



# GOETHE, JOHANN WOLFGANG VON

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**GOETHE, JOHANN WOLFGANG von** (1749-1832), and the influence upon him of the Persian poet Ḥāfeẓ (q.v.; ca. 1320-90 C.E.). Goethe, the most renowned poet of German literature, was already from his youth deeply interested in the East and in Islam. He planned to write a drama about Moḥammad, as witnessed by the poem *Mahomets-Gesang* (Mommsen, 1967, p. 455; Bürgel, p. 8). But it was not until later, during his period of romanticism, that the poet devoted his attention to the literature and history of Persia. Goethe considered literature (language) and religion as the best aids to discovering other cultures. In addition to Persian literature, he also learned the Arabic language and script and studied the teachings of Zoroaster as well as those of Islam. Goethe's productive preoccupation with Persia goes back to the years 1814 to 1827; and it was, above all, his acquaintance with Ḥāfeẓ which increasingly awakened his interest in Persian literature.

Goethe's *West-östlicher Divan* marks a literary encounter between German and Persian literature which began in 1814. In the spring of that year, Goethe received a German translation of Ḥāfeẓ's *divān* in two volumes from the publisher Cotta of Stuttgart (Bohnenkamp and Bosse, p. 308). The translator was the Austrian Orientalist Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall (1774-1856), whose translations and commentaries played a major role in acquainting Germans with the East. Hammer's translation of the *divān* broadened and expanded the knowledge of the Orient which Goethe had acquired in his youth, so that he



could now, at the age of 65, devote himself more intensively to the East, and predominantly to Persia.

Goethe's approach to Ḥāfeẓ began with enthusiasm, which, in its turn, led to interchange and dialogue, and, in the *Divan*, assumed a lyric-prosaic form. The need for communication, for narrative and for finding one's way into a different society is characteristic of the essence of the *Divan* (Bohnenkamp and Bosse, p. 306). The dialogue with Ḥāfeẓ, however, demanded a knowledgeable analysis of the Oriental world. For this there was no lack of material; for, apart from the works of such travelers to the Orient as Marco Polo, Pietro della Valle, and Adam Olearius, and, above all, the translations of Sa'di's *Golestān* and *Bustān* (qq.v.; Bohnenkamp and Bosse, p. 333), Goethe also read works by Orientalists, such as the *Denkwürdigkeiten aus Asien* (1813-15) by Heinrich Friedrich von Diez (see Mommsen, 1961), the journal *Fundgruben des Orients* (1809-14; see Solbrig, pp. 192-220), and Hammer's *Geschichte der Schönen Redekünste Persiens* (1818).

Goethe borrowed the term *Divan*, "poetry collection," from Hammer; but he first referred to his work (in a letter to his wife Christine dated 29 July 1814, and in his diary on 30 July 1814) as "poems addressed to Ḥāfeẓ" (Goethe, 1994, p. 875), and occasionally also called it "*divan*." In May 1815 Goethe described his collection, consisting of 100 poems with an index, as "a little whole" (Goethe, 1994, p. 875). Before deciding on the title *West-östlicher Divan*, he had given various names to the collection at various stages of its evolution (Burdach, 1987, pp. 270-300); but in all the titles for this complex work, he retained the word *Divan*. Between 1814 and 1815, the *Divan* was considerably expanded, due to Goethe's acquaintance with Marianne Jung (later Marianne von Willemer), who awakened fresh feelings of love in the aging poet, which he later expressed in the *Buch Suleika* (Lentz, 1958, pp. 4-21; Bürgel, pp. 14-15).

Goethe's lyrical work was publicized by an announcement in Cotta's *Morgenblatt für gebildete Stände* on 24 February 1816, as also by preprints in the morning paper of 22 March 1816 and in the *Taschenbuch für Damen auf das Jahr 1817*. Between 1817 and 1819, the year when the *Divan* appeared, several successive phases of development took place. The last phase included the prose section, which in the first edition of 1819 bore the title *Besseren Verständnis*. Since certain passages seemed to be incomprehensible to his readers, Goethe decided to supplement them with commentary (Goethe, 1994, pp. 555-63). Hammer's *Geschichte der schönen Redekünste Persiens* reached him on 3 May 1818, and kept him busy studying the history of Persian and



Oriental literature until late June (Goethe, 1994, pp. 279, 1405); this was a primary source of his commentary (Solbrig, pp. 165-91). In early June 1818 the first drafts on Persian culture were prepared; on 17 September the outline for the *Besseren Verständnis* was completed.

