

*Wilhelm Meister*



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Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Translated by H.M. Waidson



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## Introduction

It is indicative of Goethe's many-sided literary achievements that he had unique, major contributions to make to lyrical poetry, drama and prose writing. The novel *Wilhelm Meister*, it has long been generally accepted, occupies a central, pivotal position in German literature, and it has exerted a great influence from the time of the first publication of the *Years of Apprenticeship* onwards, firstly upon Romantic writers, subsequently upon realists of the nineteenth century, and later upon twentieth-century authors such as, for instance, Thomas Mann and Hermann Hesse. As a major novel *Wilhelm Meister* has much substantial and varied material to offer readers, both in the *Years of Apprenticeship* and in the later sequel, the *Years of Travel*.

The first characteristic of the *Years of Apprenticeship* to be noticed is its pursuit of the theme of an individual's personal development in relation to a broad spectrum of society, to a series of clearly and realistically portrayed milieux, and to the age in which he lives. The point of view that is predominantly shown is that of the central figure as he passes through years of early manhood, and as on occasions he evokes recollections of his childhood. The term "*Bildungsroman*", coined with *Wilhelm Meister* and novels like it in mind, includes the idea of the formation of the individual personality, both through inner effort and outward influence, and that of the unfolding of natural potentialities. Progress is from error and confusion to truth and clarity, and as the novel proceeds it makes or implies judgements on what may be right or wrong from the point of view of the hero's development in life. Such a novel is ultimately optimistic; the central figure will keep on striving, and others will help him, in a variety of ways, in his quest for fulfilment. Constructive lessons will be taught, in the manner of the Age of Enlightenment, as this was interpreted by Goethe and his intellectual associates in the late eighteenth century. The outcome is utopian, as there is the hope that the ideal of a higher form of humanity can be realized in earthly society.

Nonetheless it is the inner, emotional life of Wilhelm that is presented to us in the first place, and it is not long before it becomes evident how sensitive and fragile it is, and how easily it can be hurt. His early happiness is

followed by a protracted depression after the collapse of his relationship with Mariane; the recovery is slow and there are vacillations and wrong turnings before something akin to what we are intended to accept as the right track is taken. Whereas Goethe's first novel, *The Sufferings of Young Werther*, published twenty years prior to the *Years of Apprenticeship*, had described a highly strung inner life that terminated in suicide, Wilhelm's emotional self is allowed less overwhelming dominance and in due course finds its own adjustments to the outer world. But elements of fateful, uncanny mystery remain throughout the *Years of Apprenticeship*, particularly in the two vulnerable figures whom Wilhelm protects – the girl Mignon, on the verge of adolescence, and the Harpist, the older musician bowed down by a sense of doom.

*The Years of Apprenticeship* is divided into two major sections; the first five of the eight books focus attention on Wilhelm's early life, and offer us what seems to be a novel mainly about the theatre, while 'The Confessions of a Beautiful Soul' form an interlude, before the hero, in Books Seven and Eight, is finally removed from the theatre environment and accepts the guidance of the Society of the Tower and becomes part of a family that has the will and the means to foster intellectual and cultural ideals, and ultimately to point the way to a new society.

Wilhelm, who comes from a prosperous urban mercantile family, acquires an enthusiasm for the theatre at an early age. His fascination with theatre and drama is not only on an individualistic, aesthetic basis, but is the expression of a concern for society, particularly for German society, at this time. For the younger generation of the German middle classes in the mid-eighteenth century the stage play could represent a possible means to group, indeed national fulfilment. In the earlier books of the novel Wilhelm is full of hopes for the German theatre of the near future and the leading part he would like to play in its development. What is envisaged in a national theatre is an institution that should draw together the differing, separate social groups; the theatres based on princely courts were evidently exclusive, and the travelling players provided humbler entertainment. A national theatre, supported by public funds, should be non-commercial and could be proud of a didactic, moral tendency. The experiment sponsored by businessmen in Hamburg to which Lessing was invited as resident dramatic critic and adviser was a venture that did not survive for long, any more than Wilhelm's association with Serlo. On the day-to-day level too, Wilhelm soon finds that a number of the actors he is associating with have little or no interest in the literary qualities of plays, are haphazard in their approach to traditions, are untidy, careless and generally lacking in stability and purpose. Wilhelm

brings the criteria of his own middle-class family background to the assessment of the stage; but in spite of the criticism, the fascination remains for a long time. Both actors and aristocracy are presented here as having a strong sense of sociability together with a proclivity for intrigue, which the novelist depicts with not a little irony.

