COUNTERPARTS AND *WERTHER*: A LITERARY APPROACH TO SUBCULTURE

By

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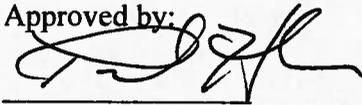In Partial Fulfillment of the Bachelors degree
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ABSTRACT:

This work takes a literary-historical approach to subculture by analyzing the affective emotions of scene culture in the context of its historical moment. Additionally, it analyzes how the structure of feeling which dominates scene culture has been at work since Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, showing that this such structure of feeling is actually a result of major cultural shifts which make the search for authenticity a near impossible task. In the process of performing such a literary-historical approach to subculture, the pitfalls of the sociological approach to subculture will be brought to light as well.

*"In such an element and in such surroundings, with hobbies and studies of this kind, tormented by ungratified passions, never externally stimulated to perform any meaningful actions, our only prospect the need to endure in a sluggish, vacuous, bourgeois existence – we grew accustomed, in a sort of petulant arrogance, to the idea that when life no longer suited us, we could always take leave of it any way we pleased..." (Goethe in* My Life: Poetry and Truth)

*"I have the whole world convinced of my contentment*

*No truth in this*

*I've lost count of all the times I've made it home alive*

*And wished I hadn't" (Brendan Murphy in "Witness" by Counterparts)*

**1 Introduction: Scene Music, The Sociological Approach to Subculture, and An Alternative Approach**

1.1 Setting the Scene

This work analyzes the affective emotions present in the non-literary texts produced by a new and rapidly growing subculture – the 'scene' subculture.  The formation of this subculture will be more fully explained in section 1.3, but for present purposes it is only important to note that this is a subculture which is inextricably tied to a few sub-genres of metal and hardcore punk and which utilizes screamed vocals in its music.  This is true of various hardcore punk and metal sub-genres (not just scene sub-genres), but it is of particular importance in the scene sub-genres due to the particularly emotional quality attached to the screamed vocals of scene songs, something which is not typical of metal and hardcore punk (and their various non-scene sub-genre affiliates) songs.  This emotional quality creates a significant distance between scene culture and metal/hardcore culture, as scene music (and, in turn, scene culture as well) is seen as overly sentimental (by members of metal and hardcore culture) in both its musical and lyrical content.  This sentimentalism is largely a reaction against the feeling of pure apathy perceived (by scene culture, at least) to be dominating the emotional structure of mainstream culture.  This work will show that this is due to an awareness of the specific 'structure of feeling' present in postmodern society, as scene bands take an awareness that the present moment requires its subjects to do, say, and feel nothing as a call to feel more deeply – in essence rejecting that the postmodern condition requires apathetic engagement with life by living a life based around the phenomenon of feeling even more deeply.  The intricacies of the postmodern moment will be addressed in the next sub-section.  However, even at this moment it seems apparent that scene

culture and its sentimental nature are worthy of study (whether sociological or otherwise).

1.2 American Youth in Post-Modernity

Ryan Moore's chapter in *Generations of Youth: Youth Cultures and History in Twentieth-Century America*, entitled "...And Tomorrow is Just Another Crazy Scam," identifies a "crisis of affectivity [which] has become a dominant 'structure of feeling' within everyday [postmodern] life itself" (254). This crisis of affectivity arises due to the postmodern condition being dominated by a 'seen it all' cynicism brought on by the dissolution of the line between reality and simulation in the present moment (254). This makes it the case that for postmodern youth there is no need to actually act out all of the strategies available, for everything is reducible to its simulation. Moore draws upon Fredric Jameson's essay, "Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," in identifying the primary cause of this 'crisis of affectivity' as the displacement of "the notion of centered subjectivity with that of perpetual fragmentation" which "renders inappropriate the kind of 'depth models' that presuppose an inner, core self from which one can be alienated" (253). This displacement, while functioning positively by allowing those in postmodern society to escape the modern feeling of anxiety and anomie, has a far greater negative function because it also "act[s] as a 'liberation from every other feeling as well, since there is no longer a self present to do the feeling'" (Jameson qtd. in Moore 254). This 'structure of feeling' then is characterized by an ironic detachment from any sort of commitment, but is also one that is "'coupled with a sense of emotional urgency'" (Grossberg qtd. in Moore 254). The effect of this doubled affect is that postmodern subjects are able to pursue avenues of passion, but this passion is merely temporary, or, as Lawrence Grossberg describes the postmodern

condition: "It is not that nothing matters – for something has to matter – but that there is no way of choosing, or of finding something to warrant this investment" (Grossberg qtd. in Moore 254). As a result, this creates a condition in which postmodern youth feel compelled to do, say, and feel nothing.

Moore looks to white middle-class youth culture to examine more fully this 'structure of feeling' that dominates postmodern society as it is displayed in the growing predominance of nihilism, cynicism, and cultural exhaustion present in such youth culture – for the defining characteristic of the postmodern condition, as Moore sees it, is that even as youth culture rejects (or 'resists' as it would be characterized in sociological circles) the dominant values and identities of the mainstream culture, there simply is no alternative worthy of placing investment in either. In tracing this structure of feeling, Moore looks to the post-punk scene, which continues the punk tradition of employing the "logic of postmodernism" through use of "a playful deconstructionism and aggressive indifference," as an instance of a scene which is aggressively in search of authenticity and meaningfulness despite knowing that such a search cannot be fruitful (257). Moore stresses the importance of these youths, as he takes them to be the best hope of finding something that matters in a postmodern society. This is due to a number of structural transformations that have occurred which have facilitated the shift from a modern to a postmodern society – the most important of which is the fact that a large proportion of the low-pay, low-benefit, service industry jobs are held by "twentysomethings" due to there being an absence of opportunities in traditional white-collar fields as corporations have been merging and downsizing repeatedly in recent history (259). Moore takes this as evidence that post-punk's aversion to the '9-5' work day is an awareness of the impossibility of upward mobility within the

middle-class.  Thus, post-punks represent a way of being that is detached from the boredom of everyday life – particularly the everyday work-life.  In recent times, a new post-punk subculture has emerged, scene culture, which brings with it the values of traditional post-punk (along with some new ones) but displays them in a different manner.

1.3 Scene Music and Culture: A New Kind of Angst

Over the past decade and a half, a new subulture has exploded onto the American landscape.  This is the scene subculture, one that draws influences from both the metal and hardcore scenes.  This is a subculture which owes its existence to a few '-core' genres, namely, metalcore, post-hardcore, deathcore, and melodic hardcore.  These genres were primarily comprised of adolescent musicians whom tailored their music to appeal to a growing population of a new type of post-punk adolescent.  These bands drew upon various influences, integrating a wide array of different sounds[1] with what they saw as the stagnant sound of hardcore punk.   In doing so, all four of these genres distanced themselves from both the hardcore and metal scenes, creating a new 'scene' genre which was defined by its inability to be defined (or at least the difficulty of doing so).  This is because as elements of hardcore punk, metal, and various other influences were combined by various bands in these genres, these bands became distinctively 'inauthentic' from the standpoint of both the metal and hardcore scenes.  The result is a genre which cannot properly be called hardcore or metal (by members of the hardcore and metal scenes, at least), but which draws upon those elements and which adheres to its own standards of

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[1]    With melodic hardcore this was done by simply combining more 'melodic' guitar rhythms with the aggressive riffs of hardcore punk.  With post-hardcore this was done by integrating alternative rock elements into hardcore punk (essentially doing to hardcore punk what post-punk did to punk).  With deathcore this was done by integrating death metal elements with hardcore punk.  With metalcore this was done by integrating heavy metal elements with hardcore punk.

authenticity.

These standards of authenticity center around an essential indefinability – scene music simply alludes definition.  This is in large part due to the nature of 'scene' as a deragatory term used by members of the metal and hardcore communities to distance themselves from these new crossover genres (which were seen as far too emotional/depressed/suicidal for these 'harder' scenes) – from its inception it has been a subculture essentially defined by what it is not.  The result of this is a subculture which depends upon doubling down on its 'other'-ness  – scene sees itself as an 'other' not only of the 'mainstream' culture but also of the hardcore and metal subcultures as well.  Thus, scene culture's standards of authenticity center around this notion of 'other'-ness - regardless of how it was defined, it was essential that scene music (and the subculture that went along with it) be an 'other.'  This makes scene culture a particularly interesting sociological phenomenon as it is 'resistant' to not only the mainstream culture, but also to other 'resistant' cultures as well.  For this reason, the sociological approach to subculture must be considered.  Before getting to that, another key aspect of scene culture must be brought to light.

As has been stated earlier, scene music is highly sentimentalized.  This comes in varying degrees depending on the sub-genre of scene music considered, but all sub-genres of scene music are sentimental to some degree.  This is due to scene culture holding on to the conviction that to live life apathetically, or even to live life focusing on spreading only a positive message, is to live as a fake or simulation – the only authentic way of living is to feel all emotions, both good and bad.  Thus, scene music tends to focus on the more vehement passions[2] because to do otherwise would be to live in a thoroughly inauthentic manner.  This has had significant negative

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[2]    See Philip Fisher's work *The Vehement Passions*

consequences come along with it as this has resulted in scene music displaying its sentimentalism through its discussion of suicide and suicidal thoughts – for scene culture holds onto this conviction so fervently that feeling even the most extreme of negative emotions is better than feeling nothing at all (or even worse, covering up negative feelings with an inauthentic veil of positivity).  For this reason scene culture has been viewed in the same light as *The Sorrows of Young Werther,* the extremely sentimental novel by Johann von Goethe, which was criticized for its leading to "copy-cat suicides" as the novel burst into popularity.[3]  Due to this aspect of scene culture, a look at the phenomenon of copy-cat suicides will be necessary. However, scene culture's ties with Goethe's famous early modern novel do not end here.  Scene culture's awareness that the postmodern condition requires that its subjects subsist merely for the sake of subsisting does not allow its members to be liberated from the feeling of anxiety in the same way that most postmodern subjects are, making them prone to a Heidegger-ian type of angst – members of scene culture feel convinced that they must find an authentic way of being but are constantly reminded that there is no authentic way of being available in the postmodern condition.  Werther's awareness of the mundane nature of bourgeois life leads him to display this particular type of angst as well.  So, by examining Werther's sentimental display of this particular kind of angst before examining a similar display of sentimentality as it is shown in scene culture a shift in this angst can be seen that mirrors the shift from modern to post-modern society.

