

Mystical Motifs  
in  
Goethe's *West-östlicher Divan*

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## Abstract

A major problematic concerning Goethe's *West-östlicher Divan* is the possibility of a mystical interpretation of this cycle of poetry. Opinions regarding this issue range over a wide spectrum, covering the extremes of a total rejection of such an interpretation and a thoroughly Christological/Christian reading. In this work, we will re-examine the question of mysticism in the *Divan* and argue that a mystical reading of it is indeed possible, provided that the exact coordinates of this mysticism are explicated and demonstrated as operative in the composition of the cycle. Our interpretive/hermeneutic framework will be based on the speculative metaphysics of two Islamic mystics/philosophers, Muhieddin Ibn 'Arabi and Shahabeddin Suhrawardi. We will attempt to show that this framework not only helps us overcome the seemingly irreconcilable worldly/mystical dichotomy in the interpretation of the *Divan*, it will also offer us new insights regarding the symbolic meaning of each individual text in question as well as the internal unity of the entire cycle. After an exposition of the main problematic, a review of the relevant background and sources of inspiration in the composition of the *Divan*, and a summary of the basic tenets of the type of mysticism - called in this work *speculative mysticism* or *Oriental theosophy* interchangeably - which we will apply as our basic hermeneutics, we will interpret one representative poem of the *Divan* in each chapter of this work from the perspective of this speculative system. We will thus demonstrate a one-to-one correspondence between a set of crucial elements in the poems of the *Divan* and a constellation of fundamental ideas and notions in speculative mysticism of the two above-mentioned mystics. We will thereby argue *not* for a direct influence of the schools of thought of those thinkers on Goethe and on the *Divan*, but for a commonality of mystical vision that overcomes a vast historical, geographical and cultural distance. This will finally lead us to consider the *West-östlicher Divan* as an example of the genuine cultural and spiritual dialogue between the Orient and the Occident.

## Résumé

Ce qui rend le *West-östlicher Divan* de Goethe problématique est le potentiel d'accorder à ce cycle de poèmes une interprétation mystique. L'éventail des opinions qui tournent autour de cette question est large, touchant le bout du refus absolu d'une telle interprétation, en allant jusqu'à la lecture profondément christologique/chrétienne. La présente remettra en question l'aspect mystique du *Divan*, puis exposera les raisons en faveur d'une interprétation mystique potentielle, pourvu que les coordonnées précises de ce mysticisme sont expliquées et décrites comme étant agents dans la composition de ce cycle. Notre cadre d'interprétation/herméneutique sera fondé sur la métaphysique spéculative de deux mystiques/philosophes, Muhieddin Ibn 'Arabi et Shahabeddin Suhrawardi. Nous tenterons de démontrer que ce cadre nous offre non seulement la possibilité de surmonter à cette inconciliable -selon toute apparence- dichotomie entre le profane et le mystique propre à l'interprétation du *Divan*, mais également un nouvel aperçu du sens symbolique de chacun des textes, ainsi qu'à l'unité intégrale de l'ensemble du cycle. Suite à l'exposition de la problématique principale, de la révision des origines pertinentes et sources d'inspiration menant à la rédaction du *Divan*, et d'un résumé des principes de base propre à ce genre de mysticisme - auquel on attribue les termes *mysticisme spéculatif* ou *théosophie orientale* de façon permutable- que nous appliquerons à notre herméneutique fondamentale, nous allons alors interpréter un poème représentatif du *Divan* à la fois, dans chaque chapitre de cette œuvre, du point de vue de ce système spéculatif. Nous allons ainsi démontrer un accord direct entre un ensemble d'éléments essentiels aux poèmes du *Divan* et d'une toile de notions et idées clés du mysticisme spéculatif des deux mystiques mentionnés plus haut. Puis nous allons ainsi argumenter, non pas pour une influence directe que les écoles de pensée de ces philosophes aurait sur Goethe et son *Divan*, mais plutôt en faveur d'une vision mystique commune qui surmonte un grand écart historique, géographique et culturel. Ceci nous permettra enfin penser au *West-östlicher Divan* comme étant un exemple du véritable entretien culturel et spirituel entre l'Orient et l'Occident.

## Preface

Gottes ist der Orient!  
Gottes ist der Okzident!  
Nord- und südliches Gelände  
Ruht im Frieden seiner Hände.

Early in the year 1814, Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, the Austrian orientalist and the diplomat stationed in the Ottoman Empire, published his translation of the collection of the poems by the Persian lyrical poet, Hafiz, in two volumes and under the title *Der Diwan von Mohammed Schemsed-Din Hafis*. Goethe scholars believe that sometime in the spring of the same year, the German master lyricist obtained a copy of this translation.<sup>1</sup> Goethe received this work during one of the most tumultuous periods of political upheaval in Europe and in Germany, and at the same time, during a period of stagnation in his own creative activity insofar as lyrical poetry was concerned. In the third volume of his book, *Goethe*, Emil Staiger summarizes the absence of the poetic inspiration on the part of Goethe in the period immediately prior to the discovery of Hafiz:

Nach Vollendung der 'Wahlverwandtschaften' hielt Goethe die Zeit für gekommen, seine Lebensgeschichte aufzuschreiben, um so den Deutschen das Verständnis seines Gesamtwerks zu erleichtern. Er betrachtete demnach sein dichterisches Schaffen als mehr oder minder abgeschlossen und hatte Grund zu dieser Meinung. Der Sechzigjährige konnte keine lyrische Blüte mehr erwarten. Einige virtuose Balladen, Huldigungsgedichte und knappe Sprüche kamen noch zustande. Das wollte aber nicht viel besagen. Es war kein Ereignis wie die Lieder und Hymnen der Jugend und wie die elegische Dichtung der nachitalienischen Jahre. [...] So schien denn nur [...] die Prosa übrig zu bleiben. Er pflegte sie in naturwissenschaftlichen, kritischen und geschichtlichen Schriften, in 'Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahren', die langsam Masse zu machen begannen, und insbesondere in 'Dichtung und Wahrheit', dem Hauptgeschäft dieser Epoche [...]<sup>2</sup>

The following sentences from Goethe's *Tag- und Jahresheft* of 1815 wonderfully express the depth of the effect and the sheer force of the transformative and rejuvenating impact of the encounter with Hafiz on the poet's creative powers:

Schon im vorigen Jahre waren mir die sämtlichen Gedichte Hafis' in der von Hammerschen Übersetzung zugekommen, und wenn ich früher den hier und da in Zeitschriften übersetzt mitgetheilten einzelnen Stücken dieses herrlichen Poeten nichts abgewinnen konnte, so wirkten sie doch jetzt zusammen desto lebhafter auf mich ein, und ich mußte mich dagegen productiv verhalten, weil ich sonst vor der mächtigen Erscheinung nicht hätte bestehen können. Die Einwirkung war zu lebhaft, die deutsche Uebersetzung lag vor, und ich mußte also hier Veranlassung finden zu eigener Theilnahme. Alles was dem Stoff und dem Sinne nach bey mir Ähnliches verwahrt und gehegt worden, that sich hervor und dies mit umsomehr Heftigkeit als ich höchst nötig fühlte mich aus der wirklichen Welt, die sich selbst offenbar und im Stillen bedrohte, in eine ideelle zu flüchten, an welcher vergnüglichen Theil zu nehmen meiner Lust, Fähigkeit und Willen überlassen war.<sup>3</sup>

Already on June 7, 1814, the name Hafiz appears in Goethe's *Tagebuch*. Only seven weeks later Goethe had written 29 *Gedichte an Hafis* and in the *Tagebuch* entry of July 31 had used the words 'Divan geordnet' to label those poems. By the end of 1814 the number of the poems of the *Deutscher Divan* had grown to 53. The storm of poetic creativity triggered by the encounter with the Persian poet continued in the following year, the collection of poems grew much larger and was organized into 12 chapters or "Books," and on February 24, 1816, the literary journal "Morgenblatt für gebildete Stände" announced the upcoming publication of *West-Oestlicher Divan oder Versammlung deutscher Gedichte in stetem Bezug auf den Orient*. However, in order that "nichts den ersten guten Eindruck des gegenwärtigen Büchleins hindern möge," Goethe decided "zu erläutern, zu erklären, nachzuweisen, und zwar bloß in der Absicht daß ein unmittelbares

Verständniß Lesern daraus erwachse, die mit dem Osten wenig oder nicht bekannt sind.”<sup>4</sup> The plan to add an expository prose section to the collection of the poems was considerably aided by the publication of another book by Hammer-Purgstall, *Geschichte der schönen Redekünste Persiens*. Goethe received this book in May of 1818, and in the remaining months of that year he worked on the prose section. The manuscript of the *Noten und Abhandlungen zu besserem Verständniß des West-östlichen Divans* was sent to the publisher on January 7, 1819. And finally, together with this expository prose part, in August of 1819, *West-östlicher Divan* with the Arabic subtitle *Ad-diwan ash-sharqi li 'l-mu'allif al-gharbi* (the Oriental Divan of the Occidental author) was published.<sup>5</sup>

Despite Goethe's effort to make the *Divan* more accessible to the public and despite Oriental Studies being in fashion at the time of its publication, it did not enjoy the understanding and warm reception of the contemporary public, literary or otherwise. Ernst Beutler, who describes the *Divan* as “nächst dem ‘Faust’ das bedeutendste und zugleich persönlichste Werk des Dichters,” reports that at the beginning of the First World War, the copies of the first edition of the *Divan* published in 1819 were still unsold and available in German bookstores.<sup>6</sup> However, there were notable and important exceptions to the general lack of enthusiasm about this work. In his *Romantische Schule*, Heinrich Heine wrote these sentences about the *Divan*:

Unbeschreiblich ist der Zauber dieses Buches: es ist ein Selam [Gruss], den der Okzident dem Oriente geschickt hat, und es sind gar närrische Blumen darunter: sinnliche rote Rosen, Hortensien wie weiße nackte Mädchenbusen, spaßhaftes Löwenmaul, Purpurdigitalis wie lange Menschenfinger, verdrehte Krokosnasen, und in der Mitte, lauschend verborgen, stille deutsche Veilchen.