If Wilhelm hopes to please the Prince (in Book Three) by commending his fondness for seventeenth-century French classicism, in particular for Racine, he is immediately afterwards recommended by Jarno to read Shakespeare. French classicist style is associated with court circles and public occasions, but the impact of Shakespeare on Wilhelm now is emotional, impassioned and inward, deriving from solitary reading. The advocacy of French plays for the German stage, especially by Gottsched in the 1730s and 1740s was challenged by Lessing in his seventeenth 'Letter on Literature' (1759) where Shakespeare is offered as an alternative model. Goethe's own discovery of Shakespeare, when under the temporary tutelage of Herder in Strasburg, soon called forth the lively adventure drama *Götz von Berlichingen*; the *Sturm und Drang* mood of the earlier 1770s included Rousseau-inspired nature feeling and the revival of the folk song, as well as the cult of Shakespeare.

The first certain reference to *Wilhelm Meister* is a diary entry of February 1777. Goethe's major work on that earlier part of the novel centring upon Wilhelm's involvement with the theatre took place after 1775, when the author established his independence of the atmosphere of his youth and his parental home at Frankfurt by his move to Weimar, and up to 1786, when the journey to Italy brought another break in his life, and the opportunity to look with some perspective at the eleven years during which he had been first adjusting to the Weimar court atmosphere. In his early Weimar years Goethe was himself, like Wilhelm at the Count's country house, writing for the court stage, acting in an amateur capacity (in the prose version of *Iphigenie auf Tauris* in 1779, where he made it clear that a classicist style was now in fact very sympathetic to him) and busying himself with all sorts of practical details concerning productions there. *Wilhelm Meisters theatralische Sendung* (*Wilhelm Meister's Theatrical Mission*) is the title of that manuscript of Goethe's, not discovered and made generally available until 1910, which consists of an extensive fragment; six books of the twelve originally planned were written. This earlier version is different in many ways from the first four books of the *Years of Apprenticeship* into which the author compressed and rewrote the material after his Italian journey. However, it seems likely that even in the *Theatrical Mission* the author was already distancing himself to some degree from his hero's enthusiasms, and that it was by no means certain

that Wilhelm was to have his aspirations for the theatre in Germany successfully and permanently realized.

The final phase of work on the *Years of Apprenticeship*, after the return from Italy, makes it fully clear that the author no longer attached a great deal of positive social merit to his hero's preoccupation with the theatre. It is true, the stage may be seen as offering a life embodying vitality and some fulfilment for Wilhelm, in contrast to the desiccating effects which the businessman's life has on Werner; but Wilhelm's appearance as Hamlet in Book Five marks the culmination and close of his theatre career. Henceforth he has to go in another direction. It is interesting to note that at that time when the novelist's didactic purpose was leading Wilhelm away from the theatre, Goethe himself took on a new commitment in this very field; he became artistic director of the professional court theatre at Weimar in 1791, and continued in that office until 1817. In 1791 he directed a production of Shakespeare's *King John*, and early the next year *Hamlet* was produced. Even if Goethe's later attitude to Shakespeare is markedly guarded, his broad and sustained presentation of Wilhelm's concern about Shakespeare is historically a very considerable contribution to the German reception of that dramatist.

Book Four introduces Wilhelm to the personality and theatre of Serlo, envisaged as the leading German theatrical manager and producer of his age. For a time Wilhelm believes that association with Serlo's theatre in the large, bustling northern city will bring him the vocational satisfaction he longs for. In the private sphere the protective element in Wilhelm's nature finds expression in his friendship with Serlo's sister Aurelia in the period of her illness and intense distress shortly before her death. On receiving the news of his father's death (at the opening of Book Five) Wilhelm feels free from the duty of paying consideration to the mercantile form of life that he finds irksome, and he goes ahead with his plans to take the title role in Hamlet. The uncertainty and hesitancy of his nature are again emphasized; he is reluctant to make conscious decisions, preferring to let himself be carried along by impulse. A number of the turning points in his life are being guided by the Society of the Tower, which centres upon the family group that acts as a form of secular providence to him.

