe the existence of anything, it is necessary that we should have a tolerably clear idea of what it is.' But in this case one sentence is enough. The nearest Goethe comes to finding himself in Shelley's or Holderlin's position is in the little theological paper called *Zwo wichtige Biblische Fragen* of 1773, where it is interesting to observe how unashamed he is in avoiding the toils of argument or of analysis. For while the paper purports to be written by a country clergyman in Swabia to a colleague with whom he has recently been conversing, we need not hesitate to break through the flimsy veil of fiction and associate the sentiments he expresses with Goethe, especially when we read his confession that he had a lot to say at their last meeting but that the talk suddenly became too learned for him, and as he was never a friend of books, least of all of exegetical books, he stayed behind as he usually did when his companions ventured into that overgrown thicket—Ich hatte

damals noch viel zu sagen, aber das Gespräch wurd auf einmal zu gelehrt, und da ich niemals ein Freund von Buchern, am wenigsten von Exegetischen war, bleib ich meistentheils zuruck, wenn meine Gesellen einen Ausritt in das so verwachsene Dickigt wagen. It is worth noting in this connexion that when Wilhelm Meister was going through his books before leaving home he found most of the theoretical ones uncut, try as he might, he had been unable to read as much as half-way through a single one of them.

The same sharp contrast with Goethe can be found everywhere, it would seem, in the early records of other poets; there is always a place somewhere in what they write where we can meet them on rational terms and satisfy ourselves that, when it is necessary, they can debate a point as well as another. But there is no such place in Goethe. If he ever consistently debated a point, it was never reported or so much as hinted at by anyone. At every turn, unless it be in the few legal documents where he had no choice and the formulas were fixed, he seems to lack or to suspend the average intellectuality and to rely solely or, if not solely, to an unprecedented extent, on feeling, excitement, inspiration. If profound thoughts sometimes came to him, as with *Werther* and *Faust* before us we must admit they did, it was not by dint of thinking or by any process that we could call logical, but rather by avoiding thought and abandoning himself to his emotions. It is very typical of Werther that he should say he likes Albert well enough except for his 'ifs and buts'—bis auf seine Zwar—or that all he can promise from the exercise of his intellect is, contemptuously, a litany of antitheses—eine ganze Litanei von Antithesen. And from Werther to Goethe it is never more than a step.

When we consider further that this obscuring or retarding of his intellectual faculty was not of brief duration or merely what we might call juvenile, but that it persisted till he was into his upper twenties, the problem begins to define itself in all its seriousness. It may sound paradoxical to speak of arrested development in reference to a man so supremely gifted and so quick to show his gifts. Yet, in the strictest sense, this is what we are confronted with. For no matter how gifted the mind, there has to come a clarifying, a maturing of it. It cannot be expected to thrive indefinitely on confusion or disorder or darkness. Sooner or later, and soon rather than late, it has to give itself a direction, a balance, a shape, a structure; in a word, it has to put itself in order. Most good

minds begin early, so that by the time they communicate with us in any permanent way the ordering process has already started and we can at least feel the common logic working in them. But in Goethe the process is strangely delayed, the gift of communication seems to come first and the ordering process afterwards, and it is this anomaly in his mental growth that gives his early writings their startling immediacy of feeling. His mind, we are driven to conclude, found or developed the power of self-expression at an astonishingly formless stage where nothing was sorted out and no sense of order discernible, and at this stage it remained, year after year, long past the time at which we should expect a change to come. Some way had to be found out of this impasse, but what way was there for him to take?

V

COMPANIONS IN CHAOS

GOETHE'S German contemporaries, those who shared the great *Sturm und Drang* excitement with him and to this extent shared his problem, for the most part failed to find a way. For one reason or another they all seem to have run dry after their first enthusiasm was spent. As one of their editors, Karl Freye, puts it: 'It is characteristic of the *Sturm und Drang* writers that their creative ability comes to a stop after they have written their first promising works.' This was said primarily of Gerstenberg, but with reservations it applies also to Leisewitz, Maler Muller, H. L. Wagner, Klinger, or Lenz, the chief names that come to mind when the initial phase, Goethe's phase, of the new movement is mentioned.

While this group scarcely constituted a school in the sense that they never put their heads together and drew up a programme, they were fairly close contemporaries. All of them except Gerstenberg were born within three years of Goethe, they responded to the same emotional forces in the life of their times, and they influenced and encouraged one another by the boldness of their works. In the eyes of the world around them Goethe was simply another of these rebels, his writings not clearly distinguishable from theirs. We have to remember, though it seems surprising now, that no less a critic than Lessing thought Leisewitz's *Julius von Tarent* was the work of Goethe, and that as late as 1776 Goethe had to correct Lavater for making a similar mistake about Jacobi's *Allwill*. This is their chief interest for us to-day. As creative writers they have not worn very well, not nearly as well as the minor Elizabethans with whom we are apt to compare them, but as personalities who belonged to the same explosive generation as Goethe and therefore met with some, if not all, of his difficulties they have their value for the light they throw on him.

Gerstenberg, to take the eldest first, wrote the works that we remember him for while Goethe was a student at Leipzig. It was a good beginning; his letters on Shakespeare were stimulating, so too was his lurid, but concentrated, play *Ugolino*; in both fields, the critical and the dramatic, he cannot have failed to influence Goethe and to influence him for good. He was just out of his

twenties when he published *Ugolino* and was therefore a young man as writers go. But after this, what? Fifty-five years of unproductivity, broken only by a negligible work or two. He died in 1823, but for German literature he may be said to have died in 1768. Then there is the similar case of Leisewitz who, after establishing himself as a dramatist, like Gerstenberg, with a single play, *Julius von Tarent*, in 1776, withdrew somewhat morbidly from publicity, leaving instructions that whatever writings of his were left in manuscript should be destroyed after his death. Save for the few fragments that escaped the bonfire, the last thirty years of his life were as infertile as Gerstenberg's fifty-five. H. L. Wagner, chiefly known for his effective snapping-up of the Gretchen theme in *Die Kindermörderin* when he was twenty-nine, toes the line even more drastically than Leisewitz by dying outright at thirty-two. Klinger and Maler Müller, on the other hand, reached a ripe old age and went on writing. But none of their later works are now remembered, all that in any way matter, chiefly Müller's idylls and Klinger's early plays, were written before 1780. Lenz, who both by temperament and by intention came nearest to treading in Goethe's footsteps, showed signs of insanity before he was thirty and was never sure of himself after this.

Within the creative field to which Goethe belonged there is no real exception to this premature decay in the ranks of his nearer contemporaries. True, there is Herder or Lavater, but these two belong rather to practical life and to criticism than to creative writing in Goethe's sense; there is Schiller or Heinse, but they came later, when the wave of enthusiasm was past its emotional peak and the crisis was less acute. Broadly speaking, it can be shown that none of the men who were young with Goethe developed in any significant or satisfactory way after their first impulse was spent. In their several degrees they all conformed to this short-lived and disappointing pattern. How did Goethe escape it? No doubt it would be easy to argue that after all he was a genius and the others were something less, and that no further explanation is needed. But this is merely to turn our backs on the problem. It is nearer the mark to remember what his mother once wrote to him in her racy way years after, on 6 October 1807. She told him that while he was admittedly a genius, it was touch and go; he might have been a quite ordinary fellow—*Vielleicht ein Gran Hirn mehr*

oder weniger und du wärstes ein ganz ordinerer Mensch geworden. In some such sense we are entitled to reflect that it was touch and go; he might have turned out to be a quite ordinary *Stürmer und Dränger*, a flash in the pan like the rest of them. It is more than likely that, if Goethe's record had stopped before Weimar and we had only the Frankfurt writings to go by, we should have consoled ourselves long ago by labelling him as one of those who never grow up, never get past the inspirational stage. The case for this view could have been made so convincing that few, if any, to-day would experience a sense of loss. Or again it would be possible to argue that these interrupted careers were all a matter of accident and that there is nothing much to be inferred from them. But this is to ignore the larger setting. Putting all these satellites of his together and seeing how problematic things were both for them and for him, it seems more plausible to conclude that there was something unfavourable or hostile in the environment of these young Germans around 1770 and that this handicap held good for Goethe and for the others equally.

There seems to be no doubt that the emotional wave which swept over Europe at this time took a more irrational, a more violent, form in Germany than elsewhere and that it was too much for all but the wisest and most robust of natures. The violence is not surprising when we consider the poverty of cultural life that preceded it. An Englishman, reacting against the Age of Enlightenment, was better placed; he needed only to shift his allegiance from one phase of the English tradition to another to find himself on just as firm ground as before, like Wordsworth, who in breaking with the Popian tradition had no difficulty in remembering Spenser and drawing sustenance from him. And the French sense of continuity or background was probably stronger than the English. But in Germany the lack of any broad and secure tradition, apparent at every turn in its political and cultural life, threw these young writers on themselves and gave them no clear sense of direction. Once they had broken with the brittle school of Gottsched, there was little or nothing for them to turn to in their country's past. They were in a sort of void, left entirely to their own resources.

Goethe was no more able to escape the disadvantages of his environment than the others. Considering how exposed and susceptible he was, for none of his contemporaries approached him in

extremity of temperament, we may suspect that he was even less able to escape them. No wonder, if this was the case, that the future often seemed dark and uncertain to him and that his problem became more and more acute as the months and years went by. The others who grew up with him all suffered defeat in their different ways, not just because they were weak, though weakness is apparent in some, but also because circumstances were against them. There was no clear way forward for them as creative writers. Goethe was in the same plight as they and might have suffered defeat in his turn as they did. Thus he might have had a mental breakdown like Lenz and, as we have seen, there were those who thought he would. When we look at his family history, and especially at the strain of morbidity in his father and his sister, the thought does not seem far-fetched, especially if we recall the evidences of morbidity in himself that he notes in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*. Or he might have sacrificed letters to public life, as Klinger did, and become a better official than poet; there must have been times in his first years in Weimar when administrative duties pulled him strongly in this direction. Or again he might have remained nominally an artist and poet, like Maler Muller, without making a success of it, without developing.

As an artist, a visual artist, this is exactly what happened to him. He showed talent and then failed to grow. The qualities that make his early drawings attractive are, as Wieland noted, precisely those that we find in his early writings—*Er zeichnet vollig wie er dichtet und schreibt* (4 April 1777). Drawings such as those he made in his study in Frankfurt or in Switzerland in 1775 have in their degree the directness, the immediacy, of the Frankfurt letters and verses. As quickly executed, impressionistic transcripts of experience, *Sturm und Drang* drawings prompted by natural instinct and carried out with a minimum of artifice, they are not unworthy of his genius. At least they are wholly consistent with it, as it expressed itself in those years, and they stand out against the dry mannerisms of the period just as the poems do. The most grudging of critics would have to admit that these beginnings were genuine and not without promise. But alas, it is a promise that was never fulfilled.

Goethe continued to draw, off and on, till he was over sixty, and was able at times to recapture something of his old spontaneity, as he did in some of the Italian drawings of 1787; but he never

learned to work deliberately and consequently he never progressed, even in this simple medium. Whenever he drops his instantaneous way of working and attempts a style or a subject that calls for thought, for planning, for conscious organization, he seems to have been usually at a loss and either to have stopped half-way or to have worked on laboriously without achieving anything. The only satisfactory drawings are the unpremeditated ones done in the period before Weimar or in the spirit of this period; the others are frankly dull, amateurish, painfully lacking in ideas. He was probably saying no more than the truth when he told Charlotte von Stein on 28 June 1807 that the drawings he had been making had all his old faults in them and little enough of his new virtues, or when he told Meyer two years later (11 August 1809) that he had been sketching again in his usual fruitless style—*indem es immer auf die alte Weise geschieht, wobey nichts herauskommen kann*—and that he could only justify it to himself as a sort of self-indulgence and substitute for tobacco-smoking. We see then that in at least one creative field which Goethe tried to explore and one that he was very loath to relinquish, as we can tell from the upwards of three thousand drawings that have been preserved, he fits the *Sturm und Drang* pattern. All he has to his credit is a zestful beginning, followed by frustration and failure. In literature and philosophy, fortunately, it is another story, but even here, as we shall see, he was very much in the dark and slow to find his way.

It will be clear that if there was something problematic in this generation for a whole group of writers, there was something peculiarly problematic in it for a man of Goethe's sort, predisposed as he was by his whole habit of mind to the new and precarious ideology, long before it began to influence him. The notion of a universal force, called Nature with a capital N, rejecting or bypassing the intellect, as he says in *Nach Falkonet und uber Falkonet*—*ohne durch die Erkenntnisskraft durchgegangen zu seyn*—and addressing itself straight to the heart and to the instincts, was exactly what his kind of consciousness called for. In a rudimentary sense this notion was the philosophical correlative of his temperament, and when it first reached him, presumably in the conversations he had with Herder in Strassburg, it must have been like his own voice speaking to him, telling him what he had always known. If the vast life surrounding him everywhere was thus

immediate, communicating emotionally, illogically, incalculably with human individuals, what better or more receptive individual could be devised than one like Goethe, who was always irrationally shifting and therefore always irrationally on the alert, ready to pick up the chance message that nature tossed in his direction? And what better way of inviting the message than to follow the bidding of his temperament and write as he had always preferred to write and as he almost invariably did in his letters, inspirationally, irresponsibly, jumping from point to point and from mood to mood? This may not have been exactly what Herder had in mind when he dilated on the staccato character of folk-poetry, claiming that it was all twists and turns—Sprunge, Wurfe, Wendungen. Herder was thinking more of the rendering of action than of the rendering of feeling when he argued thus. But the distinction between action and feeling was not one that he drew sharply, not as sharply as we should draw it to-day, and we can be sure that Goethe ignored it and interpreted all that Herder told him in terms of his own staccato sensibility.

In view of this it is not surprising if we find him without delay allying his impulsive way of feeling and writing to his new-found philosophy and letting himself go with more abandonment than ever. On revisiting Strassburg in 1775, Goethe climbed to the top of the cathedral again and scribbled down his thoughts there, rejoicing in the discovery that he was unchanged in emotional responsiveness and filled with wonder, as when he stood on the same spot four or five years before, at the miracle of creation embodied in the great architectural pile below him. In his oracular way he apostrophizes the cathedral itself as one of the great 'creative ideas'—Gedanken der Schöpfung—comparable with the river Rhine and the Swiss mountains, and then turns to the creative impulse, the corresponding impulse, in the artist who, he tells us, with the 'Schöpfungskraft' that is in him stammers and blindly scrawls down his worship of the eternal life that he beholds—In Dichtung stammelt sie über, in krutzlenden Strichen wühlt sie auf dem Papier Anbethung dem Schaffenden. Here perhaps as explicitly as anywhere we find Goethe associating the incoherent use of language with the spirit and meaning of the universe. Sometimes he goes farther and identifies the two, as in *Künstlers Erdewallen*, where he lets the artist in his excitement merge his sensibility into nature's sensibility until he fails to perceive the

difference: 'You dwell in me, primal source of Nature, life and joy of creation, I lose myself in you'—

Du wohnst bei mir Urquell der Natur
 Leben und Freude der Creatur
 In dir versunken
 Fühl ich mich seelig an allen Sinnen trunken.

In such a state of mind there was nothing to stop him from substituting his personal mood for that of the universe, as he very palpably does in the passage in *Der ewige Jude* where he speaks of the world as convulsed in desires knotted like snakes, from which it tries to escape only to entangle itself again:

Die Schlangenknotige Begier in der du bebstest
 Von ihr dich zu befreien strebstest
 Und dann befreyt dich wider neu umschlangst

—which may be hard to sustain as a piece of philosophy but comes quite naturally from him as a rather savage variant on his inner life.

On the whole we shall find that the philosophical passages, those in which he indulges in generalizations about nature, occur, like the last example, in the more rhapsodic works where he is writing at his fastest and wildest. The more heedless the course, the more likely he is to strike the deep places; if he sails cautiously he stays in the shallows. The phrase 'direct expression of nature'—Unmittelbaarer Ausdruck von der Natur—which he wrote in his Swiss diary of 1775 is an excellent description of the ideal that possessed his mind in these years. Small wonder, if convictions such as these were dominant in him, that he makes Faust ask why, when you have anything to say, you should have to hunt for words to say it—

Und wenn's euch Ernst ist was zu sagen,
 Ists nothig Worten nachzufragen?

—or makes him insist, in another famous passage, that names and words are mere sound and smoke, bedimming the heavenly light:

Nahme Schall und Rauch,
 Umnebelnd Himmels Glut.

There are no passages more characteristic of his *Sturm und Drang* feelings about the universe at this time than the description of spring spoken by the hermit at the beginning of his impolite *Satyros*—Dieses Document der göttlichen Frechheit unserer

Jugendjahre—showing all nature, birds, beasts, insects, in a multiple act of procreation at which he rejoices, singing God's praises in his heart:

Ich sah im Fruhling ohne Zahl
 Blumen und Knospen durch Berg und Thal,
 Wie alles drangt und alles treibt,
 Kein Placklein ohne Keimlein bleibt.
 Da denckt nun gleich der steif Philister.
 Das ist fur mich und mein Geschwister.
 Unser Herr Gott ist so gnadig heuer;
 Hatt' ichs doch schon in Fach und Scheuer.
 Unser Herr Gott spricht: aber mir nit so,
 Es sollen's ander' auch werden froh.
 Da lockt uns denn der Sonnenschein
 Storch und Schwalb aus der Fremd herein,
 Den Schmetterling aus seinem Haus,
 Die Fliegen aus den Ritzen raus
 Und brutet das Raupenvolcklein aus.
 Das quillt all von ErzeugungsKrafft,
 Wie sichs hat aus dem Schlaf gerafft;
 Vogel und Frosch und Thier und Mucken
 Begehn sich zu allen Augenblicken,
 Hinten und vorn, auf Bauch und Rucken,
 Dass man auf jeder Blut und Blat
 Ein Eh- und Wochenbettlein hat.
 Und sing ich dann im Herzen mein,
 Lob Gott, mit allen Wurmelein.

Or consider the astonishing lines, from *Satyros* again, describing in untranslatable language how the first signs of order came in chaos, with light penetrating the darkness and filling the whole of being with desire so that the elements opened and mingled in a universal embrace:

Wie im Unding das Urding erquoll, .
 Lichtsmacht durch die Nacht scholl,
 Durchdrang die Tiefen der Wesen all,
 Dass aufkeimte BegehrungsSchwall
 Und die Elemente sich erschlossen,
 Mit Hunger ineinander ergossen,
 All durchdringend, all durchdrungen.

It will be clear from a glance at either of these quasi-philosophical passages, in the first of which the words come so fast that Goethe twice writes a triple rhyme in what is meant to be couplets, that

they can only have been written on the spur of the moment in some utterly unguarded state of enthusiasm. The nearest he comes to making an abstract and therefore, one would expect, more considered statement of his philosophy of *Sturm und Drang* is in a review of Sulzer, not signed but certainly Goethe's, published in 1772 in the *Frankfurter Gelehrte Anzeigen*, where he says that all we see of nature is 'force consuming force, everything being transitory, a thousand seeds crushed every moment and a thousand born, and good and bad, fair and foul, existing side by side and equally justified—Was wir von Natur sehn, ist Kraft, die Kraft verschlingt, nichts gegenwartig alles vorubergehend, tausend Keime zertreten jeden Augenblick tausend gebohren, gross und bedeutend, mannigfaltig ins Unendliche, schön und hasslich, gut und bos, alles mit gleichem Rechte neben einander existierend. And what is this but another not less hasty disburdening of his feelings, never, it would seem, revised or even reread, since if he had stopped to think he would have had to modify in some degree what he had written.

We can see from these few instances that when the new ideas first took hold of him they did not, as ideas usually do, initiate any ordering or organizing process in his mental life, but encouraged him rather in the state of disorder in which he had lived hitherto. Instead of intellectualizing him or in any way disciplining him, these ideas served only to thrust him farther in the opposite direction, reinforcing his irrational bias and accentuating his habitual waywardness. So far does he go in his distrust of the intellect that he lets Werther say (and if Werther says it we may be sure that Goethe is not far from saying it himself) that he envies the half-wit the mental confusion in which he languishes—und auch wie beneid ich deinen Trubsinn, die Verwirrung deiner Sinne, in der du verschmachtest—and in another place, though not quite as explicitly, suggests that our acts are admirable in proportion as they are unpremeditated—bei halbweg einer freyen, edlen, unerwarteten That. If we can speak at all of mental growth in these years, it is only in the sense of an increasing disarrangement and turbulence of thought. The philosophical quickening that he experienced as a young man from the new ideology, as it reached him through Herder with its core of philosophical thought hidden under a pile of religious and literary associations, did not operate as a corrective of his emotional vagaries, but confirmed him in them and made

them more uncontrolled, more imperious than before. Any maturing of his mind and sensibility seems farther off than ever.

It is only when we look squarely at the disquieting side of Goethe's early years that we can account for the tragic note, the note of danger in his early writings, and assess it at its true value. On the whole the dangerous or tragic note in the Frankfurt Goethe has not been as fully explored as it deserves to be. We think rather of the joy than of the despair in his early writings, and not without reason, since whatever he has to say in these years, even in his most unhappy moments, is said with such felicity that we are apt to take the felicity for happiness, forgetting all that is behind. *Werther* is notoriously a book that plays this trick on us again and again. There is quite a peculiar sense in which Goethe's marvellous endowment of utterance makes us oblivious of strain or suffering, dazzling us as with an excess of light. A truer view of him emphasizes what cannot be denied, that the two profounder and longer works which between them dominate the Frankfurt years, *Werther* and the early *Faust*, are both of them tragic or not far from it, they both concentrate on and culminate in the destruction of an individual, *Werther* in the one case and Gretchen in the other, and the question now arises why this desperate situation should have so possessed his mind, culminating not once, but twice, in works of such seriousness and such power. One of the things we know for sure about Goethe is that his works are closely equated with his life, that he did not rely as a poet on the separate exercise of his imagination, but was committed to recording or sublimating his experience. It follows from this that he was not the sort of poet who could respond to purely literary inspiration and write tragedy simply because it was a high form of poetic art. If we find Goethe expressing himself in tragedy, as he does in these two closely related works, we are entitled to look for the sources of it in his personal life.

Once we begin to look, the correspondence between the life and the works is as easy to find at this point as at any other. The kind of tragedy or approach to tragedy that we find in *Werther* and in *Faust* is, first of all, not Shakespearean, Shakespeare's tragedy being difficult to think of apart from its plot and its theatre, whereas Goethe's impresses us as being independent of both. What is conveyed to us here, in Goethe, is not so much an action or a situation with beginning, middle, and end, as a state of mind which is

pervasive and to which everything else is subordinate; the leading spokesman serves as a mouthpiece for it, the tragic individual is the victim of it. Different as the two works, *Faust* and *Werther*, may be, they partake of this common form, the variation being that in the one case the spokesman is also the victim, who destroys himself, while in the other case the spokesman victimizes and causes the destruction of another. Furthermore we find that the state of mind is much the same in each; in each it is a state of confusion, of darkness, of emotion running riot, of complete and acknowledged unintellectuality. In short, it is the *Sturm und Drang* state of mind, as we find it in Goethe when we look at his darker side. Neither the delicacy of Werther's perceptions nor the strength and depth of Faust's should blind us to the fact that their minds, like Goethe's, are at an altogether immature stage and wrestling like his with the problem of immaturity.

This is clear enough in *Werther*, who lays little claim to experience or to wisdom either. He affects us rather as one who is at the beginning of life and who fails as yet to perceive any order in it whatsoever. He finds himself surrounded by chaos or by illimitable forces that he cannot comprehend and it is these forces that overpower him at the last: 'I stagger in blind fear with all the forces of the universe impinging on me.'¹ And while *Faust* is presented to us as a man of longer experience who has studied all the four faculties and played the professor for ten years or so, we also learn that he is no wiser than before—und bin so klug als wie zuvor—and that, like *Werther*, he too is really starting at scratch. When he cries that feeling is everything—Gefühl ist alles—he is only saying what *Werther* says or might have said. Moreover the whole subsequent course of the complete poem, if that were needed, bids us regard this first stage as the lowest, the stage of immaturity, at which life and action are not yet under control and are therefore destructive. This, rather than any social argument, is what the *Gretchen* drama tries to convey. We see, finally, that the tragedy Goethe was alive to in his early years was not the tragedy of grown men and the clash of circumstance, but the tragedy of being young and without discipline, the tragedy of life unanalysed, the tragedy of adolescence. It is the problem of *Sturm und Drang*, raised in Goethe's mind and

¹ Und so taumle ich beängstigt, Himmel und Erde und ihre webenden Kräfte um mich her.

person to a tragic pitch. Faust puts it in its most absolute, its most catastrophic, form when he cries, throwing all thought and reason to the winds. 'Let what must happen happen now. Let her fate involve mine and let us perish together':

Mags schnell geschehn was muss geschehn!
Mag ihr Geschick auf mich zusammen sturzen
Und sie mit mir zu Grunde gehn!

VI

'DICHTUNG UND WAHRHEIT'

IF the early life and writings of Goethe have not always been interpreted thus in terms of crisis and potential tragedy, the responsibility or the blame must be laid chiefly at his door. When he came to set down his own interpretation years afterwards in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, it was, in effect if not in intention, an interpretation of a very different sort, giving an impression of weight and deliberateness strangely at variance with what we have found and powerfully influencing all the biographers, even those who, like George Henry Lewes, did not wholly agree with it. Lewes was admirably quick to perceive the 'great difficulties' that *Dichtung und Wahrheit* presents, though he cannot be said to have made full use of the opening this gave him, being hampered presumably by lack of data. Nevertheless he issued a clear warning which is by no means valueless today.

The main source of difficulty, he says, is

the abiding inaccuracy of *tone*, which, far more misleading than the many inaccuracies of *fact*, gives to the whole youthful period, as narrated by him, an aspect so directly contrary to what is given by contemporary evidence, especially his own letters, that an attempt to reconcile the contradiction is futile. If any one doubts this, and persists in his doubts after reading the first volume of this work, let him take up Goethe's Letters to the Countess von Stolberg, or the recently published letters to Kestner and Charlotte, and compare their tone with the tone of the Autobiography, wherein the old man depicts the youth as the old man saw him, not as the youth felt and lived.

Part of the contradiction is removed, or at least accounted for, when we realize that Goethe was not interested in immaturity as a subject *per se* but was only concerned with it as a phase in his own development, and that when once he had, by a slow and arduous process, outlived the immaturity in himself his interest in immaturity was largely a thing of the past. From then on, as his later works show, it was the mature mind, not the immature, that engrossed and fascinated him. He was far from sharing the special interest, scientific or otherwise, in the child and the adolescent and in unformed states of mind generally which is so widespread in our day, and if in undertaking his autobiography he

was drawn perforce into dealing with this phase of life it was strictly for reasons of personal history, of filling out the account of himself that he felt impelled to give, and not because he sentimentally wanted his childhood back, as Wordsworth and so many others did, or because the problem of childhood or of anything pertaining to childhood attracted him for its own sake.

It is true that he has beautiful and memorable things to say about childhood and therefore cannot have been indifferent to it. We have only to remember the children in *Werther*, or rather Werther on the subject of children, to be assured of this. 'Nothing on earth is so close to my heart as children', he says to Wilhelm in his letter of 29 June, and at the end of the same letter he maintains that, young and old, we are all children and that instead of trying to instruct them we should learn to be like them. Nor was this just a Wertherian sentiment. The thought of childhood as something to learn from and even as a key to wisdom clung to Goethe all his life, coming out fifty years later in the 'Marienbader Elegie', where he says in memorable words that if we can retain what we have in childhood, if we can be 'immer kindlich', we shall have nothing to fear, and coming out more prosaically in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, where he observes that if children went on growing in the spirit of their first promise they would all be geniuses—Wuchsen die Kinder in der Art fort, wie sie sich andeuten, so hatten wir lauter Genies.

It will be evident from these passages, however, and especially from the last passage, that Goethe's notions of children were not those that suggest themselves to any who have close dealings with them, but were rather of the ideal and philosophical kind, not based on careful observation, which came to the fore in the eighteenth century in the wake of Rousseau. So far as we can judge, Goethe was not especially well qualified by experience to write about children. At no time in his life did he live in daily contact with them, though in earlier years he liked to play with them occasionally and, as we can see from his letters to Fritz von Stein, remained fond of them in his rather tutorial way. We cannot forget that except for little Karl in *Götz von Berlichingen*, a figure too fleetingly drawn to be informative, there are no real children in his books. It was easy for him to say, as he did to Kraft on 13 July 1779, that it made him feel young and happy to associate with children, but this does not prove that he understood

them. We have only to compare what he wrote about his early years with what Karl Philipp Moritz or Heinrich Jung-Stilling, two near contemporaries and friends of his, wrote about theirs, to see how relatively undiscerning he was in this important field. And if we compare him with later writers the deficiency becomes still more evident; when we read the opening chapters of *Der grüne Heinrich*, a mid-nineteenth-century book, we realize painfully what we have missed in Goethe, who by comparison with Gottfried Keller seems to have lost touch as an autobiographer, though not, it should be remembered, as a poet, with all that was inward and vital in his younger life.

There were times in the writing of his autobiography when Goethe became acutely aware of its shortcomings and freely admitted them. He reminds us at one point in the later stages that he was quite unable to recapture the spirit of his youthful days, brimming, as they were, with energy and promise, and that what he was saying lacked the richness and the expansiveness that he would have liked to give it—Überhaupt fehlt dieser gegenwertigen Darstellung im Ganzen die wertlauffte Redseligkeit und Fülle einer Jugend, die sich fuhlt und nicht weiss, wo sie mit Kraft und Vermögen hinaus soll. And on another occasion he went out of his way to explain that *Dichtung und Wahrheit* was not an independent work, complete and self-contained, but that it was merely a sort of supplement intended to fill out the gaps in his literary career—Es hat sich nicht als selbständig angekündigt; es ist vielmehr bestimmt, die Lucken eines Autorlebens auszufüllen. This was said, moreover, at an important point in the narrative; he was approaching the discussion of *Werther* and the *Werther* period and evidently realizing that the revealing document was the *Werther* that he had written long ago and not the sober account of it that he was about to supply. Here he insists quite clearly and unequivocally that *Dichtung und Wahrheit* was only a commentary or a companion work, meant to be read in conjunction with the original data, and that it could not claim to be a reproduction or a recovery of his former life.

It must be admitted, though, that, having made this disclaimer, he was not scrupulously mindful of it and that the work, as it now stands, has a far greater coherence and continuity than he here professes. If he had kept the subordinate purpose of his autobiography constantly before him as he wrote, the finished product

would undoubtedly have been more allusive, more fragmentary, more like the *Annalen* of his post-Italian years and less like a philosophical novel than it proved to be. It is all quite understandable. Lacking, as we have indicated, the modern curiosity about formative states of mind in the child and the adolescent or about unearthing remote memories and complexes which had given him trouble enough in the past, there was every temptation for him to do what he did, namely, to fill the empty place in his mind by extending his adult life backwards and, as it were, annexing his early life to it. In obedience to some such impulse, which seems to have had its way with him without his ever finding out, he collected round his former days the assortment of things and persons that accorded with the settled life he was now living, and in this way constructed or invented an account of his early life, not as it was when he lived it, but as it would have been if it had not been early. Instead of taking stock of his wayward and uprooted self, as in a true autobiography he ought to have done, he built up, book by book, an impressive environment of places, personalities, and intellectual movements and ensconced himself firmly and comfortably in it. Thus, without making any culpable mis-statements, the factual errors not being very important, and without wishing to falsify, since if he had wished to falsify he would have destroyed his early papers instead of in the main collecting and preserving them, he managed seriously to distort the record, replacing the chaos, the void, the fluid disorder in which he really lived at that earlier time with the secure milieu, the stable structure, the solidity that enclosed him at the time of writing.

The curious unreality of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, by virtue of which it appears rather as history of literature than as autobiography, more academic than personal, all follows from this. It was not Goethe's intention to give his autobiography this impersonal character, or, if intention was there, it was more a matter of drift than of choice. Finding as he went along that his protagonist failed to come to life, he concentrated on the stage properties and tried to make them as good and as convincing as he could. The result is what we may call a period autobiography, but scarcely a vital one. When we read it, it is as if we were close to Goethe all the time without ever seeing his face or hearing his voice. The things and people that were about him, his friends and the literary figures of his time, Gottsched with his wig off, or Merck with his

sidelong glance, his father's house, old Frankfurt and its ceremonies, the French occupation, Strassburg and Sesenheim, all stand out in clear relief, but himself we never see in clear relief, neither directly nor indirectly in the minds of others. The picture we get of him is almost the reverse of the true one, since the central phenomenon is mainly left out and the surrounding chaos is almost turned into a cosmos. Moreover the distortion, being of this impersonal kind, has given an air of objectivity to the work which is not easy to resist, making it seem most fully authoritative where it is least so, and lifting it above the suspicion of partiality that such works usually encounter.

This does not mean that we should refrain from reading *Dichtung und Wahrheit*. Far from it. But only that in reading it we should be doubly careful to remember the kind of work it is and not allow its sedate tonality to mislead us. A close reading of it will show that Goethe, in spite of himself, was unable to avoid the question of his inner condition altogether and, in point of fact, makes many references to it, but that he always or almost always refers to it in passing and never dwells on it for long. What is more surprising and may be taken as a voucher for Goethe's good intentions is the discovery that with one solitary exception the references to his inner condition are not ambiguous at all, but are quite consistent with one another and with the rest of the evidence. They all point to the disorder, the impulsiveness, the mobility, and what not, that we have extracted from the early documents.

The evidence against it being so complete, there is no need to make much of the exception; but it remains an interesting curiosity. It occurs in connection with Lavater, with whom, as we know, he was very closely associated in 1774 and 1775. Goethe tells us that the association was good for him because the incessant stimulus he got from it shook him out of his contemplative calm—denn seine dringenden Anregungen brachten mein ruhiges, künstlerisch beschauliches Wesen in Umtrieb. The conception of an overplacid Goethe that is here put before us is too far from what we know for us to take it seriously. If there is any shadow of truth in it, the explanation must be sought in terms of individual temperaments, one highly volatile nature reacting illogically against another, in which case we can agree that Lavater with his fervid emotion and what Goethe once called his 'phosphorescent inkpot'

was the right man for the part. But it is possible that Goethe was simply forgetting, or that he was for the moment confusing his present self at the time of writing with the former self that he was writing about.

The rest of the evidence is plain sailing. Goethe refers continually and in a great variety of terms to the extreme liveliness of his nature—die grosse Lebhaftigkeit meiner Natur. Sometimes he calls himself jumpy and vivacious—meinem lebhaften, fahrigten und immer regsamen Wesen—at other times restless and violent—mein unruhiges, heftiges Wesen. He tells us that he was full of eccentricity—meiner vielfachen Exzentrizität—and that he never seriously applied himself. At Strassburg he takes it as a matter of course that he should treat the main business of graduating as if it were a side-line, and while he admits on returning home that he wanted to put his life in order and plan his career, he was unable to do so because of the countless distractions that beset him—hatten mich nicht hundertfaltige Neigungen, Leidenschaften und Zerstreuungen von diesem Wege fortgerissen. More than once he refers to the rapidity with which he would act on sudden impulses, telling us that he liked to do things on the spur of the moment—weil ich alles aus dem Stegereife liebte—or that he made up his mind by divine inspiration—wie durch himmlische Eingebung. It is here that he speaks of writing a dramatic sketch at a sitting and of springing out of bed and scribbling on the nearest piece of paper at the angle at which he found it. Evidently the well-known line in 'Willkommen und Abschied' which says that the act almost anticipated the thought—Es war getan fast eh' gedacht—did not come from nowhere; in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* we read, in a quite unimportant connexion, that no sooner had a certain whim come into his head than he carried it into execution—So schnell als diese Grille in mir aufstieg, war sie auch ausgeführt

It will be seen at once that, notwithstanding the misleading tone of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, its specific pronouncements about his character and temperament are in complete accord with what the early documents tell us. If these pronouncements have been frequently overlooked, it is because they are all in the nature of asides, seldom emphasized, and never pulled together into the full-dress analysis that it would have been appropriate for him to make. He admits with the utmost frankness that in those days his

nature was swift and incalculable in the extreme, but he does so in such an unemphatic and incidental way, and the tenor of the narrative is so little in tune with what he is saying, that it is not surprising if its early readers failed to take notice. What makes the psychological problem in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* stranger still is that Goethe not only sees clearly the kind of person he was, but also sees the crisis that awaited him and is continually on the edge of formulating it, yet somehow never does formulate it and prefers to end on an evasive note. Thus he recognizes that his life was quite without plan or direction—mein planloses Wesen—and he also recognizes, very acutely, that his lack of plan was connected with an excess of mental freedom—Bei meiner überfreien Gesinnung, bei meinem völlig zweck- und planlosen Leben und Handeln. Indeed he goes on to say here, in one of the very few emphatic passages of this sort in the whole book, that he was squandering his days and his talents in wholly purposeless fashion—Mir, der ich mein Talent und meine Tage absichtslos vergeudete. In the closing section, written after a further interval of years, he confesses that his sense of the infinite only tended to confuse him—und das Unendliche, was ich gewahrt hatte, verwirrte mich vielmehr—and that his life thus far had come to nothing—kein Resultat des Lebens hatte sich in mir hervorgetan. More than once he speaks of himself as living in a state of chaos, and, in what is perhaps the strongest passage of all, he speaks of being inwardly dismembered and cut to pieces—In solcher vielfachen Zerstreuung, ja Zerstückelung meines Wesens—using, we see, in reference to himself the very image and almost the very word that Gretchen uses in her despair.

There is one respect in which *Dichtung und Wahrheit* takes us even farther than the early evidence. Goethe's friends and acquaintances in younger days, while recognizing that there was something problematic and even precarious about him, never expressly raise the question of abnormality, but *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, we find, raises it in more places than one. To begin with, it speaks twice of his writing in a somnambulistic condition, once when he is describing the experience of composing in the middle of the night—meinem nachtwandlerischen Dichten—and again in reference to *Werther*, which he tells us he wrote straight down without any preliminary draft in a half-unconscious state resembling that of a sleep-walker—ziemlich unbewusst, einem

Nachtwandler ähnlich. If this were all we might make light of it, but there are other remarks, clearly related to these, that are much less equivocal. He tells us, and here we are certainly on pathological ground, that he was persistently visited by a curious and ghostly state of mind in which he could not distinguish clearly between past and present—Ein Gefühl aber, das bei mir gewaltig überhand nahm und sich nicht wundersam genug aussern konnte, war die Empfindung der Vergangenheit und Gegenwart in Eins: eine Anschauung, die etwas Gespenstermassiges in die Gegenwart brachte—adding that this state of mind was always beneficial to his creative life and was frequently expressed there, but that it was apt to affect those who encountered it as strange, inexplicable, and even distasteful—seltsam, unerklärlich, vielleicht unerfreulich. He confesses to what he calls a 'paralysing' susceptibility to certain objects—eine durch einzelne Gegenstände leicht zu paralysierende Einbildungskraft—and he explains this in another place by saying more specifically that he was capable of going to such lengths in his passionate appreciation of pictures that at extreme moments it appeared to others, even to other enthusiasts, like a sort of madness—fast wie Wahnsinn—a peculiarity which he describes more fully in the first section of his *Briefe aus der Schweiz*.

Over and above these glimpses of abnormality in his aesthetic and creative life, he lets us see that there is a broader application, describing himself as subject to hypochondria—hypochondrisch, überspannt, krankhaft gereizt—and recognizing that this condition was capable of manifesting itself at any time and not just in special circumstances. In one place he even says that he had an initial disposition to it—Schon von Hause hatte ich einen gewissen hypochondrischen Zug mitgebracht—and in the most ominous reference of all he raises the question of his mental health and wonders how good it is. He does this at a time in his early life when we should have thought him at his best; he has just come home from Strassburg and finds himself in a healthier and happier state than last time (meaning his return from Leipzig after a serious breakdown), but not without a certain overstrain in his behaviour of the sort that would scarcely show in one whose mind was thoroughly sound—Der Wanderer war nun endlich gesunder und froher nach Hause gelangt als das erste Mal, aber in seinem ganzen Wesen zeigte sich doch etwas Überspanntes, welches nicht

völlig auf geistige Gesundheit deutete. If we add to this that he was now to spend the next four years at home in daily contact with his father, whose solitary and frustrated life oppressed him, he tells us, almost beyond the point of endurance—*Dies zusammen lag als eine entsetzliche Last auf meinem Gemüte*—we can see something of what he had to contend with. Whether we make much or little of these dark hints, and, remembering Werther, we cannot easily overlook them, we can agree that they are all of a piece with the prevailing irrationality and can be fitted into the general picture without any difficulty.

Reading *Dichtung und Wahrheit* in this light, we find that Goethe, as he wrote it, was continually touching the fringes of the crucial problem, the problem of his mind and temperament in its first stages, without ever really grappling with it. There must have been something in him, some reluctance, some inhibition, that prevented him from grappling with it and made him stop short of the mark. For our purpose it is enough to recognize that the autobiography, as Lewes puts it, does not so much mis-state as understate. If it shrinks from the cruel facts it does not go so far as to conceal them. In a last analysis there is no discrepancy between the picture of Goethe's mind that we derive from *Dichtung und Wahrheit* and the picture we find in the early documents, and there are no two ways of interpreting him. If we read carefully, everything leads to the same conclusions.

What we are confronted with, then, is a young man's mind so chaotic, so structureless, and so self-consuming, that there would seem to be no hope or future for it. If so many of his contemporaries, none of whom seem to have been blessed and cursed with his preternatural sensibilities, were unable to cope with themselves and their environment and make what we could call a success of life, how did he, the most hazardous of them, find his way forward? It was in his person that the violent reaction against logic, rationality, abstraction, discipline, affecting and inspiring them all, came sharply to a head, so that if we wish to observe it in its most absolute and uncompromising form we have only to look at him and at what he wrote. He, if anyone, was exposed to all its dangers, his very existence, it would seem, jeopardized by this torrent of feeling, and at the same time it was he more than any, far more than any, who had the faculty of exulting in its power and its beauty and of communicating them to his fellow men, so that he

was verily, as Wieland said in his poem, a man in whom the extremes of violence and benevolence were united—

Der alle Gute und alle Gewalt
Der Menschheit so in sich vereinigt!

—and who had it in him to delight and to destroy in equal measure—Gleich mächtig, zu toten und zu[•]entzucken. It is only in some such light that we can hope to understand the mood of Goethe's early years, in which rapture so intimately mingles with melancholy, confidence with despair, idyll with tragedy. It is a state of being so contradictory and so unresolved, that only youth in its hey-day could sustain it, and then only for a time.

By 1775 it is evident that the time was nearly up and that by hook or by crook he must find in himself the means of changing his condition or else make a failure of his life. This accounts for the note of urgency that sounds in the turmoil—the 'Gewurge'—of his last few months in Frankfurt. On 14 April of this year he writes to Knebel that he is tumbling out of one confusion into another—falle aus einer Verworrenheit in die andre—and on 18 October he writes to Burger that he has just come through the most distracted, confused, full, crowded, empty, energetic, foolish, three-quarters of a year that he has ever spent—nach den zerstreutesten, verworrensten, ganzesten, vollsten, leersten, kräftigsten und lappischen drey Vierteljahren die ich in meinem Leben gehabt habe. It should not be difficult to note the signs of aggravation in this paradoxical spate of adjectives, but, if more is needed, there are two remaining passages which bring home still more forcibly his realization of the critical turning-point, the climacteric, that he had now reached. 'Unhappy Fate', he cries in a letter to Auguste of 3 August, 'that will not allow me a middle position, either I clutch and cling at one spot or fly off to the four points of the compass.'¹ The grimmest note of all is the latest; on 30 October he says in his diary, in what reads like a parting word to his intimate friend Merck, that he wishes to fight it out alone, and that any sympathy with his confusion will only confuse him the more—Nein Bruder du sollst an meinen Verworrenheiten nicht theilnehmen, die durch Theilnehmung noch verworrner werden.

¹ Unseeliges Schicksaal das mir keinen Mittelzustand erlauben will Entweder auf einem Punckt, fassend, festklammernd, oder schweifen gegen alle vier Winde!

Such was the critical state of mind of the man who pulled up his stakes and migrated to Weimar to begin afresh in a different world. Much has been written about this so-called escape, some deploring it, others commending. If it has not always been well understood, it is because, on the whole, too much attention has been paid to outer circumstances, too little to the poet's temperament. Behind all the entanglements of home and society, the backward pull of old associations and new associations in his native town, there was the problem of his growth and even of his mental welfare. His letters make it clear that it was not so much his relation to others that dismayed him as his own state of mind. As early as March 1775 we find him warning Auguste that he may need her to pursue him with her letters and save him from himself—*Verfolge mich ich bitte dich, verfolge mich mit deinen Briefen dann, und rette mich von mir selbst*—and he finally asks on 18 September if the day will ever come when he will find a truer way of living and no longer be tossed between heaven and hell on the waves of his excited sensibility—*Wird mein Herz endlich einmal in ergreifendem wahren Genuss und Leiden, die Seeligkeit die Menschen gegönnt ward, empfinden, und nicht immer auf den Wogen der Einbildungskraft und überspannten Sinnlichkeit, Himmel auf und Höllen ab getrieben werden*—a question which the recipient of the letter, Auguste Stolberg again, presumably did not feel called upon to answer.

II BEFORE ITALY

... *meine Gestalt geht vorwärts und mein Geist zurück.*

› ,VII

TRANSITION TO WEIMAR

ONCE Goethe is established in Weimar the dangerous tension begins to relax. What neither Leipzig nor Strassburg nor Wetzlar succeeded in doing now seems to come quietly of itself. There is nothing sudden about it; on the contrary, it is all very gradual, a matter of years rather than of months, yet the change, the beginning of the change, is perceptible from the start. Passages in his letters that repeat the familiar psychology of unrest, but now less urgently in a sort of *diminuendo*, are among the most instructive signs at this time. Thus in the spring of 1776 (6 March) after six months in Weimar he writes to Lavater about himself, using the imagery of a ship at sea that he had used so many times before, but with the difference that his apprehensiveness has left him and a certain confidence has taken its place. 'I am now well launched on the waves of life,' he says a little flamboyantly, Lavater being, as we have seen, one of his more provocative acquaintances, 'ready for whatever may come, discovery, profit, conflict, shipwreck, ready even to blow myself up with my whole cargo.'¹ The habit of thinking of himself in these explosive terms is, we see, so strong that he lapses into it even where, as here, it is obvious from the context that the danger of explosion is past.

In much the same vein, using the ship image again but now more soberly, he tells his mother in a letter of the following year (16 November 1777) that in his country residence, his *Gartenhaus*, he is beginning to feel as if he were on shipboard with everything snug and well bestowed—Mein Haushalt fangt an sich zu ordnen, es ist einem in dem Gartenhüttgen, bald wie in einem Schiff auf dem Meere. And on 2 December he writes to Charlotte on his way to the Harz mountains that it is fun to roam the country on horseback as if he were on a ship at sea—Gar hubsch ist's Auf seinem

¹ Ich bin nun ganz eingeschiff't auf der Woge der Welt—voll entschlossen: zu entdecken, gewinnen, streiten, scheitern, oder auch mit aller Ladung in die Luft zu sprengen

Pferde mit dem Mantelsackgen, wie auf einem Schiffe herumzukreuzen—where, as before, the note of relief and assurance, so seldom sounded in the Frankfurt years, can be clearly heard.

This is one of the stages in Goethe's life at which the letters are perhaps a safer guide than the poems. Thus the poem 'Seefahrt', which bears directly on his change of residence, conceals rather than illuminates his real position by presenting the world he was leaving as the secure haven and the world he was entering as the stormy sea, when, as Georg Brandes points out, it should be the other way round; it was in Frankfurt that the crisis arose and in Weimar that he began to overcome it. The only note in 'Seefahrt' that we can take literally, the poem as a whole being more of a rejoinder to Klopstock and other fault-finders than a reckoning with himself, is the note of confidence on which it ends; for better or for worse he is prepared now to trust the powers that guide him, his star or his gods:

Und vertrauet, scheiternd oder landend,
Seinen Gottern

There are other poems, however, that record the diminishing agitation of these years with the utmost precision, especially 'Rastlose Liebe', which vents his driving restlessness with an energy that reminds us of Frankfurt, only to spend itself quickly and close on a less turbulent note, almost a note of happiness—

Glück ohne Ruh,
Liebe, bist du!

—a sentiment that goes well with the early Weimar letters and may be dated accordingly. It was about this time that he wrote his 'Wanderers Nachtlied', asking in strangely submissive mood for the gift of peace—

Was soll all der Schmerz und Lust?
Susser Friede,
Komm, ach komm in meine Brust!

—and then a little later comes the 'Mondlied' in which he finds a temporary resting-place, the disquiet being transferred from him to the river, where it runs on as a whispering undertone:

Rausche, Fluss, das Tal entlang,
Ohne Rast und Ruh.

In none of these early Weimar poems, or letters either, is the note of extremity to be heard that was so insistent before. Goethe is

still capable of depicting himself as one driven or harassed who will never find tranquillity—

der in aller Welt
Nie findet Ruh noch Rast

—but even here the mood is serene as compared with Frankfurt:

Ein stiller Friede kommt auf mich,
Weiss nicht, wie mir geschehn.

There is nothing conclusive in all this. While recognizing that the tension is less acute than it was before, we find the old moods and the old phrasing recurring sufficiently often in the poems, and especially in the letters, of the period to leave us in no doubt that Goethe still had a long way to go to master himself. The old confusion, the old volatility, persists as before, less dizzily now perhaps and less disturbingly, but with no fundamental change that we can detect. Under the surface he is still the chameleon that he was at fourteen. This helps us to understand why the Goethe that Wieland describes is so little changed from the Frankfurt Goethe or why Charlotte, writing to Zimmermann in June 1776, after she has known Goethe for several months confesses that she still distrusts his unsteady mind—*ich habe doch noch einen Unglauben an seinen unstaten Sinn*. Emilie von Berlepsch, writing to Herder about him in or around 1778, finds herself exasperated by his restless flitting between logic and feeling, weakness and strength—*er ist mir ganz zuwider mit seinem ewigen Schwancken zwischen Wiz und Gefühl, Schwache und Kraft*.

How persistently restless he remained we can tell best from his own letters, where even in 1780, after five years in Weimar, we catch him saying to Charlotte almost exactly what he had said to others years before, that thousands and thousands of ideas were rising and falling in him like a fountain and that his mind was a display of fireworks that never stopped—*Aber freylich tausend und tausend Gedancken steigen in mir auf und ab. Meine Seele ist wie ein ewiges Feuerwerck ohne Rast* (30 June). A couple of months later, on 18 September 1780, he refers to the incessant commotion in himself—in *meinem immer bewegten Zustand*—and on 16 October he says to another correspondent what he had said to Salzmann in 1772, that his mental life was so rapid that it would be difficult for anyone to record it. If he had half a dozen spirits as secretaries (not just one, as he said to Salzmann) to whom

he could have dictated continually, on horseback, at table, in the ante-room, and even in his sleep, he would have filled reams of paper with the flood of ideas, feelings, observations, stories, incidents that were streaming through him—vollgeschrieben von tausend Einfällen, Empfindungen, Bemerkungen, Geschichten und Vorfällen. As late as 12 November 1783, within three years of his going to Italy, we read in a letter to Friedrich Jacobi that in the midst of affairs and official duties, which at this time were at their height, he was still so full of passions, dilettantisms, inventions, notions, conceits, and plans that life was often a trial to him—Ich stecke mitten unter meinen Geschäften noch immer so voll Leidenschaften, Liebhabereyen, Erfindungen, Einfälle, Grillen und Plane dass mir wucklich manchmal das Leben sauer wird.

We may note, however, that Goethe was now sufficiently master of his consciousness to make excellent fun of it. For it can only be himself he is referring to in the sixth act of *Der Triumph der Empfindsamkeit*, written not later than the beginning of 1778, when the prince asks the oracle with mock solemnity if this stormy movement of his heart will ever cease and this striving, like Tantalus, for a fleeting pleasure be finally assuaged—wann denn diese sturmische Bewegung meines Herzens endlich aufhören, wann dieses tantalische Streben nach ewig fliehendem Genuss endlich ersättiget werden wurde—or when he pompously bids Merkulo leave him alone so that he may straighten out the thousand thoughts that are darting about confusedly in his mind—Lass mich allein. Meine Sinnen verwirren sich; ich muss Luft haben, um die tausend Gedanken, die in mir durch einander gehn, zurecht zu legen. When Goethe becomes satirical in his Frankfurt writings the object of his satire is either someone else or something that he has in common with others, there is nothing as private as this, nothing that points so directly and so exclusively at himself.

For a more constructive self-criticism we have to wait longer. There may be a hint of it in his words to Charlotte on 9 October 1781 about casting his skin—O Lotte was für Haute muss man abstreifen—since the image is one that he associated with spiritual growth. And there may be more than a hint in his letter to Knebel later in the same year (3 December) where he says that a manifold activity is a necessity to him—Das Bedürfniss meiner Natur zwingt mich zu einer vermanichfaltigten Thätigkeit—or in his letter to Charlotte on 28 December of the year following where he repeats

this conviction, or something very like it, in a more problematic form, saying that unless he has a constant supply of new ideas to deal with he is like a sick man—Wenn ich nicht immer neue Ideen zu bearbeiten habe werde ich wie kranck But there is nothing more positive to be had from him. Perhaps the most interesting of his asides in this period is that to Friedrich Jacobi on 12 January 1785 about the quiet chaos of his spirit now gradually ordering and purifying itself—Des stillen Chaos gar nicht zu gedencken das sich immer schöner sondert und im Werden reinigt—words that with a beautiful simplicity take us up and down his life, reminding us of what he was and suggesting what he is to be.

This passage is especially interesting as being perhaps the last occasion on which we find him involving the notion of chaos in a description of his mental life. The time was approaching, it must have been nearer than he knew, when such a term would be no longer applicable; the wonder is that he can use it at so late a date, after ten years, or just short of that, in Weimar and within about eighteen months of going to Italy. But there the word stands with its moderating adjective—Des stillen Chaos—like a lingering leit-motif in the middle of his thirty-seventh year, telling us how slow he was, how preternaturally slow, to get himself in hand and be done with his immaturity. Even now, when he was well on towards forty and many of those who were young with him were beginning to age, he was still growing up; the confusion and unmanageableness of his adolescence had still to be reckoned with. It was all very well for him to announce that he intended to raise the pyramid of his existence—die Pyramide meines Daseyns—as high as he could, as he wrote in a letter to Lavater more than four years before, in September 1780; but when he claimed that the foundation was planned and laid—deren Basis mir angegeben und gegründet ist—it is possible that he was miscalculating. There was still some ground to clear before he could proceed with the building. He admitted later in a letter from Italy to Charlotte of 29 December 1786, which seems to recall the Lavater letter, that he had been trying to build before he was ready—Ich bin wie ein Baumeister der einen Thurm aufführen wollte und ein schlechtes Fundament gelegt hatte.

It will be evident from the vagueness of all these remarks that Goethe is unable at present to formulate his thoughts about himself and that, for the time being, we have to be content with

innuendos and half-statements. It is only rarely that a clear ray of light breaks through the mist. In a letter to his mother on 11 August 1781 he says that if he had gone on living under the Frankfurt conditions he would assuredly have gone to pieces—unter solchen fortwährenden Umständen wurde ich gewiss zu Grunde gegangen sein—the disparity between the slow, narrow, bourgeois life at home and the speed and scope of his mind would have either driven him mad or kept him permanently in a state of childhood—in einer ewigen Kindheit. And it was probably with the question of his maturity in mind that he wrote again to Friedrich Jacobi a couple of years later, on 13 August 1783, that it looked as if things were coming to a head or a settlement with him—es scheint als wenn ich mit der Welt und sie mit mir in ein Geschicke kommen wollte—because he goes on to say that while it is high time and he is not as young as he was, he still has a few years to go before he reaches the proverbial forty—bis zur Schwaben-Mundigkeit.

