

Between Myth and Reality

Between Myth and Reality:
Goethe, Anna Amalia, Charlotte von Stein

By

Dan Farrelly

with a Preface by Ilse Nagelschmidt

**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

Between Myth and Reality: Goethe, Anna Amalia, Charlotte von Stein,
by Dan Farrelly

This book first published 2010

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2010 by Dan Farrelly

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-2122-5, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-2122-3

For

Clara, Clemens

Danielle, and Luke

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	ix
List of Abbreviations	xi
Preface	xiii
Ilse Nagelschmidt	
Introduction	1
Chapter One.....	9
Censorship and Cover-up	
Chapter Two	15
Some Donzdorf Letters	
Chapter Three	31
Report of a Nocturnal Visit	
Chapter Four	37
Interpretation of Signs	
Chapter Five	41
Anna Amalia – Two Journeys	
Chapter Six	51
Journeys to Carlsbad: Goethe and Charlotte von Stein	
Chapter Seven.....	61
A Continuum	
Chapter Eight.....	75
The Year 1781 – A Watershed?	

Chapter Nine.....	85
Deception: Letters to Frau von Stein	
Conclusion.....	115
Select Bibliography	117
Index	121

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing this book has been anything but a lonely process. It involved much travelling, many discussions and conversations, much contact with librarians and archivists. I am grateful to Ilse Nagelschmidt that, through her preface, the book bears the stamp of her authority. Ilse was the first to draw my attention to the existence of Ghibellino's work. At a very early stage, when I decided to translate his second edition into English, she accompanied the process with enthusiasm but also with scholarly reserve – her attitude always being one of openness to what might eventually be revealed by research. She wrote in a preface to the Proceedings of the 2007 conference held in Weimar that Ghibellino had indicated a path of which the twists and turns – and end – could not yet be predicted.

Twists and turns? This book has had its own twists and turns. Ilse Nagelschmidt and I had originally undertaken to edit a book based on some material from the Proceedings and on other essays from colleagues involved with the project. We collaborated over a period of about two years until, through rights complications with Denkena Verlag, all material that was not of my own creation became unavailable – which led to further development of my own contribution. In all of this complicated process, Ilse has been constantly involved and vigilant. Without her presence in it, the book would be unthinkable. My debt of gratitude to her is immense.

I am grateful to Lorraine Byrne Bodley for her critical interest in my work. Before the publication of my translation of Ghibellino's book (2007) she vetted the manuscript very carefully. She has also read the manuscript of the present book and given me the benefit of her trained editorial eye. I have benefited in recent years from her astute critical comments and our shared scholarly interests.

For several years I have benefited from the friendship of colleagues in Weimar, with whom I could share ideas and discuss aspects of the project. It would be invidious to single out a few names. It is a whole circle of friends gathered around the genial and jovial Ghibellino and his family.

Stefan Weiß and Gabriele von Trauchburg have proved very helpful to me, especially with regard to the important Donzdorf archive. Gabriele was particularly generous with her time in showing me the relevant letters in the archive and providing me with the many jpegs I needed. Norbert Leithold was also very helpful. During my visit to him in Schwerin he gave me access both to the manuscript of the book on Count Görtz he has

since published (2010) and to the German translations he had commissioned of letters held in the Donzdorf archive.

I am particularly grateful to Count Bernhard von Rechberg for granting me access to the Donzdorf archive. The courtesy and warmth of the Count and his family during my very brief meeting with them in Donzdorf are memorable.

Production of a book like this depends on the collaboration of librarians and archivists. I am grateful for the assistance of librarians in the University of Leipzig; in the Anna Amalia Bibliothek and the Goethe-Schiller-Archiv in Weimar; and the Landeshauptarchiv in Weimar.

Closer to home: my thanks to my friends and colleagues, Lilian Chambers, Eamonn Jordan, Rachael Kilgallon and Barbara Brown, and to my daughters Noreen and Ciara and my son Mark for their continued willingness to 'hear the latest'.

Finally, my deepest gratitude to Una for her constant readiness to listen, encourage, and comment, and for her careful proofing of the final manuscript.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DF	Dan Farrelly, <i>Goethe and Anna Amalia: A Forbidden Love?</i> trans. of Ghibellino's 2 nd edn, 2004 (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2007)
EG	<i>Goethe und Anna Amalia. Eine verbotene Liebe?</i> 3 rd revised edition (Weimar: Denkena Verlag, 2007)
GRFA	Gräfllich Rechberg'sches Familien-Archiv, Donzdorf
Grumach	Grumach, Ernst and Renate, eds, <i>Goethe. Begegnungen und Gespräche</i> , vols 1 & 2 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co, 1966).
HA	<i>Goethes Werke</i> , Hamburger Ausgabe, 12th revised edition, (Munich: C.H. Beck Verlag, 1981)
LHA	WeimarLandeshauptarchiv (now Staatsarchiv) Weimar
WA	<i>Goethes Werke</i> , hg im Auftrage der Großherzogin Sophie von Sachsen, 143 vols (Weimar 1887-1919)