The 'Confessions of a Beautiful Soul' (Book Six) are presented as a manuscript by a concerned doctor to Aurelia, so that she may be comforted by its message as she lies fatally ill. Goethe wrote this account in part as a memorial to Susanna von Klettenberg, a friend of his mother's and a member of the pietistic religious circle with which he had been in sympathy as a young man after leaving Leipzig and before going to Strasburg as a student.

The fictitious autobiography has an apparently quiet and simple succession of events, and is thus a respite from the account of Wilhelm's adventures hitherto in the bustle of the theatre world and on the fringe of intrigue in aristocratic circles. A lady who has remained single looks back upon her life and interprets it from the viewpoint of her religious inwardness. Wilhelm is to have sympathetic understanding of this approach, but will himself go on (in Books Seven and Eight) to the absorption of a secular humane idealism, where artistic and cultural values and a will to practical service of one's fellow men are integral.

Although Wilhelm puts the theatre behind him, it is only with some reluctance that he comes to accept the tutelage of the Society of the Tower. His immediate reason for making the contact is to confront Lothario with his guilt at having deserted Aurelia, but now that the time is ripe the family envelops him with hospitality and care. The death of the Uncle, the presiding father figure of the Society of the Tower, at the end of Book Seven coincides with the formal declaration to Wilhelm that his years of apprenticeship are over and that a further responsibility now awaits him, the care for the boy Felix, his and Mariane's son. This might seem to be a reasonable point at which to terminate the *Years of Apprenticeship*, but the author adds in Book Eight a further series of episodes, which are to bring various aspects of the plot to a conclusion. Wilhelm, while divided in his mind between the attractions of Theresa and Natalie, has his last outburst of resentment against the family's guidance; but this is overcome, and the marriage with Natalie signals acceptance of membership of this group. The deaths of Mignon and the Harpist may be taken as indicating the removal of irrational, daemonic influences in Wilhelm's life, while at the same time recalling that if Wilhelm is to be guided to the domain of light, others may suffer and come to an end that is premature or dark.

Thus the *Years of Apprenticeship* is rounded off and might well have been seen in 1796 as a fully self-contained and complete work; indeed, this was the form in which the novel exercised its wide influence on subsequent German writing. However, Goethe was already talking about writing a sequel in 1796, and some motifs find their place at the close of the *Years of Apprenticeship*.

The final version of *Wilhelm Meister's Years of Travel* appeared more than thirty years after the *Years of Apprenticeship*. The work is subtle and at times elusive in its structure, with a variety of styles and characters; over all, it amounts, for all the surprises of its presentation, to an endearing and impressive whole. Although there are misunderstandings, frustrations and anxieties, the novel is evidently working towards a positive acceptance of

life by its protagonists, and towards their making constructive contributions to the well-being of their fellows.

The action involving Wilhelm and his son Felix directly does not dominate the *Years of Travel* to the extent that Wilhelm's activities and thoughts take pride of place in the *Years of Apprenticeship*, but it receives sufficient emphasis for it to take its position well in the foreground. The Society of the Tower has laid upon Wilhelm a condition requiring him to travel and not to stay in any one place for more than three days. For the first half of the novel (up to the 'Interpolation' in Book Two, Chapter Seven) Wilhelm and Felix are almost constantly together, with the father finding some immediate fulfilment in the boy's company. However, Wilhelm largely plays the role of observer in such episodes as the encounter with the carpenter St Joseph the Second and his family, the visit to the rationally and philanthropically administered estate of the Uncle, and the meeting with Makarie ("the blessed one"), an elderly lady who has an intuitive wisdom and an awareness of astronomy that transcends the normal natural order and demonstrates the possibility of human openness to the supernatural; the meeting at the Lago Maggiore with a young painter who has come there in order to become directly acquainted with the background of Mignon's childhood (presumably after reading the *Years of Apprenticeship*, a self-parodic touch on the author's part) serves to introduce discussions on the nature and practice of art. On the whole, such scenes as these may contribute to the hero's general education, in the spirit of the *Years of Apprenticeship*, but in the meantime Wilhelm has become dissatisfied with the earlier aim of all-round development, and now wishes to devote himself to practical work of limited scope, in particular to becoming medically qualified. He discusses this possibility with Jarno, who is now a scientist known as Montan, though the information is not imparted to Natalie, and to us as readers, until Book Two, Chapter Eleven. Wilhelm's change in vocation is in part fulfilment, but at the same time an act of renunciation, a forgoing of wider interests for the sake of acquiring one skill in depth; he has Jarno's encouragement in making the change. The social position of the medical and surgical profession was lower in status in Goethe's time than it has become in the twentieth century, so that there is an element of sacrifice on Wilhelm's part here too. He wishes to be of service in this way within the group who are preparing to emigrate to America, where they plan to found a model community. As Wilhelm reveals to Natalie, a particularly vivid childhood memory, involving the death by drowning of some of his contemporaries, including a boy for whom he had developed a strong sense of friendship, underlies his wish to acquire medical skills. Wilhelm spends some years studying medicine, while at the same

