

Tucholsky Wagner Zola Scott
Turgenev Wallace Fonatne Sydon Freud Schlegel
Twain Walther von der Vogelweide Fouqué Friedrich II. von Preußen
Weber Freiligrath Frey
Fechner Fichte Weiße Rose von Fallersleben Kant Ernst Richthofen Frommel
Engels Fielding Hölderlin Eichendorff Tacitus Dumas
Fehrs Faber Flaubert Eliasberg Eliot Zweig Ebner Eschenbach
Feuerbach Maximilian I. von Habsburg Fock Ewald Vergil
Goethe Elisabeth von Österreich London
Mendelssohn Balzac Shakespeare Rathenau Dostojewski Ganghofer
Trackl Stevenson Lichtenberg Doyle Gjellerup
Mommsen Thoma Tolstoi Lenz Hambruch Droste-Hülshoff
Dach Thoma von Arnim Hägele Hanrieder Hauptmann Humboldt
Karrillon Reuter Verne Rousseau Hagen Hauff Baudelaire Gautier
Garschin Defoe Hebbel Hegel Kussmaul Herder
Damaschke Descartes Schopenhauer George
Wolfram von Eschenbach Darwin Dickens Grimm Jerome Rilke Bebel Proust
Bronner Campe Horváth Aristoteles Voltaire Federer Herodot
Bismarck Vigny Gengenbach Barlach Heine Grillparzer Georgy
Storm Casanova Lessing Tersteegen Gilm Gryphius
Chamberlain Langbein Lafontaine Iffland Sokrates
Brentano Claudius Schiller Bellamy Schilling Kralik Raabe Gibbon Tschchow
Katharina II. von Rußland Gerstäcker Raabe Gleim Vulpius
Löns Hesse Hoffmann Gogol Morgenstern Goedicke
Luther Heym Hofmannsthal Klee Hölty Kleist
Roth Heyse Klopstock Puschkin Homer Mörike Musil
Luxemburg La Roche Horaz Kraus
Machiavelli Kierkegaard Kraft Kraus
Navarra Aurel Musset Lamprecht Kind Kirchhoff Hugo Moltke
Nestroy Marie de France
Nietzsche Nansen Laotse Ipsen Liebknecht
Marx Lassalle Gorki Klett Leibniz Ringelntatz
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Types of Weltschmerz in German Poetry

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NOTE

The author of this essay has attempted to make, as he himself phrases it, "a modest contribution to the natural history of Welt-schmerz." What goes by that name is no doubt somewhat elusive; one can not easily delimit and characterize it with scientific accuracy. Nevertheless the word corresponds to a fairly definite range of psychical reactions which are of great interest in modern poetry, especially German poetry. The phenomenon is worth studying in detail. In undertaking a study of it Mr. Braun thought, and I readily concurred in the opinion, that he would do best not to essay an exhaustive history, but to select certain conspicuously interesting types and proceed by the method of close analysis, characterization and comparison. I consider his work a valuable contribution to literary scholarship.

CALVIN THOMAS.

Columbia University, June, 1905

PREFACE

The work which is presented in the following pages is intended to be a modest contribution to the natural history of Weltschmerz.

The writer has endeavored first of all to define carefully the distinction between pessimism and Weltschmerz; then to classify the latter, both as to its origin and its forms of expression, and to indicate briefly its relation to mental pathology and to contemporary social and political conditions. The three poets selected for discussion, were chosen because they represent distinct types, under which probably all other poets of Weltschmerz may be classified, or to which they will at least be found analogous; and to the extent to which such is the case, the treatise may be regarded as exhaustive. In the case of each author treated, the development of the peculiar phase of Weltschmerz characteristic of him has been traced, and analyzed with reference to its various modes of expression. Hölderlin is the idealist, Lenau exhibits the profoundly pathetic side of Weltschmerz, while Heine is its satirist. They have been considered in this order, because they represent three progressive stages of Weltschmerz viewed as a psychological process: Hölderlin naïve, Lenau self-conscious, Heine endeavoring to conceal his melancholy beneath the disguise of self-irony.

It is a pleasure to tender my grateful acknowledgments to my former Professors, Calvin Thomas and William H. Carpenter of Columbia University, and Camillo von Klenze and Starr Willard Cutting of the University of Chicago, under whose stimulating direction and never-failing assistance my graduate studies were carried on.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

The purpose of the following study is to examine closely certain German authors of modern times, whose lives and writings exemplify in an unusually striking degree that peculiar phase of lyric feeling which has characterized German literature, often in a more or less epidemic form, since the days of "Werther," and to which, at an early period in the nineteenth century, was assigned the significant name "Weltschmerz."

