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The Rise of a New Intellectual Elite and the Promotion of a New Cultural Ethos[1]

It is a well known fact that even in the 1770's, “German culture” was still hardly an entity in its own right, let alone a match to the cultural superpowers of the time, such as the French or the English. Yet, within a rather short span of time, before the middle of the nineteenth century, a growing sense of cultural climax was already shared by German intellectuals. At this point, the formation of a distinctive, “indigenously” German canon was already in force. This was particularly evident in the sphere of German *Literature*. In the course of the first half of the nineteenth century a pantheon of distinguished German writers and a repertory of celebrated German texts have been sanctioned, all of which endured until today as the supreme legacy of the German *Kultur*.

Two main aspects are indicative of the status of such literary items in Germany in early nineteenth century: (a) The fact that their significance extended far beyond the realm of their contemporary literature *per se* and that they have become the ultimate symbols of German *Kultur* in general; and (b) The fact that they gained, for the first time, an international reputation. Until that time the German intellectual and literary community had been mostly a translating community which imported models from other languages and cultures – at that time especially from the French, but increasingly also from the English. Only by the end of the Eighteenth century German literature was beginning to be imported into other cultures, and its representatives - notably Goethe - gained an exemplary status outside Germany (see, e.g., Leppmann 1961, 1-12). This allowed their appropriation as important assets in the “world Classics". Consequently, the discussion of the formation of the modern national German culture and literature focuses, as a rule, on the period from the early nineteenth century onwards, where the construction of a German canon was a clearly visible process with deliberate efforts to establish and canonize an “indigenous German Tradition". Obviously, the construction of a canon usually involves means of *reconstruction* which includes selection and reevaluation of past elements. Peter Uwe Hohendahl, in his book Building a National Literature analyses the project of constructing the German Tradition, from the 1830's onwards, by means of establishing a German Literary History and Criticism. Only then, says Hohendahl, the preeminence of the preceding generations has been fully recognized and their literary production was canonized. “Neither the Weimar group nor the romantics viewed their works as the climax, to say

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nothing of the end, of German literature. The notion of a time of flowering followed quickly by decline and fall, which has been set forth since 1840, belongs rather to the complex history of tradition. [...] not until about 1835, [...] was it generally accepted that an important phase of German writing had come to an end [...]" (Hohendahl 1989 [1985], 141-142).

From this perspective, thus, the period between 1700 and 1830, which is seen until today as the peak of German literature, seems to be relevant to the formation of the German canon only insofar as it served, in retrospect, as a raw material for the invention of the modern German National Tradition. That is, it enters the discussion of canon building only insofar as it played to the hands of German critics and historians of later generations, like Heinrich Heine, Georg Gottfried Gervinus, and others that followed, whose business was to establish that tradition and to secure its perpetuation for the future (Hohendahl 1989; Marsch 1975). These people's action, for all their debates and ideological differences, resulted, all in all, in the glorification of the "*Klassik und Romantic*" period and in establishing it as a corner stone and a point of reference for the modern German tradition. However, all these efforts were obviously but a further, fully explicit phase of a canonization process which originated earlier, precisely during those turbulent last decades of the Eighteenth century. Although those earlier, mythological generations were incapable of clearly foreseeing their place in the "German legacy", they have certainly had a very active role in negotiating the coming into being of a modern national German culture and in molding its patterns.

That is to say, German intellectuals in the last decades of the Eighteenth century were very much aware of the potency of promoting a new German cultural identity for the betterment of their own lives. They relied on it in their struggles for altering the power structure in the specific cultural fields they were active in and for creating for themselves better access to social and economic resources. Thereby they managed to improve and sanction their position in the local culture in general. Goethe's autobiography, *Aus meinem Leben: Dichtung und Wahrheit* written in his afterlife, between 1809 and 1832, is full of such insights. In many ways, this document may be interpreted as a most informative attempt at unfolding, on the verge of the new era, the socio-cultural conditions and processes which facilitated the rise of modern German culture and the canonization of himself and his generation as a whole.

A prominent cultural field which served as a main locus for such a gush of cultural energy had been the literary field. In light of the above, the concern of this book lies in the evolution of the literary field in Germany in the last third of the Eighteenth century, which evolution helped to establish the literary production of that particular period as the epitome of German *Kultur par excellence* More specifically, this book focuses on the way the literary field became a central force in the emergence of a modern German culture and in the rise of a new intellectual elite in Germany during the last decades of the Eighteenth century.

Before addressing the issue, however, two points should be stressed regarding the idea of the literary field as a real social field of action:

(1) The leading part played by the literary activity in the process of canon formation is by no means self-evident. Often, it is taken as an innate characteristic of literature that it serves as the ultimate generator of cultural change, especially when the rise of national cultures - since the nineteenth century - is considered. (This is all the more evident with reference to German culture, where the notion of *Kultur* itself seems to be identical with the literary expression of ideas and values). However, such preeminence attributed to literature is neither intrinsic nor universal. Rather, it results from specific historical conditions. If we accept the concept of literature as an institutionalized activity centered around the production, circulation and classification of texts accredited a certain value, then it is, like any other cultural activity, but *one option* among others which may be available for social groups as means of maintaining cohesion, self-assurance and distinction.

(2) The idea of “literary activity” is not restricted to the writing of texts alone (although writing texts is certainly considered as an essential practice of this field and as its ultimate product). Rather, this idea includes the whole range of practices and patterns of conduct which pertain to the literary occupation, from publishing strategies, models of criticism, reading habits, literary clubs and literary cliques, to lifestyles and life trajectories - and even types of personality - all of which are exercised and sanctioned by the agents in any given literary field.

Surely, the field in discussion, especially during times of such dramatic changes, was tremendously heterogeneous and dynamic, hence far from forming a definite social entity. Still, as is well known, certain figures and schools have come forth in this field like the tips of an iceberg, some of which have even lend their names to the era or to some of its segments ("*Goethezeit*", “The Romantic period"). In the intellectual and literary history, those people persist through the celebration of their thoughts and writings. From a sociological perspective, however, they were - as individuals or groups - key agents in the creation of a new map of socio-cultural power relations at the time.

Goethe's uncontested, lasting predominance apart, chronologically viewed, there are two main focal points observed in the history of this field between 1770-1800: The most conspicuous phase is that marked by the rise of the Romantic trend and the “Classic-Romantic” rivalry, with the Early Romantics (*Frühromantiker*) most effectively active as a group at the turn of the century (1795-1802). They appear to have had assumed the role of a juvenile, subversive movement, especially with relation to the gigantic literary authority of the “Weimar group” at the time (mainly that of Goethe, and to a lesser extent also that of Schiller). With their extensive and varied activity in the intellectual sphere, with the literary dictate they attempted, and certainly with their lives, their relations and contentions - with all

this the Early Romantics certainly indicate a climax in the evolution of the literary field at the time.