In both cases he is recognizing that it is taking him longer to grow up, longer to reach his majority, than it ought. But it is only here, it would seem, that he puts his finger thus exactly on the spot. And the chances are that he did so more by accident than by taking thought. He was always baffled by this phase of his life and in later years was fairly frank about admitting it. He told von Muller in 1830 that the circle in which he moved in his first ten years in Weimar now affected him like a mythology, that he could only tell the real story of those days in the garb of a fable or a fairy-tale, and that in any case he could never satisfy himself. And, probably later still, he wrote in a reissue of his *Geschichte meines botanischen Studiums* that the specialists, by whom, no doubt, he meant the literary historians who would be dealing with him after he was gone, might, if they put themselves back into 1786, arrive at some notion of the kind of life he had been involved in for ten whole years, but that it would be a difficult task and that everything he did, his obligations, tendencies, duties, distractions, would have to be taken into account:

Der Kenner, der sich in das Jahr 1786 zuruckzusetzen geneigt ware, mochte sich einen Begriff meines Zustandes ausbilden können, in welchem ich mich nun schon zehn Jahre befangen fühlte, ob es gleich selbst für den Psychologen eine Aufgabe bleiben wurde, indem ja bei dieser Darstellung meine sämtlichen Obliegenheiten, Neigungen, Pflichten und Zerstreuungen mit aufzunehmen waren.

Even if he had not given us his word for this, we could infer as much from the fact that, while he dealt freely or relatively freely with other parts of his life, he never did so with this part of it. Inveterate autobiographer as he was, beginning in his early thirties to collect and file his old letters, he fought shy of this period to the last, even after Charlotte von Stein was no longer on the scene to embarrass him. *Dichtung und Wahrheit* comes down to 1775, treading very cautiously towards the close, and there it stops. The *Italienische Reise* takes up the tale in 1786 and from then on, thanks to supplementary biography of one sort and another, the remaining years are well filled out; there are no conspicuous gaps. But the years between 1775 and 1786, crucially important years in his development, were left in a curious mistiness which has never been fully dispelled.

Nowhere else in the thousands of letters that he wrote or dictated over a stretch of more than sixty years do we find such elusive references to himself as in this first decade in Weimar and especially during the first five years of it. Something is happening to him; he obviously feels and knows that he is in some way changing or changed, but he is not able to say what the change is. When he writes to Johanna Fahlmer in Frankfurt that he has changed a great deal, it is evident that he is not fully conscious of this from day to day, but that he wakes up to it when he hears an old voice or sees a handwriting that he used to see—Ich bin sehr verändert, das fühl ich am meisten, wenn eine sonst bekannte Stimme zu mir spricht, ich eine sonst bekannte Hand sehe. This was on 16 November 1777, after two years in Weimar. There seems to be a connexion between this passage and another, addressed to Charlotte on 7 November 1780, in which he is again looking at his past life. He tells her that he has been going over the last five years, presumably reading old letters and looking over the regular diary he had begun to keep, and finding strange things there—wunderbare Geschichten—and then, without further explanation, he adds that man is like a sleep-walker moving safely in dangerous places—Der Mensch ist doch wie ein Nachtgänger er steigt die gefährlichsten Kanten im Schläfe.

These retrospective passages are perplexing enough, especially when we remember how little has happened to him, outwardly, that could account for them. But when he looks at himself in the present or in the future he perplexes us still more, falling now and

then into a vagueness and even an obscurity that would be foreign to him at any other time of life. Thus on 3 November 1776, writing to Charlotte, he refers to his 'old fantastic Adam'—den Alten Adam der Phantaseyen—which is curiously unlike anything he says about himself earlier and makes us wonder what is going on in him. Then, in a letter of 5-7 July 1777, he tells her that his life and his hopes seem to be hung between earth and heaven—Ich bin mit meinem Daseyn und meinen Hoffnungen wie zwischen Himmel und Erde aufgehangen—and again we have to ask why. What strikes us in all these passages, and particularly in this last one, is the strange dreaminess, heaven and earth, sleeping and waking, fantasy and the old Adam, that seems to have taken possession of him, making him a mystery even to himself. On 10 March 1777 he says, in another of the poetic phrases that crop up everywhere in the Charlotte letters, that life's happiness lies obscurely on him—das Glück des Lebens hegt dunckel auf mir—and 'obscure' is probably the thought that comes oftenest at this time. On 29 August he is going obscurely to meet his fate and even says he has no desire to foretaste it—ich gehe dunckel meinem Schicksaal entgegen und mag's durch Einbildung nicht vorschmecken noch verschlimmern—which is a strange remark for anyone to make and doubly strange for Goethe. On 29 November he is still in much the same darkness about himself, saying that his thoughts are in a wondrous dimness and confusion—Ich bin in wunderbar dunckler Verwirrung meiner Gedancken. Among the comments passed on him by others at this time there is one from Johanna Fahlmer, now Schlosser, in a letter to Friedrich Jacobi of 27 September 1779, that throws a light. 'He has too many confusing tendencies in him'—Er hat zu viele Mischungen in sich die wirren.

It is much the same everywhere in these enigmatic years. Goethe is for ever half-stating or hinting at his feelings, chiefly in his incessant letters to Charlotte, but never finding, as he used to do effortlessly in Frankfurt, the positive words and images that will convey them. Almost invariably, whether by choice or by necessity, he speaks in negative, evasive, mystifying terms. Twice in 1777, the year in which this ambiguity is at its most pronounced, he confesses his uncertainty, and the words he uses sit strangely on him. In March of this year he says that he does not know how the gods stand with him, he only knows that they have given spirits power over him to buffet him and drive him on—Wie die Götter

mit mir stehen weis ich nicht, so viel weis ich · dass sie Geistern Macht uber mich gegeben haben, die denn in ihrem Streit mich treten und treiben—and on 4 December he says even more blindly that the gods alone know what they intend, their will be done—ihr Wille geschehe. There is a glimmer of self-analysis on 7 November when he goes so far as to say that the way of living and feeling that he has been drawn into is as remote as it could be from what he knew before—dass ich in die von mir ehedess entferntesten Gefühle und Zustände, lieblich bin hineingeletet worden—but he goes no farther, and this is not enough in itself. Similarly, a year or so later on 11 December 1778, he says that God has made man simple and that the complications come afterwards—Gott hat den Menschen einfach gemacht, aber wie er gewickelt und sich verwickelt ist schwer zu sagen—thinking, no doubt, of his life before Weimar and his life now, and rightly recognizing a simplicity there and a complexity here, but again stopping short and leaving us uncertain as to what he means and whether he knows what he means.

Writing to Lavater he pretends to know more than he does, saying to him on 10 March 1777 that he is faring according to the decree of the gods which he honours and reveres—Mir gehts nach dem Rathschlusse der Gotter, den ich in tiefer Ahndung ehre—and saying again, two years later on 8 October 1779, that his fate is hidden from men—mein Schicksaal ist den Menschen ganz verborgen—the implication being that he is in the know himself. But he is probably truer to his real mind when he admits his perplexity, as he does on 10 December 1777, telling Charlotte that he is incapable of saying by word of mouth what has happened to him, how is he to say it with this scratchy pen—wie soll ichs mit dem spizzen Ding hervorbringen. Five years later, on 17 November 1782, we find him writing blankly to her that he has been thinking of the past, which he does not understand, and of the future, of which he knows nothing—an die Vergangenheit von der ich nichts verstehe, und an die Zukunft von der ich nichts weis—and he confesses with a like blankness in the thin disguise of his *Theatralische Sendung*, a product of these years, that there are no words to describe the wheel that is turning in him—fur das Rad, wie sich 's in meinem Herzen dreht, sind keine Worte. At no other time in his life is he so near to the mood of Hamlet, and this presumably is why we find his thoughts on Shakespeare moving in the direction of *Hamlet*, as we see them doing in this novel.

VIII

PRACTICAL, LIFE

THIS inconclusive reading of Goethe's beginnings in Weimar is only part of the story, but it is a significant part. What it signifies is that he had broken the spell that held him back and had at last reached a state of transition. It also signifies that he was not certain about himself or where he was going, and this is not surprising when we come to see how complex and how anomalous his new condition was.

To a broader view, taking stock of all that he did and wrote at this time, one thing is immediately clear. The old unity, or rather homogeneity, in him that involved one work in another and the works in the letters and the letters in the life, making it seem as if everything he felt or thought or did went into or came out of a single melting-pot, no longer exists. Where before it was possible, and not only possible but unavoidable, to formulate the whole of Goethe's life and being in a dominant idiosyncrasy, conditioned by the age in which he lived but also individual and personal, belonging to him and to no other, now it is quite impossible; there can be no question any longer of a dominant idiosyncrasy; he seems almost to have gone to the other extreme. If, in the years before Weimar, the clue to his mental life was to be found in a condition that was, if anything, too much of a piece, too little differentiated, now the reverse seems to apply. No sooner is he settled in Weimar than it becomes evident that his life has lost its simplicity or its singleness of character and divided itself into parts. But this only raises a new problem. The division, when we come to look at it, turns out to be just as perplexing as the lack of division before. Georg Simmel, who understood him so well, would appear to be hinting at this when he wrote, a little mysteriously, that Goethe's life in the years preceding the journey to Italy was split in more ways than one—mit mehr als einer Spaltung durchschattet. Unfortunately he does not explain what he means, contenting himself with a reference to Charlotte von Stein as the prime cause. And this, as we shall discover, is to over-simplify the problem.

If we examine the new pieces of writing that came from Goethe in these first Weimar years, we can at once recognize something of the change that was taking place. Apart from short poems like

those already quoted, there are chiefly two new works on a larger scale that we have to reckon with. One is *Wilhelm Meister* in its first stage, the so-called *Theatralische Sendung*, written at intervals over a period of years beginning with 1777, and the other is *Iphigene auf Tauris*, begun and completed in its unmetrical form in the space of a few weeks early in 1779. The two works are contemporary, in so far as he had them in hand at the same time, yet they are strangely unlike, and the more we examine them the less they prove to have in common.

It will be apparent from any page or paragraph of the *Sendung*, whether we look at the opening book which was completed by 1778 or at any of the subsequent books, that the work was neither conceived nor executed at the Frankfurt pitch. We can be fully assured on inner evidence that it did not proceed from any such emotional or instinctive impulse in Goethe's mind as produced *Werther* or *Faust*. If there are irrational elements here, they are quite subordinate to the methodical plan by which the whole is governed. For the first time in his life we find Goethe employing his literary faculties on the intellectual plane, writing coolly, deliberately, ably, without strong inspiration, almost professionally. The result is a work that is nearer to the Age of Enlightenment than to *Sturm und Drang*, nearer, much nearer, to Wieland's *Agathon* than to *Werther*; indeed, it is with something of a shock that we realize how short an interval of time—little more than three years—separates it from *Werther*. If it were not for the figures of Mignon and the Harper and especially for the songs they sing, which are made of such different stuff from the rest of the book that we wonder how they come there at all, there would be little indeed to tell us that Goethe wrote it. Some other not unpromising, but less inspired, less imaginative author would seem to be indicated, one whose emotions never obstruct the logical workings of his mind.

Iphigene auf Tauris, on the other hand, could never be so described. Different as it is in poetic and emotional quality from the things he wrote in Frankfurt, it remains poetic and emotional in its own right and in its own way. We cannot pool it, with the *Sendung* as we can pool *Werther* with *Faust*, or any *Sturm und Drang* work with any other, and quote indiscriminately from them in support of one and the same point. There seems to be little or no meeting-place between them anywhere. Clearly then Goethe is writing at two levels, not as before at one, and it is the *Sendung*

that brings out the change. What has evidently happened is that in writing the *Sendung* his intellect has at last disengaged itself sufficiently from the general turmoil of his spirit to move freely in a direction of its own choosing. This freedom, as we have seen, had been virtually denied it hitherto. If we set aside the few legal documents, drawn up at one time or another in Frankfurt, as being scarcely relevant and, for all we know, not quite his own, there is no satisfactory evidence of intellectual writing prior to the beginning of the *Sendung* in 1777. Not that the intellectual power was lacking, but the emotions were in excess and swept it with them, much as a river in flood sweeps away the bridge that spans it. No sooner would he start writing on any subject whatsoever than his strong feelings would get the better of him and overrule his logic, making it impossible for him to sustain any process of excogitation for more than a very brief space. If he stayed logical for one paragraph he was sure to break loose in the next.

Now, in the *Sendung*, all this is changed; there is no irrational interference; Goethe is writing with his head rather than his heart and his deeper nature is not stirred. His interest in the main theme, that of the theatre as a vocation, cannot have been vital or instinctive. Otherwise he would never have managed to tell his story in such even and unvibrant prose, which in all its length rarely, if ever, rises above itself or betrays any movement of feeling under its smooth surface. Neither his words on the poet's mission, nor his appreciation of Shakespeare, nor, if we put the companion poems aside, the parts that deal with Mignon and the Harper, nor even his treatment of Aurelie who, in the most memorable scene in the book, scars Wilhelm with her dagger to remind him of her betrayal at the hands of another, ever raises or deepens Goethe's voice or in any notable way releases in him the creative use of his mother tongue that we have come by now to expect of him every time he speaks. Take it whichever way we choose, this is not a work that wrote itself in the middle of the night, it is not the fruit of inspiration, but rather something that he set himself to do, a job or an undertaking.

There would be nothing to comment on in this very plain phenomenon if Goethe were not Goethe. What we find him doing here is what most poets and most people do from the start. We take it for granted that a poet should express himself at will in what we may for convenience call verse or prose, writing emotion-

ally or unemotionally as the case may be. It is only Goethe who is slow to operate in this normal way, so slow that from the time his serious gifts assert themselves (in other words, setting aside his Leipzig *juventutia*) until he reaches the age of twenty-eight or thereabouts he gives no clear sign of it. It is not till he begins to write the *Sendung* that he emerges as a practical man of letters.

The emergence of this practical function in his literary life, by virtue of which he was at last able to perform a writing task in a workmanlike spirit without waiting for inspiration, has its counterpart in his public life. We have seen that up to the time of his going to Weimar his life had been without serious discipline, his education private and somewhat irregular, his professional duties carelessly or at best nonchalantly executed. It is only in terms of plain indiscipline that we can interpret him thus far. But he must have known from the start that, in going to Weimar as in some imperfectly defined sense the friend and servant of Carl August, he was putting himself in the way of responsibilities which he would be unable to shirk. And so it proved. Within less than a year we find him a duly appointed and salaried member of a Privy Council of three, much to the surprise of the other two, and thus actively concerned in all that affected the administration of the duchy.

How much his sudden elevation put him in the limelight we can tell from Wieland's saying to Lavater in a letter of 22 June 1776 that Goethe was now favourite, factotum, and scapegoat, all in one—*Favorit-Minister, Factotum, und tragt die Sunden der Welt*. Whether from a sense of gratitude or of duty or because he was now convinced that it was necessary, morally necessary, for him to wear some sort of harness for a while, he threw himself into his work with a seriousness that he had not shown before in any practical capacity. His direct responsibilities were so various that it is not easy to say where they stopped and where they began. The duchy was small, the total population being under a hundred thousand, but it was large enough to be a *multum in parvo*. We find Goethe busied among other things with mines and afforestation, with the construction of roads and buildings, with recruiting and the administration of justice, with museums and education, with the theatre and official entertainments. In 1782 he took over the heavy financial duties of 'Kammerpräsident' and for the next four years his official labours were heavy.

Here we at once discover the division in his mind that we would expect. His literary life goes one way, his official life another. This is the dualism that we so commonly find in the lives of poets and men of letters. Duties not wholly welcome and involving a multitude of practical decisions occupied a large part of his time; study, speculations, and the creative life were relegated to the time that was left. There is nothing new here, it is the usual story. All that differentiates Goethe's case from the generality of cases is the late date at which the experience came to him, he was thirty, or most of thirty, before it really affected him. As in his literary life, so in his public life, the practical and intellectual functions were held in abeyance until long after the time at which we should expect to see them freely in use.

It may be in consequence of its being so long overdue that his responsible life, his life in office, is so sharply circumscribed. From first to last he makes no attempt to reconcile his new duties with the rest of himself, but keeps them entirely apart, never, except for the requirements of court entertainment, allowing his official experiences to impinge on his poetry. It is true that he said to Kestner on 14 May 1780 that he was subordinating his literary life to his practical, which might be taken as implying that he was disposed to merge the two at the expense of the former, but it becomes clear from other remarks of his that he had no such intention and that he was bent on keeping them in separate compartments. On 21 November 1782 he wrote to Knebel that he had completely shut off his political and social life, meaning presumably his many obligations at court, from his moral and poetic life—*ich habe mein politisches und gesellschaftliches Leben ganz von meinem moralischen und poetischen getrennt*—and we can see how incompatible he found them when we read his words to Lavater on 19 February 1781, saying that politics demands the whole of a man's time and that there is hardly room in his life for the other things he wants to do—*Staatssachen sollte der Mensch der drein versetzt ist, sich ganz widmen, und ich möchte doch soviel anders auch nicht fallen lassen*—or, more expressive still, his words to Charlotte a few weeks before (1 January): 'I have no verses to send you, my prosaic life swallows up these rivulets like a desert of sand.'¹

¹ Keine Reime kan ich Ihnen schicken denn mein prosaisch Leben verschlingt diese Bächlein wie ein weiter Sand

This negative attitude to his official self is not quite what we are prepared for from one whose name more than any other connotes the primacy of experience, any experience good or bad, congenial or uncongenial, rather than no experience, in the mastery of life. Goethe preaches this doctrine in the later *Faust* and in the later *Wilhelm Meister* and is never weary of advising his fellow men, if they have any choice in the matter, to attach themselves to some definite calling and be content with it. Writing to a protégé in these very years, on 9 September 1779, he tells him that a man must have a trade to live by—*der Mensch muss ein Handwerk haben, das ihn nahre*. If he was to apply this maxim to himself, now was the time to do it. It may have been with promptings of this sort in his mind that he had allowed himself to be drawn into the business of government, hoping that in the pragmatic way he would learn to manage his life more responsibly than hitherto.

Yet no sooner was he in the grip of routine, flexible as it must have been as compared with that of a lesser official, than he resisted it and wished to escape. 'How much happier I should be', he writes to Charlotte on 4 June 1782, 'if I could leave the political arena and devote myself to the arts and sciences which are my proper *métier*'—*Wieviel wohler ware mir's wenn ich von dem Streit der politischen Elemente abgesondert . . . den Wissenschaften und Künsten, wozu ich gebohren bin, meinen Geist zuwenden konnte*. To go by his own words, it would almost seem as if the sole value of his administrative life was that it enabled him to learn how little he liked it.

This can hardly be the whole story. On general grounds we can be assured that his experience as a man of affairs was beneficial to him. But on general grounds only. His instinctive reactions to it as set down in letters and other documents argue strongly the other way. Almost without exception he represents his official life as an interference, as something to be endured rather than welcomed. And if on a rare occasion, as in his diary of 13 January 1779 before the burden became heavy, he has words of approval for it, he damns it with faint praise, saying only that it makes him appreciate his leisure; the pressure of affairs is good for the soul, when it is released again it is the freer to enjoy itself—*Der Druck der Geschäfte ist schön der Seele; wenn sie entladen ist, spielt sie freier und geniesst des Lebens*. Not a very impressive remark, and one that is all but lost in the general disapproval. On 1 February,

a few days later, he writes again that he is confident he will handle the recruiting commission, over which he is to preside, satisfactorily, but the reason he gives is not that he has any aptitude or liking for the task but rather the reverse. 'It is a task in which his real powers, creative and imaginative, are not involved, and all he has to do is to keep things in order and stick to business. The same applies, he tells us, to the matter of roads and highways which he has also undertaken and, presumably, to all other matters—Die Kriegs-Commission werd' ich gut versehn, weil ich bei dem Geschäft gar keine Imagination habe, gar nichts hervorbringen will, nur das, was da ist, recht kennen und ordentlich haben will. So auch mit dem Wegbau. We know that this aloofness and inner disapproval was more than a passing whim because, when the chance came, he extricated himself from his responsibilities and recovered all or most of his freedom. One of the obvious consequences of the extended leave of absence that he took in 1786, after not more than four years of really heavy duties, was that he dropped out of the world of government and never really entered it again. From then on he saw to it that the main responsibilities he had were of the cultural and academic sort, concerned with theatre, institutes, museums, and not in conflict with his literary and philosophical pursuits.

It was in the midst of his years in office that he wrote his famous ballad of the minstrel, 'Der Sanger', who having sung before the king refuses the golden chain that is offered him and suggests that the chancellor should wear it along with his other burdens:

Gib sie dem Kanzler, den du hast,
Und lass ihn noch die goldne Last
Zu andern Lasten tragen.

It adds a sting to this innocent-looking poem when we remember that at the time of writing it Goethe was himself more chancellor than poet. In so far as there is a conflict in *Wilhelm Meister* it is of a related sort. Wilhelm is intended by his parents for business and is on a business journey when he falls in with the wandering players and joins their company. Regarding business and poetry, he asks his partner Werner if he thinks a poet can be a poet in his spare time. No, he says, a poet must be a poet and nothing else. How can you ask him to dirty—besudeln—himself with a low trade when he is made like a bird that flies over the whole world,

nests high above the ground, and feeds on buds and flowers? Do you expect him at the same time to yoke himself to the plough like an ox or chain himself up and bark like a farmer's dog?

What *Wilhelm Meister* says a little rhetorically and without the full weight of experience, the passage having been written, so far as we can judge, in 1777 or 1778, *Torquato Tasso*, which was not begun till 1780, says more convincingly. It is true that there is much talk in this play about the compatibility of poetry and public life, and there is a sense in which the action is based on it. Tasso's friends and patrons do their best to reconcile him, the moody poet, with Antonio, the man of affairs. On the face of it the play seems to argue that the reconciliation is desirable and that it is possible too. But in the event we find nothing in the play to support the argument and everything to refute it. Tasso may make some show of good intentions, but from first to last he is one who lives in the clouds and wilts when he comes to earth. He shuns the motley throng and prefers to commune in solitude with himself and the dreams that visit him:

den bunten Schwarm
Der Menschen flieht und lieber frei im stillen
Mit seinem Geist sich unterhalten mag

So unequal is he to the task of so much as mixing with his fellow-men that the effort brings him near to collapse. The last we see of him is in terms of the ship image with the rudder gone and the timbers breaking:

Zerbrochen ist das Steuer, und es kracht
Das Schiff an allen Seiten.

Yet there is no question at any point of his undertaking other work than that of writing poetry, and he is obviously incapable of sitting on a privy council with Antonio, the mere contact with ordinary life is too much for him. No matter what arguments may be advanced as the play proceeds, the final impression is that Tasso is unfit for any company but his own and that there is no common ground between him and the practical man. Thus if the outward or apparent theme is the compatibility of art and life, the inner theme, the theme that gives the work all its depth and delicacy, is the incompatibility, which is brought out with such insight and subtlety that we now regard *Tasso* as the first notable treatment in European literature of this private or anti-social conception of the artist.

All in all, it is not easy to trace the forward or constructive movement of Goethe's mind in these governmental activities. They may not have been as abortive as he makes them out to be in his letters and creative works, but at best they can only have played a secondary or steadying role in the organizing of his mental life. Nor do they throw any light on the doubts and uncertainties that hang over this period. The mere fact that the doubts and the practical activities coexist in his mind is enough to show that the problem in his life has not yet found its solution. That a solution had to be found, that this divided existence could not go on for ever, seems to have flashed across his mind now and then, and there was one moment at least when he realized, however dimly, what the nature of the solution would be. It is recorded in his already-quoted letter to Knebel of 21 November 1782, where he says that he knows he has deep down in him the secret node at which all his conflicting interests meet—und knupfe so wieder mein gesellschaftliches, politisches, moralisches und poetisches Leben in einen verborgenen Knoten zusammen. But the knowledge was evidently more subconscious than conscious—bleib ich mir geheimnisvoll selbst getreu—and for the present there was no more that he could say.

IX

THE DISCIPLINE OF SCIENCE

THE great advantage that Goethe derived from his work as a Weimar official was one that he did not foresee. For the first time in his life he found himself associated with practical men, such as administrators, technicians, and workmen, who looked at the world in a business-like way and were ignorant of *Sturm und Drang*. And since he had to deliberate and come to common decisions with them, he was compelled to see the world with their eyes. He now had to look at pine-forests, not, as before, with the hazy impressionistic gaze of Werther, but realistically with a view to deciding in consultation with woodsmen what should be cut and what should be planted; the roads he trod were not just avenues of romantic escape over the horizon like those he knew at Frankfurt, they were things that he helped to plan, build, and repair; the derelict mines at Ilmenau could not be hurried past as an eye-sore, they had to be investigated with a view to making them workable again. And so with everything else in the world around him, from the ducal buildings and their trappings at Weimar, Tiefurt, or Ettersburg, to the depressed homes of farmers and weavers in the surrounding districts. This, as we have seen, did not turn Goethe into a whole-hearted civil servant, but it headed his mind for the first time in an outgoing direction and, once headed in this direction, he persisted in it till he had satisfied a double need, first the practical need in the community and then another need that he discovered in himself. In a word, the latent scientist, the student and observer of outer nature, awoke in him and he now began to explore the physical world, not as the servant of others, but for its own sake and for his.

Exactly at what date this important activity asserted itself in him is not easy to determine. For while he suggests in the account of his botanical studies called *Geschichte meines botanischen Studiums*, already referred to and invaluable at this stage, that it began during the first year in Weimar with talks in the long winter evenings about the problems of forestry and botany, it does not come out clearly in his letters till about 1779, and this would therefore seem to be the truer date. In any case he was in no doubt as an old man about identifying his beginnings in science with his

administrative life. He told von Muller on 16 March 1824 that he came to Weimar wholly ignorant of science and that it was only the necessity of advising the duke in his many practical undertakings that impelled him to study it.—Ich kam höchst unwissend in allen Naturstudien nach Weimar, und erst das Bedürfnis, den Herzog bei seinen mancherlei Unternehmungen, Bauten, Anlagen, praktische Ratschläge geben zu können, trieb mich zum Studium der Natur. Concerning his previous ignorance of science, he is even more explicit in the botanical article where he says that, while he enjoyed a broad education in the humanities before going to Weimar, he had no notion of outer nature at that time and not the slightest knowledge of what we call its three kingdoms—Von dem hingegen, was eigentlich aussere Natur heisst, hatte ich keinen Begriff und von ihren sogenannten drei Reichen nicht die geringste Kenntnis

Goethe could scarcely be more downright than he is in these two places about his ignorance of science before going to Weimar, yet his critics have not always taken him at his word. They generally echo *Dichtung und Wahrheit* and the impression given by *Dichtung und Wahrheit* is that the scientific spirit was awake in him much earlier. Goethe tells us in this work of his daily association, both at Leipzig and at Strassburg, with medical students and of his attending lectures at Strassburg on chemistry, anatomy, midwifery, also of his visiting clinics there. He tells us further that his philosophical interest was aroused in discussions involving the names of Haller, Linnaeus, and Buffon, and that he acquired an extensive scientific vocabulary and enjoyed the respect and confidence of his medical friends. This does not accord very well with the complete ignorance with which he charges himself elsewhere, it suggests rather that he made an active start while still at the university and that it is from here that we must date his beginnings as a scientist.

A good reason for questioning the evidence of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* is that if we check it with the contemporary documents we find next to nothing to support it. The first hint of anything remotely scientific in the contemporary documents is to be found in *Ephemerides*, a commonplace book made or begun in 1770, in which we find references to early books on medicine, astronomy, &c., a curious hotch-potch including two paragraphs on the sexual life of spiders and one on meteorology. It is as Goethe says,

and the title and the attached motto say it too, one thing to-day and another to-morrow—Heut dies und morgen das. He strikes us here as being at best an excited dabbler, pouncing about among queer books with little or no sense of direction. This, it should be remembered, was back in the Herder and Strassburg days when the new conception of nature was just beginning to run riot in his mind.

Then, somewhat later, there is Lavater. Lavater tells us in passing in his diary of 27 June 1774 that he has been talking about chemistry with Goethe and finds that he has a very modern and very individual view of the subject—ganz eigne, ganz neuere Chimie—but he fails to tell us what the view is and we have to look elsewhere for a clue. We know from the autobiography the kind of alchemy Goethe dabbled in in 1771 and after, and this is presumably an echo of it. More important, no doubt, is Goethe's participation in Lavater's work on physiognomy, *Physiognomische Fragmente*, extending over the years 1774 to 1777. While Goethe's contribution does not seem to have gone far beyond a rather sketchy interpretation of portraits and silhouettes of various celebrities, chiefly Klopstock, Homer, Newton, and some Romans, it is evident that he was learning to use his eyes and look more sharply at things than heretofore. We find him comparing the animal skull with the human, copying drawings from Buffon and more particularly, as he reminds us later in his *Zur Morphologie*, beginning to observe the significance and the mobility of natural forms—Bedeutsamkeit und Beweglichkeit der Gestalten. We also find him awakening to the philosophical issue, the relation of outer and inner, man and environment. But he is not very secure in his methods. If in one place he claims for physiognomy the status of a science—Wissenschaft—and quotes Aristotle in support of his claim, in another place he falls back on vague enthusiasm, saying that God alone sees the laws and that all our human, philosophical, and physiognomical labours are no more than a mere stuttering—Das allgemeine Verhältniss erkennt nur Gott; deswegen alles menschliche, philosophische und so auch physiognomische Sinnen und Trachten am Ende auf ein blosses Stottern hinausläuft. In this vein he disclaims any harmony or consistency in the work he is engaged in and reminds us that it is, as the title professes, only a series of fragments.

The mere fact that Goethe was capable of lapsing into this

incoherent view shows that he was still very far from qualifying as a scientist. There may be curiosity at this stage and now and then an excited *aperçu*, but there is no discipline, no method, no continuity. Least of all is there any adjustment of mind or temper to the new problems; his scientific fragments are no different from his poetic fragments. He was playing speculatively with science, as he had played with it before when he browsed in theosophical books and made occult experiments. But he was not surrendering to science or making it part of his life; there is no promise that he will go on with it. It is no wonder if in afteryears he felt that this was not science at all and that he only began to be a scientist later. In 1779 we find him saying regretfully in his diary of 7 August that thus far he had only made a half-hearted approach to science and had soon turned away from it—*Wie ich alles Wissenschaftliche nur halb angegriffen und bald wieder habe fahren lassen.*

Here, as elsewhere, we find that *Dichtung und Wahrheit* tends to read the later life into the earlier and so to distort the picture. The letters definitely point to 1779 or thereabouts, roughly speaking the time of Goethe's second visit to Switzerland, as the real starting-point for this new use of his faculties, and from here on there is abundant evidence of it. One of the first clear indications is to be found in a letter to Charlotte, written on 3 October 1779, at the beginning of his Swiss tour. He is describing a rock formation he has observed at Munster near Basel and he goes into some detail about it, noting that the rock is blue-grey where it is exposed to the light but yellow underneath, as can be seen from the newly formed cracks. He also notes the curious effect of curves and angles produced in the rock by the slow process of weathering, and the remarkable way in which pines and mosses have found the means of growing wherever the ledges and crevices afforded a foothold, and in conclusion he says philosophically that there is nothing arbitrary here, but that there is everywhere only the slow operation of Nature's laws—*Man fuhlt tief, hier ist nichts willkürliches, alles langsam bewegendes ewiges Gesez.*

Here, perhaps for the first time, Goethe was voicing a conviction about law in the natural world that was to play a major part in shaping his mind from this time on. The conviction may have been implicit before, but, if so, it was clouded by the disorderliness of his moods and never got clearly expressed. It took him till now, when he was turned thirty, to realize it and say it in words that we

cannot mistake. This realization marks the autumn of 1779 as an important date in his inner biography; and while there is nothing to mark the date outwardly except a holiday tour, the tour was one that may have meant a good deal to him. It is worth noting that it did not take him straight to Switzerland and back, but went by way of the Rhine country and the native haunts that he had run away from four years before. And so at this significant moment we find him revisiting scenes of his past life, staying at Frankfurt with his parents, talking to Lili at Strassburg and to Friederike at Sesenheim and standing, it may be, at his sister's grave at Emmendingen. He was still close enough to these associations for them to have a hold on him. We naturally ask what went on in him at this time.

The answer is written plain in the account he gives of the days immediately following in his letters from Switzerland, where he shows that his detour into the past had a beneficially clearing effect on him, enabling him to turn his back on his old self and to live henceforth more objectively than before. We need not doubt that the change was under way and would have come at about this time in any case, but there is everything to suggest that the flying visit home accelerated the process by letting him see how much he had altered and where he now stood. We can observe here what every reader of Goethe observes sooner or later, how mysteriously the things that happened to him fitted the progress of his mind. He wrote to Charlotte on 26 September, the day he visited Strassburg, that he was beginning to see people in their permanent relations—die Verhältnisse zu den Menschen die bleibend sind—and that his old friends and the lives they were leading were spread before him like a landscape seen in bird's-eye view or from a mountain-top. Wieland, a usually trustworthy observer, wrote to Merck on 17 January 1780 that Goethe had come back *multum mutatus ab illo* and Bottiger noted, though only at second hand, that he was like another person—ganz metamorphosiert.

In any case the change is there, and we now find him using his mind and senses with a detachment that he had not shown before. The letters from Switzerland, taken as a whole, are a quite beautiful demonstration of this, being cool and deliberate and full of the outer world, anticipating in this respect the letters from Italy that he was to write in 1786. It would be an overstatement to call them scientific letters, but they are just the sort of descriptive

letters that a scientist might write if he were on holiday. The words quoted above about the slow operation of Nature's laws are not quite typical, because Goethe is too busy observing things to do much philosophizing about them, but he seems to have the thought of law and order in nature at the back of his mind all the time and he says nothing that is inconsistent with it. This comes out strongly in the account he gives of approaching Mont Blanc on 4 November, where we see him getting nearer and nearer to it all through a long afternoon as the party he is with makes its way up the valley of Chamouny, until he finally catches sight of it at nightfall like a luminous pyramid overtopping the other peaks. It is characteristic of his new way of apprehending the outer world that the day's experience comes to him gradually, cumulatively. He notes as he goes along how the scenery grows in magnitude and impressiveness, nature providing the slow transitions from great to greater until it reaches the climax—*die Massen werden hier immer grosser, die Natur hat hier mit sachter Hand, das Ungeheure zu bereiten angefangen*. The whole letter is a model of reflective observation such as he would have been incapable of writing as a younger man.

Before the next year is out it is clear that his newly found desire to examine and analyse the physical world has taken a powerful hold on him. September 1780 sees him geologizing at Ilmenau and up and down the 'Thüringerwald', from where he writes to Charlotte on 7 September that he is heart and soul in the study of geology, only he puts it more concretely—*Jetzt leb ich mit Leib und Seel in Stein und Bergen*. He tells her that he has been on the hill-tops and in the bowels of the earth, seeking traces of Nature's forming hand—*der grossen formenden Hand nächste Spuren*—and then, as if realizing that the search he was embarking on was not an affair of weeks or months but that it would be with him for life, he says that the day will come when someone will see the whole clearly and that he and others will do their share of the preliminary work—*Es kommt gewiss noch ein Mensch der darüber klar sieht. Wir wollen ihm vorarbeiten*.

The note of purposiveness and of joint endeavour that sounds in these words speaks for itself. It is the study of the earth's crust—*die alte Kruste der neuen Welt*—that has drawn these words from him, and this would seem to be the branch of science in which he first forged ahead. His trip to Switzerland probably pulled him in

this direction; so, too, did the mining difficulties at Ilmenau. He indicated this in his letter to Merck on 11 October 1780, where he says that, since his duties entitle him to it, he has thrown himself with enthusiasm into mineralogy—mit einer volligen Leidenschaft. He tells him that he has had a young assistant from the Freiberg academy working for him since early in the year. This was Voigt, who was making himself an authority on the Thuringen region. And he goes on to say that his assistant has not only supplied him with the nomenclature and the exact details that he lacked, but has also under his instructions covered the whole district methodically, starting from the 'Thuringerwald', working over into the districts of Wurzburg, Fulda, Hessen, Kursachsen, across the Saale, and on into the country round Saalfeld and Coburg, and in this way securing the bulk of the geological specimens that were needed for a complete survey. Goethe seems to have accompanied Voigt on some, if not all, of these expeditions; he wrote to Merck on 11 October 1780 that he did not stop to ask himself whether he was staying within the boundaries of the duchy of Weimar, since the mineralogist must be like the deer which grazes where it lists—Wie ein Hirsch, der ohne Rücksicht des Territoriums sich asset, denk ich muss der Mineraloge auch seyn. He has also been reading de Saussure's *Voyage dans les Alpes*, prompted no doubt by his visit to Switzerland the year before, and he proposes when he has finished the book to write to the author or to an acquaintance in Geneva and ask him for specimens there described. He encourages Merck, who, as previous letters show, was something of a kindred spirit in matters of science, 'the only man who really understands me,' to send him what he can from his part of the world, and he promises anyone who will collaborate with him in this way a complete set of specimens from Weimar. He says that he is clear about the fundamental ideas and he draws attention to the researches of others now being conducted.

In short, we see him at last working methodically and constructively at a subject of his own choice and finding great delight and satisfaction in it. His long letter to the Duke of Gotha a few weeks later (27 December) corroborates this, and from now on he is evidently a confirmed geologist. It so happens that his geological writings proper were all published much later, the first of them in 1807 on work done at Karlsbad, but it is in these years, the early seventeen-eighties, that he consolidates his position and gets the

best out of it, as he shows very clearly in the fine little essay or soliloquy on granite, *Über den Granit*, that he composed in January 1784 either in the Harz or with trips to the Harz in mind. Here we see him trying to sum up his geological experiences, not so much scientifically, though the scientist in him is not disguised, as humanly. He represents himself as being on a high, bare mountain-top, surveying the wide expanse below him, and saying to himself that he is standing on ground that reaches down to the deepest places of the earth; no later stratum, no heaped or drifted deposits, have put themselves between him and the firm flooring of the early world. He is not treading, as he would be doing in the fair and fruitful valleys below him, on a perpetual grave; these summits have neither produced anything organic nor destroyed anything organic, they are before all life and above all life:

Auf einem hohen nackten Gipfel sitzend und eine weite Gegend uberschauend, kann ich mir sagen: Hier ruhst du unmittelbar auf einem Grunde, der bis zu den tiefsten Orten der Erde hinreicht, keine neuere Schicht, keine aufgehaufte zusammengeschwemmte Trummer haben sich zwischen dich und den festen Boden der Urwelt gelegt, du gehst nicht wie in jenen fruchtbaren schonen Talern uber ein anhaltendes Grab, diese Gipfel haben nichts Lebendiges erzeugt und nichts Lebendiges verschlungen, sie sind vor allem Leben und uber alles Leben.

There are indications that Goethe meant to write a more extended geological book at this time. If this was so, the project, like so many others in his incredibly rich life, was never carried out. All we have is this beginning, in which, short as it is, the great value to him spiritually and philosophically of his geological studies is as fully conveyed as we could wish. No more is needed to assure us that these studies were a constituent part of his growth, enabling him to steady his volatile mind, so long at the mercy of every fleeting impulse, by bringing it to bear on the most nearly changeless and indestructible part of the created world. He reminds us here how much he has suffered and still suffers from the variations of the human mood and its 'quick motions' in himself and others, and he claims his right to a share in the sublime repose that Nature in her silence, or all-but-silence, is able to communicate—Ja man gönne mir, der ich durch die Abwechslungen der menschlichen Gesinnungen, durch die schnelle Bewe-

gungen derselben in mir selbst und in andern manches gelitten habe und leide, die erhabene Ruhe, die jene einsame stumme Nähe der grossen, leise sprechenden Natur gewahrt.

The only reason for dealing with geology first in following the growth of Goethe's mind in these years is that it seems at this point to be slightly in the lead of the other sciences he had begun to study and, by its simpler and more descriptive nature, to have been somewhat easier to master, thus yielding its fruits the sooner. But there is no question of his ever being interested in geology exclusively or even primarily. It was the whole field of science, or rather of organic science, that attracted him. His concern with anatomy and botany, the other two branches that he worked in at this time, was just as thoroughgoing as his concern with geology. Hence we find the three sciences running more or less parallel, each competing with the other two for what it can snatch of his limited time, now one of them thrusting to the fore and now another. Thus he writes to Charlotte on 8 November 1785 that some good ideas about botany have come into his mind and that he has taken an oath to suspend his geology for the present.

Each of the three studies had its special contribution to make. Geology, as we have seen, gave him something to firm his restless mind on, awakening in him a sense of the static and the changeless that he had never experienced before, and this seems to have been its chief service to him, a service perhaps more spiritual than truly scientific. But if any doubts are left by his geology as to the extent to which he submitted to discipline, they are dispelled by the work he did in anatomy. Looking at geology alone, it would be easy to argue that he had done little more than show himself to be a gifted amateur, surveying the subject with an intuitive eye, while leaving some of the more strenuous labours to others. There was no geological controversy in the air at this time; it was only later in life that he ran into conflicting theories like those of the Neptunists and the Volcanists. But in anatomy or, more strictly, in comparative anatomy it so happened that he encountered opposition quite early in the game and had to prove his worth or acknowledge defeat.

The controversy into which he was drawn turned on the question of the so-called premaxillary or intermaxillary bone, the *Zwischenkieferknochen* or, as Goethe called it, the *Zwischenknochen*, which was theoretically important to the anatomists of that day

because it had come to be regarded as a sure point of distinction between the structure of the animal body and that of the human body. In the skulls of animals anatomists were agreed in distinguishing three bones in the upper jaw, namely, the two jaw-bones proper and the intermaxillary bone lying between them and holding the incisor teeth, whereas in the human skull they insisted that the middle item was lacking. This was in part a philosophical matter. Eighteenth-century scientists like eighteenth-century humanists, with whom Goethe had had his bout some years before, tended to hold an inflexible view of life and to regard whatever types they discovered in the natural world as fixed and immutable. This in its turn made for over-specification, as in Linnaeus's treatment of botany, and a habit of differentiating at all costs. Scientists of this school were disinclined to look for any of the more elusive marks, vestigial or otherwise, in their anatomical specimens, since there was no place for these niceties in their system of thought. They were content to establish their distinctions as broadly as possible and to ignore the details, letting the established theory do the work of further observation. It goes without saying that this mechanical fixity of attitude would derive strong support from the orthodox or theological side, especially in cases where, as here, the difference between man and animal, and even the difference between man and the apes, was involved. Thus the intermaxillary bone had become the desirable missing link (desirable, that is to say, in so far as it was missing) in the scheme of things when Goethe was young, and there were good reasons of a general and cultural sort why he and others should take a close look at it.

There could be no question of Goethe's accepting the mechanical view. As we should expect, he found himself in instinctive opposition to it and, what is more, so convinced of its wrongness that he set out to disprove it. Drawing on what resources there were in Weimar and Jena and supplementing these from farther afield, he was able to examine and compare a great variety of skulls, chiefly skulls of mammals, but also of birds and fishes, and, with the help of a more exact technique than his opponents had used and his admittedly remarkable powers of observation, he was able to demonstrate to his own satisfaction that the intermaxillary bone was not lacking in man, but that it had grown into the jaw-bones on either side and become inseparable; further, that the

sutures joining it to the jaw-bones could be detected by the expert in some cases, and that there were similar cases of junction, with consequent disappearance of the intermaxillary, in certain mammals. In short, he believed that he had broken down the line of demarcation and proved his thesis. In 1784 the treatise, all complete with precise illustrations, not his own but supplied by an assistant, a Latin terminology, and a detailed commentary, partly historical, was being passed round among friends and specialists, Merck in Darmstadt, and Sommering in Kassel, and Blumenbach in Gottingen, and Camper in Holland, and while some of these remained sceptical to the last, the majority, one by one, very slowly and reluctantly recognized the soundness of his views and ceased to oppose them. The old attitude was hard to dislodge, but Goethe lived to see his thesis accepted and his labour vindicated.

How deeply Goethe was affected when he finally obtained the result he sought is revealed in the high-pitched letter he wrote to Herder from Jena on 27 March 1784, telling him that he was taking his cue from the Gospel (Luke xv) and seizing the first opportunity of letting him know of a great stroke of luck that had befallen him, something that he treasured more than silver and gold—*Nach Anleitung des Evangelii muss ich dich auf das eiligste mit einem Glucke bekannt machen, das mir zugestossen ist. Ich habe gefunden—weder Gold noch Silber, aber was mir eine unsägliche Freude macht.* And, not content with this, he wrote to Charlotte on the same day, saying that his pleasure was such that his very bowels were in commotion—*Ich habe eine solche Freude, dass sich mir alle Eingeweide bewegen.*

It would be impossible to question the sincerity of this double outburst of Goethe's or to ignore the strong pressure behind it, especially when we consider that he was not given to such expressions of pride, but usually took his achievements quietly. But why, we may ask, in this case did his sense of achievement come thus abruptly on such and such a day, as if his discovery, as he called it, had presented itself suddenly in a flash of insight? Strictly speaking, there had been no discovery at all. He had started with the conviction that the prevailing view must be wrong and his task had been to collect the evidence he needed, item by item, until he finally turned the scales of the balance in his favour. He was not the first to work over this ground. The argument was as old as Vesalius, and Vicq d'Azyr had reiterated it four years before,

though Goethe was unaware of this at the time. But he rightly knew that the enemy had not yet been demolished and that it was for him to do a better job than his predecessors, and more especially to clarify the evidence by dint of patient laboratory work till he had made it convincing for those who still resisted it.

Thus, in spite of Goethe's bowels, what he had done was not a feat of inspiration but a piece of exact research, which differed from the average of research work only in the boldness of its premisses. No doubt, Goethe enjoyed privileges that facilitated his task; he was in a position to enlist the services of others, as in his geological work, and so to save a certain amount of time. He was particularly fortunate in having the anatomist Loder at Jena, who helped him from the start and seems to have shared his opinions. He also had the advantage, such as it was, of running the Weimar art school for a while on scientific lines, systematically copying the human anatomy in life classes. But whether he was helped or not, it is agreed that the work on the intermaxillary bone was his own work and, as far as we can see, he did it all in the three years between 1781, when he first began to go into the subject closely, and 1784, when he felt that he had reached his conclusions. When we consider the multiplicity of duties and half-duties, social and official, that lay on him in these years and remember, too, that the poetic function, even when he neglected it, was always alive in him and ready to assert itself, we can only wonder at the continuity of purpose and of intellectual effort that he had shown himself capable of sustaining in the face of these distractions. He told Sommering in a letter of 9 June 1784, when his treatise was more or less complete, that, much as anatomy attracted him, he was speaking quite literally when he said that he could only find odd minutes in which to work at it. If until shortly before this time he had behaved in all things like a man who knew nothing of discipline and could not be expected to learn it, he now showed at the age of thirty-five or thereabouts that he had learned it completely and could take up an exacting piece of work and carry it through to a finish under conditions that would have defeated most men. Loder was so taken with the precision and discernment, in short with the academic excellence, of his work that, as he told him by letter after reading his dissertation, he heartily wished he had been a professor of anatomy instead of a cabinet minister.

To complete the story of his scientific doings in the pre-Italian years there remain the botanical studies, and these he has summed up for us in his own words. Coming to botany, we find ourselves at once on more intimate ground. There was something in the life of plants that spoke more immediately to him and more humanly, as we can tell from his saying to Lavater in April 1781 that vegetation 'so quiet, pure, ever-recurring and painless' often comforted him in the distresses of mankind—Die stille, reine, immer wiederkehrende, Leidenlose Vegetation, trostet mich oft uber der Menschen Noth. Botany, we might say, was more personal to him, closer to his nature and his affections, and this presumably is why it was his botanical rather than his anatomical or geological recollections that he turned into a piece of autobiography. And for the same reason botany was not something that he took up suddenly, as he seems to have taken up geology, but rather something that he was slowly drawn into almost without noticing it. He had not been long in Weimar when the Duke gave him his *Gartenhaus* on the edge of the town and this made him, initially more of a city man, an amateur gardener with trees to plant and flowerbeds to fill. Then there was the 'Thuringerwald', miles and miles of it, with its varieties of trees for him to sort out, conifers of all kinds, he tells us, dark-green and aromatic, beech groves of more cheerful aspect, slender birches, and all the lesser shrubs without a name—das niedere namenlose Gesträuch—also a great range of mosses—die ganz Sippschaft der Moose—and flowers in plenty, beginning with the gentian family which first attracted him. In the forest he came across obscure herbalists preparing their simples from ancient recipes, and in Weimar he had Buchholz, a skilled apothecary, who kept him abreast of the latest discoveries. There was a botanical institute at his disposal in Weimar and another in Jena. He made Linnaeus his daily text-book and he also went over the botanical parts of Rousseau. All this from the *Geschichte meines botanischen Studiums*.

Geology and anatomy took so much of his time in the early eighties that botany was apt to be crowded out or at least kept nearer to the level of a hobby, but by the end of 1784 he had come to a temporary breathing place in these other sciences. He writes to the Duke of Gotha on 20 December 1784 that he is surprised to find himself so much at home in the realm of stones and bones—in dem Stein und Gebeinreiche—and now botany gets its chance

and makes the most of it. The summer of 1785 finds him diligently botanizing at Karlsbad, and from now on, helped by his training in other fields, he makes most rapid progress. Within a year he begins to see clearly in it and he does so with an excitement comparable only with that of 1784 when he 'discovered' his intermaxillary bone. On 10 July 1785 he writes to Charlotte that the world of plants has again taken furious hold of him and he cannot shake it off—*Das Pflanzenreich rasst einmal wieder in meinem Gemüthe, ich kann es nicht einen Augenblick loswerden.* And later in the same letter he tells her that botany is pursuing him wherever he goes—*Das Pflanzenwesen, das mich verfolgt.*

The wave of excitement, recurring, as we see, in these early Weimar years, may by its intensity remind us of the excitement that was habitual with him when he was younger and it may resemble it superficially. But if we look at it more closely, we find that it proceeds from a very different state of mind and, one might almost say, from a very different person. In his Frankfurt days he had been constantly excited without knowing why; the excitement came from nowhere or from causes so obscure that they could not be reached. We have to content ourselves by saying that it pertained to adolescence or immaturity, that it sprang from vague emotions, from lack of understanding, and from a general disorderliness of mind. But the excitement that he feels over his scientific progress is of another sort; by comparison it is an intellectual excitement. It is based on controlled activity and a knowledge of the outer world, he has come by it slowly and has qualified for it with hard work. Moreover, it gives him deep and lasting satisfaction, which is more than we can say of anything that happened to him in Frankfurt. Far from wishing to be rid of it as a sort of incubus, he is eager to communicate it to his fellow men. In the same letter to Charlotte he goes on to say that he longs to let others see what he sees and share his joy in it—*Wenn ich nur jemanden den Blick und die Freude mittheilen konnte*—and it was in this spirit that he tried to draw his friends into actively studying science with him, writing, for example, on 30 October 1784, to his friend Knebel, who did not take kindly to these novelties, that he has been caught by the natural sciences as in a trap—*Mich haben die Geister hinein wie in eine Falle geführt*—and that he hopes Knebel will be caught by them, too, in some way or other, and writing again on 17 November after apparently having made some

headway with him, that he wishes him a continual increase of affection for natural things and for the understanding of them—*wünsche dir immer Lust und Liebe zur Erkenntniss natürlicher Dinge* We may be sure that Knebel was not the only one who showed resistance, but Goethe was not to be deterred, and in the course of a very few years he managed to get so strong a following that Schiller, visiting Weimar in Goethe's absence in 1787, was dismayed to find that the people he met would rather botanize and geologize than listen to his book-philosophy.

We can see from this desire to have others with him how much more impersonal Goethe's new enthusiasms were and how little they had to do with obscure and random impulses. It may look at times as if there was something of his old incalculableness in the way he jumps unexpectedly from one science to another or tries to study them all at once, but if we look below the surface we find that he is progressing in mastery all the time, and that in his case one science helped another. This is why, when he finally comes to the closer study of botany with two other sciences at his back, he so quickly finds his way to the fundamentals of the subject and comes within sight of his philosophical goal. He tells Charlotte in his letter of 10 July 1786 that his insight into plant-life is increasing so rapidly that it seems to come without effort on his part; the whole of this realm of nature is growing so clear that he feels there will soon be no difficult problems for him to solve—*Es zwingt sich mir alles auf, ich sinne nicht mehr drüber, es kommt mir alles entgegen und das ungeheure Reich simplificirt sich mir in der Seele, dass ich bald die schwerste Aufgabe gleich weglesen kann*

While these words refer in the first place to botany, it is evident that Goethe is thinking more comprehensively, because he goes on to say immediately afterwards that if life were only long enough he would be prepared to do the same for all the kingdoms of nature—*Hatt ich Zeit in dem kurzen Lebensraum; so getraut ich mich es auf alle Reiche der Natur—auf ihr ganzes Reich—auszudehnen*. And this is not a sudden thought, because we can see it growing in his mind from the beginning of these studies and even earlier when there was little thought of science, as he now understood it, in his mind. Before going to Weimar, on 4 December 1774 in one of his whimsical rhymed letters to Merck, he had insisted, poetically and without arguing the problem or saying

how it should be approached, that nature was a book that a man might learn to read—

Sieh so ist Natur ein Buch Lebendig
Unverstanden doch nicht unverständlich

—since, as he goes on to say, we have in our hearts this strong desire to comprehend ‘all the joy there is in the world, all the sunlight and all the trees, all the sea-coasts and all the dreams’:

Denn dein Herz hat viel und gros Begehr
Was wohl in der Welt fur Freude war,
Allen Sonnenschein u' alle Baume
Alles Meerestad u. alle Traume
In dein Herz zusammeln mit einander.

And in another of the *Knüttelvers* rhymes written about this time he tells Merck that he should love and respect everything, whether it is an old shoe or an old potato, that he should study its form and its properties and in this way learn to feel how the world hangs together:

Geb Gott dir Lieb zu deinem Pantoffel
Ehr iede krupliche Kartoffel
Erkenne iedes Dings Gestalt
Sein Leid und Freud Ruh und Gewalt
Und fuhle wie die ganze Welt
Der grose Himmel zusammen halt

It was this impulse to examine and understand nature as a whole, already awake in him as these rudimentary passages show, that inspired and guided him when at last he began to work methodically as a scientist; and we can see that by the time he left for Italy he had made no inconsiderable progress to this end. Writing to Charlotte on 15 June 1786 within a few weeks of his sudden departure he speaks again of nature as a book, as he did to Merck in 1774, but now it is a book that he is learning to read. He tells her that he cannot express in words how legible the book of nature has become, his long efforts at spelling it out have borne fruit and he has now taken a great jump forward—mein langes Buchstabiren hat mir geholfen, jetzt ruckts auf einmal. And there are other passages in the letters, especially from 1784 on, in which he makes it clear that it is the general, the philosophical, result that he is seeking and not simply the particulars which might satisfy another. He speaks variously of being on the right track or of getting round the corner—über die Mauer—or of finding Ariadne's thread. More explicitly he speaks of ‘fundamental laws

of structure'—einige Grundgesetze der Bildung—and of a 'harmony of effects pointing to a common cause'. If we find him concentrating on a single problem we may be sure that he has the larger application in mind. It was evident all along that his interest in the intermaxillary bone was not *factual* but philosophical.