Dieser Selam aber bedeutet, daß der Okzident seines frierend mageren Spiritualismus überdrüssig geworden und an der gesunden Körperwelt des Orients sich wieder erlaben möchte. Goethe, nachdem er, im 'Faust', sein Mißbehagen an dem abstrakt Gesitigen und sein Verlangen nach reellen Genüssen ausgesprochen, warf sich gleichsam mit dem Geiste selbst in die Arme des Sensualismus, indem er den 'West-östlichen Divan' schrieb.<sup>7</sup>

Also Hegel, in his *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* and in the context of the "kummerlose Heiterkeit" in Persian lyrical poetry says these words about the *Divan* and its author:

Auch Goethe ist, seinen trüberen Jugendgedichten gegenüber, im späteren Alter von dieser weiten, kummerlosen Heiterkeit ergriffen worden und hat sich als Greis noch, durchdrungen vom Hauch des Morgenlandes, in der poetischen Glut des Blutes voll unermeßlicher Seligkeit zu dieser Freiheit des Gefühls hinübergewendet, welche selbst in der Polemik die schönste Unbekummertheit nicht verliert. Die Lieder seines *West-östlichen Divans* sind weder spielend noch unbedeutende Artigkeiten, sondern aus solch einer freien, hingebenden Empfindung hervorgegangen.<sup>8</sup>

In spite of the initial lack of success and the relative scarcity of critical attention to the *Divan* – compared to his other works - in the field of Goethe studies, which has continued until the present day, important and informative works regarding the process of its composition, its relation to the circumstances of the author's life and the Oriental sources available to or studied and utilized by him have appeared throughout the two centuries since its publication.<sup>9</sup> There have also appeared thorough studies of particular motifs in the *Divan*, interpretation of single poems, the overall structure of the *Divan* as a collection of lyrical cycles or one integrated lyrical cycle as well as from the perspective of the poetic/pictorial representation of abstract concepts.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, certain seminal works have tried to situate the



*Divan* within the general context of Goethe's biography and his interest in and the knowledge of the Orient and Oriental literature and/or his attitude towards religions and religious ideas.<sup>11</sup> Thus, a whole tradition of scholarly discourse does already exist on the *Divan*, to which belong some of the most distinguished names in German philology. Most important for the purpose of the present work is the problematic of the relationship between the *Divan* and mysticism and the question whether the *Divan* indeed permits a mystical interpretation. This question can then, in turn, indeed be constructively connected to the question of Orientalism in the *Divan* and to Goethe's whole attitude towards the east and towards Islam.

On the matter of the mystical character of the *Divan*, opinions diverge from each other widely and Goethe's own equivocations have contributed greatly to this difference of opinions. For instance, Ernst Beutler and Konrad Burdach offer a mystical interpretation of the *Divan*, while Hans Heinrich Schaeder and Emil Staiger reject such an interpretation.<sup>12</sup> It seems plausible that the real reason for the divergence of opinion is the ambiguity in what is intended by the term "mysticism." The main purpose of the present work will be to re-open the question of the relationship between the *Divan* and mysticism and the possibility of a mystical reading of it from a new perspective, namely, the perspective of what I will call throughout this work Oriental theosophy or Islamic speculative mysticism. This will consequently allow us, in my opinion, to re-examine the alleged Orientalism of the *Divan* and arrive at radically new conclusions.

The problem of Orientalism in the *Divan* was of course also broached by Edward Said in his influential book, *Orientalism*, first published in 1978. Since the publication of this book, several critical responses to Said's treatment of German Orientalism in general, and the *Divan* as an example of it, in particular, have appeared.<sup>13</sup>

In his groundbreaking book, Said enumerates three interdependent aspects of the phenomenon which is nowadays designated by the title:

The most readily accepted designation for Orientalism is an academic one, and indeed the label still serves in a number of academic institutions. Anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient—and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian, or philologist—either in its specific or its general aspects, is an Orientalist, and what he or she does is Orientalism. [...] Related to this academic tradition [...] is a more general meaning for Orientalism. Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction between “the Orient” and (most of the time) “the Occident.” Thus a very large mass of writers among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social description, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, ‘mind,’ destiny, and so on. [...] [T]he third meaning of Orientalism [...] is something more historically and materially defined than either of the other two. Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point, Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.<sup>14</sup>

According to Said, the Orient was almost a European invention,<sup>15</sup> and Orientalism a way of coming to terms with this Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience,<sup>16</sup> and therefore, the whole network of

interests is inevitably brought on any occasion when that particular entity “the Orient” is in question.<sup>17</sup> He announces his contention in his book to be

that without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period.<sup>18</sup>

In his book, Said limits his study of Orientalism mainly to the Anglo-French-American experience of the Arabs and Islam. This decision is, in turn, justified by the fact of the dominance of these three world empires over the Islamic Orient since the seventeenth century as well as the leading role of their respective academic institutions in the establishment of the discipline of Orientalism. While acknowledging the crucial role of German Orientalist scholarship in the development of Orientalism as an academic discipline, Said justifies the absence of a detailed study of German Orientalism in his work primarily based on the lack of imperial or national interest:

[A]t no time in German scholarship during the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century could a close partnership have developed between Orientalists and a protracted, sustained *national* interest in the Orient. There was nothing in Germany to correspond to the Anglo-French presence in India, the Levant, North Africa. Moreover, the German Orient was almost exclusively a scholarly, or at least a classical, Orient: it was made the subjects of lyrics, fantasies, and even novels, but it was never actual, the way Egypt and Syria were actual for Chateaubriand, Lane, Lamartine, Disraeli, or Nerval. There is some significance in the fact that the two most renowned German works on the Orient, Goethe's *Westöstlicher Divan* and Friedrich Schlegel's *Über die Sprache Und Weisheit der Indier*, were based respectively on a Rhine journey and on hours spent in Paris libraries.<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless, Said sees in Goethe and particularly in the *Divan*, something akin to the European “Orientalization” of the Orient, detached from and indifferent to the crude and disappointing reality of the Orient: as human material the Orient is less important than as an element in a Romantic redemptive project.<sup>20</sup> Goethe counts among those creators of imaginative writers, who “reconstructed the Orient”—much in the same way as the Romantic representation of it as exotic locale<sup>21</sup>—“by their arts and made its colors, lights, and people visible through their images, rhythms, and motifs.”<sup>22</sup> Thus Goethe too should be included in the genealogy of European Orientalism with all its vast interests.<sup>23</sup> Most specifically, Said quotes the opening lines of the first poem of the *Divan*, *Hegire*,

Nord und West und Süd zersplittern,  
Throne bersten, Reiche zittern.  
Flüchte du, im reinen Osten  
Patriarchenluft zu kosten,

in order to show that the European, in the imaginary journey in his “Orientalized” Orient always found a place to return to and always confronted unimaginable antiquity, suprahuman beauty, boundless distance, all of which, nevertheless, could be put to use more innocently if they were thought and written about, rather than directly experienced.<sup>24</sup>

Without denying the existence of certain stereotypical Orientalist elements in the *Divan*, it will be a main consequent of the argument of the present work that once the question of the affinity between the *Divan* and its author with Oriental theosophy and Persian lyrical/mystical poetry is properly addressed, the *Divan* can also be viewed as one of the best examples of a constructive and productive West-East encounter, far from the general exploitative attitude of

European Orientalism towards the East. To this must be added the fact that the imaginary Orient which Goethe constructs in the poetic section of the *Divan* at no point purports to be a depiction of an actually empirically existing historical or contemporary entity, but itself insists on its imaginary character, and that this imaginary Orient is constituted to fulfill an urgent intellectual and spiritual need of the author, as the salutary and providential solution to certain compelling and urgent issues, which he then, at the end of the *Divan*, offers to his German compatriots, in the effort, as he says, to “Orientalize” them.<sup>25</sup> The providential and salutary solution in question however precisely involves, among other things, the image of “right living” which Goethe thought to have found in Hafiz, and inextricably bound up with that questions of the relationship of earthly and transient phenomena to a timeless sphere, for here Oriental theosophy or speculative mysticism offered Goethe a congenial and satisfying solution which he could not readily find within his own cultural context.

Thus, I will argue that a mystical reading of the *Divan* is indeed possible and perhaps necessary, *provided* that we clearly distinguish between this type of mysticism, on the one hand, and religious orthodoxies of any kind, Christian mysticism,<sup>26</sup> and even the early Sufism in the Islamic world, on the other. I will also argue that it is exactly the rejection of these latter types of religious/mystical ideas and the fundamental affinity with the type of mysticism that will be proposed here that lies at the heart of Goethe’s interest for the Orient and his profound sense of kinship with the Persian lyrical poet Hafiz.

In order to prepare for the argument presented in this work, I wish now to consider the hermeneutical apparatus and the methodological approach adopted here to address the time-worn debate of whether Goethe's attitude in the *Divan* is indeed to be considered as mystical, somehow religious or as rigorously secular. The constellation of the philosophical concepts which I will use in the present work as the hermeneutical basis for the study of the *Divan* and for which I interchangeably use the title Oriental theosophy and speculative mysticism, is an organic aggregate of certain basic tenets drawn from two main currents of philosophical/theosophical thought emerging almost simultaneously in the Islamic world in the 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D.: Shahabuddin Suhrawardi's "Philosophy of Illumination" and Ibn 'Arabi's "Theory of Unity of Being."<sup>27</sup> Both metaphysical systems contribute to the decisive break of philosophical thought in the Muslim world from scholastic, peripatetic philosophy dominant at the time in the Western world. They both mark a sharp divergence from the Aristotelian philosophies of Avicenna and Averroes and a new appreciation for Platonic and neo-Platonic thoughts. It is this move away from scholastic philosophy and towards a much more theosophically-oriented philosophy that has inspired Western historiographers of philosophy to pronounce Islamic philosophy dead with the death of Averroes. This is while Islamic philosophers consider the emergence of Suhrawardi's *Philosophy of Illumination* and Ibn 'Arabi's *Theory of the Unity of Being* the origin of the truly independent Islamic philosophy.<sup>28</sup> With their underlying mystical tendencies, these schools of thought also mark an important departure from mystical and Sufi traditions in the Islamic world, dominant in the

less systematic treatment of philosophical and mystical ideas, while mysticism of early Sufism took special pride in undermining and depreciating systematic and discursive thought. Thus, both schools are situated at the place where Islamic Philosophy after the 12<sup>th</sup> century now finds itself, that is, the boundary between philosophy and mysticism: theosophy. Secondly, and of primary importance in a Hafizean as Goethean context, while emphasizing the crucial rule of purification and personal meditation as the only means for attaining the ultimate truth, asceticism in the sense of a hostile denunciation of the phenomenal world has no place in either of these two schools of thought. Both philosophies were received, not just by the ascetic Sufis and their established hierarchies and orders, but also by the orthodox religious authorities, with extreme hostility.<sup>29</sup> In the eastern part of the Islamic world, in northwestern Iran, Suhravardi was born in 1153, and his journeys took him Aleppo in Syria, where at the age of 38 he was killed on the order of the King al-Malik az-Zahir, the famous Saladdin's son, for his dangerous and subversive doctrines.<sup>30</sup> In the far western frontiers of the Islamic world, in Andalusia, Ibn 'Arabi was born in 1165. He then travelled eastward and also settled at the end of his life in Syria and died in Damascus in 1240. Though not killed for his ideas, his thought did not fare any better. His theories were considered heretical in his own time and to this day he is vehemently accused of heresy.<sup>31</sup> Both thinkers found, however, enthusiastic followers and disciples well beyond their own life spans, particularly in Iran and among Iranians.