time Felix is a pupil at the Pedagogic Province, an educational institution whose principles and practice are shown to Wilhelm in some detail; here too the novel is presenting a form of ideal community, and anticipating the emigrants' proposed new society.

If Wilhelm's specialized service is associated with the motif of the threat of water, Felix's discovery of the casket in the mountain cave involves him in new impulses and responsibilities; very soon after this incident the boy meets Hersilie, who is eight years older than himself, and falls in love with her. Felix's impetuosity is illustrated symbolically by his fall from a horse soon after he has met Hersilie, while the final scene of the narrative (Book Three, Chapter Eighteen) allows the father to save his son when a horse-riding accident causes the latter to be thrown into the water. During Wilhelm's and Felix's years of training the casket is left unopened, and the feelings, in particular between Hersilie and Felix, remain dormant. Hersilie, in coming across the missing key, appeals to Wilhelm, but he ignores her calls to him; Felix, on the other hand, presses his attentions upon her. What is to happen to the casket is not clarified, but it is central to the relationship of Hersilie and Felix.

The theme of travelling and wandering clearly plays an important part in the *Years of Travel*. Wilhelm spends his time separated from Natalie, often engaged in visiting remote mountainous locations in Central Europe. His medical training is to enable him to be one of the select and highly organized group of emigrants, under the leadership of Lenardo, who wish to start a new life in America, based on cooperation and freedom of self-expression. Much that is cherished in their old way of life must be left behind (though reasoned arguments for continuing one's vocation in Europe are also provided in the narrative), if they are to be reborn and freshly dedicated by the challenge of the New World. Wilhelm, having found his calling in the context of this enterprise, has ceased to be the problematic figure that he was in the *Years of Apprenticeship*. He is now associated with socially forward-looking preoccupations, while Felix's role takes on further qualities of uncertainty and restlessness.

The story of Wilhelm and Felix, together with the accounts of preparations for the departure to America, form the main body of the novel, but intercalated into this is a series of independent narratives of varying weight and significance, though they are nearly always presented in a lively and quickly accessible style. In two instances, 'The Nut-Brown Maiden' and 'The Man of Fifty', the inset story interlocks with the action of the main work, while in most of the stories there are shared motifs. If the principal events can be thought of as arising out of social and economic developments

in post-1815 Europe, the inset stories seem to take place in a static, courtly, leisured social atmosphere that is remote from public and topical issues; it is usually protected from disarray of an outward kind, but is vulnerable to the encroachment of threatening emotional considerations. The ultimate teaching here is of renunciation, in particular in the sphere of personal relationships; and apart from 'The Dangerous Bet', the short stories are set in motion by falling in love, with ensuing confusions that lead to various outcomes. The protagonists have not as yet learnt renunciation, but what befalls them in the course of the action can teach them to moderate their passions. At the same time, Goethe makes us aware of the fullness of life and with humour, irony and fantasy depicts some of life's surprises and, for instance, the consequences of a renunciation that has gone astray ('The New Melusine'). The opening story, 'St Joseph the Second', is the only one which is almost wholly serene and idyllic in its portrayal of a particular family unit. 'The Foolish Pilgrim', taken from a French source, was presumably included by Goethe because of its treatment of the theme of a young woman who is admired both by a father and his son. 'The Man of Fifty' is a sensitive and more fully developed story on a somewhat analogous theme; the Major and his son Flavio are both at one time in love with Hilary and also confused about their relationship with the Beautiful Widow. The mood of this story is sometimes that of humorous irony (as in the account of the course in rejuvenation which the older man undergoes), and sometimes comes close to tragedy (as with Flavio's psychological crisis). But goodwill triumphs with the Major's act of renunciation. 'The Nut-Brown Maiden', affecting Lenardo as directly as it does, appears in a series of separated episodes and might almost be considered as being part of the main narrative. 'Who is the Betrayer?' is a love story in a lighter mode, while 'Not Too Far' comes close to the tragic in its treatment of love and marriage. There is great variety in these stories, as well as recurrent motifs which link them with features of the principal action.