This is why, when he is sure of his ground, he turns first to his philosophical friend Herder and bids him be glad because he has discovered something that he regards as the corner-stone of man—der Schlusstein zum Menschen—telling him also that he is looking at the immediate problem in terms of the whole 'in Herder's sense'. He explains himself further in his letter to Knebel of 17 November 1784, where he says that every created thing is a note or a nuance in a great harmony and that the particulars are valueless unless they are seen in this comprehensive light. If, finally, Goethe reads and rejoices in Spinoza in these years it is chiefly because he finds him in tune with this idea and, without studying him closely, is able to draw on him for support in his belief that the particulars reveal the universal and that nature is part of the divine. This comes out very plainly in his letters to Friedrich Jacobi, a more conventional reader of Spinoza, where we find him allying his scientific thought to his study of Spinoza and pitting the two together against Jacobi's orthodoxy. 'Forgive me', he writes on 9 June 1785, 'if I have nothing to say about the question of a divine being. I can only see the divine in or with the help of the particulars, and no one encourages me more than Spinoza to look closely and deeply at them . . . Here I am in the mountains seeking the divine in rocks and plants—suche das gottliche *in herbis et lapidibus*.

Without looking further into the character or the validity of these scientific and philosophical ideas which, in any case, were not yet fully formulated, we can satisfy ourselves that they were the product of a very different experience from any that he had undergone before. Broadly speaking, it would seem that he had now in his middle and late thirties begun, at long last, to make the normal use of his intellectual powers that in his case had been so singularly delayed or at least so singularly obscured. In this scientific phase of his pre-Italian years we find in abundance all the mental qualities that were lacking in his earlier life. Where before he had thriven or hoped to thrive on the wildest illogicality, surrendering without resistance to everything that was unpremeditated

and almost making a cult of disorder, he now showed that he could exercise the severest self-control, steadying his moods to meet the scientific need whenever it arose, submitting to the strictest demands of academic controversy, and enlarging and deepening his thought month by month and year by year.

It might be expected that having thus sharply corrected the dangerous bias of his earlier years he would now be done with growing pains and would move smoothly forward into his maturity. But this is not what happened. The crisis of 1786, when he secretly and abruptly slipped out of Karlsbad and travelled incognito to Italy, is in its own way just as problematic, just as much an escape, as the crisis of 1775 which in some respects it seems to repeat. Looking back we can agree that it would not have taken a very shrewd observer in the year 1774 to see that Goethe needed to get away from home, and to prophesy that when the chance came, as it did in 1775, he would seize it with both hands. But there was no one in 1785, neither Goethe himself, it would seem, nor any acquaintance near or remote, to foresee the strange break in his life that was to come in 1786, and there is nothing in the record that points to it explicitly. If he had died in 1785 we should have been spared the regret of wishing he had lived to go to Italy because there is nothing to tell us clearly that a visit to Italy was in prospect, and it seems unlikely that Goethe knew it himself until shortly before leaving. We are driven to the conclusion that he was actuated in part by forces that he imperfectly comprehended and that he went to Italy more by impulse than by plan.

This is very strange. We have seen that he was somewhat in the dark about himself after going to Weimar and that, especially during the first four or five years, he was in an indeterminate condition, but in proportion as his scientific interests grow the indeterminateness recedes and the signs of it are fewer. His life on the whole is steadier and better regulated than ever before and, when the journey to Italy comes, it comes like a bolt from the blue. So mysterious an act can scarcely have been precipitated by his scientific interests or by these alone. We can only hope to diagnose it if we inquire more carefully into the subconscious part of him, and especially into the emotional and creative part, and see what was happening there. And this inquiry cannot overlook the person of Charlotte von Stein, whose name has already figured so prominently as the chief recipient of his letters in these transitional years.

X

CHARLOTTE VON STEIN

THERE is nothing in Goethe's earlier life to prepare us for his long devotion to Charlotte von Stein. We know little about his former experiences in love, much less at any rate than his biographers would have us believe. But, so far as we can judge, they lie well within the usual range and are, on the whole, what we might expect from a high-spirited young man who had time on his hands and was free to choose his company. We notice that he extricated himself on two or three occasions from an intimate situation and we may suspect on circumstantial evidence that he was not eager to settle down in matrimony, but in this he was only obeying a reluctance that he had in common with many of his sex and was in no way differentiating himself from the average student in easy circumstances. When we consider his susceptibility moment by moment to any and every form of emotional interference, we can only wonder that his relations with women should have taken thus far so nearly normal, one might almost say so exemplary, a course. We have to remember in judging him that to a nature like his, exposed and vulnerable as it was at every point, anything at all might have happened, especially from this most precarious quarter, yet, as it turned out, up to 1775 nothing happened that might not equally have happened to another.

This was especially true of Goethe's brief courtship of Friederike Brion, which would never have become so popular a story if it had not been so very understandable, so completely within the reach of simple folk. It was in this light that Goethe showed it to us, when he wrote it up in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* where he stresses its idyllic character, using *The Vicar of Wakefield* as a prototype, and we have no good reason for viewing it otherwise. Idylls come to an end, as this one did, with regrets and perhaps with heart-searchings, which in Goethe's case lingered long enough to find expression in one or two not intensely conceived dramatic characters, first Weislingen and then Clavigo, but which probably never went to the depths of his nature or disturbed him as he was capable of being disturbed.

Altogether it is surprising how little we are dependent on Goethe's women for the understanding of his mind and character

as a young man. The more we study his condition at this time, his excessive unrest, his excessive impulsiveness, the more it affects us as an *a priori* or, if not an *a priori*, as something induced more by his whole environment, using the word in its most inclusive sense, than by any specific events, whether love-affairs or anything else. This holds good both for his person and for his works. The early *Faust*, as we have seen, becomes more intelligible to us if we regard it as springing from the pervasive, never-ending turmoil of his spirit than if we try to relate it to people and incidents in his daily life. We can be sure anyway, notwithstanding a persistent tradition to the contrary, that Friederike Brion had little enough to do with it. And so it is with *Werther*, which more patently than *Faust* reflects a drift or habit of mind, not induced by anyone or anything in particular, that seized blindly on Lotte and Kestner and clung there and in this way localized itself like a seed lodging. We come to realize that the attachment to Lotte, dominant though it may seem in a first reading of the narrative, is more in the nature of an effect than a cause and that the prevailing *Werther* mood is independent of it. As Goethe tells us in his first preface of 1774, suicide had always been *Werther's* favourite idea, long before he met Lotte—Es war von je her seine Lieblingsidee gewesen. As for Lili Schonemann and the crisis of 1775, we know that she was involved in it and that she helped to precipitate it, but, as we have seen, it was long overdue on other grounds and would have come, inevitably, without her.

Thus, in spite of their appeal to biographers, the early love-affairs are little more than salient points or fluctuations in the ruling idiosyncrasy and bring out nothing that is not apparent without them. They add colour to the picture, but they do not change its lines. The relationship with Charlotte von Stein is another matter. More than any single relationship of Goethe's it comes before us in a questionable shape and both by its persistence, testified by upwards of fifteen hundred letters from him to her, and by its strangeness compels us to reckon with it. We cannot in this case subordinate Charlotte to the ruling idiosyncrasy for the simple reason that the ruling idiosyncrasy is no longer there. We have watched it slowly but surely fade out in the Weimar life and we have established part though not all of the new *mise-en-scène*. Charlotte obviously has her place in it; whether central or not remains to be seen.

One aspect of it is and always has been perfectly clear. We know

that Weimar took the disquieting tension out of Goethe's life, and it has never been doubted that, while there must have been contributing circumstances, Charlotte played the chief part. Goethe did not know everything about himself in these years, but he knew this much and he says it so often in his letters, chiefly those to Charlotte herself, that no further evidence is needed. On this theme he is never weary of harping and his variations are inexhaustible. Here he is truly the endless coiner of images—der ewige Gleichnissmacher—that he claimed to be in his letter of 8 March 1781. Charlotte is the custodian, the protectress, the guide, the ministrant, she is the opiate, the anchor, the life-belt, and so on *ad infinitum*. Goethe writes to Knebel on 3 February 1782, after five years of it, that Charlotte is keeping him afloat like a cork jacket and that he could not drown if he tried—Die Stein halt mich wie ein Korckwamms uber dem Wasser, dass ich mich auch mit Willen nicht ersaufen konnte. On 24 December 1782, he harks back to his favourite ship image and calls her the sole anchor of his being—du einziger Ancker meines Wesens—and on 3 June 1784, eighteen months later, he elaborates the thought, telling her how conscious he is that she is the anchor that keeps him riding securely in the roadstead—wie sehr fuhle ich dass du der Ancker bist an dem mein Schiffelein an dieser Rhede festhalt. Or he turns to imagery of another sort (21 November 1782) and calls her his sleeping potion—du Schlaftrunck meiner Leiden—which we can recognize as a variant on the well-known verse of six or seven years before where he says that she distilled or injected moderation into his fever—Tropfstest Massigung dem heissen Blute.

The long interval between passages so closely connected in thought and expression may serve to remind us how little change there was in the relation between Goethe and Charlotte during the ten years and more of their strange alliance. It stands to reason that there were ups and downs, estrangements and reconciliations in it, and it is possible, that is to say, it cannot be disproved that there was a change in it from restricted intimacy to unrestricted. All this can be read or suspected by those who wish to do so in the endless stream of letters short and long, but mostly short and mostly hurried, which in default of a telephone went from him to her at odd moments snatched in the busy hours between one lovers' meeting and the next. More particularly the poem 'Der Becher' of 1781, addressed to 'Lida' who is Charlotte, raises a delicate

question which will never be answered. Fortunately we have no need to explore this almost inaccessible territory because we can satisfy ourselves in a survey of the letters that the fundamental relation remains unmodified and is one and the same from first to last. From first to last, no matter how it stands between them at this time or at that, Charlotte is the tranquillizer, the healer, the sustainer, or the same thing in other words. All we have to do is to open the Charlotte letters at random and find this confirmed. Goethe calls her his spiritual guide—*du liebe Seelenführerin*—the date is 9 November 1784. Or he tells her that he has two divinities, herself and sleep, and that between them they heal everything in him that there is to heal. This is on 15 March 1785, in the tenth year of his devotion. And so it is to the very end. On 18 August of this year she is the sole security of his life—*einzigste Sicherheit meines Lebens*. Even in Italy when the bond is loosening, though he either does not know it or does not admit it, she remains his guardian (27 October 1786)—*mein lieber Schutzgeist*—the very phrase that he had used years before on 28 July 1782, and, for that matter, might have used at the beginning. Let there be no mistake, there is nothing here for the dramatist, nothing that grows or develops, it is the static quality that impresses us in this relationship, the constant and not the variable. Whatever happens between them, it makes no difference underneath and to this extent it is unimportant and can be dismissed.

It can only have been a very powerful instinct that led Goethe into this unexpected attachment, in consequence of which his emotional nature or no inconsiderable part of it was held in suspension, or in a state of only partial release, from the beginning of his life in Weimar when he was twenty-six till he went to Italy, or rather till he returned from Italy in 1788 when he was thirty-eight. Charlotte by this time was a woman of forty-five and in all probability not young for her years, she had married early, in 1764, when she was twenty-one, she had given birth to seven children and lost four of them before she and Goethe met. Her life, it would seem, had been as exacting as Goethe's had been free, an inauspicious omen which makes us wonder whether even under favourable circumstances she would have been the right person for him. Under the existing circumstances, so far from favourable, one would have said that there could be no question of it. Yet the fact remains that she swept him off his feet the moment he met her,

and that she was and remained indispensable to him, day by day and even hour by hour, for so many years that it looked as if the spell would never break. He seems to have a new way of telling her this for every day that dawns. Writing on 17 March 1782 he says that his spirit shuts itself up when she is not with him—*Meine Seele schließt sich in sich selbst zusammen wenn mir dein Anblick fehlt*. On 9 April he tells her that while he has counterpoises or resources in him to deal with anything that might be expected to happen to him, he would be helpless to deal with the loss of her—*Gegen alles was mir wahrscheinlich begegnen kann, hab ich ein Gleichgewicht in mir selbst, gegen das einzige nicht*. And on 8 September he tells her that he is so closely bound to her that the mere thought of separation tears his life asunder—*Ich bin dir so fest angebunden dass ich mein Leben zerreißen würde, wenn ich an eine Trennung dachte*.

If these words sound conventional, we can turn to some that he wrote three years later on 28 June 1784. Not that the date counts for much in this timeless union. On this occasion he says that he is now beginning to see that she is the other half of himself, that he is not a separate individual any longer; he says further that he leans on her in all his weaknesses, protects himself with her where he is vulnerable, uses her to stop his gaps, so that when they are not together he is in a truly strange condition, being armoured on one side, but on the other side like an egg without a shell, because he has omitted to provide defences for that part of him which is hers to shield and to shelter.

Ja liebe Lotte jetzt wird es erst deutlich wie du meine eigne Hälfte bist und bleibst. Ich bin kein einzelnes kein selbstständiges Wesen. Alle meine Schwächen habe ich an dich angelehnt, meine weichen Seiten durch dich geschützt, meine Lucken durch dich ausgefüllt. Wenn ich nun entfernt von dir bin so wird mein Zustand höchst seltsam. Auf einer Seite bin ich gewaffnet und gestahlt, auf der andern wie ein rohes Ey, welch da versäumt habe mich zu Harnischen wo du mir Schild und Schirm bist.

Writing to her in French later in the same year (30 August) he tells her that his love for her is no longer a passion, it is a sickness, a sickness more dear to him than health—*Non mon amour pour toi n'est plus une passion c'est une maladie, une maladie qui m'est plus chère que la santé la plus parfaite, et dont je ne veux pas guérir*. And among the verses that he wrote and sent her there is

a couplet which says that he has so given himself to her that it is as if he had drunk of her blood:

Bin so in Lieb zu ihr versunken
 Als hatt ich von ihrem Blut getruncken.

It will be agreed that passages like these, and there are others of the same sort, lie far outside the common experience of lovers and ask to be read rather in terms of morbid psychology than of normal. Either Goethe was in a pathological condition for ten years or he was perilously near to it; the whole question of his natural wisdom, his poise, his trustworthiness, his sanity, forces itself on us at this point. We know that he was on his way to being one of the sagest and shrewdest of men, but what has this queer business to do with it? How can this have been the way to where he was going, or any part of the way? Are we to be content with the explanation that his impulses betrayed him, that he chose ill-advisedly or wrongly at a parting of the roads, and that it took him all these years to find his mistake? The truth would seem to be less simple than this. Somehow or other we have to square the peculiar subservience to Charlotte with the phases of his life that were concurrent with it, remembering more particularly his integrity as a scientist, his accountableness in office, and the note of authority that begins to sound in his verse, all of which points confidently forward to the stability of his later life and invites us to interpret Charlotte constructively.

If Goethe had gone to Weimar as a balanced person, his entanglement with Charlotte could only be regarded as in some degree unfortunate or undesirable. But it is not too much to say that he was desperately unbalanced, the sole equilibrium that we can discover in him being that of the speeder whose sheer velocity, and this alone, keeps him from toppling over and coming to grief. Only in such extreme terms can we hope to express his spirit's plight. From the day we first get to know him till the day he left Frankfurt for good, he had lived, waking or dreaming, in a constant state of over-stimulation, a flux or welter of feeling, the like of which has perhaps never been recorded. All the affective, intuitive, unthinking part of him was lavishly, luxuriantly deployed at the expense of his rational part, his power to deliberate, to plan, to argue, to assess, to look behind, to look before, which was chronically suppressed or subordinated and had to bide its time and wait for an

opening. Either the opening had to come soon or his future was dubious, to say the least.

Viewed in this light, Weimar with all its drawbacks was providential for him, because it presented him with a set of conditions which enabled him to reverse his state of mind and throw the bias over to the other side. And his is where Charlotte comes in, not as a woman of unique personality, for if Goethe believed this of her no one else did, but as a woman who happened to have the kind of disposition, the temperament, that his nature craved in its acute dilemma. How else shall we understand the rapidity with which he adapted himself to her? In so far as his love for her was Platonic (and it is suffused with a fervent kind of Platonism throughout) one would expect it to mature gradually through an exchange of minds, whereas to all appearance it was at full strength as soon as it began. As early as 14 February 1776 Goethe wrote to Johanna Fahlmer that he was, as it were, tied and tethered to Charlotte—an *die ich so was man sagen mogte geheftet und genüstelt bin*. And the month after, on 24 March, he told Charlotte herself that his love for her had sprung up before he knew it—Ich seh wohl liebe Frau wenn man Sie hebt ists als wenn gesat wurde es keimt ohnbemerckt, schlägt auf und steht da. If we did not know to the contrary we should judge that the love-poem beginning 'Warum gabst du uns die tiefen Blicke' had a long story, a long research of intimacy, behind it; it reads like a pair of old lovers thinking aloud or reading the tablets of memory together. Yet it was written and sent to her in April 1776 when they were still new to one another and had no background to share. Evidently his refuge was so congenial that he found himself ensconced and at home in it almost before he had explored it. No wonder it seemed miraculous. He hunted to Wieland in the same month of April that he could offer no rational explanation of Charlotte's hold on him and, all things considered, it was scarcely to be expected that he should.

By lodging his emotions thus securely with Charlotte he at last obtained the needed respite from them and could now begin to extend himself slowly and circumspectly in other directions. And so, as time goes by, we find him variously engaged, bending his mind to the routine of government, disciplining himself as a scientist, and plugging at *Wilhelm Meisters Theatralische Sendung*, his first long essay in deliberate writing. These may be divergent

activities, when looked at in the practical world, but they are alike or at least related to one another in their claims on the intellectual man. We have only to recall the irresponsible life he had led in Frankfurt to see how close the relationship is. The division thus set up in Goethe between intellectual and emotional is not in itself remarkable, since it is the basis of so many not unsuccessful lives, even lives of poets like himself. But in his case the division is so sharply drawn and so accentuated, as it could not fail to be, by the privacy of his relation to Charlotte, the contrast with previous habits and, for that matter, with the whole of his previous history is so stark, that we are compelled to ask how he will stand the new condition, and how long. If, as we have argued, the extraordinary appeal of Charlotte was induced by the extraordinary state of mind that preceded it, the need to cure his lopsidedness driving him with a force that he could not fathom to seek this corrective, we might expect the appeal to relax when it had served its purpose and shrink to proportions more intelligible, perhaps also more subject to vicissitude. This in the end is what happened and had to happen, but the years go by one after another and there is no sign or whisper of it, the dependence on Charlotte is unabated. We may be sure, even without recourse to the letters, that it was not inertia that kept him thus stationary, for what was it but a constitutional lack of inertia, enviable in itself, that had landed him in such jeopardy? No, if Goethe's love for Charlotte remained at its height for so many years instead of following the expected curve downwards, it is because, over and above his devotion to her as man to woman, he continued to need her in the remedial and curative sense that we have defined. The ten years of Charlotte, rightly understood, give us the measure of his crisis; they tell us more forcibly than anything else in his biography, how real the crisis was and how inveterate the condition in himself that had produced it.

XI

THE CHARLOTTE POETRY

GOETHE is not the first of those who have sought asylum from themselves in a new attachment, but it goes without saying that he has his own way of doing it and that his attachment to Charlotte is unlike any other. As we should expect, its distinctive quality or flavour is there from the beginning. When Goethe wrote to Wieland in April 1776 about Charlotte he gave him an explanation that must have seemed abrupt. He said that he could only account for it in terms of metempsychosis—*Seelenwanderung*. Charlotte and he had been united in a former life and remembered this union in the present—*Ja, wir waren einst Mann und Weib! Nun wissen wir von uns—verhüllt, in Geisterduft* So full is he of this thought that he develops it in the already mentioned verses, written either just before the letter to Wieland or just after and sent to Charlotte on 14 April, where he says that in ages past she was his sister or his wife and that the memory still lingers in their hearts:

Ach du warst in abgelebten Zeiten
Meine Schwester oder meine Frau . . .
Und von allem dem schwebt ein Erinnern
Nur noch um das ungewisse Herz.

This idea, while it need not be taken as a confession of faith, sets the pace for what is to follow. Thus, a day or two later, he tells her that from now on she will be to him like a star in the sky—*Ich seh dich eben künft'ig wie man Sterne sieht*. On 23-4 June she is 'unchangeable for ever and ever Amen'—*die hebe, unveränderliche von Ewigk zu Ewigk. Amen* On 8 August he says that he remembers what happened between them the day before as if it were in a spirit-world, a feeling beyond feeling—*Es ist wie in der Geisterwelt, ist mir auch wie in der Geisterwelt. Ein Gefühl ohne Gefühl*. And on 7 October she has become a Madonna soaring heavenwards, while he with outstretched arms watches her disappear from sight in the surrounding glory—*Sie kommen mir eine Zeither vor wie Madonna die gen Himmel fährt*. In the light of these passages we need not doubt that it was after and not before he had felt the spell of Charlotte that he wrote the verses, better

known in this slightly revised form, comparing his beloved with the peaceful moon.

Mir ist es, denk ich nur an dich,
 Als in den Mond zu sehn;
 Ein stiller Friede kommt auf mich,
 Weiss nicht wie mir⁶ geschehn.

All this and more is forthcoming by the end of 1776, and the years that follow ring the changes on it. Sometimes his feeling shapes itself ritualistically, as when he says (30 May 1779) that his faith, his faith in her love for him, lives on the heavenly manna of sacraments—*der Glaube lebt von dem himmlischen Manna der Sakramente*—or when he longs for a sacrament in the strict sense (12 March 1781) that would confirm his bondage to her—Ich wollte dass es irgend ein Gelubde oder Sakrament gabe, das mich dir auch sichtlich und gesezlich zu eigen machte. Sometimes he goes further and tells her (10 April 1782) that she is transubstantiated for him in everything he sees—Du bist mir in alle Gegenstande transsubstanziirt—or conversely, on 25–7 August of the same year, that it is he who is transubstantiated and able to see her where she is when he is not with her—Ich sehe dich immer unter den demigen, bin in euch transsubstanziirt.

The statements vary in image and vocabulary, but in spiritual quality they are alike. Transubstantiation or transmigration, the moon or the stars, they all say the same thing. When Goethe speaks thus of Charlotte it is clear that he is associating her with the notion of a spirit-world as distinct from the world around him, a heaven of some sort, and that he is being drawn into ways of thinking and feeling that accord with this notion. Hence the supernal overtones, the transcendentalism, the otherworldliness, that he cannot resist when he thinks of her, as when he writes, on 16 April 1783, that she has charge of his inner life and that his kingdom is not of this world—Mein innres Leben ist bey dir und mein Reich nicht von dieser Welt. We hear this note so often in the letters 'like a sweet melody lifting us to the heights', as he puts it on 25 August 1782—Wie eine suse Melodie uns in die Höhe hebt—that we end by hearing it all the time and are unable to think of this part of his life without it.

This marked change of sensibility in Goethe is not one that we are prepared for. Whether we consider it in the light of the rude philosophy he brought with him to Weimar, or of the sobering

activities, administrative and scientific, that he found there, it is more than a little disconcerting. The ideas about life that go with it are, as the quotations show, so dualistic, so much more in the orthodox tradition, than any he had entertained before, that they seem to widen the gulf, already wide enough, between his emotional and his intellectual self and to lure him in a direction that was either foreign to him or unlikely to satisfy him for long. The problem here raised is a difficult one, but we can at least see where it comes from; we know that Goethe associated this way of feeling with Charlotte because it only exists in relation to her and is not felt, or not usually felt, in relation to others. Thus his letters to her are the only ones in which we shall find it pervasively. As a characteristic note it comes into his life when she comes into it, and it goes when she goes. Either he was reading it arbitrarily into her, in which case it could hardly have stood the test of so many years, or she was in some way prompting it in him by thinking as she did or by being what she was.

Concerning Charlotte herself we shall never know very much, the record of her life being so meagre. It is only rarely that we get such a direct clue as the one Goethe gives us when he tells her on 28 December 1781 that she will enjoy Herder's discussion on the transmigration of souls, because the ideas in it are the same as hers—*deine Hoffnungen und Gesinnungen*—or when he confesses to Herder on 27 December 1788, when the intimacy with her was over, that he deplores her preoccupation with dreams—*die verwünschte Aufmerksamkeit auf Traume*. For the most part we have to come at her more indirectly. Fortunately, if we cannot quite reach Charlotte, we can be fairly sure of her background, and it is her background, more particularly her cultural background, that proves helpful. In the first place it was not the same as Goethe's. True, she was only seven years older than he, and seven years sometimes means nothing; but in this case we have to remember that while he and other young rebels had been flouting their seniors and racing far ahead of their times, Charlotte had been leading a conventional life, having become one of Anna Amalia's ladies-in-waiting at fifteen and having been tied to home and court ever since. Goethe for the last five years before going to Weimar had been living excitedly in the atmosphere of *Sturm und Drang*; Charlotte, we can be sure, had remained as she was to remain to the end, untouched, or virtually untouched, by it. We can infer from this

with some degree of certainty that the cultural interval, the difference in outlook, between her and Goethe was greater than their ages would suggest, and that when they met in Weimar in 1775 this difference was an essential part of the attraction

It does not follow that Charlotte was behind her generation; she was doubtless well abreast of it by ordinary standards, not Goethe's, because in spite of family cares her social life and position gave her the necessary contacts. Without being a woman of letters in any serious sense of the word, she had presumably absorbed the culture that her country, and more particularly Weimar, had to offer, and was well versed in the lore of sentiment and sensibility in vogue in the seventeen-sixties, immediately before Goethe came on the scene. Whether she knew it or not, we can take it for granted that works like *La Nouvelle Héloïse* and Klopstock's *Odes* had had their effect on her and given her something of their spirituality and their feminism. If, as we may assume, she had read *Werther*, she had probably read it as another work of the same kind, not sensing the radical and disruptive forces that were latent in it. On the whole, there was nothing in the study of this soulful literature to shake her out of her orthodoxy or unsettle her faith. The pietistic strain that runs through it may have tempered her dogma, especially if her early religious training was as rigid as we are told, but this does not imply a weakening of her religious life, Zimmermann, writing to Lavater late in 1774, found her 'very pious with a touch of fervour'—sehr fromm mit einem ruhrend schwärmerischen Schwung der Seele. The chances are that her literary connexions, the books she read, the talk of books she heard in Anna Amalia's circle, the little writing she did herself, did more than any catechism to make her realize the joys and rewards of the spiritual life when it rises above the physical, for this was the moral that confronted her everywhere at this time.

If Charlotte shared this typical outlook with others of her contemporaries, as no doubt she did, we must assume that Goethe was drawn towards it in consequence of his abnormal dependence on her and, for the time being and in his own way, began to share it, too. The rarefied and exalted sentiment that he pours out in his letters to her does not come logically from him; it is the reflection in his mind of this acquired outlook. Instead of Charlotte taking colour from him, he evidently took colour from her, adapting his nature, or rather the relevant part of his nature, to hers, and quickly

learning to see, as it were, with her eyes and to feel with her feelings, so that when he idealized her he was idealizing her on her own terms and with her own voice. The flexibility in Goethe that made this self-adaptation possible reminds us of his old chameleon faculty and presumably derives from it. In any case, we have to remember that it was in him and not in her that the initiative and the creative force, in a word the genius, resided. Charlotte's part, indispensable as it was, can only have been passive and uncomprehending and, in a sense, unreal. We are compelled to use her name as a label for what was happening and call it 'Charlotte' for short, yet it is to Goethe, and to what went on inside Goethe, that our chief, and ultimately our sole, interest goes.

If this were all, the Charlotte story would be strange enough, but there is more. In addition to the Charlotte letters there is what has always been recognized as the Charlotte poetry, and this makes the story stranger still. It is quite conceivable and even probable that a poet who found himself, as Goethe did, under the urgent necessity of curbing his emotional life in his middle twenties would suspend the writing of poetry altogether, even at the risk of never returning to it, and would concentrate on other tasks. Admittedly it is hard to imagine Goethe without some outlet in poetry, however partial, he said himself in *Tasso*, a work which grew out of these years, that to live and not be a poet would be not to live at all:

Wenn ich nicht sinnen oder dichten soll,
So ist das Leben mir kein Leben mehr.

Yet it is not easy to see what the outlet would have been, if he had found nothing more in Charlotte than the sedative for his fever that he came to seek. If she had been the assuager and nothing else and he the assuaged and nothing else, if it had been in this sense so purely negative a relation, what poetry was there for him to write? By the absoluteness of his surrender to her he was, emotionally speaking, severing the main lines of communication with his immediate past and putting himself at her mercy; if she had nothing to offer but checks and controls the prospect for poetry was not bright. We know, however, that it turned out otherwise. By adjusting himself to her as we have seen him doing in the letters, acquiring her way of thinking and feeling and identifying it with his own and persisting in it until it had become second nature with

him, he was able to convert his allegiance to her into something positive, which opened a new region of inner experience to him and so kept his poetic energies from lapsing. Thus Charlotte, far from remaining merely the guardian of his spirit, becomes unwittingly the mistress of it, his creative life swings into her orbit and begins to move there by its own force.

It takes time for this change in Goethe's creative life to become manifest. The flow of easy, irresponsible writing that came from him in Frankfurt dwindles, and for a while there is not much to replace it. Not till after three or four years in Weimar do we find anything vital enough and extended enough to tell us where he is going poetically. But the prose version of *Iphigeme auf Tauris*, written inside of six weeks in the early part of 1779 under strong inner pressure, leaves us in no doubt. We have only to examine its central character, Iphigeme, to see what has happened.

The heroine whom Goethe here creates differs from her namesake in Euripides in the possession of an inner life which she has kept jealously, almost fanatically, intact throughout her long years of exile; seeing that her exile began in childhood or soon after, we might say that she has kept it intact from birth. She has never compromised with experience; indeed it is not easy to see where experience could come from. In her conversation with Pylades in the fourth act she says, in a line which Goethe did not improve when he rewrote it, that her soul can only retain its peace if it remains immaculate—*Ganz unbefleckt ist nur die Seele ruhig*—and he reminds her, not without a touch of irony, that this is a standard only possible for those who shut themselves up in temples and that in the give and take of life we have to be content with less—*So hast du sie im Tempel wohl erhalten. Vor Menschen ist das Halbbefleckte rein*.

But Iphigeme resists this idea. Her inner voice is the only voice she can trust. She has lived with it so long that it has become the arbiter of her moral life, not sharply distinguished from the voice of the deity. When she refuses Thoas's offer of marriage, telling him that the gods disapprove of it and that she is thankful to them for giving her the strength to do as they bid, Thoas points out that what she calls the gods' bidding is only the prompting of her heart—*Du nennst das Gotterwort, was dir im Herzen schlägt*—and she has to admit that for her the two go together. In this sense we find her saying to Arkas, when he tells her at a tense moment that it is not

too late to change her mind, that it is not within her power to do so and that the gods will direct her—Auf ihren Fingerzeig kommt alles an. This conviction, living and growing in her slowly in her temple sanctuary, has become a reservoir of spiritual power so strong that she believes, if she ever returns to Greece, it will enable her to expiate the crimes of the house of Tantalus and lift the curse from it for ever.

This is the Iphigenie who now discovers that her chance to return to Greece has come at last. She can save her brother from death and herself from exile and start the two of them, to say nothing of Pylades, on their homeward journey, but in order to do so she must compromise herself morally and stoop to arts of deception. The issue is drawn between the palpable needs of the moment and the eternal needs in her soul. Torn thus way and that by fears for her brother lest he should be sacrificed and fears for herself lest she should be stained, she ends by deciding in her own favour. Throwing all discretion aside and relying solely on her ideal, she betrays the plot to Thoas, their antagonist, and is rewarded with success. Thoas rises to the occasion and bids them go. All this is set forth in the version of 1779, in which Goethe's argument is complete at every point, leaving little more than metrical revision to be done later. If anything, the revised text of 1786 emphasizes the aspect of the play here indicated by making Iphigenie in her last soliloquy threaten to turn against her nominal gods, if they fail her in this crisis:

Rettet mich

Und rettet euer Bild in meiner Seele!

There is only one region from which this ethical purism can come. It does not come naturally out of the plot or even lend itself easily to it, for while Goethe employs all his skill to fit the new heroine to the old adventure, he only succeeds in taking the sting out of the old adventure and leaving it too polite to sustain the required tension. Nor is there anything in the Greek tradition or in Goethe's attitude to the Greek tradition to account for it; here, whether we look back to *Prometheus* or forward to the *Roman Elegies*, we are tempted to see a flat contradiction. But when we remember that Goethe for the last three years had been merging his spirit into Charlotte's, habituating himself to thoughts and feelings that belonged in the first place to her rather than to him,

and, in a highly esoteric sense of the word, impersonating her, it is only a step to *Iphigenie*. If we interpret *Iphigenie* as the extension of this mysterious proxy from the daily life into the creative life, everything falls into place, the curious anomalies that lurk beneath the deceptively simple exterior cease to perplex us, we know at least how they come to be there. The Charlotte experience, we discover, does not merely supply *Iphigenie* with certain of its ingredients, such as the recurring note of feminism and the healing of Orestes, but it is the matrix in which the whole work is formed, every scene and every line is imbued with it.

It was by this extraordinary device that Goethe's instinct kept the poetic gift alive during these transitional years when it might so easily have languished and died in him. The output for the decade may be slighter, but it is enough to leave its mark on the world's literature, less emphatically but not less surely than what he produced in Frankfurt. Those who cannot reconcile themselves to the discrepancy in *Iphigenie* between the theme and the treatment of it, between Euripides and Charlotte, can compensate themselves with *Torquato Tasso*, where the choice of theme is so much happier and the Charlotte complex so beautifully sublimated. The early manuscript of *Tasso* has not been preserved, but we know that it followed close on *Iphigenie* and that two acts were in existence in rhythmical prose, probably not unlike that of the early *Iphigenie*, by 1781; and this is all and more than all we need to know because the work speaks for itself and tells us beyond peradventure where it belongs.

In *Tasso* the Charlotte impulse in Goethe's poetry finds its appropriate legend, not heroic and alien, as in *Iphigenie*, but subtle, experienced, reflective, never or hardly ever rising above the conversational pitch that is natural to it. Both in setting and in sentiment this work is the quintessence of the letters. The poetic surrender to Charlotte, hampered in *Iphigenie* by the savage associations of the tale, meets no obstacles here. Not only do we find the Weimar situation point by point in barely disguised transcript, the court and the statesmen, the cultured dialogue, the poet and his spiritual mistress; all this and everything else is completely subdued to what we now recognize as the Charlotte vision of life, the inner voice, the dream-world, the adoration, 'the sweet melody lifting us to the heights'. If the vision of life is less explicit than in *Iphigenie*, this is because it is taken for granted and does not need

to be said But it comes out nevertheless in unmistakable accents, as when the Princess reproaches herself for so often ignoring the promptings of the heart, the still small voice that speaks to us from within and tells us what to do and what not to do—

Ach dass wir doch, dem reinen stillen Wink
Des Herzens nachzugehn, so sehr verlernen!
Ganz leise spricht ein Gott in unsrer Brust,
Ganz leise, ganz vernehmlich, zeigt uns an,
Was zu ergreifen ist und was zu fliehn,

—or when Tasso in his first monologue sees his goddess descending from the sky and snatching him up to heaven and says in his rapture that he is hers to possess and to mould.

Hernieder steigend hebt die Gottin schnell
Den Sterblichen hinauf
Ihr bin ich, bildend soll sie mich besitzen.

Strictly, the poem may lack a philosophy, but we know what the philosophy would be, if it had one. When we hear the incidental talk of the Golden Age of the poets to which the Princess and Leonore withdraw for hours at a time when they get the chance—

Wir können unser sein und stundenlang
Uns in die goldne Zeit der Dichter traumen

—and of Plato, their philosopher, and of a new Hesperia, and of Elysium in the mirroring brook—

Elysium auf dieser Zauberfläche
Gebildet

—and when we pick up all the countless lesser hints to the same effect, we know what it adds up to and what it means. Bit by bit the glimpses piece themselves together till they are continuous with one another in a spirit-realm, a 'Geisterwelt', as Goethe puts it in the letters, that shines through the whole poem.

If we took the Charlotte poetry out of these years there would be little poetry left. It is true that Goethe managed to continue the *Egmont* he had begun in Frankfurt. As we shall have occasion to see again, he was often able to recover a former mode and complete a work that belonged to the past. It is true also that he managed to write the whole, or nearly the whole, of *Wilhelm Meisters Theatralische Sendung*, his longest effort thus far. But neither *Egmont* nor the *Sendung* impresses us as having occupied him intensely, as at their several times *Faust* and *Werther* and *Iphigenie* must have

occupied him, and there is nothing in his letters or anywhere else to suggest that they did. He occasionally turned out a poem that seems to pull clear of Charlotte and to point forward to his years of maturity, notably 'Ilmenau' or 'Grenzen der Menschheit' or 'Zueignung', but most of the poems and nearly all the best are, in the special sense of the word, as much hers as *Iphigeme* and *Tasso*. If he now and then felt it incumbent on him to write more or less to order, a cantata for the local amateurs like *Lila* or a commemorative poem like 'Auf Miedings Tod', these items are incidental and do not change the situation. And so it is throughout. The fragment of *Elpenor*, indeterminate as it is, is too full of echoes of *Iphigeme* to leave us in any doubt as to whence it derives. When Schiller was shown it anonymously on 25 June 1798, he said with uncanny precision that it was feminine in feeling and perhaps by a feminine hand. Goethe, we discover, has no secondary source of inspiration at this stage, the only constituent poetry that comes from him in these years, or as the result of these years, is what comes deviously by way of Charlotte, all curbed and contained by her traditions and bearing, as it were, her invisible signature.

There is only one point of view from which this part of Goethe's poetry, notwithstanding its curious derivation, has a logical place in the order of his works. The period of eighteenth-century Germany into which he found himself drawn by the Charlotte phase of his experience was, after all, not very far from him, nor was he ignorant of it. But in the rush of life he had swept past it and never done it justice creatively. By the accident of his choice of universities he had first fallen into the clutches of the literary rear-guard, the rococo poets, obsolete but still hanging on in Leipzig; and then in Strassburg, chiefly through his becoming acquainted with Herder, he had thrust forward into the spearhead of the attack. This within the space of a year and a half, between the autumn of 1768 and the spring of 1770. The resultant gap in his literary progress was something that the Charlotte experience among its other benefits helped him to fill. Having, as it were, retraced his steps under her guidance, he picked up this and that by the wayside that did not necessarily concern her. And so, for example, we find him feeling his way towards blank verse, in the prose *Iphigene*, just at the time when Lessing, twenty years his senior, was trying it. We even find him saying here and there the very things that Lessing was saying, and saying them almost in

Lessing's way. Iphigenie's words to Thoas about truth being more than a national prerogative, since every right-minded person can detect it, no matter what sky he is born under—Es hort sie jeder unter jedem Himmel, dem ein edles Herz, von Gottern entsprungen, den Busen warmt—are not unworthy of Lessing's Nathan and could be transferred to his lips almost as they stand. The synchronizing in 1779 of these two works, *Iphigene* and *Nathan der Weise*, emanating from such different minds yet in the thought of the eighteenth century so obviously affiliated, is not accidental. It is the reverse pull of Charlotte on Goethe that makes it possible. And if the *Sendung*, after *Werther*, also seems to lead us back rather than forward, this is part of the same subsidiary phenomenon.

Nothing that we can do by way of historical explanation, however, quite takes the surprise out of the Charlotte poetry. Contemporaries of *Iphigene* who saw it played in 1779 or read it later in the printed book were unprepared and, apart from a small circle of friends, slow to appreciate it. And if we put ourselves in their position by coming to *Iphigene* chronologically, with *Werther* and the like fresh in our minds as it was in theirs, we shall have no difficulty in repeating their experience. The transformation is almost more than we can accept from one and the same author.

It is not so much what Charlotte, so to speak, gave to Goethe that surprises us, though this, as we have seen, is surprising enough, as what she deprived him of. What this was it is not hard to see. In all his *Sturm und Drang* writings we are never in doubt about the source of his inspiration. Prose or verse, poem or play, fragment or finished piece, at every turn we feel the impact of the surging force that he calls by the name of Nature or, occasionally, by some alternative word that means the same, Spring, Love, the Sun, the Father, the Mother. As Merkulo reminds us in the second act of *Der Triumph der Empfindsamkeit* the word 'Nature' had to be used on all occasions—denn das Wort Natur, merken Sie wohl, muss uberall dabei sein—though, to go by Goethe's letter to Zelter of 3 December 1812 where he refers to the nameless thing they used to call Nature—einem namenlosen Wesen, das man aber Natur nannte—no word was really adequate.

Whatever we call it, we can agree that it meant everything to him. No other writer has conveyed the nature idea with Goethe's freshness and abandonment; it seems to pour through him as if he were its appointed medium, fitted for this purpose and for no other. His

unfettered mind allies itself so readily to the unfettered world which he feels playing about him that there is no line of demarcation between the two, and the poetry that follows is effortless and unpreventable. The words in 'Mahomets Gebet' which say that his burning heart dedicates itself to the burning sun—

Sonn, dir gluhenden weiht sich das gluhende Herz

—or the lines he wrote in Switzerland in 1775 implying that the umbilical cord joining him to Mother Nature was still uncut—

Ich saug an meiner Nabelschnur
Nun Nahrung aus der Welt

—show how immediate, how contiguous, his feeling was. Sometimes, as in 'Ganymed', he produces the effect of merging himself or of being merged—umfangend umfassen—and the pressure from one side or the other seems to be there always. Werther in his passivity is overpowered by it, in his letter of 18 August he tells us in so many words that the consuming energy in the universe of nature is undermining his spirit—Mir untergrabt das Herz die verzehrende Kraft, die im All der Natur verborgen liegt—and this is the key to the whole work. It is only a theological variant on the same plight if Werther is driven, under the date of 15 November, to reject the mediation of the Son and throw himself on the Father. In *Faust* the pressure rises to such a pitch that it creates its own mythology in the figure of the *Erdgeist*, in which the totality of nature-forces surrounding mankind is assembled and concentrated. 'Busy spirit that roams about the world', says Faust, 'how near I feel to thee':

Der du die weite Welt umschweifst,
Geschäftiger Geist, wie nah fühl ich mich dir

'Never', wrote Lavater to Goethe in September 1774, 'have I met a man who was so responsive, so attuned, to nature'—einen so harmonischen Mitempfinder der Natur hab' ich doch noch nicht gefunden.

It is all in accord with this inescapable motif if Goethe opens his mind as a poet to everything that comes his way and lets his verses grow unchecked and untended, no matter when or where, like flowers that spring up in any soil, some to flourish and some to wither and die. His poetry in the Frankfurt years is as unguarded, as unrestricted, as any we know; there is nothing that he closes his

mind to, as we can tell from the way his letters spill over into his poems and his poems into his letters. Consider what he did poetically with such casual things as a luncheon party in 'Diner zu Koblenz', or being caught in a hail-storm in 'Wanderers Sturmlied', or a visit from the doctor in his rhymed letter to Friederike Oeser of 6 November 1768, or an early morning walk in the lines beginning 'Ein zartlich jugendlicher Kummer', or a ride in a stage-coach in 'An Schwager Kronos', or a game of blind-man's-buff in 'Blinde Kuh', or a literary quarrel in 'Rezensent', or even a bowel movement in 'Freuden des jungen Werthers'. The truth is that his life was littered with poetry at this time. When Knebel visited him in December 1774, Goethe gave him a heap of fragments to read and fished the manuscripts out of every corner of his room; his poetic habits were as incorrigibly natural as his poetic thought. Seldom indeed do we find a writer so possessed, so ruled, by his theme; the poetry and the nature idea are so wedded to each other that it seems incredible they should ever go apart.

Yet as soon as Charlotte comes on the scene this is precisely what happens. In the Charlotte poetry the idea of nature, as Goethe knew it in Frankfurt, is as rigorously expunged as if it had never entered his mind. We have to search the text for chance echoes of it. All we get of nature in *Iphigenie* and *Tasso* is the minimum required as a setting for the action, the dull roar of an alien sea separating the exile from home, or the smooth gardens of Belriguardo where the Princess walks, supplemented here and there by imagery from the outer world to match the human mood. Joy floods the mind of Iphigenie like water flooding a shore; Orestes, when he awakens healed, thinks of the sun coming out after a storm, Tasso sees the fruits of his happiness growing as on a tree. Similes of this kind may be found everywhere in poetry; it would be difficult, if not impossible, to exclude them. But if we look beyond these incidentals for the message or the meaning of nature, whether moral or metaphysical, we come away empty-handed or nearly so. In the deeper sense of the word, nature in the Charlotte plays has no meaning at all. It is true that, if we watch closely, we find Tasso on one occasion speaking of nature's power—die mächtige Natur—but the play is nearly over, the Princess has left the stage, and, in any case, a lonely adjective is too slight a foundation to build on. If we turn to *Iphigenie*, it offers nothing, not even this much.

The contrast is surprising. Goethe, when he went to Weimar, may not have had much knowledge of nature. We have seen how little formed his mind then was. But he had a faith in it which impresses us as real and abiding. How else could he have written such a poem as 'Der Wanderer' in which he asks Nature, the mother of all things, to guide his steps:

O leite meinen Gang
Natur.

Or how could he have said of Herder in his letter to Schonborn of June-July 1774 that he had stirred up all the religious forces in nature—all die hohe heilige Krafft der simplen Natur aufgewühlt? Above all, how could he have managed to write the great *Faust* monologue, where his belief in nature comes out with such clarity and such momentum:

Und fragst du noch warum dein Herz
Sich inn in deinem Busen klemmt?
Warum ein unerklärter Schmerz
Dir alle Lebensregung hemmt?
Statt all der lebenden Natur
Da Gott die Menschen schuf hinein,
Umgeben in Rauch und Moder nur
Dich Tiergeripp und Todtenbein.

No false enthusiasm could have dictated such passages; there must have been a real conviction at the back of them. Yet at Charlotte's touch all this disappears into thin air, leaving no trace of itself behind. Not only does Goethe, as we have seen, reflect in his poetry what we may call the Charlotte philosophy, he allows the Charlotte philosophy to interfere with and, for the time being, to displace his own. So long as the sway of Charlotte lasts, there is no room in his poetic vision for the nature-worship and the thought about nature that had been the very life-breath of it before he met her.

This holds good throughout, for the shorter poems as well as the two plays, with no effective exception. The ballads of the 'Erlkönig' and the 'Fischer', the chief ballads of these years, are both written to the Charlotte formula; in both we find the spirit-world singing to human ears with a seductive melody, and we know by now what the melody is. The night-mists in the one poem and the clear waters of the stream in the other are less potent than the supernatural sights and sounds that creep into them. Even the

three or four pieces that seem to involve the deeper significance of nature, such as 'Über allen Gipfeln' or 'Gesang der Geister über den Wassern', philosophical as they seem on a first reading, prove on better acquaintance to be non-committal and adaptable to any company. They are only lyrical variations of the use of nature for simile or for setting that we noted in the plays, we are not compelled to read radical meanings into them. The 'Mondlied', more than any, is a poem of withdrawal into the inner life:

Selig wer sich vor der Welt
Ohne Hass verschliesst.

Search as we may for evidence to the contrary, we find that for these ten years and more Goethe has his nature-thought and his poetry, and thus means his science and his poetry, in separate compartments; the two rarely or never meet. Here and there we may feel a certain approximation between them, in the poem 'Harzreise im Winter' of 1777, for example, a poem which stands curiously alone, or in the prose-poem 'Über die Natur', written in the early eighties. But the latter was in all probability the work of Tobler and should not be identified with Goethe off-hand. If we were better informed about Goethe's reading of Spinoza at this time, we might discover that there was common ground here, for we know that he associated Spinoza with his study of science, as he indicated in his words to Friedrich Jacobi, already quoted, on 9 June 1785, and we also know, strange as it may sound, that he associated him with Charlotte. He read parts of the *Ethics* with her in 1784 and 1785; moreover, in a letter of 9 November 1784, he refers to mysteries that have so much in common with her spirit—Geheimnisse . . . die mit deinem Gemuth so viele Verwandtschaft haben—and it is almost certain that he had Spinoza in mind. On the other hand he told Jacobi that he had never read Spinoza fully or even consecutively, and we can only speculate therefore as to how much it meant to him and whether it helped him to any effective reconciliation of his feeling for science and his feeling for poetry. There is nothing tangible to be had from this quarter; the conspectus remains as before. As for Charlotte, it does not follow that because Goethe took Spinoza to her she was in any sense a Spinozist, any more than it follows that because he tried to make her study science along with all the others, telling her on 11 September 1780 that she must become a nature-lover—Sie müssen noch eine

Erdfreundinn werden she had any real aptitude for science, or he any real success in discovering it in her. It can only have been in deference to him that she consented to play with a microscope or a telescope, as we are told she did. If we want to arrive at her instinctive reaction, we come nearer to it in a letter she wrote in May 1784, in which she says that everything that passes through Goethe's mind becomes intensely interesting, and that in this way she, too, has become interested in horrid bones and dismal rocks—die gehässigen Knochen . . . und das öde Steinreich.

There is no satisfactory exception at any point. The more we try to break down the barrier between the sphere of Charlotte and the sphere of science or, what amounts to the same thing, between the sphere of poetry and the sphere of nature, the firmer it proves to be. Of all the divisions that we find in Goethe in these years, this is surely the strangest and, in the long run, the least tolerable. It is conceivable that the division he was labouring under between official and poet might have continued indefinitely without destroying his genius, that is to say, we can imagine him carrying on somehow and developing his outlook as a part-time poet and thinker, while bearing the burdens of office. If his office handicapped him in some ways, it bore fruit in others; there was no irreconcilable antagonism. But if we ask whether he could have continued indefinitely to keep his philosophy, his real philosophy, out of his creative life and to write poem after poem in which there should be no place for his ideas about nature, the answer must be that he could not, or that he could only have done so by sacrificing the best part of himself. It was essential to his very existence as a poet-philosopher that his poetry should enjoy the freedom of his thought and his thought the freedom of his poetry; either he had to break down the division between them or be false to his deepest instincts. And since the division came into his life with Charlotte, as the price he had to pay for what he got from her, this means that Charlotte had to go, too, as she did inevitably in the new life that he began to live in 1786.

III

ITALY AND AFTER

Warum nicht fruher! Warum nicht wohlfeiler!

XII

THE MEANING OF 1786

IT was not until Goethe was safely on the road from Karlsbad to Italy that he felt clear of Weimar and sure of his escape. The effect on him was instantaneous, as if he were a spring, long detained and now leaping at the moment of release into its true position. On 5 September 1786, only two days after setting out and before he has crossed the frontier, he writes in his diary at Regensburg that he feels as if he were beginning everything at the beginning again—*ich fang in allem gleichsam wieder von vorne an*—and a couple of weeks later, on 18 September, he says in a letter sent from Verona to the Herders that he hopes to come back to Weimar as a man reborn—*hoffe wiedergeboren zuruckzukommen*. From now on the sense of beginning again, of being regenerated or reborn, is so strong in him that he has it on the tip of his tongue continually and comes out with it in letter after letter, even repeating it at ridiculously short intervals to the same correspondent. Thus Herder, who has already heard it directly or indirectly more than once, has to listen to it at least three times more during the month of December. On 2 December Goethe writes to him that he counts his second birth, his rebirth, from the day he entered Rome—*ich zahle einen zweyten Geburtstag, eine wahre Wiedergeburt von dem Tage da ich Rom betrat*. Then on 13 December he tells him that in Rome one has to be, as it were, born again, and that he looks back on his former ideas as on a sort of infancy—*Man muss so zu sagen wiedergeboren werden und man sieht auf seine vorigen Begriffe wie auf Kinderschue zuruck*. Not content with this he writes again on 29 December that he has put aside all his preconceived notions in order to be thoroughly reborn and re-educated—*Das gesteh ich aber auch dass ich mich aller alten Ideen, alles eignen Willens entaussere um recht wiedergeboren und neu gebildet zu werden*.

What he says to Herder he says with the same excited reiteration

to everyone else. Never before had he so unbosomed himself with such little regard to his addressee. His sense of consummation, of having found himself at last, must have been supreme. It is only in writing to Carl August, for whom he had a special and more worldly-wise manner always, that he moderates his expression, saying in a letter of 18 September 1786 that he hopes to come back cleansed and equipped—*einen wohl ausgewaschenen, wohl ausgestaffirten Menschen wieder zuruck zu bringen*. To all the rest he is quite unreserved, speaking indiscriminately to Herder, Knebel, and the Duke of Gotha about his second youth or his return to youth—*eine neue Jugend, eine zweyte Jugend*—and speaking in much the same terms to others—*ein neuer Mensch, ein neues Leben*. On 2 December 1786 he says in a letter to the Weimar circle that he believes he is changed to his very marrow—*so meyn ich biss aufs innerste Knochenmarck verandert zu seyn*—while for Charlotte, to whose person he remains unchanged in devotion, he finds what are perhaps the most revealing terms of all. On 20 December he tells her that the rebirth that is changing him from within continues on and on—*die Wiedergeburt die mich von innen heraus umarbeitet, wurckt immer fort*—and again two weeks later on 6 January he writes that he is casting a new skin every day—*Taglich werf ich eine neue Schaale ab*. On 17 January he uses a special word and speaks of a transformation of himself—*eine Umwandlung sein selbst*.

If this were merely a transitory mood of exhilaration and of holiday such as many have experienced on being set free from a round of arduous duties, we could afford to make light of it. But, as we can see from the above dates, there was nothing transitory about it; the mood continued at its height for days and weeks, even for months. During at least the first half-year of his absence the sense of rebirth and of transformation is so insistent that it bursts out of him again and again as if for the first time. As late as 7 February 1787, in the sixth month of his travels, he tells Charlotte about the sudden upsurge in him—*Es ruckt alles auf einmal in mir herauf*—saying how new and primal everything is—*ja wie ganz neu und von vornen alles hab ich dir nicht zu sagen*—undeterred by the fact that he has been talking this way from the beginning and that she has heard it all countless times before. Even after a twelvemonth, on 1 October 1787, he is still going full tilt; he says that not a day passes but he learns something new or

develops a faculty—Es vergeht kein Tag, an dem ich nicht eine neue Kenntniss erwerbe oder irgend eine Fähigkeit ausbilde

It is not only the duration of his experience that impresses us, there is also the intensity and the earnestness of it. He writes to Herder on 2 December 1786 that in this year things have come together in a wonderful way—Sehr wunderbar drängt sich in dieses Jahr soviel zusammen—and on 13 December he says to him quite simply that the past year, which has brought the great change, is the most important in his life. On 20 January 1787, speaking more heatedly, he tells Charlotte that he has staked his whole existence on this venture, that it is a crucial test of mind and body, that life would be valueless without it, and that he must go through with it even if it destroys him—ich habe nur *Eine* Existenz, diese hab ich diesmal *ganz* gespielt und spiele sie noch. Komm ich leiblich und geistlich davon, überwältigt meine Natur, mein Geist, mein Glück, diese Krise, so ersetz ich dir tausendfaltig was zu ersetzen ist. Komm ich um, so komm ich um, ich war ohne dies zu nichts mehr nütze. If these extreme words wrung from him in a moment of strain or friction have to be discounted somewhat, they still have their value as showing how strong his sense of crisis was; we can agree fully with his quieter way of putting it in his diary of 27 October 1786, within two days of reaching Rome, where he says that he knows now and knew it beforehand that only the direst necessity could have made him undertake this journey—Ich sagte mir's voraus, und nur die höchste Nothwendigkeit konnte mich zwingen den Entschluss zu fassen

The note of crisis, present or barely past, is so clear and emphatic in these first weeks and months away from Weimar that it is difficult to realize how little there is in the outer circumstances to account for it. In this respect the turning-point of 1786 is like the turning-point of 1775. In 1775, as we have seen, the key to the situation was psychological. However much was ascribable to the drawbacks of Frankfurt or the prospects of Weimar, both of which have to be taken into account in a full analysis, it was the state of mind in Goethe that threw the revealing light. Apart from the person involved, the contributing circumstances (a love-affair not unlike thousands of others, and a lucky invitation, half holiday, half business) were scarcely what we should call problematic; it was in Goethe's mind that the crisis lay. And so it is, even more conspicuously, in 1786. Outwardly Goethe is doing nothing more

than taking a leave of absence, not precipitated by any new turn of events but arising in the course of his daily life and differing only from most other leaves of absence in its abruptness and its secrecy. The conditions of his life at the time of leaving are those that he has been living under for years; if a change comes suddenly, the forces that bring it about can only have come from himself, from within, and it is there that the explanation must be sought.