1.4 The Sociological Approach to Subculture

The notion of a 'subculture' has been used in sociology for decades to describe the

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[3] Such criticism were so widespread that such a phenomenon came to be called the Werther Effect, a term still used in contemporary sociology.

phenomenon of groups of people 'resisting' against the dominant (as it is called in sociological studies), or 'mainstream' (as it is called by some subcultures), society.  This term has been used to apply equally to violently resistant groups, such as criminals, as well as to more passively resistant groups, such as the punk scene.  Sociologists focus much of their attention on finding a group of core values which individuals of a given group must accept, thereby defining subculture as a group of members who both interact with each other and adhere to the subculture's core values.  However, sociologists have run into a number of significant problems when attempting to work out such a definition as well as in studying subcultures with such a definition in mind.  Various re-conceptualizations of subculture have been offered in an attempt to 'tidy up' the notion of subculture so that it could be used for relevant sociological purposes.

However, as Fine and Kleinman point out in their article entitled "Rethinking Subculture: An Intereactionist Analysis," there are considerable conceptual problems present even when considering the various views of subculture at work.  They identify four conceptual issues that have arisen in the sociological literature surrounding subcultural study: "1) Subculture has often been treated as synonymous with the population comprising the subsociety. 2) Subculture has been examined without sufficient concern for delineating the group of individuals serving as its referent. 3) The subcultural system is pictured as homogeneous, static, and closed. 4) Subculture is depicted as consisting in its entirety of values, norms, and central themes" (2).  Fine and Kleinmann then, in an attempt to avoid these conceptual issues present in the sociological study of subculture, suggest an 'interactionist analysis' of subculture – one that focuses on the interactions between members of a given subculture rather than focusing on subculture itself as a "reified"[4] concept.  They identify sociologists' fascination with the "reified" conception of

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4    Term used by Fine and Kleinman, as well as many other sociologists, to refer to the notion of subculture that

subculture – one that ignores the individual in favor of studying subcultures as "static" or "homogenous" entities – so their focus on an interactionist analysis is, then, their way of studying subcultures without relying on the notion of a "reified" conception of subculture. In this way, they argue, they can "provide a more accurate account of subcultural variation, cultural change, and the diffusion of cultural elements" (8). However, by focusing on the face-to-face interactions between subcultural members, Fine and Kleinmann must give a complicated account of how subcultural content is transmitted in facets other than strict face-to-face interactions. Their method of accounting for this is to identify subcultures as originating in groups, and then appeal to the fact that groups often interact with one another to show how static elements of subcultural content can come to be transmitted between groups. Thus, they identify the referent of subculture as the social network which connects various groups – thereby identifying subculture with group-to-group interactions (8-9).

The notion of subculture as resistance has worked in tandem with the work of defining subcultures to allow sociologists to generalize over subcultures – thereby 'reifying' the notion of subculture into something static and homogenous that is useful for sociological study. At the same time that considerable work has been done to re-conceptualize the notion of a subculture so that it might be more useful for sociological research, similar work has been done to re-conceptualize the notion of resistance itself, thereby indirectly altering the conception of subculture in the process. Ross Haenfler, in his article entitled "Rethinking Subcultural Resistance: Core Values of the Straight Edge Movement," is one such sociologist, as he focuses on the Straight Edge Hardcore Movement[5] to show that the standard notion of political

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falls victim to the four problems cited earlier.

[5] The intricacies of this subculture will be tangentially related to the overall discussion of the scene subculture, so I'll save a more thorough discussion of it for that time. For now, it is only necessary to know that it is a

resistance does not necessarily apply equally to all subcultures.  Rather than simply define a subculture as resistance (which would then preclude any insight into the individuals in the subculture under consideration) Haenfler offers a new conception of resistance which aims to "account for individual opposition to domination, 'the politicization of the self and daily life' in which social actors practice the future they envision" (409).  This conception of resistance is, then, one that focuses on the complex nature of both a given subculture's collective resistance (in his case, the straightedge hardcore subculture) and of the individualized conception of resistance present in individual members.  Thus, he sees his conception of resistance as being able to account for an individual's acceptance of some aspects of the collective resistance while not accepting others – preferring their individualized notion of resistance over the collective one in those instances where the individual and collective notions of resistance diverge.  This conception of an interplay between collective and individualized notions of resistance allows for an account of subcultural resistance which privileges the individual – thereby avoiding the pitfalls of classical conceptions of subculture as resistance which identified resistance as political resistance through stylistic choices.

Though both Fine and Kleiman's and Haenfler's re-conceptulizations of the notions of subculture and subcultural resistance, respectively, have done a considerable amount of work towards making the sociological study of subculture both more accurate and more amenable to sociological study.  However, a problem still looms even with these re-conceptualizations of subculture and resistance.  The problem is this: the primary function of these notions of subculture and resistance has been to aid in the sociological notions of identity and social-identity theory.  By focusing on the personal identity aspects of subculture itself and subcultural

subculture which was derived from the hardcore punk movement, with its own distinct set of 'core values.'

resistance, sociological studies of subculture have neglected to analyze the precise nature of the resistance itself – for even though Haenfler's notion of an individualized conception of resistance seems to get at this notion, it is rendered useless as a sociological notion.  This is due to the sheer impracticality of identifying each individual's conception of resistance – the only method available to the sociologist of identifying the complex nature of a given subculture's resistance. Without a legitimate way of gaining empirical insight into the complex nature of a given subculture's resistance, the sociologist is left to merely posit that each individual in a given subculture has an individualized notion of resistance without identifying what it is – leaving the sociologist to rely on the collective conception of resistance if he or she is interested in studying a given subculture.  Thus, though the individualized conception of resistance is important to keep in mind, in the end it is rendered useless for the sociologist.

There is a further problem with the sociological study of subcultures: at the same time that it seeks to study a given subculture it also condemns.  By using a term like 'resistance' to generalize over a given subculture's core values, the sociological study is intrinsically flawed so long as it continues to utilize such a notion.  A term like 'resistance' can do nothing other than condemn, there is no way for a sociological study to describe a subculture as resistance and then say that that resistance is valuable or should be sustained.  This is due to the nature of the term itself, as 'resistance' can only be defined negatively.  When such a negatively defined term is employed to characterize divergent sub-cultures, it carries with it the connotation that the dominant culture, in essence, gets things right, and that it is the subcultures which resist – as if the resistance itself is unwarranted.  This leads to a notion of subculture which assumes that subcultures are merely reactionary, as if only the dominant culture is capable of having substance

on its own.   For this reason, the use of a term like 'resistance' will be noticeably absent from the remainder of this work, instead focusing on the notion of a 'perfect storm of sentiments' to describe the generalization of scene culture's "core values."

1.5 An Alternative Method of Studying Subculture

Given that the sociological study of subculture is flawed in a number of significant ways (given above), it may simply be the case that the sociological approach to subculture is an ineffective means of tracking the ideology of a given subculture.  Thus, if there is another avenue available to get at the complex nature of the ideology of scene subculture, it seems that this avenue should be taken in favor of the sociological approach.  When studying musical subcultures (as scene surely is) in particular, there is a perfectly static domain of subcultural content available for study – the music that the subculture both produces and consumes itself. The musical content produced scene bands and consumed by 'scene-agers' (as members of scene culture are sometimes called) remains static though scene culture may fluctuate its core values over time – opening up an avenue for literary-historical insight into the complex nature of the collective ideology of scene culture by analyzing the musical content for its 'individualized'[6] ideology.[7]  While members of scene culture have historically been averse to categorical

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[6]   It is not strictly individualized, for any given band must condense the individualized conceptions of each member into a collective conception which the band must display, but the use of 'individualized' here does not seem totally inaccurate as each band surely does not purport to convey the collective conception of the entire subculture, rather its own 'flavor' of it.

[7]   There is a further reason for analyzing the lyrical content of the music as a way of getting at the collective ideology of scene culture – the manner in which scene music is presented and received require that its listeners know the lyrics to their favorite band's songs.  There are two main reasons for this: 1. All scene music utilizes screamed vocals which require a dedicated listener to look up the lyrics in order to be truly sure of what is being screamed in the songs and 2. Live performances of scene music are typically held in punk venues which do not have barricades separating the audience from the musicians.  Due to this, many vocalists will share the microphone with as many fans as possible, turning many performances into a group experience in which the crowd is able to scream the lyrics with the band.  Thus, it is difficult for fans of scene music to avoid the lyrical content of the songs.

definition, scene music has some salient features about it which help give it some sense of definition. These features contribute to what will be referred to in later sections as a 'perfect storm of sentiments' which functions as a sort of Searlean cluster-descriptor[8] for scene music as a whole.

What follows is an attempt at drawing out this perfect storm of sentiments from the lyrical content of a particularly sentimental scene band, Counterparts, which will stand as a representative of scene culture as a whole. This does leave this work open to the charge that I am projecting the ideology present in Counterparts work onto the rest of scene culture. However, as will be made apparent in section 3, Counterparts is the quintessential scene band. This is primarily due to the nature of the cluster-descriptor for scene music, as the majority of scene bands display a few aspects of the cluster (or display all of the aspects, but only emphasize a few of the aspects which they see as most essential), but only Counterparts (among a select few others) display all of the aspects with equal vehemence. In analyzing this cluster of sentiments as they apply to scene culture, a natural comparison to Goethe's *The Sufferings of Young Werther* arose as Goethe's portrayal of Werther essentially makes him out to be the first 'scene-ager' a little over two hundred years before the first 'scene-agers' started showing up in North America.

