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INTRODUCTION

Goethe's Autobiographical Works

There are four major autobiographical works by Goethe: *Poetry and Truth*, the *Italian Journey*, the *Campaign in France 1792* and *Siege of Mainz*, and the *Annals*. In addition to these four there are several short works stemming from his travels (for example the *Letters from Switzerland*) which are often included among the autobiographical works in the collected editions, and a number of autobiographical fragments and essays, which we felt would have been out of place in an edition devoted, like this one, to the major writings.

Of the four major works, our edition includes the first three. The *Annals* are Goethe's solution to the problem of how to deal with those parts of his long life which could not be accommodated in the pieces of autobiography that finally emerged from his endeavors. When he began the project of an autobiography he planned to bring it down approximately to the time when he began working on it in earnest, that is, he would have written the history of his life at least to the time of Friedrich Schiller's death in 1805 and possibly a bit farther: the first plan for the autobiography, dictated in October, 1809, covered the years 1749–1809. As late as 1826, when publishing the advertisement for what was to be the final, complete authorized edition of his works, Goethe still hoped to finish a volume of *Poetry and Truth* which would have been devoted to the period between his arrival in Weimar in 1775 and his departure for Italy in the summer of 1786. In 1826 the *Annals* were projected above all to fill the gap between the end of the Italian journey and the beginning of the campaign in France (1788–1792), and then to cover the period from August, 1793, on (the end of his narrative of the siege of Mainz). Whereas the *Annals* would offer only a brief treatment of the events between 1788 and 1792, for the period commencing in 1793 they would take on a "totally different character," alternating between diary and chronicle and combining the personal with the world-historical.

Goethe's decision to end the volumes of true autobiographical narrative with the conclusion of the siege of Mainz in August, 1793, is understandable in light of the epochal importance he attached to his friendship with Schiller, which began in the summer of 1794. To have described the Schiller years would have necessitated the development of a new mode for continuing the story of his life. In addition he intended to publish his correspondence with Schiller, a voluminous document of the period from 1794 to 1805: he could well have considered that by completing the final volume of *Poetry and Truth* for the years 1775–1786 as promised in the advertisement he would essentially have finished the history of his life down to 1805, as had been the original plan.

In the end, however, Goethe was not to write that volume of *Poetry and Truth* projected in 1826—a substantial loss for our understanding of his life, as that period is otherwise in many respects unsatisfactorily documented—and the *Annals* for those years are also exceedingly sketchy. The *Annals* are in any case qualitatively different from the three volumes of autobiography that Goethe finally completed for publication, and while they are essential to the scholarly specialist who desires to understand Goethe's works after 1793 in the context of his life and times, they are less accessible and rewarding to the general reader. Particularly in view of the limited space available we have chosen to include the three completed narrative works in full and to refrain from any attempt at excerpting the *Annals*, which in their entirety are somewhat more voluminous than the *Campaign in France*.

The three autobiographical works contained in our edition were composed for publication as segments of the planned full autobiography. They represent a major portion of Goethe's creative output from 1810 until the end of his life, in volume far more extensive, for example, than his last two novels, *Elective Affinities* and *Wilhelm Meister's Journeyman Years*, and the second part of *Faust* together. As late prose works they share many of the characteristics of the last novels and themselves verge at times on the novelistic. They deserve to be read and studied in that context, not just as documents of Goethe's life history. *Poetry and Truth* has always been read widely and was, at least at one time, probably one of Goethe's two or three best known works: for a large part of the nineteenth and early twentieth-century reading public, which insisted on viewing Goethe as a sage as much as a major writer, *Poetry and Truth* came to represent not just an autobiographical work, but a work of philosophical and religious wisdom. It is the only extensive source for our knowledge of Goethe's life before his move to Weimar in 1775 and has provided the bulk of the material for all biographical treatments of that period. The *Italian Journey* has also enjoyed a rather wide readership, both for what it says about Goethe's Italian transformation and for the inherent interest of his descriptions

of Italy and Italian art, and it has already become known to the contemporary English-speaking public through W.H. Auden's translation, which he undertook with Elizabeth Mayer. Of the three major works, *Campaign in France* has been by far the least read, the least understood, and the one which has attracted the least scholarship. The scholarship devoted to *Poetry and Truth* is immense, that devoted to *Italian Journey* significant (much of it concerned with the work from the perspective of art history), the scholarship devoted to the *Campaign in France* miniscule by comparison. It is only in recent years, however, that the three works have attracted significant interest in the context of Goethe's late period.