We are fortunate in having a very full record of the days following the departure from Karlsbad, and this does something to compensate for the silence that lies over the days preceding. For the first two months, covering the journey south and the halts he made in northern Italy, chiefly at Verona and Venice, before going on to Rome, we have the diary that he wrote day by day for Charlotte, after which there are the abundant letters, already sampled, that he sent from Rome and Naples and elsewhere. The great value of the diary is that it lets us see at first hand the direction his mind moved in when it was suddenly liberated, the direction not being the one we should expect when we consider that this is a German poet making his Italian tour. If Charlotte looked for picturesqueness in what he sent her, she must have been disappointed; nothing could be farther from his thoughts.

We have only to read the opening sentences to see the frame of mind he was in. After saying in a few plain words that he managed to steal out of Karlsbad a few days later than he intended, having been delayed chiefly by his preparations for the journey, he goes on to say that he was at Zwota at half-past seven on a fine misty morning and that he was at Eger at noon, by which time the sun was bright and hot. He reminds us that the morning had been overcast, the upper clouds streaky and woolly, the lower ones heavy, the wind steadily from the south-west. He had been thinking about the problem of weather and refers to other notes he had made. If this sounds matter-of-fact, it is not more so than his own words:

Um halb 8 in Zwota schöner stiller Nebelmorgen Nr 1 um 12 in Eger bey heissem Sonnenschein. Der Morgen war bedeckt gewesen, die oberen Wolcken streifig und wollig, die unteren schwer; es hielt sich das Wetter bey SudWestWind. Gedanken darüber. Das Wetter gab schon den 2ten gute Anzeichen. Siehe das weitere in der Note a fol. 19.

The note to which he refers, a summing-up and interpretation of his weather observations during the first week of his journey between Karlsbad and the Brenner Pass, marks the beginning of

his interest in the problems of meteorology. All that he has to say on this subject in the *Italienische Reise* and in his various scientific papers on cloud-forms and the source of weather changes may be dated from this momentous week when he was on his way to the fabulous south. If he had contemplated the sky before, he had done so with a poet's or a painter's eye, not as an investigator. It speaks volumes for the strength of his scientific preoccupations that he should be unable to repress them even at this exciting time when his eagerness to reach Italy was such that he pushed on as fast as the coach would carry him, never stopping for more than a few hours until he was safely across the Italian border. It is characteristic, too, that he was not content to stay within his previous range of observation but must needs enlarge it, adding meteorology to the sciences that he had already begun to explore. Of the five appendixes that he attaches here, four are strictly scientific, dealing with meteorology, climate, botany and geology, and the fifth, a note on the people of the districts he has passed through, scarcely less so. He has taken an oath not to burden himself with geological specimens on the journey, but he has the utmost difficulty in keeping his word. He nearly succumbs on the second day of his journey—*Ein Stuck war gar zu appetitlich, der Stein aber zu fest, und ich habe geschworen mich nicht auf dieser Reise mit Steinen zu schleppen*—and he fails to hold out for long, explaining a few days later that he has plenty of room for specimens if he is not too greedy and keeps to the smaller ones.

These nature notes set the pace for the journey. As we read on, we find that science is not just a stop-gap helping to fill in the time when there was nothing else for him to do; it possesses his mind constantly and never leaves it. In spite of the magnetic pull of the south, he keeps his mind strictly on things around him, not dwelling introspectively on himself or looking back at Weimar or even forward to Italy, but concentrating on what he can apprehend with his five senses in the world about him. If he quotes poetry in his diary, he only does so because it comes intangibly as part of the natural scene, copying out a rhymed motto that he found inscribed on an inn window at Regensburg and quoting a hexameter from Virgil that he came across in his guide-book at Rovereto on the shores of Lake Garda, Virgil's Benacus—

teque

Fluctibus et fremitu assurgens Benace marino

—adding the significant remark that the wind now rising in his face is making him realize the truth of the line, and that this is the first time he finds himself reading Latin with his eye on the object—*Der erste lateinische Vers dessen Gegenstand mir lebendig vorsteht und der, da der Wind immer starcker weht und der See höhere Wellen schlägt recht wahr wird* If there is a fallacy here, it is one that shows exactly which way his mind was turning.

Now that he has cast loose from Weimar and struck out into new territory, Goethe soon realizes how much he has learned from the study of nature and how much he relies on it. Writing on 13 September in the second week of his travels, he says in his diary that he owes more than he can say to his studies in mineralogy and botany, and that they have given his journey whatever value it has for him thus far—*Wie mir auch Mineralogie und das bisschen botanischer Begriff unsaglich viel aufschliessen und mir der eigentichste Nutzen der Reise bis jetzt sind.* And a little later, on the 21st, he says in the same spirit. 'You know what it means to me to have *things* in front of me, I am in conversation with *things* all day long'¹ It is presumably this conversing with *things*, this concreteness, that he has in mind when he says on his first day out that his way of looking at the world—*meine Art die Welt anzusehn*—makes him unspeakably happy, teaches him something every day, and seems to solve all his problems.

When he comes to Italy proper and begins to look at its monuments, the product of men's hands, he carries on in the same spirit as before and treats them as objects to be examined, not as miracles to be gaped at. This comes out finely in the account he gives of the amphitheatre at Verona, the first great monument of antiquity that he set his eyes on. It was years since he had had occasion to look strenuously at a great piece of architecture. In Strassburg he had rhapsodized over the cathedral as a tumultuous *Sturm und Drang* fragment of a building—*einen Babelgedanken*—never stopping to ask himself in his enthusiasm why it was undertaken and whether it fulfilled its purpose. But this was fifteen years ago and he is a different man now. At Verona there is no blind enthusiasm, no rhapsodizing; he studies what he sees as he would study any natural object, a plant or a mountain or an intermaxillary bone, not as a thing isolated but as a thing conditioned in time and

¹ Du weisst was die Gegenwart der Dinge zu mir spricht und ich bin den ganzen Tag in einem Gespräche mit den Dingen.

place, and in doing so his thoughts go back to the time when there was no amphitheatre here; if there was a public spectacle, people were driven to use what devices they could to see over the heads of those in front of them, standing on tubs, on wagons, on improvised platforms, and in this way creating the great bowl or concave that was later carried out architecturally in the planned amphitheatre—Dieses allgemeine Bedürfniss hat der Architekt zum Gegenstand, er bereitet einen solchen Crater durch die Kunst, so einfach als nur möglich.

In looking thus genetically and functionally at the monument before him, Goethe was simply dealing with it as he had learned to deal with rocks and stones and trees, accepting it as part of the world to which it belonged and interpreting it in terms of the forces that had produced it. When he looks at Venice, the first city in which he lingered, or at Rome, where he spent the greater part of his time, he looks at them exactly as he had looked at the Verona amphitheatre. Venice, he writes in his diary, did not come to be where it was by accident, it was chosen by those who saw the advantages of the site, its physical conditions gave it its character. Similarly, Rome had not always been as it was when he saw it; it grew, as he points out in his letter of 25 January 1787, from inauspicious beginnings which account for its curious position on and around the seven hills by the Tiber, no powerful well-managed tribe would have chosen the spot, no great ruler would have tried to colonize it, but it was shepherds and vagrants who first settled there among the reeds and swamps either for want of a better place or in the hope of being unmolested; as the city grew it spread up into the higher ground and the hills.

These are simple remarks and do not claim to be anything more, but they are valuable as indications of Goethe's attitude, which was not that of the average eighteenth-century visitor. It was only because of the study he had begun to make of the earth's surface that he was prompted to look at Rome and Venice in this geographical light and to ask where they came from and why they were as they were. Once the first questions were asked there was no end to the questions that lay behind; a hundred related ideas were forcing themselves on him, so he writes on the above date, too many to go into a letter.

The organic point of view that we find in these early comments on Verona, Venice, and Rome holds good for the Italian journey

as a whole, and not only for the Italian journey but for the rest of his life. Where it led him is a long story, but we can see now where it came from. By the time he left Weimar in 1786 Goethe had found himself in the study of natural things and was sure of his approach; when he came to look at Italy and above all at the great works of antiquity that Italy had to show him he made them part of the same study and subjected them to the same approach, adding architecture and, in due course, painting and sculpture to his field of inquiry, just as he had added meteorology a short time before. This at least is what he tried to do and what he believed he was doing. Again and again in his letters home to Weimar he insists that his scientific insight is the basis of his wisdom and that his study of Italy and of antiquity is simply an extension of it. He tells Charlotte before he has been a month in Rome, on 24 November 1786, that he is treating Rome as he treats nature—*Du kennst meine alte Manier wie ich die Natur behandle, so behandl' ich Rom*—and on 20 December we find him using the very terms that he had used in Weimar not many months before about his progress in botany. He says that he is studying art as he studies nature, and that everything is coming to him of itself without effort on his part—*Ich lasse mir nun alles entgegen kommen und zwingen mich nicht dies oder jens in dem Gegenstande zu finden. Wie ich die Natur betrachtet, betrachte ich nun die Kunst*. He says the same to Herder in different words, telling him on 2 December that what he experienced in the study of natural history was repeating itself in Rome—*Wie mir's in der Naturgeschichte erging, geht mir's hier*—and on 29 December he takes obvious pleasure in saying to him that architecture, sculpture, and painting are for him in no way different from mineralogy, botany, and zoology. On the same day he writes to Charlotte that Italy is going to be like another of his favourite sciences—*Es wird mir mit diesem Lande wie mit meinen Lieblingswissenschaften gehn*. But perhaps the most revealing words of all are those he writes in his diary at Venice on 5 October: 'I cannot say strongly enough how much I owe at every point to my hard earned knowledge of natural things—*meine sauer erworbenen Kenntnisse der natürlichen Dinge*—thus my knowledge of things geological gives me a great advantage—*ein grosser Vorsprung*—in architecture.' In the revised version of this passage he crossed out 'architecture' and wrote 'art' instead, thus broadening the application.

This evidently was not a passing whim, it was a conviction that had come to stay. At the beginning of his second year in Italy (3 October 1787), he said to Knebel what he had said, or virtually said, to others months before, that he had arrived at an attitude to art that squared with his attitude to nature and that the two would now be all the dearer to him—Glücklicherweise hab ich auch eine Combination der Kunst mit meiner Vorstellungs Art der Natur gefunden und so werden mir beide doppelt lieb. And on 25 January 1788, three or four months later when his furlough was nearly up, he wrote to Carl August that when he first came to Rome he soon discovered that he had only looked superficially at works of art and had no real understanding of them; now, when he had begun to probe the depths beneath, it was his previous experience of looking into the depths of nature that made him happy and at home there.

This new-found conviction is written large all over the account he gives of Italy, whether we look for it in the contemporary documents, the letters and diaries written on the spot, where, as we have seen, it comes out plainly, or in the *Italiensche Reise* of more than twenty-five years later, in which he arranged the letters and diaries in a continuous narrative, editing and amplifying them as he saw fit, but not tampering with their philosophy. The greater wealth of descriptive matter that he now introduces makes the philosophy less prominent perhaps and easier to ignore for those who wish to ignore it, but it is all there and, if anything, more explicit than before. Under the date of 6 September 1787, he says outright in the *Italienische Reise* that the great works of art are supreme works of nature carried out by man in accordance with nature's laws, all that is merely fanciful or arbitrary is eliminated. Again, under the date of 5 October, he writes that where Plato would admit to his academy none who was ignorant of measurement, Goethe, if he had one, would admit none who had not devoted himself strictly and seriously to some branch of natural science—ich litte keinen, der sich nicht irgend ein Naturstudium ernst und eigentlich gewählt. Perhaps the climax of all these remarks about art and nature is the one he made under the date of April 1788 at the end of the *Italienische Reise*. Standing in a roomful of statuary, he says he felt as if the forces of nature were in commotion around him—Umgeben von antiken Statuen empfindet man sich in einem bewegten Naturleben.

There is no important change or development of outlook to be detected at this later date; at the end of his stay in Italy he merely confirms and reinforces what he said at once on arriving there. The only change that comes with the passing months is a certain widening of his activity. It was understandable that he should begin with an examination of the more conspicuous monuments and the greater cities and establish his position first in relation to them before going farther into detail or further afield. Later, however, when he was back in Rome after his trip to Sicily and had had his fill of monuments, he spent considerable time drawing and modelling, realizing now the supreme importance of the human figure; and while he was conscious of his serious limitations as a practitioner, he was in no doubt about his philosophical approach. He said in the *Italienische Reise* (23 August 1787) that his long scientific preparation—mein hartnackig Studium der Natur—and more particularly his researches into comparative anatomy, had given him an insight into the figure, living and sculptured, that is often denied to the professional artist

It will be apparent from this incessant reference back to natural science that it is here rather than in any conceptions of Italy that we must look for the more vital meaning of the change that was taking place in him. It was in Italy, or should we say it happened to be in Italy, that Goethe discovered how fruitfully the ideas he had been maturing in himself as a student of anatomy, geology, and botany could be applied to other regions of life and even to the whole of life. More particularly, since the new experiences that Italy offered lay chiefly in the region of classical antiquity, he may be said to have discovered for himself the common ground between classical antiquity and his natural philosophy or, to put it more concretely, between the great monuments of art that have come down to us, exemplified in the relics that lay all around him, and the revelations of science as he had come to understand and practise it in recent years.

This common ground between science and art, or between natural philosophy and the creative life, was something that he had not felt clearly before, though he had felt it blindly and confusedly as a young man, we may recall, when he looked at Strassburg cathedral and saw it as a thing begotten and grown—gezeugt und entfaltet—rather than built with hands, or, again, when as a young

artist he expressed the wish to have the creative force of nature pour through his fingers:

Wo ist der Urquell der Natur,
Daraus ich schopfend
Himmel fühl' und Leben
In die Fingerspitzen hervor!

Indeed it is not too much to say that this inchoate notion of organic forces thrusting into the life of the mind can be felt everywhere in his early writings, and that this was the germ from which his later wisdom grew. But he had never managed to clarify the notion during his Frankfurt years, and in Weimar he had come perilously near to losing it. It was only in the strictly delimited portion of himself then devoted to science that he was able to keep the notion alive, all or most of the rest of his nature, his poetic faculty and with it no small portion of his moral faculty, being under the dominion of Charlotte which, as we have seen, was alien, if not hostile, to science. Hence the strange anomaly, doubly strange in him, that, prior to Italy, he had studied nature scientifically for seven years, if not for more, yet in all this time he had never effectively applied the lessons he had learned from science to anything outside, keeping science strictly segregated as if it were an end in itself and could be carried on in its own compartment, without in any way intruding on the poetic and creative life. With the rest of Goethe's record before us, we may doubt whether he could have continued to lead this double life much longer; the wonder is that it lasted as long as it did. It seems obvious now that the time was coming, and had to come, when he would make his choice and let the whole of his nature go in the direction that was congenial to it.

It was the breaking down of this artificial division that made the year 1786 so miraculous for him and filled him with so exhilarating a sense of a new birth and a new beginning. The novelty of existence that he records with such unwearying excitement throughout his Italian journey is the novelty of seeing things from the point of view of a single personality, when for a long period of years he had been compelled to see them from the point of view of two. The parts of him that had been shut off had come together again at last, and they rejoiced in one another as if after a long exile now happily terminated. Writing to Charlotte on 25 January 1787, he emphasized his new sense of unity and co-ordination by telling her that it was

difficult to deal in a letter with all the wealth of ideas that were filling his mind, because it was not a matter of isolated remarks and notions, everything hung together and needed to be presented in this light—Bey der grossen Menge von Ideen wird es mir sauer zu schreiben, denn es sind keine einzelne Bemerkungen und Begriffe, sie sind zusammenhangend. In the same sense he wrote to Wieland in September 1788 soon after his return to Weimar that everything was coming together and fusing in his mind, natural history, art, morals, &c —Naturgeschichte, Kunst, Sitten, pp , alles amalgamirt sich bey mir—and he was only paraphrasing this when he wrote in his *Italiensche Reise* under the date of 23 August 1787 that all his inner resources were being consolidated—Ich fuhle, dass sich die Summe meiner Krafte zusammenschliesst.

The Charlotte years, rightly understood, make the Italian crisis and its after-effects as lucid and intelligible as we could wish; it is only because Goethe was unable to understand these years fully himself that he failed to show the crisis in its true light, avoiding all but the briefest hints at the circumstances, the inner circumstances, that had led up to it, and springing it on us wholly without preparation. It is at this point, the starting-point, that the *Italiensche Reise* may be said to let us down. Lacking any account of the complicated action that went before, it is like the *dénouement* of a play of which the previous scenes have been lost. Those who read it as a self-contained narrative without having a clear grasp of its antecedents are bound to be puzzled, whereas once the antecedents are known the puzzle is solved.

One of the difficulties in 1786 is that while Goethe talks incessantly about rebirth and about scrapping all his old ideas and beginning again, he also talks about the very opposite, saying that he is sticking closely to his old ideas and finding confirmation of them. Thus at Padua on 27 September 1786 he notes that he is finding excellent support for his botanical ideas—Schone Bestatigungen meiner botanischen Ideen hab ich wiedergefunden—and that his life—meine Existenz—is growing in magnitude like a snowball. And two days before this entry we find him writing that it gives him particular pleasure to think that Italy is not unsettling or changing any of his old ideas, but is bearing them out at every point—Was mich freut ist dass keine von meinen alten Grundideen verrückt und verändert wird, es bestimmt sich nur alles mehr.

It will be evident that the note of continuity is just as much part of the story as the note of interruption and that, incompatible as it seems, we cannot overlook it. For Goethe there was no incompatibility or, if there was, he was sublimely indifferent to it. In one place, writing to Herder on 13 December 1786, he calls his journey a *salto mortale*, a leap in the dark, while to his secretary Seidel a little earlier, on 18 September, he had called it a ripe apple falling from the tree, which is quite another matter—Diese Reise ist wurcklich wie ein reifer Apfel der vom Baum fällt, ich hatte sie mir ein halb Jahr fruher nicht wunschen mogen. Similarly he says in his diary on 5 September 1786 that he feels like a child, whereas later, in a letter to Herder of 13 December, already quoted, he says that he is putting his childhood—Kinderschue—behind him. This, moreover, in a sentence that begins on the now familiar note of rebirth. On the face of it, one would say, there is a flat contradiction, you cannot both continue and discontinue, be reborn and not reborn, at one and the same time. Nor is it likely that a man would think of himself as a child at a turning-point in his life when he was realizing that at last he had come into his maturity. At first sight the paradox is hard to accept. But when we remember the divided existence that Goethe had been leading these many years past, one part of him exploring the laws of nature in field and laboratory, another part sequestering itself in Charlotte's retreat, the paradox disappears and everything falls into place. The breaking down of the partition and the pooling and ventilating of himself that ensued accounts for the sense of rebirth and of a new beginning; the pursuit of science, which went on serenely with no intermission, and his rapidly maturing philosophy of science accounts for the sense of continuity.

In this light the change that took place in Goethe in 1786, far from being the enigma that it is sometimes made out to be, is as lucid and as logical as a syllogism or a parallelogram of forces. If Goethe was to be Goethe, the change was bound to come and would have come sooner or later, even if there had been no such place as Italy for him to go to. He might have gone somewhere else, or he might at a pinch have stayed at home, and still the change, the fundamental change, would have worked itself out and set him free. It was in himself that the determining forces lay and, no matter where he went, he would have taken them with him and found the means of resolving them. This is why he could say not untruthfully to Carl

August, on setting out on 2 September, that he wanted to lose himself in some region of the world where he was unknown and, again, to Kestner on 19 February 1757, when he was settled in Rome, that he had landed in this country more by chance than by intention—*Ich bin hierher mehr verschlagen worden als gereisst*. In neither case was he speaking the whole truth, and in addressing Carl August he was saying less than he knew, but he was speaking part of the truth, and it happens to be the part that is most frequently overlooked.

XIII

THE LURE OF ITALY

BUT no account of Goethe can dismiss Italy in a sentence. Everything goes to show that it had been in his mind for years as a country that he must see with his own eyes sooner or later. His father had travelled in Italy as a young man and written an account of his journey, and he probably held out a prospect of his son's doing likewise long before he was old enough to know what it meant. Moreover, the name of Winckelmann, the great pioneer in classical archaeology then living and working in Rome, was in the air and Goethe soon encountered it. We know this because on going to Leipzig in 1765 he began to study figure drawing with a follower of Winckelmann's, Adam Friedrich Oeser, with whom he struck up a warm friendship; and this, followed by the tragic death of Winckelmann on his way back into Italy in 1768, served, we may be sure, to crystallize the notion of Italy in his mind and to give it shape and meaning for him. From then on, it would seem, he took it more or less for granted that he would go to Italy some day and see it for himself, like the wanderer in his poem who was so deeply moved by coming across a moss-grown architrave and broken columns of a temple in the country round Cumae:

Von dem Moos gedeckt ein Architrav!
Ich erkenne dich bildender Geist,
Hast dein Siegel in den Stein geprägt.

This was written about 1772, and in the next year we find Schönborn reporting to Gerstenberg that Goethe, whose walls he found covered with reproductions of Greek and Roman art, had told him that he was intending to visit Italy in order to study its art treasures.

Then in 1775 when Goethe made up his mind to leave Frankfurt anyway, Italy offered itself as an obvious choice of direction, which made it all the easier for him to accept an invitation to go to Switzerland early in the summer. We know, and we do not need telling, that when he was there in June of this year he cast his eyes longingly towards the south, and we have it from Bodmer that he planned to extend his journey and go on to Milan, from where, no doubt, he would have been tempted farther. And while he failed to carry out his plan, the impulse persisted. He wrote to

there was no hint whatsoever in those days of whence or whither, or top or bottom, or inside or outside—noch keine Spur von *woher?* und *wohin?* von *woaus?* *woein?*—and this was precisely the source of all his troubles—deshalb auch einem solchen Wesen gar wundersame Prüfungen bevorstanden. We may recall, too, what Bretschneider wrote to Nicolai in 1775 or earlier, that Goethe was far too fickle to settle down to any school of thought or feeling, and that it would be just as easy to make a Moravian Brother of him as a free-thinker.

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Anna Luise Karsch in Berlin on 17 August that he might be going on another journey soon, but probably not in a northerly direction; and we know that he meant Italy when he said this, because only a few days before he had been urging Merck to persuade his father to send him to Italy, adding that he had to get away from Frankfurt in any case—*das heist, zu Ende dieses Jahres muss ich fort*. Again, at the end of October, when the prospect of going to Weimar seemed uncertain, his father, according to *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, gave him the alternative of Italy which he conditionally accepted and then cancelled. If we can trust his account he was actually on his way to Italy when the Weimar coach picked him up at Heidelberg. Anyway, there is no good reason for doubting that if Weimar had not come off when it did he would have set out for Italy there and then, instead of waiting ten long years and more before going.

It will be clear from all this vacillating that if he had gone to Italy thus early the experience would not have been anything like as crucial as it proved to be in 1786. Italy in 1775 was far from being the matter of life and death to him that it became later. For the present it was simply a country that he dearly wished to visit, without being under the inner necessity of doing so. There is nothing here to surprise us, since, of the various countries that he might have thought of visiting, Italy, both for its own sake and, still more, for what lay behind, was by all odds the most inviting. In wishing to see it he was in no way different from the general run of artists and writers (and Goethe was both artist and writer) in Germany at that time. We can take it for granted, without looking for evidence in every case, that they all in their degree, some vaguely and aimlessly, some with clear knowledge and purpose, wanted to see Italy, and we know that many of them went there. When Goethe arrived in Rome in 1786 he found a whole colony of artistic and literary Germans, Tischbein and Angelika Kauffmann and Karl Philipp Moritz, to name only three of them, settled there ahead of him. There can be no question of Goethe's being pathologically concerned with Italy at this earlier crisis. It is true that on his way to Rome on 17 October 1786 he spoke in round numbers of thirty years of yearning—*eine Sehnsucht von dreissig Jahren*—and when he found himself in Rome at last, so he wrote in his joint letter to his friends in Weimar on 1 November, he felt that the dreams of his youth were now being realized—*Alle*

Träume meiner Jugend seh ich nun lebendig—all of which suggests that what was now happening was the climax of a long process of gravitation dating from his very early life. And his mother might be quoted in support, for she said somewhere before 1775 that he had been dreaming of going to Rome day and night from the time he was a child, and she expressed the same opinion again in 1786 and 1787 when he was finally there.

What makes us hesitate about taking these retrospections literally is the paucity, not to say the complete lack, of evidence in the contemporary documents to support them. If Goethe had been obsessed with Italy, if Italy had dominated his mind, as early as this, say any time before his going to Weimar, he would surely have let it out somewhere either in his letters or his conversations, for, so far as we can judge, there was nothing of any moment in his youthful days that he managed to conceal. Everything, it seems, got scribbled down, or hinted at, or blurted out to someone. Why, if Italy were already the be-all and end-all to him, did he give no suggestion of it anywhere? Why, for that matter, did he not go there and satisfy himself, as he could have managed to do somehow if he had been determined about it?

What the early documents do tell us, and tell us clearly, is that his state of mind in those years was one that precluded any such localization of his desires and enthusiasms. It is only putting the basic problem of his early life in another way to say that it was the lack of any localization, the lack of any sure objective, that drove him to despair. If we want to catch his sense of direction then, in the years before Weimar, we can take it from Faust's wild impulse to strike out into the open—*Flieh! Auf hinaus in's weite Land!*—or from Werther's equally ubiquitous feeling that, for all his mortal confinement, he could leave his prison when he chose, without, it would seem, knowing or caring where he would go when he left it, content with the sweet sense of freedom that he enjoyed—*das susse Gefühl von Freyheit*. Or again, and here perhaps most conclusively of all, from the confession in Goethe's letter to Auguste Stolberg of 3 August 1775, already quoted, that as soon as he let go of the place he happened to be clinging to, like a butterfly in a high wind, he was blown in every direction. We shall look in vain in his *Sturm und Drang* frenzy for any local habitation or place of refuge. As Goethe said to Marianne Willemer on 3 January 1828, after looking over some old letters,

there was no hint whatsoever in those days of whence or whither, or top or bottom, or inside or outside—noch keine Spur von *woher?* und *wohin?* von *woaus?* *woein?*—and this was precisely the source of all his troubles—deshalb auch einem solchen Wesen gar wundersame Prüfungen bevorstanden. We may recall, too, what Bretschneider wrote to Nicolai in 1775 or earlier, that Goethe was far too fickle to settle down to any school of thought or feeling, and that it would be just as easy to make a Moravian Brother of him as a free-thinker

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antiquity, should not have grown rather than declined since the uncritical days when he read Homer one minute and Ossian the next. Signs are not lacking that it grew and matured steadily and would have done so under any circumstances. The choice of subject in *Iphigenie*, though scarcely the working out of the subject, points to it; and so does the choice of Proserpina for a poetic interlude, and of Elpenor for a drama that he never completed. It is significant too that in the course of the Charlotte years he began to feel his way epigrammatically or briefly with classical metres, trochaic and elegiac, and so to come closer to classical models, as in 'Anakreons Grab' or 'Der Becher', than he had done before. Even Mignon has her archaeological moment when she speaks of a house with columns and shining interior and marble statues, into which, as the poem says or very nearly says, she seems to have strayed by mistake:

Kennst du das Haus? auf Säulen ruht sein Dach,
Es glänzt der Saal, es schimmert das Gemach,
Und Marmorbilder stehn und sehn mich an
Was hat man dir, du armes Kind, getan?

But it would be wrong to interpret the figure of Mignon, dark-eyed and mystery-haunted, as the by-product of a passion for archaeology or for any purely cultural ideal. It is only when the spell of Charlotte supervenes that Mignon becomes intelligible as a creation of Goethe's, growing like his other creations out of first-hand experience. In this light, however, seen as a thing of vision coming to life like a smouldering flame at the moment when the spreading sentimentality, the *Sehnsucht*, of the Charlotte years impinges on the latent desire for Italy, she is as intelligible as we could wish.

From Mignon to the crisis of 1786 in its pathological aspect it is only a step or a shift of emphasis. The stage is now set and the ground prepared for the excessive and sometimes violent terms that Goethe uses to describe his craving for Italy and the suffering it caused him. Writing in his diary of 10 October 1786 when the suffering, or the worst of it, was over, he says with relief that he can at last confess to the malady and the madness that had afflicted him—*meine Kranckheit und thorheit*—adding that for years he had been unable so much as to look at a piece of Latin or at anything that reminded him of Italy without undergoing the most desperate torment, and that if he had not made his plan for this

journey and carried it out he would have gone under completely—so wär ich rein zu Grunde gegangen. Nine days later he said in the same spirit that he was being driven by a passion that was beyond words—eine unsagliche Leidenschaft—and in this driven condition he remained until with the lapse of days he found himself in Rome at last where, as he believed, he would find the start of a new life.

It was thus mysteriously, with Mignon as a sort of precursor, that Italy, as he understood the word, became so deeply, so passionately, involved in his mind and person at the time of his coming to full maturity, the consequence being that instead of our now having to deal simply and solely with a nature-philosophy which ripened at its appointed time, we have also to deal with an interpretation, one might almost say a philosophy, of classicism, which not only associated itself with his nature-philosophy but grafted itself on to it and, for a time at least, became inseparable from it. Any analysis of Goethe's mind in the Italian years and the years immediately following Italy must face the pros and cons of this uneasy marriage.

Looking back over the not far from forty years of Goethe's life that preceded this union, we can soon see that of the two, the nature-philosophy and the classicism, it is the nature-philosophy that shows a rectilinear development, from the blind enthusiasm for nature in Strassburg and Frankfurt to the controlled and methodical pursuit of science that grew out of it in Weimar in the early eighties, and the classicism that comes deviously and irrationally via his entanglement with what we call Charlotte. Until 1775, as we have seen, there is nothing to perplex us about it. If Goethe had classical associations in his mind at this early time and was drawn, for example, to the Prometheus theme or, as his references show, to the Orestes theme, this does not entitle us to call him a budding classicist, because we find him at the same time drawn, and not less strongly drawn, to the almost medieval Faust legend and to the mists of Ossian and to Shakespeare and to the Bible. We have only to remember that his mind in these *Sturm und Drang* years was a chaos, whichever way we look at it, in which no single tradition, whether German or Greek or English, whether native or foreign, can be said to dominate.

When we come to ask where the Classics stood in Goethe's mind during the Charlotte régime we find ourselves, quite apart

from Mignon, on much more ambiguous ground. For on the score of discipline and refinement of form, discernible even in the prose *Iphigenie* of 1779 as compared with almost anything of earlier date, Charlotte might be said to be drawing him nearer to the Classics, the French Classics if not the Greek, and so to be bridging the gap between Frankfurt and Italy. This is a common and very convenient interpretation, which derives support from the palpable affinity between *Iphigenie* and the dramas of Racine. But it is an interpretation that is apt to do more harm than good, the truth being that in all its profounder aspects, moral as well as metaphysical, the pull of Charlotte with its feminism, its soulfulness, its Christianity, was away from the ancients, not towards them. What, one may ask, could be farther from Greece and Rome, what could be more strictly modern, than the 'Mondlied', or *Tasso*, or the daily love-letters? The gulf between all this and the classical world, especially the classical world as Goethe and his contemporaries saw it, is so wide that it could hardly be wider. It is in this fundamental, this almost diametrical, opposition of spirit that the true interpretation lies. And the event bears it out, for when once Goethe's mind turned resolutely towards the classical world, the break with the Charlotte way of feeling and also with Charlotte herself was sure to come, as every reader of Goethe knows and feels, and did come, inexorably, whether he wanted it or not.

This was a consequence, the inevitability of which was forced poignantly on him as the months went by, and he saw his old self steadily receding in the distance. If he had known himself better, he might have extracted the lesson years before from *Iphigenie*, in which, if we look beneath the surface, the clash between Charlotte and the pagan world is so readily discoverable. But, as usual in all that affected his inner life, he had to wait for the truth and learn it the slow and painful way. It is, then, in this deep-seated incompatibility in his inner mind between the ancient world and Charlotte that we find the basic explanation why Goethe's desire to visit Italy, normal enough and moderate enough to begin with, became later so immoderate, so abnormal, with the result that in the end he flung himself at Italy with a violence in excess of his need and clung to it, as we shall see, long after it had ceased to be vital to him.

It would seem as if each phase of Goethe's development had its price, a price that was paid with interest in the phase that followed.

We have seen already that only the long incorrigibility of his emotional life in Frankfurt could account for the long subservience to Charlotte. And, similarly, only the long subservience to Charlotte with its queer dichotomies and its forcing on him of a kind of sensibility, a philosophy, that he was bound to throw off sooner or later, could account for the extremity of his feelings about Italy and the persistence with which he held to them. If he was to be cured of the sickness of the Charlotte years, now that they had served their purpose, he must seek out the opposite of them and recover his health there. It was in this sense that he said to Carl August in a letter of 25 January 1788, shortly before his return to Weimar, that his main purpose in Italy had been to cure himself of an affliction, moral and physical too, that had tormented him in Germany—*mich von den phisisch moralischen Übeln zu heilen die mich in Deutschland qualten*—and again, more ironically and racily, to Eichstadt nearly thirty years later in a letter of 29 January 1815, written when he was putting his *Italienische Reise* together, that 1786 was the time when his natural instincts freed themselves drastically from a state of morbid confinement—*wo das bisher beengte und beängstigte Natur-Kind in seiner ganzen Lohheit wieder nach Luft schnappt*. This presumably was what he meant, though he had not clearly formulated it yet, when he referred to the years before Italy as stagnant or arrested—*den stockenden Zeiten*—as he does in his letter to Charlotte of 6 January 1787. If such is the true diagnosis, as Goethe evidently believed, then Mignon must be regarded as somewhat in the nature of an added complication, the virus, as it were, attacking the remedy. Italy, the corrective of Charlotte, is subdued for a brief space to her spirit and seen with her eyes.

But when all has been said about the fever that attended the Italian crisis, we cannot question the soundness and the appropriateness of the Italian or rather of the Latin form for Goethe's immediate mood and purpose. Having at last rid himself of the insidious transcendentalism of the Charlotte stage of his development he found himself filled with a sense of strength and stability that he had never known before. Only those who can look back at the whole of his former life and recall the extreme volatilities and sublimations of spirit that had attended it thus far can enter fully into what he meant when he wrote to the Herders on 10 November 1786, after only a few weeks in Rome, that what delighted him

most was the feeling of weight and steadiness, of solidity, to use his own word, that was becoming habitual with him—Was ich aber sagen kann und was mich am tiefsten freut ist die Würckung, die ich schon in meiner Seele fühle. es ist eine innre Solidität mit der der Geist gleichsam gestempelt wird. This is an observation which he restates to Charlotte in the same uncompromising terminology in a letter dated a day later, saying that he realizes what he had not clearly realized until now, that the effect of living in Rome on those who respond to it seriously is to fill them with a sense and a conception of solidity they had never known before—Was aber das grosste ist und was ich hier fühle; wer mit Ernst sich hier umsieht und Augen hat zu sehen muss *solid* werden, er muss einen Begriff von Solidität fassen der ihm nie so lebendig ward

This was no fugitive or illusory experience but one that persisted, as we can see from his putting it again, this time more subtly, to Charlotte weeks afterwards, on 27 January 1787, his life, he says, has at last acquired a ballast to weight it down, and hence he need no longer fear the ghosts that have so often played with him in the past—Meine Existenz hat nun einen Ballast bekommen, der ihr die gehorige Schweere giebt ich fürchte mich nun für denen Gespenstern nicht mehr, die so oft mit mir gespielt haben. Here there is no mistaking the echo of the Charlotte days, and we catch it again in a remark to Kestner almost two years after this, on 10 November 1788, to the effect that if he had gone to Italy twenty years earlier it might have been better for him, but in that case he would not have got the 'solidity' out of his experience.

But it is not until he says it in verse that we get the full meaning of his words. Only when we come to the *Roman Elegies*, a cycle of love-poems in elegiacs, not completed till 1790 and not published till 1795 but possibly begun in Rome and in any case deriving from there, do we get the impact of the change that has been wrought in him. Nothing short of these plangent hexameters and pentameters with their Latin weight and firmness was capable of expressing his new experience of the parts of him coming together and cohering in one piece, and it was a right instinct that made him choose this metre in preference to the metres that had served him in the past—Dir, Hexameter, dir, Pentameter, sei es vertrauet. The conviction that he had reached the goal he sought and could relax and be happy in it visits him in poetry for the first time in his life. Others, he says, may pay homage where they will,

he has found himself at last—Ehret, wen ihr auch wollt! Nun bin ich endlich geborgen! From this vantage-ground he can look back serenely at the life he left behind him in the north, where, as he puts it, the grey days held him prisoner, the skies were dark and heavy and there was neither shape nor colour in the world about him:

O wie fühl' ich in Rom mich so froh! gedenk' ich der Zeiten,
Da mich ein graulicher Tag hinten im Norden umfing,
Trube der Himmel und schwer auf meine Scheitel sich senkte,
Farb- und gestaltlos die Welt um den Ermatteten lag.

What makes these elegies especially revealing, coming when they do, is that they not only convey the weight of his mind, as these sonorous distichs show, but also convey the order and lucidity of it. He has told us repeatedly in a great variety of terms that the change that took place in him was due to the unifying of his mental powers, which, having operated for years in a painfully diffused and divided fashion, now joined up with one another in a united front. 'I cannot say', he wrote on 1 November 1786, 'that I have added to my stock of ideas or run into anything I didn't know before, but the ideas I brought with me have become so firm, so vital and so coherent, that they affect me like new ideas'—So bestimmt, so lebendig, so zusammenhangend. It is this coherence, this living interrelation of parts, that now works itself out poetically, as we can plainly see it doing in the first elegy when he insists that it is not enough to go to Rome with his book-learning, but he must also go to it with his emotions and passions; only by giving the whole of his nature can he put himself in living contact with his environment. This is what he says here, or comes as near to saying as his erotic theme allows:

Eine Welt zwar bist du, o Rom; doch ohne die Liebe
Ware die Welt nicht die Welt, ware denn Rom auch nicht Rom.

It is the same desire for close co-ordination, for bringing related things together as compactly as possible, that prompts him in the third elegy to assemble all the Greek and Latin love-myths, divine and semi-divine, Luna and Endymion, Hero and Leander, and the rest, in order to focus them on Rome, ancient and modern, and so on himself at this Roman climax in his life; and then, not content with this, to tie the whole bundle together again in a common psychology of love in which, with the same sort of

compressing and interrelating as pervades the rest of the poem, desire follows immediately on seeing, and fulfilment on desire—
 Folgte Begierde dem Blick, folgte Genuss der Begier.

Having had the parts of himself so far asunder for so long, it seems that he cannot now get them near enough to one another. Not only must seeing and desiring and doing be linked together without interval; his sense-perceptions must do the same, the eye performing the work of the hand, the hand performing the work of the eye, while the mind weighs and compares:

Dann versteh' ich den Marmor erst recht · ich denk' und vergleiche,
 Sehe mit fuhlendem Aug', fuhle mit sehender Hand

This emphatic connecting of likes and unlikes runs through the whole cycle, dictating the swift journey across Europe from west to east with the song 'Malbrough' to hold it together like a string in the second elegy, or the bold foreshortening of history in the sixteenth where, in the space of half a dozen lines, we see Rome built and destroyed and built again:

Sahst eine Welt hier entstehn, sahst dann eine Welt hier in Trummern,
 Aus den Trummern aufs neu' fast eine grossere Welt.

It is all in keeping with the character of these elegies that their underlying thought is never explicitly stated; on the surface they are not philosophical. But there is a philosophy contained in them, and it reaches us in a variety of ways, whether we find it in cosmic passages like these where Goethe sweeps the totality of things, the growth of Rome and the sun circling the earth, into his poetic framework, or in the pagan conception of love that is traceable on every page. If this is not enough there are the eighth and ninth elegies, in which, with obvious implications, human nature and outer nature are placed side by side. In the eighth elegy a girl's growth from childhood is compared with the ripening of the vine in the vineyard, an analogy that is carried a stage farther in what must be an unused fragment of the cycle (now *Venezianische Epigramme*, 101), while in the ninth elegy the lover's fire is compared, even more closely, with the fire in the hearth, which leaps into flame and dies and leaps into flame again:

Morgen fruhe geschäftig verlässt sie das Lager der Liebe,
 Weckt aus der Asche behend Flammen aufs neue hervor.

Best of all at this point there is the twelfth elegy, where Goethe links his Roman amours with the Eleusinian mysteries and the

myth of Demeter, in which 'the bridal-bed of the goddess swelled with sheaves' and the harvest was bountiful:

das Hochzeitbette der Gottin
Schwoll von Ähren, und reich druckte den Acker die Saat.

The connexion between the *Roman Elegies* and the rest of Goethe at this time needs no labouring. Whether he looks at natural objects or at works of art, or whether he himself, as in the *Roman Elegies*, composes a work of art, the basic ideas are the same and can be sensed at every turn. Examining plants by the sea-shore near Venice on 6 October 1786, he notes with relief in his diary how good it is that all this, meaning his pursuit of science, is no longer shut off in a compartment by itself, but has now become a part of everything else—Wie wohl wird mir's dass das nun Welt und Natur wird und aufhort Kabinet zu seyn. Commenting on a popular play he saw at the theatre two days before, he refrains from approving here and disapproving there, saying that it is not the details but the whole thing that matters—das Ganze machts, nicht das einzelne. It is especially this notion of the whole, the undivided whole, inherent in both of these passages which now takes possession of him, so that the word 'whole'—ganz—is for ever on his tongue. Writing to Charlotte about himself on 20 January 1787, he reminds her in a passage quoted above that he has only one life to live and that he has staked and is staking the *whole* of it in his present venture; and almost exactly a year later, on 19 January 1788, he tells her that he is more of a whole than he was—so bin ich wenigstens ganzer geworden als ich war. And so on indefinitely. The letter to Charlotte of 8 June 1787 is particularly valuable because he refers here in quick succession to human life and to plant life and lets us see the same idea working in each case. First he says that he has been meeting people who are happy because they are whole, that he must strive to be like them, and that he would rather die than live the sort of life (clearly he means the divided life) he had been living of late—Übrigens habe ich glückliche Menschen kennen lernen, die es nur sind weil sie *ganz* sind, . . . das will und muss ich nun auch erlangen, und ich kanns, wenigstens weiss ich wo es liegt und wie es steht. . . . Wie das Leben der letzten Jahre wollt ich mir eher den Todt gewünscht haben. And then almost immediately he tells her that he has been botanizing and getting at the secret of plant organization, which, as

he indicates, is something simple, consistent, pertaining to all living things, and so in every sense of the word affecting the whole. It is the same, whatever region of life he touches.

The only difference between these passages and the *Roman Elegies* in respect of their philosophy is that the latter are, if anything, the more individual and therefore the more revealing. Far from betraying the dead hand of the past, as is sometimes held, they may be said to offer a completer, a more concrete, expression of what he had been trying to say about himself sporadically in letters and diaries; they demonstrate, if demonstration is needed, that the change in him that he had been harping on for so many months and years was not a matter of mere head-work or self-deception but had genuinely affected and transformed his whole person. Whatever we may think of his Italian *credo* in other respects, there can be no doubt that at this stage, in and around 1790, it accords wonderfully with the rest of him. On this summit of life, science, nature, morals, poetry, and the Classics meet at a common point of intersection and are, for the time being, in harmony with one another.

XIV

PROFIT AND LOSS

THE victory over himself that Goethe celebrated in the *Roman Elegies* was in one way decisive. From his early youth he had been beset by an inner problem, the problem of his feelings and susceptibilities, which, as we have seen, were so unstable as to interfere with him to a most unusual degree in his daily life, compelling him to disburden himself incessantly in letters, addressed first to a variety of friends, of whom the earliest is Behrisch, and then in Weimar addressed chiefly to Charlotte; compelling him also to create successively, at an interval of several years, the two figures of Werther and Tasso; Werther the most defenceless, Tasso the most exacerbated of mortals. The concern with himself, the introspection, that gave rise to these extraordinary documents must have been acute and at times alarming. 'They tell', says Werther in his letter of 16 March 'of a noble breed of horses, which when overdriven and overheated instinctively bite open a vein with their teeth in order to relieve themselves I often feel like that.' And on 28 June 1784, some ten years later, we find Goethe saying to Charlotte in a passage quoted already that he feels as helpless as an egg with half a shell, unless he has her to protect him. It was not for nothing that images like these came to be used, whether personally or imaginatively. We can well believe that by 1786 the cup of misery or, as Tasso puts it, the panel of torture was full, the last word had been written on it, and he could endure no more:

es grabt sich wie ein Schluss
Des Schicksals noch zuletzt am ehren Rande
Der vollgeschriebnen Qualentafel ein

It was providential that he had finally got himself in hand and was done with this unhealthy preoccupation, which, if it had lasted much longer, would have lasted for life, with results that could not have been other than destructive. From now on, say from the time of his return to Weimar, he is master of his instability to the extent that he can deal with it as it comes, silently or poetically, without involving others. The proof of this is that the intimate letters, so habitual with him thus far, and, it may be admitted, so precious to those who study him, cease now to be written and are

never resumed save at the more impersonal level of his correspondence with Zelter or Marianne Willemer, or such others as shared his confidence in later life. The spectacle of Goethe's inner self laid bare as in an *écorché*, with the very nerves showing, held up for all to see in the unguarded letters of more than twenty years, is no longer accessible to us. It is almost with a sense of loss that we find him suddenly become so self-contained, so little in need of unbosoming himself. Whereas hitherto he had been almost incapable of writing a letter, except the occasional official letter, without saying exactly how he felt at the time of writing, so insistent were his fluctuations of mood from moment to moment, from now on it is only on rare occasions that he experiences the need of doing so, and even then the most we learn is that he is gloomy or restless, or in a bad temper, none of which in its context proves illuminating. In forty years of perpetual letter-writing or letter-dictating, from the Italian journey to his death, there may be half-a-dozen such references, hardly more, to set against the wellnigh countless references in earlier life.

It would be easy to argue, coupling these observations with occasional remarks of his own, that he had sacrificed more than he had gained by growing up, and that if from now on he put less feeling into his letters it was because he felt less and, as Robertson maintains, had 'lost his artist's soul'. Speaking to Gerning on 18 August 1793 about his essay on Strassburg cathedral and other early writings, Goethe seems to deprecate their excessive liveliness as a fault that he had outgrown and put behind him—*Wir empfinden da zu lebhaft*. *Werther*, he said to Eckermann on 2 January 1824, was simply one bombshell after another—*Es sind lauter Brandraketen!*—and he dreaded the thought of going through all this turmoil again. At other times we find him making what would seem to be the same admission regretfully, and longing to return to the happy days when feeling was everything and he lived carelessly, as he put it to Boisserée on 18 June 1819, on the fleeting joys and sorrows of the moment—*die schone Zeit wo man in den Tag hinein nach Freud und Leid hascht*. It was in similar mood that he observed to J. Ch. Lobe in July of the next year how all men were like Adam in that sooner or later they were driven out of 'the paradise of the emotions' into the chilly desert—*Jeder Mensch ist ein Adam; denn jeder wird einmal aus dem Paradiese der warmen Gefühle vertrieben*.

There are at least two occasions on which he gives notable expression to this sentiment in poetic form. One is the poet's cry, in the *Vorspiel of Faust*, to have his youth back at all costs with its violent joys and pains and loves and hates:

Gib ungebandigt jene Triebe,
Das tiefe, schmerzenvolle Glück,
Des Hasses Kraft, die Macht der Liebe,
Gib meine Jugend mir zurück!

And the other, less familiar but more exact in its rendering of what he knew, is spoken in the opening monologue of *Pandora* by the aged Epimetheus who looks back as from a great distance at himself when young, continually oscillating between the extremes of fullness and dearth, delight and discontent, and contrasts those crowded days with the spent and shadowy existence that he is now compelled to lead:

So flogst du, kraft'ge Zeit der Jugend, mir dahin,
Abwechselnd immer, immer wechselnd mir zum Trost,
Von Fülle zum Entbehren, von Entzucken zu Verdruss.

Yet the very authenticity of these two passages, one written at about fifty and the other at about sixty, is proof that we need not take them for gospel; it was only because Goethe still had the emotional flow he yearned for that he was able to convey the sense of having lost it in such moving words. He would scarcely have written so powerful a line as that spoken by Faust when he sees the sunrise and experiences the shock of joy and pain in tremendous alternation—*Mit Schmerz- und Freuden wechselnd ungeheuer*—if his *Sturm und Drang* had not been vividly awake in him. And it is unlikely that the line or the impressive speech containing it was written before he was seventy-six.

Quite apart from what his poetry has to say on the subject, there are sufficient indications of a purely casual sort, chance remarks and chance opinions, to make it clear that his old excitability, though of necessity mitigated as time went on by the ageing of his body, never quite left him but persisted even under the sometimes cold and forbidding manner of his late years. Riemer, whose acquaintance with him began in 1803, could only compare his extreme sensitiveness with the phenomenon of electricity manifesting itself instantaneously at the moment of contact, and Johanna Schopenhauer, who met him first in 1806, wrote to her

son Arthur that she never saw so mobile a face. It is interesting to see how all the old marks and labels repeat themselves at one time or another, if we watch for them. Thus Caroline Herder finds him on his return from Italy (17 August 1788) just as much a chameleon as ever, despite his transformation—*Er ist beinahe wie ein Cameleon, bald bin ich ihm gut, bald nur halb*. Vert notes in a letter to Rahel of 19 October 1794 exactly what Kraus had noted in 1775, that Goethe had a way of breaking off a conversation abruptly and walking out, leaving his interlocutor standing Stephan Schutze, who had discussions with him somewhere between 1806 and 1814 and seems to have watched him closely, was struck, much as Wieland was twenty or thirty years before, by the variety of his moods—*Diese grosse Verschiedenheit oder Menge von Stimmungen*—and could only ascribe it to an extreme mobility and adaptability of feeling—*eine grosse Schmiegsamkeit des Gefühlssystems . . . ein wandelbares Mitempfinden*—a characteristic which Soret observed again at a still later date (15 February 1824). Schutze seems to have talked to Goethe about it, because he quotes him as saying dryly in this connexion that people didn't keep up with him, and that when they thought he was still in Weimar he was already in Erfurt—*Wenn die Leute glauben, ich ware noch in Weimar, dann bin ich schon in Erfurt*.

Goethe also told Countess O'Donell on 24 November 1812 that the reason he preferred dictating his letters to writing them was that his thoughts ran too fast for his pen and that his handwriting was so variable it would change three times in the one letter. Even dictating was too slow for him. He told Zelter once, on 28 December 1830, when he was past eighty, and he repeated his words a few days later to another correspondent, that he wished he had someone, as it were, in his head to write down his thoughts in shorthand without his having to take time to say them—*ich wollte nur, meine Gedanken hatten einen Geschwindschreiber, ohne dass ich sie aussprache*—again reminding us of his early life when he expressed himself in almost identical terms to Salzmann. Sometimes, and this also recalls him as he was then, he was inclined to look at the bright side of himself, sometimes at the dark. He confessed to Schiller at the beginning of their closer acquaintance, on 27 August 1794, that he was at the mercy of something vaguely hesitant in himself that he was unable to control—*eine Art Dunkelheit und Zaudern . . . über die ich*

nicht Herr werden kann—which shows that the irrational part of his nature was still capable of molesting him. On the other hand, as he indicated to Zelter on 9 January 1824 when he had just written his 'Marienbader Elegie', he could not wish this part of his nature away because, troublesome as it sometimes was, it helped to make him a poet.

It will be evident from these sidelights alone, that his freedom, his relative freedom, from self-torment, and the peace of mind that resulted from it, was not, as Robertson implies, a negative victory of the sort that he might have won by suppressing or mortifying himself, but, as he claimed triumphantly in the *Roman Elegies*, a positive one whereby his inner nature was enriched. This does not mean, however, that his life henceforth was easy and harmonious. On the contrary, there are strong indications that the years in Weimar immediately following his journey to Italy, roughly speaking the early nineties, were as trying as any. But the difficulties that confronted him were of another sort. Having solved the inner problem or, rather, having secured himself against its more pernicious onslaughts so that he was not again to be under the necessity of writing a full-length *Werther* or *Tasso*, he was now confronted with the problem of the world about him which, strange to relate, he had never deliberately faced before.

Until now, it is fair to say, he had lived his life like an adolescent, actuated in everything he undertook more, far more, by considerations of his inner self than by considerations of his environment. Thus in going to Weimar in 1775 he was not making an objective choice of abode in which he weighed the value of one locality against another, so much as snatching at an opportunity, an opportunity of escape or of change, which he inwardly craved and needed. The attachments that grew and held him there were, from his point of view, of an essentially private nature too, all calculated, though for the most part unconsciously calculated, to help him in dealing with himself, either by steadying what was overdeveloped in him, or by encouraging what was underdeveloped, or in some way enabling him to complete the process of growing up. The question whether Weimar in itself was the right place for him was one that had never arisen, for the reason that he had not yet reached the point in his growth at which the question could profitably be asked. What he said late in life, on 28 March 1830, to von Muller about his always having studied art

and nature egoistically is, as he indicates in his letter to Körner of 26 November 1812, particularly applicable to the first half of his life, not, we may add, because he was more of an egoist than other men, but because he took so much longer than they to reach his maturity.

All he had to say about the choice of Weimar in general was that **something**, he knew not what, had brought him there, and that he was bound to it by association:

Ich bin dir nicht im stande selbst zu sagen,
Woher ich sei, wer mich hierher gesandt;
Von fremden Zonen bin ich her verschlagen
Und durch die Freundschaft festgebannt.

This was how it seemed to him in 1783 when he wrote these lines. And when he came back to Weimar after his Italian journey, he stayed there as a matter of course, reborn or not reborn. In reading his mind at this stage, we have to remember that while, psychologically speaking, he was in the position of a young man who had just come of age, he was also in point of fact a man not far from middle years and less inclined to consider a complete change of environment than if he were fifteen or twenty years younger. But there is no good reason for assuming that he ever asked himself whether he should stay or not. To Weimar he had come in what now seemed to be the distant past, and to Weimar he belonged henceforth.

If we compare his experience on returning to Weimar with his experience on first going there in 1775, the difference would seem to be that in 1775 he was too much in the dark and had to wait more or less in the mood of his 'Einschränkung' for things to happen—

Ich weiss nicht was mir hier gefällt,
In dieser engen, kleinen Welt
Mit holdem Zauberband mich halt.
Vergess' ich doch, vergess' ich gern,
Wie seltsam mich das Schicksal leitet,
Und ach, ich fühle, nah und fern
Ist mir noch manches zubereitet,

—whereas now he was too little in the dark and saw perhaps too clearly for his comfort. Though he could not be unmindful of the great advantage he enjoyed of being free to follow his poetic and philosophical bent and to live out his life creatively, 'als Künstler', as he put it on 17 March 1788 to Carl August, to whom as part of the general stock-taking he now pays impressive tribute in the

Venezianische Epigramme, calling him ruler and patron, Augustus and Maecenas, in one, he could not lightly overlook the peculiar handicaps that were there too. Even his private life, hitherto so fascinating in all its ups and downs, seems for the first time somewhat unenviable. For while it is easy to dispose of the cohabitation with Christiane Vulpius, which began almost immediately after his return from Italy, as part of the setting for the *Roman Elegies*, and so to let it be seen for the time being in an idealized light, there can be no doubt that it was not long before he found it embarrassing. Carl August may have been overstating the case when he said towards the end of his life to von Müller that Christiane had alienated Goethe from society and spoilt everything—Die Vulpius habe alles verdorben, ihn der Gesellschaft entfremdet—but anyone can see that these blunt words were not without their measure of truth. Whatever benefits the Christiane affair brought into his life, it had the immediate disadvantage of punctuating his estrangement from Charlotte in a socially demonstrative and even provocative manner, which can only have served to isolate him further in a world he had already grown away from. These are matters that it is neither useful nor possible to explore, and they were perhaps of passing, rather than of permanent, importance. But they have their place in the somewhat discouraging picture. It may well have been this phase of his development he was thinking of when he said in the *Wahlverwandtschaften* that each decade of a man's life has its own character and that you cannot with impunity try to be older or younger than you are.