This comparison has already been hinted at earlier due to the sentimental nature of scene culture and the obvious sentimentality of *Werther,* but this similarity goes far deeper than mere genre identification – as will be shown in the following two major sections. For this reason, it seems that the best method available is to analyze Werther's 'scene-ness' in the context of his

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8  Essentially a cluster of features which bands and consumers of the music adhere to – none of the features in the cluster has priority over any of the any other features and referents need not adhere to all of the features in the cluster, they simply must have a sufficient (though what is sufficient is not defined) number of them to warrant their being referents.

historical moment before moving on to an analysis of the affective emotions at work in scene culture so that scene culture can be properly placed in its historical moment. Though scene culture has only arisen in recent years, this 'perfect storm of sentiments' has been displayed in sentimental literature since Goethe's *The Sufferings of Young Werther.* Further, as will be shown in the following sections, the unique circumstances under which Goethe wrote the famous sentimental caused some of the first readers of the novel to question how much of reality Goethe had injected into his novel – something which is mirrored in the reactions to scene music's own display of sentimentality. So, in order to give a complete literary-historical account of the nature of this specific type of sentimentality, it seems necessary to analyze it as it was first displayed through Goethe's characterization of Werther and then situating it within its own historical moment before moving onto an analysis of scene culture's display of it in its historical moment. What can then be seen is a shift in the nature of this type of sentimentality that mirrors the two major shifts that have occurred in relatively recent history – the shift from pre-modern to modern society (after which *Werther* was written) and the shift from modern to post-modern (after which scene culture arises).

**2 Historical Antecedent: _The Sorrows of Young Werther_ and the Shift Into Modernity**

2.1 Werther: The First Scene-ager

_The Sufferings of Young Werther_[9], the second literary work written by a young Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, depicts the journey of an equally young Werther as he attempts to set out on his own in the small, fictional German town of Wahlheim.  Goethe paints the young hero as an immature, highly emotional individual; one who is driven by an all-encompassing desire for the object of his affection, Lotte.  This desire, burning with an intensity commonly seen in such paradigmatic instances of unrequited 'young love,' urges Goethe's hero to take his own life upon coming to the realization that his beloved Lotte will not leave her fiance/husband – a fact that he simply cannot live with given the intensity of his attachment to her.  However, Goethe makes it clear that it is not simply Werther's attachment to Lotte that leads to his inevitable demise – it is his dissatisfaction with bourgeois life combined with a certain structure of feeling, which is expressed through his unrequited love for Lotte, that leads to his inevitable demise (this will be shown explicitly in the next sub-section).  Thus, with Werther Goethe had created a character in which a sort of 'perfect storm' of sentiments led to his inevitable demise, with the implication at work in the novel being that none of these sentiments, in isolation, would be sufficient causation for Werther's tragic ending – rather, it is the combination of this 'perfect storm' of sentiments that leads to his death.  Further, Goethe's portrayal of Werther makes it the case that this perfect storm could not have been avoided – for Werther to feel otherwise would be for him to live inauthentically.  In this way, Goethe unknowingly presented Werther as the first 'scene-ager' almost two and a half centuries prior to the emergence of scene culture – the perfect storm which both 'others' Werther and leads to his fascination with sentimental suicide is still at work in scene

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[9]    Alternatively titled _The Sorrows of Young Werther._

culture's sentimental 'literature' which is being produced and consumed today.

## 2.2 The Perfect Storm Unpacked

Perhaps the most prominent and important aspect of this perfect storm of sentiments is not really a sentiment at all, but rather a general claim about the way in which such excessive sentimentality manifests itself in Werther. This is the claim that Werther is a character defined primarily by his ability "'for profound and pure feeling and true penetration'" (Goethe qtd in Corngold vii). However, what exactly does the capacity for more 'true' or 'profound' feeling amount to given that emotions are subjective affective states, and, as such, the notion of a capacity for more 'true' feeling may seem just *odd* – true feeling is simply feeling whatever emotional state a subject just happens to be in at that time. However, Werther's excessive sentimentality does make Werther out to be an 'other' in relation to those around him. Further, Werther perceives a lack of sympathy in those around him, and it is this lack of sympathy that Werther seems to detest most in the others that surround him. This itself is perhaps best displayed in the first scene in which Werther and Albert debate the topic of suicide, which Werther recounts in full detail in a letter to Wilhelm dated August 12, 1771. Throughout the debate Werther defends the decision to commit suicide as an act of extreme passion, akin to a man who kills his unfaithful wife. Albert reacts rather simply, claiming "that is something completely different... because a man swept away by passion loses all his powers of reason and is viewed as a drunkard or a madman" (Goethe 35). It is at this point in the exchange that Werther displays his distaste for those that are unable to sympathize with vehement displays of passion, as he refers to Albert (and those that agree with him) as "rationalists" and goes on to chastise the

man: "You stand there, so calmly, *without any understanding*, you moral men!" (35, emphasis mine). This is perhaps why Werther finds Lotte so intriguing, from the first initial descriptions of his new-found beloved Werther makes it clear that he is drawn to her because she has a capacity for sympathy[10] that he does not see in anyone else.[11] However, even though Lotte seems to understand that Werther is prone to extreme displays of sentimentality, Werther's letters make it clear that she does not understand that Werther cannot feel other than in the extreme.[12] So, it seems that regardless of whether or not it can rightly be said of anyone that he or she truly has a capacity for more 'true' feeling, the fact is that Werther's perceives himself to have such a capacity due to the lack of sympathy present in those around him – since they cannot understand the most vehement of emotions they must not be 'true' feelers. It is this phenomenon which will now be unpacked, first as it relates to Werther and then as it relates to scene culture in the next section.

This perceived capacity for more true or profound feeling is displayed by Werther throughout the novel through his inability to feel, or even perceive, otherwise. From the very outset of the novel Werther is depicted as a passive agent with respect to his emotions – his

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[10] In a letter sent to Wilhelm less than a month after he first met Lotte, Werther describes to his dear friend how his new-found beloved is "always with her dying friend and is always the same, always the fully attentive, lovely creature, who, wherever she turns, relieves pain and makes people happy" (26). Additionally, Werther at times speaks of Lotte as if she has some sort of special insight into the true nature of his feelings. In a letter dated November 24 Werther claims that "[Lotte] feels my suffering" (68).

[11] There is an issue that arises here due to the method of narration Goethe chose to employ. Because the reader is only given Werther's perspective, nothing can really be attributed to Lotte with absolute certainty. Rather, since only Werther's perception is available to the reader, strictly speaking all that can be said of Lotte with any certainty is that she appeared in such-and-such a way to Werther. For brevity, I will not make this distinction from here on out. Rather, when I speak of Lotte being such-and-such a way, I am really talking about Werther's perception of Lotte. I do not pretend to make claims regarding Lotte's actual character.

[12] The November 8, 1772 letter hints at this notion, as Werther laments that "[Lotte] has reproached me for my excesses!" (66). The notion of moderation is brought up again by Lotte in one of the few letters given after the Editor steps in to facilitate the narrative, dated December 20. In the letter Werther declares that he cannot see either her or Albert again, as it is simply too much for his heart to bear. Upon hearing this Lotte laments, "why did you have to be born with this vehemence, this untamed, unyielding passion for everything you touch! I beg you...Learn moderation!" (79)

sentiments seize upon his entire soul forcing him to perceive his surroundings and to act in the ways that he does (the implication then being that he could not have acted nor perceived otherwise because he could not have felt otherwise).  As early as Werther's second letter to Wilhelm, dated May 10, 1771, Werther expresses to his dear Wilhelm how a "wonderful gaiety has seized [his] entire soul" which has made it such that he has been unable to draw due to the sheer extremity of his feeling (6).  This is particularly true of Werther's feelings for Lotte.  Even in his first characterization of Lotte, given in the June 16, 1771 letter, Werther, lamenting over the fact that he cannot describe her angelic perfection with any adequacy, finally settles on simply "say[ing] that she has captivated all [his] senses" (14).  This further exemplifies the fact that Werther describes himself as entirely passive with respect to his emotions, but what is most interesting in this letter is the manner in which this captivation manifests itself.  Immediately after Werther has just admitted that he swore to himself that he would not ride out to see his newfound beloved, he exclaims that he simply "could not resist, [he] had to go and see her" (14). This is continued throughout the novel, as Werther habitually convinces himself that he must stop seeing Lotte so often but laments over the fact that he simply cannot keep himself from seeing her.  In fact, his inability to keep himself from Lotte despite his knowledge that seeing her will only cause him pain[13] is the impetus for the major turning point in the novel, as it is what causes Werther to return to Wahlheim for the few months before his eventual suicide.[14]  Thus, throughout the novel Werther's encounters with Lotte prove that he is unable to act as his rational

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[13]  It should be noted that seeing Lotte is not the direct cause for Werther's pain here.  Werther repeatedly mentions how much he loves being in her presence.  However, seeing her whilst knowing that she could never be his is what causes such deep pain for Werther.

[14]  The July 18 letter makes his reason for returning to Wahlheim clear: "Where is it that I mean to go?  Let me tell you in confidence... I've deluded myself into thinking that I want to visit the mines in ---, but really, there's nothing to that, I just want to be nearer to Lotte, that's all.  And I laugh at my own heart – and do its bidding." (58)

side prescribes him to, showing that it will always be Werther's sentiments that are a guide to his

actions, not his reason.  Perhaps even more telling than this is the fact that Werther often refers to

his heart as holding his sentiments, as if he and his heart were two separate entities and as such

he could not control the doings of his heart.[15]

This conviction that one's sentiments force one to act in a certain way is best exemplified

by Werther not in his own doings, but in his vehement defense of other equally sentimental

individuals (whether hypothetical or actual).  The first instance of this kind of defense has

already been looked at previously, but it is worth returning to the Albert-Werther suicide debate,

detailed in the August 12, 1771 letter, in order to draw out this aspect of Werther's sentimentality.