PREFACE

ILSE NAGELSCHMIDT

Since the publication of the second edition of *J.W. Goethe und Anna Amalia: eine verbotene Liebe* (2004) Dan Farrelly has been continually engaged with the provocative thesis of the lawyer, Ettore Ghibellino, that the lady of Goethe's choice since his arrival in Weimar was not Charlotte von Stein but, indeed, the young Duke's mother, Anna Amalia. As a consequence, according to Ghibellino's reasoning, Charlotte von Stein, formerly a lady-in-waiting, now played the role of a 'straw woman' who received letters and notes from Goethe which, however, were meant for Anna Amalia herself. Despite extensive research on the part of Goethe scholars, clarity about many aspects of this correspondence has not been achieved, since only one part of it has survived – Goethe's own letters. The existence of the answers to these letters can be traced back to the nineteenth century – directly to Goethe's own life-time – but since then they are presumed lost.

In 2007 Dan Farrelly's English translation of Ghibellino's book appeared with Carysfort Press in Dublin under the title of *Goethe and Anna Amalia: A Forbidden Love?* In the Spring of that year the First Interdisciplinary Symposium was held in Weimar under my direction. At this point problems regarding the thesis were aired, and contributors were urged, on the one hand, to carry out intensive work in contextualizing the thesis and, on the other hand, to engage in exact study of sources. One result was the research by Dr Gabriele von Trauchburg on the activities and movements of Countess and Count von Görtz. On the basis of her study of sources which heretofore have attracted little attention, von Trauchburg has given a sensitive portrayal of Countess von Görtz – one of the keen observers of activities at the court of Weimar, especially during the years immediately following Goethe's arrival there.

In this current book, Dan Farrelly undertakes a meticulous rereading of the letters Goethe wrote to Charlotte von Stein between 1776 and the beginning of his journey to Italy on 3 September 1786. Convincingly, he shows breaks in the correspondence, where, for example, there is a transition from the formal mode of address 'Sie' to the intimate 'Du'; he

examines in detail the whereabouts of Anna Amalia and Charlotte von Stein – where they were living or where they were travelling – when Goethe was writing the notes and letters, and he comes to the conclusion that these were clearly meant for Charlotte von Stein and not for Anna Amalia. In this way he refutes, with regard to this period of time, one of Ghibellino's main arguments, and through an intensive examination of the letters sheds light on the 'private' Goethe and the way he lived his ordinary everyday life.

This book has provided another study of Goethe's life in the first Weimar decade and is hereby highly recommended to the reader. Similarly, I suggest that, on the basis of the fruitful methods employed here, further research be undertaken into letters Goethe wrote to Charlotte von Stein after he left Carlsbad en route for Italy.

INTRODUCTION

2003 saw the publication of an extraordinary book linking Goethe and the Weimar Dowager Duchess Anna Amalia. Written by Ettore Ghibellino, an Italian/German lawyer living in Weimar, the book gathers pieces of evidence from which the author endeavours to construct his case: that after Goethe arrived in Weimar on 7 November 1775 he very soon became involved in a love relationship with Anna Amalia that was so intimate and so intense that it had to be veiled in secrecy. According to Ghibellino, this highly erotic relationship was continued until Goethe fled to Italy in 1786, where he managed to achieve an inner distance from his beloved – resigned to reducing their relationship to a deep friendship which lasted until her death in 1807. For Ghibellino, Anna Amalia continued to be his muse for the rest of his creative life.

A relationship between a woman of the highest aristocracy and a middle-class man – even one of Goethe's distinction – was, to say the least, precarious. Anna Amalia's own reputation, as well as that of the small Duchy of Weimar, was at stake. She could not expose herself to the ridicule that would arise from a discovery of this link with Goethe; and Goethe's own position at court as well as his international reputation would be in jeopardy. It was necessary, according to Ghibellino, for them to devise a means of covering up their relationship.

Charlotte von Stein, formerly Anna Amalia's lady-in-waiting until her marriage with Josias von Stein, was attracted to Goethe from what she had heard of him even before his arrival in Weimar. The von Stein family was deeply dependent on the Ducal family for its subsistence and, according to Ghibellino, could be expected to collaborate in the plan Anna Amalia and Goethe devised: namely, to use Charlotte as a front for their own relationship. Goethe would cultivate a 'relationship' with Charlotte, and the flood of letters he wrote to Anna Amalia would be addressed and sent to Charlotte and passed on to Anna Amalia. Hence, for Ghibellino, the more than 1600 letters and notes to Charlotte are referred to only in inverted commas as the letters 'to Charlotte von Stein'. For Ghibellino, there was never a love-relationship between Goethe and Charlotte.