Yet these people acted already as members of a rather self-assured elite. They have struggled for a leading role within a literary field which by then had already undergone transformation and had become a rather powerful field of action. By the time they entered the field, German literature had already yielded a considerable cultural capital and a recognized normative system which did not exist about twenty years earlier. By then, the revolutionary attitude and provocative tone had already become a fashion. This fashion, however, originated around 1770- 1780, by former groups of young, enthusiastic intellectuals, most notably those known as the members of the *Sturm und Drang* movement, with the young Goethe among them. These are the *Stürmer* more than anyone else, that are credited for having set forth that Romantic trend which brought about a revolution in the German literary field.

Two main aspects underlay the emergence of this revolutionary literary trend in Germany: (a) The strong appeal of the literary occupation to young German people during the last third of the Eighteenth century; and (b) The structural transformation in the literary occupation, and its consequences on the re- organization of the local culture and the process of culture building at the time.

I. *The special position and characteristics of the literary field in the local culture*

1. *Chances for social mobility for the learned bourgeoisie: literature as a field of opportunity*

To understand the changes in the literary field, and the special role it played in the process of culture building, we must try to understand what the literary occupation meant for educated Germans in the last third of the Eighteenth century. Generally speaking, the emergence of modern national German culture during the Eighteenth century is discussed in the context of the tension between the rising middle-class and bourgeois culture on the one hand, and the declining aristocracy and court culture, on the other. With reference to this social stratification process, my contention is as follows: the special potency of the literary occupationat the time lied in its serving as a most versatile field of action which offered the German learned bourgeoisie maximal opportunities for rise in life. While being highly accessible to them, it also provided them with the legitimate values in the name of which prospects for social mobility opened for them. In this way it allowed the emergence of a new elite from within their circles.

A major source of inspiration for this view I find in Norbert Elias's analysis of the “Sociogenesis of the Difference Between *Kultur* and *Zivilisation* in German Usage” (Elias 1978 [1939]), which even today is still unrivaled for its powerful socio-semiotic insight (Elias 1978 [1939]). In Elias's view (which is basically uncontested by all other scholars), the so-called German revolution was practically a

literary movement, since its promoters - mostly members of the bourgeois intelligentsia - have been able to identify themselves as a distinctive status-group and to gain social power only by means of their intellectual and literary practices. Because of a relatively stagnant class division, with the German bourgeoisie practically barred from any position on the political level, the process usually accounted for in terms of class and national awakening could not have manifested itself in Germany in the form of an overtly political struggle. That is, the motivations as well as the achievements involved in that process in Germany have been basically *cultural* rather than strictly political ones.

Indeed, even the *Sturm und Drang* movement which accentuated, more than its Romantic followers, a vein of social revolt, did not actually advocate a change in the social order, because they were, as Roy Pascal, for instance, puts it, “incapable of defining any method for altering the social structure, since the preconditions of social change did not exist” (Pascal 1953: 84). Further, as Pascal already maintained, the resentment these young people may have expressed toward the nobility was essentially a criticism of court-culture taste, lifestyle and values, innocent of any programmatic political agenda. For them, what was at stake were the ethics and manners to be promoted as the peculiarities of what they viewed as a vital, authentic German being, without a concrete challenge to the existing class system (Pascal 1953, 56-59; see also Vaughan 1985, 62-85).

Along this line, the social criticism voiced in Goethe's juvenile novel, *Leiden des jungen Werthers* (1774) - the *Sturm und Drang* novel *par excellence* - is hardly expressed in terms of class conflict. In fact, Werther's bitterness is explicitly directed against the bourgeois ethos, and not against the aristocratic estate as such. His worship of rural life and of commoners reflects an idealized view largely rooted in polemical moral- philosophical biases and literary conventions rather than in an activist social protest. With the exception of one bold humiliating experience of being rejected by the high society, Werther's suffering emanates first and foremost from the “confine” (*Einschränkung*) posed to the soul precisely by the code of bourgeois life. The disillusion of the bourgeois cultural configuration, more than the constraints of aristocratic rule, is presented by the young Goethe, himself a member of that socio-cultural figuration, as the most sever cause of distress to the sentimental human being.

I will leave aside the question, to what extent this literary movement in Germany should be regarded as a peculiar German version of the global process of class struggle which, elsewhere in Europe - notably in France - had far reaching, brutal, political consequences during the late Eighteenth century. There is no doubt, however, that the literary movement in Germany, from the 1770's onwards, revealed considerable aspirations to socio-cultural mobility. Such mobility had opened to members of the German middle class intelligentsia, people whose occupations and social status derived primarily from their educational skills. With the growing demand for reading and writing services in the bureaucratic and educational systems of the State, and as a direct consequence of the expansion of the

literary market, the diverse range of modern learned professions were relatively less effected by the limitations on mobility, placed by the restoration of past legal relationship structure and the preservation of kinship systems (see e.g., Friedeburg and Mager 1996; Sheehan 1989, 73-89, 125-143, and more).

Admittedly, the chances for upwards mobility were greater for the upper stratum of the learned bourgeoisie, mostly civil servants (mainly those in the law and the administrative service, as well as university professors; to much lesser extent also clergymen and schoolmasters); people in the liberal professions, and wealthy independent citizens. An outstanding example for this kind of moving-up educated middle-class is provided by the profile of Goethe's father, Caspar Goethe, a son of a *nouveauriche* tailor and an inn-keeper's widow who inherited her husband's capital in Frankfurt-am-Main. Caspar Goethe had been afforded a complete legal academic education, and with it also came the acquisition of a different habitus, with a far more elevated lifestyle.[2] Thanks to all this, within the time-span of just one generation he arrived at the position of relating by marriage to a family of the first rank in the town council, and was counted in the highest class of Frankfurt society. His rise in status would have been faultless had he not unfortunately ignored, out of ambition, “the slow and uncertain path to honour that might have been open to a man of his abilities in the city's administration” (Boyle 1991, 50-51) and sought office directly in the imperial administration, which was eventually bared because of unfortunate shift of political power-relations (ibid.)

However, the appetite for social mobility was also shared by the lower educated and semi-educated strata. With the imposition of reading and writing requirements on all middle-class strata under the growing modern bureaucratic system, a new educated civil stratum was gradually expanding and transforming (Vaughan 1985, 49-61). As emerges from Goethe's own description of his adolescence in his autobiography, there prevailed a general feel for opportunities to improving one's life- trajectory. Although Johann Wolfgang Goethe himself was raised already as an upper-class bourgeois with fair chances for the future, he was in fact very much aware of his social origins and the improvement of his family's social standing (Siegbert 1996). The urge to moving up in the social ladder was not unfamiliar to him as a youngster. He was fascinated by the aspirations of his home- town friends of a lesser standing, people who could hope to earn a living by their educational skills: The young people, with whom in this way I formed a closer and closer connection, were not exactly of a low, but of an ordinary, type. Their activity was commendable, and I listened to them with pleasure when they spoke of the manifold ways and means by which one could gain a living: above all, they

[2] Such a lifestyle included typical symbols of higher pursuits, such as the change of spelling of his family name from Göthe to Goethe, or the acquisition of a coat of arms, as well as more substantial indications of social advance, like a grand tour to Italy, Paris and other fashionable destinations, the rebuilding and restyling of his house, the acquisition of collections of books and paintings, and other components of a life of leisure (Boyle 1991, 50-51).

loved to tell of people, now very rich, who had begun with nothing. Others to whom they referred had, as poor clerks, rendered themselves indispensable to their employers, and had finally risen to be their sons-in-law; [...] We all liked to hear this; and each one fancied himself somebody, when he imagined, at the moment, that there was enough in him, not only to get on in the world, but to acquire an extraordinary fortune. But no one seemed to carry on this conversation more earnestly than Pylades [...] The circumstances of his parents would not allow him to go to universities; but he had endeavored to acquire a fine handwriting, a knowledge of accounts and the modern languages, and would now do his best in hopes of attaining that domestic felicity. (Goethe 1969 [1811-14/1833], Book 5: 181).