Though Werther's sympathetic feelings towards those that feel compelled to commit suicide have

shown up prior to this moment in the novel, in this letter the reader is given Werther's first

sustained defense of suicidal feelings.  This comes just after Werther has noticed Albert's pistols

hanging on the wall and shortly thereafter puts one pistol to his forehead.  Albert, stunned that

anyone would put even an unloaded pistol to their forehead for any reason, chastises Werther for

being so foolish as to do such a thing.  Werther immediately takes offense to such an accusation,

calling into question why it is that non-sentimentals are so quick to declare certain actions

foolish and others clever, asking Albert earnestly: "have you investigated the deeper

circumstances of an action to that end?  Are you able to explain the causes definitively, why it

happened? why it *had* to happen?" (34, emphasis mine).  Albert, continuing in his rational

manner, then asks Werther to consider that there are certainly some actions which are "vicious

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[15]   In the July 1, 1771 letter Werther claims that "[his] own poor heart, which suffers more than many who languish
on their sickbeds, shows me what Lotte must mean to an invalid" (23).  Just before this Werther speaks of "how
happy [he is] that [his] heart can feel the simple, innocent bliss of the man…" (22).  These are just two examples
among many.

however they occur, whatever motives are adduced" (34). Though Werther does not dismiss the

point altogether, he offers a few counterexamples to Albert's unflinching claim. The most

interesting of these counterexamples is the example of the "husband who, in righteous anger,

makes short shrift of his unfaithful wife and her worthless seducer," whom Werther seems

convinced no one would feel was deserving of punishment, with the implication behind such an

assumption being that the husband could not have acted otherwise given the severity of his

emotions (34-5).

This conviction that he could not have done otherwise is an important aspect of Werther's

capacity to feel more 'true' emotions, but perhaps even more important than this is the fact that

Werther is only able to feel emotions in their most extreme form. This is showcased throughout

the novel, whether it be through Werther's relation to nature, his abhorrence of the ambassador

whom he works for, or even through his feelings about the two poets whom he reads throughout

the novel – Homer and Ossian. However, this quality is most obviously displayed in his

romantic feelings for Lotte. From the moment he met Lotte he cannot contain his feelings for

her, describing her to Wilhelm as an angel, one who is so perfect that her perfection is

inexpressible (14). In describing his first dances with Lotte, Werther is continues in this lavish,

excessive manner, claiming

> Never have I danced so effortlessly. I was no longer a mere mortal. To hold the loveliest
> creature in my arms and to fly with her like the wind, so that everything else around me
> vanished, and – Wilhelm, to be honest, I vowed to myself that a girl to whom I was
> attached, should *never waltz with anyone but me*, even if it were to cost me my life. You
> understand what I mean! (18 emphasis mine)

From the outset Werther can only speak of Lotte in excessively sentimental terms, and this does

not waver throughout the novel. In fact, Werther's letters to Wilhelm become increasingly more

sentimental as his feelings for Lotte grow, going so far as to claim in the August 30 letter that he

has "no prayers other than those directed to her; no shape appears to my imagination other than

hers, and I see everything in the world around me only in relation to her" (40).

Though Werther's excessive sentimentality is most obviously displayed in his romantic

dealings with Lotte, it is displayed with equal fervor in his expressions of distaste toward the

mundane bourgeois culture around him. This is most clearly brought out when Werther travels to

an unnamed German town in order to escape Lotte and his equally beloved Wahlheim. This

town is vastly different from rural Wahlheim, preferring the modern luxuries of social status and

wealth over the pastoral luxuries of natural beauty and serenity. Werther finds it difficult to

connect with nearly anyone in this new town due to their preoccupation with status, going so far

as to wonder "what sort of people are these, whose whole soul rests on ceremony, whose

thoughts and struggles are bent on shoving themselves year after year one seat higher up at the

table!" (49). His abhorrence of the people of the town's obsession with rank is displayed

throughout his encounters with the various people in the town, but is perhaps most interestingly

displayed in his dealings with one of the people whom he finds tolerable in this town – Fräulein

von B. Werther meets Fräulein von B. a couple months into his stay in this new town, and he is

immediately drawn to her because she has been able to retain "a great deal of naturalness in the

midst of this rigid life" (49). Werther sees in her a stark contrast with her aunt, a woman who

"lacked everything, had no respectable income, no intellect, and no support other than her

ancestry, no security other than the social class in which she barricaded herself, and no pleasure

other than looking down from her upper landing over the heads of the bourgeoisie" (49). This is

made clear in one of the few letters written to Lotte, dated January 20, 1772, in which Werther

speaks highly of his new-found companion, claiming that "her social class is a burden to her, one

that gratifies none of her heart's desires" (50).  Werther is overjoyed that he has finally met

someone like him (and like his beloved Lotte, he tells us) but this perfect view of the Fräulein

does not last, as he comes to see that though she may not be as rank-obsessed as the rest of the

town, she cannot completely escape the pressures of her social status.

      In a letter written to Wilhelm, dated March 15, 1772, Werther describes how he

unknowingly ended up at a meeting of the nobles at the Count's[16] house.  Having only been

invited to the Count's house for dinner, it did not occur to Werther that he would be unwelcome

company amidst the nobles whom were expected to arrive following the meal.  Amongst the

nobles at this meeting is Werther's own Fräulein von B., but as he attempts to speak with her he

begins to realize that "she was speaking to me less freely than usual, with some embarrassment,"

causing Werther to wonder if "she, too, [is] like all these people?" (52).  Upon meeting the

Fräulein the next day, Werther cannot help but express how hurt he was at her recent behavior,

leading to a conversation in which the Fräulein's true concern for her social status comes out:

> Oh Werther, she said to me in a tender tone, how could you interpret my confusion this way, you who know my heart?  How I suffered for you from the moment I came into the room!  I foresaw the whole thing, a hundred times it was on the tip of my tongue to tell you.  I knew that von S. and von T. and their husbands would sooner leave than remain in your company; I knew that the Count was in no position to spoil things between them[17] - and now the commotion! - How is that, Fräulein?  I said, concealing my dismay... What it has already cost me! said the sweet creature as tears came to her eyes – I could no longer control myself, I was about to throw myself at her feet. - Explain yourself!  I cried.  - Tears streamed down her cheeks.  I was beside myself.  She dried them, without attempting to conceal them. - You know my aunt, she began, she was present and saw it, oh, with what a look!  Werther, I had to get through the night, and this morning I had to endure a sermon about associating with you and had to listen to her denigrate, demean

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[16] One of the few people in the town whom Werther gets along with other than the Fräulein.

[17] As the night went on the animosity felt towards Werther by the nobility continued to grow, as he is seen as unfit to be amongst people of such high rank in the town.  This causes the Count to eventually ask Werther to leave, which he does without protest.  This is what the Fräulein is referring to.

you, and I could and might only half defend you. (54)

This is too much for Werther to take, as he recounts to Wilhelm that "every word she spoke pierced [his] heart like a sword" (54). In fact, this fatalistic imagery is continued through the last moments of the letter, as Werther is so furious that his new-found beloved did not spare his feelings by concealing this all from him that he claims that he'd "like to open a vein that would grant [him] eternal freedom" (55).

Werther's propensity to fall into suicidal imagery is something readers can come to expect at this point in the novel, and it is easy to assume that this is simply another instance of Werther reacting in his typical overly sentimental manner to another instance of unrequited love. However, both the Fräulein and Lotte seem to represent possible pursuits of authenticity amidst the abundant examples of inauthentic pursuits available to Werther, and it is actually his conviction that only authentic objects of pursuit are worthy of pursuit that leads to his eventual demise. Throughout the novel Werther makes it clear that he seeks out authenticity in everything he does, preferring to not even attempt to capture the natural beauty of Wahlheim in his drawings because the beauty is simply to all-encompassing to be able to capture with any level of authenticity (6). In fact, Werther's realization that he is not capable of capturing the intensity of the natural beauty which surrounds him leads him into fatalistic imagery just the same as his dealings with unrequited love, as he notes that he is "dying of this" as he "succumb[s] to the force of the splendor of these displays" (6). This sentiment is carried throughout the novel, as none of Werther's occupations are deemed authentic enough to be worthy objects of pursuit, and it is this perceived lack of authenticity in anything that leads Werther to vehemently attach himself to his overly sentimental nature – in this emotionality Werther is able to find an

authenticity that he is not able to find anywhere else.  This is what really leads Werther to return to his beloved Lotte, for though it can only cause him pain, his conviction that authentic pursuits are the only ones worth pursuing is what continuously causes him to return to Lotte.

Shortly after being crushed by the Fräulein's inability to defend Werther in the wake of her aunt's criticisms, Werther makes his intention to leave this town in order to accompany a Prince to his estates known to Wilhelm.  Werther explains that the Prince has promised to leave him "entirely to his own devices," indicating that this might be a place where Werther can find some source of authenticity (55).  In fact, Werther is able to draw in this place, something that not even his beloved Wahlheim could allow.  Further, unlike the ambassador from the previous town, the Prince treats Werther quite well.  However, Werther is unable to focus on anything but the Prince's inauthenticity, as Werther perceives the Prince to be entirely too academic and unfeeling to provide any helpful insight in his artwork, explaining to Wilhelm that "sometimes I gnash my teeth when, my imagination taking fire, I lead him through nature and art, and he suddenly thinks he's done the correct thing by bumbling in with a stock technical term" (57).  Despite the Prince's perfectly fine treatment of Werther, he cannot help but focus on the inauthentic aspects of his new boss, as the Prince is unable to feel in the same authentic manner as Werther.  This seems to be what leads Werther to feel convinced that he must leave this place as well, as his painting seems to be the only thing worthy of doing there but is rendered inauthentic in the presence of an inauthentic observer and critic.  So, Werther is left with only one authentic choice, despite the fact that it will surely lead to his demise – he can do nothing other than return to Lotte.

It is this perfect storm which leads Werther to his ultimate demise, for Goethe's

characterization of Werther makes it the case that without any one of these elements[18] he would

have been able to avoid his tragic ending.  Given the novel's emphasis on Lotte as the object of

Werther's affection and his excessively sentimental displays of that affection, it was natural for

readers to assume that she alone was the impetus for the young hero's demise.   However, given

Werther's repeated fruitless attempts at finding authenticity, it seems that his decision to commit

suicide should instead be read as a reaction against being unable to find any source of

authenticity, as Lotte remains the only source of authenticity for Werther throughout the novel

yet she too is unavailable – leaving Werther with no authentic object of pursuit other than death.

When read in this way, Werther's excessive sentimentality is not the result of him being a

"drunkard" or a "madman," but is instead a reaction against the inability to find authenticity in a

modern society which emphasizes the importance of the bourgeois public sphere, in turn

rejecting the newfound importance placed on social status that Goethe perceives to be

dominating the society of his time.