In the prose section Goethe refers to imperfections in his work and to a plan for a *Künftiger Divan*; he also explains how he went about his Oriental studies. His arguments about Eastern poetry, as well as about the Christian Orient (*Israel in der Wüste*), are fully represented (Lentz, 1957, pp. 180 ff.). Goethe's preoccupations with travel descriptions by visitors to the East, as well as German translations of Oriental works, which formed the source of his own knowledge about the East, are also discussed in this part. A characteristic mark of this less lyrical and more prosaic part of the *Divan* is Goethe's passage from travelers to the Orient to Orientalists (Goethe, 1998a, pp. 245-58), which simultaneously marks an evolution from descriptions based on personal experience to scholarly accounts of the East. Among the main activities of Orientalists was translating from Oriental languages; Goethe ends his *Divan* with a chapter reflecting on the problems of translation.

The year 1827 marked the publication of the enlarged edition of the *Divan* (the "author's definitive edition," *Ausgabe letzter Hand*), which was now complete. Here the prose section bears the title *Noten und Abhandlungen zu besserem Verständnis des West-östlichen Divan*. This edition includes forty-three new poems. In addition, there are a few departures from the 1819 edition, and some rearrangements of the *Divan's* books (Bohnenkamp and Bosse, p. 311).

The title *West-östlicher Divan* (West-Eastern Divan) is ambivalent, and shows that the work is not to be understood unidimensionally, but as a dialogue (Richter, p. 217). A discussion takes place which begins as a lyrical dialogue between Goethe and Ḥāfeẓ, but later expands to encompass East and West (Goethe, 1988, p. 366). When considering not only the work's title, but its content as well, the ambiguity becomes even more obvious (Wertheim, pp. 244-46). The incentive provided by Ḥāfeẓ prompts the German poet to make a fictitious journey to the East, where the competition between poetry and religion, a favorite theme of both poets, leads to instructive discussions. The eastward journey—which, with its initial poem, "Hegire," in the *Buch des Sängers*, marks the beginning of a new phase in life (Ileri, p. 184)—and the sojourn in the east also characterize this lyrical work as poetry based on personal experience. This poetry shows Goethe's wealth of imagination—an imagination steadily nourished by Ḥāfeẓ—through masquerades and role-



playing, irony, jest and earnestness.

The twelve books of the *Divan* (Goethe had originally intended there to be thirteen; Schaeder, pp. 101-2) can be interpreted as a reflection of Goethe's Oriental studies. To begin with, the reader's attention is drawn to its structure, for this is the first time that Goethe divides a work into "books." Each book bears a double title: a Persian title, followed by a German one, with the word *nameh* (Pers. *nāma*)/*Buch* as the first component. (This is similar to Sa'di's method in the *Golestān*; see Tafazzoli, p. 97.) The *Divan* opens with the *Moghani Nameh/Buch des Dichters* (later *Buch des Sängers*), which has as its main theme the poet's "Hegira" to the East and his acquaintance with Oriental culture. This is followed by *Hafī;s Nameh/Das Buch Hafī;s*, which is devoted to characterization and admiration of the Persian poet, and in which Ḥāfeẓ assumes the central role of interlocutor. The third book, *Uschk Nameh/Buch der Liebe*, discusses love and passion; there is a thematic relationship between this book and the *Buch Suleika*, although the name Suleika is not mentioned in the *Book of Love*. The *Tefkir Nameh/Buch der Betrachtungen* has a didactic and moral character. *Rendsch Nameh /Buch des Unmuts* contains political and social criticism. *Hikmat Nameh/Buch der Sprüche* closely resembles the *Buch der Betrachtungen* and *Buch des Unmuts*, centering on Oriental adages and the art of poetry. *Timur Nameh/Buch des Timur* is devoted to the conqueror Timur (771-807/1370-1405), Ḥāfeẓ's contemporary, whom Goethe considered as resembling his own contemporary Napoleon (Goethe, 1998b, pp. xx-xxi, 256-57; Schaeder, pp. 68-69); it is linked with the ensuing *Suleika Nameh/Buch Suleika* by the poem "An Suleika" (Goethe, 1998b, pp. 238-39). The *Buch Suleika* takes the form of a dialogue between the Arab Hatemand the Persian Suleika, who figure the poet and his beloved Marianne; a number of Marianne's own poems are included (Goethe, 1998b, pp. xxii-xxiii; Bürgel, p. 19). Monologues and dialogues of a totally different kind are found in the *Saki Nameh/Das Schenkenbuch*, with its anacreontic tone, which Goethe had already used in his younger days and which he now imitates in the style of Ḥāfeẓ. *Mathal Nameh/Buch die Parabeln* contains fables and parables; *Parsi Nameh/Buch des Parsen* deals with the old Persian adoration of fire and the sun. The final book, *Chuld Nameh/Buch des Paradieses*, blends Islamic conceptions of paradise with those of the poet himself.