The emergence of these two metaphysical schools coincides, interestingly enough, with an important stage in the development of Persian literature. After the

revival of the Persian language as a literary language in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, mainly through Ferdowsi's (940–1019 or 1025) *Book of Kings*, and in the course of its further development and in interaction with the Islamic religion, Persian literature moved towards pedagogical, but more importantly, lyrical poetry with strong early Sufi coloring. The poets of Khorasan in the north-eastern part of the Iranian region, most notably Sanaee (d. 1131) and Attar (1145-1221), paved the way for the Persian language in its self-assertion as a language capable of participating in the highest levels of religious discourse. In this region was also born, in 1207, Jalaluddin Rumi (d. 1273), arguably the greatest poet, as far as the sophistication of ideas is concerned, in the Persian mystical tradition. But Persian lyrical/mystical literature was then destined to reach new aesthetic heights with the poetry of Sa'di (1184-1283/1291) and in the towering figure of Hafiz (1325/26–1389/90).<sup>32</sup>

In the main chapters of this work, when I come to the application of different key concepts of speculative mysticism in our interpretation of the *Divan*, I will discuss them in detail. I will be primarily using the French Iranologist Henry Corbin's seminal expository works on both Suhrawardi and Ibn 'Arabi, the Japanese Iranologist Toshihiko Izutsu's work on Ibn 'Arabi, and the German Islamic Studies scholar Annemarie Schimmel's work on Persian and Islamic poetry and mysticism.<sup>33</sup> In what follows, I will briefly introduce the basic tenets of these two schools of thought and explain the hermeneutical method based on them. It is extremely crucial at this point to emphasize the fact that the hermeneutics offered here as a basis for the interpretation of the *Divan* is itself



indeed *a* reading – that of the aforementioned scholars, and specifically, of Henry Corbin - of the metaphysical thoughts of the two Muslim thinkers, Suhravardi and Ibn ‘Arabi. It would be equally inaccurate to claim exclusivity on the correct reading of our mystics’ work as it is to claim absolute definitiveness regarding the mystical interpretation of the *Divan* offered in this work.

In Suhravardi’s Philosophy of Illumination, Being in its metaphysical conception coincides with Light as the principle of both manifestation and perception. All of existence emanates from an original pure non-material Light, Light of Lights, in descending order and decreasing intensity. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, in his *Three Muslim Sages*, summarizes the basic doctrine of this philosophy as follows:

The Essence of the First Absolute Light, God, gives constant Illumination, whereby it is manifested and it brings all things into Existence, giving life to them by its rays. Everything in the world is derived from the Light of His essence and all beauty and perfection are the gift of His bounty, and to attain fully to this illumination is salvation.<sup>34</sup>

According to this philosophy, the souls before being born into the phenomenal world have an existence in the “angelic world” which is divided into two, one remaining in the angelic world and one descending into the body. The one remaining in the angelic world is the heavenly prototype of the one descendent into the body. This is clearly akin to the Platonic concept of Universal Ideas. However, as Henry Corbin points out, this angelic world in Suhravardi’s philosophy, called *Mundus Imaginalis*, is a concrete spiritual world, having nothing to do with a world of concepts or universals. This world is the world of angels of the different species.<sup>35</sup>

Derived from this concept is the concept of “personal guide.” The personal guide of each individual is his or her counterpart in the angelic world. The idea of this world, *Mundus Imaginalis*, is extremely important in Corbin’s exposition of Suhrawardi and Ibn ‘Arabi and in the speculative mysticism and the hermeneutic method used in this work. Every other key concept in this speculative system is in one way or another connected to this idea. This world is an intermediate world objectively existing as an intermediary between the phenomenal world and the world of pure intelligibles. It is a world of spiritualized bodies and bodily spirits. Corresponding to this world an organ of perception is afforded to all human beings. This organ is called *Active Imagination*. Through the activation of this organ the human subject can witness and perceive the entities and the events of this world in the light of the divine sphere of heavenly archetypes; these entities are the heavenly counterparts of the entities and events in the phenomenal world. Viewed from the perspective of the perception of the human subject, *Mundus Imaginalis*, is considered to be the *field of theophanic visions*. The Orient of Oriental theosophy is thus not the geographical Orient; it is this world of heavenly origins and counterparts of the entities in the phenomenal world.

Ibn ‘Arabi’s doctrine of Unity of Being is also a theory of self-manifestation of the absolute, “the revelation of God out of pure being, the absolute inwardness, in the world of created things.”<sup>36</sup> Commenting on the original Arabic term for Unity of Being, *wahdat al-wujud*, Annemarie Schimmel writes:

The term *wujud*, which is usually translated as ‘being,’ ‘existence,’ means, basically, ‘finding,’ ‘to be found,’ and is, thus, more

dynamic than mere ‘existence.’ [...] Thus, *wahdat al-wujud* is not simply ‘unity of being,’ but also the unity of existentialization and the perception of this act.<sup>37</sup>

Although Ibn ‘Arabi’s theories have been interpreted by some as a “pantheistic” and “monist” doctrine – resulting in his condemnation as a heretic—the interpretation of his doctrine subscribed to by all three scholars mentioned above rejects the notion of a pure pantheism.

In Ibn ‘Arabi’s thought a transcendence across categories, including Substance, is maintained. God is above all qualities—they are neither He nor other than He—and He manifests Himself only by means of the Names, not by his essence. On the plane of essence, He is inconceivable (transcending concepts) and nonexperiential (transcending even non-rational cognition). That means that in their actual existence the creatures are not identical with God, but only reflections of His attributes.<sup>38</sup>

Directly related to the notion of divine attributes and names, and roughly corresponding to Suhraward’s *Munuds Imaginalis*, is Ibn ‘Arab’s Notion of *Eternal Archetypes*. These are also the inhabitants of an intermediary world between the absolute in its complete indetermination and its full manifestation in the world of phenomena. They are inner articulation of the absolute, thus its attributes and names, which gaining objective existence become the absolute’s multitude of self-manifestation in the physical world. Thus they are infinite in number, that is, they are as numerous as all entities in the created world.

A key and quite controversial idea in Ibn ‘Arabi is that of the *pathetic God*. Summarizing this notion in a compact form, Annemarie Schimmel writes:

The Absolute yearned in His Loneliness, and according to the tradition ‘I was a hidden treasure and I wanted to be known, so I created the world,’ produced creation as a mirror for His [...] manifestations. The ‘pathetic God’ brought into existence the named things for the sake of the primordial sadness of the divine

names. The infinite thirst of the pathetic God is, in a certain way, reflected in the infinite thirst of his creatures, who long for home.<sup>39</sup>

Consequently, the idea of the pathos of God and the sym-pathos existing between him and his creatures results in positing love as the fundamental force of cosmogony in Ibn 'Arabi's doctrine. On the side of human beings, however, divine love cannot be attained in isolation from human love. This will, in turn, bring about the question of the feminine divine and the female element in cosmogony; the divine love is "symbolized" by the love for the feminine.

It will also be extremely crucial to understand the nature of the symbol as intended in speculative mysticism and also in the language of Goethe. Strictly speaking, a symbol is the locus of a theophanic vision and is capable of endlessly generating meaning and interpretation. It is not, as allegory is, an arbitrary sign, but it is the unique and necessary expression of the thing symbolized. Or as Corbin writes:

To penetrate the meaning of a symbol is in no sense equivalent to making it superfluous or abolishing it, for it always remains the sole expression of the signified thing with which it symbolizes. [...] Transmutation of the sensible and imaginable into symbol, return of the symbol to the situation that brought it to flower—these two movements open and close the hermeneutic circle.<sup>40</sup>

The symbol is the prime example of a fundamental structure that permeates every key notion that participates in the constellation of the ideas within the speculative mysticism used as hermeneutical foundation of this work, namely, the structure of Bi-Unity. This structure characterizes the nature of all phenomena (taken in the most general use of the term) constituted through the necessary co-existence of two separate entities, a structure akin to the Hegelian Identity of Identity and non-

Identity. The correspondence of an entity with its counterpart in *Mundus Imaginalis*, a human being with his heavenly guide, a created thing with the divine attribute which it manifests, the identification of lovers with one another and the symbolization of divine love through human love, the relation of the signifier with the signified in the symbol, the appearance of the phenomenon (in the specific sense of the word) with its essential Reality, and the world as the totality of the absolute's manifestation with the absolute itself, in all this the relation of homology is not one of undifferentiated identity and unification, it is not a kind of pure monism, it is unity and duality together, it is a bi-unity. In each instant, an entity A is the original truth of an entity B, while B is the manifestation (and simultaneously concealment) of A. <sup>41</sup>

This leads us further to an extraordinary and fundamental generalization of the concept of "exegesis." The technical term for exegesis in Oriental theosophy is *Ta'wil*; it is ordinarily used to indicate the discovery of the esoteric meaning of the holy scripture.<sup>42</sup> But as its meaning is "to return to the origin," it can be, and is, applied to every process where a thing is united with and returned to its original truth. A human soul too can undergo the process of exegesis in that it meets and unites with its heavenly counterpart. The Orient of Oriental theosophy, it cannot be emphasized enough, is therefore not the geographic Orient; it is the land of the heavenly origin of all things. Thus orient-ation is also nothing other than exegesis. It is in this spirit that the present work aspires to understand Goethe's orient-ation and his identification with a figure such as Hafiz.

In the present work, by way of interpreting five main representative poems and highlighting certain crucial elements in them, I will try to show the kinship between Goethe's *Divan* and the basic ideas and notions mentioned above. I would like to acknowledge at the outset that we have no evidence—above and beyond what he knew of Christian or Jewish esoteric traditions, his familiarity with Oriental and Persian poetry and the Islamic mysticism reaching him through the works of the Orientalists—that Goethe had a direct knowledge of the work of any of the Islamic speculative mystics or oriental theosophers, Suhravardi, Ibn 'Arabi or others. Nor do I claim that the *Divan* is evidence of Goethe's adherence to the tenets of these schools of thought in all their metaphysical commitments or ramifications, and much less, of course, that the *Divan* is an expression of his adherence to a religious orthodoxy of any kind. What I rather wish to show is a basic affinity, a "common vision," which takes place in spite of the lack of precise discursive knowledge across a vast geographical and historical distance. In my opinion, this is much more valuable than the type of cultural appropriation that can be demonstrated through a kind of positivistic search for hard and exact references, for it shows that a true meeting of the East and the West is possible, not just because each may in all deference and humility try to learn from the other, but also because they have a common origin and the same capability to reach for and contemplate that origin. It is in this sense that I propose the interpretation of the *Divan* from the perspective of Oriental theosophy. My interpretation is, therefore, a kind of immanent interpretation, not in the sense that it will not point out extra-textual or inter-textual references or sources, but in the

sense that it seeks the meaning of the texts in terms of a vision which is not necessarily traceable to any specific positivistic evidence of “influence,” but rather of presence: that is to say, the question to be posed here is not whether Oriental theosophy “influences” the *Divan*, as a kind of extraneous stimulant or source material, but rather whether the paradigms and motifs of Oriental theosophy are indeed to some crucial degree in fact present and formative within it, and what importance may then be ascribed to that presence. The fact and degree of this presence then emerges from the confrontation – or rather, and more precisely - the juxtaposition in dialogue of the Goethean poems with, as their privileged hermeneutic medium, the central related tenets and motifs of Oriental theosophy itself. For just as a Marxist, a Freudian, a Benjaminian, or even a Saidian reading may in all fairness be undertaken of an author quite independently of whether they were themselves directly influenced by those thinkers, so here too with the hermeneutic tool of Oriental theosophy, whose validity or non-validity does not derive from Goethe being extraneously and demonstrably “influenced” by it, but rather, on the one hand, by the very presence of characteristic motifs and paradigms of Oriental theosophy in his work, and, on the other, by the privileged access which the tenets and motifs of that theosophy may then afford to the inner workings, imagery and formative problematics of the Goethean texts. At the same time, it may be pointed out that if the Goethean poems themselves do indeed exist in a dimension which may in some senses be more fully appreciated and accessed through a hermeneutic itself derived from a strand of Oriental thought, then the question of their being works of pure “Orientalizing” projection becomes

moot: for clearly they are then situated in a realm which does not reside exclusively in projection, but has arisen from a genuine dialogue and encounter of two cultures; and indeed, thus constitutes a work of authentic transplantation and synthesis of one cultural framework and point of beginning with another.