Poetry and Truth depicts Goethe's life from his birth in Frankfurt on the Main on 28 August 1749 to November, 1775, when he left Frankfurt for what was supposed to be only a short visit to Weimar at the invitation of the young Duke Carl August, who had just attained majority and taken over the rule of Saxe-Weimar. Goethe quickly became such an integral part of the duke's circle that he was induced to remain in Weimar as a government official (he was almost immediately appointed to the privy council and held responsible posts for most of the rest of his life) and never returned to live in the imperial free city which had been his home throughout his formative years and to which he retained emotional ties. The *Italian Journey* is the account, partly in the form of narrative, partly in the form of a diary and of letters to friends and intimates at home in Weimar, of the trip to Italy and the sojourn from 1786 to 1788 which Goethe credited with having changed his life, giving him a new understanding of art and the calling of the artist, as well as significant insights and breakthroughs in his thinking about nature. Goethe's turn toward "Classicism" is commonly dated from the period in Italy and is generally considered to represent a synthesis of his new artistic strivings (symbolized by the verse version of *Iphigenia*, the major poetic fruit of his stay in Italy) with an intellectual framework incorporating a heightened awareness and understanding of nature and pictorial art. His *Italian Journey* is the most complete record of that journey and that transformation, a work greater in volume even than *Poetry and Truth*, though it deals with only two years of his life. The *Campaign in France* covers almost exactly one year, from August, 1792, to August, 1793, from the time he traveled to catch up with the armies that had already advanced into France on their way (so they thought) to Paris, to the time when he left the army which had successfully concluded the siege of Mainz at the end of July, 1793.

Poetry and Truth, *Italian Journey*, and *Campaign in France* were all conceived as individual parts of that original autobiography which was never to be completed, and at the time of first publication they all shared the same main title: "From My Life." The *Italian Journey* had

the subtitle "Poetry and Truth" as well. It was only in the last authorized edition of his collected works that Goethe restricted the use of the title "Poetry and Truth" to the first part dealing with his youth to 1775, thus setting free the other two works from their original subordination to the master plan. In fact (quite apart from the disparity in their respective lengths and detail of treatment) the three works are distinctly different in character, tone, and complexity, so that they would not in any case be recognizable as individual parts of the same work if it were not for the original title and our knowledge that they belong to Goethe's autobiographical project as a whole: *Italian Journey* can be viewed as much more a travel account than a piece of autobiography, while *Campaign in France* is on the face of it a military memoir which uses many of the narrative techniques of the novel. *Poetry and Truth*, although the title has long led to efforts on the part of readers and scholars to separate fact from fiction, and the narrative itself includes a number of segments which can be read practically as polished and artistic novelettes, is the only one of the three works which can almost unequivocally be termed an autobiography and would be recognized as such by the average reader.

Toward the end of his life Goethe sought to explain the significance of the title "Poetry and Truth" which he had attached to his autobiography. In a letter to King Ludwig I of Bavaria, dated 12 January 1830, he wrote that it was only to be expected that the public would be somewhat dubious with regard to the veracity of such writing. In order to counteract such doubts, he had voluntarily resorted to a kind of fiction: "For it was my most earnest endeavor to portray and express as well as possible that real and elementary truth which, as far as I could see, had governed my life. If, however, in advanced years it is not possible to do this without allowing some scope to reminiscences, and thus also to the faculty of imagination, and if one thus is compelled again and again, so to speak, to make use of one's poetic faculty, then it is clear that in the end it will be more the *end results* (. . .) than the *individual events* which occurred long ago that will be called to mind and emphasized. (. . .) It is all of those things pertaining to the narrator which I have subsumed under the term 'Poetry,' in order to be able to use for my purposes the truth which I had in mind." In his commentary to *Poetry and Truth* Erich Trunz, perhaps a bit too simply, supposes "Poetry" to mean Goethe's interpretation of events, while "Truth" is the facts and the events themselves. It should be clear, however, that even the selection of facts and events to be narrated is an interpretive act on the part of the author. Goethe very consciously determined the picture of himself and his past that he wanted to convey in his autobiographical writings.

