Goethe, his love rivals and evidence of a generalized anxiety disorder

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Abstract – In 1787, Goethe fell in love with an Italian girl, who he met in Italy while he was on a long journey. He enjoyed her company. From the very beginning the poet knew that his sweetheart was already engaged and he was afraid that his behavior was unseemly. It was not the first time that the existence of a rival placed him in emotional difficulties and it would not be the last.

Introduction – Can a genius fall in love? Of course, he can. Goethe travelled widely over Italy and there met a lovely girl. New and old feelings swirled through his mind. As Freud wrote, many artists invest their sexual instincts in their own works. Knowing Goethe's biography, we can try to establish links with his work. Often biographers tend to idealize their heros; but these heros are human beings who can share something, however slightly, with us. Their works stimulate our emotions while their lives may teach us something.

Background - Johann Wolfgang Goethe was a beloved child. His mother's love was very important to him. He had several brothers and sisters, some of whom died at an early age, as was usual at that time. He was born on August 28th 1749 in Frankfurt-on-Main, a free and imperial town where, since 1254, the German King was elected.

Childhood and Youth - In his autobiography, that he began writing when he was 60, the poet described an incident that occurred after the birth of one of his brothers, when the poet was 3. Concerning this event, in 1917 Freud published a papers entitled “A Memory of Childhood from 'Poetry and Truth' by Goethe”. What did happen? Goethe threw some little plates and earthenware vessels out of the front hall of his home into the street, and the neighbor’s children on the other side noticed and encouraged him to continue. That's all. However, Freud placed great interpretive value on this event. He believed Goethe got really angry about the birth of his little rival and symbolically threw him out of home. The little neighbors, obviously, participated with some of their own fantasies. Loved children agree to share their parents’ love with difficulty. In 1776, Goethe obtained a degree in law and, in the same, year moved to Wetzlar, where had enrolled as articled clerk at the Holy Roman Empire's court. There he fell in love with Ms. Charlotte Buff, who was already engaged to a legal clerk. In “The Sorrows of Werther”, a novel he published two years later, Goethe gave an imaginary account of another event in his life. Werther, the hero of the story, courts the girl in such a querulous and mournful way, that she prefers to stay with her previous fiancé. At a certain point, Werther starts reciting some Ossianic poems to her and the girl, not wrongly, decides to leave him. Werther decides to revenge himself for the girl and to do so, commits suicide. Because of a second rival in love, Werther-Goethe again behaves

like this. In 1776, Goethe befriended another Charlotte, the lady-in-waiting to Baroness von Stein, who will never become his wife but will keep him company until 1789.

Italian Love - In 1787, the poet was 39, single and was traveling all over Italy, as he described in one of his books. In October of that year he lived in Castel Gandolfo, near Rome. One day, in a group, he meets a nice, friendly girl from Milan. She does not like her school and resents her teachers who do not want her and the other girls in the class to write love letters. They may read only prayer books and they are not taught foreign languages. Immediately, the German poet starts to teach the Italian girl English. Then the couple went for dinner and the girl sits down near the poet. The poet talks in German with his fellow countrywoman, Mrs. Angelika Kaufmann, and the amused girl listens to them. A smiling girl, about time too! After dinner, some women who were there ask the poet to join in their conversation. During the conversation the poet hears that the girl, whom he just met, has a boyfriend. Again a third man, a new rival; and the poet begins to treat the girl with respectful indifference.

Roman Holidays - The poet leaves for Rome and, in December, he learns that the girl's engagement has broken up. In some ways the poet could fast foresee this event, but he was afraid to consider it. The girl falls ill with a high fever and the poet feels guilty. He daydreams about old fine monuments ruined by time. However that girl had nothing to do with the old, rather she was something new that risked being ruined. He continued to inquire about the girl's health. In February 1788 he becomes irritated with someone who asks him about the best Italian translation of his “Werther” because at that time, he was working on an Italian translation of that book. Irritation is not a good sign. After the Rome carnival had finished, on his way home the poet meets a chariot with the ubiquitous Fraulein Angelika and, surprise, the beautiful Milanese girl. The girl has recovered and is convalescing at Mrs. Kaufmann's home. Obviously Angelika is not a dangerous rival so the relieved poet gives up the two women to their new life. At that time Goethe was a mature and established poet. His artistry had fraud fulfillment in his work. His humanity has fulfilled his life. His work helps us to understand the reasons of his behavior.

Concluding Remarks - The poet is reaching a turning point. The year he came back to Weimar he met the florist, Christiane Vulpius, whom he will marry after living with her for 18 years. In 1789 among flowers, the poet had a son who died in Rome in 1830. From March to June 1790, he made a second journey to Venice. In 1816, his wife Christiane died. At the end of his poem, “Journey in Italy” Goethe said his poetic vein had stayed forever in Rome near the Colosseum, where he recalled the verses Ovid wrote on the last night he spent in Rome before being exiled on a charge of conspiracy. Similarly, we should refer to his poetry “to understand our feelings” while a chariot is taking away the a nice Milanese girl with his lady friend. We think such a story could have ended in another way; he could have handled his feelings with the help of an even tiny spark of that genius which enlightened his artistic life. Goethe played out his own story, and told it to us with his artistic talent. It is up to us now to bear it in mind.

As it appears the picture of that very sad night,
In which in Rome last time ended for me;
As I come to that night, in which I left my beloved world,
My eyes fill with tears again.
Men's and dog's voices were already silent,
And Moon took care of nocturnal horses.
I was looking at her and from her discerning the Capitoline Hills,
That were in vain close to our Lar...

Cum subit illius tristissima noctis imago,
Quae mihi supremum tempus in Urbe fuit;
Cum repeto noctem, qua tot mihi cara reliqui,
Labitur ex oculis nunc quoque gutta meis.
Jamque quiescebant voces hominumque canumque,
Lunaque nocturnos alta regebat equos.
Hanc ego suspiciens et ab hac Capitolia cernens,
Quae nostro frustra juncta fuere Lari...
(Ovid)

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Acknowledgements
We thank Tijana Mladenovic Fossaceca, Ph.D., and Paolo Facci, Ph. D. for helpful assistance.