The life trajectory of Heinrich Jung- Stilling is a paradigmatic example of such an intellectual self-made man of the time; or rather, as Henri Brunschwig describes it (1974 [1947]), it is the incarnation of the time's ultimate intellectual opportunism. Born as the son of a poor woodcutter's family he managed to move in all the intermediate stages in the climb into the upper middle-class. At the age of fourteen he worked as a village schoolteacher. Although he was unable to keep this job and other jobs he attempted, and "never earned enough to buy the cloth for a coat" (Brunschwig 1974: 29), he was determined to devote his time to reading "instead of working at his tailor's trade" (ibid.) In Strasbourg he studied medicine, which he later also practiced, but his career was definitely supported by the fact that he was, still as "a miserable debt-ridden fellow despised by all" (ibid., 139), associating with literary circles and became himself a writer (ibid., 40; see Goethe.. Book 9). Eventually he married a rich wife thanks to whom he was in easy circumstances, but it was also thanks to his ability to make a rather good career for himself by moving from one occupation to another, as Brunschwig sarcastically puts it, that his fame and fortune continually increased. "For after a spell of a doctor, failing to make a really good living at it, he discovers a vocation as professor. Then, at the age of fifty-four, he confesses his error for the last time and perceives that God has predestined him for His own service. His material situation continually improved from job to job." (ibid. 215).

By contrast to such optimistic reports, however, there was yet another, more distressing, aspect to this relative freedom of choice and high expectations, and that is the frustration caused by a lack of solid and promising life- trajectories and careers opened for the young generations whose only capital was university training. Indeed, there were cases of impressive success. Such cases were, to repeat two most notable examples, beside the life of Heinrich Jung-Stilling, also that of Friedrich Klinger, both thesons of poor lower-class families who had made a considerable progress in the social scale thanks to their education. Yet as a rule, the offer of jobs and occupations was limited as was the reward attached, in disproportion to both the demand and expectations thereof.

In his study of the socio-cultural situation in Eighteenth century Prussia, Brunschwig (1974 [1947]) presents a rather gloomy description of a cultural

scene, with an increasingly growing population of students, mainly of the lower-middle classes, with meager chances for careers or any substantial gains to match their investment and ambition. These people were usually hardly able to arrive further than the borderline - often rather despised - learned occupations, such as village school teachers, private tutors, translators, minor clerks or copyists (*German* private tutors were apparently in the most humble situation, and were certainly inferior to the imported French ones, see Vaughan 1985, 70). The result was an increased instability and "movability" accompanied by a decreased faith in solid channels for decent livelihood. According to Brunschwig, there prevailed a predilection for "the insecure life of the adventurer with all its hazards" (ibid., 124) and "a species of brash careerism, a juvenile but unfocused ambition without regard to the means or the objective. These young men acknowledge no attachment to any peculiar country; [...] owing to their painful memories of adolescence, many of them detest their place of birth. Nor have they any very definite notion of the sort of occupation likely to suit them; official, soldier, merchant, it is all one to them; they will do anything whatever to satisfy their hunger for fame; the sole exception is that they will have nothing whatever to do with the occupation to which they seemed destined from birth" (ibid., 147). Although Brunschwig focuses on the situation in Prussia, his account is not dramatically off base regarding the situation in other German states at the time.

This state of affairs also accounts, as emerges from Brunschwig, for the strong appeal of the *literary* profession to young educated people at the time. Aware of the difficulties ahead of them, he maintains, the students thronging the universities were seeking a short cut to gaining both dignity and profit. Entering the literary world became a rather favorable outlet for those who hoped for an administrative post or a university chair, because "Even if not very well paid, situations of this sort are preferable to a slow rise through a hierarchy, for they represent the culmination of a very special kind of career, one which is subject to no regulation and where the summits are not kept for a privileged few, as they are in the civil service [...]" but for the most capable individuals (ibid., 139).

Admittedly, Brunschwig's own focus of interest in his analysis is different from mine here. For him, the general fascination with the literary profession is but another indication to the crisis of the Enlightenment system in Prussia in the second half of the Eighteenth century, and to the revival of irrationality. In spite of the undeniable success of the culture- planning project championed throughout the Eighteenth century by the Enlighteners, he claims, mystical currents never ceased to prevail in the unofficial strata of the local culture. Having been radiated from above by an elite minority of thinkers (who were strongly supported by the state) with the view to gradually penetrate the masses, the Enlightenment eventually lost ground with the community which retreated to older traditions. Toward the end of the century, the argument goes, the vision of Enlightenment collapsed, since the realization of a nationwide education had been proven a failure, with too many educated and semi-educated people with no future ahead of them. With the intellectuals' disillusion with their own upbringing, irrationality surfaced again, so as

to become the dominant mentality of the era. This was the Romantic mentality, characterized, in Brunschwig's words, by the belief in the “miraculous” and by the tendency to run an unstable, dissipated lifestyle. According to Brunschwig, the development of this Romantic ethos penetrated all areas of life (he particularly elaborates on this evolution as manifested in people's approach to health and medicine, to lottery, to personal relations and to career opportunities). This time, however, irrationality was no longer restricted to the lower classes and peasantry, but was warmly adopted by the intellectuals - that is, precisely by the Enlightenment's breed.

Brunschwig's analysis may be disputable in that it attempts toward a sweeping mental structure of an era, equally manifested in all areas of life and by all members of a society. It is perhaps the typical history-of-mentality fallacy of looking for a signifying generalization supposedly unifying the diversity observed in any given culture. Furthermore, his analysis rests on the rather problematic assumption that such structure is totally subjugated to, and maintains a perfect homology with socio-economic conditions. Such a view may be contested on the ground that it fails to take into account the specific organization pertinent to each and every field of action described, as well as the particular repertoire of practices available in each such field. Such a repertoire determines, in every specific field, the range of actions, stances, and even sentiments available for those who act in it. Overlooking all this, Brunschwig fails to pinpoint the *particular* structure of the literary field, as well as the specific cultural capital it offered; or more precisely, he neglects to account for the specific balance between economic profit on the one hand, and cultural gratification on the other, peculiar to that field at the time. These peculiarities made this field a major candidate for playing the role not only of a “refuge for young frustrated intellectuals", as Brunschwig describes it, but also that of an incubator of a more general cultural transformation.