With this side of the poet under investigation, there must of necessity be an enquiry, not only into his writings, his expressed feelings, but also his physical and mental constitution on the one hand, and into his theory of existence in general on the other. Psychology and philosophy then are the two adjacent fields into which it may become necessary to pursue the subject in hand, and for this reason it is only fair to call attention to the difficulties which surround the student of literature in discussing philosophical ideas or psychological phenomena. Intrepid indeed would it be for him to attempt a final judgment in these bearings of his subject, where wise men have differed and doctors have disagreed.

Although sometimes loosely used as synonyms, it is necessary to note that there is a well-defined distinction between Weltschmerz and pessimism. Weltschmerz may be defined as the poetic expression of an abnormal sensitiveness of the feelings to the moral and physical evils and misery of existence—a condition which may or may not be based upon a reasoned conviction that the sum of human misery is greater than the sum of human happiness. It is usually characterized also by a certain lack of will-energy, a sort of sentimental yielding to these painful emotions. It is therefore entirely a matter of "Gemüt." Pessimism, on the other hand, purports to be a theory of existence, the result of deliberate philosophic argument and investigation, by which its votaries have reached the dispassionate conclusion that there is no real good or pleasure in the world that is not clearly outweighed by evil or pain, and that therefore self-destruction, or at least final annihilation is the consummation devoutly to be wished.

James Sully, in his elaborate treatise on Pessimism, [1] divides it, however, into reasoned and unreasoned Pessimism, including *Weltschmerz* under the latter head. This is entirely compatible with the definition of *Weltschmerz* which has been attempted above. But it is interesting to note the attitude of the pessimistic school of philosophy toward this unreasoned pessimism. It emphatically disclaims any interest in or connection with it, and describes all those who are afflicted with the malady as execrable fellows—to quote Hartmann—: "Klageweiber männlichen und weiblichen Geschlechts, welche am meisten zur Discreditierung des Pessimismus beigetragen haben, die sich in ewigem Lamento ergehen, und entweder unaufhörlich in Thränen schwimmen, oder bitter wie Wermut und Essig, sich selbst und andern das Dasein noch mehr vergällen; eine jämmerliche Situation des Stimmungspessimismus, der sie nicht leben und nicht sterben lässt." [2] And yet Hartmann himself does not hesitate to admit that this very condition of individual *Weltschmerz*, or "Zerrissenheit," is a necessary and inevitable stage in the progress of the mind toward that clarified universal *Weltschmerz* which is based upon theoretical insight, namely pessimism in its most logical sense. This being granted, we shall not be far astray in assuming that it is also the stage to which the philosophic pessimist will sometimes revert, when a strong sense of his own individuality asserts itself.

If we attempt a classification of *Weltschmerz* with regard to its essence, or, better perhaps, with regard to its origin, we shall find that the various types may be classed under one of two heads: either as cosmic or as egoistic. The representatives of cosmic *Weltschmerz* are those poets whose first concern is not their personal fate, their own unhappiness, it may be, but who see first and foremost the sad fate of humanity and regard their own misfortunes merely as a part of the common destiny. The representatives of the second type are those introspective natures who are first and chiefly aware of their own misery and finally come to regard it as representative of universal evil. The former proceed from the general to the particular, the latter from the particular to the general. But that these types must necessarily be entirely distinct in all cases, as Marchand [3] asserts, seems open to serious doubt. It is inconceivable that a poet into whose personal experience no shadows have fallen should take

the woes of humanity very deeply to heart; nor again could we imagine that one who has brooded over the unhappy condition of mankind in general should never give expression to a note of personal sorrow. It is in the complexity of motives in one and the same subject that the difficulty lies in making rigid and sharp distinctions. In some cases Weltschmerz may arise from honest conviction or genuine despair, in others it may be something entirely artificial, merely a cloak to cover personal defects. Sometimes it may even be due to a desire to pose as a martyr, and sometimes nothing more than an attempt to ape the prevailing fashion. To these types Wilhelm Scherer adds "Müssiggänger, welche sich die Zeit mit übler Laune vertreiben, missvergnügte Lyriker, deren Gedichte nicht mehr gelesen werden, und Spatzenköpfe, welche den Pessimismus für besonderen Tiefsinn halten und um jeden Preis tiefsinnig erscheinen wollen." [4]

But it is with Weltschmerz in its outward manifestations as it finds expression in the poet's writings, that we shall be chiefly concerned in the following pages. And here the subdivisions, if we attempt to classify, must be almost as numerous as the representatives themselves. In Hölderlin we have the ardent Hellenic idealist; Lenuau gives expression to all the pathos of Weltschmerz, Heine is its satirist, the misanthrope, while in Raabe we even have a pessimistic humorist.