The nature of Goethe's relationship to his materials is different in

each of the three major autobiographical works. In *Poetry and Truth* Goethe was writing the history of his youth, the period of his life farthest removed in time. His memories alone did not suffice to accomplish the task in the manner he had set for himself, and it was also precisely for this period of his life that he most lacked raw materials of his own in the form of letters and diaries. More than once before the beginning of his “Classical” period, and in fact, as late as 1797 he had destroyed large quantities of such artifacts—it was only later that he began to regard himself in an “historical” light and preserve his documents—and due to the careless manner in which he had treated many of his works and manuscripts during his youth he had honestly lost track of a number of his creations, some of which came to light again only much later. He was compelled to read a large number of historical works about the period of the mid-eighteenth century and literary works dating from that time which had contributed to his development as a young man, and also to rely on the memories of others in the process of writing *Poetry and Truth*. The most conspicuous and perhaps touching example of this was his request to Bettina Brentano, sister of the Romantic poet Clemens Brentano, that she copy down for him all the stories she could glean from his mother about his early childhood. As a result of his efforts to reconstruct his youth in the context of the times in which he lived, however, he produced in *Poetry and Truth* a work of social and cultural history which significantly transcends the scope of his own individual life. In writing the *Italian Journey*, on the other hand, he was well provided with materials of his own with which to work, not only the diaries and letters from that period of his life, but also a good number of his own works on science, nature, and art which had stemmed in large part from the point of view developed in Italy and in the years immediately following his return to Weimar. To a large extent he still viewed the world through that lens and the *Italian Journey* is above all the document which seeks the genesis of this transformation.

Poetry and Truth is the story of how Goethe, the child and the youth, evolved in the context of his times; *Italian Journey* is the story of how the man began to part company with his times. While the views he brought back from Italy were personally satisfying and fulfilling, Goethe sensed that he had thereby begun to enter a realm into which his contemporaries were unwilling or unable to follow him. This was especially true of his devotion to scientific studies in the years following the return from Italy. At one point in the *Campaign in France*, during the siege of Verdun, Goethe reports on an entire night spent with the Austrian ambassador to Berlin, Prince Reuss, discussing at length, among other things, Goethe’s scientific projects. Goethe was struck by the willingness and ability of the cultured man of affairs to interest himself in scientific subjects, whereas in other sections of the *Campaign in France*

he complains bitterly of the inability of old friends to understand or sympathize with his newest transformation. Goethe felt himself becoming more and more isolated from all but a handful of like-minded intellectuals—this is the reason why the closer acquaintance with Schiller beginning in 1794 was so precious to him—while becoming progressively more alienated from a number of his oldest intellectual companions. Prominent among these were Johann Gottfried Herder, who had been such an influential mentor during Goethe's Storm and Stress days, Johann Georg Schlosser, his brother-in-law, and Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, whose relationship to Goethe had originally been cast more or less in the sentimentalist mold. The *Campaign in France* is, on its surface, the memoir of a disastrous military campaign. But even in the thick of the military action Goethe finds solace and diversion in scientific studies. Assuredly this sets him apart from his martial colleagues, but it only symbolizes Goethe's feelings of isolation and of no longer belonging totally to his world, a primary theme of the work. In the middle part, which is devoted to his journey through Westphalia on the way back to Weimar from the war theater, when he had visited Jacobi for several weeks, and in the account of his winter in Weimar between the French campaign and the siege of Mainz, Goethe complains openly of his friends' lack of understanding for his new interests and of his lack of success in communicating with his age in his writing. This period was not a fruitful one for Goethe, the poet. The *Campaign in France* closes on a gloomy note unique among Goethe's major works, with the account of a totally uncommunicative meeting with Schlosser, the Duke of Weimar's resignation from the Prussian army and his renunciation of the prospects for a glamorous military career, and a look ahead in time to the Prussian catastrophe at the Battle of Jena and Auerstedt in 1806.

Poetry and Truth

Goethe apparently began thinking seriously of writing the story of his life shortly after 1800. Two serious illnesses in 1802 and 1805, and the death of Schiller in 1805, intensified his concern about the image of himself that would remain after his death. When he looked around at the kinds of biographies of writers and famous men being produced by his contemporaries, he could not be reassured that anyone would write the story of his life in a manner he himself would approve. Most biographies at the time were being written for the lexicons or for the "necrologies" that were such a feature of intellectual life in that period. The most Goethe had to look forward to in the way of such a biography was a listing of dates and the titles of those of his works considered

important by his biographer. This was before he had found disciples such as Johann Peter Eckermann to whom he might have entrusted the task with some confidence.