For, as is to be admitted as the outset: to say something truly new about a text which has been the object of such sustained and distinguished scholarship, as in the case of the *Divan*, is an almost impossible task requiring a genuinely fresh perspective. I have therefore sought to use all the existing information and scholarship in my interpretation of the poems. But in the case of almost every poem, my interpretation, and the way it differs from or adds to the existing interpretations, may seem at times to hinge upon a very small but crucial element, a particle, a word, a grammatical peculiarity, or a turn of phrase. It is the contention of this work that those elements interpreted anew will make allowance for a possible reading of the *Divan* from the standpoint of the mysticism introduced here. What I am therefore ultimately proposing is a hermeneutic framework that I hope will permit us to overcome the old sterile juxtaposition/distinction of a worldly or religious and mystical interpretation of the *Divan*. I will show, hopefully compellingly, that approached from the perspective of Oriental theosophy, the *Divan* is at once both worldly and mystical. This can, moreover, offer the possibility of taking our understanding of the text to another level by providing a framework not only for probing and explicating a horizon of symbolic meaning hitherto not fully explored in the literature for the individual texts concerned, but also for understanding the inner unity and the



conceptual, speculative and symbolic underpinnings of the entire poetic project of the *Divan* in a new way, to which the speculative mysticism of Oriental theosophy then affords us access.

Finally, a word on the organization of the present study: *West-östlicher Divan* is organized in twelve books and a long prose section, *Noten und Abhandlungen*. While the twelve books reveal the internalization of the Orient in Goethe's life and poetic creation, the prose section is the attempt at a disinterested and objective introduction to the Orient, its history and its poetry and other topics the knowledge of which Goethe found necessary to communicate to his German audience for the understanding of the poems. The books are titled in imitation of oriental Divans of poetry: "Buch des Sängers" (Moganni Nameh), "Buch Hafis" (Hafis Nameh), "Buch der Liebe" (Uschk Nameh), "Buch der Betrachtungen" (Tefkir Nameh), "Buch des Unmuts" (Rensch Nameh), "Buch der Sprüche" (Hikmet Nameh), "Buch Suleika" (Suleika Nameh), "Das Schenkenbuch" (Saki Nameh), "Buch der Parabeln" (Mathal Nameh), "Buch des Parsen" (Parsi Nameh), "Buch des Paradieses" (Chuld Nameh). There is also a collection of miscellaneous poems "Aus dem Nachlaß." A truly comprehensive study of the *Divan* from the perspective of speculative mysticism would therefore have to include the investigation of the mystical motifs in all these books as well as how they all ultimately relate to each other to form a larger whole. This would be a work considerably larger in scope than present study can claim to be. My work is necessarily quite incomplete in this respect and can be understood only as kind of introduction for the type of study it proposes. The five main poems that are to be

discussed here are chosen from the first book of the *Divan*, “Buch des Sängers,” and the eighth book “Buch Suleika.” “Buch des Sängers” mostly includes the poems Goethe composed in the immediate aftermath of his encounter with Hafiz, and is infused with the spirit of discovery and rejuvenation. They are the immediate product of what Max Kommerell calls “der Moment, wo diese Welt [der Orient] entdeckt wird.”<sup>43</sup> “Buch Suleika” is the lyrical core of the *Divan* and the place where the privileged position of love, the dialogical nature of lyrical/mystical poetry, and the bi-unitary character of the entire *Divan* are best manifested. The basic speculative mystical notions that I have enumerated above form a constellation around the fundamental metaphysical concept of Light (in Suhrawardi) or Unity of Being (in Ibn ‘Arabi). These mystical notions are not to be linearly ordered; they are rather more circular in nature, in that starting from each, one notion can find its way to any other and it is only in their totality that they first can be adequately and fully understood. The same holds true, therefore, for the different chapters of this work. There is, to be sure, a certain logic to their ordering; they are, for instance framed by two poems symbolizing the first and the last stage of the mystic journey towards and within the Orient. Moreover, with one exception, the order of the chapters matches the order of appearance of each poem in the *Divan*. However, assuming the information in this prologue, the five chapters can be read in any sequence. In the first chapter, “Orientation” (*Hegire*: “Buch des Sängers), through the interpretation of the opening poem of the *Divan*, I have tried to clarify the notion of Orient not as a geographical place, but as the place of true origin, and thus of the divine reality, of the numinous dimension, if

one so will, of all created things and individuals in their very phenomenality. Accordingly, the idea of Orientation as the journey towards and within this Orient is explained. Here I will also discuss Hafiz as the spiritual guide, heavenly twin and the figure of identification for the poet of the *Divan*. Crucial to the interpretation of the poem is the appearance of the mystical figure of *Khidr*, the guide of master-less wayfarers in Oriental theosophy, who bestows upon them the water of life and grants them eternal youth.

Chapter 2, “Dialectic of Love” (*Gingo Biloba*: “Buch Suleika”), investigates the importance of symbols in the *Divan* and their bi-unitary structure as well as the bi-unitary structure of love. It also proposes bi-unity as the leitmotif of the entire work. Moreover, the symbolization of divine love through human love will also be discussed here.

In the third chapter, “Sigh of Creation” (*Wiederfinden*; “Buch Suleika”), I will discuss the notion of the “pathetic God” and the role of passion and love in Goethe’s cosmogony. This cosmogony will then also be understood in terms akin to the concept of manifestation in Philosophy of Illumination and in the doctrine of Unity of Being. An elaboration on the motif of divine attributes and names will here lead to the theme of the bi-unitary nature of the relationship between God and Creation.

Chapter 4, “Divine Names” (“In tausend Formen magst du dich verstecken”: Buch Suleika), is a more extensive and explicit study of the theme of the divine attributes. Crucial here will be the introduction of the divine feminine, as Goethe significantly deviates from the standard (re)presentation of the divine

attribute in the canonical Islamic sources through the feminization of the attributes.

In the fifth chapter, “Annihilation and Perpetuation” (*Selige Sehnsucht: “Buch des Sängers”*), I will be discussing this perhaps greatest, arguably most mysterious, and definitely most extensively interpreted poem in the *Divan*. Here I shall complete my argument for the possibility of a mystical reading of the *Divan* through the characterization of this mysticism as a mysticism of perpetuation (*baqa’*) as opposed to a mysticism of annihilation (*fana’*). I will also interpret this poem as a “visionary poem,” a poem of mystical initiation which actually not simply describes, but embodies the experience of which it speaks, and in which it therefore extends to the reader the possibility of themselves experiencing; a finally, a poem in which mystical ideas are matched and supported not only by the poem’s indispensable existential interpellation and ethical imperative, but also by its evocation of a return to archetypal origins of phenomena and their relationship to a suprasensual sphere, while at the same time remaining firmly grounded in the phenomenal and sensuous. Investigating the poem’s startling renewal of the all-too-familiar and hackneyed motif of “the moth and the candle” in Persian poetry, I will also discuss the importance of metaphor as the tropological means for the revelation and expression of new and hidden dimensions of reality.

The concluding book of the *Divan*, “Buch des Paradieses,” reiterates a number of important motifs from the entire cycle, and in particular, from the first book, “Buch des Sängers,” and its opening poem, *Hegire*. Thus, the journey that begins with the discovery of the Orient, and the promise of arriving at the gates of

paradise by virtue of poetry, comes to its conclusion at the promised place. A study of the overall structure of the *Divan*, especially from the perspective of mystical motifs, cannot possibly be complete without at least a brief discussion of how the fundamental motifs of the *Divan* reappear in “Buch des Paradieses.” In the sixth chapter of this work, I will show, by pointing to the reappearance of these fundamental motifs, how this concluding book completes the poetic structural frame of the *Divan*. However, a new motif emerges most pronouncedly in this concluding book, that is, Goethe’s awareness of his position as a poet in the German language. This will also give me an opportunity to summarize the expressed opinions on the question of Orientalism in the *Divan*. Addressing the motif of the German poet at the gate of (and in) paradise, I will then make some observations regarding the lessons that a deeper and sustained study of a work such as the *Divan* can teach us in the areas of Oriental studies, West-East dialogue, and indeed, and perhaps more importantly for the author of this work, of Occidental studies.

In conclusion, one final word on the vexed question of “religiosity” as it impinges on these texts. Should we chose to consider, as Hans Heinrich Schaeder urges,<sup>44</sup> the religious ideas, images and symbols as essential to our understanding of Goethe and the *Divan*, we may allow ourselves to use the full capacity and potential of the hermeneutic ideas available to us, without unduly attributing to the poet, whose aversion to religious dogma of any kind is well-known, a rigid adherence to a particular religious orthodoxy or even a particular school of speculative mysticism. Our particular choice of hermeneutic would be all the

more justifiable, if those mystical and religious elements ideas present in the *Divan* in their singular Goethean articulation, could be shown to indeed originate from a cultural, historical and spiritual milieu for which Goethe himself expressed such love, gratitude, and interest. Should we then, in applying the framework offered by Oriental theosophy, be successful in offering a coherent view of this selected corpus of poems, as indeed of the overall poetic project of the *Divan*, and affording a type of new and privileged access to a hitherto concealed dimension of the work, in all its singularity, we have then accomplished a rewarding task; for in addition to disclosing a perhaps as yet not fully explored or articulated dimension of Goethe's poetic masterpiece, we will have demonstrated that a true meeting between human imaginaries from widely different backgrounds is indeed possible on the field of ideas and symbols, communicating over vast distances of time and cultural and linguistic difference. For it is the contention of the present author, that if we choose to dismiss the issue of religion and spirituality as unessential in understanding the *Divan*, or to confine our understanding of the intercultural encounter to looking for positivistic evidence and traces of extraneous "influence," we may be running the risk of reducing it to an idle exercise of poetic talent and virtuosity in simply and willfully, and ultimately superficially, appropriating foreign motifs and forms, without any such deeper intercultural communication and contact, or indeed any consequential, experiential and existential aspect to the intercultural encounter. As regards the possibility of a genuine West-East dialogue, such a production may well then seem to be a useless, if not indeed harmful, piece of Orientalism in the Saidian

sense. Let it be said that this rather desultory view, which has indeed arisen in the post-Saidian discussion of the work – despite the expressly stated and very emphatic positive judgment on the *Divan* by the later Said himself - <sup>45</sup> is most definitely not the view of the present author, nor does he regard it, as will hopefully emerge from the following, as philologically sound or tenable: given that it may hopefully be shown that the motifs of Oriental theosophy are not a kind of extraneous Oriental garb in which Goethe clads himself for exoticist or atmospheric reasons, but do indeed reach to the very heart of the philosophical and existential preoccupations informing his poetry, as of the singular poetic form in which he expresses them, and thus to the *Divan's* formative center.

## NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> Ingeborg Hildegard Solbrig, *Hammer-Purgstall und Goethe*. Bern, 1973, p. 124: "Dass Goethe den *Hammer-Hafis* im Frühjahr 1814 erhielt, wurde bereits von der modernen Goethe-Forschung vermutet und anhand von Goethes Tagebuchnotizen und des Briefwechsels mit Cotta wenigstens impliziter gezeigt."

<sup>2</sup> Emil Staiger, *Goethe*, Zürich, Freiburg, 1959, vol. 3, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Goethes Tag- und Jahreshefte*, [FA I/17], p. 259.

<sup>4</sup> *Goethes West-östlicher Divan*, Frankfurter Ausgabe (Abteilung I, Band 3), Hendrik Birus (ed.), p. 138. All Goethe citations in this work will be from the Frankfurter Ausgabe (from now on [FA]). For detailed listing, cf. Bibliography at the end.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 875-877 & 1405. For different working titles of the growing collection of *Divan* poems also, cf. *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Ernst Beutler (ed.). *Goethes West-östlicher Divan*, Bremen, 1956, p. xii.

<sup>7</sup> Heinrich Heine, *Sämtliche Schriften*, vol.3, München, 2005, Vol. 3, p. 403.

<sup>8</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, Frankfurt am Main, 1970, Vol. 1, pp. 476-7.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Hans Heinrich Schaeder, *Goethes Erlebnis des Ostens*, Leipzig, 1938, pp. 62, 167 & 168 for a brief report on the philological work on and critical editions of the *Divan* until 1938. Most notably the remarks on the *Weimarer Ausgabe* and Konrad Burdach on page 168: "reichliches neues Material zur philologischen Erforschung des Divans brachte die Weimarer Ausgabe, in der er die Bände 6 (die Gedichte, bearbeitet von Konrad Burdach) und 7 (die Noten und Abhandlungen, bearbeitet von Carl Siegfried und Bernhard Seuffert) füllt. Damit begann zugleich die über fünfzig Jahre reichende Arbeit Konrad Burdachs an der Erklärung des Divans." In the present work, we will mainly use the philological information in Henrik Birus' edition of 1994 (Frankfurt am Main) and Ernst Beutler's commentary published in 1956 (Bremen). For the question of the quality of Hammer-Purgstall's translation of Hafiz cf. Nimas Mina, *Les traductions de la poesie Hafisienne du persa en allemande par Josef von hammer-Purgstall (1774-1856) et leur impact sur Goethe* (dissertation, Université de Montréal), 1998.

<sup>10</sup> A few notable examples: two volumes of collected essays *Studien zum West-östlichen Divan Goethes*, Darmstadt, 1971, and *Interpretationen zum West-östlichen Divan Goethes* Darmstadt, 1973, both edited by Edgar Lohner, are very useful sources containing many such studies. Edith Ihekweazu's *Goethes West-östlicher Divan*, Hamburg, 1971, is a study of the structure of the *Divan* as a cycle. Gisela Henkemann studies the motifs of conversation and sociability in her *Gespräch und Geselligkeit in Goethes 'West-östlichem Divan'*, Stuttgart, 1975.

<sup>11</sup> Two important examples which we use in this work are: Hans Heinrich Schaeder's *Goethes Erlebnis des Ostens*, and Grete Schaeder's *Gott und Welt*.

<sup>12</sup> We will often cite Beutler's interpretations in this work. For Schaeder's opinion, cf. his *Goethes Erlebnis des Ostens* and for Staiger's, cf. *Goethe*, vol. 3. A concise summary of the history of the debate, including Burdach's interpretation, can be found in Wolfgang Lentz, "Goethes Divan und die Hafisforschung" in *Studien zum West-östlichen Divan Goethes* (Edgar Lohner, ed.). pp. 190-220.

<sup>13</sup> Cf., for example, Hendrik Birus, "Goethes imaginativer Orientalismus," 1992, pp. 107-128, Anil Bhatti, "Der orient als Experimentierfeld. Goethes "Divan" und der Aneignungsprozess kolonialen Wissens," 2009, pp. 115-128, and Miriam Weber, *Der „wahre poesie-Orient“* Wiesbaden, 2001.

<sup>14</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism*. New York, 1994, pp. 2-3.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 22.



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<sup>23</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 99-100.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Chapter 6 of this study.

<sup>26</sup> Rejecting the idea that the *Divan* is a departure from the poetic norms of Classicism and coining the term “Classical mysticism,” a recent publication by Rainer Hillenbrand, “Klassische Mystik in Goethes ‘West-östlichem Divan’ (2010, pp. 186-194), ignores the highly significant differences between mainstream Christian mysticism and Oriental theosophy as well as Goethe’s own flat rejection of Christian mysticism, and claims: “[die] Berührungspunkte mit der Klassik [erlauben Goethe], im Divan Aspekte der islamischen Mystik einzubeziehen, die sich freilich ebensowenig in der christlichen wiederfinden lassen (p. 190).” Pointing out several dualities and Goethe’s resolution of them, Hillenbrand characterizes this classical mysticism as “die höhere Einheit scheinbarer Gegensätze (p. 187).” This is indeed a basic tenet of Oriental theosophy and one may find the same idea in several other mystical traditions, and therefore, one may freely re-name it as classical mysticism. In this work, however, we will try to demonstrate that certain aspects of the *Divan* can be best interpreted through the particular tradition of Oriental theosophy, which substantially diverges from other mystical traditions in certain crucial points. For a more extensive exposition of Hillenbrand’s views and his defense of the *Divan*’s Classicism, cf. also his *Klassischer Geist in Goethes West-östlichem Divan*, Frankfurt am Main, 2010.

<sup>27</sup> A compact exposition of these schools of thought can be found in Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*, Cambridge, Mass., 1963.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone; Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn ‘Arabi*. Princeton, 1997, p. 3-38, and *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, Princeton, 1990, pp. 3-16 for the development of Islamic philosophy and mysticism as the result of the introduction of Ibn ‘Arabi’s and Suhrawardi’s thoughts.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Annemarie Schimmel. *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*. Chapel Hill, 1975, pp. 259-274.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 260

<sup>31</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 263.

<sup>32</sup> For a history of Classical Persian poetry, cf. Arthur John Arberry, *Classical Persian Literature*, London, 1958.

<sup>33</sup> We will mainly use Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone* and *The Man of Light In Iranian Sufism*, New Lebanon, 1994, Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism*, Berkeley, 1983, *The Basic structure of Metaphysical Thinking in Islam* Tehran, 1971, and Schimmel’s *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*.

<sup>34</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*, p. 69.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Henry Corbin, *The Man of Light In Iranian Sufism*, p. 6.

<sup>36</sup> Annemarie Schimmel. *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 266.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 267.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 267- 268.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Henry Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>41</sup> As we hope to make clear in the course of this study, the relationship of this figure of thought to Goethe’s own view of the “phenomenon” is quite close, and one basis for the sympathy between the Goethean imaginary and that of speculative mysticism.

<sup>42</sup> For a discussion of the notion of “Ta’wil,” see *ibid.*, p. 28-35.

<sup>43</sup> Max Kommerell, *Gedanken über Gedichte*, Frankfurt am Main, 1968, p. 258.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Hans Heinrich Schaeder, *Goethes Erlebnis des Ostens*, p. 129: “[d]ie Frage nach Goethes Stellung zur Religion [ist] nicht allgemein und nicht losgelöst von den individuellen Gestaltungen seines dichterischen Schaffens zu stellen, vollends nicht so, daß die Maßstäbe ihrer Beurteilung von außen herangebracht werden, Im Zusammenhang mit der Frage nach Gehalt und Form der einzelnen Goetheschen Dichtung ist nach dem religiösen Element zu fragen, denn hier wird es gegenständlich und faßbar. [...] In keinem Goetheschen Werk, wenn von seiner Lebensbeschreibung abgesehen wird, tritt die Besinnung auf Religion und Religionen, auf ihre geschichtliche Erscheinung und die darin aufleuchtende Idee so durchgängig und beherrschend hervor wie im Divan.”

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<sup>45</sup> Cf. Chapter Six of the present study for Said's later views on the genuine possibility of a West-East dialogue and Goethe's *Divan* as a prime example of this possibility.

## INTRODUCTION

The question of a mystical interpretation of the *Divan* is closely connected to the question of Goethe's personal attitude towards religion, on the one hand, and his interest in the Orient (as the birth place of world religions) and in Oriental poetry, particularly in Persian lyrical poetry, on the other. But as Hans Heinrich Schaeder has emphasized in his *Goethes Erlebnis des Ostens*, the question of Goethe's religion overlaps with the question of his "historical thinking."<sup>1</sup> According to Schaeder, both problems run into three difficulties:

[S]ie begehren Goethes Ansicht von einem nur künstlich abzusondernden Teil der Wirklichkeit zu erfahren, die er als Ganzes auffassen und festhalten wollte; sie suchen seine Anschauung festzuhalten, während ihm daran lag, vom Anschauen zu Entschluß und Tätigkeit überzugehen; sie erwarten von seinem einzelnen Wort den Aufschluß, den nur das Ganze seines Lebens geben kann.<sup>2</sup>

One's historical and religious experiences are only valuable insofar as they become sources of individual conscious action. From early childhood, Goethe was an avid reader of the Bible, and in spite of the evolution of his attitude towards Christianity throughout his life, the Bible always remained a source of linguistic and thematic inspiration in his work. This is indeed Goethe's point of departure in his Oriental journeys. Writing about his love for the Bible as a child in the first book of his autobiography, *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, Goethe writes:

[W]enn es auch draußen noch so wild und wunderlich herging; [...] so flüchtete ich gern nach jenen morgeländischen Gegenden, ich versenkte mich in die ersten Bücher Moses und fand mich dort unter den ausgebreiteten Hirtenstämmen zugleich in der größten Einsamkeit und in der größten Gesellschaft.<sup>3</sup>