This brief list needs scarcely be supplemented by other names of poets of melancholy, such as Reinhold Lenz, Heinrich von Kleist, Robert Southey, Byron, Leopardi, in order to command our attention by reason of the tragic fate which ended the lives of nearly all of these men, the most frequent and the most terrible being that of insanity. It is of course a matter of common knowledge that chronic melancholy or the persistent brooding over personal misfortune is an almost inevitable preliminary to mental derangement. And when this melancholy takes root in the finely organized mind of genius, it is only to be expected that the result will be even more disastrous than in the case of the ordinary mind. Lombroso holds the opinion that if men of genius are not all more or less insane, that is, if the "spheres of influence" of genius and insanity do not actually overlap, they are at least contiguous at many points, so that the transition from the former to the latter is extremely easy and even natural.

But genius in itself is not an abnormal mental condition. It does not even consist of an extraordinary memory, vivid imagination, quickness of judgment, or of a combination of all of these. Kant defines genius as the talent of invention. Originality and productiveness are the fundamental elements of genius. And it is an almost instinctive force which urges the author on in his creative work. In the main his activity is due less to free will than to this inner compulsion.

"Ich halte diesen Drang vergebens auf,
Der Tag und Nacht in meinem Busen wechselt.
Wenn ich nicht sinnen oder dichten soll,
So ist das Leben mir kein Leben mehr,"

says Goethe's Tasso. [5] If this impulse of genius is embodied in a strong physical organism, as for example in the case of Shakespeare and Goethe, there need be no detriment to physical health; otherwise, and especially if there is an inherited tendency to disease, there is almost sure to be a physical collapse. Specialists in the subject have pointed out that violent passions are even more potent in producing mental disease than mere intellectual over-exertion. And these are certainly characteristic in a very high degree of the mind of genius. It has often been remarked that it is the *corona spinosa* of genius to feel all pain more intensely than do other men. Schopenhauer says "der, in welchem der Genius lebt, leidet am meisten." It is only going a step further then, when Hamerling writes to his friend Möser: "Schliesslich ist es doch nur der Kranke, der sich das Leid der ganzen Welt zu Herzen nimmt."

Radestock, in his study "Genie und Wahnsinn," mentions and elaborates among others the following points of resemblance between the mind of genius and the insane mind: an abnormal activity of the imagination, very rapid succession of ideas, extreme concentration of thought upon a single subject or idea, and lastly, what would seem the cardinal point, a weakness of will-energy, the lack of that force which alone can serve to bring under control all these other unruly elements and give balance to what must otherwise be an extremely one-sided mechanism. Here again the exception may be taken to prove the rule. It is not too much, I think, to assert that

Goethe could never have become so uniquely great, not even through the splendid versatility of his genius, but for that incomparable self-control, which he made the watchword of his life. And in the case of the poet of Weltschmerz the presence or absence of this quality may even decide whether he shall rise superior to his beclouded condition or perish in the gloom. The conclusion at which Radestock arrives is that genius, as the expression of the most intense mental activity, occupies the middle ground, as it were, between the normal healthy state on the one hand, and the abnormal, pathological state on the other, and has without doubt many points of contact with mental disease; and that although the elements which genius has in common with insanity may not be strong enough in themselves to induce the transition from the former to the latter state, yet when other aggravating causes are added, such as physical disease, violent emotions or passions, overwork, the pressure or distress of outward circumstances, the highly gifted individual is much more liable to cross the line of demarkation between the two mental states than is the average mind, which is more remote from that line. If this can be asserted of genius in general, it must be even more particularly and widely applicable in reference to a combination of genius and Weltschmerz. We shall find pathetic examples in the first two types selected for examination.

Having thus introduced the subject in its most general bearings and aspects, it remains for us to review briefly its historical background.