More serious than the domestic handicap, because more difficult to offset, was the literary handicap, which he found blocking the way forward for him as a poet. There was a time years before when he stood in the vanguard of the new movement, one might go so far as to say that he embodied the new movement in his own person, so unrivalled had he proved himself in creative strength and subtlety. Thanks to *Werther* and *Gotz von Berlichingen* and a variety of shorter utterances in prose and verse, his prestige as an author seemed assured, his prospects unbounded. At twenty-five he was in the position that young poets dream of: he had the world, the literary world, at his feet, all he had to do was to advance at his leisure and take possession of it. Or so it seemed.

Whether he was fully alive to this opportunity we are not able to determine, but he cannot have been wholly unaware of it. If he

failed to see it himself, there were others, friends and admirers, to see it for him. What we do know is that he was uninfluenced by it and, in obedience to impulses that were not apparent at the time, conducted his life for the next fifteen years in complete indifference to it. He may not have realized this at once, but he did so as the years went by, and in his Italian studies, if not before, deliberately excluded any thought of what was going on at home—unbekummert, was wahrer Zeit in Deutschland vorgegangen—as he tells us bluntly in his *Metamorphose der Pflanzen*. The not unnatural result was that when he reached the point at which he felt sure of himself and was ready to co-operate in the world of letters there were none or few to co-operate with. The shock of disappointment, which he seems to have been wholly unprepared for, was such that, as he confesses, he would have given up the practice of poetry altogether, if that had been possible—die Ausübung der Dichtkunst hatte ich gerne völlig aufgegeben, wenn es möglich gewesen wäre. The works which he found everyone, students and courtiers too, reading enthusiastically reflected for him the very vices he had been expelling from his system and, as he hoped, putting behind him for ever. Such were Schiller's *Rauber* and, worse still, the works of Heinse, which with their cult of beauty and sensuousness seemed to be basely parodying the Italian ideal that he had come home to teach. 'Imagine my plight', he says frankly. 'I had returned with my ideas clarified, eager to practise and to propagate them, and here I found myself stuck down between Franz Moor [Schiller's noisy hero] and Heinse's Ardinghello—zwischen Ardinghello und Franz Moor eingeklemmt.'

This was a strange moment in his creative life. To find himself frustrated at a time when he had just given such signal proof of his literary powers must have been truly perplexing. Not only had he recently conceived or executed the *Roman Elegies*, a startlingly new departure in poetic experience by any account, but he had also brought to completion a variety of projects of earlier date, the mood of which one would have thought him incapable of recovering, especially at such a time. It is true that in his bout with *Faust* he had the worst of it and came away, we must surmise, with a certain sense of defeat. But he was able to return to *Egmont*, a sixteenth-century historical subject dating from before Weimar, and bring it to a conclusion. This is surprising, when we consider how far he had travelled in the meantime. And, what is still more

surprising, he was able to work over the texture of his *Iphigenie* and put it in its final form, and to do this at the very beginning of his stay in Italy when the excitement of being reborn and re-fashioned and purged of all that *Iphigenie* really meant was working in him at its height. Most surprising of all, he was able to take up the manuscript of *Tasso*, which cannot have been more than half written when he set out from Weimar, and to recapture the accent and the atmosphere of it as surely as if the spell of Charlotte which had once inspired it were still unbroken. When we consider the empirical kind of poet Goethe was, unable to write well except about what he had gone through in person, it is astonishing that he should have been able to live on the plane of *Tasso* and the plane of the *Roman Elegies* at one and the same time, as he must have done in and about the year 1788 when the *Elegies* were on their way. We can well believe him when he says to Carl August on 28 March 1788, with the unfinished *Tasso* before him, that if he had not begun it earlier, he would not begin it now. The miracle is that he was able to feel his way back into it notwithstanding, and go on with it as if nothing had intervened.

It was after giving these various proofs of his versatility and resourcefulness as a poet and publishing them in the collected edition of his works of 1787-90, the first authorized edition, that he found himself so utterly out of tune with his generation. The Latin verse-form that he had adopted for his own use, hexameter or elegiac, was not new to the German tradition, but it was scarcely what his fellow-countrymen were looking for at this moment, and there was nothing in the changing aspect of the times to bring them nearer to it. The unpleasant truth may not have reached him immediately, but the day soon came when it did, showing him to his dismay how alone, how little understood, he was. Here he had come back from Italy, bringing his sheaves with him and expecting his friends to welcome and understand him, and instead, as he tells us in *Zur Morphologie*, they drove him to despair with their indifference and their lack of comprehension. No one was interested, no one knew what he was talking about—ich vermisste jede Theilnahme, niemand verstand meine Sprache. To Knebel he confessed in a letter of 25 October 1788, that his isolation was extreme and that he felt just like Epimenides when he woke up after his fifty-seven years' sleep.

To make matters worse, the French Revolution broke out within less than a year of his return home, just when he least wanted it, and filled him with apprehension. There is everything to show, and we have his express word for it, that it not only disturbed him when it came, but continued to disturb him for long after, and had a thoroughly bad effect on him creatively. Writing as late as 1823 in a review of Heinroth's *Anthropologie* he speaks of his having been concerned for many years with the problem of the Revolution—die vieljährige Richtung meines Geistes gegen die französische Revolution—and of his having tried his utmost to master it poetically, only to admit in the end that he had been defeated by it and had consumed his creative energy to no purpose—mein poetisches Vermögen fast unnutzerweise aufgezehrt. We know from his collected works that, beginning with *Der Grosskophia* in 1791, he made not less than five different attempts to write about the Revolution in dramatic form during the next decade, and we can well believe that this took more out of him than any writing, however strenuous, on subjects that were congenial.

It is an indication of his inability to grapple with the political theme that he succeeded with it only in proportion as he removed it from reality. The most impressive, or at any rate the least unimpressive, of this group of plays about the Revolution is the last, *Die Naturliche Tochter*, not begun till 1799 and not completed till 1804, fifteen years after the storming of the Bastille, and even then not quite completed in so far as he for years afterwards entertained the thought of writing a second drama in continuation of it. This, then, was the vein in which he felt himself best able to present the Revolution and to set down his mature thoughts about it. After trying to deal with it in prose comedy with results at their best scarcely worthy of his genius and at their worst, as in *Der Bürgergeneral*, not far from trivial, he withdrew into the most unworldly, the most idealistic, the most private region at his command, that of *Iphigeme* and *Tasso*, and continued his poetic deliberations there. It must have been like trying to write in a vacuum. So hushed and guarded is the atmosphere of this strange play that, as the speakers say in the opening scene, the far-off rumour of events can scarcely be heard:

Entfernten Weltgetöses Widerhall

Verklinge, nach und nach, aus meinem Ohr.

Goethe was not in doubt about the close relationship of this

drama to the two Charlotte dramas, because he immediately listed the three together, as constituting a volume, in a letter to his publisher, Cotta, of 14 June 1805; and this makes it all the more surprising that he should not have felt the inappropriateness of choosing so rarefied a poetic mode, a mode, moreover, intimately associated with a phase of his life that he had finished with long ago, in which to deliberate on such harsh and insistent realities. But there is a logic in all this, even if it is a logic of defeat. It was only because he had never come to grips with the Revolution that he was impelled to write about it in so unreal a way and to produce a work in which for once he seems to be offering the shadow without the substance, the ghost of a play instead of the play itself. The aspect of the Revolution that is dealt with or, should we say, adumbrated, is that of the ruling classes or, to put it more truly, that of the ruling families; the tragedy, as Goethe calls it, being the tragedy of a noblewoman, Eugenie, who is suddenly brought out of obscurity and plunged into the intrigues of a court which is itself threatened with destruction. Whatever he might have done finally with the projected sequel to *Die natürlche Tochter*, in the fifth act of which by marrying Eugenie to a commoner he was giving himself an excellent opportunity to break the magic circle, the work, as it stands, is and remains exclusively, almost inaccessibly, aristocratic, with only the muffled sound of thunder here and there to remind us that there are other forces in the offing. If he ever looks at these forces, he sees them in so purely negative a light that they lose all contact with history and become thin and meaningless, as when he says, or lets Eugenie say for him, that the elements of society are going apart from one another, and that each element is withdrawing coldly into itself:

Die zum grossen Leben
Gefugten Elemente wollen sich
Nicht wechselseitig mehr mit Liebeskraft
Zu stets erneuter Einigkeit umfassen.
Sie fliehen sich, und einzeln tritt nun jedes
Kalt in sich selbst zurück.

The words tell us by their very abstractness how little at home he was with public issues and how remotely he was compelled to deal with them. Reinhard was speaking out of a long experience of political life when he asked him in his letter of 30 October 1823

what grounds there were for treating these convulsive events in so proportioned and canonical a manner

If further evidence is needed of the maladjustment of Goethe's genius to the European crisis, we may turn to the account he gave in the *Kampagne in Frankreich* of the Prussian counter-revolutionary expedition in 1792, which he witnessed as a member of Carl August's staff, accompanying the army in the field to Valmy and back, seeing at first hand the grimness of war, refugees, burning villages, and the like, and even exposing himself to fire. What gives this piece of autobiography its specific character is that it is written from the point of view of one who stands aloof from the main business and reports on it as a detached and almost indifferent onlooker. This is not Goethe's usual way of writing and, interesting as the result is, it is not quite what we have come to expect of him. When all allowance has been made for the discomforts of campaigning in dirty weather, or of being snatched away from other tasks at the bidding of a ruler, there can be no doubt that, in spite of a famous *aperçu* about Valmy being a turning-point in history, he was utterly out of tune with the whole affair and only waiting to extricate himself when the opportunity came. He wrote to Friedrich Jacobi on 18 August 1792, with perhaps a partial distortion of the truth, that he did not care in the least whether the aristocrats got killed or the democrats—da mir weder am Tode der Aristocratischen noch Demokratischen Sunder im mindesten etwas gelegen ist—and he wrote on 7 July of the next year, on a second expedition to the front, that in the midst of these noisy events he felt like the melancholy Jaques in the play, looking on disapprovingly at the *mêlée*. A month later, on 19 August, he confessed to Jacobi again that this unsettled way of living and the preoccupation of everyone with politics was driving him back home where he could shut these things out and devote himself to his immediate circle and to the arts and sciences which were his proper domain—wo ich einen Kreis um mich ziehen kann, in welchen ausser Lieb und Freundschaft, Kunst und Wissenschaft nichts herein kann.

These were hindrances that, considered all together, might well have robbed him of the fruits of his genius. Not only had he taken so much longer than others to stabilize himself; in the process of doing so he had lost contact with his old environment and parted

company with all but a handful of his fellow men. It makes no difference whether we lay the blame for these hindrances chiefly at his own door or at the door of eighteenth-century Germany, they were there and could not be lightly removed. Something of the loneliness that descended on him after his return from Italy clung to him to the last and clings to him still. There will always be readers of Goethe to agree with Wilhelm Grimm who, as he said on 12 December 1809, felt this loneliness pervasively in most of his work.

Fortunately, nothing could now deprive Goethe of the gains he had made. Having at last arrived at a way of seeing things that satisfied him, he proceeded to live by it in the sphere of life that he had elected as his own. One of the advantages, perhaps the supreme advantage, that accrued from his reaching his mature position by so slow and devious a course was that when the time came he reached it with his whole person and not just with his intellectual part, which of itself might have acted with greater despatch. Outwardly, it must be admitted, there was nothing to stop him from developing much faster. The philosophy to which he had finally come was basically the philosophy he had learned from Herder as a young student of twenty and, this being so, it is only natural to ask why he did not stay with it consistently from the start. Having hit on what he wanted at so early a stage in his career, all he had to do, one might be pardoned for thinking, was to accept it, formulate it to the extent that he found desirable, and carry on from there in a straight line, as Herder did and as so many others have done.

This is a question to which there is no direct answer. We cannot be content to blame Herder's lack of method, as *Dichtung und Wahrheit* invites us to do.¹ All we can say is that, whether for accidental reasons or for reasons closer to the mystery of his personality, this is not what happened in Goethe's case and that, had it happened, he would have been a man much more like other men and not the very different man that he was. The most remarkable aspect of his early life is that while the emotions were dominant in him throughout, and it was emotional impulses, irrational impulses, that swept him out of Frankfurt in 1775 and dropped him at the feet of Charlotte and then swept him away

¹ Wäre Herder methodischer gewesen, so hätte ich auch für eine dauerhafte Richtung meiner Bildung die kostlichste Anleitung gefunden; aber er war mehr geneigt, zu prüfen und anzuregen als zu führen und zu leiten.

again in 1786, the whole story, when we look back at it, can be translated into conceptual terms and seen accordingly. In the long run this is how we are compelled to see it. It is impossible to make a satisfactory analysis of what happened to him in these years, the alternative being to make a fairy-tale of it, without putting it, however tentatively, into the abstract, without intellectualizing it. While admitting that any account of what he went through must fall short of the very complicated reality, it can be agreed, and this is the crux of the matter, that as a young man he was powerfully drawn away from an incipient philosophy of nature towards a philosophy that was opposed to nature and later, by an almost logical or dialectical change, restored at a higher level to the philosophy of nature again. We can see too that it was not so much as a thinker that he submitted to these mutations, for we may seriously doubt whether at any time in his growing years he thought out his position, but as a man living his life, so that it is scarcely too much to say that he enacted and experienced his philosophy, as well as enacting and experiencing the argument against it, before he clearly admitted it to himself and made it explicit.

It was because the experiencing of his philosophy preceded the formulating of it that he was so completely ready when it finally reached him. His instinct about it was now perfectly attuned to his reason, the one acted in unison with the other. This was what he was saying or trying to say when he insisted, in 1786 and after, that he was staking the whole of himself in what he was doing, or that he was being made over and being born again; when we consider how unbalanced or how divided his previous states of mind had been, it is not surprising that he felt and wrote as he did. And whether or not he was, pardonably, overstating what was going on inside him, the effects of the change are unmistakable. From now on it is broadly true that he avoided the one-sided departures and excesses of his past life and brought the whole of himself to bear at whatever point he was engaged. Much that is characteristic of him as a mature person seems to spring from a reluctance to let any fraction of himself go off on adventures of its own. Feeling without thought, to put it in its simplest terms, was as unacceptable to him as thought without feeling. Rather than divide himself he would prefer not to feel or to philosophize at all. This is what was in his mind when he made fun of the epistemologists by saying in one of his inimitable *Zahme Xenien* that if he had managed his

life well it was not for nothing; he had always been careful not to get involved in the bypaths of 'thinking about thinking':

Mein Kind, ich hab' es klug gemacht:

Ich habe nie über das Denken gedacht.

And it is all part of the same attitude if he says in another place that we only really think when what we are thinking about cannot be thought to a finish—Dass man gerade nur denkt, wenn man das, worüber man denkt, nicht ausdenken kann—meaning, as before, that the separate exercise of the abstract faculty, whereby a logical terminus can always be reached, is fruitless, and that the proper exercise of it is in conjunction with the senses, with experience, with life, in short, with data that cannot be finally resolved.

At every turn, we shall find, it is the unity of the consciousness that he insists on; this above all was what he required henceforth of himself and of his fellow men. Again and again he says it with all the weight and all the lucidity at his disposal. 'Man', he wrote in his essay on *Winckelmann* in 1805, 'can achieve much by using his individual faculties appropriately, he can do extraordinary things when he begins to combine them, but the supreme achievements only come when all his faculties are united.'¹

In *Dichtung und Wahrheit* he quotes as a splendid maxim of Hamann's what is obviously a restatement of his own maxim, though there is also a debt to Hamann at this point, that everything we do and say should come from our united powers—aus sämtlichen vereinigten Kräften—and that nothing can be achieved by using these powers separately—alles Vereinzelte ist verwerflich. 'Whoever is not convinced', he wrote again in a review of Stiedenroth's *Psychologie* in 1824, 'that he must develop all his human capacities—alle Manifestationen des menschlichen Wesens—his senses, his reason, his imagination, his understanding, into a real unit—zu einer entschiedenen Einheit—will be at odds with himself and the rest of the world to the end of his days', meaning, no doubt, much the same as he meant in *Wilhelm Meister* when he spoke of the unity, the healing unity—die heilsame Einheit—that Wilhelm had lost, or was in danger of losing; or in his *Betrachtung über Morphologie überhaupt*, where he says explicitly that it is only when we are able to forget the separate parts and sense the whole of ourselves that we reach the state of perfect health—da wir den

¹ Aber das Einzige, ganz Unerwartete leistet er nur, wenn sich die sämtlichen Eigenschaften gleichmässig in ihm vereinigen

vollkommensten Zustand der Gesundheit nur dadurch gewahr werden, dass wir die Teile unseres Ganzen nicht, sondern nur das Ganze empfinden.

It will be clear, especially from the last two quotations with their biological standard of reference, that the unity of our consciousness and of our human nature, by which he sets such store, is not a mechanical unity of the sort that can be reached by adding the parts together, but, as we know, an organic unity in which the sum is more than the parts. When he states his ideal in terms of unity or of the whole, he is simply stating his organic ideal in terms that are appropriate to it, since, as he maintains here, it is in organic things, and in them alone, that the principle of wholeness is manifested.

There is evidently a closer correspondence here between the philosophy and the acquiring of the philosophy than we usually find. The way in which Goethe reaches his ideas proves by a rare dispensation to be the very way in which these particular ideas ought to be reached. It is this correspondence, this identity almost, between the approach and the realization, between the ideas and the experience, rather than the finality of the ideas themselves that make Goethe's life so valuable. In respect of the ideas it is enough to recall that they were those pertaining to his age, an age in which the biological sciences were rapidly overhauling the physical, and that it would have been strange indeed if he had been untouched by them. What distinguished him from his contemporaries was his close personal relation to these ideas, by virtue of which he may be said not only to have experienced them intellectually, but also, in a very special sense of the word, to have embodied them and made them part of himself. In this way he was given an opportunity to explore them and learn from them that was denied to others, and it is probably by the use he made of this opportunity rather than by his performance as poet or scientist alone that we shall prefer to judge him in the end.

This does not mean that we dismiss or depreciate his performance as poet or scientist in order to reach something else in him, but, on the contrary, that we prize it the more highly. It is after all in his writings, poetic or otherwise, that we find the chief data for knowing him. Without them there is no Goethe. The difference between Goethe's writings and those of most other men of letters, using the word broadly to cover all who use the literary medium, is that wherever we touch him, in a lyric, or an epigram, or a novel, or a

drama, or an essay, or a review, or a scientific monograph, or even in a letter, we cannot, unless we are indifferent to him, leave it at that, but are gradually, insensibly, involved, led on, started on a journey; and the journey, we find, though not a day's or a year's journey, but rather that of a life-time, always points or leads to the common centre of experience in his mind and person, from which the whole of his immense production seems to radiate. It is this reference to a centre which gives Goethe's works their peculiar, their specifically Goethean, character.

Whether we are entitled to describe this difference between Goethe and others as a qualitative difference may be left an open question. Something not unlike it can be observed in many well-integrated writers, writers whose works really 'belong', and even in obscurer persons who never write and yet communicate the same quality, which we always call a philosophical quality, in the give and take of ordinary life. On the other hand, there is something in Goethe's case, something that can only be defined in terms of the structure and unity of his consciousness, that almost puts him in a category by himself. True, there may be others who in some degree share or approach the inner solidarity that we find in him, in which the mental parts that in mankind at large have, as we commonly feel, grown away from one another seem miraculously to have grown together again and, as it were, to have fused or uncurdled themselves, but, if so, we can only suspect or conjecture it; we have no certain knowledge or anything approaching it, nothing like the wealth of evidence that Goethe offers in his incredibly varied and incredibly revealing works.

The question, then, is one that we have no need to answer. It is enough to raise it and to recognize that we have to raise it, if we probe him deeply enough. And even those who do not probe him deeply are likely to raise it too by asking the question that is so often asked about the normality of his genius. Many are the readers of Goethe who at some time or other have wondered at the absence in him as a mature person of all the arresting qualities that make poets so conspicuously different, and often so colourful, so exotic, and have reflected on his almost disconcerting nearness to the common man. Yet the same readers at another time will find themselves switching to the other extreme and asking if anyone was ever so profoundly original as Goethe, and if he is not in the end the most astonishing of men.

The seeming paradox disappears when we realize the source of it. It is only because the point of differentiation in Goethe is so deep-seated, so far below the surface, that it does not, and does not need to, obtrude itself. His originality, unlike that of lesser men, seldom thrusts itself on us immediately, it grows, rather, in proportion as we come to know him. Verses and sayings of his that at first sight impress us as simple and easy to fathom prove on better acquaintance to be less simple than we thought. *Faust*, a relatively popular work, is full of this deceptiveness; the longer we read it, the less popular, the less elementary, it becomes. This is possibly truer of the supposedly easy parts of the poem than of the supposedly hard. As Georg Simmel points out in his essay on *Kant und Goethe*, Goethe seems to have been in the unusual and enviable position of being able to philosophize without being technically a philosopher, without having to use any special department of his mind. All he had to do was to voice his sentiments about the universe directly, the way we voice our sentiments about the weather or any other everyday matter, and out they came as philosophy. No special vocabulary, no translation of his feelings into the abstract, no process of ratiocination, simply 'I feel this' and 'I feel that'. Simmel puts it in such clear analysis that he deserves to be heard in his own words:

Wenn ich aber Goethe recht verstehe, handelt es sich bei ihm immer nur um eine unmittelbare Äusserung seines Weltgefühles; er fangt es nicht erst in dem Medium des abstrakten Denkens auf, um es darin zu objektivieren und in eine ganz neue Existenzart zu formen, sondern sein unvergleichlich starkes Empfinden der Bedeutsamkeit des Daseins und seines inneren Zusammenhanges nach Ideen treibt seine philosophischen Äusserungen hervor wie die Wurzel die Blüte

This, while written in the twentieth century, may prove to be more than a merely modern way of seeing Goethe such as may be expected to fade out as the philosophical fashion changes. For it was exactly in this way that Goethe was seen at the outset by the first critic who took a close and deliberate look at him, and all Simmel does, here and in his book on *Goethe*, is to return to it and explore it more subtly. How Schiller managed to see so much at so early a date is one of the marvels of criticism. It is probable, however, that in default of the *Italienische Reise* and almost all the other documents on which we chiefly rely he was compelled to learn what he could at the source from conversations and personal impressions, and that this necessity turned to his advantage. Be

that as it may, there can be no doubt that in his letter to Goethe of 23 August 1794, his bold opening move in their famous exchange of ideas, he saw in the eighteenth century what Simmel saw in the twentieth and strove to say it in the vocabulary at his disposal. What impressed him about Goethe first and foremost was the unusual way in which his mind was constituted, thought and feeling, as he discovered to his surprise, not being separated out from one another to the extent that we should consider normal, but acting in strangely close conjunction, so that in order to describe the phenomenon he was compelled to bring opposites together and to speak of him tentatively as thinking with his feelings or feeling with his thoughts—die Anschauung Ihres Geistes—thus going a stage farther in the analysis of Goethe's mind than Goethe himself who, in the fifth of his *Roman Elegies*, not yet known to Schiller, had set the ball rolling by noting a similar conjunction of the sense-perceptions in which, as he said in a passage already quoted, he touched things with his eyes and saw them with his hands 'Minds like yours', Schiller went on to say, 'seldom realize how deeply they have penetrated and how little they need to borrow from the philosophers; all the philosophers can do is to borrow from them', a view of Goethe, by the way, that Fichte anticipated, without elaborating the point, when he told him in a letter of a few weeks earlier, on 21 June 1794, that the philosophers had to come to him because what he felt was the criterion or touchstone of what they argued—An Sie wendet mit Recht sich die Philosophie: ihr Gefühl ist derselben Probierestein. Hegel was thinking on similar lines at a somewhat later date when he wrote (24 February 1821) that Goethe brought the two worlds, the abstract world and the world we know, into touch with one another—begrüssen sich die beyden Welten—unser Abstruses und das erscheinende Daseyn einander.

If these men had conversed with Goethe at an earlier stage in his life it is unlikely that they would have seen him in this light. As Goethe knew, it was not until the crisis of 1786, which brought the great shake-up and rearrangement of himself, that he turned into this sort of person, and we can be sure that, whether he formulated it in so many words or not, he agreed fundamentally with what they said and was thereby confirmed and strengthened in his belief that the state of mind, or rather the state of being, he had at last achieved was all-important to him and that everything else, whatever he wrote or thought or did, must follow from it.

GOETHE AND SCHILLER

IT is only when we realize how persistently the rest of Goethe's life revolves round this one central experience that we can understand his indifference to considerations that were not closely related to it. This comes out very clearly in his poetic writings where, as we can readily observe, his first thought was not and, for that matter, never had been to project a series of poems and carry them out to the last syllable, but to see to it that whatever he wrote came out of the whole of himself, in the organic or natural sense in which he understood the term, and, failing that, not to write at all. This, rather than any mere dilatoriness or incompetence, is the reason why we find him so often waiting to begin a poem or waiting to finish, or, for a while, neglecting poetry altogether, his sole criterion being that what he wrote should proceed, not from this part of him or from that, but from his entire and undivided person. It was not for him, as Schiller told him in the already quoted letter of 23 August 1794, to make poems out of his imagination or his intellect, both of which he came to regard as subordinate or secondary faculties not to be trusted by themselves, or to accept any short cut to poetry whatsoever. 'If we allow the imagination or the intellect to originate instead of to follow', he says in a late note, 'we are not achieving much'; and there is everything to show that he was possessed of this conviction long before he formulated it, and that he used his poetic gifts accordingly even at a much earlier date.

This is especially noteworthy when we consider how near he must have been at one time to putting his imagination in the saddle and letting it take him where it listed, say, in the spirit of the poem 'Der neue Amadis', in which he tells us that in childhood he was capable of closeting himself with his imagination, his 'Goldne Phantasie', and living in a world of pure make-believe, with dragons and castles of crystal and a princess all 'enamelled with sunlight':

Rings mit Sonnenschein
War sie enpaillirt.

He showed more than once in his early poetry, and especially in the wonderful Gretchen scenes in *Faust*, what imaginative gifts he had, and his critics have sometimes asked if he acted rightly in

making so little use of them. When we think of the evocative power with which in the scene called *Nacht Offen Feld*, almost with a stroke of the pen, he makes us see Faust and Mephistopheles galloping on black horses past a haunted gibbet in the dead of night—auf schwarzen Pferden daher brausend—and disappearing again in the empty landscape—

Faust · Was weben die dort um den Rabenstein?

Mephistopheles Weis nicht, was sie kochen und schaffen.

Faust Schweben auf und ab. Neigen sich, beugen sich.

Mephistopheles Eine Hexenzunft!

Faust · Sie streuen und weihen!

Mephistopheles Vorbey! Vorbey!

—or when we think of Mephistopheles in the cold twilight snatching Faust away from Gretchen for ever, to say nothing of the prison scene, as a whole, or the scene in the cathedral with its sepulchral music or the blinding apparition of the *Erdgeist* in Faust's dark chamber, we can agree that it is only human to ask, for more and to wonder whether Goethe could have supplied it, if he had chosen to do so.

For himself, whether he wavered for a while or not, his mind was soon made up. His friend Merck told him with uncanny foresight while he was still in Frankfurt that he should leave imaginative poetry to others and approach the expression of reality in a truer way, a reminder that he carried with him for forty years and incorporated in a memorable paragraph of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*; and about the same time, whether earlier or later we have no means of determining, he spoke in very similar terms to Kestner, telling him that while for the present he was compelled to say things imaginatively or figuratively—uneigentlich—he hoped when he was older to be able to say them unfiguratively and to set down his thoughts exactly as they were, without interference—die Gedanken selbst, wie sie waren, zu denken und zu sagen.

This devotion to a poetic ideal not dominated by the play of imagination is amply shown in his maturer verse; it was his own work he was thinking of when he insisted, at a much later date, that there was or could be a direct kind of poetry, not dependent on figures of speech—eine Poesie ohne Tropen. Significantly, the only time in his adult life when his thoughts turned explicitly the other way and gave imagination the place of honour was the time between Frankfurt and Italy when his sense of values was so

strangely distorted by the pull of Charlotte. And even here there is only the one poem, 'Meine Gottin', in which he playfully seats Imagination in the lap of Jove, to tell the tale of his defection. Philosophy for once has to take a back seat:

Und dass die alte
Schwiegermutter Weisheit
Das zarte Seelchen
Ja nicht beleid'ge.

For a truer and a more downright opinion we may turn to the *Wanderjahre*, where he reminds us that the imagination is a vague, unreliable faculty—ein vages, unstetes Vermögen—not to be trusted by itself.

This was not an attitude to poetry that made it any easier to write. His slowness in producing it, his unwillingness to produce it at all costs regardless of whether it came genuinely from the whole of him, is very clearly shown in the years of his association with Schiller, in the course of which he was compelled, as Schiller saw, to think much more closely about the problem and the technique of writing than he had done before. Stimulated though he was by this fortunate partnership, which began, it will be remembered, in 1794, just when he most needed it, and gave him a sense of companionship in poetry that he had not known for years, there was never any question in his mind of adjusting himself psychologically to Schiller, or of producing poetry by his means. It is true that he came nearer to writing like Schiller, nearer to writing intellectually and arbitrarily, than at any other time, never before had he managed to turn out so forcefully conceptual a ballad as 'Die Braut von Korinth' or to plan a long poem and carry it out according to plan with the efficiency, with the practical command of his art, that is evidenced in *Hermann und Dorothea*.

Here, and still more in the less refreshing series of polemical epigrams, called *Xenen*, that the two of them wrote and published together, we can see the intellectual side of him coming to the fore and threatening to take the lead. But this was due rather to his genius for adaptation, the old chameleon faculty that was born in him and never left him, than to any permanent change of habit. He might submit to Schiller's influence for a brief space, long enough to experience it, but it was not to be thought of that he should remain under it and compete with him on his terms. Nothing could be farther from his taste. In the end we

find that he liked or accepted Schiller's plays, the finished product, much better than he liked the way he made them. According to Falk's report of 17 July 1792, at which date the two hardly knew one another personally, Goethe heartily disapproved of Schiller's way of working, and especially of his way of working under artificial pressure, and was at first more inclined to ridicule it than to respect it. He told Falk that in Schiller's slightest things he could feel the extreme effort that had gone into writing them, and that when he read even as quiet a piece of work as the *Letters on Don Carlos* he could see the drops of sweat standing on his brow.

In later years, while his regard for Schiller was higher, he held the same views as before, less harshly but not less firmly. Schiller, he said to Conta on 26 May 1820, true to his belief in the primacy of the spirit over nature, always planned his works beforehand, imposed them on himself as a task, and forced himself into the necessary state of enthusiasm, thus wearing himself out before his time—*Das aber hat ihn auch allzu früh aufgerieben*. In his own case, he said, he always waited till he was in the mood or till the inspiration came, not thinking his subject over or talking about it beforehand, but letting it come of itself. And we know from countless other indications that this was his settled practice and his settled conviction, for himself and also for others. His chief warning to younger writers who consulted him was to relax and not drive themselves. Knebel notified his sister on 20 April 1810 that Goethe's advice to poets was not to put on too much pressure, but only to attempt what was well within their range; and again, on 11 March 1828, we find Goethe advising Eckermann, who had creative ambitions of his own, above all not to force things—*Mein Rat ist daher, nichts zu forcieren*—and rather to trifle away his time than write when the impulse was lacking. Schiller, he reminded him on another occasion (19 February 1829) was too violent in his methods and much too predetermined—*Schiller hatte in seiner Natur etwas Gewaltsames; er handelte oft zu sehr nach einer vorgefassten Idee*.

The contrast is patent: Schiller, the poet who forced his nature, which means in Goethe's sense that he pitted one part of himself against another, Goethe, the poet who yielded to nature and took what nature or the whole of himself gave. Whatever aspect of Goethe's poetic mind we consider, his reliance on the whole of himself, his distrust of the imaginative or the abstract or the volitional

faculty, his belief in inspiration and spontaneity, his willingness to wait, we find the nature impulse, the organic impulse, behind it, and are compelled to describe it in corresponding terms. Schiller may have been idealizing Goethe when he said on 11 July 1797 that while others had to work like slaves, Goethe only needed to shake the tree and down would come the apples—Während wir andern muhselig sammeln und prüfen müssen . . . darf er nur leis an dem Baume schütteln, um sich die schönsten Früchte, reif und schwer, zufallen zu lassen—but he was entirely right in his choice of imagery. Whenever Goethe had occasion to refer to his inner processes, as he was now drawn into doing by Schiller's explicitness, this was almost invariably the imagery he used, that of trees, of gardens, of germination and growth, of winter and summer, of sleeping and waking.

In reply to an inquiry about his work on *Wilhelm Meister*, which he had taken up after several years and then laid aside again, he told him on 30 July 1796 that he had nothing to report, the book was having a siesta—vom Roman ist gar nichts zu sagen· er halt einen Mittagsschlaf—an image that he used again on 26 April 1797 in reference to his scientific studies, which, he said, had been prodded out of their winter's sleep by a visit from Alexander von Humboldt but were in danger of dropping off again in the spring. 'Winterschlaf' and 'Frühlingsschlaf' are the words he uses. It is not enough to take these remarks playfully, though they are not without their playful note. Schiller at least knew better and read them seriously, though he could not approve, as we can tell from his letter of 18 December 1800, to Iffland, in which he says tartly that Goethe believed he couldn't write poetry in the winter and that he consequently didn't write it. Thus the seasonal imagery that Goethe became ever fonder of using, far from being a mere evasion and conceit, though it often served an evasive purpose, comes straight out of life, and Schiller had to accept it whether he liked it or not.

From about the beginning of the Schiller years on we can catch Goethe again and again ringing the changes on this endlessly variable theme. On 6 March 1799, he wrote to Schiller that he was like an onion lying under the snow, waiting to sprout in a few weeks' time. Referring on 8 February 1814, fourteen years later, to a temporary stoppage that had occurred in writing the third book of the *West-östlicher Divan*, Goethe said that, while any

young author in his position would be beside himself with impatience, he comforted himself with the thought that if he left the work alone for a while it would be all the better for waiting, like the medlar-tree—wie die Mispeln. Writing to Knebel on 14 November 1827, fourteen years later again, he reflected that his *Helena*, by which he may have meant his *Faust*, had been longer growing than the tall trees in his garden by the Ilm, which he had planted in 1776, when, as he might have recalled, drawing on an image which gained in depth of meaning the older he got, he wrote his little poem, 'Hoffnung', so close to this later time, about growing like a tree:

Schaff', das Tagwerk meiner Hände,
 Hohes Glück, dass ich 's vollende!
 Lass, o lass mich nicht ermatten!
 Nein, es sind nicht leere Traume:
 Jetzt nur Stangen, diese Baume
 Geben einst noch Frucht und Schatten.

This was the imagery he liked best, himself the gardener and his works the flowers and the fruits. When he reminded F. A. Wolf, to whom he had just sent off a copy of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* on 26 December 1796, that it was not unusual for the amateur gardener—*Der Gartenliebhaber*—to distribute some of his little harvest among his friends, we can feel the pleasure he took in putting it this way. Happiest of all, and closest in setting to the image he uses, are his words at the beginning of a letter to Schiller in late summer, on 21 August 1799, in which we see him in his real garden and in his figurative garden, both at once and all in a sentence—*Mein stilles Leben im Garten tragt immerfort wo nicht viele doch gute Fruchte*

Delightful as it is to contemplate, it would be idle to pretend that this was not a very precarious way of making poetry. The inducement it offered day by day to lie fallow and then to go on lying fallow indefinitely, to begin a poem and not to finish it, or else to finish it in a mood that was out of keeping with the beginning, would have been too much for any poet except perhaps the one poet who was born to it and had it in his bones. And even he, while justifying and more than justifying his poetic practice in the long run, would be the first to admit that it had its drawbacks, and that any reader of his poetry could discover them for himself. But he accepted them as part of the price he had to pay. This, for better

or for worse, was the kind of poetry he chose to make, a kind of poetry in which the state of mind generating the poem was, so to speak, more important than the poem itself, and, with the whole of his work spread before us, we can agree that he chose consistently, and hence that he probably chose rightly

After all, he was not doing anything drastic to himself or trying to be someone else, but was only choosing to go on making poetry the way he had always preferred to make it, by impulse and by inspiration, not by taking thought, in accordance with the habit, which, he tells us in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, was early established in him, of treating his poetic talents as if they were a part of nature — das mir inwohnende dichterische Talent ganz als Natur zu betrachten. To this extent he may be said not to have chosen at all, but simply to have followed his nose and done what was congenial to him. As we have seen, the whole or practically the whole of his early work was produced in spontaneous and often in wildly spontaneous fashion, either dashed off in the heat of the moment or carried out in double-quick time. The futility of forcing himself was already apparent to him, as he says in his 'Denck und Trostspruchlein', afterwards more baldly entitled 'Guter Rat':

's gschihet wohl dass man an einem Tag
Weder Gott noch Menschen lieben mag
Dringt nichts dir nach dem Herzen ein
Sollts in der Kunst wohl anders seyn
Drum hetz dich nicht zur schlimmen Zeit
Denn Full und Kraft sind nimmer weit.
Hast in der schlappen Stund geruht
Ist dir die gute doppelt gut.

This holds good both for the Frankfurt years, where the mere thought of planning and deliberating rules itself out as preposterous, and, so far as we can see, for the Charlotte years too. The prose *Iphigenie*, controlled and reflective as it is, took less time to write than *Werther*: the lyrics of the period affect us as being, for the most part, just as unpremeditated as ever. With the exception of *Wilhelm Meisters Theatralische Sendung*, a more workmanlike work, extending over a number of years, there is nothing in Goethe's way of writing prior to Italy, and perhaps prior to Schiller, that remotely compares with what we know of Schiller's way of writing

This is not surprising; it is only what we could infer from look-

ing over the earlier works themselves, where we find the marks of ease and of immediacy written large on every hand. Here, even if every outside clue were lacking, we should have no trouble in arriving at a right conception of the poetic process behind. It is another matter with the later works, some of which strike us as being far too studied and far too formal to have come into existence in any but the most considered and calculated way. Yet if we are to take Goethe's word for it, these, too, were arrived at according to his usual formula or lack of formula, not by any process of excogitation but rather according as the mood took him and as the sudden impulse prompted. Whatever plans for writing he had previously made, and it was necessary in some cases that he should make plans, when it came to the point the writing itself had to be done spontaneously. If he so much as communicated his plans to anyone, so he told Schiller on 28 April 1797, he always found to his cost that he was unable to carry them out.

Speaking of his *Helena* and the classical portion of *Faust*, a highly esoteric piece of writing if ever there was one, he said to Eckermann on 15 January 1827 that it was hard to write, not, as might be expected, for reasons of metre or scholarship or elaborate symbolism, but because the actual writing depended almost entirely on the chance, the mood, the energy, of the moment—*Dieses alles ist nicht leicht zu machen und hängt sehr viel vom Glück ab, ja fast ganz von der Stimmung und Kraft des Augenblicks.* *Hermann und Dorothea*, a deliberate-looking poem from every point of view, whether we consider Goethe's nearness to Schiller at the time of writing it or the hexameters that he chose to write it in or the spirit of order and lucidity that pervades it, was executed, as Schiller reported to Körner on 28 October 1796, when it was just finished, with incredible ease and speed—*mit einer unbegreiflichen Leichtigkeit und Schnelligkeit.* This, when we reflect on the character of the work in question, is an even more remarkable feat than the extemporizing of *Paläophron und Neoterpe*, a lighter work in some two hundred and fifty lines, which, we are told, he dictated in 1800 while walking up and down the room, or the composing of the 'Marienbader Elegie' twenty-three years later, when he was seventy-four, while travelling by coach from Eger to Jena.

His shorter lyrics in old age, even in extreme old age, were written, so far as we can judge, in much the same way as his Frankfurt

lyrics, quite without premeditation. Witness the flood of *Divan* poems that came from him in his middle sixties, sometimes at the rate of two or three a day, or the group of Dornburg lyrics in his late seventies. If anything, he seems as an old man to have been more dependent on sudden inspiration than ever. He told Boisserée on 8 August 1815, when he was in the thick of the *Divan*, that his good poems came into his mind from beginning to end—*auf einmal und ganz*—and that unless he wrote them down immediately they would leave his mind again and he would be unable to recover them. If, as sometimes happened, he dreamed a poem in his sleep it was simply a poem lost, since when he awoke it would be gone, and even when he was out for a walk, without writing materials, he had to guard against the sudden flow of verse that might overtake him. When his memory failed him at such times, his subsequent efforts to fill the gap were never quite to his satisfaction. At no time in his life does he seem to have been able to write poetry satisfactorily in any other way. Even in 1795, a time when he strikes us as being more than usually self-controlled, he told Friederike Brun that he was seldom able to write a short poem except at the opportune moment, and that on this account, for fear of losing time, he preferred to use a pencil. Three years later, when he was still writing classical metres and had been drawn into discussions of prosody with Wilhelm von Humboldt, he confessed to him in a letter of 16 July 1798 that he hadn't a drop of grammatical theory in his veins. And to the last he cherished the belief that all great poetry grew in the dark, uncalculated and untampered with and, as he said to Eckermann on 2 January 1824, in a state of possession not far from somnambulism—*Jenes ungestorte, unschuldige, nachtwandlerische Schaffen, wodurch allein etwas Grosses gedeihen kann*.

It was by cultivating this habit of poetry in himself, a habit which his reason now endorsed not less strongly than his instinct, that he was able to keep his creative life so close to nature and, in the main, to grow his verses rather than to compose them. 'Composition indeed!' he said to Eckermann on 20 June 1831. 'As if a poem were like a piece of pastry that you make by stirring eggs, flour, and sugar together, when in reality it has to be all one, both in the spirit behind it and in the impulse that produces it'—*das Einzelne wie das Ganze aus Einem Geiste und Guss*. The only real unity a poem could have in his estimation was, as he once said

to Riemer, the unity of mind or mood informing it—In eigentlichen Poemen ist keine als die Einheit des Gemuts. It mattered little to him that by putting his trust thus exclusively in the natural sources of poetry he was limiting his performance, making it impossible or all but impossible to execute a long poem consistently, as he saw Schiller doing repeatedly during the short time they were together, and *confining himself* for the most part to a sporadic and uneven lyricism. He knew and he took comfort in the knowledge that his poetry was different for being differently arrived at and that, coming out of the fullness of himself, it partook of this fullness and was the truer and the better for it.

XVI

THE PROGRESS OF 'FAUST'

WE have to remember that there was more than one time in his poetic career when Goethe might have taken, and perhaps did take, a wrong turn. It was not a foregone conclusion that old age would find him making this appropriate use of his genius; the forces that had struggled for the mastery of him were not such as would in any case have brought him through to so consistent a position. Neither the direction that his poetry took under the influence of Charlotte nor the classical direction that was given to it in Italy could have been trusted not to lead him astray, not to alienate him from his true self and his true centre, if he had followed either of them unreservedly. We have only to ask ourselves, to take a notable case in point, what would have happened to *Faust* in such an event, or, rather, what did happen to *Faust*, since if we examine the text the answer is there.

Faust is especially pertinent to this inquiry, not only because it accompanied Goethe through life and reflected or, as the case may be, failed to reflect the various stages through which he passed, but because it was also the receptacle, the chief receptacle, into which, as a poet, he poured his natural philosophy. This is conspicuously true of its beginnings. The Frankfurt *Faust*, the *Urfaust* as we call it, is without question the work in which he best succeeded in capturing, more nakedly than in *Werther*, more intelligibly than in *Satyros*, more powerfully than in the short lyrics, the turbulent unrest that possessed him in early years, 'das unruhige Wogen und Treiben im Menschen', as he, more impersonally, put it to Steinfurt on 3 October 1829, and the blind worship of nature and of natural impulses on which it fed insatiably. Here, if anywhere, was the beginning of the great organic poem in which he might hope to explore and to fathom the mystery that surrounded him in the air he breathed—

Ihr schwebt, ihr Geister, neben mir,
Antwortet mir wenn ihr mich hort

—'to find out what it was that held the world together and behold the energies and the seeds of life':

Dass ich erkenne was die Welt
Im innersten zusammenhält,
Schau alle Wurckungskraft und Saamen.

The promise, the challenge, in this astonishing burst of poetry is hard to match, no matter where we look. If ever a poet by his own act put himself under obligation to go on with what he had started and at all costs work out his theme, the poet was Goethe and the poem was *Faust*. Yet, to the best of our knowledge, and there seems to be no doubt about it, he neither added nor tried to add a single line nor gave any creative thought to it whatsoever during the ten years and more between leaving Frankfurt and going to Italy, thus putting a barrier of time, and not merely of time, between him and his poem which was not good for it and might well have proved insuperable. The manuscript must have lain completely untouched for twelve years and perhaps for more.

A strange suspension, yet not so strange when we come to look at it. If Goethe was unable to proceed with his great theme for so many precious years, there was a good reason for it. It was not so much that he was dissatisfied with it or that he had begun to disapprove of it formally, for if this had been the case he would not have been willing, as we know he was, to read it aloud and lend it to his Weimar friends. It was rather that the deflection of his poetic mind towards Charlotte, which, as we have seen, set in as soon as he reached Weimar and lasted throughout the pre-Italian years, was powerful enough to put *Faust* out of his reach and make him spiritually incapable of continuing it. So long as the Iphigenie theme or any variation of it was in the ascendant, there was no room for the Faust theme, and it had to acknowledge defeat. In the recognition scene between Iphigenie and Orestes in the third act of *Iphigenie auf Tauris* the conflict dramatizes itself under our very eyes and we can see the one theme receiving the shock of the other and quietly, confidently, absorbing it, Iphigenie being manifestly the spokesman of Charlotte and Orestes temporarily assuming the mantle of Faust.

All this is clearly indicated in the prose *Iphigenie* of 1779, but the final version, if anything, accentuates it, endowing the youthful Orestes with a somewhat more Faustian heat for the breath of Iphigenie to cool—

O lass den reinen Hauch der Liebe dir
Die Glut des Busens leise wehend kühlen

—and letting Iphigenie herself be momentarily infected with the disturbance of spirit she is about to quell, her divided feelings of

hope and fear—dieses Gluck und Elend—becoming intensified in typically *Sturm und Drang* fashion into a dizzy whirl of joy and pain that is more than a little foreign to her.

Es walzet sich ein Rad von Freud' und Schmerz
Durch meine Seele.

Anything Goethe might have had to say in immediate continuance of the Gretchen tragedy and, more particularly, any treatment of Faust's remorse and suffering after the execution of Gretchen, which some readers look for and fail to find, was evidently taken up and disposed of here in the guilt and the purging of Orestes, so that when he finally got back to writing *Faust* he had nothing to add at this point and let the Gretchen drama end, as before, with the prison scene.

Nothing brings home more forcibly the cleavage we have noted between the realm of Charlotte and the realm of nature than the drastic exclusion of *Faust*, a poem which both in its emotional abandonment and in its philosophical utterances was the very essence of Goethe's early nature enthusiasm, from these ten years of his life. It is not merely that what he had written of the poem thus far was so dynamic as to have swept away, one would have thought, any but the stiffest of obstacles. There is the further consideration that the years of its exclusion from Goethe's poetic mind were the crucial years in his development as a student of natural things, as a man of science, and that by the end of this time he had converted himself from a mere dabbler in anything and everything to a trained and systematic worker in three separate fields of scientific research.

Now Faust, too, was by way of being a man of science; the tale of Faust, as Goethe tells it, begins at the point where Faust turns abruptly, though only, as yet, in the *Sturm und Drang* sense, from the older studies that he had exhausted, the arid book-disciplines of a dying age, to the new biology that was dawning on the world. The theme of science, explicitly or all but explicitly heralded in the magic and theosophy of the opening monologue, was inseparable from the poem as a whole and was bound to come back in the course of the argument, as it eventually did, and receive a more extended treatment. If Goethe's development in poetry instead of changing direction so mysteriously had followed as straight a course as his development in science, the two interests would have

run parallel with one another and interacted as they went along. The next stage in *Faust* would then have incorporated in some form or other, presumably under the supervision of the *Erdegeist*, Goethe's biological adventures and discoveries in the early Weimar years, and it might have been begun any time after about 1779. But the event was otherwise; the poetry went one way, the science another, and it was a long time before the two came together again, too long perhaps for him to get the best poetically out of the reunion.

This helps to explain why *Faust*, a poem sometimes wrongly described as Goethe's life-poem, and manipulated accordingly as a sort of skeleton key to open every door, is so singularly uninformative about Goethe's real development. Of all Goethe's poems this is surely the one that ought to throw a light, since, more than any other poem of his and possibly more than any other poem we know, it is itself concerned with development, with progress from immaturity to maturity, from low to high. Yet those who come to it with the question what really went on inside Goethe between his callow years and his years of discretion will go away empty-handed or nearly so. There is only one real clue to the intermediate stage, namely, the twenty-three lines of blank verse confronting us at the beginning of the scene *Wald und Hohle*, and even this clue is useless or mystifying by itself.

Faust, it will be remembered, has run away from his lecherous companion Mephistopheles and taken refuge, from the turmoil of seducing Gretchen, in a remote cavern deep in the forest where, sheltered from the storm that is raging outside, he addresses the presiding *Erdegeist* who, we must infer, after first rebuffing, has afterwards befriended him, somewhat as follows. 'Spirit sublime, you gave me, gave me everything I asked. Not for nothing did you show me your countenance in the flames. You gave me all nature for my kingdom, and you gave me also the power to feel and to enjoy it, not merely in cold far-off astonishment, but like friend with friend, looking deep into the heart. You pass all living things before my gaze and teach me to know my brothers in the air and in the water and in the quiet thickets. And when the storm brings down the giant pines that strew the woods with ruin, and the hill-sides dully echo to their fall, then you lead me to the sheltering cavern, teach me to know myself and the deep, secret wonders of the heart flower within me. The chaste and comforting moon goes

up the sky and the silvery figures of the past come hovering out of the rocks and the dripping trees and moderate the austere joy of contemplation':

Erhabner Geist, du gabst mir, gabst mir alles,
 Warum ich bat Du hast mir nicht umsonst
 Dem Angesicht im Feuer zugewendet.
 Gabst mir die herrliche Natur zum Konigreich,
 Kraft, sie zu fuhlen, zu geniessen. Nicht
 Kalt staunenden Besuch erlaubst du nur,
 Vergonnest mir, in ihre tiefe Brust,
 Wie in den Busen eines Freunds, zu schauen.
 Du fuhrst die Reihe der Lebendigen
 Vor mir vorbei, und lehrst mich meine Bruder
 Im stillen Busch, in Luft und Wasser kennen.
 Und wenn der Sturm im Walde braust und knarrt,
 Die Riesenfichte, sturzend, Nachbaraste
 Und Nachbarstamme quetschend niederstreift,
 Und ihrem Fall dumpf hohl der Hugel donnert,
 Dann fuhrst du mich zur sichern Hohle, zeigst
 Mich dann mir selbst, und meiner eignen Brust
 Geheime tiefe Wunder offen sich.
 Und steigt vor meinem Blick der reine Mond
 Besanftigend heruber, schweben mir
 Von Felsenwanden, aus dem feuchten Busch
 Der Vorwelt silberne Gestalten auf
 Und lindern der Betrachtung strenge Lust.

What makes this so remarkable a document in the biography of Goethe is that it is the only piece of poetry he wrote in which the two otherwise hostile themes of Faust and Iphigenie or, to put it more comprehensively, of nature and Charlotte, are palpably brought together and reconciled with one another. For this is obviously what has happened. It is not merely the shifting of the poem from rhyme to blank verse which tells us this, though the blank verse is significant when we consider how closely it is identified with the Charlotte dramas and how little Goethe uses it outside them. The Charlotte spirit presides and broods over the whole passage and can be felt everywhere in it, whether we read it for the main argument of the sheltering cavern and the escape that the sheltering cavern symbolizes or for the subtler accents and implications accompanying or rising out of it. Charlotte parallels, textual parallels with the Charlotte poetry, crowd into the mind at every

turn. Consider only the receptivity and the gratitude of 'gabst mir, gabst mir alles' in the opening line, so reminiscent of Iphigenie's gratitude for the gifts beyond all measure, the 'Übermass der Gaben', that she has received from above. Or the converting of the *Erdgeist*, which means the converting of the spirit of nature, from a monster of energy, indifferently bringing man to birth and bringing him to the grave, into a friend and intimate with whom to withdraw from the storms, the storms of life, into the safe retreat, there to be initiated into the 'deep secret wonders of the heart' or, in the not less memorable words of the 'Mondlied', into 'the heart's labyrinth'—das Labyrinth der Brust. It was inevitable that the moon, Charlotte's moon—

der reine Mond
Besanftigend

—should rise on such a scene, and that the aspect of the natural world, so beautifully evoking the 'Thüringerwald' of Goethe's early years in Weimar, should recede before the supernatural, the 'silvery figures of the past', much as we see it doing in the Charlotte ballads of the 'Erlkönig' and the 'Fischer', and in the still more closely related scene where Tasso gazes into the quiet brook and beholds his Elysium reflected there.

The date of these lines throws an additional light. They were written, as we know, either in Italy or shortly after the return from Italy and, in any case, not later than 1790, when Goethe was unsuccessfully trying to complete *Faust* for publication. Thus, coming at a time when the future of the poem hung in the balance, they represent one of the ways in which he might conceivably have tried to carry it forward. It is true that the spell of Charlotte was broken, but the Charlotte poetry was still at his command. Had he not recently worked over *Iphigenie* and, more recently still, written the greater part of *Tasso*? What is more understandable than that, finding it difficult to recover the spirit of the Frankfurt scenes, he should, at this complicated parting of the ways, have drifted, insensibly perhaps, into Charlotte's tracks and stayed in them long enough to write this monologue?

But the more important question that arises is whether, having got into this vein, he could have profitably continued in it, if he had chosen. And the answer is given by the monologue itself, where it will be apparent from this very incomplete analysis that the reconciliation of Faust with Charlotte, such as it is, is entirely

at Faust's expense and leads to the immediate suppression of all that we call Faustian. Charlotte simply usurps the functions of the *Erdgeist* and the *Faust* poem passes for the moment into her hands. This was an impasse that Goethe must have sensed, however dimly, because on continuing the blank verse monologue for eleven lines more, presumably at a later sitting, he lost no time in wrenching the poem back into its former channel, returning at once to the Faustian note of dissatisfaction—

O dass dem Menschen nichts Vollkommnes wird,
Empfind' ich nun

—and ending speedily in a conflagration of feeling—ein wildes Feuer—that sets Faust 'plunging from desire to the fulfilment of desire, and in the act of fulfilment yearning for desire again'—

So tauml' ich von Begierde zu Genuss,
Und im Genuss verschmacht' ich nach Begierde

—after which outburst the poem gets back to its rhyming and Faust and Mephistopheles harangue one another as before.

If it is not easy to see what future there was for *Faust* under the aegis of Charlotte, neither is it easy to see what future there was for the poetry as a whole, since both, as we now have them, are so deeply involved in his philosophy and his psychology of nature. Yet when we remember how many years the Charlotte influence lasted and how alive it was in his poetry even after he had detached himself from it by going to Italy, it is not idle to speculate briefly on the possibility of its continuing much longer and remaining the dominant influence in his later verse, in which case the split between his poetry and his science would have remained and the great unifying of himself that he rejoiced in would have been more illusory than real. It was just such a conflict of philosophies, natural and transcendental, that prevented Wordsworth, whom Goethe so closely approaches in the first part of the *Wald und Hohle* monologue and in certain of the Charlotte lyrics, from getting the best out of his middle and later years, and there is no reason for thinking that Goethe, with Wordsworth's handicap, would have fared better.