Compelled by the dangers of their situation, Goethe had to find another way of expressing his secret love for Anna Amalia. According to Ghibellino, he did this by leaving many signs which astute observers might

pick up. In this way the truth of their love would not be obliterated. These signs were to be found partly in his literary creations – like *Iphigenie*, *Tasso*, *Wilhelm Meister* – and partly in paintings and sculptures deriving from Anna Amalia and Goethe's circle.

With the appearance of a second edition of Ghibellino's book (2004), a group of scholars from various disciplines gathered to examine the various aspects of the thesis. Disciplines represented were: literary history, psychoanalysis, history, and history of art. Professional artists, including painters and sculptors, are members of the group. Jörg Drewes, the recently deceased literary historian from Bielefeld, was one of the first scholars to have welcomed the thesis:

I can talk myself into accepting the Stein story only with great unease and by employing all my desire to believe.

[...] ich [kann] die Stein-Story mir wirklich nur mit großem Unbehagen und unter Aufbietung aller Glaubenskräfte einreden.¹

The first findings of the group were presented in a public forum in Weimar at a conference in 2007. The first English translation² was launched on this occasion, along with a third edition of Ghibellino's book. In 2008, the proceedings of this conference were published in a volume edited by Ilse Nagelschmidt.³ In the same year Ghibellino was invited by the State Chancellry of Thuringia in Erfurt to present his thesis along with a report on further progress.

Out of the first enthusiastic public reception of Ghibellino's thesis arose the idea, which is currently being pursued, of making a film based on the material. Work on this film is ongoing.

The Klassik Stiftung Weimar, which plays an important role in promoting interest in Goethe not only in Germany but world-wide, used its website to publish a very detailed rebuttal of Ghibellino's ideas.⁴ This was followed by a response composed by Ghibellino and his colleague, the

¹ *Der Spiegel*, 30/21.07. 2008, p. 136.

² Ettore Ghibellino, *Goethe and Anna Amalia: A Forbidden Love?*, trans. Dan Farrelly (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2007).

³ Ilse Nagelschmidt, ed., *Alles um Liebe. Anna Amalia und Goethe. 1. Interdisziplinäres Symposium – Tagungsband* (Weimar: Denkena Verlag, 2008).

⁴ <http://www.klassik-stiftung.de/einrichtungen/goethe-und-schiller-archiv/-aktuelles/stellungnahme-ghibellino.html>.

historian Stefan Weiss.⁵ In July 2008, *Der Spiegel* published a discussion of the thesis along with a lengthy interview with Ghibellino.⁶

In what is known as the house of Frau von Stein at the Ackerwand, where Goethe was her next-door neighbour for several years, a press conference was held, in which the text of the Klassik Stiftung Weimar and the response by Ghibellino and Weiss were discussed at length. The differences seemed irreconcilable, with Ghibellino insisting that much more research was needed. As he said in the *Spiegel* interview:

We have to go back to the archives.
The human sciences often show a
lack of ambition to study documents
and to decipher manuscripts.

Wir müssen zurück in die Archive.
Man hat in der Geisteswissenschaft oft
nicht genug Ehrgeiz, Akten zu
studieren und Handschriften zu
entziffern.⁷

The opposing view was that such research would bring no results.

A further development of Ghibellino's project came about with the formation of the Goethe/Anna Amalia Academy. This Academy has initiated a series of lectures, edited by Ilse Nagelschmidt, which are aimed at promoting further public discussion of the ideas. In Weimar, on 23 October 2008, the first of these lectures was given by Professor Jochanan Trilse-Finkelstein, the distinguished Heine scholar.⁸ Amongst other things, this lecture/publication shed an important new light on the controversy. Trilse-Finkelstein claimed that in Weimar in the 1960s Goethe's romantic involvement with Anna Amalia was already known and talked about privately, but that the socialist regime of the GDR refused to permit any public discussion of it. Scholars, archivists, and custodians possessed knowledge about the intimate relationship but were not allowed to speak of it. There was also a circle that met in the Café Resi, the ancestors of whom, dating back to the period in question, had claimed knowledge of the relationship.

In an academic seminar which Trilse-Finkelstein had attended as a student, one professor (Frau Weithase) hinted at the love relationship between the highest woman in the land and Goethe. When pressed by her

⁵ Stefan Weiss & Ettore Ghibellino, *Erwiderung zu „Stellungnahme der Klassik-Stiftung-Weimar zu den Hypothesen Ettore Ghibellinos“* (Weimar: Denkena Verlag, 2009).