Weltschmerz is essentially a symptom of a period of conflict, of transition. The powerful reaction which marks the eighteenth century—a reaction against all traditional intellectual authority, and a struggle for the emancipation of the individual, of research, of inspiration and of genius—reached its high-water mark in Germany in the seventies. But with the unrestrained outbursts of the champions of Storm and Stress the problem was by no means solved; there remained the basic conflict between the idea of personal liberty and the strait-jacket of Frederician absolutism, the conflict between the dynastic and the national idea of the state. Should the individual yield a blind, unreasoned submission to the state as to a divinely instituted arbitrary authority, good or bad, or was the state to be

regarded as the conscious and voluntary coöperation of its subjects for the general good? It was, moreover, a time not only of open and active revolt, as represented by the spirit of Klinger, but also of great emotional stirrings, and sentimental yearnings of such passive natures as Höltz. Rousseau's plea for a simplified and more natural life had exerted a mighty influence. And what has a most important bearing upon the relation between these intellectual currents and Weltschmerz—these minds were lacking in the discipline implied in our modern scientific training. Scientific exactness of thinking had not become an integral part of education. Hence the difference between the pessimism of Ibsen and the romantic Weltschmerz of these uncritical minds.

In accounting for the tremendous effect produced by his "Werther," Goethe compares his work to the bit of fuse which explodes the mine, and says that the shock of the explosion was so great because the young generation of the day had already undermined itself, and its members now burst forth individually with their exaggerated demands, unsatisfied passions and imaginary sufferings. [6] And in estimating the influences which had prepared the way for this mental disposition, Goethe emphasizes the influence of English literature. Young's "Night Thoughts," Gray's "Elegy," Goldsmith's "Deserted Village," even "Hamlet" and his monologues haunted all minds. "Everyone knew the principal passages by heart, and everyone believed he had a right to be just as melancholy as the Prince of Denmark, even though he had seen no ghost and had no royal father to avenge." Finally Ossian had provided an eminently suitable setting,—under the darkly lowering sky the endless gray heath, peopled with the shadowy forms of departed heroes and withered maidens. To quote the substance of Goethe's criticism: [7] Amid such influences and surroundings, occupied with fads and studies of this sort, lacking all incentive from without to any important activity and confronted by the sole prospect of having to drag out a humdrum existence, men began to reflect with a sort of sullen exultation upon the possibility of departing this life at will, and to find in this thought a scant amelioration of the ills and tedium of the times. This disposition was so general that "Werther" itself exerted a powerful influence, because it everywhere

struck a responsive chord and publicly and tangibly exhibited the true inwardness of a morbid youthful illusion. [8]

Nor did the dawning nineteenth century bring relief. No other period of Prussian history, says Heinrich von Treitschke, [9] is wrapped in so deep a gloom as the first decade of the reign of Frederick William III. It was a time rich in hidden intellectual forces, and yet it bore the stamp of that uninspired Philistinism which is so abundantly evidenced by the barren commonplace character of its architecture and art. Genius there was, indeed, but never were its opportunities for public usefulness more limited. It was as though the greatness of the days of the second Frederick lay like a paralyzing weight upon this generation. And this oppressing sense of impotence was followed, after the Napoleonic Wars, by the bitterness of disappointment, all the more keenly felt by reason of this first reawakening of the national consciousness. Great had been the expectations, enormous the sacrifice; exceedingly small was the gain to the individual. [10] And the resultant dissonance was the same as that to which Alfred de Musset gave expression in the words: "The malady of the present century is due to two causes; the people who have passed through 1793 and 1814 bear in their hearts two wounds. All that was is no more; all that will be is not yet. Do not hope to find elsewhere the secret of our ills." [11]

This then in briefest outline is the transition from the century of individualism and autocracy to the nineteenth century of democracy. Small wonder that the struggle claimed its victims in those individuals who, unable to find a firm basis of conviction and principle, vacillated constantly between instinctive adherence to old traditions, and unreasoned inclination to the new order of things.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] "Pessimism, a History and a Criticism," London, 1877.

[2] Ed. von Hartmann: "Zur Geschichte und Begründung des Pessimismus," Leipzig, Hermann Haacke, p. 187.

[3] "Les Poètes Lyriques de l'Autriche," Paris, 1886, p. 293.

[4] "Vorträge und Aufsätze zur Geschichte des geistigen Lebens in Deutschland und Oesterreich," Berlin, 1874, p. 413.

[5] Act 5, Sc. 2.

[6] "Goethes Werke," Weimar ed. Vol. 28, p. 227 f.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 216 f.

[8] In view of Goethe's own words, then, the caution of a recent critic (Felix Melchior in *Litt. Forsch.* XXVII Heft, Berlin, 1903) against applying the term *Weltschmerz* to "Werther," would seem to miss the mark entirely. Werther is a type, just as truly as is Faust, though in a smaller way, and the malady which he typifies has its ultimate origin in the development of public life,—the very condition which this critic insists upon as a mark of *Weltschmerz* in the proper application of the term.

[9] "Historische und politische Aufsätze," Leipzig, 1897. Vol. 4.