The only other *Faust* passage of crucial importance that Goethe was able to write at this time—the rest of the new material, chiefly the scene in the witch's kitchen and the discussion in *Wald und Hohle*, being somewhat less than crucial—is the conversation of

Faust with Mephistopheles which immediately follows the signing of the compact and, more particularly, the lines with which in the *Fragment* of 1790 the conversation abruptly begins, announcing that Faust intended to experience everything, the depths and the heights, the weal and the woe, and by so doing to make himself commensurate with the whole of mankind, even to the extent of going down with it in the final shipwreck:

Und was der ganzen Menschheit zugetheilt ist,
Will ich in meinem innern Selbst genießen,
Mit meinem Geist das Hochst' und Tiefste greifen,
Ihr Wohl und Weh auf meinen Busen haufen,
Und so mein eigen Selbst zu Ihrem Selbst erweitern,
Und, wie sie selbst, am End' auch ich zerscheitern.

Here is a passage which, far from running counter to the main trend of the poem, as the *Wald und Hohle* passage did, thrusts it forward in its original direction and sets the pace for what is to follow. Nothing that Goethe had added to the poem since the opening monologue, where Faust announced his ambition without knowing exactly what to do with it, was quite as indispensable and as constituent an addition as this; nothing enlightens us more as to the scope and the character of the work as a whole. Coming, as it did, so soon after the Italian journey and putting so strong an emphasis on the notion of totality, it relates itself at once to Goethe's total self of 1786. What we see here is Faust applying to the outer world, the world of action, the findings that Goethe had made in the inner world, the world of consciousness, during his sojourn in Italy. The heights and the depths, the weal and the woe, and the shipwreck simply state in the violent terms appropriate to *Faust* what we might describe more dryly as the external correlative of Goethe's newly consolidated personality.

It is evident, when we place this passage side by side with that in *Wald und Hohle*, which of the two the poem had to follow and which it had to reject, and we can only wonder why, with both of them before him, *Wald und Hohle* almost certainly written first and the totality passage after an interval, he should have failed to see immediately that the former, however beautiful and cherishable in itself, was a false step for *Faust* and ought to come out. If he had taken this step promptly, there would have been nothing in the text of the poem to stop him from forging ahead with it and bringing it to some sort of conclusion. But the

published *Fragment* of 1790, which not only retains the *Wald und Höhle* passage but leaves both it and the totality passage imperfectly related to their context and, as it were, hanging in the air, shows that he did not at this juncture see his way clearly, and the poem leaves us quite in the dark as to his poetic future.

It was not till he wrote the *Roman Elegies*, which must have been slowly gathering weight at the back of his mind during the months and years he spent working off his poetic arrears, that the main doubt was removed and the Charlotte phase relegated to the subordinate place it was to occupy henceforth, as something that he no longer depended on, though, as *Die Naturliche Tochter* shows, he was still able to return to it, if need be. After so bold an avowal of paganism there could be no question of Charlotte retaining her hold on his poetry or seriously interfering with *Faust*. Any danger there may have been that Goethe would side-track the argument into the bypath of the *Wald und Hohle* monologue can now be disregarded. From this quarter nothing now remained to threaten the progress of the poem.

Yet, as we know, the poem failed to develop. After reaching the somewhat equivocal and discouraging stage of the *Fragment*, in which the total amount of new material was very small, a mere five hundred lines as against the most of five thousand of the first part, or the upwards of twelve thousand of the completed poem, it came to a full stop for a second time and was again left untouched for a period of years. It was not till 1797 that Goethe managed to resume work on it, and it was not till the new century was in that the first part was completed. Evidently there were forces other than those associated with Charlotte to prevent him from carrying it forward. And it is not difficult to see in what they chiefly consisted. If the *Roman Elegies* liberated *Faust* from the hindrance of Charlotte, they in their turn constituted a hindrance that was not less effective, though of a markedly different character. We have only to read a few lines from the *Roman Elegies* and then a few lines from *Faust*, that is to say from the *Urfaust* or the *Fragment* which is all of the poem that existed at this time, to feel how incompatible, how mutually exclusive, they must have been. Flexible as Goethe's genius was, there were limits to his flexibility, and here for the present he had reached his limits. Having at last attuned himself to the grave elegiacs of his Latin models, having learned to speak with their voice in his own tongue, how was he to go on with a

poem so undignified, so unclassical as *Faust* with its crude plot, its slangy couplets, and its vulgar expletives, Gretchen's 'Was Guckguck', for example, which he had decided to suppress when preparing the text for publication, or Frau Marthe's 'Ey wie Ey wo?' which he allowed to stand? After the solemn enthusiasm with which he had so recently learned to celebrate the classical past and the classical present—

Froh empfind' ich mich nun auf klassischem Boden begeistert,
Vor- und Mitwelt spricht lauter und reizender mir

—what must have been his feelings at sight of such slipshod and half-illiterate couplets as Mephistopheles's

Denckt nur den Schmuck den ich Margreten schafft
Den hat ein Pfaff hinweggerafft,

which stared at him out of the old manuscript?

If, after using the classical form so appropriately in the *Roman Elegies*, he had allowed himself to drift away from it in the same way as he drifted away from Italy, which he only visited once again, in 1790, and then briefly and not by his own choice, *Faust* would have had a better chance. But he was not so minded. Far from relinquishing the classical form or relaxing his hold on it, as we might expect him to do, he clung to it tenaciously and clearly preferred it to any other. There were times when it looked as if he had surrendered to it completely and would never write in rhyme again. Throughout the seventeen-nineties, and even longer, we find him sedulously cultivating the metres of Latin and Greek, the elegiac for epigram, the hexameter for epic, the iambic trimeter for tragedy, with the evident purpose of establishing or re-establishing a classical tradition of poetry for himself and for his fellow Germans. The *Venetian Epigrams*, the *Xenien*, *Achilleis*, and *Helena* are among the further landmarks in this endeavour to fit the German spirit to the Greek mould, *Hermann und Dorothea* is the shining example of how genuinely popular a result it could achieve.

It was undoubtedly his preoccupation with the Classics, rather than any mere procrastination or neglect, that retarded the further progress of the first part of *Faust*. We can deduce this from his letter to Charlotte Schiller of 14 April 1798, ten years after his return from Italy, in which he said that it was as if a curtain had fallen on the beautiful Homeric world, and that the northern

figures of 'Faust and Company'—die nordischen Gestalten, Faust und Compagnie—had crept in front of it. But even without so broad a hint to tell us how matters stood, the conflict between the two, between *Faust* and the Classics, can readily be felt. A little more of the latter and *Faust*, we suspect, would have been laid aside for good, so intense, so uncompromising, was Goethe's devotion to his classical prosody and all that it involved.

The problems that arise out of this, the most debated phase of Goethe's mature poetry, are more literary than biographical. On literary grounds it may be difficult to assess the degree of misdirection or of over-emphasis that Goethe was guilty of in so identifying himself with the ancient world, but there is nothing in it to surprise us when we consider what had gone before, and especially when we consider what had happened in 1786. Never having clearly distinguished between what he owed to himself in this momentous year and what he owed to Italy or, to put it more fundamentally, between what was truly philosophical in his new experience and what was, relatively speaking, local or accidental in it, it was inevitable that he should see Italy in an ideal light, as if the organic thoughts he was then formulating were embodied and made visible there, and that this ideal view of Italy should transfer itself to the classical world, which was the part or the aspect of Italy that meant most to him and therefore stayed longest with him.

We can easily trace the growth of this belief or superstition about the Classics in the letters he wrote home during his journey. Thus on 18 August 1787 he wrote to Knebel that in the natural world as he found it in Italy all the forms were more explicit and more fully developed than in the north, and that this was what he had expected to find—Wie ich es oft voraussagte habe ich es gefunden, dass hier alles aufgeschlossener und entwickelter ist. Again, on 3 October, he wrote to him that his ideas about nature, in which until now there had been an element of conjecture, were completely borne out by the observations he had made in Italy—Was ich im Norden nur vermuthete finde ich hier offenbar. He had no need to go farther afield, to India, as he instanced, because he had already found everything he wanted. Evidently he believed, or was inclined to believe, that the philosophy of nature towards which he had been feeling his way for so long was made more apparent, more visible, to him in Italy than in Thüringen, and that nature in Italy was, as

it were, more 'natural' than elsewhere. Falk reports him as saying, on 17 July 1792, that the hand of God was more legible in an Italian face than in a German, and we can accept the report as constituting at least an amusing parody of what Goethe really thought.

Having thus precariously thrown his philosophy into the arms of geography, it was only a step to throwing it into the arms of history, a step that we see him taking in his letter of 21 December 1787, to Knebel again, in which he says he is beginning, thanks to his knowledge of natural things, to see how closely and how grandly the Ancients followed nature—*Meine Kenntniss der naturlichen Dinge hilft mir sehr fort Es ist unsaglich wie die Alten der Natur, und mit welchem grossen Sinn sie ihr gefolgt sind.* Out of observations such as these, made while he was reading the works of classical poetry in their native landscape or in what approximated to it, there grew in him the conviction that they, too, were just part of the landscape, that they, too, were as free from artificiality, as wholly natural, as the hills and the trees and the water that he saw before him when he lifted his eyes from the printed page. He confessed to Schiller more than ten years later, on 14 February 1798, that when he read parts of the *Odyssey* in Naples and Sicily, which he always remembered as the Greek stage of his Italian journey, it ceased to be a poem and felt like nature itself—*Ich gestehe das es mir aufhorte ein Gedicht zu seyn, es schien die Natur selbst*

Something of this idea, the idea that the Classics were natural, or the converse of it, in which he also indulged, that nature was classical, as he says in his letter to Schubarth on 21 August 1819, stuck to him for the rest of his life. And we have to admit that he at least knew what he meant by it. It was his persistent belief, set forth in his essay on *Winckelmann*, that the unnatural dualism, the almost incurable splitting-up of the human faculties which, as he saw it, had settled on the modern world like a disease, was not to be found in the ancient Greeks—*Noch fand sich das Gefühl, die Betrachtung nicht zerstückelt, noch war jene kaum heilbare Trennung in der gesunden Menschenkraft nicht vorgegangen*—and that if they achieved more than we can hope to do they did so by virtue of their unimpaired unity and wholeness of mind.

The fallacy of persuading himself that if the Greeks enjoyed this good fortune they had the sole ownership of it is easy to detect. It is as if, having discovered the inadequacy of his old adage that

the key to happiness was not in Greece or Rome but in the human heart—

Nicht in Rom in Magna Grazia
 Dir im Herzen ist die Wonne da

—he had jumped into its false obverse and decided that, if it was not where he first thought it was, there was nowhere but Greece or Rome for it to be. It may be noted that ideas of this sort were much in the air at the time, and that others as well as Goethe, Schiller for example, fell a prey to them. In his famous letter to Goethe of 23 August 1794 Schiller vitiated his argument somewhat for a modern reader by claiming that if Goethe had been born a Greek or only an Italian he would not have had to strive so hard to acquire his nature philosophy, but would have come by it easily and, as it were, in the cradle, which is just what Goethe had been saying again and again in other words ever since his visit to Italy.

It is only when we read his classical predilection in this light, in the light of 1786, that it becomes intelligible and ceases to be a mystery. The absence of any clear marks of it prior to 1786 is the more noticeable because, thanks to Bodmer, Klopstock, J. H. Voss, and others, the classical tradition in German literature or, at any rate, the beginning of it, dating from the first half of the century, was there before him, and all he had to do was to fall in with it. The hexameter had already been tried for the most German of purposes such as translating the *Nibelungenlied* or conveying the sentiments of the Pietists—Sing, unsterbliche Seele—and nothing would have been more in line than for Goethe to have followed suit and written hexameters and the like more promptly, as Holderlin did later in the century. Instead of this we find him very slow to use un-German metres and not disposed as a young man to prefer the Classics to Shakespeare, say, or to anything else that was good. If he wrote a *Prometheus* or, rather, started one, he wrote it loosely in the spirit of *Faust* or *Mahomet*; there was nothing particularly Greek about it. Even when he came to write *Iphigene* he was drawing away from his model all the time, rebutting the Greeks rather than endorsing them. However powerful the spell of Winckelmann in his early life, it pertained chiefly to his study of the visual arts and interfered very little with his poetry.

In 1786, on the other hand, when he reached the point of throwing himself openly on the Classics, he had the strongest personal

reasons for doing so. After all the fickleness and instability that had molested him in earlier years and continued to molest him even after Charlotte had taken him in hand and eased his torment, what was more understandable than that, having found at last what seemed to be the final corrective of it in the ancient world, he should cling to what he had found even after he ceased to need it acutely? The slowness with which he disengaged himself from the influence of the Classics has its close parallel in the slowness with which he disengaged himself from the influence of Charlotte. In either case we may wish that he had been nimbler about it, a wish that he himself would probably have shared, but we have to take him as we find him. Given the *tempo* of his personality, which under its deceptively mobile exterior was strangely, almost preternaturally, retarded, his classical decade is just as explainable, one might almost say just as logical, as his Charlotte decade. While it pertained chiefly to the ten years following Italy and from then on gradually declined, in practice if not in theory, he cannot be said to have ever renounced it or to have ceased to cherish the hope, fantastic as it now seems, that the German tradition in poetry would return to classical forms. As late as the eighteen-twenties we find him telling Eckermann (18 January 1825) that he would rather read *Hermann und Dorothea* in its Latin translation than in the German, a strange preference when we consider that the German was his; or on another occasion, on 21 October 1823, weighing the pros and cons of the iambic trimeter for German tragedy and finding it the most dignified line for the purpose but unfortunately a little too long for the genius of the language.

If by his own standard it seems to us now that he ought to have taken more quickly to heart what he once said, in his review of Stiedenroth, about the priority of the contemporary over the ancient—denn das Allernachste bleibt doch immer das Lebendigste—and to have freed himself sooner from the classical bias he had acquired, we have to remember that his inner life, even in later years, was by no means as secure as it sometimes looked, and that the struggle for security, never quite outlived, persisted underneath the surface, making him loth to let go. We have to remember, too, that he never at any time accepted the Classics, in the academic sense of the word, as self-sufficient, but only and always, as he was never weary of hinting, as an ally of the natural sciences. This, and much more, was clearly implied when he wrote to Knebel on 25

November 1808 that the humanities alone—*Humaniora*—had been losing their vital hold on men's minds, even the minds of scholars, for most of a century, and that we were fortunate to see natural science coming to the fore and showing us the way to a true humanity by another approach:

Deine Bemerkung zu Ehren der Naturstudien gilt nicht für Jena und für diesen Moment allein, es liegt ein viel allgemeineres dahinter und daran. Schon fast seit einem Jahrhundert wirken *Humaniora* nicht mehr auf das Gemüth dessen der sie treibt und es ist ein rechtes Glück, dass die Natur dazwischen getreten ist, das Interesse an sich gezogen und uns von ihrer Seite den Weg zur Humanität geöffnet hat.

The remark may serve to remind us that Goethe was just as devoted a natural scientist during his classical years as at any other time, and that this more than anything kept him close to the living world and enabled him to end his days, as he did, in active concern with current things. Wilhelm von Humboldt wrote to Caroline on 1 December 1823 that if he had as short a time to live as Goethe, whose life at this moment seemed perilously near its close, he would be turning his thoughts to the past, but Goethe, to his astonishment, he found almost exclusively occupied with the present—den Produkten der Zeit.

Returning to *Faust*, we find that Goethe's classicism, while not strong enough to dominate or to arrest the poem, was strong enough to force a compromise. Instead of carrying out the whole of the classical portion in *Knittelvers*, as he at one time seems to have intended and as the tradition and character of the poem required, he incorporated into it a piece of Greek tragedy which he had originally written in what must have been virtual opposition to the spirit of *Faust* twenty or thirty years before. The *Helena*, as we call it, dates back to 1800 or before, when he was still struggling with the first part of the poem, and the issue with classicism was undecided. The poem may be autobiographically the truer for this intrusion, but it would be idle to deny its formal inappropriateness. Indeed, it is not unpardonable to speculate whether Goethe, when he plunged Euphron, the child of Faust and Helena, out of the sky and so made an end of him, was not half admitting to himself at this late date, 1825-7, that no real reconciliation was possible.

Be that as it may, the poem as a whole is reassuring. It was *Faust* that won out and not the Classics. If *Faust* failed to dissolve

the hard lump of Greek tragedy that Goethe offered it, it at least swallowed it whole, an excellent reminder of the vitality of his native instincts and of the relation in which his classical performance stood to the main body of his verse. In any case, whether or not we question his literary judgement, we cannot question the integrity of his mind or the constancy of his adherence to a philosophical standard. While it is open to us to wonder how genuinely organic, in his sense of the word, his classical poems were and, more especially, to shake our heads at their artificial verse-forms in which, as he tells us himself, he had to count out the feet by thrumming with his fingers—*leise mit fingernder Hand*—we can see from a glance at 1786 that they must *a priori* have seemed organic to him for the simple reason that they were classical. And since his belief in the identity of the Classics with nature and with the conception of wholeness was so honest, something of the quality of his belief gets into the verses and authenticates them in spite of themselves. Thus even here, where he probably came nearest to getting off his course, he may be said to have stayed in it by sheer force of sincerity and to have remained true to himself and to his genius.

XVII

NATURE PHILOSOPHY

THE conviction that Goethe had reached about trusting the whole of himself and not trusting the parts, so manifest in his attitude to poetry and the poetic life, had been growing in his mind for a long time. Italy may have enabled him to clarify and confirm it, but the seeds of it were there already; we can see them sprouting in his *Sturm und Drang* years, if not before. Writing to Hetzler from Strassburg on 14 July 1770, in reply to an inquiry about the problem of the beautiful, in which, it need hardly be said, he takes sides against the theorists, he points out, in support of his contention, that if you catch a butterfly and pin it down on a sheet of paper, no matter how carefully, you cannot pin down the whole butterfly, because you have taken the life out of it and made it a corpse and 'the corpse is not the whole'—*der Leichnam ist nicht das ganze Tier*. Evidently he had picked up the theme of his Leipzig poem about the dragonfly and the dissecting mind and was restating it, as an appreciably older and more thoughtful person, a little nearer to the form it was to take. The precise wording may be lacking, but it was on its way; we can tell how congenial it was going to be when it finally reached him. It is typical of him even at this early date that when he sang the praises of Strassburg cathedral he was compelled to translate his feeling for it into organic terms and to see it as something 'whole and growing like the Lord's trees'—*ganz, gross . . . wie Baume Gottes*—and, again, as 'living and undivided, not patched and pieced together'—*Eins und lebendig . . . nicht zusammengetragen und geflickt*—or that in denouncing the slavish conventionality of the eighteenth century through the mouthpiece of *Satyros* he should hold it up for ridicule against the truth, the freedom, the happiness, and, last but not least, the wholeness, of nature:

Gewohnheitsposse nur.
Fernt euch von Wahrheit und Natur,
Drinn doch alleine Selgkeit
Besteht, und LebensLiebensFreud.
Seyd all zur Slaverrey verdammt,
Nichts ganzes habt ihr allzusammt.

This is as far as he takes us at this stage. For the next step

forward we have to overleap a period of years and look at the philosophical notes jotted down at some time during the Charlotte decade, probably in 1784 or 1785, in which we find him developing the idea of wholeness, hitherto so turbulently expressed, with an unexpected lucidity. Considering how much there was at this stage of his life to divide him and keep him divided and so to prevent his thoughts about nature from maturing, it is astonishing to see how far he had progressed. Something may be due here to Spinoza whom he had been reading again, it will be remembered, with profit, but the thoughts are recognizably his and not borrowed.

It is in these notes, sometimes entitled 'Aus der Zeit der Spinoza-studien Goethes' and sometimes, and perhaps more correctly, entitled simply 'Philosophische Studie', that we find him for the first time voicing his distrust in the application of mechanical principles, principles of physical measurement, to living things—*Das Messen eines Dings ist eine grobe Handlung, die auf lebendige Körper nicht anders als höchst unvollkommen angewendet werden kann*. The distinction between organic and inorganic, on which his thoughts were evidently turning, comes out clearly in the argument that follows, where he not only defines organic life exclusively in terms of the whole as against the parts, making it thereby less susceptible of measurement, but goes on to show how deeply he was committed to this idea by stating that both truth and beauty are simply aspects of it and subordinate to it.

In every living thing [he writes] what we call the parts is so inseparable from the whole that the parts can only be understood in the whole, and we can neither make the parts the measure of the whole nor the whole the measure of the parts, and this is why living creatures, even the most restricted, have something about them that we cannot quite grasp and have to describe as infinite or partaking of infinity. . . . When the impression living things make on us springs from their complete existence we call it true; when this complete existence is limited in such a way that we can easily grasp it and when it stands in such relation to us that we enjoy grasping it, we call it beautiful.

This is noteworthy. Here, locked away in this little capsule of an essay which lay unnoticed till 1891 when it was published from a manuscript in Charlotte's hand, we have the nucleus of his philosophy, the focal point on which in the end his thinking about nature, truth, beauty, the good life, and everything else, was to converge. All he had to do was to apply these ideas to himself, to

work them out in person, and there was Goethe. Thus it is with his philosophy as with his poetry: the attitude he reached and permanently adopted in Italy was the attitude that was appropriate to him from the start. Italy, we might say, merely helped him to discover what he had always known and was bound to discover sooner or later. If, in point of philosophy, he was doubly slow to find himself and was unable in 1784 to take advantage of the conclusions he had reached, we know the reason why. He had to wait till the Charlotte dualism was over and done with before he could surrender his nature to what, deep down in himself, he already believed. All he could do meanwhile was to state it intellectually and let it wait or even forget it altogether so as to discover it again, with the freshness of a new discovery, when the right time came. There is only one other place in these years where he approaches this cardinal topic. It is in the second book of the *Sendung*, where he hints at the 'fusing totality' —das zusammenbrennende, zusammen-treffende Ganze—that the mind alone can conceive and carry out, but the phrase adds little or nothing to what the 'Studie' tells us.

The real affiliations of the 'Studie', coming as it did in or around 1784, were with the scientific pursuits which by this time were so firmly established in him. It was in 1784, we may recall, that he wrote the essay on granite, summing up his feelings about geology, and, what is more to the point, since it takes us into the biological field, completed his researches on the intermaxillary bone. The affiliations are obvious, the practical examination of living things that he was making almost day by day in his study of anatomy could not fail to influence and enliven his theory of them. Yet it is characteristic of the effectiveness with which he partitioned himself at this time, a corroboration of what we might call the dualistic habit of the Charlotte years, that there is no reference in the 'Studie' to his scientific studies or to anything concrete or specific. To an extent that surprises us in Goethe it is abstract and self-contained, stating an argument but not illustrating it. Evidently his science and his philosophy had not yet come to terms with one another, or not quite. We know from his letters, especially those to Herder and Knebel, that from the beginning he was more deeply interested in the fundamental laws of science than in the particulars, and that he was already feeling his way, however tentatively, towards his true position, situated, as he tells us in his *Maximen und Reflexionen*, in the common territory midway between science and metaphysics.

—wo Metaphysik und Naturgeschichte ubereinandergreifen But it is significant, and it is quite consistent with the general picture of him, that he did not enter into the freedom of this territory till after his break with Weimar.

His thesis on *Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen* of 1790 is the first of the scientific-philosophical documents to be issued, as it were, from his permanent headquarters. Taken along with the hexameter verses on the same subject which he afterwards incorporated in the text, it tells us better even than the *Roman Elegies* what his mind was like in the post-Italian years and what the ideas were that possessed and inspired him. Not the least vital of these was the idea of plant metamorphosis which he here expounded, the idea, namely, that everything in plant life short of the unknowable could be interpreted in terms of a modulated leaf-form, discoverable at every stage of a plant's growth and constituting the primal or basic plant pure and simple. This must have been the idea or the discovery, if we may call it that, which he was on the verge of making in 1786 when he wrote to Charlotte in an already quoted letter about how rapidly the whole problem of botany was simplifying itself. But it was not till he had felt the impact of a changed climate and a changed vegetation in Italy that he saw the solution clearly and was able to formulate it. 'Tell Herder', he wrote to her on 8 June 1787 immediately after his visit to Naples, 'that I am very close to the secret of plant organization and that it is the simplest thing imaginable—das einfachste . . . was nur gedacht werden kann. . . The primal plant—die Urpflanze—is going to be the most wonderful thing in the world. . . With this model and the knowledge how to use it—Mit diesem Modell und dem Schlüssel dazu—one could go on for ever inventing plants that would be consistent and would have an inner necessity and truth.' He said again to Knebel on 18 August that he was growing surer all the time that the formula he had found could be applied to any plant whatsoever.

Remote as this sort of botanizing may seem to-day, we need have no difficulty in seeing why it meant so much to Goethe. If, as he believed, he had elucidated the 'laws of transformation' whereby nature produces one part by means of another and reaches the utmost variety of form by modifying a single member—die Gesetze der Umwandlung . . . nach welchen sie [die Natur] einen Teil durch den andern hervorbringt und die verschiedensten Gestalten durch Modifikation eines einzigen Organs darstellt—then the

wholeness of organic life, which was coming to mean so much to him, was vindicated beyond his wildest dreams. Without sacrificing any of the detail of the vegetable kingdom, rather by magnifying it, he had arrived at an interpretation in which the problem of the separate parts was disposed of and virtually eliminated, since to his new eyes the parts now contained one another and each part contained the whole. Not only this, but in probing 'the secret affinity between the various external organs, the leaf, the calyx, the flower, the stamen, which developed successively out of one another' he had gone farther than he could have hoped towards excluding the inorganic from his apprehension of plant-life and towards demonstrating or satisfying himself that organic laws, and organic laws only, were relevant to it

It was, above all, the notion of metamorphosis itself, the mobility and pliability of natural forms, to which, as we know from looking at his inner life, he must have been exceptionally responsive, that filled and delighted him. And he stresses this both by his choice of title and by quoting Job ix 11 on the subject at the head of his thesis:

Siehe er geht vor mir uber,
ehe ich's gewahr werde,
und verwandelt sich,
ehe ich's merke.

We shall understand him better at this point if we remember that the academic botanists of his day, or most of them, were committed to the preformation theory, according to which the forms of plant life were all ready-made in the seed, immutable from the first—von Adams Zeiten her—with nothing to do but unfold themselves in an endless series of mechanical repetitions, and that it was more especially this theory, a very rigid and predetermined theory, against which he was reacting. Hence the quickness, apparent in everything he says, to dissociate the organic from the static and to make static and inorganic as nearly synonymous as possible. Not altogether wrongly, as Thales, Goethe's Thales, knew when he pinned his faith on nature's flow—Natur und ihr lebendiges Fluessen—or Mephistopheles when he watched the body to see if the last flicker of movement had stopped and the soul had departed:

Oft sah ich lustern auf die starren Glieder—
Es war nur Schein, das ruhrte, das regte sich wieder.*\

All of this goes to show that it was not the notion of form Goethe was emphasizing when he referred back to a primal plant, an 'Urpflanze', so much as the notion of changing form. It was the upsetting of the preformation theory that concerned him, not the modifying of it. The old stationary view of plant life, he insisted, was futile and led to mere classification and nomenclature; only when we learn to view it in terms of growth does it transmit its meaning to us:

Werdend betrachte sie nun, wie nach und nach sich die Pflanze,
Stufenweise geführt, bildet zu Blüten und Frucht.

But now, he says jubilantly, any plant and any flower will have the divine laws written across it; once you have learned the script you can read it everywhere, even in a different hand:

Jede Pflanze verkundet dir nun die ew'gen Gesetze,
Jede Blume, sie spricht lauter und lauter mit dir.
Aber entzifferst du hier der Gottin heilige Lettern,
Überall siehst du sie dann, auch in verändertem Zug.

Like everything else in Goethe's life at this time, his botanical thesis was not met with open arms; the reception was cold, he tells us, and not far from hostile—*kalte, fast unfreundliche Begegnung*—and he was not surprised. For he had been aware all along that the old rationalism was too deeply entrenched to make way lightly or without a struggle for these novel ideas. By now, however, he knew what he was after and made no compromise. Instead he pushed ahead without loss of time with his study of animal metamorphosis, which simply carries the botanical argument into the animal world and continues it there. He told Charlotte when writing home from Italy on 8 June 1787 about his plant philosophy that the law he was formulating was not a law of botany alone, but could be extended to the whole of the organic world—*Dasselbe Gesetz wird sich auf alles ubrige lebendige anwenden lassen*—and we see what he meant when he proceeded to argue, among other things, that the animal skull is not just an independent piece of its anatomy, made, as it were, to measure, but is a development or modulation of the spinal column, growing out of the upper vertebrae in much the same way as the flower grows out of the leaf. Thus, exactly as before, we find him seeking to break down the separateness of the parts and to bring out and uphold their inner identity.

It may have been an accident this time, or perhaps it was half-

consciously prompted by his bias towards Italy, that it was Italy again in which he saw or thought he saw the light, a sheep's skull picked up on the Lido during his second visit to Venice, in 1790, having, as he tells us, suddenly given him the clue. In any case the logic or the consistency of his thought is no longer in doubt; we can trace it at leisure in the various conjectures and theories, sometimes sound, sometimes less sound, sometimes unsound, that he ventured to put forward in one field of inquiry or another, 'meine Ideen und Grillen über die organische Natur', as he called them in his letter to Zelter of 26 December 1806. Everywhere, not only in his biology, but also in his geology, his meteorology, and his optics, we can watch him pushing his researches consistently into the aspect of nature that had commended itself to him. As he told Friedrich Jacobi on 20 March 1791, he was determined to extend his investigations over the whole of the natural realm in order to explore the laws governing the organization of living things—um die allgemeinen Gesetze wornach die lebendigen Wesen sich organisiren naher zu erforschen—and a few weeks later, on 1 June, he went on to say to him that he had projected a series of treatises, short and long, in almost every branch of natural science and was reckoning with the possibility of devoting himself exclusively to this work. Moderating his zeal a little, he then wrote to Goschen on 4 July that he expected to divide his time equally between science and letters, and this proved to be a fair indication of what was to come.

The evidence is to be found not merely in the scientific writings themselves, which are by any account a vital and impressive part of his work, but also in the endless references to science in the letters and diaries and discussions of the next forty years. These, while not very informative in matters of detail, leave us in no doubt as to his application and his enthusiasm. How irresistible the impulse was which drove him to science we can tell from his saying to D. J. Veit in 1795, that he studied science not perhaps as a specialist, but out of passion and deep desire—ich treibe es aus Begierde, aus Leidenschaft—or from his saying to Loder more than thirty years after this, on 2 January 1829, that his affection and his craving for natural science had grown rather than declined with the passing of the years—Liebe und Leidenschaft für die Naturkunde ist mit den Jahren nur gewachsen. Sometimes a word will tell us all we want to know; 'die verführerische Botanik', the

'seductiveness' of botany, for example, in his letter to Nees von Esenbeck of 2 April 1828 or the 'unbounded' interest in natural science—*meiner unbegrenzten Neigung zu den Naturstudien*—which he confesses to in his letter to Jäger on 15 November of the same year, his seventy-ninth. During the ten weeks he spent at Dornburg in the late summer and autumn of this year, almost the whole of his time, he told Sternberg on 5 October, went on scientific work.

How authentic as well as enthusiastic he was in all this expenditure of energy, how far removed from the average run of literary dreamers about nature of whom there was an abundance in his day, and how close to the laboratory scientist, is well attested by the comparison of himself with Herder that we find him making in conversation with Falk on 28 February 1809. Herder, he said, was always jumping to conclusions, whereas he was more inclined to keep his eye on the object and to bide his time, the consequence being that Herder usually reached the end of the argument before Goethe had got well started with examining the data. Even Aristotle, it would seem, was a little too hasty for him, a little too quick with his opinions, seeing that if you want to get anything out of nature you have to deal 'slowly and casually' with her, '*langsam und lasslich*', as he said to Eckermann on 1 October 1828. Very illuminating, too, is the phrase he used to Nees von Esenbeck on 21 April 1818, describing himself as a friend of 'tangible' things—*als Freund fasslicher Gestalten*—a phrase that he could never have invented if it had not been the right phrase. Again and again he had to insist to one person or another that unless he could see and touch things, he was helpless and lost. 'I must have things in front of me', he wrote to Boissierée on 22 March 1831, when he was over eighty, 'words mean less to me than ever'—*Das unmittelbare Anschauen der Dinge ist mir alles, Worte sind mir weniger als je*. It was fortunate that, being so constituted, he was not thrown confiningly on himself and on his own resources, substantial as these were, but had a whole university at his elbow, or, rather, at Jena some fourteen miles away, and was in a position to develop the practical side of his work to his heart's content. Here into this philosophical retreat, where there were not only libraries and laboratories but also men of his own persuasion to learn from and confer with, he could slip away for days and weeks and even months at a time till it was not always easy to say to which he

belonged, to Jena or to Weimar, and he playfully confessed as much in the epigram which runs them into one, calling it Weimar-Jena, the city with good at both ends:

Weimar-Jena, der grossen Stadt,
Die an beiden Enden
Viel Gutes hat.

On a formal occasion, on 24 November 1825, he told the philosophical faculty of the university that without Jena his studies of nature would have been impossible, and that it was not too much to say that he owed to it his whole development as a scientist—*ich bin dieser Akademie ganz eigentlich die Entwicklung meines wissenschaftlichen Bestrebens schuldig geworden.*

There is nothing in this continued devotion of Goethe's to science that need surprise us when we remember what had gone before. Looked at biographically, it is exactly what we might expect. For it was science, first and foremost, that in his critical years had been the saving of him and had shown him the way forward to a secure and fruitful existence. If there was a central column in his life, a main stem or trunk which nourished and sustained and held it aloft, it was not Charlotte von Stein nor, in a last analysis, was it Italy, much as he owed to the one and to the other, but it was the intensive study of nature which, coming to him as a disciplining and a clarifying force in 1779 or thereabouts, and not a moment too soon for he was entering now into his thirties, had enabled him to find his true self and his true philosophy and so to justify, and more than justify, his career.

Any estimate of Goethe's relation to science must begin by recognizing the formative part it played in making him what he was. No matter how lightly we may be disposed to think of the contribution he made to science, which, for one reason or another, seems less negligible to-day than it did half a century ago, there can be no two opinions about the contribution, if we may so stretch the term, that science made to him. Here at least he knew himself through and through and was never in a moment's doubt. But there is no need to draw a hard and fast line between what he took and what he gave. By admitting the study of science into his life and allowing it to permeate and inform his whole activity, and also by recognizing the fact and putting the weight of his personality behind it, he was making a contribution to science or, at any

rate, he was doing a service to science that is felt by all who read him and will continue to be felt as long as his writings last. It would be a service to science if he had done no more than remind us, as he does in his *Kristallisation und Vegetation* of 1789, that science was man's prerogative—die Wissenschaft ist eigentlich das Vorrecht des Menschen, or that science was the only sure basis for us to stand on—die Naturwissenschaften sind die einzigen, die uns auf einen sicheren Grund führen (3 October 1829); or, again, that all we were here for was to observe nature—wir sind überhaupt bloss da, um die Natur zu beobachten (27 August 1831). It adds to the force of these pronouncements if we note that there is an interval of more than forty years between the first and the last of them, and that the last was made in the closing year of his life. For those who find them too sweeping there is another that comes nearer to a definition. In a letter or, rather, a set of notes sent to Schultz on 24 November 1817 he said that it was strange to find people treating science as if it were something separate or existing by itself, since it was really the handle or lever we have for taking hold of and moving the world—Handhabe, Hebel womit man die Welt anfassen und bewegen soll. Coming at this time, instead of, say, half a century later, the words surprise us with their modernity.

Regarding his contribution to science in the stricter sense of the word, the scientific writings proper, we find that they never stray very far from his personal experience or from the conclusions he had come to in 1786. We might sum it up by saying that he was only doing for the interpretation of the organic world what he had already done for himself, breaking down the partitions that isolated the parts from one another and substituting his idea of the organic whole. This, as it happens, was exactly what science or, rather, the philosophy of science, needed in making the great shift of emphasis from physics to biology that was then in process, and to this extent it may well be that all the scientific writings of Goethe, even those that proved to be wrong, were helpful and suggestive in their degree. By showing others how to break their former habits of thought and to think biologically, as he did invariably and as so few were capable of doing at that time, he was, in the worst case, clearing the ground and preparing the way for the truths of biology to emerge. And, in the best case, he was doing something more. His dominant theory of metamorphosis,

whereby in a sense undreamed of in the older philosophy the parts of an organism were seen to grow out of one another, was in direct line with the theory of evolution, in which it was the species that grew out of one another, and, more particularly, with the work of Lamarck, though, so far as we know, the name of Lamarck never reached him. As long as Goethe kept inside his province, there was no fear of his going badly astray. The errors did no harm; the influence, the spirit, of his work was timely and beneficial. It is worth remembering that no less a scientific personality than Alexander von Humboldt, looking back years afterwards on the three months he spent with Goethe in 1797, said they had powerfully influenced and inspired him, and that they had equipped him, as it were, with new organs of perception.

For the most part Goethe was fully aware of the limits within which it was advisable for him to stay. If there was one science above all others to which he peculiarly belonged, both by sympathy and by association, it was the science of botany, which, it would seem, was not only the first to acquaint him with the aspect of natural law that was to prove most deeply congenial to him but which he also used as a sort of guide or amanuensis to all the others, pursuant to his belief, noted somewhere under the rubric of optics, that he would find nature the same everywhere—*Überzeugung die Natur durchaus sich selbst gleich zu finden*. Just as he was in a quite legitimate way thinking of botany and his theory of the leaf-origin of the flower when he formulated his anatomical theory of the vertebral origin of the skull, so when he came to speculate about geology and the origin of life on the terrestrial globe, as we find him doing in the Homunculus part of the *Klassische Walpurgsnacht* in *Faust*, it was this way of thinking and, above all, it was his sense of the gradualness of natural life, so evident in the life of plants, 'den einfachen stetigen Gang der organisirenden Natur' as he described it to C. W. M. Jacobi on 16 August 1799, which determined his mind and shaped his argument.

Homunculus, the synthetic mannikin who has started life dubiously in a glass bottle in Wagner's laboratory, which means, by the way, that he derives from the first part of the poem though he only appears in the second, is desirous of starting life over again on a sounder basis. But he is undecided as to ways and means. This involves him in the controversy of the Vulcanists and the

Neptunists, a contemporary controversy which Goethe transfers whimsically to the lips of Thales and Anaxagoras as they wander among the shades, and he finds he has to choose between the rival claims of the fire smouldering under the ancient rocks and the vegetable slime lying in the bed of the ocean. Needless to say, he chooses the latter, obedient to the assurance given him by Thales that life began in the water—Im Feuchten ist Lebendiges erstanden—and that the slow processes of aqueous life are what he needs.

How far Goethe was philosophically committed to his belief in the slowness and gradualness of the life-process it is not easy to say, though it will be clear from the above that he set not a little store by it. A modern reader looking at the whole of Goethe's record, the life and the works together, cannot fail to notice a discrepancy between the gradualness Goethe perceived or thought he perceived in nature's development and the lack of gradualness in his own which, as we have seen and as he would have had to admit, had gone by crisis and revolution (a process more Vulcanist, one would think, than Neptunist) and in any case not by easy stages. He indicated this himself when he wrote to Charlotte von Stein on 13 June 1782, midway between crises, that with him everything went 'in epochs'—Da Alles Epochen weise mit mir geht. It may be noted also that he was strongly drawn to the notion of polarity or of actively related opposites, as we can see from his creative writings which are full of temperamental opposites, and this is a notion which allies itself not less readily to the thought of clash and conflict than to the easy continuity that Thales preferred. We do not know what answer Goethe would have given here, but, whatever the answer, we can be sure that he would have stuck to his conception of natural growth, with climaxes or without them, and that he would have identified it with his sense of law and order.

Without committing him farther than he chooses to take us, we can see from this quasi-scientific episode in *Faust* where his philosophical preferences lay. Here, as almost invariably in his contemplation of nature, we find him putting his trust in the organic forces operating in it and distrusting, or dissociating himself from, the inorganic. While it might be unfair to hold him strictly to the opinion which he once tentatively voiced in his 'Betrachtung zur Morphologie überhaupt' that the superiority of organic life is in direct ratio to the inadequacy of inorganic or

mechanical principles when applied to it—man durfte beinahe sagen, dass die organischen Naturen nur desto vollkommner werden, je weniger die mechanischen Prinzipien bei denselben anwendbar sind—we can see that some such assumption must have been at the back of his head and that he would instinctively fight shy of any inorganic questions with which he was confronted.

This comes out very plainly in his *Kristallisation und Vegetation*. When Knebel wrote to him about the curious problem of the leaf and tendril forms that he had observed in the frost patterns on his window-pane Goethe was immediately on his guard. First, couching his answer in letter form, he invented the fiction that he was still in Italy, which he had left in the previous spring, and was not able to inspect the phenomenon at first hand; secondly, he was at pains to warn Knebel, somewhat to Knebel's annoyance, against the danger of joining what should be kept separate Crystallization, he reminded him, was one thing and vegetable or animal organization another, and we should never allow ourselves to confuse them. Only with this reserve was he prepared to discuss the problem or any other that arose in the intermediate areas—die Zwischenräume—where, as he put it, the various kingdoms met and overlapped or seemed to overlap—wo die verschiedenen Reiche zusammenzutreffen und in einander überzugehen scheinen. The trouble with Homunculus was, we may recall, that he got crystallized first instead of organized, and this is why he had to go back to the beginning again. Mephistopheles, having seen all the queer things there were to see, had seen this too, as he tells us himself with implications.

Wer lange lebt, hat viel erfahren,
Nichts Neues kann für ihn auf dieser Welt geschehn
Ich habe schon in meinen Wanderjahren
Krystallisiertes Menschevolk gesehn

It was in this sense that Goethe remarked, in his letter to Lindenau of 31 March 1819, on the necessity of distinguishing between chemical physics and mathematical or, more broadly, between mathematics and biology. He believed, or he persuaded himself, that the truths he was seeking could be arrived at without recourse to mathematics—auch ohne Mitwirkung der Mathematik—and that being what he was and where he was—meine Anlagen und Verhältnisse zu Rathe ziehend—he was entitled to proceed accordingly, which in the main he may be said to have

done. But it was inevitable that there should be occasional collisions between the two camps, border incidents as it were, and it is in this light that we have to explain the attack he made on Newton in regard to optics and the theory of colour. Here, as luck would have it, he had become engrossed in one of the very problems he had warned Knebel against, a problem most precariously situated on the border-line between biology and physics, and therefore, by his own admission, not quite under his jurisdiction. On the one hand, there was the approach through the problem of light and the colour of light, which, as Newton had shown, was susceptible of exact analysis by means of the prism, and, on the other, there was the approach through physiology and colour vision, which Newton had not attempted. It was in the latter region, hitherto but little investigated, that Goethe, impressed by the splendour of colour he had experienced in the Mediterranean, first began to extend his curiosity, and it was here, in the physiology of colour, that he was entitled to speak. The description of colour phenomena that he slowly compiled during the twenty years following, and presented in full in his *Zur Farbenlehre* of 1810 along with an extremely interesting historical survey, not only bears witness to this but displays at their very finest the qualities of mind he was able to bring to scientific questions. But by going farther and challenging Newton on his own ground he was exceeding the boundaries he had set himself and plainly asking for trouble. Once involved, he was unwilling to withdraw, his feelings got out of hand, the quarrel perpetuated itself.

Seen in perspective, it was all a tactical or personal question, not a philosophical one. Philosophically, that is to say, there was nothing new to be had from it, since the limitation, or rather the delimitation, which it exposed in his philosophy of science was conceded anyway and was evident in every phase of his work. All the optical controversy did was to throw it into relief and force it on the attention of those who might not have noticed it. We have no need to dwell on this misadventure, because we know from other sources how little disposed he was to compromise with evidence unless it was evidence of his sort. His own ideal in scientific method, not that he always succeeded in living up to it, called for an almost indefinite suspension of judgement. What he advocated, as we can learn from his essay on experimentation

called 'Der Versuch als Vermittler von Objekt und Subjekt', was an accumulating of experiments, each of which was in itself partial or isolated, continued patiently till the accumulating produced a totality. At any given point of inquiry it was not for science to take a single line of approach, but to take every line and, as it were, to rotate round the centre till the investigation had come full circle and there was no more to do, whereupon out of the wholeness of the evidence the truth would emerge

This is what Goethe was driving at when he said that, since everything in nature is in constant action and interaction, we have to recognize that any single phenomenon stands in relation to countless others, in the same way as a luminous point of light sends its rays in every direction. The scientist, he went on to say, must link his researches together by asking at the end of each experiment 'what lies next to it or what follows immediately upon it'—was *unmittelbar* an ihn grenzt, was *zunächst* auf ihn folgt—and so gradually work his way round to a complete result. What particularly dismayed him in Newton's theory was the poverty of experiment on which it was based, three attenuated pieces of observation in a darkened room providing the material for a final and comprehensive judgement on all the light and colour that filled the universe. This more or less is how he put it to himself, though, knowing him as we do and remembering the lifelong uneasiness with mathematics that he confessed to Zelter in his letter of 12 December 1812, we might prefer to put it differently.

The extent of Goethe's unusualness in scientific matters is not fully shown till he comes to deal with the scientist himself. Here he takes an unexpected, but quite consistent, stand. If the aim of science, as he conceived it, was to apprehend the infinite variety and detail of the natural universe in its quality of oneness or wholeness, then the person who seeks to apprehend it, being himself part of the natural universe, must partake of this wholeness or he is unfitted for the task. All the isolated findings in the world will not avail if the living and undivided personality is lacking to receive them. It was in accordance with this criterion, which is appropriate to Goethe, though difficult of application to others unless they have it in them to follow and be like him, that he distrusted any merely intellectual or manipulatory endowment in the scientist and demanded that he bring all his faculties, his combined faculties, to bear on the problems he undertakes.

Ultimately, he said, man, man in his entirety, and not the instruments he uses, must be the test. Or, rather, he himself is the chief instrument and, as such, must make himself adequate. Man, making the normal use of his senses, he told Riemer in 1809, is the first and the commonest piece of physical apparatus. Trustworthy, he might have added, when rightly used, but not otherwise. This is what he meant when he said to Eckermann (18 May 1824) that those theoretical people who are committed to one exclusive direction have 'lost their innocence' and can no longer see the outer world in its natural purity. When he wrote that nature was silent if you put her on the rack—*Die Natur verstummt auf der Folter*—or that, in Faust's words, you cannot force her secrets out of her with screws and levers—

Und was sie deinem Geist nicht offenbaren mag,
Das zwingst du ihr nicht ab mit Hebeln und mit Schrauben

—it was not the shortcomings of nature he was censuring nor even the shortcomings of science, but only those of the scientist if he thinks he can intercept nature with partial or artificial devices or with anything less than his full humanity. Not even the mathematician is exempted; he, too, can only attain perfection in his science if he perfects himself.

It will be evident that what Goethe asks of the scientist, namely that he put the whole of himself into his work, is just what he asks of the poet, neither more nor less. This he would have been unlikely to do if he had shared the belief, not less widespread in his day than in ours, that poetry was one thing and science another, and that there was no close or vital relation between the two. We know from his attitude to the Classics that he thought otherwise and, so far as we can judge, he must have thought otherwise from the start. Neither the predominantly literary training he received as a boy in Frankfurt nor the anti-scientific trend of his poetry during the Charlotte years, both of which might have been expected to foster in him the orthodox view that the humanities were enough in themselves, seems to have shaken the assumption on which he always acted, that science and poetry went together.

It was only when he began to write about science and to show that he was in earnest about it that he realized how little this was expected of him. As he discovered to his sorrow on publishing *Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen*, the old pigeon-holing was still in

force; everything was cut off from everything else. Poetry and fine art, he tells us in *Zur Morphologie*, hardly touched—berührt einander kaum—while poetry and science were treated as sworn enemies—Poesie und Wissenschaft erschienen als die grossten Widersacher. Thus the attitude to Goethe which implied that if he was a poet he should stick to poetry and leave science to others was not a specifically nineteenth-century attitude; it was there waiting for him in the eighteenth. But he was not young enough to change his ways and he was far too sure of his ground. Science was involved as well as poetry when he reflected how few there were who did not 'want him different' and how little any such considerations could sway him now:

Solcher Fehler, die du, o Muse, so emsig gepfleget,
 Zeihet der Pobel mich; Pobel nur sieht er in mir.
 Ja, sogar der Bessere selbst, gutmutig und bieder,
 Will mich anders; doch du, Muse, befiehlst mir allein.

It was against this background of disapproval that Goethe carried on with his poetic-scientific affairs, 'Das alte poetisch-wissenschaftliche Wesen das du an mir kennst,' as he said to Friedrich Jacobi on 23 November 1801, a phrase which in itself tells us how closely the two activities of poetry and science were associated in his mind. However little his own performance may seem to support it, his scientific writings being to all outward appearance so far from poetry and his poetic writings, for the most part, so far from science, he believed, and he stated on more occasions than one, that the creative life was the same in both, in man and in nature, and that the laws governing the form of a poem or of a work of art were the same as the laws governing natural form. This belief comes out very clearly in his above-mentioned conversation with Eckermann on 20 June 1831, in which he takes the French biologists to task, not excepting Geoffroy de Saint-Hilaire whom he so deeply admired, for resorting to such a mechanical term as 'composition', and insists on the word's unfitness to denote either the organization of a living creature or that of Mozart's *Don Juan*. 'Nobody understands', he said to Zelter on 30 October 1808, 'that the formative process—die Gestaltung—is the supreme process and, for that matter, the only process, alike in nature and in art—Kein Mensch will begreifen, dass die höchste und einzige Operation der Natur und Kunst die Gestaltung sey.

Not content with identifying the creative life of man thus closely with that of nature, he implied in an introductory passage in his *Zur Morphologie* that science or, rather, the life of the scientist was creative, too, and that the impulse working in him and especially the impulse to understand the relation of the parts to the whole in living things, the ruling impulse in Goethe's conception of science, was indistinguishable from the artistic impulse—Wie nah dieses wissenschaftliche Verlangen mit dem Kunst- und Nachahmungstriebe zusammenhänge, braucht wohl nicht umständlich ausgeführt zu werden. This was obviously what he meant when he said in his *Geschichte der Farbenlehre* that we were compelled to think of science as an art, if we expected any sort of totality from it—so müssen wir uns die Wissenschaft notwendig als Kunst denken, wenn wir von ihr irgend eine Art von Ganzheit erwarten.

Whether this identifying of art with science holds good for the generality of poets and artists or not, it certainly held good for him or, at least, he believed it did. In one of the few places where he writes theoretically about the way his mind worked, in his Heinroth review of 1823, we find him illustrating what he has to say about himself with examples from both his science and his poetry, evidently going on the assumption that the mental processes were the same in both, and that it did not matter which of them he turned to. But he makes it clear, and without this the assumption would seem unduly bold, that he was not thinking merely of the end of the process, the moment of writing a poem or of making a scientific discovery, at which the difference between the two activities is probably at its most apparent, but rather of the preparation, the long preparation, that made the end possible. In both his science and his poetry it is the slowness with which his mind worked that seems to have impressed him most when he looked back. Far from rebuking himself, as so many of his critics have done, for his supposed dilatoriness, his long delays and his reluctance to finish, he recognizes it as an indispensable condition and offers it as a clue to the understanding of him. The themes of his poems, he tells us, would be active in his mind for thirty and for forty years, passing from one transformation to another—da sie sich denn zwar immer umgestalteten—till they finally took shape and matured; and similarly in science a problem would lodge in his mind, engaging him, yet offering little prospect of solution, half solved and half unsolved, till after years of watching

and waiting it would all work out suddenly to a clear and connected result. Wilhelm von Humboldt was giving him his own thoughts back when he said to him in a late and valuable letter of 6 January 1832 that a process of retarding—ein langsames Hervorbrechen—was, in Goethe's case, indispensable to the creative life.

For Goethe, we can see, the law of metamorphosis, the law of growth and changing form, was operating here, in the life of the mind day by day, not less surely than in the trees that grew in his garden or the birds that came and nested there. It need not surprise us therefore, the two activities of science and poetry being so close to one another, that he should occasionally think of them as serving the same purpose and possibly moving towards the same goal. If it was science's business to seek the truth, perhaps it was poetry's, too. A hazardous thought, yet we know that it flitted through his mind now and then, because in his *Zur Morphologie* he welcomes a suggestion from Alexander von Humboldt that poetry, too, might occasionally be able to lift nature's veil—dass es der Poesie auch wohl gelingen könne den Schleier der Natur aufzuheben—adding that if Humboldt, the scientist, admitted it, why should he, the poet, deny it—wenn er es zugesteht, wer wird es laugnen? Again, in his 'Symbolik', a set of notes included in the scientific writings, he reminds us that while ordinary speech may serve for ordinary purposes, another kind of speech, poetic speech, comes of itself as soon as we begin to go deeper—Sobald von tiefern Verhältnissen die Rede ist, tritt sogleich eine andre Sprache ein — die poetische. Furthermore he reminds us in 1817 in connexion with *Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen* that if we go back far enough we shall find that science developed out of poetry anyway, as it did in ancient Greece, and that in the revolution of time the two may meet again at a higher point to the advantage of both. This much can be agreed that if there is a way for poetry to become the instrument of truth, instead of being merely a vehicle for it, it will have to be Goethe's way or something like it.

These reflections, while not entitling us to make an oracle of Goethe, indicate an attitude to his poetry, and especially to his late poetry, that enables us to get the best out of it, and is therefore probably the right attitude. If we adopt it, we shall be adopting the attitude he took in early life when he said that he looked forward to the day when he would express his thoughts just as they were—eigentlich—and we shall judge his poetry as philosophical

poetry, concerned, that is to say, with the expression, and at favoured moments even with the creation, of philosophical truth. There are passages in his late verse, and something of their spirit pervades it all, in which we feel that the truth or the wisdom has not been intellectually rephrased from a previous formula, as it usually is in poetry of this sort, but that it comes with and through the poetry, surprising us with its immediacy. There is no need to specify at length; we can take our choice from the *Divan* or from *Gott und Welt* or from *Pandora* or from the *Trilogie der Leidenschaft* or from the *Zahme Xemen*. A reader who had never learned to recognize the serenity and the mighty working of the universe might more aptly learn to do so from the lines 'Wenn im Unendlichen dasselbe' than from Faust's contemplation of the macrocosm written probably more than fifty years before. To this extent the later passage has the advantage over the earlier.

Wie alles sich zum Ganzen webt,
Eins in dem andern wurckt und lebt!
Wie Himmelskräfte auf und nieder steigen
Und sich die goldnen Eimer reichen!
Mit Seegenduftenden Schwingen
Vom Himmel durch die Erde dringen,
Harmonisch all das All durchklingen!

This is the younger Goethe speaking And here is the elder:

Wenn im Unendlichen dasselbe
Sich wiederholend ewig fliesst,
Das tausendfältige Gewolbe
Sich kraftig ineinanderschliesst,
Stromt Lebenslust aus allen Dingen,
Dem kleinsten wie dem grossten Stern,
Und alles Drangen, alles Ringen
Ist ewige Ruh in Gott dem Herrn.

And, by the same token, the philosophical impact of Goethe's lines on divine immanence, in which, remembering Giordano Bruno, he asks what sort of a god it would be who worked from outside and ran the world like a wheel that his finger could stop or start, might well be accounted greater than any he wrote in early life, when by his own standard the turbulence so often clouded and blunted the meaning:

Was war' ein Gott, der nur von aussen stiesse,
Im Kreis das All am Finger laufen liesse!