⁶ *Der Spiegel*, pp. 136-140.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁸ Published as *Goethe and Anna Amalia: Ein neues klassisches Liebespaar der Literatur und die absurd-humane Rolle der 'Frau von Stein'.* Zu den Thesen von Ettore Ghibellino. Lecture series of the Anna Amalia and Goethe Academy, Weimar, eds Ilse Nagelschmidt and Stefan Weiss (Weimar: Denkena Verlag, 2008).

student, Trilse-Finkelstein, she identified the woman as Anna Amalia. She also said that this was known in her circles, but that it was not to become public knowledge. There was to be no further discussion.⁹

Dr Gerhard Femmel, editor of the many volumes of *Corpus der Goethe-Zeichnungen* and a man of considerable academic standing, had written a substantial manuscript which he showed to Trilse-Finkelstein, intimating that it contained the truth about the relationship. He was unable to have the manuscript published but said that some day he would ‘drop the bomb’. The manuscript has, unfortunately, never been found.

Another highly significant contribution has been made by Dr Gabriele von Trauchburg, an historian who has access to the private archive of the Count von Rechberg in Donzdorf near Göppingen. She lectured in Weimar on 28 May 2009 on the subject: ‘Who was Countess Görtz? First Biographical Fragments in honour of her 260th Birthday.’¹⁰ This lecture coincided with the publication of her text.

In the present context, von Trauchburg’s lecture/publication plays an important part in establishing the credentials of Countess Caroline von Görtz as a reliable witness to events referred to in correspondence with her husband Johann Eustachius von Görtz zu Schlitz: namely, events and circumstances relating to the Weimar Court, particularly in the years 1776-1778. This correspondence reflects the lives not only of the Duke Carl August and his wife, the Duchess Luise, but also of the Dowager Duchess Anna Amalia, Goethe, and Charlotte von Stein – and of other people in their circle.

The significance of the correspondence in question has hardly been touched on except by Ghibellino, whose access to it, until 2007, had largely been limited to the texts recorded in volumes 1 and 2 of Grumach.¹¹ There are more letters in the Donzdorf archive than those that appear in Grumach. Without von Trauchburg’s research the reader of the excerpts in Grumach’s edition could be tempted to dismiss the content of the letters as the idle gossip of somewhat silly ladies at court. The opportunity to read not just the excerpts but the whole series of letters in their entirety provides the reader with a much fuller, organic picture of the quality and integrity of their authors. Von Trauchburg also establishes the seriousness and stature of Count Johann Eustachius von Görtz, which again supports the case for

⁹ Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁰ *Wer war Gräfin Görtz? Erste biographische Fragmente zu ihrem 260. Geburtstag.* Lecture series of the Anna Amalia and Goethe Academy, Weimar, eds Ilse Nagelschmidt and Stefan Weiss (Weimar: Denkena Verlag, 2009).

¹¹ Ernst and Renate Grumach, eds, *Goethe Begegnungen und Gespräche*, vol. 2, 1777-1785 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co, 1966).

seeing this correspondence as an important historical source. It is of the utmost significance as well that von Trauchburg has indicated the sound basis for the opposition of the von Görtz couple to Goethe and to the role he plays as Carl August's companion: the wild, irresponsible behaviour of these *Stürmer und Dränger* towards decent people. Their opposition to Goethe is not reducible to purely narrow-minded animosity. (There was, of course, an element of resentment, since von Görtz was sacked by Anna Amalia from his role as educator of the Princes Carl August and Constantin. However, this was before the arrival of Goethe in Weimar.) A serious foundation for their opposition was their conservative Protestant upbringing, which could not let them condone what they saw as improper behaviour and the irresponsible flouting of respected conventions.

As already indicated, the proceedings of the first symposium 2007 covered a very wide range of topics arising from Ghibellino's publications. It had been felt, in particular, that the paintings and sculptures had their own stories to tell and, properly interpreted, could yield up clues about a relationship that for reasons of state had to be kept secret. This 'other' story is something for experts in the field of art history to investigate and cannot be dealt with in this volume.

Here it is worth referring briefly to the range of topics covered in the 2007 symposium and taken up in the volume of the Proceedings under the title *Alles um Liebe* (All for Love).

At the 2007 symposium in Weimar, there were approximately twenty-two contributions, many of which were recorded in *Alles um Liebe*. The symposium and the volume cover an extraordinarily wide spectrum of subjects – mostly issues that arose out of the 2004 edition of Ghibellino's book. To mention just a few of the topics dealt with: Hubert Speidel's discussion of Kurt Eissler's monumental Goethe biography; Stefan Weiss's study of espionage in the Goethe period; Ulrike Krenzlin's study of Tischbein; and Manfred Ludwig's comparison of the methods of proof in science and the humanities (*Geisteswissenschaften*)..