2.3 The Emergence of the Public Sphere: A Look at the Shift into Modernity

At the time of *Werther's* publication, Germany's shift into industrial modernity was

already beginning to take place.  In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Jürgen

Habermas traces the history of the emergence of the public sphere, demonstrating the

transformation of European agricultural-feudal societies into distinctively modern-industrial

societies from the High Middle Ages through the eighteenth century.  In tracing this history,

Habermas first looks to the etymology of the words "public" and "publicity" as they came to

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[18] Conviction to authenticity, extremity of emotion, emotions supervening on his actions, and his status as an 'other' as a result.

refer to a new type of bourgeois public sphere in these emerging modern societies – diverging

from the original meaning of the terms.  In Germany, the term *"Öffentlichkeit"*[19] only emerged

during the eighteenth century, suggesting that the public sphere did not emerge until this time

since there was no name for it until this time (3).  However, Habermas notes that the distinction

between public and private spheres has been in use since ancient Greek and Roman times (3).

This strict distinction between public and private sphere did not carry through to the feudalism of

the middle ages, as the public and private spheres were inextricably intertwined at this time.

However, even in this feudal society attributes of lordship were still referred to as 'public,'

though this 'public' did not refer to a separate realm of a public sphere but rather was a way of

establishing status (7).  As medieval feudal society continued to evolve throughout the fourteenth

and fifteenth centuries, a more rigid distinction between the public and private spheres began to

emerge as lordly representation began to be associated with the public sphere.  Thus, only in the

sixteenth century did the term *"privat"* emerge in Germany, meaning simply "not holding public

office or opinion" (11).  However, as power began to shift away from monarchies into the hands

of the bourgeois public itself, "a new stratum of 'bourgeois people arose which occupied a

central position within the 'public'" (23).  This stratum was occupied primarily by "the officials

of the rulers' administration" - which itself included "jurists, doctors, pastors, officers,

professors, and 'scholars,' who were at the top of a hierarchy reaching down through

schoolteachers and scribes to the 'people'" (23).  Interestingly, though these occupations held a

degree of social status and were called upon to contribute in the instruction and use of the public

reason, such contributions could not be made without being subject to regulation from the

administrative public (25).  This was typical of this time, as even the consumption of bread

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[19] German word closely related to "publicity" meant to refer to the public sphere.

became subject to regulation in times of wheat shortages (24).  However, this intense regulation

eventually led to the formation of a new type of public in which the private, common people

came together in order to challenge the regulation of public reason, asserting their right to use

their own reason towards the latter half of the eighteenth century (25).  It should come as no

surprise, then, that *Werther* exploded into popularity at this time, as his rejection of the public

values of social status and rank in favor of authentic living through following one's own reason

(though it is highly influenced by his sentiments) mirrors this new public sphere's rejection of

the aristocratic rationality that had been imposed on them.


2.4 The Werther Effect: A Look at the Phenomenon of Copy-Cat Suicides

Easily the most discussed aspect of Werther's particular brand of sentimentality is his

sympathetic discussions of suicide - even before Werther has met his beloved Lotte he speaks of

the wretched nature of mundane life, with the only solace coming in knowing that each man is

free to "leave this prison [mundane life] whenever he chooses" (10).  Given Werther's repeated

sympathetic discussions of suicide with Albert (given in the context of Werther defending either

the actual or hypothetical doings of others in the face of Albert's 'rational' criticisms of them)

and the book's extraordinary popularity, the book was placed under close scrutiny as the

possibility of a novel *not* having a didactic purpose was something that had not been encountered

previously.  When Bertell, a twenty year old male who had been rejected by his beloved, was

found on the New Jersey shore with a suicide note, a will, a gun, and a copy of *Werther*, the

possibility of copy-cat suicide – the supposed phenomenon wherein reading about suicide can

influence the decision to commit it - became all too real (Bell 93-4).

     For early Americans, the presence of Goethe's famous sentimental novel was the biggest clue as to why this young man had chosen to take his own life.  Bertell's copy of *Werther* "lay open at the page where Werther, pistols prepared, writes to the woman who has promised herself to another and takes his final leave," and with Bertell's fatal wound resembling Werther's, the assumption that reading about suicide can influence one's decision to commit it was easily confirmed (Bell 93).  Richard Bell, in his article entitled "In Werther's Thrall: Suicide and the Power of Sentimental Reading in Early National America," places this assumption under close scrutiny, examining "why so many adults found it useful to claim that stories like Werther's could steer suggestible young readers toward copy-cat suicide" (94).  This assumption relied heavily on a particular conception of the purpose of literature, and it was not until *Werther* that this paradigm through which literature was viewed and evaluated came to be challenged.

     *Werther* burst onto the American reading landscape right as the 'reading revolution' was hitting its height in early national America, a reading revolution that was centered around a fashion for sentimental literature.  Early patriots and anxious patriarchs saw in the sentimental works of authors such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Samuel Richardson, and Laurence Sterne a "culture of sensibility" that, they hoped, could be replicated in American works so that they could be used to instill moral virtues into young American readers (98).  Thomas Jefferson captures the paradigmatic conception of the purpose of literature in a letter to his cousin Robert Skipwith: "The entertainments of fiction are useful as well as pleasant…  Everything is useful, which contributes to fix in us the principles or practice of virtue.  When an original act of charity or of gratitude, for instance, is presented either to our sight or imagination, we are deeply impressed with its beauty and feel a strong desire of doing charitable and grateful acts also"

(Jefferson qtd in Bell 99).  However, this view of literature was not merely adopted for its possible pragmatic functions.  This view of literature had already been long established, as the Horation principle of *prodesse et delectare* became the predominant view of the poet's purpose.  So long as sentimental works continued to present didactic plots in which young readers could easily identify the proper moral to be gained from it, this view of literature proved quite useful.

However, this view of literature proved to be problematic when *Werther* came to American shores and exploded into popularity.  The same concerned patriarchs who had once heralded the reading revolution for its potential to inject virtues of chastity and male self-discipline into young readers were now denouncing overly sentimental literature for its ability to "skew young readers' delicate sensibilities to the point of perversion, encouraging them to wallow in exquisite fictional tragedies while ignoring those around them truly in need of their sympathy" (100).  The novel's absurd popularity only strengthened these fears, as many young readers "learned [Werther's] speeches as they learned Hamlet's," the fear that reading about suicide could influence the decision to commit seemed only natural (Minois qtd in Bell 95).  Further, the novel seemed to create a "'Werther-mania': readers dressed like Werther, read what Werther reads, [and] [spoke] like Werther in his signature emphatic and sentimental style" (Frey and Martin 218).  However, as Goethe himself reminds us repeatedly in *My Life: Poetry and Truth*, *Werther* was not meant to be received in the same way as the more didactic sentimental works which preceded it – rather, Goethe described his work as an intellectual one, lamenting over the fact that he could not force his readers to "receive an intellectual work intellectually" (Goethe 118).  For *Werther* was "an experiment in realism," and as such it did not ask of its readers that they emulate its hero's tragic footsteps (Frey and Martyn 220).  Instead, Goethe's

purpose was simply to present a "true depiction" of modern German life, in an attempt to "illuminate and instruct" (118).  In this way, *Werther* is simply a result of the cultural transformations that were taking place at the time in Germany, and any sympathetic reactions to it should be viewed as merely the result of these cultural transformations taking shape and forging a new type of modern individual – thus, the "Werther Effect" might be more aptly termed the "Modernity Effect" in that the effects of the cultural transformations taking place made it the case that Goethe could rightly claim that the following disposition was so widespread:

> In such an element and in such surroundings, with hobbies and studies of this kind, tormented by ungratified passions, never externally stimulated to perform any meaningful actions, our only prospect the need to endure in a sluggish, vacuous, bourgeois existence – we grew accustomed, in a sort of petulant arrogance, to the idea that when life no longer suited us, we could always take leave of it any way we pleased. (115)

In this way, Goethe has shown with *Werther* that a rejection of the bourgeois public sphere as the only method of attaining authentic meaning in life will inevitably lead one into a search for authenticity in other realms, and in the absence of another worthy, authentic object of pursuit this may have fatal consequences.  However, it is not the literature which is to blame for the fatal consequences, rather it is the demands of modern society insisting upon its subjects that the bourgeois public sphere is the only method of attaining authenticity in one's life and a lack of authentic alternatives that is to blame.  Thus, in composing *Werther* Goethe made himself out to be the first scene writer through providing a true depiction of the mundane nature of modern German life.

**3 Musical Case Study: Counterparts**

3.1 Scene Music as a New Form of Sentimentalism

Having seen how this perfect storm of sentiments has manifested itself in *Werther* as the only method of attaining an authentic life in a modern society which emphasizes the importance of the public sphere, let us now shift our attention to how this perfect storm of sentiments manifests itself in scene culture's rejection of the postmodern crisis of affectivity (described in section 1.2 above). Though the perfect storm may be the same, the way in which scene culture displays this structure of feeling is anything but, preferring blunt, aggression filled expressions over Werther's romanticized displays of emotion. Furthermore, scene culture tends to take an antagonistic approach towards the mainstream society which has ostracized them for attempting to find authenticity in a postmodern society which pushes its subjects towards the conclusion that no such authenticity can be found. However, scene culture shares Werther's conviction that authentic living can only come through faithful adherence to the 'perfect storm of sentiments' described above, in the process rejecting the apathetic structure of feeling which dominates postmodernity. Additionally, writers of scene music share Goethe's conviction that the purpose of writing is to "illuminate and instruct" by offering honest (authentic) depictions of postmodern capitalist life (Goethe 118). In this way, scene culture has emerged as a new type of sentimental literature in that it utilizes Goethe-ian techniques in its criticism of postmodernity.[20] In order to draw these elements of scene culture out, an analysis of the affective emotions at work in a

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[20] The comparison with Werther goes even further, as the manner in which scene music has been received is nearly identical to the way in which young readers received *Werther*, with scene-agers dressing in the style of popular vocalists and imitating their harsh screaming style. This has led to a sort of "Scene Effect" in which mainstream culture tends to assume that the aggressive nature of the music is mirrored in the dispositions of its listeners. While this may be true, it will turn out that members of scene culture whom are as angry as the music they listen to are that way due to their awareness of the structure of feeling dominating mainstream society in the same way Brendan Murphy will be shown to have such an awareness.

highly sentimental scene band, Counterparts, follows.  As will be shown throughout the next sub-section, Counterparts emerges as the quintessential scene band due to its ability to draw out all of the aspects of the perfect storm with equal vehemence, so an analysis of these affective emotions as they are displayed in the lyrical content of Counterparts' songs will provide an analysis of scene culture as a whole – for though most scene bands display one or two aspects of this perfect storm with the same vehemence that Counterparts displays all of them, scene culture, when taken as whole, displays all of the aspects of the perfect storm (even if Counterparts were not included in this picture).  Now, let us turn to the lyrical content of Counterparts music.