The contention, sometimes voiced, that the years of Goethe's life devoted to science were years stolen from poetry is not easy to sustain. If it is based, as it seems to be, on the not very defensible premiss that a poet can write poetry all the time, provided he gives his mind to it, then it must be admitted that of all the kinds of poetry known to us Goethe's is the last to which this premiss could be applied. It was clear to him early, and he accepted the condition cheerfully, that he was not so constituted as to be able to say when he would write poetry and when he would not and that, for this reason if for no other, he would have to spend part of his working day in other pursuits. By turning so much of his time over to science, there was this advantage for his poetry that his mind was being continually brought to bear on, and continually attuned to, the very aspect of nature and of consciousness at which, by his reckoning, poetry could be expected to emerge and that, far from neglecting the source of creative life by botanizing and geologizing and what not, he was concentrating on it, familiarizing himself with it, and keeping himself, as it were, in form or in training for the next event. This point of view, or something very like it, is implicit in a remark he dropped about Byron, which shows that he not only applied the point of view to himself but was prepared to apply it to poets in general. Byron, he noted with surprise, so Crabb Robinson tells us on 17 August 1829, put so much truth into his poetry that there was little in it that he, Goethe, would have cared to alter, yet he had spent his life in the study of nature and Byron had not.

The chances are that, whether or not his readers are satisfied, Goethe got all the poetry out of himself that it was in his power to give. Taken as a whole, his poetic writings, in the broad sense which includes some of his prose, can be said to have run their course and to show beginning, middle, and end as surely as anyone's. Both his long maturity and his long immaturity are fully recorded for us, provided we know how to read him and are prepared to take a fragment or even a stray line as seriously as a five-act play. If by good fortune he had succeeded in extracting more from himself as a poet, it would probably have poured itself into the comprehensive scientific poem, the modern *De Rerum Natura*, that he always wanted to write and of which he has given us a clear, if not wholly convincing, foretaste in the two short pieces entitled *Metamorphose der Pflanzen* and *Metamorphose der Tiere*,

where he begins to survey the kingdoms of nature as from a mountain top and promises us the 'sweet certainty' of knowledge—die liebliche volle Gewissheit—from the lips of the Muse:

Freue dich, höchstes Geschöpf der Natur! Du
fühlest dich fähig,
Ihr den höchsten Gedanken, zu dem sie schaffend
sich aufschwang,
Nachzudenken. Hier stehe nun still und wende die
Blicke
Rückwärts, prüfe, vergleiche und nimm vom Munde
der Muse,
Dass du schauest, nicht schwärmst, die liebliche
volle Gewissheit.

It is interesting to compare this noble conception of a long poem, which dates explicitly from the late seventeen-nineties and is perhaps of longer standing, with the vague and unpromising *Geheimnisse* that he was beginning to compose towards the end of the Charlotte years. Once the new idea for a long poem had taken hold of his mind it ousted the old one completely and, so far as we can judge from chance remarks, stayed with him to the last, or at any rate for a long period of years, as something that he owed it to himself to write. 'I still cling to the idea', he said to Knebel on 22 March 1799—Jenes grosse Naturwerk habe ich auch noch nicht aufgegeben—and according to Boisserée it was in his mind in 1815, though now more retrospectively. Caroline von Wolzogen remembers his agreeing with her that he ought to have written a book, meaning possibly a book in prose or in prose and verse combined, summing up the scientific progress of his time—wo alle Fortschritte des Naturstudiums unserer Zeit benutzt waren. In whatever form, and however inadequately, he might have carried out this ambitious project, it would have had the merit, as Schiller hinted to him on 5 March 1799, of linking his scientific activity with his poetic and so, we may add, of facilitating and reinforcing the true interpretation of him. If there is an incompleteness in his work as a poet, it is not in fiction or stage drama, since neither of these genres was vital or indispensable to him, but rather in the scientific nature-epic that the rest of him called for and that he never managed to supply.

XVIII

THE OUTER WORLD

IF in spite of all Goethe says to the contrary his poetry continues to impress us as being frequently remote from the scientist, rarely touching on anything that pertains obviously to science and devoting itself for the most part to matters that seem alien to it, it is not without good reason. He had begun as a poet by exploring the richness of sentiment that he discovered in himself, and it was in his ability to express its variations so perfectly, with a purity, an immediacy, rivalling the great musical composers, that he may be said to have first shown himself supreme. Whatever promise he may have shown here and there of gifts of another sort, dramatic or narrative, they are completely overshadowed by his lyrical gift and his command of the emotions.

That he himself regarded his beginnings in this light is shown by the comment he makes on them in his *Geschichte meines botanischen Studiums*, where he reminds us that while his early ventures in poetry were well received at the time, they were perhaps better treated than they deserved, since they really did little more than describe the inner life and show his knowledge of it to the virtual exclusion of everything else—welche jedoch eigentlich nur den innern Menschen schildern, und von den Gemuthsbewegungen genugsame Kenntniss voraussetzen. He recognizes that they also betray an enthusiasm for natural objects combined with a philosophical desire to probe their mystery, but this, he confesses, spent itself in a vague and restless brooding which led to nothing—ein unbestimmtes, unbefriedigtes Hinbrüten. His generalization may not fit *Gotz von Berlichingen*, which he either disregards for the moment or takes more lightly than his commentators, but it fits the general run of his shorter poems and it fits *Faust*, where even the vivid Gretchen scenes are felt more as a projection of the turmoil in Goethe's mind than as a piece of drama seen independently of it.

But it is *Werther*, all in all the most personal of his early works, that it fits best. We have only to read the letter dated 18 August in which the outer world and even the universe seems to dissolve and disappear in an ocean of feeling—wie faßt' ich das alles in mein warmes Herz—to realize afresh how lavishly, how danger-

ously, introspective a work it is. But any page of it will tell us as much. In its extreme form this sentiment rejects the outer world completely. Werther speaks in an earlier letter (22 May) of withdrawing into himself and finding a world—Ich kehre in mich selbst zurück und finde eine Welt—and the spokesman in 'Kenner und Enthusiast', dating from the Werther years, goes further and is ready to give birth to a hundred worlds:

Mein Busen war so voll und bang,
Von hundert Welten trachtig.

We get a foretaste of Goethe's critical attitude to this sort of thing in the devastating line he wrote for Mephistopheles in the *Fragment* about Faust trying to squeeze the 'six days of creation' into his heart—Alle sechs Tagewerk' im Busen fühlen. And in later life, as we have just seen, he becomes explicit about it, telling Eckermann on 16 February 1826 that when he was young he was short of things to write about—Es fehlte mir damals an Stoff—and that while he made a happy choice of material in *Gotz*—Ich tat einen glücklichen Griff mit meinem Gotz von Berlichingen—he was thrown back on himself for *Werther* and for *Faust*—Beim Werther und Faust musste ich dagegen wieder in meinen eigenen Busen greifen.

What he does not seem to have realized when he passed this judgement on himself is that the fault or preference he confesses to was not restricted to his early poetry but had its important bearing on the whole of it. Thus the Charlotte phase which came next, instead of correcting the fault, served rather to increase it. Tending as Charlotte's influence did to shut the door on the outer world and so to insert itself between him and his nature philosophy, in which, as he indicates, his way of recovery lay, he found himself thrown back on the inner world more completely than before. True, there is a social situation in both *Iphigenie* and *Tasso* which seems at first sight to offer a corrective; the persons in these two plays interact with one another more constructively than in his *Sturm und Drang* works, and to this extent they are drawn out of themselves. But the social setting in either case is too restricted to be truly social. Both *Iphigenie* and *Tasso* have enough people round them to bring out their inner qualities, but not enough to absorb them or determine what they do. If it is possible to overlook the extreme, the almost doctrinaire, inwardness of *Iphigenie*,

so foreign to the brisk enterprise of Euripides' play, there can be no two opinions about *Tasso*, which is and remains the most sequestered, the most cloistered, of all Goethe's masterpieces, *Werther* not excepted. Werther with all his introspection has for what it is worth the potential freedom of movement that Tasso lacks; the Faustian impulse to fly with the wings of a bird to the horizon and beyond is also his—Ach damals, wie oft hab ich mich mit Fittigen eines Kranichs, der über mich hinflieg, zu dem Ufer des ungemessenen Meeres gesehnt (18 August)—whereas Tasso stays strictly within the walls of his garden and has no serious thought of leaving it. It is not without meaning that the bustle of the political world is less audible in the fifth act of *Tasso* than it was in the first, resembling in this the beating of the waves in *Iphigenie* which are heard in the opening monologue and then heard no more, while for the end, if not for the *reductio ad absurdum*, of this confinement of spirit we may turn to the muted and almost inaccessible dialogues of *Die Natürliche Tochter*, beyond which there can only be silence. Antonio sums it up when he says in the third act of *Tasso* that Tasso withdraws into his inner life as if it were the whole world, complete and self-sufficient, and loses sight of everything else:

Bald

Versinkt er in sich selbst, als ware ganz
Die Welt in seinem Busen, er sich ganz
In seiner Welt genug, und alles rings
Umher verschwindet ihm.

Thus it is not merely to his *Sturm und Drang* that Goethe's criticism applies; it applies equally, and perhaps with greater force, to the main body of his creative writing up to the age of forty. As he tells us in the seventh of the *Roman Elegies*, that is to say as late as the seventeen-nineties, he had spent far more of his time than was good for him looking into himself and exploring the dark and disconsolate paths of the spirit, with insufficient regard to the significance of what lay all around him:

Und ich über mein Ich, des unbefriedigten Geistes
Dustre Wege zu spähn, still in Betrachtung versank.

Notwithstanding the excellences of *Götz von Berlichingen* and *Egmont* and *Wilhelm Meisters Theatralische Sendung*, all three of which have the merit of taking the mind outside itself into the world of action and character, it is not easy to see them in anything

like the intimate relation to him in which *Werther* stands or, for that matter, *Faust* or *Iphigene* or *Tasso* or any one of a bookful of songs and lyrics. They impress us rather as excursions and, *Gotz von Berlichingen* excepted, not very spontaneous excursions into fields that others have moved in more freely than he. Even his power to draw character, surprise us as it may in the creation of such everyday folk as Frau Marthe in *Faust* or the Klarchen household in *Egmont*, soon draws away from the daily world and finds its true outlet in characters of another sort, characters that are not quite characters but rather embodiments of a mood or a quality, pitched nearer to philosophy than to realism. *Faust* and *Werther* and *Mephistopheles* and *Iphigene* and *Tasso* and all the constituent characters in Goethe's greatest works affect us in this way; they may, and they do, inhabit and enlarge the spirit, but they cannot walk the stage of life, as *Egmont*, a border-line case half individual and half somnambulist, found to his cost when he had to leave it.

Knowing by now the excessiveness of emotional life that Goethe was born with, we can see only too clearly where the pressure came from to thrust his poetry in this direction, and we can well believe that if he so often yielded to the pressure he did so more from necessity than from choice. How problematic his inner life remained, or was capable of becoming, even in later years when he had done all he could to correct it is amply shown by such a disquieting incident as his loss of balance over Ulrike von Levetzow in 1823, when the 'uncertain labyrinth of passion' involved him like a second *Werther*—

Dann zog uns wieder ungewisse Bahn
Der Leidenschaften labyrinthisch an

—and brought him at seventy-four to the brink of despair. Or again, and still more alarmingly, by the scene in the fifth act of the second part of *Faust*, where Faust in advanced age—im höchsten Alter—is found struggling with the direst of apprehensions, which whisper to him with ghostly voices that he cannot dismiss—

Wurde mich kein Ohr vernehmen,
Musst' es doch im Herzen drohnen

—telling him of the 'darknesses that lurk within'—

Bei vollkommenen äussern Sinnen
Wohnen Finsternisse drinnen

—and surrounding him with such a throng of portents and irrational fears, the cry of a bird, the creak of a door, that it is only with an effort beyond his strength if he succeeds in throwing them off and standing free for a moment at the last:

Wenn auch ein Tag uns klar vernunftig lacht,
In Traumgespinnst verwickelt uns die Nacht;
Wir kehren froh von junger Flur zuruck,
Ein Vogel krachzt; was krachzt er? Missgeschick.
Von Aberglauben fruh und spat umgarnt:
Es eignet sich, es zeigt sich an, es warnt.
Und so verschuchtert, stehen wir allein.
Die Pforte knarrt, und niemand kommt herein.

For a man so constituted, tragically susceptible in his inner life even in its decline, it is difficult to over-estimate the benefit to be had from the scientific study of nature, which in any and every field and for amateur and professional alike, turns the mind to external objects and gives it, as it were, a respite from itself. This is what Goethe was trying to tell us in his essay on granite when he contrasted the 'sublime repose' of nature with the 'quick motions' of the heart. And we can well imagine how sharply at this date, 1784 or thereabouts, the outer and the inner realms conflicted. At the very time of his life when he was passing through the extreme phase of his introspection, with the spirit of *Iphigene* and of the 'Mondlied' presiding over him and the morbid refinements of *Tasso* accumulating in his mind against the day when he would put them down on paper, the cool survey and scrutiny of the natural world set in like the ticking of a clock and took an equal and perhaps a stronger hold. Whatever Goethe has to say later about the compatibility of his science with his poetry, we have to recognize the initial incompatibility, science in the early Weimar years being rather the opponent of his poetry than the ally. When he wrote innocently to Charlotte from Zellerfeld in the Harz mountains on 11 August 1784 that she had no rival in his affections apart from his geology—*du hast ausser den Steinen keine Nebenbuhlerin*—he was speaking more truly than he knew.

We can see without his telling us how acute must have been the tension in this phase of his life between the two activities, the one taking him into the world of dreams and the other into the world of things, and we may be grateful to it for giving us the ballad of the 'Erlkonig', written at this time, in which the tension is so

marvellously recorded, the fever of his spirit communicating here in urgent dialogue with his sense of reality until it is too late and the bond of communication is snapped:

Mein Sohn, was birgst du so bang dein Gesicht?—
 Siehst, Vater, du den Erlkönig nicht?
 Den Erlenkönig mit Kron' und Schweif?—
 Mein Sohn, es ist ein Nebelstreif. . . .

Mein Vater, mein Vater, und hörest du nicht,
 Was Erlenkönig mir leise verspricht?—
 Sei ruhig, bleibe ruhig, mein Kind
 In dürren Blättern sauselt der Wind.

The direction Goethe would move in when the time came for him to choose, inwards or outwards, was not in any doubt, as we know already and as the ballad tells us. No sooner was he out of the Weimar atmosphere than he began to concentrate on the world about him, on what he could see with his eyes, with a passion and a delight that he had not known before, though the scientific study of natural things that he had begun to make was obviously leading up to it. If in spite of science he had spent too much of his time until now day-dreaming and seeing the world out of focus, as he confessed again to Boisserée as late as 18 June 1817—Ich habe in meinem Leben viel zu viel gedammert—he now began to glory almost for its own sake in seeing clearly, 'das Auge Licht seyn zu lassen' as he said to Herder on 10 November 1786, and to look, and look his fill, at the outer world, only suspending the activity at moments in order to count his gains and begin again. 'I have stopped looking at things for a while', he said to Herder in the following month on 29 December, 'so as to digest what I have seen already'—Ich habe Zeither eine Pause im Sehen gemacht um das Gesehne wurcken zu lassen.

To start with, then, this emphasis on the visual simply marks the extending of his scientific eye, with its several years of training in field and laboratory, to the world at large. Being released at last from the besetting inwardness of Charlotte, he could throw his whole nature into looking outwards and at long last begin the process of externalizing it. In an ideal sense there was no need for him to choose; anything and everything would serve his purpose, especially in a land where, as he says in the *Roman Elegies*, 'the god Phoebus calls forth the forms and the colours'—Phöbus, rufet, der Gott, Formen und Farben hervor But, for

better or for worse, he was surrounded by monuments and museums that he had long wanted to see, and it was only to be expected that he should concentrate first on them and in his enthusiasm identify them with his new vision. It was in this spirit, not so much judging dispassionately as seizing an early opportunity of defining his position, that he let himself be carried away by paintings of Mantegna which he saw in Padua in September 1786 during his first fortnight in Italy. In his diary he tells us that he cannot find words to convey the effect of these pictures and, above all, their 'sharp and assured immediacy'—*Was in den Bildern für eine scharfe sichere Gegenwart ist lässt sich nicht ausdrücken*—and then without more ado he spills the words at our feet in overflowing praise of the definition, the lucidity, the scrupulous detail, the utter undeceptiveness, of what he sees before him. Not since his letter to Burger on 18 October 1775 had he been so prolific of adjectives, but where before he was piling confusion on confusion in order to express the inexpressible chaos of his mind, he is now adding precision with every stroke in the hope of making us see with our own eyes what is all so clear to him. It is a work of art he is looking at, yet in his terminology he is, if anything, a shade nearer to science when he speaks of the accurate, conscientious, and wholly unspecious impression he has received—*dieser ganzen, wahren, (nicht scheinbaren, Effekt-lugenden, zur Imagination sprechenden) derben reinen, lichten, ausführlichen gewissenhaften, zarten, umschriebenen Gegenwart*.

Here and in his remarks on the tombs he saw at Verona a few days earlier, we can see his special use of the word 'Gegenwart' developing as the best label he can find for his new-found sense of the living and immediate present, visible and self-sufficient, neither looking away nor looking within, but taking itself as it appears and as it is. The carvings on the tombs, he tells us, do not show any medieval knight in armour kneeling in expectancy of a joyful resurrection; instead, they show us people living simply together with no thought of a hereafter, content in a sort of tangible eternity to be what they were and are—*Hier ist kein geharnischter Mann auf den Knien, der einer frohlichen Auferstehung wartet, hier hat der Künstler mit mehr oder weniger Geschick immer nur die einfache Gegenwart der Menschen hingestellt, ihre Existenz dadurch fortgesetzt und bleibend gemacht. Sie falten nicht die*

Hande zusammen, schauen nicht gen Himmel; sondern sie sind was sie waren.

We can tell from the personal note and from the very quality of these remarks, both written down at the beginning of his Italian journey, how spontaneously and whole-heartedly he turned to the visual arts at this time, when the desire to extrovert himself, so long frustrated and delayed, at last came over him like a rising tide and carried him with it. Painting and sculpture and architecture, all addressing themselves to the eye and to the outer man, were for the time being a safer ally than poetry, and it is not surprising that he relied so steadily on them and let his poetry, his new poetry, wait for a while. 'I have taken hold of the arts', he wrote to Herder on 29 December 1786, 'and shall not let them go', adding that in doing so he was not snatching at phantoms but at something concrete and within his reach—Auch hab ich die Kunste nun recht gepackt, ich lasse sie nicht fahren und weis doch dass ich nach keinem Phantom hasche. Soon we find him making drawings again and this time with a renewed sense of their usefulness, not for a moment over-estimating his proficiency, 'das armseelige Bissgen Zeichnen' he says in a letter to Charlotte of 7 February 1787, but finding the exercise invaluable because it enabled him to look at things more sharply—genauer und scharfer—and so to comprehend them the better. He also took up his Winckelmann again, and this, coupled with his daily study of the monuments around him, led him back to life classes on Winckelmann's lines, in which, more strenuously than before in Leipzig or Weimar, he worked over the anatomy of the human body, part by part, and so improved and enriched himself in his appreciation of the classical sculpture to which he now had such easy access.

However little interest may attach to his efforts as an artist, about which he was not under any illusion, or to what he wrote at one time or another about art and the principles of art, where, it must be admitted, the dead hand of the past lies only too heavily, we need have no difficulty in seeing why this phase of his experience meant so much to him and why he clung to it with such determination. He tells us explicitly in the *Annalen* under the date of 1789 that when he came back from Italy he made it a matter of principle to thrust his private feelings aside, rejecting now the sentimental journeys of Sterne and his followers, and to train his mind to be as objective as possible—mich soviel als möglich zu

verleugnen und das Objekt so rein, als nur zu tun wäre, in mich aufzunehmen. As he said to Eckermann at a later date, on 5 July 1827, it was their objectivity which gave the visual arts their great advantage—Zudem hat die bildende Kunst den grossen Vorteil, dass sie rein objektiver Natur ist und uns zu sich herannotiget, ohne unsere Empfindungen heftig anzuregen.

It was in this spirit, working, as it were, with a harder, a more resistant, surface than was his wont, that he wrote the best of his classical verses, some of which are as direct and convincing a rendering of the plastic or pictorial medium in the verbal as any we know. Take those he wrote, remembering Verona, on the theme of the urn or sarcophagus, in which the marble comes to life with dancing fauns and Bacchae and wild music:

Sarkophagen und Urnen verzierte der Heide mit Leben:

Faunen tanzen umher, mit der Bacchantinnen Chor

Machen sie bunte Reihe, der ziegengefussete Pausback

Zwingt den heiseren Ton wild aus dem schmetternden Horn,

Cymbeln, Trommeln erklingen wir sehen und hören den Marmor.

Or the pictures of Helena's journey home, first by water across the waves of the Aegean with their stiff, high backs—Auf sträubighohem Rucken—and then upland through the meadows by Eurotas' banks:

Du aber ziehe weiter, ziehe des heiligen

Eurotas fruchtbegabtem Ufer immer auf,

Die Rosse lenkend auf der feuchten Wiese Schmuck

Thus it is to his study of the visual arts and, behind or underlying them, to his study of visual nature that we must turn if we wish to trace out the change from subjectivity to objectivity that now begins to assert itself in him. The older one gets, he indicated in a letter to Princess Gallitzin on 6 February 1797, the greater the need to live in the world of objects, not, as in the days of one's youth, reading oneself into them, but learning rather what they have to teach, and he took pleasure in the thought that he had and always would have his scientific work at his elbow to help him to do this. Similarly he said to Heinrich Meyer, his right-hand man in matters of classical art, on 9 March 1796 that if we continually strive to see things and not merely to see ourselves in them, we cannot fail to progress; and it was in the same connexion that Schiller shortly before this in a letter to Wilhelm von Humboldt on 9

November 1795 referred to Goethe's way of deriving his laws and principles from studying the object and the nature of the case—Sie kennen seine solide Manier, immer von dem Objekt das Gesetz zu empfangen und aus der Natur der Sache heraus ihre Regeln abzuleiten. Hypochondria, as Goethe indicated to Riemer on 3 May 1814, he came to regard as simply an extreme form of inability to do this—Hypochondrisch sein heisst nichts anders, als in's Subjekt versinken. Nothing gave him more contentment in later life than Heinroth's description of him as an objective thinker, one whose thinking was inseparable from things, and he lost no time in following this up with an article of his own to drive home what Heinroth had said—dass nämlich mein Denkvermögen *gegenständlich* tätig sei, womit er aussprechen will: dass mein Denken sich von den Gegenständen nicht sondere. He had said the same to Boisserée in a letter of 22 December 1822 in which he claimed that his thinking was objective because it always had something behind it—Was ich aussprach, ist nicht aus der Luft gegriffen, es hat immer ein Substrat—and, as Heinroth said, always operated with its eye on the object—immer im Angesicht des Gegenstandes sich bilde und äussere.

It is in reflections such as these, scattered liberally over his letters and conversations, that we find the main clue to the difference between his early life and his late, his early life a flood of feeling which came out of him and submerged the world, his late life a taking back of the world into himself. All his mature views on the arts and sciences and on everything else are determined or powerfully influenced by this change of emphasis. More and more, as he was never weary of saying, he deprecated the concern of poets and writers with their own feelings and insisted that it was their business to observe the character of the world about them, a point of view which comes out with amusing dryness in his dealings with the poet-improviser O. L. B. Wolff of Hamburg, who visited him in 1826. Recognizing that Wolff suffered like everyone else from subjectivity, the common complaint of the times as Goethe came to believe, he set him a small task with a view to correcting it. 'Describe your return to Hamburg', said Goethe to him, which Wolff promptly set about doing according to his lights. But what was the result? Not a description of Hamburg, but, as Goethe complained to Eckermann (29 January), the sentiments of a son returning to his parents, relatives, and

friends, so that his effort, devoid, as it was, of any local touches, might equally well have been called a return to Merseburg or a return to Jena. Yet Hamburg, he added feelingly, was such an interesting place, with a character all its own. Nevertheless Goethe saw a real future for the man if only he could learn the lesson of objectivity, and learn it quickly—Wenn er zum Objektiven durchbricht, so ist er geborgen. This he considered indispensable, not only for Wolff, but for poets everywhere. If a poet is only able to express his own meagre feelings, he went on to say, he is not a poet at all; he must make the world his own and express that—sobald er die Welt sich anzueignen und auszusprechen weiss, ist er ein Poet. 'All that is wrong with our young poets to-day,' he said on 24 November 1824, 'is that their feelings are not important and yet they cannot get away from them.' When it came to discussions about naive and sentimental, or about classical and romantic, poets, all of which, according to him, originated in the talks he had with Schiller about object and subject, Goethe's sympathies were invariably on the naive, the classical, that is to say, the objective, side.

Any question that arises here is less likely to concern itself with the soundness of the views expressed than with their applicability to Goethe. Did he in this instance conform to his own standard or is it nearer the truth to say that he practised one thing and preached another? For himself he saw no discrepancy, not at any rate in the direction in which he travelled. For while, as we have seen, he condemned much of his early work for the very defects that he condemned in his younger contemporaries and even apologized, unnecessarily, for the whole of the first part of *Faust* as being too subjective, he was just as emphatic in maintaining that the second part overcame this defect and that his work as a whole, by which he must have meant his later work, was objective in the above-defined sense. The objectivity of his poetry, 'die Gegenständlichkeit meiner Poesie', as he said to Eckermann on 20 April 1825, was directly attributable to the training he had given himself in the use of his eyes, and we know from his various other pronouncements on the visual faculty and its closeness to the life of the mind how very much in earnest he was in saying this.

Nevertheless as a characterization of his poetry his dictum leaves something to be desired. Aptly as it may fit his classical

verses of the seventeen-nineties, the two passages quoted above, for example, or *Alexis und Dora* or *Hermann und Dorothea*, where his visual powers are so much in evidence, this is not the sort of poetry by which, first and foremost, we choose to judge him, nor is it the sort of poetry he went on to write. Even while the classical impulse was strong in him we find him returning to *Faust* and writing as emotionally and as inwardly as ever. It is worth noting that the dedicatory lines telling how the figures of the poem came creeping back into his mind—

Ihr naht euch wieder, schwankende Gestalten,
Die früh sich einst dem truben Blick gezeigt

which is a masterpiece of introspective writing, as all will agree, was written within a few months of *Hermann und Dorothea*, and that *Faust's* scarcely less introspective lines to the Easter bells, in which he recalls the fervent emotions they used to awaken in him—

Sonst sturzte sich der Himmelsliebe Kuss
Auf mich herab, in ernster Sabbatstille;
Da klang so ahnungsvoll des Glockentones Fülle,
Und ein Gebet war brünstiger Genuss

—were written at a not much later date. By the time of the *West-östlicher Divan*, if not before, Goethe's epic genius was a thing of the past and his lyrical genius was firmly in the saddle again.

Thus, whatever he may say or suggest to the contrary, it was not by following the advice he gave to others, it was not by suppressing his feelings and writing with his eye on the object, that he retained his stature as a poet, though he did this successfully for a time, but rather by continuing to vent his feelings as before and writing lyrically as he had done in his youth. If he continued to move towards a greater objectivity in poetry, as he believed he did and as most of his readers believe, too, it can only have been by accepting his lyrical genius, not by thwarting or trying to suppress it. The objective level that he was capable of reaching in this lyrical way is well shown by the gnomic verses, the rhymed comments and sayings and thoughts, that he wrote in such abundance in later years. Here we find, on the one hand, a perfectly natural and appropriate development of his lyrical genius and, on the other hand, a detachment and an objectivity that few have attained

No one could fail to recognize the specifically Goethean echo of joy and pain commingled as of old in the lines he wrote in the

Divan about the rare moments of intense experience poised between an infinite past and an infinite future:

Woher ich kam? Es ist noch eine Frage,
 Mein Weg hierher, der ist mir kaum bewusst;
 Heut' nun und hier, am himmelfrohen Tage
 Begegnen sich, wie Freunde, Schmerz und Lust
 O susses Glück, wenn beide sich vereinen!
 Einsam, wer mochte lachen, mochte weinen?

Yet at the same time the lines reach us with such an ancient validity, such a wealth of association with the collective wisdom of the past, that they affect us as if nobody or everybody had written them. And we can make the same observation time and time again in this portion of his work. All his sense of delay and of reserve, so familiar to those who have traced out his slowness of growth in a long lifetime, can be felt in the couplet he addresses to those who cannot wait for the snow to melt:

Wer will denn alles gleich ergründen!
 Sobald der Schnee schmilzt, wird sich's finden

And all his sense of the fulfilment that comes in due season like the blooming of the rose in the couplet that goes with it, a rendering from the Italian thrown in lightly as if to show how readily, from anywhere or nowhere, these sayings follow one another.

Hier hilft nun weiter kein Bemühn!
 Sind Rosen, und sie werden blühn

Nothing, again, could be more personal to Goethe, nothing more deeply imbued with his lifelong conviction about the permeating of the spiritual by the natural, than his lines on finding the life of the spirit in the waters of the brook:

Ich wandle auf weiter, bunter Flur
 Ursprunglicher Natur,
 Ein holder Born, in dem ich bade,
 Ist Überlieferung, ist Gnade.

But in the very act of observing this we realize how impersonal and ageless the lines are. Something of this losing and finding, this proverbial hide-and-seek, gets into everything he writes in this venerable tradition. We find it in the simplest lyric, as in his lines about being an onlooker:

Zwischen oben, zwischen unten
 Schweb' ich hin zu muntre'r Schau.

We find it again in the driest abstraction, as in his reaffirmation of the necessity of seeing the whole in the part:

Musset im Naturbetrachten
Immer Eins wie Alles achten

But we do not need to choose, we find it everywhere. Consider the fullness of reference in his aged words on procrastination:

Mancherlei hast du versaumet:
Statt zu handeln, hast getraumt,
Statt zu danken, hast geschwiegen,
Solltest wandern, bliebest liegen.

Or compare what he says about names and anonymity with what he said on the same topic when he was young:

Ihr sucht die Menschen zu benennen
Und glaubt, am Namen sie zu kennen.
Wer tiefer sieht, gesteht sich frei,
Es ist was Anonymes dabei.

When we read his quatrain about the nightingale going away for a spell and coming back to sing the same old songs—

Die Nachtigall, sie war entfernt,
Der Frühling lockt sie wieder,
Was Neues hat sie nicht gelernt,
Singt alte, liebe Lieder

—the thought and the phrasing are so inimitably Goethe that we might be tempted to say that no one else could have written it, yet it proves on examination to be a modern Greek epigram and not strictly his; all he does is to domesticate it.

We can look where we like in the last twenty or thirty years of Goethe's life, in the *Divan* or in the *Zahme Xenien*, everywhere we encounter this rare blend of warmth and detachment, of person and proverb, of giving and taking, of self and more than self. Here is objectivity indeed, objectivity achieved, in the end, not by excluding the personal, as he tried to do for a while in his middle years, but by accepting, enlarging, standardizing it, and so making it objective. If, as we have suggested, he failed at this point to practise what he preached, it is only because he went one better than himself and arrived at a pitch of objective experience which transcended his critical formulae. Besides, it is understandable and pardonable, too, that in making public statements about

poetry he should reserve something for himself and not proclaim it from the house-tops.

The notion of standardizing himself, of correcting his subjective bias, and, as far as possible, making his person authoritative, had probably been in his mind for a long time. As early as 1794 Schiller had reminded him, in his letter of 31 August, that there was no greater achievement open to a poet than that of making his feelings and perceptions representative—*seine Anschauung zu generalisieren und seine Empfindung gesetzgebend zu machen*—and we know that he was thinking of Goethe because he goes on in the next sentence to remind him how far he has already travelled towards reaching it. There is no need to elaborate the thought. It is enough to recognize that it is one we can readily associate with Goethe, and that it was he and no other who prompted it in Schiller. If Goethe boldly stated to Lavater on 7 May 1781 that his name was legion—Ich heisse Legion—we have to admit that the remark comes less inappropriately from him than from almost anyone we can think of. Those who knew him in life were impressed both early and late by his range and potential, recognizing that he had it in him to become a larger, more comprehensive, and in this way, we might add, more objective person than they. Reinhard according to von Muller's report of 7 October 1823 asked him as an old man if there were twelve of him instead of one, and Lavater half a century earlier said there were a hundred. He also asked on another occasion (29 May 1788) whether anyone but Goethe could be so many different characters without losing his own? No wonder that to so multiple-seeming a person the epithet of Proteus should attach itself, which Friederike Brun applied to him in 1795 and von Muller more than thirty years later. It was appropriate, too, that in the course of time the figure of Proteus should find a place in his writings. This, it will be remembered, is in the second part of *Faust*, where Proteus appears as a consultant for Thales on behalf of Homunculus:

Hinweg zu Proteus! Fragt den Wundermann:
Wie man entstehn und sich verwandeln kann.

It is not merely in 1775 or 1786 that we are able to observe his faculty for extending his experience beyond the supposed limits. Something of this, something of the continuous rebirth that he commemorates in a famous poem in the *West-östlicher*

Divan, pervades the whole of his life and stays with him to the last:

Und so lang' du das nicht hast,
Dieses Storb und werde!
Bist du nur ein trüber Gast
Auf der dunklen Erde.

When we read Goethe's saying to Eckermann on 11 March 1828 that while most people are only young once there are some who experience their youth repeatedly, we cannot help thinking of him. In his case the normal span of years was insufficient, as Lavater foresaw when he pointed out to him in younger days that he was behaving as if he had three hundred years to live, a remark which Goethe remembered and quoted to Boisserée long after on 18 June 1819. On 29 April 1830, when his life was drawing to a close, he said to Zelter that the flood of new ideas visiting him in old age was enough to justify a repetition of his existence—eine Wiederholung des Lebens. It is in this sense that we must interpret the feeling of incompleteness and sometimes of resignation that crept over him with growing frequency as time went by. 'The older I get, the more I have to restrict myself', he wrote to him on 17 April 1815, and again, on 20 August 1831, in his last year: 'The older I get, the more gaps I see'—seh' ich mein Leben immer luckenhafter. If as an old man he entertained thoughts of immortality, it was not on theological but on personal grounds, his sense of unexpended energy driving him with a biological force to find an outlet for it. 'If I work incessantly to the last', he said to Eckermann on 4 February 1829, 'nature owes me another form of existence when the present one collapses.' Here again, as in his gnomic verses, the objective ideal to which he points would seem to be personal, not impersonal.

How reluctant he was to disengage the personal from the philosophical at any point is clearly shown in his scientific writings, where he not only insists that the scientist cannot be better than himself and that, as has already been noted, even the mathematician to be a good mathematician must be a good man, but also indicates his theoretical grounds for doing so. What he seems to have rejected from the start was the hypothesis, the working hypothesis which usually goes unquestioned and even unnoticed, that objectivity consists simply in excluding subjectivity and that the scientist can and must, if he is a true scientist, eliminate

himself and operate, as it were, *in absentia*, leaving his personality outside in the lobby like a hat or an umbrella. How completely Goethe distrusted the hypothesis is seen in his essay on experimentation, where he argues that the scientist is no more able to escape himself than the man of affairs and that, even in the act of making what he believes to be a strictly impersonal judgement, he is as fallible as ever, perhaps more fallible, for here, banded together like enemies at the mouth of a narrow defile, all his weaknesses, illusion, impatience, overhaste, self-satisfaction, rigidity, preconceived opinion, laziness, fickleness, and frivolity, lie in ambush, ready to spring upon him unawares. And not content with this warning, he was prepared to argue that, even if it were possible, the exclusion of the personal was metaphysically unsound and therefore undesirable. This is evidently what he was driving at when he said to E. H. F. Meyer on 10 September 1822 that science by trying to impersonate nature—*sich an die Stelle der Natur zu setzen*—was only making itself more and more unintelligible, and that what it ought to do in the interest of truth was to take up its proper place midway between nature and the subject—*sich in die Mitte zu stellen zwischen Natur und Subject*. When he was commended for introducing the subjective element into the study of the physical world—*dass ich das Subject, das empfangende, aufnehmende Organ, mit in die Physik eingeführt*—he replied, according to his letter to Reinhard on 7 October 1810, that he was not satisfied with having introduced it, but also intended to do all he could to see that it stayed there.

Here, as always with Goethe and especially when he goes to extremes and speaks provocatively, we are thrown back for explanation on his organic beliefs, which compelled him to think in terms of the whole, irrespective of consequences, and to discard or to subordinate anything that conflicted with it. Thus he was unable to accept a definition of objectivity in terms of the object alone for the simple reason that it left the subject out, and he formulated a definition of his own in terms of both, of object and subject together. If a further clue is needed for this reading of him at a difficult point, we can find it in the distinction he drew in a letter to Schlosser on 6 February 1815 between the subjective-organic—*das Subjectiv-Organische*—and the objective-physical or mathematical, where his inability or his unwillingness to exclude the subject from his organic conceptions is plainly indicated. It is

only in this way, in the light of an organic unity overriding and co-ordinating the two, that we can account for the presence in Goethe of what to some must seem a disturbing prepossession with himself, an extreme of subjectivity, and to others a conspicuous detachment, an extreme of objectivity, the point being that his deepest concern was to eliminate the difference and reach, or as nearly as possible approach, a position in which it was unprofitable to think separately of either, but only of the direct apprehension of truth by a trained and ever-widening consciousness. This, no doubt, was what he was driving at when he said to Riemer that the poet stood for both the subject and the object—das Subjekt-Objekt.

His perspective was, finally, one which enabled him without discrepancy to maintain, on the one hand, that personality was supreme and that, as he said to Nees von Esenbeck on 13 November 1825, there can be no true relationships without it—*die alte Lehre, dass ein achtes Verhältniss nur persönlich seyn kann*—and, on the other hand, that he had learned with the years to detach himself and see everything historically. 'Ich bin so alt', he wrote to Mullner on 6 April 1818 when he still had thirteen years to go, 'dass ich alles was begegnet nur historisch betrachten mag.' One of the rewards of old age, he said to Esenbeck on 20 September 1822, was the faculty of seeing with other people's eyes and not with his own. Whether in a final analysis this Goethean attitude, an attitude at once personal and supra-personal, sets a higher standard of objectivity than that usually accepted must be left an open question, but we need not doubt that, for his part, he would have answered the question in the affirmative.

XIX

THE POLITICAL DILEMMA

IT was only to be expected that a poet who began, as Goethe did, by having such a lengthy struggle with himself, one inner problem leading to another till it seemed the inner problems would never cease, would be drawn into seeing life from this point of view, privately rather than publicly, and that he would have no choice but to concentrate on those aspects of humanity which detached themselves, or came nearest to detaching themselves, from social and political questions. This points to a limitation in him that he would scarcely have denied, though, as we shall see, he would not have been under the necessity of accepting it without reserve.

Regarding his beginnings, the case is clear. He tells us frankly in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* that he and the small group of cultivated people he associated with in his early twenties were not disposed to read newspapers and follow the events of the day, but rather to ignore them and devote themselves to what they believed to be the study of man—uns war darum zu tun, den Menschen kennen zu lernen; die Menschen überhaupt liessen wir gern gewahren. And in what is an obviously autobiographical passage in *Wilhelm Meisters Theatralische Sendung*, written not many years after leaving Frankfurt, he shows that he was alive at a fairly early date to the drawbacks of this position both for himself and for his poetry. For notwithstanding the divinatory insight with which, we are given to understand, Wilhelm expounds Shakespeare to his friends, persuading them almost that he is speaking with the voice of a god and that the subtlest and profoundest truths have been revealed to him, when he turns aside from books and intimate friends and moves in a larger company he is, as Aurelie tells him, no better than a big baby—das erste gross geborne Kind der Schopfung—devoid of all real understanding of his fellow men—Ich habe nicht leicht jemanden gesehen, der die Menschen, mit denen er lebt, so von Grund auskennt wie Sie—whereupon Wilhelm confesses that he has always lived too introspective a life—mehr einwärts als auswärts gesehen—and that while this has given him a certain knowledge of mankind in the singular it has left him very unenlightened about mankind in the plural, thus making the distinction Goethe was to apply explicitly to himself at a later date. When Wilhelm tries his

hand at writing tragedy it is exactly as with his criticism; he shows a knowledge of the human heart or, to put it another way, a knowledge of one person, which is himself, but he shows no knowledge of others—Man sieht, dass der Autor sein eignes Herz kennt, aber er kennt die Menschen nicht.

There is no need to look long at Goethe's early works to see how well they bear out this view of him. Here at every turn we find him sheering away from the social background, either leaving it out altogether or introducing it so unemphatically that it is scarcely felt. We need only note how in *Gotz von Berlichingen*, a play dealing with a period of German history fraught with social and political crisis, his sense of romance, his sense or rather his illusion of the happiness of living in those bygone days, wipes all thought of crisis from his mind and makes even the Peasants' War seem like a holiday. Granted that Goethe displays in this early work a most promising aptitude for seizing on individuals from any and every rank of life, gipsy or courtier, monk or peasant, and making them live before us with a few strokes of the pen, an aptitude that he never displayed again on quite so large a scale, the variety of characters that he puts on the stage serves only to give us the colour and the pageantry of the times without ever raising the deeper questions. For what is it but the avoidance of the deeper questions and the sustaining of the whole play from first to last at the boyish level, the level of young Georg who worships Gotz and longs to be like him, that gives it its perennial appeal to all readers, German or not German? The attack Goethe makes here on the rulers of the land—*Durften wir nur so einmal an die Fursten, die uns die Haut uber die Ohren ziehen*—is so unspecified and so picturesque, in a word so harmless, that, far from alienating the sympathies of the nobility of his day, it made him popular with them, as he tells us in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, and contributed to his friendship with Carl August. How different, though more by reason of the changing consciousness of mankind than for any security of social outlook in the author, is Gerhart Hauptmann's *Florian Geyer*, in which the true picture of early sixteenth-century Germany emerges in all its luridness.

If we turn from *Gotz von Berlichingen* to *Werther*, we can observe again how slightly the social problem, the problem in this case of Werther's relation to his community and to his profession, is treated. Here it would not be too much to claim that the social

problem could be removed bodily from the text and the personal tragedy stand unimpaired. So completely does Werther feel that the problem lies in him and not in circumstance that he counts those other unfortunates happy who can in any way lay the blame or think to lay the blame outside themselves—Seliges Geschopf, das den Mangel seiner Glückseligkeit einer irdischen Hinderniss zuschreiben kann. This, it should be noted, is said in apostrophe to the village idiot, who is spared the agony of knowing, as Werther knows, that the seeds of his misery are all within, and that no power on earth can save him—Du fühlst nicht! Du fühlst nicht! dass in deinem zerstorten Herzen, in deinem zerruttenen Gehirne dein Elend liegt, wovon alle Könige der Erde dir nicht helfen können (30 November)

Faust, we find, is just as independent of the world around him as Werther. He may tell us in his Frankfurt monologue that he has neither prestige nor pence and that, socially speaking, he is leading a dog's life and worse—

Auch hab ich weder Gut noch Geld
Noch Ehr und Herrlichkeit der Welt.
Es mogt kein Hund so langer leben!

—but, having said this, he promptly dismisses it and nothing is lost; the action proceeds at full pitch without it. As for the Gretchen tragedy, it is disconcerting to realize, after the first thrill of experiencing it is over, how little it lends itself to analysis in terms of social justice. For while the Gretchen theme is one that calls expressly for such analysis and, one would have said, compels it, there is something in Goethe's attitude that prevents us from making it. Evidently his preoccupation with feeling as a problem in itself is so strong that we have to read his Gretchen tragedy in this light and cannot profitably read it otherwise. It is as if the fire burning in the heart of the action were so intense that it fused off the social implications as fast as they arose and left us at the last with nothing but the sense of catastrophe naked and unrelieved, the effect of which is rather to paralyse comment than to encourage it. Even the bald reminder we get from Mephistopheles about Gretchen not being the first—Sie ist die Erste nicht!—is swallowed up in the fury of the action, and we hear it only to forget it again. And so it is everywhere in the record of Goethe's *Sturm und Drang*; the social faculty is engulfed in the emotional and nothing is left

but unreasoning joy and pain. If an exception is asked for with a view to proving the rule, we may take the case of *Stella* where in the original ending, later converted to tragedy, the eternal triangle of the sexes is fantastically solved by making an institution of it and letting all three, Fernando and the two women, live happy together ever after.

Any inquiry into the origins of Goethe's extreme detachment in early manhood from the question of society and of his almost exclusive concern with individual passion must lead to our taking stock of the world he lived in. And here it is fruitful, first of all, to consider the narrow separatism which by the middle of the eighteenth century had reduced his native country, or rather the Holy Roman Empire of which it was a part, to the jumble of independent populations and communities, ranging in size and status from kingdoms to small towns, that was so soon to fall apart in helpless collapse at a blow from without. We know what Goethe thought about this on the rare occasions when he thought about it at all, because he tells us in the tavern scene in *Faust*, especially in the Frankfurt version of it, where Frosch asks in a drunken catch how long the dear old Empire will hold together—

Das liebe heilige römische Reich
Wie halt's nur noch zusammen?

—and Brander replies: 'Fie, a nasty song, a political song, a wretched song. Thank God the Holy Roman Empire is no business of yours.'¹

This may be taken as a much safer index of Goethe's political feeling than the lengthy account of the coronation of Joseph II which he misleadingly introduced into the fifth book of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*. The Seven Years' War which shortly before this time had brought the French to Frankfurt and billeted them for three years all over the town, even in his father's house, seems to have left no political marks. As he tells us, the family took sides for and against the great Frederick, but why? On grounds of personal preference and of hero-worship, not because they cared one way or the other for Prussia—denn was ging uns Preussen an? And this, we may take it, was a typical Frankfurt sentiment. When the French withdrew, the ancient 'free' town was ready to carry on as before.

¹ Pfuy, ein garstig Lied! Ein politisch Lied, ein leidig Lied. Danckt Gott dass euch, das heilige römische Reich nichts angeht.

It will be apparent that in a Germany such as this, a Germany which existed more in name than in reality, with no clearly apprehended frontiers, no prevailing sense of national unity, no outstanding capital city around which the intellectual life could revolve, the poet and the man of letters would be only too prone to drift away from social and political ways of thinking and to develop instead on individualistic lines. The somewhat negative, but quite indispensable, picture of the formless and very backward Germany in which Goethe was born and bred and the consequences good and bad, but chiefly bad, for a whole generation, and more than a generation, of German writers has been so well presented by Bruford in his *Germany in the Eighteenth Century* (1935) that there is no need to elaborate it here. Enough to recognize that Goethe in underdoing the public argument in *Gotz* and *Werther* and the early *Faust* was moving with the trend of the times rather than against it and was to this extent behaving like most other German writers of his day and for the same reasons. This is a judgement which, in kind, he would have been likely to endorse, because he knew as well as anyone, and much better than the generation before him, that, as he wrote to Knebel on 30 December 1785, the environment could not fail to illuminate the man—*Der Mensch ist mit seinem Wohnorte so nah verwandt dass die Betrachtung uber diesen auch uns uber den Bewohner aufklaren muss*—and that neither the highest literature nor the lowest was to be dissociated from its century and its period.

What differentiates him, however, from the more thoughtful and significant of his contemporaries is that he goes so much further than they. Politically nondescript as the country was, it did not prevent Lessing, his elder contemporary, from writing *Minna von Barnhelm* or Schiller, his younger contemporary, from writing *Die Räuber*. In both of these works we can observe a social seriousness, sagacious in Lessing, uncouth and immature in Schiller, which we shall look for in Goethe, or rather in the early Goethe, in vain. And the same holds good if we turn to less obvious examples. Klopstock, Wieland, Lavater, even Herder, they all had their political moments when the welfare of the nation or the problem of government put other considerations out of mind. It is only Goethe, apparently, who in his earlier years had no such moments, but invariably lived and acted in response to his own needs.

So strangely detached does he prove to be from the ordinary

obligations, whether to his parents or to his community or to his country, so free to live the life of the spirit regardless of all else, that we cannot be content to equate him with his environment, we have also to ask what it was in his case that so conspicuously released him from it and made him, as it were, so foot-loose in the universe. What extraordinary set of more intimate conditions was it that enabled him to say as he did in a letter to Auguste Stolberg in January 1775, his first letter to a correspondent he had never met, that he was not conscious of anything whatsoever outside him that interfered?—Nichts ausser mir stört, schiert, hindert mich.

Here we are admittedly on difficult ground. But we can see from what we have already observed of Frankfurt that it lent itself better than many another place to producing a human specimen of this sort, being at once so independent, a miniature republic of less than fifty thousand inhabitants, and, as we are told on every hand, so easy-going. If Frankfurt had been ruled by a petty tyrant, as Schiller's Württemberg was, it is improbable that anything like Goethe would have come out of it. We can see, too, that the accident of chronology which made Goethe thirteen years old when the Seven Years' War ended, too young to experience it fully, and forty when the French Revolution began, would also contribute to his being as he was. He refers in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* to the atmosphere of security which filled the deceptive lull between the two wars, when the nearest fighting was between the Russians and the Turks in what then seemed the ends of the earth, and he recovers this atmosphere in the words of the Frankfurt burgher in *Faust* who liked to drink his Sunday beer and talk of war and rumours of war and think how different and how peaceful it was at home.

Nichts Bessers weiss ich mir an Sonn- und Feiertagen,
 Als ein Gespräch von Krieg und Kriegsgeschrei,
 Wenn hinten, weit, in der Türkei,
 Die Völker auf einander schlugen.
 Man steht am Fenster, trinkt sein Glaschen aus
 Und sieht den Fluss hinab die bunten Schiffe gleiten;
 Dann kehrt man Abends froh nach Haus,
 Und segnet Fried' und Friedenszeiten

Even more to the point, though less familiar, is Goethe's rhyming in a letter to Kestner of January 1773 at the time of the First

Partition of Poland, in which he says that for all he cares the nations may divide the whole world between the devil and themselves, provided they leave him free to come and go between Frankfurt and his dear friends in Wetzlar:

So lass des Reichs und Cristen Feind
 Und Russ und Preuss und Belial
 Sich teilen in den Erdenball
 Und nur das liebe Teutsche Haus
 Nehmt von der grosen Teilung aus
 Und dass der Weeg von hier zu euch
 Wie Jakobs Leiter sey sicher und gleich.

Whether in this inquiry we can narrow the focus a little further and make the household on the *Grosser Hirschgraben*, the Goethe household, contributory is a more elusive question. But must there not have been something socially indeterminate about a family life presided over, on the one hand, by a father who had improved himself in station only to withdraw from the world and live aloof and, on the other hand, by a mother twenty years younger who was by birth so privileged, being a daughter of one of the first families in Frankfurt, and by temperament so delightfully unprivileged? The effect of this domestic background may well have been such as to make the boy feel that he was, shall we say, equally near, or equally far from, the various social groups in his native city and therefore beholden to none of them. His evident maladjustment to Lili Schonemann's circle which, under very slightly different circumstances, he might have belonged to from the start, points to this conclusion. Thus the picture we have of him as a tame bear in Lili's garden—

Unter die zahme Compagnie gebracht,
 Und mit den andern zahm gemacht

—may owe more to his social history than to Lili.

As for the literary environment in Frankfurt or in Germany generally, we know how vacuous, how nearly non-existent, it was. Lenz may have been overstating it in his *Pandämonium Germanicum* when he said that they had neither readers nor spectators, only reviewers, but the initial truth of the situation is there. If Goethe did not realize this at the time, he realized it later. On 24 April 1830 he told von Muller that he and the rest of the *Stürmer und Dränger* were outside of tradition; they could do as they liked

because they had nothing behind them—Wir andern dummen Jungen von 1772 hatten leichteres Spiel, wir hatten nichts hinter uns. Thus the freedom from social obligation that we can discover in his early life was paralleled by a freedom from cultural. Which, ever way he looked, there was nothing to hold him; he was like a bird of the air or more nearly so than any human being we know. Under such conditions it is not surprising to find him experiencing moods like that recorded in his 'Ganymed', where we see him leaving the earth altogether and soaring aloft like a balloon that has left its moorings:

Wohin! Ach Wohin!—
Hinauf, hinauf strebts

Tentative as these reflections must be, they help to bring out the essential truth of the picture he gives us in his letter to Auguste Stolberg in February 1775 of the Goethe who cared nothing for society and the opinions of others—weder rechts noch lincks fragt: was von dem gehalten werde was er machte?—but who sought only the picked company of those, the best people of his time from near and far, who could share his ideals and his enthusiasms with him—dessen groste Glückseligkeit ist mit den besten Menschen seiner Zeit zu leben. Here in a paragraph we have as complete a statement as we could wish of the extreme self-determination and liberty of choice that he enjoyed or believed he enjoyed in the early seventeen-seventies. And he puts it even more pregnantly in the verse of his 'Felsweihesang an Psyche' when he says that home and country will be found wherever our affections are engaged, and that they have no other frontiers:

Da wo wir lieben,
ist Vaterland;
wo wir genießen,
ist Hof und Haus

It was in this strangely undomiciled spirit that he stylized himself in various poems as the 'wanderer' who roamed the countryside from place to place and, so he tells us in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, even cultivated the habit of passing through his native Frankfurt like a stranger, as if he did not belong there —als wenn sie mich nichts anginge.

Coming back now by this outer approach to his inner mind, we can see that it owed everything to his lack of social attachment and social obligation and that if, for example, he had been poor instead

of comfortably well off, if he had had to work strenuously or steadily for his living, it could scarcely have developed as it did. This is an observation that he came very near to making for himself when he wrote the passage in *Stella* where the postmistress, when mildly rebuked for getting over her husband's death so quickly, replied that she was far too busy from morning to night with one thing and another to have time to indulge her feelings even in grief and prayer, unless perhaps the parson got on to the subject now and then or she heard a funeral hymn sung—O Madame, unser eins hat so wenig Zeit zu weinen, als leider zu beten Das geht Sonntag und Werckeltag Wenn der Pfarrer nicht manchmal auf den Text kommt, oder man ein Sterbelied singen hort. There is a sense in which the whole of Goethe's early condition, all that was best in him and all that was worst, was the product of over-favourable circumstances and even of a kind, though not a material kind, of luxury. As he said to Caroline Herder in October 1788, by which time he certainly knew what he was talking about, when he was young he was free and he was rich—ich war frei und reich—and could therefore indulge his idiosyncrasy, his 'Eigenheit', and do more nearly as he wished than other people, adding that he also knew better than other people what harm it had done him and, for that matter, what harm it could still do him if he allowed it. When we remember what was in Goethe the most important element of all, namely the superabundance and, one is tempted to say, the superfetation of emotional life that he was born with, we can feel the force of these restrained words and we can realize afresh how seriously the freedom from all commitment to which he is referring, the 'unchartered freedom' that was so much completer in his case than it was in Wordsworth's, must have involved him.

It is fair to say that the antisocial or unsocial bias thus given him by the first twenty-five years of his life was one that he never wholly corrected. For however much Weimar may have helped him to correct it, as with its closely articulated world of officials and courtiers it cannot have failed to do, the net result of his first ten years of residence there was the sudden escape to Italy, when, literally and figuratively, too, he shook the dust of Weimar off his feet and reasserted his individualism as firmly as before. If he had come to Weimar in search of an environment that would contain him and hold him down, and this must have been at least a part of what he was dimly looking for at that time, he now rejected the

environment and, in so far as he had already taken root there, deliberately uprooted himself, not, as we now know, for the sake of uprooting himself, but because the still unsolved problem of his inner life left him no choice. Thus the progress towards a positive and constructive relation to society that he had been making from 1775 on, especially in his strenuous years as an administrator, had to be discarded and a new start made after his return.