2. The Sturm und Drang as embodiment of the situation in the field

An indication of the preeminence of the literary field in accelerating a general cultural movement is provided by the legendary meteoric appearance of the youthful movement, later to be known as the *Sturm und Drang* in the literary arena in Germany during the 1770's. This was the uncontestedly recognized first revolutionary movement in the cultural scene of the period, which laid the basis for the ethos of the young German intellectuals for generations to come. The crucial point is that, for all its *literary* fame, this was not a typical literary stream, if we take this notion to mean a certain literary guideline consciously promoted by a group of writers. Indeed, many scholars seem to agree that from the viewpoint of German literary history it is harder to locate this movement on the basis of its “purely” literary achievements than on the basis of its social import and general cultural impact. Often the tendency in literary history is to view the *Sturm und Drang* as a transitional phase in the shift from Enlightenment to Romanticism, the two polar key notions in the conception of the German literary revolution, in the

discussion of which most scholars feel on safer ground.[3] Yet it is impossible to deny the fact that in the eyes of their contemporaries the *Stürmer* constituted a very distinctive *literary* trend and marked a most momentous twist in the local *literary* field (e.g., Brunschwig 1974 [1947], 91-95).

The reason is that the main concern and element of cohesion of the group which formed the core of this movement was not essentially a specific *literary* interest, such as the propagation of a certain literary agenda. In fact, the so-called movement had originated from a clique of young German students in Strasbourg (later to be followed by the Frankfurt-Darmstadt intellectual circle) whose initial affinity was primarily *social* rather than strictly literary. What they had in common was above everything else a shared *habitus* emanating from their more or less similar socio-cultural position. Their interest in literature was evidently only one component of this habitus, and the cultivation of a literary taste was a matter of cultural routine which helped maintaining their close kinship. Their bond as a group - albeit for but a few years - was based first and foremost on close personal ties. It was an essentially intimate friendship between individuals, manifested in the different forms of intellectual inter-personal exchange, such as maintaining correspondence or reviewing each other's writings, as well as in material aid (often it was Goethe who offered financial support, and latter helped in arranging positions for his friends of lesser standing, like Jung- Stilling, Klinger, Lenz or Herder). This intimate friendship stemmed from their shared sense of a peculiar cultural identity - or more precisely, of an *inferior* cultural identity - which drew them together and to which they became all the more aware precisely through that shared experience as semi-outsiders in Strasbourg (I will return to this issue in more detail in section 3 below).

The crucial factors of their bond were their being *young middle-class* and *educated Germans* In 1770 Herder was 26, Goethe 21, Lenz 19, Wagner 23, and Klinger was 18; the eldest of them were Merck, 29 years old at the time (both the latter became Goethe's acquaintances about two years later in Frankfurt and Darmstadt), and Jung-Stilling, who was 30 when participating the Strasbourg studential circle (he was, though, only loosely related to the *Strum und Drang* movement). Most of these young people came from the middle and lower urban strata. They all had university education and were trained or training for the learned professions (mainly law, theology, and medicine). Yet although they were, with the exception of Goethe, depending on their jobs, they tended to be unhappy with the professions they were destined for, sometime to the point of abandoning them in favor of other occupations, at the risk of insecure - even poor - livelihood. Herder and Lenz came from simple, Pietistic families from provin-

[3] This fact is evident from many literary histories, where the elaboration on the *Sturm und Drang* as a stand-alone literary category is only optional. Often the philosophical achievements ascribed to this phase of German literary history are paid tribute to only with specific reference to its most leading figures, notably Goethe and Herder. (For a further discussion of the way canonical literary histories tend to represent this period, see chapter...)

cial towns in East Prussia. They both were former students of theology, and were doomed to financial and occupational discomfort, and to dependence on patronage, for the greater part of their lives. Klinger was the son of a poor widowed laundry woman in Frankfurt-am- Main, and was fortunate enough to have access to academic education thanks to a generous patron in Giessen. Goethe's social background and relative welfare from birth was, as said, an exception among them.

Those who formed the Strasbourg studential circle were mostly provincial Germans who came to Strasbourg for professional reasons, certainly not with the intention of developing a literary career, nor with the hope for enjoying a literary ambience, or of improving their literary education. Strasbourg offered at that time a decent French-oriented academic opportunity, but was by no means considered a literary center, nor was it ranked among the German cultural centers of any importance, as were Leipzig, Hamburg, Zürich or Frankfurt-am-Main, as well as Göttingen, Halle or other northern-Germany university towns (see, e.g., Perels 1988). Each member of the German students' circle in Strasbourg had certain literary aspirations and writing experience, simply, it seems, because this was a fashionable intellectual practice at the time. Admittedly, their literary sensibilities had a strong bearing on their close personal ties in Strasbourg and on their further development as a more self-aware intellectual group in Germany. Evidently, they have fostered during these few years certain literary inclinations, values and ideas, which eventually culminated in a more distinct literary taste. Yet all this was to a large extent but the *result* of their shared experience during those formative years in Strasbourg and Frankfurt, rather than its initial driving force.

And yet, in spite of the fact that this movement is hard to define on the basis of so-called purely *literary* achievements, it is still considered an indispensable component in the German *literary* history. In fact, it has already assumed this reputation in its own time, when this group of young men, to judge from the aggressive reactions it provoked on the part of senior mainstream literary agents, appeared as a vanguard which placed a threatening challenge to the contemporary literary institution. Friedrich Nicolai, the zealous Enlightener, a powerful publisher and a prolific writer and critic, was a prominent opponent. He severely criticized these young writers' obscure sentimentalism (his parody of *Werther* is a notorious example, see Goethe's autobiography [1811-14/1833, Book 13), and accused them of acting deliberately as a sect by writing to each other and showing indifference toward the wide population of people who could read German (Berghahn 1988: 23, 67). In the final analysis, in spite of their allegedly immature literary contribution, these young people in the 1770's had an enormous cultural impact as a social group by introducing a new literary ethos and a sense of literary exclusiveness which open the way to a structural change of the literary occupation and its becoming a dominant factor of social cohesion.

II. *Structural Transformation: a change of the literary occupation*

1. *The situation until the last third of the Eighteenth century*

It is not an accidental fact that the interest in literature was an indispensable component of the habitus of the *Stürmer* yet did not fully determine their social or professional profile. Rather, this fact pertains to the structure of the literary world of their time. Generally speaking, two main factors were responsible for the organization of the literary field in Germany in the second half of the Eighteenth century:

(a) On the one hand, there was the canonical literary tradition which preserved the dictate of Classicist criticism. This tradition was perpetuated in the form of a highly elevated body of knowledge accessible to small-scale circles of connoisseurs only, like the different literary societies which thrived in the local culture (see, e.g., Blackall 1959; Dülmen 1986), and which have set the tone of literary taste under the imprint of the courtly-oriented cultural figuration.

(b) At the same time, the development of large-scale market forces has introduced elements of modern literary mass production and distribution into the field, such as the different forms of literary journals and almanacs, the printing and reprinting of prose-fiction volumes and series, or the thriving book fairs and loan-libraries. This section of the literary activity was only partly subject to the dictate of the canonical tradition, and opened a leeway to promoting other kinds of literary goods which were not recognized by that tradition, notably the popular novels. Although these so-called commercial literary elements (both the texts and the institutions promoting them) counted as inferior or marginal in the traditional hierarchy (and were at best ignored by the gate-keepers of this tradition), they nevertheless presented an ever growing threat to its authority (see discussion in chapter...).