Various letters, an 1806 review of a collection of biographies of Berlin intellectuals, and comments preserved from his conversations show that Goethe was actively thinking about the topics of biography and autobiography in the years before 1809. Until then he was preoccupied with completing work on the first collected edition of his works published by Cotta in Tübingen and on the *Elective Affinities*. The first sketches for his autobiography date from the fall of 1809, but even then the process first of clearing away other projects and commitments and then preparing to begin the story of his life took considerable time. He received a particular impetus from his work on the biography of his artist friend Philipp Hackert. The *Annals* for the year 1811 recall how Goethe asked himself the question why he should not do for himself what he was doing for another, and that he had interrupted his work on Hackert's life to turn to his own earliest childhood. It was high time that he begin in earnest to capture and set down his reminiscences before it was too late and before all the people who could help him reconstruct his past had departed the scene. He had already outlived many of his contemporaries. His father was long dead, his mother, whose recollections would have been of the most direct assistance, had recently died, and practically all he had in the way of material dealing directly with his childhood were the anecdotes collected for him by Bettina Brentano. In January, 1811, when he was sixty-two, Goethe finally was able to devote full attention to writing his autobiography. Once he had started, the work progressed quickly. By the end of May he had finished the draft of the first part (Books One through Five) and it was published by the end of October, 1811. Work on the second part (Books Six through Ten) proceeded immediately and it was published almost exactly a year later. Part Three (Books Eleven through Fifteen) was written just as quickly as the first two parts: the printing had been completed by January, 1814, although the volume itself did not appear until May. At this point, however, the writing of *Poetry and Truth* was interrupted and not completed until the months before Goethe's death in March, 1832.

There are two principal reasons for the interruption of work on Part Four of *Poetry and Truth*. The first is that, after a period of relatively meager poetic productivity since the completion of the *Elective Affinities*, Goethe was suddenly full of new inspiration, which drew his attention from the autobiographical task at hand. The direct cause of the interruption most probably was the beginning of the great late cycle of lyric poetry, the *West-East Divan*. The second major reason for the interruption is presumably that in the fourth part of *Poetry and Truth*

Goethe finally had to come to terms with Lili Schönemann. Goethe clearly regarded his relationship to Lili as the most painfully wrenching of all the romantic episodes of his young years. While he had always felt some regret and remorse at having left Frederica Brion, the pastor's daughter who had charmed him so during his student days in Strasbourg, he had been able to deal with his actions and rationalize them in terms of Frederica's inability to be assimilated to his urban patrician world. When he thought of Frederica, it was in terms of a pastoral, and he had managed to narrate the Frederica episode in the second and third parts of *Poetry and Truth* accordingly. The Lili episode was altogether different. Goethe had even gone so far as to become engaged to this daughter of an affluent Calvinist merchant and had been entirely bewitched by her before beginning to have strong second thoughts. Finally he ran away from Lili to accompany his friends, the Stolbergs, on their trip to Switzerland in 1775, and after his return the two lovers, miserable but realistic about their situation, agreed to break off the engagement. If Frederica had been unable to fit into Goethe's world, now the shoe was on the other foot: Goethe, although the son of one of Frankfurt's finest and most influential families, was unable to feel comfortable in Lili's world. Renunciation was the only sensible course of action, in order to spare both Lili and himself.

When Goethe completed the third part of *Poetry and Truth* and should have moved on to the fourth part, Lili, who had long since married a Strasbourg banker, was still alive. Although he worked at various parts of the last five books over the years and had in fact begun them even before 1814, he could not bring himself to complete those books in which she would have had to play such an important part. In general Goethe was quite careful, and in any case diplomatic, when writing about persons who were still alive. The purpose of his autobiography was not to attack others, he did not want to deal unfairly with anyone who might have been hurt by what he wrote, and in certain passages he did not even name names (for example Frederica Brion's last name is never mentioned, nor is Lili's, nor even the first name of that willing partner in the social marriage game whom his parents had for a while viewed as a potential daughter-in-law)—unlike the style of our modern kiss-and-tell memoirs. It had pained him enough when Fritz Jacobi was upset by a half sentence in the description of their youthful friendship that had hinted that they would later grow apart, and Goethe's authoritative version of what had come between them had to wait until the publication of *Campaign in France* in 1822, after Jacobi's death. In 1814, it is clear, Goethe simply could not bring himself to go on with the fourth part of *Poetry and Truth*. Over the years he gave up hope of ever completing it, and in the 1826 advertisement he announced that this part of his autobiography would be published as a "fragment."