Even this short list gives an idea of the wide variety of topics touched on. They served to open up many of the areas which Ghibellino considers in need of exploration. For the purposes of this present volume – a partial response to the 2007 symposium – Hubert Speidel's contribution,¹² which asks whether Eissler's 'Goethe' is Goethe, is, to my mind, the most strikingly relevant contribution. Speidel's study of Goethe's sexuality has an important bearing on Ghibellino's thesis. By his serious modification of Eissler's theory (which had been accepted and developed by a generation of Goethe scholars) that Goethe was seriously inhibited in his sexuality,

¹² *Alles um Liebe*, pp. 19-43.

Speidel removed an important barrier to the acceptance of Ghibellino's theory that the Dowager Duchess Anna Amalia and Goethe were lovers. Speidel shows that Goethe, on his arrival in Weimar in November 1775, was probably quite normal in his sexuality. Whatever else (dynastic and class considerations) might have militated against the possibility of a sexual liaison between Anna Amalia and Goethe, sexual inhibitions on Goethe's part were not – according to Speidel's findings – an important barrier.

But then, a logical conclusion arising from Speidel's findings would be: if Goethe is deemed capable of having a sexual liaison with Anna Amalia, the same must apply to his relationship with Charlotte von Stein. For the moment we can leave aside the debate about Charlotte's personality and her own possible openness to a sexual liaison with Goethe – or with anybody else. If the validity of Ghibellino's claim – that the 1600 letters and notes known as the 'Letters to Charlotte von Stein' were really written for Anna Amalia – can be seriously contested, in fact, disproved, the way is clear for a study of Goethe's relationship with Charlotte in complete opposition to the view entertained by Ghibellino.

For the purposes of the present volume the focus is limited to documentary and archival evidence with a view to examining the extent to which Ghibellino's main theses were supported by the available evidence.

The starting point for the series of studies presented in this volume was the construction of a database which included all the known dates of Goethe's letters and notes to Charlotte von Stein for the period January 1776 until the time of his departure for Italy on 3 September 1786. The database includes the dates and other details of Goethe's own journeys and his absences from Weimar during this period. It also includes details of Anna Amalia's journeys and her absences from Weimar for the same period. Similarly, where the information is available, Charlotte von Stein's absences from Weimar – mainly during her stays in her Grosskochberg residence – and journeys to Pyrmont, Kalbsrieth, and Carlsbad have been recorded in the database.

Other materials investigated in detail as a basis for these studies are:

Various editions of Goethe's letters to Charlotte von Stein

The Fourier books¹³ for 1776-1786 to establish days when Anna Amalia was definitely present in Weimar (and Tiefurt)

The original letters of Countess Caroline von Görtz to her husband held in the private archive of the Count von Rechberg in Donzdorf.¹⁴

The chapter on Censorship and Cover-up shows briefly the problems posed for researchers by the censors who have been at work 'purifying' the whole of Goethe's literary legacy. There is also evidence of censorship in the Letters to Charlotte von Stein. (Chapter 1)

Letters held in the Donzdorf archive (Chapter 2) throw an unfamiliar light on the relationship between Goethe and Anna Amalia, partly corroborating Ghibellino's view that there was an intense erotic relationship between them. At the same time, however, the letters give evidence that this relationship is to some extent superseded by Goethe's intensifying love relationship with Charlotte von Stein. By mid-1781 Goethe seems to have focused his passion exclusively on Charlotte, though his friendship with Anna Amalia continued on a different footing. Chapters 6-8 document the intense focus on Charlotte von Stein.

Eckermann's report on a conversation with Goethe, revealing a nocturnal visit of Goethe to his beloved after his return from a journey in his first Weimar years, is examined with a view to establishing the identity of this 'beloved'. Further studies of the journeys and absences in Chapters 5 and 6 are particularly important as a means of showing to whom the crucial letters were written.

Of special importance, in Chapters 7-10, is the corpus of letters showing the passionate language – even expressions of exclusivity – which characterizes Goethe's stream of letters to Charlotte von Stein.

These investigations scrutinize and partly support Ghibellino's claim that a serious erotic relationship existed between Anna Amalia and Goethe – at least for a limited time – but equally they challenge the claim that Charlotte is merely a 'straw woman' used by Goethe and Anna Amalia as a

¹³ Weimarer Fourierbücher for 1775-1786, Thüringisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Weimar.

¹⁴ Access to these letters was graciously accorded by the Count von Rechberg himself. Gabriele von Trauchburg's generous assistance has been invaluable. I am especially grateful to her for providing me with jpegs of the letters.

front for their relationship.¹⁵ It should also become clear that Ghibellino's claim, in his writings and speeches, that most of the letters to Charlotte were not really meant for her but were to be passed on to Anna Amalia herself, is no longer sustainable.

¹⁵ If this amounts to saying that, at least for a short time, a love triangle existed involving Goethe, Anna Amalia, and Charlotte von Stein, the idea is not entirely new. In his review in *Die Zeit* (11 March, 2010) of Norbert Leithold's book on *Graf Goertz. Der große Unbekannte* (Berlin: Osburg, 2010) Nicolas Boyle says of the love triangle (Dreiecksverhältnis), 'one can only agree. It goes without saying that Anna Amalia was in love with Goethe.' (... so kann man nur zustimmen. Selbstverständlich war Anna Amalia in Goethe verliebt...) 'Feuilleton', p. 48.