From the viewpoint of the canonical literary tradition, which at least until the middle of the Eighteenth century was in absolute control of the literary capital, the literary occupation - as a profession in its own right - was hardly profitable, either in terms of livelihood or in terms of social status. The only literary agents who made a living by their pen were novels writers (*Roman Schreiber*) who wrote for the “mass market", evidently without any claim to cultural recognition (they often published under pseudonyms; to be called a *Romanist* was an insult. See Ward 1974: 25). Or else, they were occasional poets, like students who wrote poems for festive occasions as a means of financing their studies (ibid., 26). Even court poets (a profession which had vanished during the first half of the Eighteenth century), for all their relative security, were often dependent on additional sources of income, and in any event were not ranked very high in the hierarchy of court servants (ibid.) In principle, practicing literary writing was gratifying only as a leisure hobby for respectable people. Paradoxical as it may seem, the more it was practiced as a full time profession, the less rewarding it was, from both the

social and the economic points of view. Literary prestige was absolutely preconditioned by social prestige. In cases where the latter existed, the literary occupation added considerable value to it, yet as profession in itself it lacked any glamour and was even despised.[4] This state of affairs also emerges from Goethe's own view of the literary field of the 1770's, as reported in his autobiography: When the German poets, as members of a corporation, were no longer standing as one man, they did not enjoy the smallest advantages among their fellow citizens. They had neither support, standing, nor respectability except in so far as their other position was favorable to them; and therefore it was a matter of mere chance whether talent was born to honor or to disgrace. A poor son of earth, with a consciousness of mind and faculties, was forced to crawl along painfully through life, and, from the pressure of momentary necessities, to squander the gifts which perchance he had received from the Muses. Occasional poems, the first and most genuine of all kinds of poetry, had become despicable to such a degree, that the nation even now cannot attain a conception of their high value: and a poet, if he did not strike altogether into Günther's path, appeared in the world in the most melancholy state of subservience, as a jester and parasite; [...] If, on the contrary, the Muse associated herself with men of respectability, these received thereby a luster which was reflected back to the donor. Noblemen well versed in life, like Hagedorn; dignified citizens, like Brockes; distinguished men of science, like Haller, -- appeared among the first in the nation, to be equal with the most eminent and the most prized. Those persons, too, were specially honored, who, together with this pleasing talent, distinguished themselves as active, faithful men of business. In this way Uz, Rabener, and Weisse enjoyed a respect of quite a peculiar kind: people had here to value, when combined, those most heterogeneous qualities which are seldom found united. (Goethe 1969 [1811- 14/1833], book 10: 3-4).

In short, as additional merit to a well established social standing, the practice of literature was valued and considered an advantage. As such, it guaranteed maximal gratification precisely for those who were moving up in the social ladder. Moreover, only when taken in this combination it was at all possible to acknowledge the existence of an innate value peculiar to the literary practice. It was thus only natural for the young students who were later identified with the *Sturm und Drang* to show keen interest in literature in addition to the professions they were training for.

This situation is one explanation to the growing interest in literature at the time, as described by Brunschwig. The appropriation of literary taste became a requirement to whoever had social aspirations in the existing cultural figuration. However, the pursuit of literary fame was certainly also encouraged by the considerable growth of the literary market as a locus for free economy-based forces. This

[4] Ward cites Christian Weise's complaint that “Die Dichtkunst wird erst ästimirt, wenn der Mann etwas anders daneben hat, davon er sich bei Mitteln und Respect erhalten können [...] Opitz' unsicheres Leben wird gewiss kein Vater seinem Sohn wünschen” (Ward 1974: 26; cited from Schmidt [1862-4]).

subject is intensively covered by research. Indeed, the question is still open to re-examination, what the volume of literary consumption really was, and to what extentthe readership was really expanding so as to create a “mass audience” (see Sheffy 1992, and discussion in chapter...) Nevertheless, there is no dispute that the literary market in Germany in the second half of the Eighteenth century became increasingly dominated by an offer-and- demand dynamics.

At least with regard to the literary *entrepreneurs* on the *production* end, in the last decades of the century, this market gained an impetus that in the eyes of the contemporaries was altogether monstrous. To judge from the gate-keepers' complaints, the threat of the “*writing* epidemic” exceeded even that of the “reading epidemic". This means that more and more educated people were tempted to practice writing as means of making a living. According to estimations of contemporaries, in 1773 there were in Germany more than 3,000 writers, while by the end of the century their number increased to over 10,600! Their ratio against the general population in 1790 was one writer to every 4,000 people. The records vary from state to state. Moreover, the estimation is that there were in Germany considerably more people who practiced literary writing than appeared in the records. In other words, all evidence shows that toward the end of the Eighteenth century the literary field had became magnetically attractive, not only from the viewpoint of a readership, but mainly form that of an *authorship* In spite of serious hardships caused by the absence of legally-fixed routines (such as the lack of institutionalized publisher- writer relations, the piracy in the production and distribution of books, and the delay in legalizing royalties [see, e.g., Münch in Kiesel and Münch 1977; Ward 1974: 93-96]), still, the greater fame one gained in the literary market, the greater was one's profit. And although in effect only few became really successful, while most of the writers remained in the shadow, the temptation was apparently very strong.

2. *The Sturm und Drang: a revolution from the margins*

Given this structure of the literary field, the *Sturm und Drang* movement marked a transformation in this structure. Admittedly, theirs was not the first expression of a *social* frustration legitimately converted into *literary* struggle (the language and literary societies already in the previous century were important precedence). But it was certainly the first of such expressions to revolutionize the structure of the field,in the sense of severely challenging the existing traditional literary authority and eventually neutralizing it. In practice this means that those young people, coming from an ambivalent position in both the social space and the literary field, *were able to alter the rules of the literary game so as to use it to their own advantage* They managed to do so not in spite of, but in fact *thanks* to their initial marginal position in the field.

Located outside the main literary nerve- centers and having no commitment to the people in power (they did not have a Gottsched - not even a Wieland or a Lessing - as their mentors), they were in the position to rely on marginal, semi- official

sources for cultural capital. Such sources were the alleged local *Volk* elements or literary elements which gained popularity on a "market-scale" (by 1775 Goethe's *Werther* was acknowledged an unprecedented success). All these "extraneous" elements were given legitimation in Germany through the imposition of English quasi-folklorist, and popular literary trends (like notably English Sentimentalism) which conferred on them an exotic charm. Moreover, the subversive tone these elements assumed was given an ideological justification. *Werther*'s tremendous popularity, and its scandalous message, were defended by the supporters of the *Sturm und Drang* on the grounds that the work truly reflected the ethos of the young generation, which the existing literary dictate allegedly failed to respond to (this polemics is largely unfolded in Goethe's autobiography, in book 13).