In a letter to Schiller (12th July 1796), at the time when the *Years of Apprenticeship* was just published, Goethe referred to his wish to write a sequel, and two years later he mentioned the matter again in a letter to his publisher Cotta. However, it was not until 17th May 1807 that Goethe's diary spoke of the title and of the beginning of the new work. During that year he wrote a number of the inset stories, of which five appeared separately; 'St Joseph the Second', as the beginning of the novel, was published in 1809. The encounter between Wilhelm and Jarno-Montan in the mountains (Book One, Chapter Four), which is the first indication of Wilhelm's wish to change his vocation in life, was written in 1810; it can be assumed that from

then onwards the author may have become more interested in introducing ideas and social tendencies into the work. However, the preliminary version of the *Years of Travel*, published in 1821, gave pride of place to the inset stories, while there was as yet no clear outline to the narrative concerning Wilhelm, Felix and Hersilie. The revised and extended edition of 1829 gave the novel its final shape, clarifying the main narrative, introducing the figure of Makarie, and developing the theme of emigration. Goethe originally intended to place the collection of aphorisms 'From Makarie's Archive' and the accompanying poem 'In the Solemn Charnel House' (sometimes known as 'While Considering Schiller's Skull') at the close of Book One. Owing to a misunderstanding between author and publisher, this did not happen, and their final position was at the close of the work; Goethe had no objection to this arrangement. 'Reflections in the Sense of the Wanderers' and its accompanying poem appear at the close of Book Two, in conformity with the author's original intentions. The note "to be continued" after the close of 'In the Solemn Charnel House' is intriguing. What was it that this referred to? One explanation might be simply that the aphorisms and the poem, being originally intended to appear after the end of Book One, were followed by an authorial direction leading the reader on to Book Two. Or could Goethe have been referring to an intention to continue either the poem, or the aphorisms, or the whole work?

The narrative, however, has closed with the conclusion of Book Three, Chapter Eighteen. Felix has been rescued and has succumbed to the healing powers of sleep; the sun's glow is acting gently upon him, and he is in good hands.

The *Years of Travel*, whose definitive version appeared in 1829, reflects some of Goethe's ideas on society in a world that was adjusting itself to the new shape of Europe that emerged after 1815; the *Years of Apprenticeship* describes a world that did not anticipate the French Revolution of 1789 and what was to follow. The whole work offers a rich, broad panorama as well as frequent penetration in depth into poignant personal problems. It is a major novel in European literature.

— H.M. Waidson



*Wilhelm Meister*



*Wilhelm Meister's Years  
of Apprenticeship*



# Book One

## *Chapter One*

THE PERFORMANCE WENT ON a very long time. Old Barbara stepped to the window several times, listening for the rattle of carriages. She was waiting for her pretty mistress Mariane with greater impatience than usual, even though she had only a modest supper to put before her; Mariane was delighting the audience that evening in the dramatic epilogue, in the guise of a young officer; on this occasion she was to be surprised by a package which Norberg, a young and wealthy merchant, had sent in order to show that even at a distance he thought of his beloved.

As old servant, confidante, adviser, agent and housekeeper, Barbara had the right to open the seals, and on this evening too she found it all the more difficult to restrain her curiosity as the attentions of the generous lover meant more to her than to Mariane herself. She was overjoyed to find that the package contained a fine piece of muslin and the latest in ribbons for Mariane, while for herself were a piece of cotton, neckerchiefs and a rouleau of money. With what affection and gratitude did she remember the absent Norberg! How enthusiastically did she resolve to mention him most favourably in Mariane's presence, to remind her what she owed him and what he should be able to hope for and expect from her faithfulness.

The muslin, brightened up by the colour of the half-unrolled ribbons, lay like a Christmas present on the little table; the position of the lights enhanced the lustre of the gift; all was in order when old Barbara heard Mariane's feet on the steps and hurried to meet her. But with what surprise did she step back when the little female officer rushed past her without noticing her demonstrations of affection, entered the room with unusual haste and movement, threw her feathered hat and dagger onto the table, walked agitatedly up and down, and did not cast a glance on the solemnly lit lights.