CHAPTER ONE

CENSORSHIP AND COVER-UP

The challenging hypothesis developed in Ettore Ghibellino's book has had little or no resonance in the English-speaking world. I was introduced to the second edition of the book by my colleague in Leipzig, Professor Ilse Nagelschmidt, and, after studying it for a couple of months and meeting Ghibellino in Weimar, I decided that the hypothesis was worthy of very close scrutiny.

I was struck at the very beginning of my study of Ghibellino's book by the level of censorship affecting the editions of Goethe's work. This is not just a matter of the somewhat puritanical editing – a kind of expurgation – by the Grand Duchess Sophie, who inherited the literary works of Goethe from the last of Goethe's heirs in 1886. There is evidence of a much wider-ranging cover-up, relating, as Ghibellino claims, to the Dowager Duchess Anna Amalia, Charlotte von Stein (her former lady-in-waiting), and Goethe himself. Ghibellino rejects the generally accepted notion that Goethe's beloved in his Weimar years before the Italian journey was Charlotte von Stein. He claims that this relationship – which existed at least in the form of a strong friendship – was also a front for Goethe's secret (because forbidden) relationship to Anna Amalia herself. In the context of scrutinizing Ghibellino's thesis the phenomenon of censorship is particularly interesting.

It is well known that the correspondence between Goethe and Charlotte von Stein existed. There are seven folio volumes of Goethe's letters to Charlotte von Stein, containing over 1700 brief notes and letters, most of them relating to Goethe's pre-Italian years: 1776-1786. For this same period, Charlotte's letters to Goethe are not extant. It is generally thought that Charlotte asked for her letters back and then destroyed them. According to Susanne Kord, this is not necessarily the case.¹ Kord goes so far as to say that, considering the care Goethe took in editing his own letters and those of others for posterity, it seems equally possible that he destroyed

¹ Susanne Kord, ed., *Charlotte von Stein: Dramen* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1998), p. vi.

her letters himself.² Regarding correspondence between Goethe and Anna Amalia the situation is even worse: although both of them were prolific letter writers and went through intense periods of collaboration – not only during their many stage productions in Ettersburg, Tiefurt, and Weimar itself, but also in the context of the many cultural and social meetings in Anna Amalia's Wittumspalais – during the period in question not one letter of Anna Amalia to Goethe and not one of Goethe to Anna Amalia is extant.

Twenty years after Anna Amalia's death, her son, the Grand Duke Carl August, commissioned Chancellor Friedrich Theodor von Müller to gather Anna Amalia's papers, to order them, and to list them in a catalogue. Von Müller did this and showed his work to Goethe, who replied on 24 July 1828:

This will lead to special documents being saved. They are priceless – not from a political but from a human point of view – because only from these papers will people be able to see what the situation was like at the time.

Auf diesem Wege werden sonderbare Documente gerettet; nicht in politischer, sondern in menschlicher Hinsicht unschätzbar, weil man sich nur aus diesen Papieren die damaligen Zustände wird vergegenwärtigen können.

In referring to this passage, Ghibellino says:

Today there is no trace of these papers. When what was left of Anna Amalia's letters was being sifted through in 1872, the then reigning Grand Duke [Carl Alexander] insisted on a two-fold right to correct and oversee them should they be published. But they were never published.

Von diesen Papieren fehlt heute jede Spur. Als das, was von Anna Amalias Briefen übrig geblieben war, ab 1872 mühsam gesichtet wurde, behielt sich der regierende Großherzog [Carl Alexander] ein zweifaches Korrektur- und Kontrollrecht im Falle einer Veröffentlichung vor, die aber nicht zustande kam.³

Censorship in some letters to Charlotte von Stein

An important letter, written between 12 and 13 December 1781 – at the time when the highly-placed women at court in Weimar were commenting on the relationship between Anna Amalia and Goethe – shows that a whole section of about five lines has actually been cut or carefully torn away. In this letter Goethe is playfully responding to a letter from his

² Ibid.

³ Ghibellino, p. 13, Farrelly, pp. 2f. Further references to Ghibellino's book [2007] and the translation will abbreviated as, for example, EG, p. 13; DF, pp. 2f.

beloved, in which she has shifted from using the familiar 'Du' form of address back to the formal 'Sie'. While the ink is drying on page one of his reply he spends the time translating the 'Sie' and the 'Ihnen' forms in her letter back to 'Du' and 'Dir'. Immediately following the gap there is a section in which he uses very elevated forms of address like 'allerdurchlauchtigste' which only apply to persons of princely rank.⁴ While it would have been totally meaningless to use such forms of address in writing seriously to someone of Charlotte von Stein's rank, it is quite likely that Goethe was mocking Charlotte von Stein in these terms in playful revenge for the formal tone of her letter.