In his *Noten und Abhandlungen* Goethe paid tribute to several other Persian poets: Ferdowsi, Anwari, Nezāmi, Rumi, Sa'di, and Jāmi (Goethe, 1998a, pp. 153-60). But Ḥāfeẓ was the only one to whom he devoted an entire book. In his



*Zwillingsbruder* he had discovered a poet whose inspiration awakened in him a feeling of rejuvenation. And although in some cases a critical distance can be felt in Goethe's approach to the form of Ḥāfeẓ's poetry, he nevertheless felt inspired to write *ḡazals*; an example is the last poem of the *Buch Suleika* (Goethe, 1998b, pp. 344-45). In many poems he employs a "signature verse" (*takallosá*) typical of the *ḡazal*, in which he addresses, refers to, or identifies with the Persian poet (see, e.g., 1998b, p. 32: "Und mit diesem Lied und Wendung/Sind wir wieder bei Hafisen"). But Goethe's attempts at writing *ḡazals* came up against his own criticism, which he expressed in the poem *Nachbildung* by criticizing the formal constraint of using monorhyme (Goethe, 1998b, pp. 64-65; Lemmel, p. 95). But while Goethe preferred a unified and logical whole—and here he remains Western (Bürgel, p. 21)—he followed closely the thematics and imagery of Ḥāfeẓ's poetry (for comparisons see Bürgel, pp. 21-26). In the *Buch des Sängers* and the *Buch Hafis*, where Ḥāfeẓ's name is most often mentioned, motifs and characters from the latter's poetry form the Persian mask of the *Divan*.

Ḥāfeẓ's inspiration was so strong that in some of his poems Goethe called him *heiligen Hafis* or *Meister*. In other books, although Ḥāfeẓ's name is not mentioned, his proximity can be felt through allusions and hints. A theme shared by both poets was that of poetic madness, already well-known in European literature (see Bürgel, pp. 33-34; Goethe, 1998b, pp. 176-77). As in Ḥāfeẓ's work, panegyrics, anacreontics, mysticism, and eroticism formed the motifs of Goethe's *Divan*, in which passion and intellect, mysticism and irony, love and common sense were equally present (Bürgel, p. 11). Through Ḥāfeẓ, Goethe was able to express his own moral and political criticism of his time (Bürgel, p. 28). A significant aspect of Ḥāfeẓ's work appears in Goethe merely by implication: Ḥāfeẓ's *rendi* (libertinism) is recognized but never appears as such, although Goethe did use Persian words (see Bürgel, p. 7). Allusions to *rendi* can be found both in the *Buch Hafis* and the *Schenkenbuch* ("Offenbar Geheimnis"; cf. Bürgel, pp. 26-27).

Goethe's encounter with Ḥāfeẓ was highly significant for the history of German poetry. His *Divan* is generally considered as an east-western work containing both foreign and native elements (Richter, pp. 218 ff.; Bürgel, p. 39). Goethe's poetic art consists of mixing foreign and indigenous elements by creating a dialogue between two poets: the German poet of Weimar and the Persian poet of Shiraz. The last great collection of poems by the classicist Goethe thus marks a major stage in the development of lyric poetry in general.



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