Yet the *Stürmer* did not stay outsiders for long, but managed to use this supposedly extraneous capital for proposing a serious alternative to the inside power structure of the field. The serious alternative was *themselves* What they had to offer to the literary field was the new cultural ethos incorporated in their literary works as well as in their lives as individuals. This new ethos also entailed a whole new set of value judgments which determined literary taste. In other words, their far- reaching impact on the socio-cultural figuration in which they lived was due to the structural change they initiated in the *literary* field, as a result of which the powerful advocates of the canonical tradition became outmoded, and the situation was ripe for giving rise to an alternative literary authority.

More specifically, the change this movement brought about the literary field was most effective in two crucial respects:

(a) It opened the way to dissociating the literary prestige from existing social ranks, and to establishing a different kind of cultural capital as a basis for literary recognition. This new type of literary prestige applied to German writers and poets of whatever social standing. Moreover, it became equal to - if not transcended - the prestige conferred by the canonical literary tradition which hitherto prevailed in the existing socio-cultural formation.

(b) It managed - especially in light of the ever increasing fascination with the literary profession - to set forth a new logic of exclusion in the literary field, so as to guarantee the hold of this new capital by select, small-scale circles of people like themselves.

3. *A revolutionizing strategy: Mystification*

What facilitated these changes in the field was first and foremost a strategy of mystification which characterized the *Sturm und Drang* attitude (and which was all the more zealously adopted later on by the Early Romantics; see discussion in chapter..). Indeed, from that period onwards, mystification became the predominant strategy not only in the German, but also in Western literary and art criticism in general. It was in the last decades of the Eighteenth century, and especially to-

ward its end, however, that German literary discourse assumed an ever growing inclination to mystify its objects; the objects being both the literary *person* as a special type of human existence, and the literary *product* Regarding the latter, it was mainly the endeavor of the Early Romantics, at the turn of the century, to mystify the idea of literature in general and of certain literary forms in particular. As I have tried to show elsewhere (forthcoming; see also discussion in chapter....), the blurriness of literary knowledge reached its extremity in the theory of the Early Romantics. This theory is marked by obscurity of concepts; tautological definitions; the combination of elliptic fragmentary arguments on the one hand, with wild, sweeping generalization, on the other; and by complete detachment from the majority of the actual contemporary literary production (a typical example is the Romantic theory of the novel). All this renders the notion of literature by Schlegel or Novalis in the late 1790's a sheer enigma, a riddle hard to decipher.

For the Early Romantics, this was the supreme expression of literary progress. Such extravagance which they could afford in the realm of literary theory at the turn of the century, however, was preconditioned by the acceptance of certain norms which resulted from the more general tendency of mystifying the literary *competence* about twenty years earlier. The *Sturm und Drang* so-called literary revolution was chiefly the effect of introducing a new mental disposition - embodied in new models of conduct, taste and practical skills - which defined the "poet" as a type of person qualified for the literary activity. The message with which this group of young men entered the literary field was the elevation of the literary *profession* They succeeded in turning it from a learned expertise to be acquired by connoisseurs who mastered its lucid rules and norms, into a kind of "destination", a mode of human existence which is subject to no rules, and which is irresistibly conferred on a person who is endowed with the right innate virtue like with a gift of God (to use Goethe's own terms in the last quotation). Apparently, the mystification of the literary competence proved to be a most effective strategy of revolutionizing the structure of the field, in that it enabled this group of young middle-class German intellectuals to get away with the existing social hierarchy and power relations which this field, like other cultural fields at the time, embodied. In short, this strategy enabled them to invent the prize of which they were the absolute winners.

III. *"Germanness" as a literary and cultural alternative*

1. *Cultural provincialism: the terror of cosmopolitanism*

It is impossible to understand the effectiveness of this strategy without the context of the prevailing cultural configuration in Germany at the time. We must bear in mind that "culture" in Germany, at least until the middle of the Eighteenth century, meant a cross-European court culture, whose center and predominant source for models was France. This upper cultural stratum, epitomized by the different German courts, was a typical example of cultural provincialism; the language of culture as well as social taste and manners were French, as was most of the ad-

mired literature. All these models were ardently embraced by the local aristocracy and the upper-class learned bourgeoisie who aspired tocosmopolitanism. From the viewpoint of the majority of middle-class German intellectuals, however, this was a painful state of affairs. Although this cross- European genteel culture was not unfamiliar to them, it nevertheless doomed them to inferiority. For all their mastery of the proper languages and literatures, and their fair command of civilized taste and manners, they remained forever on the "receiving" end, with no prospect for full integration in this culture, let alone for playing a leading part. Against such a background, to follow Elias's argument, the most distinctive cultural element to the advantage of the learned middle-class individuals was their mastery also of the German language, and especially the written German. According to Elias, this state of affairs motivated them to rely all the more strongly on their skills in German as a source of cultural distinction. The result was the flourishing of contemporary *original German* literature, whose existence was hardly self-evident even as late as the first half of the Eighteenth century.

However, as is also quite typical of cultural provincialism, the adoption of French repertoire was rather zealously defended. Apparently, the more original German literature thrived, the stronger it was rejected by members of the court and court-oriented culture. Even as late as the 1780's, original German literature was considered inferior. The hostility and despise of Friedrich the Second toward it is well known. As requested from an elegant "man of culture", he did not only ignore the achievements of German writings, but also claimed not even to be able to speak the language properly.[5] The king was indeed a fanatic proponent of a frenchified German culture, but he was by no means an exception. Evidently, it was not merely a language clash; it emanated from a socio-cultural conflict of status- groups identity. Since the learned bourgeoisie, more than the aristocracy, were also skilled in a local culture in the German language in addition to the frenchified one, the German practices and skills served them later as an option for overcoming their relative cultural and social inferiority.

Admittedly, the endeavor of building a domestic literature in German was set forth by literary scholars already many decades before. The very fact that in the second half of the Eighteenth century original German literature was already a prosperous, stratified institution with voluminous production – in spite of the reluctance to recognize it on the part of certain elite circles – this fact alone testifies to the extent to which this endeavor has been successful. Yet, paradoxical though it may appear, the predilection for German-written literature first originated, as Gunther Grimm shows (1983), not from what we would view today as "primordial nationalism" (that is, from an urge for a national distinction and self defini-

[5] Ward cites Gottsched reporting of his audience with the king in 1757: "Als ich sagte, dass die deutschen Dichter nicht aufmunterung genug hätten, weil der Adel und die Höfe zu viel französisch und zu wenig deutsch verstünden, alles deutsche recht zu schätzen und einzusehen, sagte Er: das is wahr, denn ich habe von Jugend auf kein deutsch Buch gelesen, und ich parle comme un cocher, jetzo aber bin ich ein alter Kerl von 46 Jahren, und habe kein Zeit mehr dazu". (Quoted by Ward 1974, 124, from J. Schmidt, II, 138).

tion), but rather conversely, from a sense of cosmopolitanism. That is, the promotion of original German literature originated precisely from the desire of German scholars, who were educated in the canonical languages and literatures, to participate in the polite European culture, and from their attempts, already in the previous century, to cultivate a domestic version of the very same Classicist literary repertoire which pertained to that culture, with an aspiration to matching its achievement and finesse (Grimm 1983: 115-148).