But there is another side to the letter which, Ghibellino claims, would make it unlikely that the addressee is Charlotte von Stein. Goethe writes here of an Italian translation of his 'Werther' novel which he has recently received. After commenting on the quality and limitations of the translation, he says that 'she' – the addressee – should see it and judge for herself.

I have been sent an Italian translation of Werther. What a sensation this will o' the wisp has made! This man has understood him, too. His translation is nearly always accurate, but the glowing expression of pain and joy which continually consume him is completely gone, and so it is not clear what the fellow wants. He has also changed the name I love so dearly into Annetta. You must see it and judge for yourself.

Man hat mir eine Italiänische Übersetzung des Werthers zugeschickt. Was hat das Irrlicht für ein Aufsehn gemacht! Auch dieser Mann hat ihn wohl verstanden, seine Übersetzung ist fast immer Umschreibung; aber der glühende Ausdruck von Schmerz und Freude, die sich unaufhaltsam in sich selbst verzehren, ist ganz verschwunden und darüber weis man nicht was der Mensch will. Auch meinen vielgeliebten Nahmen hat er in Annetta verwandelt. Du sollst es sehen und selbst urtheilen.⁵

Though Charlotte had proficiency in speaking and writing French, she had no knowledge of Italian – nor any significant interest in Italy – and was in no position to make any judgement about the quality of the Italian translation. Anna Amalia, on the other hand, had a very good knowledge of Italian and was capable, herself, of translating from Italian into German and

⁴ See Friedrich Bury, *Briefe aus Italien an Goethe und Anna Amalia*, ed. Martin Dönike (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2007). In some letters to Anna Amalia Bury addresses her as: 'Durchlauchtigste Fürstin!' (54); 'Durchlauchtigste Herzogin!' (78); 'Durchlauchtigste Herzogin! Gnädige Fürstin' (84).

⁵ In quotations from Goethe's letters the original spelling used in the Weimar edition is retained here.

vice versa. Like Goethe, she also had a profound interest in Italy. Against this, it is interesting to note that in this letter he refers to the name in the novel [Lotte] as much beloved and disapproves of the translator changing it to Annette. If this letter were really meant for Anna Amalia, his comment would be tactless; if meant for Charlotte it would make perfect sense.⁶

Two observations are to be made here: first, that, in Ghibellino's view the letter which is supposed to have been written to Charlotte von Stein may not have been meant for her; second, and more convincingly, there was some material in the letter which had to be removed: in other words, we have a clear example of censorship, although we have no inkling of what was being censored.

We can point to two other examples of such censorship: the introductory lines of a brief letter of 29.12.1781 have been neatly cut away. It is a matter of conjecture whether the reason for this is that the addressee might have been identifiable as someone other than Charlotte or whether what had been written there was of too private a nature. The rest of the letter is innocuous. Be that as it may, there is no question but that the letter has been censored. In another letter – written on 8 September 1785 – to which there were four sides, on the first three sides the writing ended well before the end of the page. On the fourth side, on which the writing went down to the bottom of the page, a section has been cut or torn away. Of course, we don't know the content of the text that was removed, but it is clear that a censor was at work.

Addressing the question of who might have censored these letters, we can narrow down the field of possibilities. Unlike the literary legacy, which after the death of Goethe's grandson passed into the possession of the Duchess Sophie in 1886, the collection of Goethe's letters to Charlotte von Stein was in the possession of Charlotte von Stein herself until her death in 1827. She bequeathed them to her son Fritz von Stein. Pasted into 7 folio volumes,⁷ the letters were kept in the von Stein residence at Großkochberg. Fritz von Stein bequeathed them, in turn, to his nephew Karl, who retained possession of them until 1896, when, with the inauguration of the Goethe-Schiller-Archive in Weimar, they were presented to the archive by Erich Schmidt, where they have been housed ever since. The evidence of censorship we have referred to above was already to be seen in the first edition of the letters published by Adolf Schöll in 1848. Subsequent editions show no changes in this respect.

⁶ See below the later chapter on 'Deception', where there is further discussion of this point.

⁷ By whom we do not know.

So, who is responsible for the censorship? It could have been Charlotte von Stein herself, who had possession of them until her death in 1827. It could have been her son, Fritz, who had them until shortly before his death in 1842. It could have been Karl, Fritz's nephew, in whose possession they were while Schöll was preparing his 1848 edition. Or it could have been the then reigning Grand-Duke of Weimar, Carl Friedrich, who would have been solicitous of preserving family secrets from public gaze. It is unlikely that Schöll himself, as a scholar and editor, would have tampered with the letters – except, of course, that he might have warned the Ducal family about the implications of publishing certain passages in the letters.