3.2 Counterparts, the Quintessential Scene Band: The Perfect Storm Unpacked (Again)

"The Current Will Carry Us," the second album released by Counterparts, features lyrical content which emphasizes Brendan Murphy's[21] search for authenticity in a postmodern society which advocates that its subjects live inauthentically (according to Murphy, at least).  The first track on the album, entitled "The Disconnect,"[22] describes Murphy's struggle to literally disconnect from the constraints of postmodern capitalist society[23] and those who choose to accept its path to inauthentic living.[24]  Murphy lays out what he perceives to be the dominant structure of feeling plainly in this song, emphasizing the all-encompassing greed that postmodern capitalism forces upon its subjects, claiming that "all of our lives we've been told what to

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[21]  Vocalist and lyricist for Counterparts.
[22]  Though I will not be using every song from both "The Current Will Carry Us" and "The Difference Between Hell and Home," I have provided the lyrics from each song on each album at the end of this work.  This is merely for transparency, showing that I am not simply taking lyrics out of context.
[23]  At times I will simply refer to this as mainstream culture, consumer culture, or even postmodern society.  These are all meant to refer to the same thing.
[24]  In many ways this is a concise formulation of what scene culture's search for authenticity amounts to.  Due to this, all of the aspects of the perfect storm come up in this song, though they are not displayed as clearly as they are in songs which focus on only one or two aspects.

believe. 'Nothing is perfect' so what's the point of purpose?" ("The Disconnect"). Even from this first line Murphy's awareness of the seen-it-all cynicism that gives rise to the crisis of affectivity at work in postmodern society is made clear, as he sees in this cynicism a propensity to be led into a lifestyle based around greed and consumption – for if there is no point in purpose than all that is left is greed.[25] Rather than give into this cynicism, Murphy vehemently rejects it, declaring that "the line that separates the weak from us who truly care, is one I don't intend to cross," in the process simultaneously criticizing postmodern subjects for their apathy and greed as well as asserting his own capacity for more true feeling ("The Disconnect"). Murphy emphasizes that there is a capacity for more true perception entailed in this capacity for more true feeling, as he chastises mainstream culture, urging them to "open up [their] eyes, and open up [their] mind" so that they might be "exposed to a world as cold as those who are left to populate it" ("The Disconnect"). The guiding thought behind such a claim seems to be that the greed which dominates mainstream consumer culture blinds those who give into it, causing them to focus on inauthentic objects of pursuit. Murphy admits his own struggle with the demands of mainstream culture, as "two decades spent swallowing lie after lie has sparked a fire in [his] heart, and the time has come to spread the flame" ("The Disconnect"). Here we get the first glimpse of what causes Murphy to write in the manner that he does, for to simply "shield our eyes" as mainstream culture continues to infect its subjects with apathy and greed would be to "blind mankind" – thus authentic living comes in the form of ripping the blinders off the faces of the masses by showing a true depiction of life ("Outlier"). However, Murphy ends the song on a negative note, reacting against those who claim that his way of living is inauthentic by

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[25] "The heart of man beats but only in greedy hands" - Murphy's assumption that greed (and apathy) are the only emotions available to postmodern subjects is made clear throughout the song.

screaming back at them that he "never thought [he] would need to justify a reason to continue in this life I lead. I fucking hate the world. I fucking hate myself" ("The Disconnect"). In these final lines the true angst of scene culture comes out, as Murphy makes it clear in this song that he has found a method of authentic living through spreading an honest depiction of life in postmodern society, yet "the world" continues to shout back at him that this mode of living is not worth living.

In the third track on the album, entitled "The Constant," Murphy offers a way of dealing with this particular type of angst by refusing to be deterred by a mainstream culture which constantly reminds him that his definition of success is mistaken – thereby making himself out to be a "constant." Though the song begins with Murphy's acceptance of the fact that his definition of success will never align with that which is fixed by mainstream culture, this acceptance really amounts to a form of rejection of the mainstream definition of success in favor of his own. This is emphasized throughout the song, as Murphy claims that "though [he's] turned down a chance at fame and fortune, [he] know[s] that there is no greater payment than this" and that he "couldn't be happier" ("The Constant"). What is interesting about Murphy's depiction of his rejection of the mainstream definition of success is his inability to "explain the path [he's] chosen," suggesting that his sentiments supervene on his actions in a particularly Werther-ian fashion ("The Constant"). Even more interestingly, Murphy is not deterred by a lack of monetary success due to following the path he's chosen. For though "[he] may die poor, at least [his] life had meaning" ("The Constant"). It is at this point that we find Murphy's most scathing critique of postmodern consumer culture, as it leads to a life based upon living for the sake of living. His response is shockingly simple: "there's more to life than living" ("The Constant"). The force of

this near tautological statement is that there seems to be an implied "mere" before "living," and given Murphy's rejection of the mainstream definition of success which is built around the notions of fame and fortune gained through capitalist means, it seems fair to claim that producing so that one has the chance to continue to consume (for no reason other than for the sake of consuming) is a form of mere living. Thus the only way to "truly be alive" is through finding some source of meaning in life, one that is not dependent upon consumption for the sake of consumption.

The fourth song on the album, entitled "MMVII," shows a more aggressive side to Murphy's lyrics, as he lashes out at the society which has ostracized him for living an authentic life amidst a society which all but requires its subjects to commit to an inauthentic mode of living. It is in this song that we find the reason for Murphy's claim that he "fucking hates the world" given just a few songs earlier ("The Disconnect"). For though he may be fine with living a life according to a different definition of success than the mainstream one, he is not fine with simply letting mainstream culture think that its definition of success is the right one, going so far as to demand respect from the society which dismisses him. This emphasizes what is particularly authentic about Murphy's endeavor, as he sees his efforts to provide an honest depiction of postmodern life as fruitful work, work that "cannot be measured with a dollar figure" because "there's a much deeper meaning than that" ("MMVII"). However, Murphy's work is dangerous for those who accept the values of mainstream consumer culture, as he states clearly that his goal is to "make you question yourself" so that you might "realize that your [bourgeois] existence has meant nothing" ("MMVII"). This is perhaps why he feels that he has been oppressed by mainstream culture, but what is interesting is that he expresses his

dissatisfaction with this oppression through excessively sentimental terms, claiming that he "hates you more than you could ever fucking know" ("MMVII").

The following song on the album, ironically entitled "The Optimist," continues this superlative mode of expression in giving an explicit formulation of Murphy's conviction to offering a true depiction of postmodern life as a method of authentic living. This song is rather short and straightforward, with Murphy simply claiming that he "will not lie to others" nor himself - the implication being that to be optimistic would be to lie to others and himself ("The Optimist"). However, the song ends more optimistically than it first appears, as Murphy feels convinced that he (and those like him) will be able to "turn [their] hatred into something to be proud of" by making "life worth living" ("The Optimist"). Murphy's conviction to authentic living is furthered in the next song on the album, entitled "Jumping Ship," in which he claims that he "will never allow [him]self to exchange all [his] morals for acceptance" and that he "would rather isolate [him]self than be a walking definition of travesty" - showing that even though his conviction to authentic living has made him an 'other' in the eyes of mainstream culture, he would rather be an 'other' than give up such a conviction ("Jumping Ship"). Though Murphy is confident that he and those like him "will be remembered," and in that way find at least one aspect of the source of meaning in life, "Uncertainty" shows that this search for meaning does not come without anxiety ("Jumping Ship"). In "Uncertainty," Murphy expresses the anxiety felt when faced with the task of finding authentic modes of living in a society which is convinced that there are no authentic objects of pursuit available, claiming that he is "scared to death" of his future ("Uncertainty").

The third album released by Counterparts, entitled "The Difference Between Hell and

Home," picks up where "Uncertainty" leaves off, offering a depiction of authentic living through vehement displays of the perfect storm of sentiments while simultaneously lamenting over the difficulty of finding a mode of authentic living is not based around such a perfect storm. This is due to Murphy's awareness that such vehement displays tend to hinder his own mental health, but his conviction that only authentic modes of living are worth living makes it the case that he could not do otherwise – in essence claiming that excessive sentimentality (even when it leads to thoughts of suicide or actual suicide) is a far better alternative to accepting the postmodern structure of feeling based upon apathy. Additionally, Murphy claims with this album that being labeled an 'other' due to his seeking out authenticity in this manner is a far better alternative to giving into such a structure of feeling.

The opening track on this album, entitled "Lost," immediately establishes the tone of the album, with Murphy claiming that "As far back as [he] can remember / The failure was always there" ("Lost"). The next stanza explains what this "failure" is, as Murphy laments over the fact that he is "being bled dry by [his] conviction" to spend his "life trying to find [his] confidence" though he "found absolutely nothing" ("Lost"). Though exactly what finding this confidence would amount to is not made explicitly clear, given the vehement search for authenticity detailed in the previous album it seems fair to assume that this confidence is something like a confidence in knowing that the life he has chosen to live is truly authentic. The next stanza seems to confirm such an assumption, as Murphy is left to lament that "life is a lost cause," suggesting that the search for authenticity in something other than a vehement adherence to a structure of feeling based around excessive sentimentality, including the ugly feeling of hatred, has become so overbearing and difficult that he is prepared to give up on it all together. However, the final

stanza seems to be a reminder to himself that even a structure of feeling based on hatred is preferable to one based on apathy, as he claims that "When you're devoid of feeling / You just do as your told / Hatred is exhausting / But it's all I'll ever know" ("Lost"). Murphy's acceptance of hatred as a dominant structure of feeling within his own life as a welcome alternative to an apathetic one is particularly telling, particularly when viewed in conjunction with the fifth track on this album, "Witness," which details the toll such a structure of feeling has taken on his life. This song, the only single to come off of this album, depicts Murphy's struggles with hiding his depression that comes as a result of living a life based around excessive sentimentality, particularly when that sentimentality tends to manifest itself in a constant state of misery. It is in this song that Murphy's suicidal tendencies come out, and, like Werther, Murphy is left to only wish that he could be more than "just fine" though he knows that he is so constituted that he could not feel other than he does, so he is doomed to count "down the minutes / Until [he's] miserable again" ("Witness"). At the same time that Murphy laments over his own inability to feel otherwise, he also laments over the fact that mainstream culture is incapable of dealing with citizens whom feel anything but positive emotions through his claim that he has "the whole world convinced of [his] contentment / No truth in this / I've lost count of all the times / I've made it home alive... / And wished I hadn't" ("Witness"). This seems to be the impetus for his repeated demands for someone to "expose [him] for all that [he is]," as the entire song is devoted to feeling as if one is living behind a mask by pretending he actually enjoys living.