"What is it, darling?" the old woman cried out with surprise. "For Heaven's sake, child, what's wrong? Just look at these presents! Whoever could have given them if not your fondest admirer? Norberg is sending you

the muslin for a nightdress; he will soon be here himself; he seems to me to be more zealous in his attentions and more open-handed than ever."

The old woman moved round and was intending to show the gifts, in which she herself had also been considered, when Mariane turned away from the presents and called out passionately: "Away, away with them! Today I don't want to hear any more about all this; I obeyed you, it was your wish, let it be so! When Norberg returns, I shall once more belong to him and to you, and you can do what you like with me; but until then I want to lead my own life, and even if you had a thousand tongues you would not talk me out of my plan. I want to give my whole self to the man who loves me and whom I love. Don't make faces! I wish to submit to this passion as if it should last eternally."

There was no lack of contrary ideas and reasons on the old woman's part; but when she became vehement and bitter in the continuing altercation Mariane jumped up and seized hold of her in front. The old woman laughed excessively loudly. "I shall have to see to it that you are put into long clothes again," she exclaimed, "if I am to be sure of my life. Away, get changed! I hope as a girl you will apologize to me for the injury inflicted on me by yourself as a fugitive young gentleman; off with the coat, and the other things! It's an uncomfortable outfit and one that's dangerous for you, as I perceive. The shoulder ribbons are carrying you away with enthusiasm."

The old woman had placed her hand upon her, but Mariane tore herself away. "Not so fast!" she cried out, "I'm expecting another visitor this evening."

"That's not a good thing," the old woman interjected. "Surely not the young, fond, unfledged son of the merchant?"

"The very person," replied Mariane.

"It seems as if generosity might be becoming your dominant passion," the old woman answered mockingly: "You are very keen to make yourself responsible for those under age and those without money! It must be wonderful to be adored as an unselfish donor."

"You can make fun as much as you wish, I love him! I love him! It is with such delight that I pronounce these words out loud for the first time! That is the passion as I have imagined it so often; it is something of which I earlier had no conception. Yes, I am willing to throw myself at him! I would like to clasp him as if I were going to hold him for ever. I want to show him all my love and to enjoy his love in its whole compass."

"Calm yourself," the old woman said quietly, "Calm yourself! I must interrupt your joy with *one* thought: Norberg is coming! He's coming in a fortnight. Here is his letter, which came with the presents."

“And even if the morning sun were to rob me of my friend, I would want to conceal it from myself! A fortnight! What an eternity! What cannot happen in a fortnight, what changes there can be!”

Wilhelm came in. With what liveliness did she fly towards him! With what rapture he embraced the red uniform and pressed the little white waistcoat against his breast! Who would venture to describe the bliss of two people in love, for whom would it be appropriate to make such a declaration! The old woman went to one side grumbling; we depart with her, leaving the happy pair to themselves.

## *Chapter Two*

WHEN WILHELM GREETED his mother next morning she told him that his father was very annoyed and would very soon forbid him to pay daily visits to the theatre. “Even though I occasionally like to go to the theatre myself,” she continued, “I am all the same often inclined to curse it, since my domestic quiet is disturbed by your excessive passion for this form of entertainment. Father always asks what use it can be and how people can waste their time with it.”

“I’ve already had to listen to him as well,” replied Wilhelm, “And perhaps I answered him too hastily; but for Heaven’s sake, Mother, is everything useless which does not immediately put money in our pockets and which does not procure us possessions near at hand? Didn’t we have room enough in the old house? And was it necessary to build a new one? Doesn’t Father spend a considerable part of his business profits in embellishing the rooms? Aren’t these silk tapestries and English furnishings also useless? Could we not content ourselves with less? I at least admit that these decorated walls, flowers, flourishes, little baskets and figures repeated a hundred times make a wholly disagreeable impression. At the best they appear to me like our theatre curtain. But how different it is to be sitting in front of this! Even though you may have to wait a long time, you do know that it will be raised, and we shall then see the most varied things which will entertain, enlighten and elevate us.”

“Do take things calmly,” his mother said. “Father also likes his relaxation in the evening; and then he believes that you will find it distracting and in the end, if he gets cross, it’s my fault. How often have I had to listen to reproaches about the wretched puppet theatre which I gave you for Christmas twelve years ago and which first gave you a taste for plays!”