Whether we are able to uphold Ghibellino's thesis as it stands, or whether the time of Goethe's liaison with Anna Amalia was limited to only a few years, in either case it is clear that Goethe would have needed to guard the secret very closely. Anna Amalia, as a Duchess and a member of the highest aristocracy, would have been exposed to ridicule for her relationship to the upstart poet, and it is more than likely that Goethe's status in Weimar would have been under very serious threat. He may even have been forced to leave the Duchy. The Ducal family – with its excellent connections throughout the courts of Europe – would have seen fit to protect its reputation from unnecessary scandal.

CHAPTER TWO

SOME DONZDORF LETTERS

At this point it is useful to focus on some important letters which are to be found in sources outside of Weimar. Although the letters in question were written by women closely associated with the Weimar court, the addressees themselves were in another jurisdiction, so that the letters, once they reached the addressees, were no longer subject to Weimar censorship. Individually, these letters have, in the past, raised the odd eyebrow, but Ghibellino is the first to have brought some of them to bear on a serious interpretation of Goethe's life. The letters are held in the private archive of Count von Rechberg in Donzdorf¹ and some of them have already been cited in *Begegnungen und Gespräche* as early as 1966.²

Written mainly in French, the letters stem from members of a group of highly-placed court officials and cannot simply be dismissed as idle gossip.

The archive contains many letters which concern us here. They are mainly those written by the Countess Caroline von Görtz to her husband Eustachius during the times of his absence from Weimar between 1776 and 1778, at a time when he was trying to establish his independence vis-à-vis the Weimar Duchy. His various endeavours led him eventually to move, with his family, to Berlin, to the court of Frederick the Great.

Along with the letters of Caroline von Görtz, dating mainly from 1776 to the middle of 1778 – by which time she had effected the move of their family from Weimar to Berlin – there is a small batch of letters written to her by her niece, Marianne von Wöllwarth, who was very fond of her aunt and uncle (Eustachius).

A third group of letters stems from the hand of the Countess von Giannini, who, after Eustachius von Görtz relinquished his post as Chamberlain (Oberhofmeister) at the court of the Duchess Luise, was

¹ The private archive of the Count von Rechberg contains papers relating both to the Count and Countess von Görtz, whose daughter married an ancestor of the present Count von Rechberg.

² Ernst Grumach and Renate Grumach, eds, *Goethe. Begegnungen und Gespräche, vol. 2, 1777-1785* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co, 1966).

appointed as Lady Chamberlain (Oberhofmeisterin). She held this post until her death in 1784. Her letters quoted here reveal her close friendship both with von Görtz, who recommended her for the post, and with his wife Caroline. Giannini's letters, written to Caroline between 1780 and 1784, speak volumes about her love for the von Görtz family, about her concern with their health, about her own health, and about the way she is treated at the court of Duchess Luise.

Count Johann Eustachius von Görtz zu Schlitz had a distinguished career. He had been appointed in 1762 by the young Regent Duchess Anna Amalia as principal educator of her young sons, Carl August and Constantin. He played an important role in their early formation and eventually accompanied them on their Cavalier's tour in 1775, during which time the future Duke Carl August met Goethe when the Ducal party was passing through the Frankfurt area on its way back to Weimar. When Görtz arrived back in Weimar with the Princes, he was dismissed by Anna Amalia – the reasons for which can only be properly established by further research. After Carl August's marriage to Princess Luise von Hesse-Darmstadt in September 1775, Görtz was offered an important post as Chamberlain (Oberhofmeister) in the court of the new Duchess Luise. Obviously he found the duties of this post too narrow and limiting, and in 1776 he was already seeking leave of absence for several weeks. Eventually, he sought permission to quit the service of Carl August altogether. His dissatisfaction with his treatment in Weimar was in no small measure due to the arrival of Goethe in Weimar and to the level of favouritism shown the young poet both by Anna Amalia and the young Duke Carl August. He would naturally have been envious of Goethe's meteoric rise to positions of great influence in the Weimar administration.

Even before Goethe's arrival in Weimar in November 1775, the *Sturm und Drang* movement had made its impact and had met with the disapproval of the conservative elements in Weimar society. The Görtz circle was amongst those scandalized by the unruly, iconoclastic behaviour of the *Sturm und Drang* aficionados. Given their Protestant upbringing, the von Görtz circle set themselves high standards of moral behaviour and decorum – which predisposed them to reject this new movement. As Gabriele von Trauchburg points out in important new research which throws light on some of the circumstances governing von Görtz and his wife's opposition to events in Weimar:³

³ Gabriele von Trauchburg, *Wer war Gräfin Görtz? Erste biographische Fragmente zu ihrem 260. Geburtstag* (Weimar: Denkena Verlag, 2009), pp. 36f.