Thus, through his honest depiction of the perfect storm of sentiments as they have manifested themselves in his own life in both "The Current Will Carry Us" and "The Difference Between Hell and Home" Brendan Murphy has made Counterparts into the quintessential scene

band.

## Conclusion: The Philosophy behind Sentimental Suicide

Through tracing the structure of feeling present in the perfect storm of sentiments as it is displayed in the lyrical content of Counterparts and *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, the following conviction seems to be the primary impetus for both Goethe's and Murphy's eventual dealings with sentimental suicide: to die authentically is a welcome alternative to living inauthentically. Though this conviction seems problematic in its own right, it can lead to a life based on authenticity if one is so lucky as to find an object worthy of such authentic pursuit. However, when this conviction is coupled with a major shift in cultural standards of authentic living, if an individual's own standards of authentic living do not coincide with the shift in the cultural standards it can have fatal consequences. Thus, with Werther we are able to see a young man who rejects the emerging standard of authenticity based on social rank in the public sphere, preferring to find his authenticity in nature and a propensity to feel more deeply. However, the postmodern society in which scene culture finds itself is even more tumultuous, as it tends to claim that either there is no authentic mode of living available to its subjects or that the only authentic mode of living available is one based upon an apathetic structure of feeling. In rejection of this, scene culture lives a life centered around the search for true authenticity, utilizing excessive displays of sentimentality in the process. Though such a search may result in a propensity towards suicidal thoughts and actions, the guiding thought behind scene culture's constant search for authenticity is that if one is able to overcome these suicidal tendencies that come about as a result of this, the authenticity of life that comes at the end of such a search is more than worth the depression one must wade through in order to get there. Further, even if such an authenticity of life continues to place one in a state of depression, even this is a welcome

alternative to the apathy dominating mainstream culture.  For the guiding thought running

through scene culture is that through honest portrayals of these ugly sentiments one will be able

to find the ultimate source of authenticity – the immortalization of expression.  Scene culture

claims that through honest expression its members will be able to "find [their] mark and make it"

so that they too "will be remembered" ("Soil) ("Jumping Ship").  For though  "I may die poor, at

least my life has meaning" ("The Constant").

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All lyrics taken from darklyrics.com

## Appendix

## The Current Will Carry Us

"The Disconnect"

All of our lives we've been told what to believe. "Nothing is perfect" so what's the point of purpose? The line that separates the weak from us who truly care, is one I don't intend to cross. The heart of man beats but only in greedy hands, and it seems that most are still content. Where most are comfortable accepting insignificance, we strive to find the effort within. If you open up your eyes, and open up your mind you we be exposed to a world as cold as those who are left to populate it. Two decades spent swallowing lie after lie has sparked a fire in my heart, and the time has come to spread the flame. We can't continue wasting time, day after day trying to find a new means of escape. We do this day after day. And I can't face the disconnect. I'll shed the dead weight and rise. I never thought that I would need to justify a reason to continue in this life I lead. I fucking hate the world, I fucking hate myself. I fucking swore I'd never feel like this.


"I Am No One"

Every fucking day, I have to deal with the pressure I put on myself, to outdo myself. But I can't ask for help, I can't admit I'm weak. I'm going back on my words, I'm going back on who I used to be. I can't take it anymore. Every day I wage a war on myself because I'd rather die than let this win over me. I can't let this win over me. How can I be expected to help anyone else, when I can't even help myself? Call me a hypocrite and I'll be the first one to agree. I am no longer the prophet I once claimed to be. I'm stuck between trying to find where I stand, and what it is I stand for. I am no one.

"The Constant"

I will graciously accept that my life's work, whether it be
in the past, the present, or the future will be overshadowed by those around me
with a different definition of "success." Though I can't explain the path I've
chosen, all I know is I'm right where I need to be. And though I've turned down
a chance at fame and fortune, I know that there is no greater payment than
this. And I'm so fucking far from the life I'm supposed to lead, and the man
I'm supposed to be and I couldn't be happier. And I will remain a constant, I
know where I stand, and I refuse to let their selfishness take control of who I
am. While I may die poor, at least my life had meaning, there's more to life
than living, and I truly feel alive. And I know that when I die, there will be
others who feel the same way ready to take my place. This is our song of
protest. I promise you that nothing is slowing us down. While I may die poor,
at least my life had meaning, there's more to life than living and I truly feel
alive. And I know that when I die, there will be others who feel the same way

ready to take my place. I will laugh in the face of those who tell me different. Even with both of my feet planted firmly on the ground, I am free to move in my own direction. I will remain a constant. I know where I stand.

"MMVII"

Why do I need to justify my opinion, after all that I've seen and done? And year after year, we give our everything to get nothing in return. The time has come for things to change. We don't need your adoration, but we demand your respect. I will not allow anyone the opportunity to deny half a decade of labor. The places we've been, the faces we've seen, the months spent far from home. This is what moves us. This is what we've grown accustom to. What we will leave behind can not be measured in a dollar figure. There's a much deeper meaning than that. I can't wait until the day when we've surpassed everything that gave you a false sense of importance. I want you to question yourself. I want you to watch you slip away. I want you to realize that your existence has meant nothing. I hate you more than you could ever fucking know. And I hate you for making me feel like this. I know deep down that I'm a good person, but my patience is wearing thin. The best retaliation I can think of, would be to let you know that for once in my life, I'm truly happy. I'm more than content with who and where I am. Your oppression has had no effect. I don't need to justify my opinion after everything we've been through. And year after year, we give our everything and what we receive in return, I can't explain with words. I'm so fucking thankful that I made it to where I am today. (I watched the world upon your shoulders, and from these heights it's so far down.)

"The Optimist"

I never asked for anyone to listen, and I never asked for anyone to take my words to heart. I've let myself become a target based on nothing more than expression. I will not lie to others, and I won't lie to myself. If you're searching for safety you can find it somewhere else, and I won't mind. I've never seen myself as optimistic, so this should come as no surprise. No one feels good forever. Not even me. But this doesn't give us an excuse to allow ourselves to become useless like the rest. We will turn our hatred into something to be proud of. We will make life worth living.

"Jumping Ship"

As time passes by
I feel everything changing but me
I will not feel the sting of defeat
I've watched days become months
become years
and I've lost all faith in progression
I will never allow myself to exchange all my morals for acceptance
If this is truly where I belong
I'll fucking be here until the end of time
I've watched everyone around me jump ship
and I hope they're left to sink
The current will carry us
I am proud of all that I've become
and I'm well aware that I have steered myself in the right direction
And life is your's to destroy
I just can't respect your decision
I would rather isolate myself than be a walking definition of travesty
I watched you do away with everything
I would love nothing more than to watch this world swallow you whole
You were the catalyst for your downfall
But where the rest have failed
we are bound to succeed
And mark my fucking words
as long as we are breathing
we will overcome
The integrity that we emanate day-to-day is unparalleled
and our efforts will not go unnoticed
We will be remembered

"Pedestal"

I'm looking back on those I once looked up to, and I can't help
but feel that I'm looking down. Everyone I've ever admired has left me with
nothing. Not even a memory. I remember growing up, and yearning to be just like
you. It pains me to admit that I held you in such a high regard, as if my life
would mean nothing without your approval. But now I see the error of my ways.
All that time spent searching for myself in someone else. I think it's safe to
say that I've become everything I wanted to be. And no one can take that from
me. All of my heroes have failed me, but I won't ever fail myself. I can't
believe how naive I used to be when I never really needed anyone. All of my
heroes have failed me, but I won't ever fail myself.

"Thank God"

I want to thank you for never being there. Your absence has
forced me to find my own way. While others are led through life with a
blindfold, I can see clearly, the rain will wash me away. I reject the thought
of a god when all we see is the work of an ill-fated world. I reject a liar's
cross. Who am I to say what I believe is right for the masses? I just know it's
right for me. For this I have secured my place in hell, but every day I face is
my own heaven in the making. What do you believe in? What do you think is
right? Centuries have passed, the voice of reason is still being suppressed.
Salvation dances in front of their faces, but they're too blind to see. I
reject the thought of a God, when all we see is the work of an ill-fated world.
I reject a liar's cross. Thank you for never being there. Thank God for never
being there.

"Uncertainty"

Though I look forward to my future, just know I'm scared to death. After all is said and done, I
won't have a clue what to do next. Will I struggle to find the answer? Will I take an easy way
out? Or will I find the strength inside to carry on? My greatest fear is amounting to nothing. I
fucking hate the fact that I feel no sense of security. But more importantly, I hate the fact that I
can't confide in myself. It feels like nothing good will stay, unless I stay the same. I need to find
a way to dissolve the uncertainty. This is who I am, and this is who I'll always be. I refuse to be
afraid, of something I don't know to be true. I need to pick myself back up, I need to find a way
to keep all the worry from head. Before it sends me to an early grave. I refuse to let fear define
me.