This cosmopolitan attitude prevailed in the literary centers in Germany even as late as the middle of the Eighteenth century. In his autobiography, Goethe tells us with sharp sarcasm about his encounter, as a young student, with Johann Christoph Gottsched, a leading promoter of German neo-classicism. Gottsched was a professor in Leipzig university, a citadel of German provincialism and a prominent literary center at the time. In retrospect, Goethe reconstructs the figure of Gottsched, as allegedly seen in the eyes of a young enthusiastic German law student craving for a genuine literary experience, as the incarnation of the local pompous, pretentious culture which, in his mind, amounted to nothing more than idle farce:

The Gottsched waters had inundated the German world with a true deluge, which threatened to rise up, even over the highest mountains. It takes a long time for such a flood to subside again, for the mire to dry away; and as in any epoch there are numberless aping poets, so the imitation of the flat and watery produced a chaos, of which now scarcely a notion remains. To find out that trash was trash was hence the greatest sport, yea, the triumph of the critics of those days. Whoever had only a little common sense, was superficially acquainted with the ancients, and was somewhat more familiar with the moderns, thought himself provided with a standard scale which he could everywhere apply. (Goethe 1969 [1811-14; 1831-32], Volume 2, Book 6: 270-273)

Although Goethe's scorn for Gottsched is formulated in purely literary terms, it is evident that his aversion for him is directed to the whole environment of frenchified culture of which he holds Gottsched a representative; it is directed to Gottsched's everyday conduct to no lesser extent than to his bearing in the literary world.[6] For Goethe – who takes retrospectively the stance of a middle- class

[6] A ridiculous episode of the young students' - Goethe and Schlosser's - audience with Gottsched, as vividly described in Goethe's autobiography, may best illustrate Goethe's mockery of the master's bogus elegance and good manners: We were announced. The servant led us into a large chamber, saying his master would come immediately. Now, whether we misunderstood a gesture which he made, I cannot say: it is enough, we thought he directed us into an adjoining room. We entered, to witness a singular scene: for, on the instant, Gottsched, that tall, broad, gigantic man, came in at the opposite door in a morning-gown of green damask lined with red taffeta; but his monstrous head was bald and uncovered. This, however, was to be immediately provided for: the servant rushed in at a side door with a great full-bottomed wig in his hand (the curls came down to the elbows), and handed the head ornament to his master with gestures of terror. Gottsched, without manifesting the least vexation, raised the wig from the servant's arm with his left hand, and, while he very dexterously swung it up on his head, gave the poor fellow such a box on the ear

young student - Gottsched, and the society in Leipzig in general, were the essence of his encounter with the terror of civilized style and finesse performed by the German high-society, a terror which placed a barrier to the middle-class young intellectuals and caused their sense of cultural inferiority:

> Everyone who perceives [...] the influence which men and women of education, the learned and other persons who take pleasure in refined society, so decidedly exercised over a young student, would be immediately convinced that we were in Leipzig, even if it had not been mentioned. [...] a student could scarcely be anything else but polite, as soon as he wished to stand on any footing at all with the rich, well-bred, and punctilious inhabitants. (Book 6, 270)

> All politeness, indeed, when it does not present itself as the flowering of a great and comprehensive mode of life, must appear restrained, stationary, and, from some point of view, perhaps, absurd; [...] For the student of any wealth and standing had every reason to show himself attentive to the mercantile class, and to be the more solicitous about the proper external forms, as the colony exhibited a model of French manners. [...] at first this kind of life was not repugnant to me [...] But as I was soon forced to feel that the company had much to find fault with in me, and that, after dressing myself in their fashion, I must now talk according to their tongue also; and as, moreover, I could plainly see that I was, on the other hand, but little benefited by the instruction and mental improvement I had promised myself from my academic residence, - I began to be lazy, and to neglect the social duties of visiting, and other attentions; [...] (ibid., 270-272) 2. *An indigenous cultural ethos: the German "poet"* These examples from Goethe's report reveal that (a) the literary revolt of the young generation cannot be conceived of without the element of cultural frustration which characterized the ambivalent position of the young middle-class intellectuals as an inferior, yet *highly resourceful* status- group. (b) These examples also reveal that the terms in which this revolt was formulated were those selected to define the "authentic Germanness" as a sort of alternative cultural - and specifically literary - entity.

It was not just accidentally that the core of the *Sturm und Drang* first emerged from the coming together of a group of young German students in Strasbourg. There, the more direct encounter with French and French-oriented culture gave rise to a bolder sense of alienation toward that culture and language which they knew from home. What was less likely to happen in their home cultural centers, where they strove to integrate, was almost inevitable at the periphery, where they were freer to indulge in an outsider state of mind and in seeking for an alternative source of cultural self-esteem. Such an extra- cultural situation so to speak was the basis for their affinity. Out of this irregular social position they were freer to endorse "subversive" values, such as "feelings", "naturalness", "genuineness" and "genius", which they embraced from foreign, more exotic cultural sources

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with his. right paw, that the latter, as often happens in a comedy, went spinning out at the door; whereupon the respectable old grandfather invited us quite gravely to be seated, and kept up a pretty long discourse with good grace. (Goethe 1969 [1811-14/1833], book 7: 288)

(namely, mainly from the English literary cult of "primitivism" and sentimentalism). These foreign models served them as means of defending their alleged roughness against the civilized terror, by conferring upon this roughness the aura of a *natively German* authenticity. In fact, paradoxically as it may appear, it was precisely the exposure to these foreign models which facilitated their revolutionary stance of a "patriotic" socio-cultural front (albeit, as mentioned above, without a well defined program and certainly without realization). In this way they were in the position to propose "Germanness" as a legitimate polemical notion, and to rely on it, further, as a key element in their claim for cultural superiority.

Indeed, this revolutionizing trend was so successful that the cult of the "natural genius" soon became fashionable to the extent that the concept itself became, as many complained, depleted of its content.[7] Nevertheless, it was doubtlessly extremely functional in the shaping of the new literary ethos. It provided the ideological justification for the social and economic setback of young poets - allegedly gifted and inspired - who failed to find their way in society and to make a decent living. The contempt for materialism and rationally calculated lifestyle, the withdrawal from society, the melancholy, and even sickness, all these elements

[7] In his autobiography, Goethe reflects, not without sarcasm, on the "genius craze" that swept German culture at the time: Natural gifts of every kind can the least be denied; and yet, by the phraseology common in those times, genius was ascribed to the poet alone. But another world seemed all at once to rise up: genius was looked for in the physician, in the general, in the statesman, and before long in all men who thought to make themselves eminent either in theory or practice. [...] the word *genius* (emphasis in original) became a universal symbol; and, because men heard it uttered so often, they though that what was meant by it was habitually at hand. But then, since every one felt himself justified in demanding genius of others, he finally believed that he also must possess it himself. The time was yet far distant when it could be affirmed that genius is that power of man which, by its deeds and actions, gives laws and rules. *At this time it was thought to manifest itself only by* overstepping existing laws, breaking established rules, and *declaring itself above all restraint* (my emphasis).It was, therefore, an easy thing to be a genius; and nothing was more natural than that extravagance, both of word and deed, should provoke all orderly men to oppose themselves to such a monster.