When Goethe did turn in the years after 1814 from periods of intense poetic creativity to work on his autobiography, he focused on other parts of the whole that he had originally planned. In 1816 and 1817 he wrote and published the first two parts of the *Italian Journey*. The *Annals*, which he intended as a “supplement to my other confessions,” were written mainly in the years 1819 to 1825 and, when announced in the 1826 advertisement, were substantially completed. The third major area covered was the years 1792–1793, narrated in the *Campaign in France*, which he wrote from 1820 to 1822.

Goethe had originally intended the later books of *Poetry and Truth* as a vehicle, among other things, for dealing with a number of the poetic works of his Storm and Stress days in Frankfurt which he had never completed. He had devoted space in Book Fourteen to the *Mohammed* fragment and in Book Fifteen to the *Wandering Jew*. He incorporated *The Clown's Wedding* in Book Eighteen in a similar fashion. The main unfinished poetic work, however, of which he wanted to give a more complete picture in the pages of *Poetry and Truth* was *Faust*. Although the first part of *Faust* had been published in 1808 and whole acts of the second part were long since complete, Goethe doubted for a long time that he would ever be able to finish the work in anything like the manner in which he had conceived it. Consequently, Part Four of *Poetry and Truth* was to contain a lengthy prose sketch of the second part of *Faust* as a substitute for the real thing.

In 1826 Goethe obviously intended to devote substantial attention to the autobiography, in order to complete what he had promised. But he had been inspired again by *Faust* and had already begun in February, 1825, to devote almost his full attention to the work. Until its completion in the summer of 1831 *Faust* then remained what Goethe termed his “main business” and *Poetry and Truth* was once again put on the back burner. After he had sealed up the second part of *Faust* and put it away to be published only after his death, Goethe finally returned to *Poetry and Truth* and completed Part Four in his last months. In comparison with the other three parts of the autobiography the last part makes something of a fragmented impression. It is not crafted as carefully as they, nor does it show the same degree of unity in its conception and composition. Still, it is Goethe's last major work, and for the reader and the scholar alike it is a great treasure because it fills out the story of the young man of genius who, instead of burning himself out at an early age as he was on the way to doing in his last years in Frankfurt, became Germany's greatest national poet and man of letters, as well as a scientist and statesman, in the calmer atmosphere of Weimar.

We noted that when Goethe began between 1800 and 1810 to think about writing the story of his life there were few contemporary biographical works to inspire him or to serve as a model. This was not

the case, however, in the area of autobiography. There was a strong autobiographical tradition in Western literature dating back to Christian antiquity and St. Augustine's *Confessions*. Augustine's title, however, already establishes the emphasis that was to become dominant in the western autobiographical tradition: by far the greater part of this literature was religiously oriented, devoted to the history of the soul's struggle to find God and right itself with Him. The purpose of such literature was to bare the soul, expose its darkest crevices, and show that it had been purged and purified by the grace of God. Even Rousseau's *Confessions*, though secularly oriented, still share this propensity to seek out depravity in order to glorify both the depravity and the author who thus bares his soul. The pietist autobiography dominant in Goethe's day was fully in keeping with this tradition. The orthodox pietist literature in fact even evolved a model for such autobiographies: they had to center on the soul's struggle with itself, its fear and trembling at the sudden realization of its own weakness and sinfulness and the certainty of divine punishment. When the soul has thus been humbled and stripped naked, God's grace lifts it up and it finds peace and new life in God. Typically, the pietist soul can cite the exact hour in which this experience came to it and released it from its pent-up dread, and this moment of its true conversion marks the beginning of the new life dedicated to the love of God.