[10] As early as 1797 Hölderlin's *Hyperion* laments: "Mein Geschäft auf Erden ist aus. Ich bin voll Willens an die Arbeit gegangen, habe geblutet darüber, und die Welt um keinen Pfennig reicher gemacht." ("Hölderlin's gesammelte Dichtungen, herausgegeben von B. Litzmann," Stuttgart, Cotta, undated. Vol. II, p. 68.) Several decades later Heine writes: "Ich kann mich über die Siege meiner liebsten Ueberzeugungen nicht recht freuen, da sie mir gar zu viel gekostet haben. Dasselbe mag bei manchem ehrlichen Manne der Fall sein, und es trägt viel bei zu der grossen düsteren Verstimmung der Gegenwart." (Brief vom 21 April, 1851, an Gustav Kolb; *Werke*, Karpeles ed. Vol. IX, p. 378.)

[11] "Confession d'un enfant du siècle." *Œuvres compl.* Paris, 1888 (Charpentier). Vol. VIII, p. 24.

CHAPTER II

Hölderlin

A case such as that of Hölderlin, subject as he was from the time of his boyhood to melancholy, and ending in hopeless insanity, at once suggests the question of heredity. Little or nothing is known concerning his remote ancestors. His great-grandfather had been administrator of a convent at Grossbottwar, and died of dropsy of the chest at the age of forty-seven. His grandfather had held a similar position as "Klosterhofmeister und geistlicher Verwalter" at Lauffen, to which his son, the poet's father, succeeded. An apoplectic stroke ended his life at the early age of thirty-six. In regard to Hölderlin's maternal ancestors, our information is even more scant, though we know that both his grandmother and his mother lived to a ripe old age. From the poet's references to them we judge them to have been entirely normal types of intelligent, lovable women, gifted with a great deal of good practical sense. The only striking thing is the premature death of Hölderlin's great-grandfather and father. But in view of the nature of their stations in life, in which they may fairly be supposed to have led more than ordinarily sober and well-ordered lives, there seems to be no ground whatever for assuming that Hölderlin's Weltschmerz owed its inception in any degree to hereditary tendencies, notwithstanding Hermann Fischer's opinion to the contrary. [12] There is no sufficient reason to assume "erbliche Belastung," and there are other sufficient causes without merely guessing at such a possibility.

But while there are no sufficient historical grounds for the supposition that he brought the germ of his subsequent mental disease with him in his birth, we cannot fail to observe, even in the child, certain natural traits, which, being allowed to develop unchecked, must of necessity hasten and intensify the gloom which hung over his life. To his deep thoughtfulness was added an abnormal sensitiveness to all external influences. Like the delicate anemone, he recoiled and withdrew within himself when touched by the rougher material things of life. [13] He himself poetically describes his absentmindedness when a boy, and calls himself "ein Träumer"; and a

dreamer he remained all his life. It seems to have been this which first brought him into discord with the world:

Oft sollt' ich stracks in meine Schule wandern,
Doch ehe sich der Träumer es versah,
So hatt' er in den Garten sich verirrt,
Und sass behaglich unter den Oliven,
Und baute Flotten, schiff't' ins hohe Meer.
Dies kostete mich tausend kleine Leiden,
Verzeihlich war es immer, wenn mich oft
Die Klügeren, mit herzlichem Gelächter
Aus meiner seligen Ekstase schreckten,
Doch unaussprechlich wehe that es mir. [14]

If ever a boy needed a strong fatherly hand to guide him, to teach him self-reliance and practical sense, it was this dreamy, tender-spirited child. [15] The love and sympathy which his mother bestowed upon him was not calculated to fit him for the rugged experiences of life, and while probably natural and pardonable, it was nevertheless extremely unfortunate that the boy was unconsciously encouraged to be and to remain a "Muttersöhnchen." But even with his peculiar trend of disposition, the result might not have been an unhappy one, had the course of his life not brought him more than an ordinary share of misfortune. This overtook him early in life, for when but two years of age his father died. His widowed mother now lived for a few years in complete retirement with her two children—the poet's sister Henrietta having been born just a few weeks after his father's demise. But it was not long before death again entered the household and robbed it of Hölderlin's aunt, his deceased father's sister, who was herself a widow and the faithful companion of the poet's mother. When the latter found herself again alone with her two little ones, whose care was weighing heavily upon her, she consented to become the wife of her late husband's friend, Kammerrat Gock, and accompanied him to his home in the little town of Nürtingen on the Neckar. But this re-established marital happiness was to be of brief duration, for in 1779 her second