When anybody rushed into the world on foot, without exactly knowing why or wither, it was called a pass of genius; and when any one undertook an aimless and useless absurdity, it was a stroke of genius. Young men, of vivacious and true talents, too often lost themselves in the limitless; and then older men of understanding, wanting perhaps in talent and in soul, found a most malicious gratification in exposing to the public gaze their manifold and ludicrous miscarriages.

[...] With a strange rapidity, words, epithets, and phrases, which have once been cleverly employed to disparage the highest intellectual gifts, spread by a sort of mechanical repetition among the multitude; and in a short time they are to be heard everywhere, even in common life, and in the mouths of the most uneducated; indeed, before long they even creep into dictionaries. In this way the word genius had suffered so much from misrepresentation, that it was almost desired to banish it entirely from the German language. (Goethe 1969 [1811-14; 1831-32], volume 2, book 19: 404-405. Translated by John Oxenford); Also: Möser cited in Brunschwig 213"

became most fashionable.[8] Stemming from literary sentimentalism and quasi-"folklorism", these elements now became the symbols of a natural talent, of an inborn emotional depth and sensibility. These values, which were absolutely inconceivable by the existing dominant cultural dictate, were now cherished by the uprising middle-class intellectuals as essential components of the genuine poet's mental disposition.

Surely, at this early stage, this mental disposition was largely a hypothetical cultural stance rather than a practical model to be realized in everyday life. In fact, being basically theoretical, the so- called patriotic stance of the *Stürmer* was mainly effective in revolutionizing the intellectual and *literary* field, yet had scarcely an immediate bearing on the lives of its precursors. The group soon dissipated and each of its members had to find his own way into society and to accept the rules of the game in the still existing court-oriented cultural configuration. Some of them, like Klinger or Jung-Stilling, not to mention Goethe himself, had even succeeded more than well - and precisely thanks to their *literary* fame - in gaining higher positions in society. Whoever failed to fit in the scheme, like Jakob Lenz, to mention an outstanding example, remained in their eyes painfully awkward and obscure.

Indeed, of all the young men who participated in the Strasbourg circle, it was Lenz - whose enigmatic personality attracts the attention of many scholars (e.g., Osborne 1975, Stephan 1995, Winter 1987, 1995, Madland 1994) - who fully implemented this new model of the poet's mental disposition (or in fact was the victim of it) in his real life. By contrast to the others, Lenz was portrayed as a dissolute, mentally disturbed person, utterly incapable of persisting in any career, even by his contemporaries. Although, according to Madland, “His enormous productivity during the few years in Strasbourg, [...] demonstrates that he spent his days reading, writing, discussing, and finding publishers more successfully than many others in his immediate circle", she nevertheless agrees that, “Yet Lenz himself is responsible for This image of the suffering and alienated young artist, the incompetent Wertherian individual at odds with society, an image which began to emerge already during his lifetime and accelerated to such a degree during the nineteenth century that it overshadowed his works [...]” (Madland 1994: 28). Having perhaps taken the sentimental tone of his age too seriously, Lenz is said to have indulged himself in audacious expressions of emotionalism and mental instability, like attempting suicide or falling in hopeless love with unattainable or fictional women. Yet, evidences show that he was not unaware of the hazardous dissonance between his emotions and reality, turning, in fact, the tyranny of uncontrolled feelings, and the resulting agony, into a life program: “the greatest misfortune is the lack of capacity for feeling” he wrote (Notizen, *Schriften* IV, 285), and “[...] My greatest sufferings are caused by my own heart, and yet, in spite of

[8] To appreciate the extent of this fashion it is enough to read Goethe's *Werther* where all these elements are heavily reflected upon. For an analysis of some social aspects of this fashion, see e.g., Brunschwig 181-222.

all, the most unbearable state is when I am free of suffering" (cited from a letter to Lavater, 1775, in Pascal 1953, 33).

For all the sympathy and material help offered to him by friends and fellow writers, who treated him like a "sick child", he eventually provoked resentment for being too absent-minded and helpless to maintain himself. After the many turns in his scandalous life trajectory, switching from academic training, to tutoring and humbly living by his pen, then to unrealistic aspirations of military service or administrative post, and finally to dependence on the hospitality of wealthy friends and courts; and after the restless and purposeless wandering from Prussia to Strasbourg, to Weimar and Switzerland, and finally to Russia, he died in misery away from his home. Yet precisely this life story makes perfect evidence, though by way of negation, to the fact that this life-model was conceivable at the time only as a *literary* highly hypothetical, model. More precisely, it may serve as example for a misinterpretation of the cultural repertoire and a misjudgment of the options which were available at his time. Today Lenz may be viewed as a true bohemian who lived ahead of his time, a forerunner of a lifestyle later to become an elitist - and rather gratifying - habitus. In the eyes of his contemporary, however, Lenz remained a miserable pathetic failure.

However, even if most of the members of this group never realized this model in their own lives, they certainly cultivated it as an ideal model, embracing it as a fantasy, and as a sort of mannerism. In fact, Goethe's *Werther* can be seen as an ideal autobiography of the whole group. While the fictional characters and events are borrowed, as a rule, from Goethe's real life experience, the novel as a whole construct a legendary life story. It was a myth with which Goethe as a youngster may has identified himself, but which he had no intention to actually implement in his own life (see Goethe 1969 [1811-14/1833], books 12 and 13). However, although Goethe insists that *Werther* did not create a cultural fashion but rather gave expression to an inclination which already prevailed in this cultural climate, there is no doubt that this novel, among other things, helped to mold the archetype for the Romantic person for generations to come.

Finally, a considerable attention has certainly been paid at the time to fabricating a new prototype for the ideal German poet, for which purpose a precedent had to be found. This was apparently the function of the posthumous glorification of Johann Christian Günther, as echoed by Goethe (1969 [1811-14/1833], Book 7). Günther was a lower-class poet in the first half of the Eighteenth century, who ran a dissipated life and died young and impoverished, after failing to take a position offered to him as a court poet. Goethe, selecting him from his contemporary court poets, celebrates his figure as the ultimate type of German poet, a person whose natural talent and creativity prevent him from compromising and yielding to the pressure of economic and social conditions, and who devotes his life completely to his destiny as a poet. Hence, Goethe proposes him in retrospect as a ideal model in the tradition of German literature: When one considers closely what was wanting in the German. poetry, it was a material, and that, too, a national one:

there was never a lack of talent. Here we make mention only of Gunther, who may be called a poet in the full sense of the word. A decided talent, endowed with sensuousness, imagination, memory, the gifts of conception and representation, productive in the highest degree, ready at rhythm, ingenious, witty, and of varied information besides, -- he possessed, in short, all the requisites for creating, by means of poetry, a second life within life, even within common real life. We admire the great facility with which, in his occasional poems, he elevates all circumstances by the feelings, and embellishes them with suitable sentiments, images, and historical and fabulous traditions. Their roughness and wildness belong to his time, his mode of life, and especially to his character, or, if one would have it so, his want of fixed character. He did not know how to curb himself; and so his life, like his poetry, melted. away from him. (Goethe 1969 [1811- 14/1833], book 7: 284-285)

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