Goethe was well acquainted with this literature and with the phenomenon of Pietism. Even foes of Pietism used the pietist model when it came to writing their own life histories for their contemporaries. Karl Philipp Moritz's quasi-autobiographical novel, *Anton Reiser*, represents the logical end of the outlook of fear and dread: there is no conversion experience, no grace of God displayed in Anton Reiser's life, and the fear and trembling extend throughout the entire novel. It is the most bleakly pessimistic and depressing artifact of German literature of that time. In addition to the religiously oriented autobiography Goethe was familiar with the memoirs of Renaissance artists and had himself translated the autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini. That Goethe could write (or at least imitate) a pietist autobiography is demonstrated by the "Confessions of a Beautiful Soul," which makes up Book Six of *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. But the astute modern reader quickly discerns that the "Beautiful Soul" is a sick woman indeed, and her autobiography, which is thus incorporated into the novel, shows her as a model of how *not* to be and how *not* to live one's life, rather than as a model to be emulated.

Goethe himself was not a sick person, although he underwent numerous crises, nor did he share the pessimistic outlook on human nature embedded in the pietist model. He was a thoroughly Pelagian nature, unable to accept the orthodox doctrine of original sin and the innate

depravity of man. When he came to write his autobiography he had to evolve his own model. Even though he too more than once calls his autobiography a book of “confessions,” it is not the struggle of the soul to gain God’s grace that is at the center of *Poetry and Truth*. Although religion, religious sentiments, and the effort to come to terms with God and the world occupy a large part of the work, it is not Goethe’s fear that impels the search, but rather his innate curiosity about the nature of things and his to all intents and purposes totally unshaken optimism about his own nature and about human nature in general. There are no villains in *Poetry and Truth*, no confrontations with the darkness of fear and trembling, no despair. To be sure, there are spiritual and emotional crises, but not of the Christian sort. The crises occur rather at maturation points where the young Goethe is in need of new direction.

In Goethe’s life there are also no confrontations with material adversity. He was extremely fortunate in the choice of his parents and the surroundings in which he was to grow to manhood. Most of the leading figures of eighteenth and early nineteenth century German literature had to struggle in order to establish themselves economically at all. Aside from a few sons of the aristocracy, perhaps, there is no one in German letters of the time who enjoyed such a privileged and comfortable childhood and youth as Goethe. The son of a wealthy father and a mother whose patrician family was influential in Frankfurt and held posts in the city council and in the magistracy, Goethe was predestined to success in one line or the other.

In the autobiography and elsewhere Goethe speaks warmly of his mother, who was only eighteen when he was born, herself childlike and open, supportive of her son and admiring his vast talents and achievements, although it is likely she failed fully to comprehend their importance. Goethe’s relationship to his father is much more problematic. It would be extremely interesting to investigate the role of the father figures in Goethe’s poetic works. Often the father is totally lacking and the nuclear family consists only of mother and child. In the first version of *Wilhelm Meister*, the *Theatrical Mission*, Wilhelm’s father is a negative figure; in the later version, *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*, it is his deceased grandfather with whom Wilhelm identifies, while it is his father who sells off the grandfather’s art collections in order to invest in business. Johann Caspar Goethe was an extremely ambitious man who demanded of the world that it conform to his ways. This is clear in everything he ever undertook, the most intriguing example being his attempt to gain a high post in the Frankfurt city government immediately after completion of his legal studies. When he was turned down for lack of experience, he arranged to be named an Imperial Councilor, so as to make himself ineligible for any post in the

local government in the future and place himself on a level with those who had spurned him. That he was obstinate and a man of principle is more than evident, shown above all in his refusal to suppress his Prussian sympathies or to cooperate with the king's lieutenant, Count Thoranc, who was lodged in his house during the French occupation of Frankfurt in the Seven Years War. Unfortunately, his title of Imperial Councilor also made him ineligible to practice law in the city and he found himself well off, but without a career or any profitable way to occupy his time. The only other thing he could have done with his fortune, namely to be a merchant or a banker, apparently did not appeal to him, and the man who had thus cut himself off from all possibility of attaining high rank, honors, and great fortune for himself sought his fulfillment in the achievements of his children.