“Don’t attack the puppet theatre, don’t have any regrets for your love and care! These were the first pleasurable moments which I enjoyed in the new,

empty house; I can still picture this moment for myself, I know how strange it seemed to me when, after receiving the usual Christmas presents, we were told to sit down in front of a door which led from another room. The door opened, but not for going to and fro in the usual way; the entrance was filled with an unexpectedly festive atmosphere. A portal was built up high which had been covered by a mysterious curtain. At first we all stood at a distance and, as we became more curious to see what gleaming and rattling things might be concealed behind the half-translucent covering, each one of us was provided with his little chair and asked to wait patiently.

“So now everyone was sitting quietly; there was a whistle as signal, the curtain was raised and revealed a prospect of a temple, painted bright-red. The high priest Samuel appeared with Jonathan, and their alternating, unusual voices seemed to me most venerable. Shortly afterwards Saul came on the scene, much embarrassed because of the impertinence of the huge warrior who had challenged him and his man. How happy I felt when the dwarflike son of Jesse skipped up with shepherd’s staff and pouch, and a sling, and said: ‘O most powerful King and Lord, let no one lose courage on this account; if Your Majesty will allow me, I will go forward and engage in conflict with the mighty giant.’ The first act was ended, and the audience was very keen to see what would happen further; everyone wished that the music would soon stop. At last the curtain was raised again. David dedicated the monster’s flesh to the birds of the air and the animals of the field; the Philistine spoke scornfully, stamped a lot with both feet, fell down finally like a log and gave the whole business a magnificent turning of the scales. When afterwards the maidens sang: ‘Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands’, and the giant’s head was carried in front of the little conqueror and he received the King’s beautiful daughter as his bride, I felt annoyed in spite of all happiness that the lucky prince was so dwarf-shaped. For, following the idea of the great Goliath and the little David, the opportunity had not been missed to make both figures truly characteristic. Please, do you know what has happened to the puppets? I’ve promised to show them to a friend whom I gave a great deal of pleasure by talking to him recently about this children’s entertainment.”

“I’m not surprised that you remember these things so vividly: for it was you who straight away became the most involved in them. I recall how you took the little book off me and learnt the whole play off by heart; I was not aware of this until one evening you made a David and Goliath with wax, got them both to speechify to one another, gave the giant a push finally and fixed his unwieldy head on a big pin with a waxen knob in little David’s hand. At that time I took such heartfelt motherly pleasure at your good memory and

your lofty talk that I at once determined to hand over the wooden troupe to you myself. I didn't think that it would cause me so many tiresome hours."

"You mustn't have any regrets," Wilhelm answered, "for these amusements have brought us many a happy hour."

And with these words he asked for the keys, hurried away, found the puppets and for a moment was transported into those times when they had still seemed alive to him, and when he had believed that he could bring them to life with the vivacity of his voice and the movement of his hands. He took them with him to his room and kept them carefully.

### *Chapter Three*

**I**F FIRST LOVE, as I have generally heard maintained, is the most beautiful thing that a heart can feel, whether earlier or later, we must praise our hero as triply happy because it was granted to him to enjoy the bliss of these unique moments in its whole range. Only a few are favoured so pre-eminently, while most people are led away from their earlier feelings only through a hard school in which after scanty enjoyment they are compelled to forgo their most ardent wishes and to learn permanently to do without what appeared in their minds as the greatest happiness.

Wilhelm's yearning for the attractive girl had risen on the wings of imagination; after knowing her a short while he had won her affection, and he found himself in possession of someone whom he loved, indeed adored, so very much: for she had appeared to him first in the favourable light of a theatre performance, and his passion for the stage combined with his first love for a woman. His youth allowed him to partake in rich joys that were enhanced and maintained by a lively imagination. The circumstances of his beloved also gave her behaviour a quality of mood that very much supported his own emotions; the fear that her lover might discover the rest of her affairs prematurely gave her an attractive appearance of worry and shame, her passion for him was intense, even her uneasiness seemed to increase her fondness; she was the most delightful creature in his arms.

When he awakened from the first ecstasy of joy and looked back on his life and his situation, everything seemed new to him, his obligations seemed more solemn, his inclinations keener, his knowledge clearer, his intentions firmer. Consequently it became easy for him to make an arrangement which would allow him to escape his father's reproaches, to calm his mother down and to enjoy Mariane's love in an untroubled manner. During the day, he got on with his business punctually, usually did without going to the theatre,