"Sinking"

This is the only thing I have worth holding onto. I have condensed my past to fit the lines on the pages that no one will ever see. But still I fight, day after day. 'Cause this is all I've ever wanted my life to be and I push everything I've ever loved away to keep myself from sinking. If I find the bad in everything, I can never be attached. I'm trying to find a balance, trying to find my way, and every choice I've ever made brings me anywhere but home. But I've welcomed sacrifice with open arms, and I will never regret my decision. This is the only thing I have worth holding on to. This is the only thing that makes me feel alive. I've simply been searching for the right place to rest my head. I'm searching for common ground between all that I am, and all that you need me to be. I've seen a future and want nothing to do with it. A constant campaign to impress those who never ever cared. I'm struggling but I won't allow myself to sink. You know where to find me. I keep my composure and assume my place, in front of the people I love most. You're the reason why we're here. I'm struggling, but I won't allow myself to sink.

"Reflection"

I've never told this to anyone. I've just tried to move past.
But lately it seems that my insecurities have got the best of me. And I'm no
longer in control. No one should ever have to feel like this. To feel like me.
Even though the good I have outweighs the bad, the bad is what's leaving me
with sleepless nights. I spend most of my time arguing with my own reflection.
For no apparent reason. And it may seem as if I have all the answers, but I'm
just as lost as you. I've spend the past few years trying to overcome my own
misery, but these sort of things take time, and I'm running out of mine. So I
will pray to a God that isn't there, to a world that doesn't hear, to anyone
who will listen, to keep me from becoming everything I promised myself that I
would never be. I do not deserve this.

## **The Difference Between Hell and Home**

"Lost"

As far back as I can remember
The failure was always there
It was the only real companion that I have ever had
Not meant to live like this

Consciousness is nothing more than a vicious cycle
And I am being bled dry by my conviction
I've spent my life trying to find my confidence
And found absolutely nothing

Life is a lost cause
Too weak to carry on
I wish I'd never met who I once was
Not meant to live like this

Pursuing the love in all that I have lost
But I have left myself neglected
Deserted from the start
Longing for a chance to wander
A chance to chase my aspiration

When you're devoid of feeling
You just do as you're told
Hatred is exhausting
But it's all I'll ever know

"Ghost"

Born of two; raised by four
I guess I took it all for granted
And only three remain

Even though you're wounded
I know that you're still here
I don't blame you
You just can't face the change

We spend our golden years as living ghosts
Caught in a constant state of purgatory
We are only burdened by our memories
Until the day they cease to exist
And we follow shortly after

Although I wonder if at any time
Our minds fell upon the same plane
I know they did
I just wish I had a chance to go back and appreciate it
But we'll always have the winter
And the snow that got you trapped behind the glass
You may be only a shell of the man that you used to be
But I love you just the same
And I will until the day you're gone

I just never know if I'm communicating with you or the disease
And even though I curse the idea of an afterlife
I still hope you're taken care of
You deserve to be at peace
Please don't forget my face
I won't forget to remember you

"Debris"

Everything ends
At least that's what we hope for
Plagued by our past
And we're doomed to repeat ourselves

Afraid of the thoughts that dance in revolutions
And circle the mind like a snake
Binding me
I'm just trying to feel something

Cold and stale
Searching for warmth inside of every promise wasted
You wrap yourself around me
But I can only sense your presence
You're nothing but a carcass

I've never felt more alone than I did on those nights
I spent watching you sleep
You're the furthest thing from me
And you've been there from the start

An empty shell
You're vacant and it scares me to death
One by one
I watched them leave me behind like living debris
Fortunately, I know that I'm not worth it
In my purest form, I was never good enough for anyone
Why did I think that this time it'd be different?

I came bearing only the beat of my heart
And the best of my intentions

I tried my hardest but I couldn't make you feel a fucking thing

"Outlier"

I live with the awareness of my own seclusion
Existence fueled by separation
A war I will not win
Embracing only alienation
To suffer is to abandon the only home I've ever had

Outlier
I don't belong here
The present state of existence acts as a refuge for the weak
To shield our eyes is to blind mankind
Refusal to secede
Inhabiting a world of filth which others have condemned
We won't live our lives for them

Human hatred is my second nature
This is the root of my isolation
I am what I am
And I am an outcast

Don't look for me in the clouds
When I am beneath you nowhere to be found
Submerged in apathy
It's just becoming hard to care
And I am nothing

I have grown sick of the sound of my heartbeat
And while the whole world breathes in unison
My lungs are my shield
To reject the world around me

I am what I am
And I am an outcast
I am what I am
And I am an outcast
This is the root of my isolation
And I'm starting to lose all control
And I am an outcast

"Witness"

Expose me for all that I am
The man behind the masquerade
I am my own false witness

Fact resides solely in the depths of my mind
And will I ever really let it come to surface?
You only see what I want you to see
And you believe all that you're told

Serenity is a beautiful hoax, a liar
I have the whole world convinced of my contentment
No truth in this
I've lost count of all the times I've made it home alive...
And wished I hadn't

Expose me for all that I am
The man behind the masquerade
I am my own false witness
I'm left to conquer the mountains in my mind
And I am my maker

Life is what's killing me
I hate the fact that I'm just fine
Forever seeking anything to take responsibility
Life is what's killing me
I hate the fact that I'm alive
Forever searching for my scapegoat because
I refuse to face reality

At least I can say I tried to cherish
Every single day when I woke up and didn't want to die
I'd work my hands to the bone
Trying to stay suspended in those specific seconds
But I know I'm just counting down the minutes
Until I'm miserable again

"Decay"

The grave welcomes you with open arms
Last light escapes, last breath remains
Circling the body
Brushing past the skin and bone
It cradles you, your holy manger

Born into ruin, we feel withdraw
Death is your procreator, your predecessor
From your decay grows a beautiful garden
The stalks caress your failure
And the petals bring you closer to eternity

Pray for your rebirth
Pray for your chance to bloom
The heart starts and stops
The mind disconnects
As flowers, we grace the earth with our presence
The tide rises and turns
And we simply expire

Over-saturated
Our lungs fill with the essence of the universe
Until we feel the gentle kiss of dawn draw the water from our lungs
And we can breathe easy
Like night and day

We have never met aching for one another
We aim for congregation
You are my prey
You are the martyr
The blight takes its toll and our bodies grow black
Wilted, we fade away rotted from the root
We exchange our stem for legs
We blossom into our bodies
And the process has been reset

Welcome to your new home

"Compass"

The weight came and went and took my will to live
Spoiled by defeat, forced to drown in what's left of me
That's when breathing became routine
And I could feel myself fading

No direction, I am a compass
Constantly spinning
Constantly searching for the end
Never reaching our destination
But the goal was never when
Or where
Or who...
It was only you

I appeared in your arms as if I had been born there
You promised you'd never let me go
But I don't know what I believe anymore
Affection allowed me to let the light in
The fear made me whole again
Help me rebuild my broken bones
Help me regain my sanity
But with caution always present
Our pasts manifest themselves
And we act as if this is what we deserve
But I refuse to fail again

I'd force my ghost to write your name in the flowers on my grave
I watched the world give up on me

I used to spend my nights praying for air in my bloodstream
Now I long to feel your breath pass throughout my arteries
The goal was never when
Or where
Or who...
It was only you

I appeared in your arms as if I had been born there
You promised you'd never let me go
But I don't know what I believe anymore
Fill me with your faith and let me leave

I'm scratching at my skin to take my mind

Off the absence we've created
The lines blur together like the veins in my arms
And I wish I wasn't so alone
You are the difference between hell and home

"Wither"

I am more than familiar with feeling empty
The conduit, I allow myself to drain
My mind is the trench in which I will be buried
Watch me wither away

Put me our of my misery
I can only find solace in sleep
A sub-conscious sanctuary
I am longing to be set free
Yet I am the one who holds the key
I am the one who holds the key

A lifetime spent trying to place the blame
On anyone or anything
This is not who I am
I am not who I used to be
Set me free

"Cursed"

We ache to be transparent
We run from the "open" arms;
The facade of something greater than ourselves
And we're left to coexist with infestation

Our history is cursed
Through the past, present, and future
If they're created in his image
Then his image is disgusting...
And even he can't wipe you clean

How can someone see so far ahead
While they're spending every day on their knees?
Is the view from above really worth the judgement passed?
The fear, the lies, and the manipulation?
A doctrine bathed in ignorance
And written in the blood of the enslaved

And I have never lost my faith
I just never had any to begin with
I would sooner die for my sins
Than pray for my forgiveness
Sew my palms together
And crucify the thoughts in my mind

Awaiting Armageddon
Neglecting to exercise the demons in your head
You're "born again,"
But you're better off dead
Conversion or a casualty
Renounce and save yourself

Is the view from Heaven really worth all of the judgement passed?
The pestilence that you've inflicted
And the souls of all the loved ones we've lost?
We are the sheep that rose against the shepherd
We are the ones you led astray
Embrace the light in your heart
Not the one in the sky

Saints and sinners rejoice
We will all rot together

"Slave"

If I allow the light to leave my eyes
I will never see again
The thoughts disintegrate into cognitive pollution
Abandoning my body, renouncing my existence
Show me the meaning of happiness

Trapped inside this nightmare
But I haven't slept for days
I am a slave
A slave to what I cannot see
Are we being strung along or are we just strung out?

The quest to be clairvoyant:
You are your own black hole
How much longer do I really have
When I wish every breath would be my last?

Your words like rope
Tied around my throat
Remove the earth beneath me
Watch my spirit sink

"Soil"

Tragedy is all we have in common
And at times we allow it to swallow us whole
Drawing the marrow from our misfortunes
To ignite the fire that's inside
Inhale the smoke from the burn that leaves you breathless
Breathing life into the lifeless
Dragging them into the sun and exposing them as apparitions

But is there dignity in living as an entity?
"You could have made history and we are already forgetting about you."
Humanity is poison
And we are lost without a cure
So stop your heart and start the healing process

I am not fit to walk among you
But I don't want to end my life
And just know that if I knew of any common ground
I'd leave here now
And I would find a home that I could die in
Just to say I tried to rest in peace

Erase me from your memory
The ones we love will let us down
And the rats will feed off of our failure
Eventually, this is something we must accept

The world moves on without us
We leave only footprints that fade away in time
Walk with fire and save yourself from vagrancy
We leave our spirits to retrace our steps

You are your memorial
Find your mark and make it
The soil is the last thing we ingest
We watch our ashes scatter
You are your own memorial
Find your mark and make it