The father seems to have regarded the task of educating his children as the most significant activity of his life, and from his earliest years on there was no way for Goethe to escape his father's pedagogy, his tenacity and obsession with detail and principles. As intelligent as Johann Caspar undoubtedly was, he was also something of a crank and a pedant. Goethe's troubled relationship with his son, August, must have been in large part a repetition of his struggles with his own father, with one important difference: August von Goethe was not the genius his father had been. There was nothing to be made out of August von Goethe—whereas Johann Caspar Goethe's son could have become practically anything. Ambivalent as Goethe's relationship to his father appears in the pages of *Poetry and Truth*, he was probably conscious of a massive debt to him. As a child Goethe was presented with opportunities beyond the dreams of most young men, and it was certainly the attention of his father that helped him make the most of them. The father's fine library of old and valuable books, his collections, to which Goethe was introduced (and introduced himself) at an early age, and a series of competent tutors in various subjects, were only the most visible of these opportunities. All the houses of Frankfurt society were open to him and his family, as well. The peculiar way in which Johann Caspar went about bringing up his son probably had no really deleterious long-term effects. He was a champion of independent resourcefulness and the traditional staunchly republican virtues who could not comprehend how anyone (even his own son) could enter the service of a duke, even a Carl August, rather than remain a solid citizen of his ancestral city. Goethe, while sensing that his own path through life could not be the same as his father's, in the end had to internalize many of his father's attributes—above all his discipline, his goal-orientation, and even his pedantry—in the form of self-control, in order to remain a productive human being and artist.

The autobiography as Goethe knew it, both the religious autobiog-

raphy and the Renaissance autobiography and the memoir literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, made little pretense of being anything other than a straightforward narrative. It moves in a straight line. Goethe's autobiography is a much more complex undertaking, both in its style of narration and in its composition and structure. It moves in the direction of the ascending spiral, covering ever wider areas as it rises in height. *Poetry and Truth* begins in the confines of the parents' house and opens gradually onto the surrounding world, incorporating into itself everything that Goethe, from the perspective of his advanced age, viewed as important in the process of his having become what he was. Here Goethe's autobiography is vastly different from the traditional religious opus. In the religiously oriented autobiography, the hero moves through the world seeking God and the world is a static thing that serves only as a backdrop for attainment of the ultimate goal, the grace of God. For Goethe, by contrast, the world is a living, growing, and changing thing and the interplay between self and world not only represents a prime value of human life, it is the prime means by which character and personality are developed. Man changes in the world, as a result of his experiences (while also changing the world itself), and is not just a pilgrim in search of God. Consequently, in order to depict the process of his own becoming, Goethe found it necessary to paint a broad canvas of the world and its formative influence on him. Included in this world are fascinating places (mainly the cities of Frankfurt, Leipzig, and Strasbourg) and the realms of science, religion, philosophy, literature, historical events, and human interactions. But Goethe was not interested only in portraying his own life. He had the strong sense that he was living at the end of an historical epoch, that there would be no more people like himself and his intellectual companions in the future. As a result, the picture he painted of his own life is a valuable picture of his age, as well, and has no rival in German autobiographical literature. *Poetry and Truth* has found many imitators in the last century and a half, but no equals.

A Note on the Commentary

It is no longer possible to read and understand Goethe's autobiographical works without assistance. Persons, events, places, and things that were familiar to his original readers are now matters of historical record and no longer present to us. In the case of similar texts by many of Goethe's contemporaries we would continually be confronted by our lack of understanding and stumble over the simplest problems of exegesis. Although there are still stumbling blocks, our ability to comprehend Goethe's texts has benefited from decades of painstaking re-

search and scholarship devoted to their elucidation. Scholarship builds upon its own past; we have made grateful use of the results published by untold others. In particular, anyone at all familiar with the Goethe literature will easily discern our debt to the editorial and scholarly achievements of Erich Trunz, which we would like to acknowledge here.

It is, in fact, gratifying that over long stretches *Poetry and Truth* can be read with minimal annotation. (The same is unfortunately not true of *Italian Journey* and *Campaign in France*.) The sole purpose of our annotation has been to facilitate the comprehension of Goethe's text. We have supplied the minimum of information on practically every historical person mentioned in Goethe's pages, so that he or she can be accurately identified by anyone interested in pursuing other sources of information. We have tried to identify all works of German literature and all artists mentioned, even those whose reputation was purely local. In the interests of saving space, however, we have presupposed a certain general level of knowledge on the part of the reader. Whereas we have provided references to French and German writers and literary works, we have refrained from supplying notes on works of world literature (for example Shakespeare), figures of Greek or Roman history or mythology, and world-historical personages. We hope that this treatment of the problem of text annotation will adequately fulfill the needs of the reader.