In fact, Goethe's thorough knowledge of the Bible is one of the reasons he compares himself to the Persian poet Hafiz, whose nickname means he who knows the Qur'an by heart:

Hafis, drum, so will mir scheinen,  
Möcht' ich dir nicht gerne weichen:  
Denn, wenn wir wie andre meinen,  
Werden wir den andern gleichen.  
Und so gleich' ich dir vollkommen,  
Der ich unsrer heil'gen Bücher  
Herrlich Bild an mich genommen,  
Wie auf jenes Tuch der Tücher  
Sich des Herren Bildnis drückte,  
Mich in stiller Brust erquickte  
Trotz Verneinung, Hindrung, Raubens  
Mit dem heitern Bild des Glaubens.<sup>4</sup>

Goethe's residence in Strasburg as a student and in particular, his encounter with Herder in 1770, proved crucial to the formation of his attitude towards Christianity as well as the expansion of his knowledge and interest in the Orient beyond the world of the Bible. In Herder, Goethe found a theologian without dogmatic rigidity. As Grete Schaeder writes in her *Gott und Welt*, Herder grants Goethe's individuality "den denkbar weitesten Spielraum" and demands of him only that which he was always willing to fulfill: "für alles Gute und Schöne in der Welt Gott zu verehren."<sup>5</sup> Herder conveyed to Goethe the idea that religious feeling is not contradictory to reason and that God speaks through the world. The question of belief hinges upon realizing God in the reality in which he has given and represented himself to man. Man is religious when he perceives himself in his innermost as part of divine manifestation. Equally importantly, Herder offered Goethe a vast overview of ancient and modern literature, philosophy and history. Through Herder, Goethe was driven towards Volkslied, "dessen Einfachheit und

Natürlichkeit seine Lyrik stärker befruchtet hat als irgend eine der Kunstformen, mit denen er sich damals beschäftigte.”<sup>6</sup> Poetry for Herder is not so much the private heritage of the educated individuals as it is dependent on a broader framework of general cultural expression; it is a natural force articulating the genius of an entire nation within the possibilities afforded to it by its particular historical stage. Crucial for the development of Goethe’s ideas regarding religion and poetry are Herder’s views on historical relativity: in order for each era of human history to be equally essential before God, it must be unique and transient within history. All life is necessary in its own place, a piece of revelation, but no single form of life, be it individual or collective, contains the entire revelation of God in itself.<sup>7</sup>

Under such influences, Goethe’s path towards a more developed view of the Bible and other Oriental religious (and literary) traditions begins:

[Er bricht] mit der theologisch-heilgeschichtlichen Ausdeutung der Bibel und mit der Selbstabgrenzung der mittelalterlich-christlichen Welt gegen den vom Christentum abgefallenen oder ihm fern gebliebenen Orient. Sodann bahnt er das entwicklungsgeschichtliche Verständnis der biblischen Religion an, als einer von Ort, Zeit, Volkstum, politischem und sozialem Geschehen mannigfach bedingten geschichtlichen Größe, und zugleich die unbefangene Ansicht der orientalischen Völker außerhalb des biblischen Bereichs und der Gesamtheit ihres geistigen Schaffens.<sup>8</sup>

For Goethe the Bible remained a revered book with inner value, it was not simply a “Volksbuch,” but “das Buch der Völker,” which made from the destiny of a nation a symbol for that of all nations.<sup>9</sup> He wished that the Bible would become the fundament and the tool in the hands of truly wise educators of human beings.<sup>10</sup> This wish did not materialize, nor did Goethe’s particular view of the

Bible gain widespread currency. The result, as formulated by Hans Heinrich Schaeder, was that within the official and church-based Christianity the Bible continued to be regarded from an unhistorical perspective and isolated from the general history of peoples, and among those who had turned their away from the Christianity of the church, an 'Unkenntnis' regarding the Bible, matched with contempt and indifference, prevailed.<sup>11</sup> As for Goethe,

[Er hat] die Bibel weder rationalistisch klügend noch pietistisch empfindsam, weder romantisch träumend noch kritisch ungerührt lesen wollen. Er hat sie mit Bedacht als das Buch gelesen, an dem dreitausend Jahre Menschengeschichte hängen – so hat er gezeigt, wie ein Deutscher die Bibel lesen kann.<sup>12</sup>

Hendrik Birus has observed that Goethe's positive attitude towards Islam must be taken "in context with his confession to reformation and enlightenment, and his criticism of clerical claims to power."<sup>13</sup> Much like Lessing's view crystallized in his *Nathan der Weise*, Goethe's religious attitude—which makes him sympathetic towards Islam—is that of "the mutual relations between man's autonomy and his submission to God."<sup>14</sup>

Although Goethe had already known Voltaire's play *Le Fanatisme ou Mahomet le Prophète* as a young student in Leipzig, his first serious encounter with the Islamic prophet and the holy book of Islam was occasioned by the publication of the German translation of the Qur'an by David Friedrich Megerlin in 1771.<sup>15</sup> Goethe's Qur'an studies in 1771 and 1772 inspired him to write a *Mahomet-Tragödie*.<sup>16</sup> The project was not completed, but from the written fragments we now have the well-known *Mahomets Gesang*, where "das Wesen

des Religionstifters, eines geistigen Führers der Menschheit, [wird] dargestellt  
durch die Metapher des Stroms.“<sup>17</sup>

Seht den Felsenquell,  
Freudehell,  
Wie ein Sternenblick;  
Über Wolken  
Nährten seine Jugend  
Gute Geister  
Zwischen Klippen im Gebüsch.

Jünglingsfrisch  
Tanzte er aus der Wolke  
Auf die Marmorfelsen nieder,  
Jauchzet wieder  
Nach dem Himmel.

Durch die Gipfelgänge  
Jagt er bunten Kiesel nach,  
Und mit frühem Führertritt  
Reißt er seine Bruderquellen  
Mit sich fort.

Drunten werden in dem Tal  
Unter seinem Fußtritt Blumen,  
Und die Wiese  
Lebt von seinem Hauch.

Doch ihn hält kein Schattental,  
Keine Blumen,  
Die ihm seine Knie umschlingen,  
Ihm mit Liebesaugen schmeicheln:  
Nach der Ebne dringt sein Lauf  
Schlangenwandelnd.

Bäche schmiegen  
Sich gesellig an. Nun tritt er  
In die Ebne silberprangend,  
Und die Ebne prangt mit ihm,  
Und die Flüsse von der Ebne  
Und die Bäche von den Bergen  
Jauchzen ihm und rufen: Bruder!  
Bruder, nimm die Brüder mit,  
Mit zu deinem alten Vater,  
Zu dem ewgen Ozean,

Der mit ausgespannten Armen  
Unser wartet  
Die sich, ach! vergebens öffnen,  
Seine Sehnenden zu fassen;  
Denn uns frißt in öder Wüste  
Gierger Sand; die Sonne droben  
Saugt an unserm Blut; ein Hügel  
Hemmet uns zum Teiche! Bruder,  
Nimm die Brüder von der Ebne,  
Nimm die Brüder von den Bergen  
Mit, zu deinem Vater mit!

Kommt ihr alle! -  
Und nun schwillt er  
Herrlicher; ein ganz Geschlechte  
Trägt den Fürsten hoch empor!  
Und im rollenden Triumphe  
Gibt er Ländern Namen, Städte  
Werden unter seinem Fuß.

Unaufhaltsam rauscht er weiter,  
Läßt der Türme Flammengipfel,  
Marmorhäuser, eine Schöpfung  
Seiner Fülle, hinter sich.

Zedernhäuser trägt der Atlas  
Auf den Riesenschultern; sausend  
Wehen über seinem Haupte  
Tausend Flaggen durch die Lüfte,  
Zeugen seiner Herrlichkeit.

Und so trägt er seine Brüder,  
Seine Schätze, seine Kinder  
Dem erwartenden Erzeuger  
Freudebrausend an das Herz.<sup>18</sup>

Goethe was also introduced to an older Latin translation of the Qur'an (1698) by the Jesuit Marracci.<sup>19</sup> He drew out extensive excerpts from the German translation and compared them with the Latin version.<sup>20</sup>

In her detailed study of Goethe's relationship to the Islamic and Arab world, *Goethe und die arabische Welt*, Katharina Mommsen has reproduced these



excerpts.<sup>21</sup> Under the rubric “Anregungen zu Divan-Gedichten durch den Koran,” Mommsen discusses the instances in which the poems of the *Divan* seem to be directly inspired by Qur’anic verses.<sup>22</sup> One notable example is verse 109 of chapter 2 which Goethe encountered more than four decades after Megerlin’s translation in Hammer-Purgstall’s *Fundgruben des Orients*: “Sag: Gottes ist der Orient, und Gottes ist der Occident; Er leitet, wen er will, den wahren Pfad.” The first two lines of the short poem cited from “Buch des Sängers” of the *Divan* at the beginning of the preface are clearly the verbatim use of a part of this verse. Mommsen’s *Goethe und die arabische Welt* is a very useful source for the study of the inspiration and influence Goethe received from the Islamic world, and specifically from Arabic poetry. She surmises, to mention one main example from Arabic poetry in the Islamic era, that already as a sixteen year old student in Leipzig, Goethe might have become acquainted with the poetry of Abul Taijib Ahmed Ibn al Hosain (915-965 A.D.), nicknamed Motanabbi, through Johann Jacob Reiske’s *Proben der arabischen Dichtkunst in verliebten und traurigen Gedichten, aus dem Motanabbi*. It is of this great Arab poet that Goethe speaks when in *Noten und Abhandlungen* he discusses the differences and similarities between poets and prophets:

Der Verwegenste jedoch, ein geistvoller Dichter, war kühn genug zu versichern: alles, was Mahomet gesagt habe, wollte er auch gesagt haben, und besser, ja er sammelte sogar eine Anzahl Sektierer um sich her. Man bezeichnete ihn deshalb mit Spottnamen *Motanabbi*, unter welchem wir ihn kennen, welches so viel heißt als: einer, der gern den Propheten spielen möchte.<sup>23</sup>

In the section dedicated to Motanabbi in her book, Mommsen traces the influence of his poetry in the composition of *Faust* as well as in several parts of the *Divan* beyond the mere reference to him in the passage cited above.<sup>24</sup>