Looking back over his life from this point of intervention we can see how badly managed his social experience had been, in so far as it had swept him on such ridiculously short notice from one extreme to the other without letting him do anything to fill in what we might call the middle positions. In Frankfurt he had chosen to stand virtually outside society in a sort of literary lawlessness or vagabondage, with nothing vital binding him to his fellow men except what came by way of poetry and such-like, in short, responsible to nobody, responsible for nothing. Then, in Weimar, he was lifted by a sudden wave of circumstance to a post of highest authority in the land, which gave him, along with the ruler himself and a handful of others, complete charge of the welfare and the behaviour of the population at large. The gulf between these conflicting phases of experience was far too wide to be beneficial; it is not surprising that he never succeeded in bridging it but instead retreated from it in a chosen direction, disengaging himself, as we have seen, from responsibility and returning for the time being to his former irresponsibility.

All this is clearly reflected in the drama of *Egmont* which was begun shortly before going to Weimar and ended shortly after leaving it, thus synchronizing closely with the period in question. There can be little doubt that in its first stage in Frankfurt, though we have no record of it, the emphasis was on the temperament of Egmont as displayed in the conversation with his secretary, when he throws all circumspection to the winds and says with a typical *Sturm und Drang* gesture that he will go his way heedless of consequences, leaving it to others 'to hatch and concoct, to creep and to crawl'—sinnen und aussinnen, wandeln und schleichen. Then in its middle stage, helped, no doubt, by his administrative experiences, the play probably came as near to being a successful political play as any he wrote. The plot invited such treatment, if indeed it did not expressly call for it, and it was presumably in response to the challenge it laid down that Goethe wrote his

excellent palace scenes, with notabilities like William of Orange and Alba and the Duchess of Parma to hang his thoughts on, and his still more excellent street scenes, and so gradually brought himself face to face with the problem of a political *dénouement*, only to back out at the last and finish on the emotional and wholly unpolitical note on which he presumably began, Egmont soliloquizing in prison about sleep and freedom until he is interrupted by his executioners and led out to the scaffold. An evasive ending indeed. Yet when we remember that the final work on the manuscript was not done in Weimar but in Italy, where, as he told Carl August on 28 September 1787, he was completely out of the arena—Ich bin an der friedlichen Seite der Welt, Sie am kriegrischen Ende—we can better understand how it came to be as it is.

If more than Italy were needed to complete the tale of Goethe's withdrawal from politics, it came with a vengeance a couple of years after this. Whether the French Revolution, if it had happened ten years earlier or ten years later in Goethe's life, would have affected him differently is a matter of conjecture. What we do know is that it happened when it did, at the very time when he was least willing to concern himself with it and, if for no other reason, least able to learn from it. It is all understandable, whether we like it or not. Having by his own standard taken so long to grow up, having after such curious and such protracted trials at last reached the point at the age of forty at which he could say to himself that he now stood securely and confidently on his own feet and could begin to gather the fruits of his experience, a new set of disturbances, vaster than his own, suddenly threatened from another quarter. It was as if the ground beneath him, which he had always taken to be firm, was starting to crumble. He may have had a glimmering of this when he wrote to Lavater on 22 June 1781 that the public life of the times was mined with unsavoury sewers and cellars—Glaube mir, unsere moralische und politische Welt ist mit unterirdischen Gängen, Kellern und Cloaken miniret—but, if so, he dismissed it and, when the shock of revolution reached him, was not prepared for it. 'You can believe me when I tell you that the French Revolution was also a revolution for me', he wrote somewhat guardedly to Friedrich Jacobi on 3 March 1790.

Goethe never explains himself fully on this point and for very good reasons. But in his *Zur Morphologie* he comments regretfully on the coincidence which brought him to the threshold of his

maturity at the very moment when Europe plunged into revolution, and he shows both by his subsequent attempts at political drama and by various references in his letters that it was a long time, if the time ever came, before he was able to throw off what in his letter to Zelter of 20 February 1828 he called the revolutionary nightmare and look at world events with equanimity. Being unable to dispose of his uneasiness dramatically, as he would have liked to do, it continued to haunt him. His apprehensions at the time of the revolution of 1830 were as dark as those of 1789.

It is in this light that we have to explain the political attitude or rather the lack of political attitude of his later years. We can sum it up by observing that, as far as possible, he tried to stay out of politics altogether. For his own part he was fully conscious of this and made no bones about admitting it. He insisted to von Muller on 3 February 1823, that he had never in his life wanted to set himself in vain opposition either to the rulers or to the masses, but that he had always preferred to go into his shell and occupy himself there—*Ich habe nie im Leben mich gegen den übermächtigen Strom der Menge oder des herrschenden Prinzips in feindliche, nutzlose Opposition stellen mögen; lieber habe ich mich in mein eigenes Schneckenhaus zurückgezogen und da nach Belieben gehauset*. And there are plenty of others to bear him out. 'I can't remember him ever talking about politics', says Reinbeck in 1806 or 1807, and Goethe himself confessed, as Luden reports on 13 December 1813, that he was very, very reluctant to touch on such matters—*Ich spreche über solche Dinge sehr, sehr ungern*. Johanna Frommann notes on 4 December 1817, that when Rodiger tried to draw him out on politics he steadily refused to be drawn—*er hat immer von Politik anfangen wollen, G. aber immer gleich abgebrochen*—and Boisseree on 7 October 1815 goes so far as to say that he suffered from a perpetual fear of the subject. Wilhelm von Humboldt summed it up on 1 January 1814 by saying that Goethe was by nature indifferent to politics and nationalism—*Er gehört durchaus zu den gleichgültigen Naturen für alles Politische und Deutsche*.

Any positive views that Goethe expressed on the great events of his time, the Napoleonic campaigns, the invasion of Germany, the Wars of Liberation, and so on, are completely in accord with the negative and ultimately reactionary position that is here indicated. Thus we shall come nearer to the truth of his relation to Napoleon

if we remember that his first and strongest impulse was to keep out of trouble and not involve himself actively, than if we take him literally when he talks about hero-worship and the demonic spirit. Say what he might about the greatness of Napoleon, no sooner was Napoleon safely off the scene than he found himself quite able to do without him. He commended Heinrich Meyer for pushing on with his researches in Florence in 1796 at the very time when Napoleon was occupying the city and in 1810, in a letter to Sartorius from Karlsbad (19 July), he patted himself on the back for not having looked at a newspaper for eight weeks. Even such a momentous turning-point as Moscow in 1812 failed to shake him out of his aloofness. He told Reinhard on 14 November that it was all the same to him whether Moscow burned or not—Dass Moskau verbrannt ist, thut mir gar nichts—and we need not hesitate to take him at his word, remembering, if we choose, that it was himself he was thinking of along with others when he remarked in the *Wahlverwandtschaften* that the best of us are at the mercy of the age we were born in, and that we cannot wholly escape its weaknesses—Die grossten Menschen hangen immer mit ihrem Jahrhundert durch eine Schwachheit zusammen.

In so far as he reasoned his attitude to politics, he was inclined to fall back on his early conception of himself as a 'private man', first clearly formulated in 1782, when he was deep in administration, in a letter to Charlotte, to whom he wrote on 17 September that he was born to be a 'Privatmensch' and that he could not understand how he had managed to land himself in the midst of a government and a ruling family—Ich binn recht zu einem Privatmenschen erschaffen und begreiffe nicht wie mich das Schicksal in eine Staatsverwaltung und eine furstliche Familie hat einflicken mogen. Then, in the second act of *Egmont*, he lets William of Orange, who is speaking, as it were, from the other side of the house, observe in similar vein that just as there are men of leisure—mussige Menschen—who spend their lives searching into the problems of nature, so there are rulers who must spend their lives over the problems of state. This for better or for worse was the position to which he clung, insisting, for example, in a letter to Buchholtz on 14 February 1814 that he and private individuals like him—wir Privatleute—did right to leave the troubled affairs of state to those whose business it was to deal with them—den Grossen, Machtigen und Staatsweisen—and that he knew no better service he could perform

for his part than by going on with the literary and philosophical survey of the recent history of his country that he was endeavouring to provide in his autobiography.

As he grew older he was more and more tempted to generalize about this aspect of his life, possibly for the reason that he was not any too happy about it, and to regard his case as typically German. He told Cotta on 7 October 1807 that the Germans had never been politically important and that their significance consisted in their disproportionate concern with the arts and sciences—*einer gegen unsere Krafte disproportionirten Beforderung der Kunste und Wissenschaften*. He also reminded Lichtenstein on another occasion (25 June 1829) that the German scholar or scientist always regarded himself as private and isolated—*als ein isolirtes Wesen, als eine Privatperson*—not as part of a whole. And while it was only natural that at times he should make a virtue of what he found, saying to von Muller on 30 June 1824, perhaps justly, that he would not choose to have lived at any other time, and saying playfully in one of his *Zahme Xemen* that the Germans were all right if you let each one go his own way—

Die Deutschen sind recht gute Leut':

Sind sie einzeln, sie bringen's weit

—in general he was more acutely aware of the drawbacks that were entailed, and he often compared the German opportunity unfavourably with the French or the English. 'Here everyone looks for a side-path of his own, as if life were no more than going for a walk', he said to Esenbeck on 2 April 1828, with obvious disapproval—*Jeder sucht sich ein Abwegelein, als wenn das Leben ein Spaziergehen ware*. And to Reinhard he observed on 12 May 1826 that, whereas the French did all their talking and thinking in public, the Germans, even the best of them, gave you the impression that they were alone and speaking for themselves. Even Weimar, he observed to von Muller on 6 June 1830, in spite of all that had been done to make it a headquarters of culture, remained a place without a centre—*nirgends ein Zentrum*—interesting more because interesting individuals lived there than because it had any sort of unity. In all of which the dominant note of disapproval is clearly to be heard. He confessed outright to Luden on 13 December 1813 that the contrast between the Germans and other nations embarrassed him sorely—*erregt uns peinliche Gefuhle*.

The true cause of Goethe's embarrassment was deeper than he

cared to admit, deeper, it may be, than he knew. For while the force of circumstances, as it must have seemed to him, had thrust him into this position, in which he found himself year after year standing aside from the great events of his day, the real bent of his mind must have been all against it. For how could he enjoy so partial and subjective an attitude when he knew all the time that it was the purpose of his existence, as he had come to understand it, to extricate himself from partial and subjective attitudes and see life true and complete? If he was to move, as we know he wished to move, in the direction of an ever greater objectivity, how could he afford to ignore so vast a field of objective experience? If, to put the charge in its bluntest form, he was to be consistent in his philosophy of the whole, how was he to refuse so important a part? It will be evident at once that if he had tried to make a case in support of his refusal, he would have involved himself in a set of premisses which he would have had no choice but to reject. He may not have seen the issue as nakedly as this, but there were times when he came very near to seeing it and was obviously uncomfortable. Commenting to Knebel on 22 April 1815, during Napoleon's 'hundred days', on the changed political atmosphere, which, he admitted, recorded itself even on 'the most domestic and sequestered of barometers', he was driven to ask the crucial question whether it was better to clarify his mind about the state of the world or to stay as he was and brood darkly about it—Man weiss wahrlich nicht, woran man besser thut, ob sich über die Zustände aufzuklären, oder sich darüber zu verdüstern—and he answered the question only by saying that he was unable to answer it—Ja, beydes will nicht gelingen. It was in this mood of hesitation, as the letter virtually tells us, that he wrote *Des Epimenides Erwachen* in which, unless we except the closing lines of *Hermann und Dorothea*, he attempted for the first and last time to speak directly as a poet to his fellow countrymen on the national crisis, not, it must be said, with much benefit to them, but perhaps with some to himself, since the work enabled him to confess that his non-participation, symbolized here in the long sleep of Epimenides, had done him no particular credit—

Doch schäm' ich mich der Ruhestunden;
 Mit euch zu leiden, war Gewinn:
 Denn für den Schmerz, den ihr empfunden,
 Seid ihr auch grosser, als ich bin

—and at the same to console himself, like Tasso, with the thought that his poetic gift was unimpaired and might still be put to use.

But *Epimedes* was too slight a work to resolve so important a conflict. How inescapable the conflict was, the conflict, to state it broadly, between Goethe's remoteness from society and his need, his philosophical need, to come to terms with it, can be seen from what he says in many another place. Writing to Schopenhauer later in the same year, on 16 November 1815, he warned him that the subjective philosopher must not forget the limits of his subjectivity, the lesson of experience being that the subject, the individual, is not, and by its nature cannot be, infallible. And he explained more exactly what he meant in conversation with von Muller on 8 June 1821, when he said that nature did not put wholeness into individuals, but put it into the species—*die Natur schaffe nichts Ganzes in den Individuen, während der Charakter der Gattung freilich ein Ganzes sei*—and that unless we examined the various human qualities in the light of this wholeness we should not be on the right track.

Here the insufficiency of the individual and the dependence of man on his fellows is stated in its most radical form. But in one form or another it gets stated many times. Thus in *Wilhelm Meister* we are reminded by Jarno that it takes all men to make humanity and all our united powers to make a world—*Nur alle Menschen machen die Menschheit aus, nur alle Kräfte zusammengenommen die Welt*. In *Dichtung und Wahrheit* Goethe expresses the same sentiment when he says that it takes all of humanity together to give us the true man—*dass die Menschheit zusammen erst der wahre Mensch ist*. In a letter to Schiller of 25 February 1798 he said, more pertinently, that the reason why nature seemed unfathomable was that no one person could fathom it, though humanity as a whole—*die ganze Menschheit*—might conceivably do so. And he expressed himself in very similar terms to Willemer a generation later, on 11 July 1821. It gave him pleasure to point out to Carlyle on 15 June 1828, how the view-points of different nationalities, in this case a Scot, a Frenchman, and a Russian, supplement and reinforce one another. And to Schlichtegroll on 31 January 1812 he went the length of saying that it was precisely the conflict, the antinomy, of opinion which gave us the assurance that a total humanity existed—*denn gerade dadurch wird es eine Menschheit, dass, wie so manches andere sich entgegensteht, es auch Antinomien der Überzeugung gibt*.

Here, it is interesting to note, he was speaking with science and the development of science in mind, where more urgently than anywhere else, much more urgently than in his poetic life, he had come to feel the need of co-operation and united effort. However far short of his ideal he may have fallen, as he did in the Newton controversy, he was firmly and honestly convinced at a quite early stage in his researches that any pride or privacy in the scientist was not only to be deplored, but was contrary to the spirit of science and, in the end, destructive of it. Nothing short of the joint labours of all scientists put together, the society of scientists in the fullest sense of the word, could, he believed, carry science forward to its goal. 'In matters of science', he said in a passage in his essay on experimentation, which reads better to-day than when he wrote it, 'we must do the opposite of what the artist does. The artist may be well advised to keep his work to himself till it is completed, because no one can readily help him or advise him with it . . . but in science it is wiser not to withhold a single finding or a single conjecture from publicity and never to build up a scientific argument until the plan and the materials have been widely circulated, judged, and sorted out.'

The passage makes it clear that while the contacts of the artist, his submission to the opinions of others, must come between-whiles, the contacts of the scientist, the reciprocal freedom of access to whatever is being thought and done in his field, must be maintained unremittingly. It is only when we understand how corporately Goethe conceived of the scientist, how incapable he was of seeing him in isolation from his co-workers, that we arrive at the full implication of what he says about the personality of the scientist. For however much the scientist may do to make himself personally adequate, in Goethe's sense, he remains a person and an individual and cannot escape himself—So muusst du sein, dir kannst du nicht entfliehen. Only the combined resources of many individuals can be relied on to correct the bias of the one.

It was at about the same time as he was recording these views on the relation of scientist to scientist that he claims to have realized the importance of studying more specifically the relation of man to man. In a note appended to his *Metamorphose der Pflanzen* he says that his recent sojourn in Italy brought home to him the importance of three things, two of them, needless to say, being nature and the Classics, and the third human society—die Sitten der Völker. And

it was not very long after this, probably in 1793, that he began to work on *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* where for the first time we are made to feel that he was setting out to write from the social point of view, in other words, that he was at last approaching the individual from the outside and studying him not by himself, but as one among many.

For Goethe this was a new step or not far from it. In *Faust* and in *Werther*, as we have seen, the problem is that of man from the inside, man in the singular, man at grips not so much with his fellow men or with institutions large or small as with the forces of nature and with what we call the universe. Werther alone among the grass blades by the falling brook, Faust alone in the night confronting the *Erdgeist*, this is the typical situation in Goethe's early work, beside the significance of which all other situations recede. And if with the dramas of *Iphigenie* and *Tasso* there comes a change, the change is not sufficient to turn the scale. The only characters round Iphigenie are those whom she dominates, the only characters round Tasso are those who prove his unfitness. In neither case, as we have already noted, is a truly social situation achieved. But with the *Lehrjahre* we are not in doubt. Here is recognizably a work, a novel, not cluttered up with introspection, for the introspective passages are so few and far between that we have to search the pages for them, but detached, dispassionate, impersonal, in short a real novel, and this means a social novel.

To what extent the socially serious trend of the *Lehrjahre* was foreseen in the *Sendung*, on which it was based, is not easy to determine. But it will be evident from what we have already seen of the early version that the virtues it possesses, virtues which can now be approached in a more positive light, are all in the spirit of the *Lehrjahre*, and that when it came to making the transition from the one to the other no particular change of key was needed. Thus the chilliness, the matter-of-factness, the externality of the *Sendung*, unwelcome as it may be on a first reading to those who come to it fresh from *Faust* and *Werther*, proves in the end to be exactly what the *Lehrjahre* required, and to this extent may be said to have anticipated it.

If notwithstanding its close affinity of spirit with the *Lehrjahre* the *Sendung* fails to impress us constructively, there are good reasons for it. For one thing Goethe in setting out to depict a slice of society in novel form was at the disadvantage of not having a

suitable society to draw on. This at any rate was his own view, because he said in September 1823 to von Muller that in *Wilhelm Meister*, for want of anything better, he had to fall back on the most miserable people imaginable, wandering players and insignificant landed nobility—herumziehendes Komodiantenvolk und armseelige Landedelleute—only to get some life and movement into the picture. And while he laid the blame on the poverty of the German background, so apparent, he maintained, when you compared it with Walter Scott's, the ultimate explanation must surely be looked for in his own development, in the curiously floating life that he had led so long in Frankfurt and in the curiously immured life that he had gradually made for himself afterwards in Weimar. The invisible barrier thus set up between him and his immediate world could not fail to obstruct his creative intention.

But another and more cogent reason why the *Sendung* was bound to be inconclusive was that the maturity of social purpose, which was either inherent or came to be associated with it, required a mature person to work it out, and Goethe, it cannot be said too often, was still in his immaturity, a condition in which it was one thing to write the *Werther* or *Tasso* type of masterpiece and another to write *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*. We can agree without much difficulty that, however clearly Goethe may have foreseen the outcome of this new project, he was not in a position to deal with it adequately till after 1786. It says not a little for the purposiveness of his moral nature that the origins of what was to prove, in intention if not in performance, the most constructive of his works should reach as far back as February 1777, that is to say, to within less than eighteen months of Frankfurt.

This does not mean that after 1786 all was easy. So far as we can judge, the writing of *Wilhelm Meister*, unlike the writing of most of the strictly poetical works, must have been hard going all the way. For if the years in Italy gave Goethe his maturity, they also aggravated the sense of loneliness from which, as we know from the songs of the Harper in the *Sendung*, he was already beginning to suffer:

Wer sich der Einsamkeit ergibt,
Achl der ist bald allein.

Looking back on the early nineties, the time roughly in which he completed the *Lehrjahre*, he said in his *Kampagne in Frankreich* that you could not imagine a more isolated person—keinen isolier-

tern Menschen—than he was at that time, and he also said to von Müller (22 January 1821) that you could tell from the *Lehrjahre* itself what a state of loneliness it was written in—Der Meister belegt, in welcher entsetzlichen Einsamkeit er verfasst worden.

When we consider these grave impediments, the wonder is not that *Wilhelm Meister* is as defective as it is, but that Goethe managed to proceed with it at all. The fundamental defect that had to be made good was one that he recognized, as we know from his reference to the meanness of the company that Wilhelm kept. What was clearly needed was a larger canvas and a more representative array of persons and places, a social setting for the main action that would less inadequately represent a cross-section of late eighteenth-century Germany. And what is equally clear to any reader is that Goethe failed to supply it and instead of extending the milieu on a large and generous scale, as he must have desired, ended by transferring Wilhelm from the confining but not uninteresting company that he had been sojourning in to a company still more confining, in which the breath of real life that came over from the *Sendung* was stopped for good. The quasi-masonic group of people that now takes charge of Wilhelm's destiny is, if anything, less suited to the social purposes of the book than the bohemian group that it replaces. The autobiographical approach may throw a light on this awkward point of transition, but it does not make it more acceptable. There is only one way to get the best out of *Wilhelm Meister* and that is to look at what Goethe would have done with it, if he could, rather than at what he did.

What he would have done with it is significant. At this important stage in the narrative, when Wilhelm is about to part company with the players, he begins to take stock of himself, chiefly by going over old letters from home that he has neglected and also by planning an elaborate diary of the sort that his father has been urging him to write, not a diary of his private feelings, but one devoted to a business-like account of the places he has visited, all complete with facts and statistics—mit allen verlangten geographischen, statistischen und merkantilischen Bemerkungen. Wilhelm, who believes he has seen a good deal on his travels thus far, sets about the project with a light heart and expects to polish it off without much loss of time. But what is his surprise to discover that while he could go on indefinitely, page after page, with the recital of his thoughts and sensations—von Empfindungen und Gedanken, von

manchen Erfahrungen des Herzens und Geistes—he is unable to say anything at all about external objects, about ‘things’—von aussern Gegenständen—and has obviously paid no attention to them whatsoever. He characterizes the plight he finds himself in by recalling a recent occasion on which, like the Direktor in *Faust*, he had the players assembled and the theatre illuminated only to realize at the last moment that he neither had the parts memorized nor the play written. Fortunately Wilhelm has his friend Laertes at his elbow, who is in the opposite case from himself, being so completely extroverted that he might have gone from birth to the grave without ever stopping once to think about himself—hatte er alt werden können, ohne über seinen Zustand irgend nachzudenken—and whose mind is so chock-full of travel books, which he devours to the exclusion of all other reading, that he carries half the world about with him in his noddle—bald spukte die halbe Welt in seinem guten Gedächtnisse ‘Give me your itinerary’, he says to Wilhelm, ‘and I will supply the facts’, and he goes on in an amusing paragraph to outline the dazzling book that they will now produce between them

While Goethe misses an opportunity in not developing this comic situation, the opportunity is one of his own devising and the meaning of it is plain, namely, that what Laertes has is what Wilhelm needs and that if their two personalities were rolled into one the resultant personality would be better than either. The direction in Wilhelm’s development thus indicated is indicated again, more earnestly, by the sort of woman Goethe marries him to. For after steering him safely past a number of others, notably the gay and promiscuous Philine and the brooding Aurelie, he deposits him with no other than Natalie, whose character completes his exactly as Laertes’ did, but on a higher plane. Natalie tells Wilhelm in a very beautiful passage that as far back as she can remember she found herself responding to the needs of people—die Bedürfnisse der Menschen—and to the desire to supply them, so that it seemed to her as if it must be her destiny to look after those who could not look after themselves, the very young and the very old, the childless, the poverty-stricken, the frustrated. If she saw a beggar in rags, she thought of all the clothes hanging unused in the family wardrobes; if she saw children neglected, she thought of idle women sitting with their hands in their laps; if she saw people living in crowded quarters, she wanted to take them out and house

them in mansions and palaces. All of which, she told him, came so naturally to her that it would sometimes manifest itself in most disconcerting ways. Money and the exchange of money was so distasteful to her that she always avoided it in making presents, a weakness for which she was often ridiculed. On the other hand, the charms of nature meant nothing to her, still less the charms of art; the only pleasure she was conscious of was in finding that something was wanted somewhere and in seeing how to procure it.

While we cannot but regret that Goethe withdraws Natalie from sight almost as soon as he has shown her to us, we have to admit that he says more about her in a page than many would say in a volume and that, philosophically speaking, we know as much about her as we need to know. Evidently it was part, perhaps a major part, of Goethe's intention to surround Wilhelm with complementary personalities, with minds directed outwards so as to offset his introspectiveness and thus gradually to fill him out and make a social man of him. At any rate there is nothing in the later chapters or anywhere in the more amorphous *Wanderjahre* to conflict with this reading and there is much to support it—Wilhelm's parenthood, for example, and his turning from art to practical life, the practice of surgery, in his choice of a vocation.

In the *Wahlverwandtschaften* of 1809 Goethe surprises us by going one further than *Wilhelm Meister* and writing a novel in which the centre of gravity shifts from the single individual to the group of individuals or rather to the institution, the institution of marriage which unites and divides and destroys them. Making no attempt this time to provide the milieu that he had failed to provide satisfactorily in *Wilhelm Meister* and following what was for him the easier course of handling his characters in a vacuum or near vacuum, a country-house where nothing happens in the daily round beyond leisurely conversation and a little landscape gardening, he almost makes a virtue of his defects by creating, as it were, a laboratory atmosphere, neatly suggested by the chemical affinities of the title and the discussion of them in the fourth chapter, and by writing a work which, whatever its shortcomings as a novel, is a wonderful piece of case-history, its weight of experience and its power as a social study being well indicated by the words of the reader, a woman, who, it is reported, said to Goethe that she had read the *Wahlverwandtschaften* once and not understood it, that she had never read it again but understood it now.

If it is in prose rather than in verse that his sociological thought is mainly recorded, there is no occasion for surprise, his poetic nature being what it was. But we must not overlook *Hermann und Dorothea* where the social picture, this time a quite normal picture of a son and his parents and his betrothal, is so beautifully handled. Here for once is a work of Goethe's in which we cannot isolate the characters, but are compelled to study them in and through one another. If we feel after reading it that we know Hermann intimately, it is chiefly because we know his father and his mother and have seen how they react to him. And the same applies to our knowledge of them and of their neighbours and of Dorothea. Within its limits, the limits of a small household and of a single day from noon to nightfall, the tale is completely told and there is nothing to add. It is moreover, or rather it was when it was published, a strictly contemporary tale, the time at which it was written, 1796-7, being the time at which the events are supposed to be happening.

Nor must we overlook *Faust*, which Goethe took up again soon after completing *Hermann und Dorothea* and now carried boldly forward. *Faust*, by its very conception a highly individualistic poem, was already well advanced and there were limits to what he could do with it. But the desire to enlarge it socially, to fill out the human background behind Faust and his immediate company, asserts itself strongly after Italy, or rather after the *Fragment* of 1790, and contributes not a little to the completed first part. Of the four entirely new items introduced after 1797 three are markedly social in content. First the *Vorspiel auf dem Theater* with its incomparable analysis of the theatre-going public, its variety, its boredom, its receptiveness, and of the poet's dismay on being confronted with it, the vote, it should be noted, being two to one against him in favour of the ruling that he should stop writing poetry esoterically and should turn his attention to the common stuff of life:

Greift nur hinein ins volle Menschenleben!
Ein jeder lebt's, nicht vielen ist's bekannt,
Und wo ihr's packt, da ist's interessant.

Then the scene *Vor dem Tor*, which puts the lesson of the *Vorspiel* vividly into practice and shows us a German holiday, the common folk relaxing after a winter's drudgery and darkness, servant-girls in their Sunday best, the noise of the skittle-alley, and peasants

dancing round the linden tree, much as Breughel would have done it:

Schon um die Linde war es voll;
Und alles tanzte schon wie toll.

Finally there is the first *Walpurgisnacht* which, if not exactly a social document, is next door to one, since it derives all its deeper meaning from its close association with the mentality of Lieschen and Valentin and the talk in the tavern and the crowded street and the crowded cathedral, in short from the superstitious and unenlightened world in which Gretchen has always lived.

It is true that the social and unsocial aspects of the first part of *Faust* are left imperfectly correlated, and that the social aspect remains understressed, the *Walpurgisnacht* serving, it might be objected, rather to deflect the social argument into supernatural channels than to force a reckoning with it in terms of the real world. And the same general observation holds good of the second part, in which, more palpably than in the first, the two aspects lie side by side, the social picture and the social comment being largely relegated to the Imperial scenes, the political and economic collapse of the Empire in the first act and the warfare which grows out of it in the fourth, and excluded perforce from the classical scenes. For, notwithstanding the doughty retainers whom Faust calls up from nowhere in defence of his seizure of the Peloponnesus, the classical scenes admit of no other than a cultural and, at bottom, an individualistic interpretation. Only by withdrawing into Arcadia does Goethe succeed in developing the social background of his classical world and, while we would not wish to be without so magnificent a picture of an early society living serenely, generation after generation, on the fruits of the earth at the fringe of the primeval forest and the towering mountain slopes, we have to admit that the picture is somewhat gratuitous, that it does not grow out of what has gone before but exists rather in its own right and for its own sake:

Alt-Walder sind's! Die Eiche starret machtig,
Und eigensinnig zackt sich Ast an Ast;
Der Ahorn mild, von sussem Saft trachtig,
Steigt rein empor und spielt mit seiner Last.
Und mutterlich im stillen Schattenkreise
Quillt laue Milch bereit fur Kind und Lamm;
Obst ist nicht weit, der Eben reife Speise,
Und Honig trieft vom ausgehohlten Stamm.

Hier ist das Wohlbehagen erblich,
 Die Wange heitert wie der Mund,
 Ein jeder ist an seinem Platz unsterblich:
 Sie sind zufrieden und gesund.

The lack of fusion between social and unsocial, between individual and community, which we have observed throughout the poem and which, in view of its initial character, was hardly to be avoided, persists to the last. When in the fourth act Faust announces his scientific purpose of mastering the blind forces of nature—Zwecklose Kraft unbandiger Elemente!—and making them obey which, it would seem, is his mature and ultimate purpose on this side of eternity, he does so in such violently individualistic terms as rather to obscure than to illuminate the far from individualistic project on which he is now embarking, a project, it might be said, more Promethean than Faustian. Then, in the fifth act, with scarcely sufficient preparation, we are plunged into the great final monologue in which Faust, while still the master, has achieved or is near to achieving the ideal of standing 'among free men on a free earth'—auf freiem Grund mit freiem Volke stehn—where, when a breach is made in the common security, all hands hasten together to close it up—Gemeindrang eilt, die Lucke zu verschliessen. And this, we may note, is the thought that makes Faust's death a triumph.

It was in such passages as these from the late stages of *Faust* as also, we may conjecture, in some of the Utopian parts of the *Wanderjahre* and in the sayings and maxims of his old age where he sets himself at last on an easy proverbial footing with his fellow mortals that he found compensation for the uncomfortably conservative views, not wholly desired by him, which his negative attitude to politics had made inevitable. How little he relished his position as an apparent supporter of the *ancien régime* is shown in the too little regarded Imperial scenes in *Faust*, which leave us in no doubt about the matter. For, if he had accepted the régime heartily, how could he have brought himself to present it in so savagely ludicrous a light with all its tinsel and frivolity, its sepulchral-sounding dignitaries, and, last but not least, its carnival emperor, a nincompoop who alternately sulks and simpers and of whom Mephistopheles, when informed by Faust that a true ruler must deal austere with himself, says with an envious grin, 'This one wasn't like that'—So ist er nicht. Er selbst genoss, und viel

A just verdict on Goethe's social and political outlook, while recognizing that the individualism of his genius was never wholly corrected, would also recognize that his individualism was characteristic of the century and the society in which he lived, and that it was to this extent appropriate to him. It would therefore invite us rather to rejoice at what he made of himself, as compared with others of his time, than to wish vainly that he had been different. It would recognize further that notwithstanding his individualism, or perhaps it would be truer to say because of his individualism, there were questions even in this region of thought that he was fitted to answer, better fitted than any who came after him. Of all the poets and artists and philosophers we know of Goethe is the one who by reason of the extraordinary flowering of his emotions, something almost unparalleled in the records of literature, was probably under the strongest temptation to yield to the seductiveness of the inner life and become the sort of creative person, more familiar to us than to him, who, escaping from society, bases his thought and his conduct of himself on privacy. When we remember how long and how incessant the temptation must have been, as witness the circumstance that he was writing *Torquato Tasso*, his life-and-death study of the introverted poet, when he was over forty, it is astonishing to see how, far from surrendering to it, he put it behind him and kept it there. It comes from him with a weight that no one else could give it when he claims that the poet who fails to establish his solidarity with the rest of mankind and to shape his life accordingly is a child not yet out of tutelage. In the dedicatory poem that he put at the head of the first authorized edition of his printed works, the 'Zueignung' written in 1784 or somewhat later, when he was in his middle thirties, he confesses to the impulse which prompted him to treat himself as the Muse's darling and therefore as a person apart and, speaking through the mouthpiece of the Muse herself, he states what is already the truth of it for him, that his first consideration must be that he is a man not so very different from other men, and that it is his duty to put his gifts at their service and to live with them in peace—

Wie viel bist du von andern unterschieden?
Erkenne dich, leb' mit der Welt in Frieden!

More than forty years later, on 29 January 1826, Goethe pointed out to Eckermann that it was only in the decadent ages of society

that poets and artists became inward and self-preoccupied, in all the great progressive ages the creative mind concerned itself with the outer world. Looking back over his long life and, more especially, at the gradual extroverting of himself which characterizes it, we can see that this remark, not an isolated remark but rather the summing-up of many, gives us the trend of his mind exactly and assures us of his fundamental soundness even in the social field. However far he may have travelled or failed to travel towards a full survey of it, no serious reader of him can be in doubt for a moment as to the direction in which Goethe is moving or, for that matter, as to the direction, the outward and altruistic direction, in which Goethe is thrusting him.

PROSPECT AND RETROSPECT

WHEN Goethe observed in a letter of advice to his assistant Philipp Seidel, written in Italy on 29 December 1787, that he would realize as he proceeded with his scientific studies how incredibly defined and circumscribed all natural things were—*Die Art zu seyn der Dinge ist auf eine unglaubliche und geheimnissvolle Weise bestimmt und umschrieben*—he would not have wished to make an exception of himself. He, too, he would have been quick to affirm, was defined and circumscribed, a man, like other men, of clearly observable contour both in body and in mind. And he would have been able to point in support to the evidence of his writings, which are in the main admirably lucid and concrete, more, it might be claimed, after the manner of English writers than of German. Even the incoherences of his youth are not without an exactitude of their own, but for which they would not be as informative about him as they are. In *Werther* we find him recording the most elusive of sentiments, page after page, without a single blurred edge or line, as if writing with a needle-point. And the same precision can be found elsewhere, in the nuances of *Tasso*, in the tirades of *Faust*, in the least carefully considered of the songs and lyrics, and in the letters, even the earliest and wildest of them, as also in the theoretical writings, scientific or otherwise, in which he never uses an idle word.

Here, one would infer, is a writer and thinker concerning whom it ought to be possible to reach some degree of clarity and agreement, something that might be accepted as a basis for the further discussion of him. Yet it is scarcely too much to say that no such basis exists. The mental picture that does duty for him in the mind of the cultured reader, the connotation that is released when we say the word Goethe, is more obscure and enigmatic by far than it was a century ago. When we read what penetrating things C. G. Carus, a younger contemporary, wrote about him in the years immediately following his death, we are compelled to inquire whether Goethe criticism has gone forward or backward since Carus's time. Certain it is that Goethe has become less intelligible than he was then.

This, it will be admitted, is a strange state of affairs, which, if it

went much further, would rob us of Goethe altogether. Bruno Bauch may have had the best of intentions when he wrote in 1904 that in Goethe's personality all the opposites were harmonized, and that he was at once an Aristotle, a Giordano Bruno, a Spinoza, and a Kant, but the effect of his words is to make Goethe vaguer and remoter than he was before. Hermann Bahr in his *Goethebild* (1923) is so carried away by the thought that Goethe can be everything to everybody, now a monist, now a dualist, and so forth, that he ends by asking or all but asking if Goethe ever existed—Fast mochte man zuweilen fragen, ob im gemeinen Sinne Goethe überhaupt gelebt hat. It is in such dead ends of criticism as this that we find the clue to what has gone wrong. The interpreters of Goethe or, at any rate, the majority of them, including the most influential, have been so much more at pains to bring out the range and manysidedness of his genius, his so-called universality, than to arrive at the specific character of the man, his 'Art zu seyn', that they have robbed him of his character and made him hollow and unreal, an inflated Goethe, reminding us of the bogus elephant that the poodle turned into before Faust finished exorcizing it—

Hinter den Ofen gebannt,
Schwillt es wie ein Elefant

—in which extremity we are sometimes offered the alternative of a mummified or plaster-cast Goethe, which may have the merit of containing him or his effigy, but has no other merit nor any relation whatsoever to the highly nervous and highly energetic life that Goethe once lived

It may be conceded in extenuation of this misguided way of dealing with him that his scope and receptivity are truly vast, too much so to be easily captured in a book of criticism. We have to go to the works themselves, one hundred and thirty-three volumes of them, all told, in the great Weimar edition, to see what is meant. But we can arrive at some indication of the territory he covered by taking a surveyor's reading here and there and noting that in point of character-drawing, which was not his main concern, he could bring to life and not only bring to life but also dwell affectionately on types as disparate as Gotz von Berlichingen in the play and Ottilie in the *Wahlverwandtschaften*, which is like saying that he could be Walter Scott at one time, though this by the way was

before Scott, and a twentieth-century novelist at another; or by noting again that in point of aesthetic sensibility he was able to travel confidently from the thinnest and airiest of moods to the solidest and most metallic, from *Werther*, say, to the *Roman Elegies*, as if he had both Rilke and Stefan George tucked away inside him. When we turn the pages of *Faust* and, more especially, when we look at its two ends, the earth-bound monologue and the heavenly journey, it is as if he were spanning the human gamut in the one poem. If more is needed, we may remind ourselves that for quality and variety together he was not far from being the supreme master, the world's master, of the short poem, responsive as an Aeolian harp—der Aolsharfe gleich—to the breath and the aura of the moment, and that he was at the same time, year in and year out, a close methodical observer of natural phenomena and as patient a worker as any. The combination of sensitiveness and endurance, of vulnerability and sheer brawn that is established in him by these two lifelong activities, of scientist and lyrical poet both, shows the size of him as nothing else could.

What surprises us still more is that the process of travelling outwards and digesting new realms of experience, one after another, never seems to stop but continues in old age and almost to the day of his death, so that the sense of spread, of ever-widening circles pushing out and out into unexplored regions, comes over us almost of itself as we follow him through his last years. If the recognition of this sweeps a light-headed appreciator off into infinity now and then, it is not to be wondered at. There was nothing Goethe was fonder of quoting, early as well as late, than the words of the Scripture telling him that in his Father's house were many mansions, though he liked to secularize a little and make it provinces or apartments or even recipes, as he put it to Lavater on 4 October 1782—In unsers Vaters Apotheke sind viele Recepte—in saying which he was obviously exposing himself to all and sundry and encouraging the nebulous critic. When, further, he told Schiller in April 1798 that in his capacity as observer he was a hardened realist—ein Stockrealiste—but that in action of any kind he was an idealist through and through and, more riskily still, told Friedrich Jacobi on 6 January 1813 that as poet and artist he was a polytheist and as man of science a pantheist and, moreover, that if he wanted a personal god for his own use he was entitled to that, too, he was opening the door and opening it

wide for the multitude of those who would rather break down his edges and dissipate him into thin air than try to see him clear and plain.

Nevertheless there is nothing in all his utterances, not even here where he is farthest off his guard, that cannot be accepted and taken up in the coherent body of his thought and personality. It was only because he was so sure of himself that he could now and then let himself go and say what he liked on the spur of the moment. If any doubts are raised at this juncture as to his philosophical discrimination, they can be dispelled by recalling his saying to von Muller on 16 July 1827 that Victor Cousin, with whom he had conversed, did not seem to understand that while there could be eclectic philosophers well enough, like Cousin himself, there could be no such thing as an eclectic philosophy. Or, failing that, by the item in *Maximen und Reflexionen* stating that if something really belongs to you you cannot lose it even if you throw it away—Was einem angehort, wird man nicht los, und wenn man es wegwurfe—which is not the sort of observation to come from one who went by picking and choosing and had no mind of his own. Goethe told Schiller in so many words on 10 February 1798 that what enabled him to adventure freely in the philosophies was that his mercurial nature, of which we have such abundant proof, could always quickly return to itself like so many balls of quicksilver running together again—da meine Natur, wie getrennte Quecksilberkugeln, sich so leicht und schnell wieder vereinigt. And he explained what he meant more elaborately to von Muller when he said that among the countless things that interested him there was always something that held the chief place, letting the others, the *quodlibet* as he called it, revolve around it like so many moons till one or another of them got its turn in the centre.

This imagery of centre and circumference was clearly what he needed to describe the working of his mature mind because he used it so variously and flexibly, telling Esenbeck on 16 December 1824 that he always preferred to work from the centre outwards, and telling Reinhard on 26 December 1824 he was pulled in so many queer directions that if he hadn't always had his radii firmly attached to his centre—wenn ich nicht von jeher meine Radian am Mittelpunkt festgehalten hätte—he might easily lose his bearings altogether. The only way in which Wilhelm Meister was able to keep his, when he looked at the spectacle of the starry heavens

from the top of an observatory tower, was by reminding himself that he, too, had a focus inside him at which all his activities met.

We can see from these plain words, without looking for more, that any reader of Goethe who is content to enjoy the circumference of him and let his eye go wandering from the centre is not reading Goethe as Goethe would have him read. His strong objection to Madame de Stael's criticism, so he said to von Muller on 29 May 1814, was that she made the mistake of treating the works separately without perceiving their inner connexion. What we find in the end is that the concentration of Goethe's mind, the compression and the compactness of it, is as remarkable as its range, possibly more remarkable. Nothing brings out his quality better than the way in which, without ever confusing the various faculties with one another, he holds and engages them together, revealing in this a finesse and a dexterity of mental life that we can only describe by returning to the image which he once was fond of using, of the racing charioteer expertly manipulating his many-footed team. In this connexion it is helpful to find him recognizing in Kant's philosophy the tendency, which was the opposite of his own, to attain a maximum of specification and to define the faculties as sharply as possible, even at the risk of setting them far apart. 'Kant's system', he said baldly to Victor Cousin on 20 October 1817, 'consists in distinguishing between the subject and the object', whereas with himself, he might have added, it was instinctive to centralize and to look for the maximum area of overlapping or of common ground. It is in this sense that he was entitled in correspondence with C. H. Schlosser in 1815 and also in his *Maximen und Reflexionen* to call it a general confession of faith—mein allgemeines Glaubensbekenntniss—that 'in the object there is everything that is in the subject, and something more, and again that in the subject there is everything that is in the object, and something more'. To which in his note to Schlosser he appends the observation that what is common can be known outright, and that the 'something more', the 'etwas drüber', can be approached and felt—geahndet—an observation that he further illuminates by means of the lovely epigram which asks how else we could ever hope to see the sun or rejoice in the divine:

War' nicht das Auge sonnenhaft,
Die Sonne konnt' es nie erblicken;
Lag' nicht in uns des Gottes eigne Kraft,
Wie konnt' uns Gottliches entzucken?

Turning to the not less fundamental question of thought and action, of theory and practice, we find him dealing with it in much the same way and with the same command. In his letter to Schiller of 30 June 1798 he confessed that the problem of using the theoretical in the practical was very important and very difficult, and he was inclined to believe that once you had really separated them you could not join them together again but that they could only work together if they had worked together from the start, as they did in the man of genius—Ich glaube wirklich, dass zwischen beiden, sobald man sie getrennt ansieht, kein Verbindungsmittel stattfindet, und dass sie nur insofern verbunden sind, als sie von Haus aus verbunden wirken, welches bei dem Genie von jeder Art stattfindet. In the same sense he pointed out to Knebel on 15 March 1799 that for himself he was incapable of thinking save in so far as he was being productive—Da ich nur *denken* kann in so fern ich *producire*—a challenging remark which gradually leads him on to the still more challenging remark made to Zelter in late years, on 31 December 1829, that he was finding himself unable to see how anything could be true unless it was also fruitful for him—Ich habe bemerkt, dass ich *den* Gedanken für wahr halte, der für mich fruchtbar ist—by which he meant, as he went on to say, that it must throw in and co-operate progressively with the rest of his mind—sich an mein übriges Denken anschliesst und zugleich mich fordert.

It is the same everywhere, in metaphysical speculations or in the ordinary business of living. Invariably we find him linking and gearing his faculties together for combined operation, reminding himself, as he does so, that this is nothing new but only, so he writes to C. W. M. Jacobi on 16 August 1799, what our ancestors did before us until they somehow unlearned it. And he sums up his position by insisting that it is as futile to act and observe without thinking as it is to think without acting and observing, the only way for us being to cultivate the habit of using our whole nature at once with all its faculties single and united—uns so zu gewöhnen dass unsere ganze Natur, mit allen ihren Fähigkeiten, zusammen und einzeln, so gut es nur gehen mag, wirken könne.

And so by another approach, this time through his technique of thinking, he lands us back in his concept of wholeness or of unity and in the belief in nature and natural process that underlies and

informs it. Here, there is no gainsaying it, was the belief that lay at the very core of his life. It was this belief that he had begun with in the uncritical seventeen-seventies when Rousseau was running riot in younger minds, and it was this belief that remained with him in all his vicissitudes and carried him through to a secure position. 'Was I not also a prey to this epidemic', he said to Zelter on 3 December 1812, speaking of those far-off days, 'and was it not the beneficent cause of my whole growth and development?'—denn ward ich nicht auch von dieser Epidemie ergriffen, und war sie nicht wohlthatig schuld an der Entwicklung meines Wesens?—adding that when he looked back now his life was unthinkable to him from any other point of view. And on 20 February 1831, a year before he died, he is reported by Eckermann as saying what amounts to the same thing in other words, that the god he really believed in—Das ist *mein* Gott—was the god or, as we should prefer to say, the goddess of proliferation and of fecundity that he had celebrated so memorably in *Satyros* and elsewhere in the days of his youth. 'The god I worship', he said, 'is the god who has put such productivity into the world that if only the millionth part survives the world is so thronged with living things that fire and water and war and pestilence can do nothing with it.' This is the god, it might be added, whose creativeness was the despair of Mephistopheles, who had to admit that man and his fellow animals managed to reproduce themselves altogether faster than he was able to destroy them:

Und dem verdammten Zeug, der Tier- und Menschenbrut,
 Dem ist nun gar nichts anzuhaben
 Wie viele hab' ich schon begraben!
 Und immer zirkuliert ein neues, frisches Blut.

The difference between Goethe and the rest of those who felt thus unreservedly about natural forces was that instead of going under or going astray, as so many did both in Germany and in other countries, he managed to come through in his own way and in his own time by gradually attuning his nature to the nature that he apprehended around him and making himself part of it, with the result that in due course he began to feel at home there and almost as if he were a root growing out of the ground, nourishing himself not at second hand but at the source. It was like recovering in mature life and, as it were, with his eyes open the sense of closeness to nature that had possessed him when he was young and made

him describe himself as the child at nature's breast or even as the child just born, still drawing sustenance through its umbilical cord. It was in this sense that he observed to Leonhard on 12 January 1828 how, in spite of affairs which took him away from his studies, the trickle of life from nature's never-failing source was running into him all the time—so rieselt doch, althergebrachter Weise, aus nie versiegenden Quellen immer etwas Zufluss in mein Bassin. On 9 December 1822 he said to Schultz that we must go to nature, the mother who is old and who is young—der jung-alten Mutter—for everything. And as far back as 24 July 1788 he drew Heyne's attention to the way in which, in whatever he undertook, he always began very close to the ground—Sie sehen dass ich sehr von der Erde anfang. If there is any difficulty in understanding Goethe's wisdom at this point it is because it is the sort of wisdom we look for, if at all, from those of restricted experience, such as woodsmen who are shrewd and weather-wise and chary of books, and because we are not prepared for it in one whose curiosity is so unbounded.

But whether we understand him fully or not, we can take it for granted, without drawing on the abundance of further evidence, that Goethe's expeditions into the life of the spirit and the record of things past and present, no matter how promiscuous they sometimes seem, were all made from this strongly established base both as their point of departure and as their point of return. In a philosophy as generous as his there was nothing that the spirit of man had essayed, not even in its most unearthly and world-escaping flights, that was not ultimately natural as the expression of what it had been led into doing by conditions in time and place and circumstance that were themselves nature. This, he implied in the fourth book of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, was the only way to read the Bible and get the best out of it, and the same held good elsewhere. The thousand religions that have arisen in the course of time, so he wrote to Lavater on 4 October 1782, were for him just so many manifestations of nature's power to heal a wound in the body spiritual—was sind die tausendfaltigen Religionen anders als tausendfache Äusserungen dieser Heilungskraft. In his view everything in the inner life not less than in the outer had come about or grown in a kind of soil, however rarefied, and belonged as *natura naturans* not less legitimately to his proper field of experience as a biologist than the strange tree that came

from Japan on the boar's skull that came from Celebes. It was in this sense, not as one who was philosophically hesitant or given to poetic trifling, that he felt himself entitled to use the imagery of the medieval church as the vehicle for Faust's last enterprise or in the *Wahlverwandtschaften*, a story of his own times, to contemplate the union of Eduard and Ottilie in a blessed hereafter. Why, he might ask, should he not re-experience these phases of life if it were in his power to do so? Might he not thereby be brought nearer to understanding the not yet terminated progress of the human spirit towards heights and depths that, as yet, we know nothing of?

The tendency to range farther afield than another would dare was characteristic of Goethe from the beginning. 'How with your philosophy could you write the "Pastorbrief"?' said Lavater to him on 28 December 1773, meaning the pietistic and relatively orthodox *Brief des Pastors* that Goethe had recently published. Lavater added for his part that if he tried to do such a thing he would suspect himself of insincerity. But in saying what he did he was not questioning the document. Among the many charges that have been brought against Goethe the charge of insincerity is the hardest to come by. Wieland seems to have been speaking for everyone when he said to Reinhold on 2 December 1796 that in spite of his foibles Goethe was consistent and all of a piece in everything he did—so sehr *aus Einem Stucke*, so sehr *bona fide* alles was er ist.

For himself Goethe was not in doubt. Far from feeling insecure when he was drawn in opposite or conflicting directions, as with his Protean and chameleon-like susceptibilities he was only too apt to be drawn, he took the chance it gave him of observing in the unfolding of the spiritual life the polarity, the play of antithesis, the systole and diastole, that he was never weary of observing in the life of nature. Here, too, we find him starting close to the ground and establishing his law of opposites or rather his law of the interplay and interdependence of opposites, in the earliest and most elementary of experiences, in the simple act of breathing with its alternate expansion and contraction or in the quick exchanges of joy and pain that he had felt almost as long as he could remember, and proceeding from there to the discovery of remoter and less apparent examples in one field of science or another. We have only to reflect for a moment how this notion

of polarity, a notion closely anticipating the dialectic of a slightly later time, would help him to preserve order in the multifariousness and the not far from chaos that he was for ever encountering in his restless exploration of life to see how congenial it must have been. His poetic writings, and especially the poem of *Faust* where the clash and dialectic of the spirit is written large for all to see, tell us this with even greater certainty

Wherever he went we can be sure that he took his belief in natural law, whether in the form of polarity or in some other form, along with him. Provided he did this, he could go as far abroad as he liked, there could be no loss of coherence or of unity either in his work or in his person. If his philosophy of nature limited him and limited his capacity to experience, as any dominant philosophy must, if only for the reason that it excludes or subordinates the other philosophies, he would have been the first to admit it, because he knew better than his critics that he was conditioned like everyone else and committed like them to his niche in time and circumstance. All he did and all he could do was to solve or try to solve the problem that his environment, the world he lived in plus himself, confronted him with

As a young man at the threshold of life his evident intention was to be a poet, even a gay and irresponsible poet, and nothing else, unless perhaps to be in the broader sense an artist who would draw and paint as well as write. It was in this spirit that he played happily with arts and letters in Leipzig, sketching in Oeser's studio and writing his airy nothings. Then, soon after this, came *Gotz von Berlichingen* and the Friederike songs, showing at its best the delightful insouciance that he was capable of in these relatively happy days when he was so full of the dancing mood of the 'Mailed':

Wie herrlich leuchtet
Mir die Natur!
Wie glanzet die Sonne!
Wie lacht die Flur!

If all too soon there was a change and he was no longer able to move as freely as before in this *tempo* or in this kind of writing, it was not so much by taking thought or even by listening to the thoughts of others as by finding that the emotions he had been playing with had grown over his head and were threatening to swamp him, in other words, that he was himself, in his own person,

unmanageable. It was this elementary dilemma that gradually forced itself on him as the Frankfurt days and months and years went by and no relief came. His plight was not unlike that of the novice who in sheer inexperience had liberated forces that he could not control and was at his wit's end, the more so as the forces, it seemed, were all in himself, in Goethe, and there was no one to help him:

Die ich rief, die Geister,
Werd' ich nun nicht los

What he did not know and could not be expected to know, though it will be palpable to any but the most capricious reader of history to-day, was that in being submitted to this acute personal trial he was being submitted to something more than personal, that the wave of irrationality, which swept over Europe in the middle of the eighteenth century, had caught him at its emotional peak, or made him its emotional peak, and so turned him into a representative, a critically representative, person. Not knowing this, he went on with his private struggle, a long and intricate one, with the results that we have now witnessed, his mastery of life within his appointed limits being as conspicuous at the finish as his lack of mastery at the start. He did not foresee the coming, in the century after him, of a point of view that would have preferred to have him go to pieces at all costs like a good poet rather than make a success of things, and if he had foreseen it there was something in him, fortunately, that would have rejected it. For if the impulse to survive is more valuable to humanity than the impulse to perish, then the life and work of Goethe, as we now have it, means more than it could possibly have meant if he had crumpled under the pressure of himself or failed to do what he did. What gives him his special importance is precisely the circumstance that in his case and in his judgement the question of how to live and how to make life controllable, not as a question of theory but as one of urgent practice, had to come first, and that the questions usually, but wrongly, held to be prior, the question of being wise and the question of being creative, had to follow it and be dealt with accordingly. Both his poetry and his philosophy or rather his poetry and his philosophy together, the two being not easily separable without loss to either, derive their value from being thus integrated with the problem of living.

This was surely their gain and not their loss. At least it is

difficult to see how at this stage in the world's history, a stage at which the whole of human society has found itself jeopardized by irrational forces that we have not yet finally disposed of, a more purely imaginative or a more purely abstract use of his genius could have produced anything comparable in value with what he has given us by being what he was and by writing neither for art's sake nor, in a last analysis, for philosophy's sake, but for life's sake. When we look back at the principal beliefs of Goethe, those that he finally reached and acted on, above all his belief in science, his belief in objectivity, his belief in unity, and realize, as we must, how compatible they are with what is best in the social and political thought of to-day, it is pardonable to ask whether he may not prove to have a wider and a more immediate bearing on the betterment of the world than he ever contemplated or would have cared to claim.

If he had been consulted about posterity and himself, he would probably have given the simple answer that it might be some little time before the last word was said. He was no friend of last words and never or hardly ever tried to say one. His ideas being something that grew and ripened in him rather than came logically, it was not in his power to say halt or to stop at a given moment. The ripening went on of its own accord. This is the reason or one of the reasons why he never arranged his ideas in formal order but left them lying where they happened to be, trusting to the solidarity of his work and his person to provide what order was needed.

He drew attention to this subtle way of dealing with himself in a late piece of verse which none but he would have written, and especially in the lines telling how in all his long progress towards the truth he never quite reached a terminus and did not foresee the time when he would:

Stets geforscht und stets gegründet,
Nie geschlossen, oft gerundet.

If by preserving this attitude he was making greater demands on his readers than they were accustomed to, he was also offering them the compensation of being able to share the attitude with him and to carry on where he left off without having to agree or disagree dogmatically. He implied this in a remark made to von Muller on 5 January 1831 within a year or so of his death. Whoever, he said, had read his works and entered into the spirit of them would find that they had given him a certain freedom of mind. And there he was content to leave it.

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