Goethe's interest in Arabic poetry, as the section "Araber" in *Noten und Abhandlungen* indicates, included pre-Islamic Arabic poetry. The chapter "Vorislamische Beduinendichtung" in Mommsen's *Goethe und die arabische Welt* is dedicated to the analysis of this aspect of Goethe's interest in the Orient.<sup>25</sup> Of particular interest in this regard is an anthology of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry under the title *Moallakat*, about which Goethe has these words at the beginning of the above-mentioned section in *Noten und Abhandlungen*: "Bei einem östlichen Volke, den Arabern, finden wir herrliche Schätze an den *Moallakat*."<sup>26</sup> This anthology was introduced in the west in the year 1783 through the English translation by William Jones (1746-1794).<sup>27</sup> Apart from the translation and commentary on Taabbata Scharran's "Rachelied" (Unter dem Felsen am Wege) in *Noten und Abhandlungen*, Goethe attempted the translation of a poem by one of the most well-known pre-Islamic Arab poets, Amralkais. Mommsen's book contains a fragment remaining from Goethe's translation.<sup>28</sup> The chapter "Islam" in Mommsen's *Goethe und die Arabische Welt* is a study of Goethe's attitude towards this religion. Commenting on what she calls Goethe's "extraordinarily positive attitude towards Islam," she points to the Goethe's general interest for all religious phenomena as well as to the idea of religious tolerance in the age of Enlightenment.<sup>29</sup> However, there are certain basic teachings of Islam and the

Qur'an with which, according to Mommsen, Goethe's religious attitude had particular affinity:

Vornehmlich wurde Goethe [...] zum Koran hingezogen durch religiöse Affinitäten. Hauptpunkte der islamischen Lehre, wie sie der Koran verkündet, stimmen mit seinen eigenen religiösen und philosophischen Überzeugungen überein. Diese Hauptpunkte waren: die Lehre von der Einheit Gottes, die Überzeugung, daß Gott sich in der Natur offenbare und daß er durch verschiedene Abgesandte zur Menschheit spricht, das Abweisen von 'Wundern' und die Auffassung, daß Religiosität sich in wohltätigen Wirken erweisen müsse.<sup>30</sup>

I will shortly make a few brief remarks regarding Goethe's relationship to Spinoza's philosophy and the idea of *Gott-Natur* common to both thinkers. Let us, however, mention here that Mommsen sees a basic agreement between Goethe's Spinozism and those fundamental teachings of Islam with which Goethe felt a particular affinity. To contemplate the One, the Holy, in all and everything, is the most important instance of this agreement.<sup>31</sup> Reflecting the orthodox view, however, Mommsen warns us against the full identification of Islamic beliefs and what she calls Goethe's pantheism:

Allerdings dürfen die Unterschiede zwischen Goethes Pantheismus und der Naturfassung des Islam nicht verkannt werden. Nie verschmelzen im Islam Gott und Natur miteinander wie in Spinozas *divina natura*, Goethes 'göttlicher Natur' oder Herders 'Pan! Universum!' Schöpfer und Schöpfung bleiben im Islam wie im mosaisch-christlichen Monotheismus stets voneinander getrennt.<sup>32</sup>

The second point of agreement according to Mommsen is the idea of surrender or "Ergebung," an idea from which the religion of Islam receives its very name. It is to this basic understanding of the concept of Islam that Goethe refers in a poem in "Buch der Sprüche" of the *Divan*:

Wenn Islam Gott ergeben heißt,  
Im Islam leben und sterben wir alle.<sup>33</sup>

Regarding the connection of this Islamic idea and Goethe's Spinozism, Mommsen writes:

Goethe glaubte in der Tat so fest wie ein Muslim an die Vorherbestimmung des Schicksals durch Gott und erachtete es als ein Gebot der Frömmigkeit, sich nicht gegen den Willen Gottes aufzulehnen.[...] Zu einer ähnlichen *amor fati*-Gesinnung war Goethe längst geführt durch die *Ethik* des Spinoza, deren treuer Anhänger er war seit derselben Zeit, aus der auch die Fragmente seiner *Mahomet*-Tragödie stammen.<sup>34</sup>

A fundamental ethical consequence of the Islamic idea of unconditional surrender to the will of God is for the pious Muslim to live his life in equanimity and serenity. With respect to this consequence Mommsen writes:

[Goethes] Lieblingphilosoph seit den frühen siebziger Jahren, Benedikt Spinoza, hatte ihn gelehrt, daß man 'die Fügungen des Schicksals mit Gleichmut ertragen müsse, weil ja alles aus dem ewigen Ratschluß Gottes mit Notwendigkeit folgt'.<sup>35</sup>

Finally, discussing the concept of "charity" as one the most essential ethical principles of Islam, and commenting on the following poem from "Buch der Betrachtungen" of the *Divan*,

Und was im "Pend-Nameh" steht  
Ist dir aus der Brust geschrieben:  
Jeden dem du selber gibst  
Wirst du wie dich selber lieben.  
Reiche froh den Pfennig hin,  
Häufe nicht ein Goldvermächtnis,  
Eile freudig vorzuziehen  
Gegenwart vor dem Gedächtnis,<sup>36</sup>

Mommsen writes:

Zwei bezeichnende Wörter – 'froh' (v. 5) und 'freudig' (v. 7) – bestimmen den Ton der Verse. Sie erinnern an die Bedeutung der Freude (laetitia) in der *Ethik* des Spinoza. Dort ist das

Charakteristikum des geisteskräftigen Menschen: ‘gut zu handeln und froh zu sein‘ (*bene agere et laetari*).<sup>37</sup>

The question of Goethe’s relationship to Spinoza and the idea of *Gott-Natur* common to both thinkers is clearly of great importance to the problematic of the role of mysticism in the work of Goethe, since different systems of speculative mysticism in Abrahamic traditions and even in the philosophies of the Far East display tendencies akin to a kind of Spinozean pantheism. Goethe began to study Spinoza more or less at the same time that he became acquainted with Islam and Oriental literature and throughout his life maintained his interest and reverence for the radical philosopher. But characteristically, the relationship of his own ideas with Spinoza’s philosophy went beyond simple admiration and uncritical appropriation. As for all sources of knowledge and inspiration, so too with Spinoza Goethe incorporated the ideas only in so far as it would fit into his own way of thinking and more importantly, to his own way of living in the world. In her *Gott und Welt*, Grete Schaeder follows the trajectory of the relationship between these two ideas, God and World, “die beiden Pole der Glaubenshaltung Goethes, die wir als ‘Weltfrömmigkeit’ zu bezeichnen gewohnt sind,” in the life and work of the poet.<sup>38</sup> The second chapter of this book, dedicated to the period of Goethe’s intense interest and activity in *Naturwissenschaft*, opens with an informative discussion regarding Goethe’s relationship and differences with Spinoza’s philosophy. Schaeder points out that the complete unselfishness in matters of love and friendship, disinterested contemplation of the inner and outer worlds, love for one’s own destiny as a profound feeling for the necessities of one’s own nature, freedom from delusional self-assertion and from the suffocation

of passions, peace in God and understanding love for him, all these ideals were indeed inspired by Spinoza and formed a lasting and coherent ensemble of “Lebensweisheit” for Goethe.<sup>39</sup> Through Spinoza are thus confirmed Goethe’s own “Lebensgefühl” and fundamental ideas and leitmotifs of his *Weltanschauung*. Goethe is able to translate Spinoza’s concepts into the language of his own “Lebensgefühl.”<sup>40</sup> But the effect of Spinoza on Goethe is not in the full and detailed appropriation of the former’s system of thought by the latter.

Goethe geht es nicht um die logische Einheit alles Seins, um eine ‘schöpferische Urdefinition’, aus der sich das All folgerichtig entwickeln läßt. Es geht ihm nicht um Gott-Natur als in sich ruhende Ordnung von Begriffen, sondern um einen unendlichen Zusammenhang bewegender Kräfte, um den Inbegriff des Wirkenden und Wirklichen. Goethe sucht Gott-Natur in der ihn umgebenden Wirklichkeit, in dem Natur- und Weltgeschehen, wie es sich jetzt und hier vollzieht. Er hat von jeher der Allmacht des Denkens mißtraut, an die Spinoza glaubte.<sup>41</sup>

Goethe sees Spinoza’s idea of *Gott-Natur* with the eyes of a born artist. For him *Gott-Natur* is an inexhaustible kingdom of “Gestaltung und Umgestaltung,” whose rhythm he feels with every fiber of his being. In a letter to Lavater in 1780, Goethe writes: “Hab ich Dir das Wort ‘Individuum est ineffabile’ , woraus ich eine Welt ableite, schon geschrieben?” Grete Schaeder hears in these words, “jedes Lebewesen ist unaussprechlich,” the anticipating echo of the verse written fort years later in the *West-östlicher Divan*:

Unmöglich ist immer die Rose,  
Unbegreiflich die Nachtigall.<sup>42</sup>

Also commenting on the notion of “Gesetz”, the connection which is established between *Gott-Natur* and man through it, and the interpretation of “göttliche Gesetze” in nature according to Goethe, Schaeder writes:

Das Gesetz, das [Goethe] meinte, war nicht die unumschränkte Herrschaft des Kausalprinzips, der Deus sive Natura, wie Spinoza ihn verstand: Goethe sprach das Wort Gott-Natur mit einem kräftigen Akzent auf der ersten Silbe. Er hat selber seine Naturfassung mit Vorliebe ‘dynamisch’ genannt. Damit meinte er seine Betrachtung, die von einer Einheitlich wirkenden Kraft ausgeht und die Welt aus einem schöpferischen Urprinzip erklärt, das man Gott, aber auch Idee nennen konnte.<sup>43</sup>

According to Spinoza it is possible to define the “infinite substance” and the from that determine each individual object, but for Goethe,

das Unendliche [...] oder die vollständige Existenz kann von uns nicht gedacht werden. Wir können nur Dinge denken, die entweder beschränkt sind oder die sich unsere Seele beschränkt.<sup>44</sup>

Thus, unlike Spinoza who looked for an “Urdefinition,” from which the universe could be derived, Goethe is concerned with an “Ur-Polarität” that pervades the entirety of existence. Nature, according to Goethe, is not the rigid concept of unity, but the dynamic life of things. Yet it is the One, in the Spinozean sense, which reveals itself infinitely. And it is the infinite multiplicity that our view is directed towards, not the unity in which it remains trapped: “Bei Spinoza versinkt das Viele im Einen; bei Goethe offenbart sich das Eine im Vielen.”<sup>45</sup> The same difference of views is, consequently, manifest when it comes to the notion of

Harmony of Creation:

Spinoza vermittelt ihm [Goethe] die Harmonie der Schöpfung unter der strengeren und herberen Form des alles verbindenden Gesetzes: Goethe, der darin resigniert hat, die Urmelodie des Weltalls mit dem Gefühl aufnehmen zu können, behauptet dem großen Denker gegenüber die Harmonie, die er als Künstler kennt und die er als Naturforscher zu lernen bestrebt ist: die Harmonie der Gestalt, die ‘Übereinstimmung’, die ein jedes Wesen zu dem macht, was es ist, die unerforschliche Atmosphäre des Lebendigen.<sup>46</sup>

In Spinoza's idea of *Gott-Natur*, in the appreciation for the Bible gained from Herder's theories of the original unity of language, poetry and religion, and from his views on poetry as the common mother tongue of humanity, and in the study of Islam, the Qur'an and Arabic poetry, Goethe finds those elements from which he could make his personal use in the formation of his own thought and more importantly, the expression of his individual *Lebensgefühl*, all this without being willing to submit to any one specific doctrine or established orthodoxy. This is true, first and foremost, about his views on Christianity. Regarding Goethe's illustrious friends during his youth and their desire to each convert him to their own brand of Christianity, Hans Heinrich Schaefer writes the following words:

Die Frankfurter Stillen im Lande, Herder, Lavater, Fritz Jacobi, sie alle haben den jungen Goethe bekehren wollen, ein jeder zu dem, was er jeweils glaubte oder zu glauben wünschte. Jedem von ihnen ist er um seiner Freundschaft willen ein größeres oder geringeres Stück gefolgt, um dann wieder auf seine Bahn zurückzukehren, die ihn sein Daimon gehen hieß, die Bahn der Aufrichtigkeit vor sich selber. Der ziellose Eifer von Lavaters Christsuche stieß ihn schließlich ab. Jacobi wurde zu einem der Wegbereiter des christlichen Nihilismus im 19. Jahrhundert; [...] Ihre Beziehung – die tiefste und leidvollste von Goethes Jugendfreundschaften – blieb äußerlich bis zu Jacobis Tode (1819) bestehen; innerlich war sie längst kalt und tot. [...] Herder ging in den ersten Jahren der Freundschaft mit Goethe rasch von einem subjektiven zu einem anderen ebenso subjektiven theologischen Standpunkt über, stets in leidenschaftlicher Abwehr der jeweils gegnerischen theologischen Richtung, mit dem Eifer des Bekehrers und Reformators. Seine Religion, auch nachdem sie sich von den aufklärerischen Neigungen der Rigaer und den Orthodoxen der Bückeburger Jahre zu dem Humanitätschristentum der Weimarer Zeit geläutert hatte, konnte eben wegen ihrer anspruchsvollen Subjektivität bei Goethe nicht dauernde Gefolgschaft finden. [...]

Die Scheu vor dem Bekenner- und Bekehrerwillen seiner Freunde hat Goethe öfters dazu geführt, in Briefen und persönlichen Äußerungen seine abweichliche Gesinnung mit einer Deutlichkeit, ja Schroffheit zu bezeichnen, die man nicht ihrerseits für ein Bekenntnis nehmen darf. Das gilt von dem Wort vom



‘dezidierten Nichtchristen’ so gut wie von der dreißig Jahre später gegen Jacobis Eifer für die Ausschließkeit der christlichen Offenbarung gerichteten und daraus zu verstehenden Versicherung Goethes, daß er als Dichter und Künstler Polytheist, als Naturforscher Pantheist, als sittlicher Mensch Monotheist sei.<sup>47</sup>

Goethe’s threefold self-characterization at the end of the above quotation is indeed remarkable, and quite essential in our understanding of how any thread of thought or idea was integrated and put into “Privatgebrauch” within in his holistic world-view as a human being, a thinker and an artist.

In the fifteenth book of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, Goethe gives testimony to his tense relation with zealous friends during his youth and his own personal use of Christianity:

[I]ch hatte so viel wackere und brave Menschen kennen gelernt, die sich’s in ihrer Pflicht, um der Pflicht willen, sauer werden ließen; ihnen, ja mir selbst zu entsagen, schien mir unmöglich; die Kluft die mich von jener Lehre trennte, ward mir deutlich, ich mußte also auch aus dieser Gesellschaft scheiden, und da mir meine Neigung zu den heiligen Schriften so wie zu dem Stifter und den früheren Bekennern nicht geraubt werden konnte, so bildete ich mir ein Christentum zu meinem Privatgebrauch, und suchte dieses durch fleißiges Studium der Geschichte, und durch genaue Bemerkung derjenigen, die sich zu meinem Sinne hingeneigt hatten, zu begründen und aufzubauen.<sup>48</sup>

It is in the spirit of “Privatgebrauch,” then, that Goethe’s encounter with all religions and their teachings takes place. In his later years, as he allows himself to make his life experiences “erzieherisch fruchtbar,”<sup>49</sup> his observations and writings regarding religious questions become the background of his poetic creation. Here, as Hans Heinrich Schaeder writes, “the inexhaustible fruitfulness of the world of religious phenomena is revealed.”<sup>50</sup> Religious images permeate the whole of Goethe’s late works. Thus, the question of Goethe’s stance towards

religion cannot be posed in isolation from the individual figurations of his poetic creation. Schaeder suggest, therefore, that it is from this perspective that the *Divan*, as the work with the most intensive and extensive reflections upon religious ideas and images among all Goethe's works, should be viewed:

Im Zusammenhang mit der Frage nach Gehalt und Form der einzelnen Goetheschen Dichtung ist nach dem religiösen Element zu fragen, denn hier wird es gegenständlich und faßbar. Dabei muß ihm die zurückhaltende Ehrfurcht entgegengebracht werden, die Goethe selber im Angesicht Heiliger Dinge wahrte.

In keinem Goetheschen Werke, wenn von seiner Lebensbeschreibung abgesehen wird, tritt die Besinnung auf Religion und Religionen, auf ihre geschichtliche Erscheinung und die darin aufleuchtende Idee so durchgängig und beherrschend hervor wie im *Divan*. Die größte Mannigfaltigkeit religiöser Vorstellungen und Bilder wird in ihm lebendig, als dichterische Aussage und in dem geschichtlich-gegenwärtigen Weltzusammenhang, den er in sich schließt. Es ist in der Tat eine Breite und Tiefe der Weltansicht im *Divan*, die alles aufnimmt, was an geschichtlicher Überlieferung in das Leben des Dichters eingegangen war. Mit der antiken Bejahung der schönen Welt und des Menschen in ihr ist ihr alter Widersacher versöhnt, der ihren Fortbestand rettete, indem er sie überwand: die christliche Sehnsucht nach Welt- und Ichüberwindung. Dem mit verjüngter Kraft behaupteten Deutschtum, das die Verse des *Divans* prägt, tritt der sich neu auftuende Osten gegenüber, das Mutterland der Religion, die das Schicksal des Morgen- und Abendlandes gelenkt haben: israelitische und christliche Religion, Parsismus und Islam.<sup>51</sup>

In Hermann August Korff's view, too, the *Divan*'s deepest essence is "freie Religiosität", and this free religiosity is not only "Freiheit *von* allen Religionen," but also "Freiheit *zu* allen Religionen."<sup>52</sup> It should be emphasized once again, that the kernel of Goethe's "Gottesglaube," is "nicht der Glaube an *Gott*, sondern an die Göttlichkeit der von ihm geschaffenen *Welt*."<sup>53</sup> This is what is called, in keeping with Goethe's Pantheism, the "Naturreligion." And it is here that Goethe

and his *Divan* show a relative distance from Christianity and relative closeness to Islam:

Diese Naturreligion kommt auf kürzeste und unmittelbarste Weise zu Gott. Sie sieht ihn in der aufgehenden Sonne als den Herrn des Lebensquells auf hohem Throne, und ihr Glaube findet sich mit jedem Tage neu bestätigt. Den weitesten *Abstand* von dem Urphänomen der Naturreligion dagegen bezeichnet das *Christentum*, das Gott für den sündigen Menschen zunächst unerreichbar zu machen scheint, um erst durch einen *übernatürlichen* Glauben, den Glauben an die Erlösung durch den Kreuzestod des Gottessohnes, die Verbindung mit Gott zu gewährleisten. [...]

In der Religionsbewertung des Westöstlichen Diwans verhält sich der Islam wie die Synthesis zu der Thesis der persischen Naturreligion und der Antithesis der unnatürlichen Religion des Christentums. Das der Grund, weshalb er [...] nicht nur äußerlich, sondern auch innerlich der freien Religiosität des Diwans *am nächsten steht*. Näher als das Christentum auf jeden Fall. Aber näher als die persische Naturreligion, weil dieser noch der persönliche Monotheismus fehlt, dem sich der pantheistische Goethe im höheren Alter wieder zuzuwenden beginnt. Besonders aber die *Gottergebenheit* hat nirgendwo einen so starken und freilich auch primitiven Ausdruck gefunden wie in dem Begriff, von dem die islamische Religion ihren Namen hat. 'Wenn Islam Gott ergebenheit heißt / in Islam leben und sterben wir alle.'<sup>54</sup>

By way of preparing ourselves for a formulation of the problematic of the relationship between the *Divan* and mysticism, I have so far made mention of Goethe's general attitude towards religions and their historical realities, his affinity with certain tenets of Islam, his interest in the Qur'an and in Arabic poetry, and the relationship of his thoughts to Spinoza's philosophy. To this list, let us also add a sequence of events, accidental encounters with the Islamic Orient, portentous signs of what was yet to come, a short while before the most decisive encounter that once again, and after a period of stagnation, unleashed the

poet's tremendous artistic power and occasioned the creation of *West-östlicher Divan*.<sup>55</sup>

In autumn of 1813 in Weimar, Goethe received from a participant in the Spanish war a hand-written note in the Arabic alphabet. Goethe had the “rätselhafte Schrift” translated by the experts in the university of Jena. It was the beginning of the 114<sup>th</sup> and last chapter of the Qur'an. This event occasioned a renewed involvement with the holy book of Islam. In later years, he tried to copy the Arabic words in his own handwriting. The copies of his exercises in Arabic handwriting from the *Divan* period have been preserved.<sup>56</sup> In January of 1814, he witnessed the praying ceremony of a Muslim delegate in the Protestant high school in Weimar. About this event, Goethe gives the following report in a letter:

Da ich von Weissagungen rede, so muß ich bemerken, daß zu unserer Zeit Dinge geschehen, welche man keinen Propheten auszusprechen erlaubt hätte. Wer durfte wohl vor einigen Jahren verkünden, daß in dem Hörsaale unseres Protestantischen Gymnasiums mahometanischer Gottesdienst werde gehalten und die Suren des Korans würden hergemurmelt werden, und doch ist es geschehen, wir haben der baschkirischen Andacht beigewohnt, ihren Mulla geschaut, und ihren Prinzen im Theater bewillkommt.<sup>57</sup>

Finally, in February of 1814 a financially troubled art dealer in Leipzig persuaded Goethe to buy for the state library in Weimar a large collection of Arabic and Turkish manuscripts which turned out to include the Qur'an and commentaries on it. For months during and after the process of purchasing the manuscripts, Goethe was intensely dealing with them.<sup>58</sup>

Already in 1792, through Herder's “Blumenlese aus morgenländischen Dichtern,” which included a selection of maxims and anecdotes by Sa'di, Goethe

had encountered Persian literature.<sup>59</sup> He had also been aware of other Persian poets, including Hafiz, through scattered appearances in journals, travel books and other publications. But the fateful encounter which was to be the beginning point of a new era of his poetic creation was occasioned by his reading of Hammer-Purgstall's Hafiz translation. For those interested in the literary work of this extremely prolific Orientalist (which include apart from the Hafiz translation, *Fundgruben des Orients*, *Geschichte der schönen Redekunst Persiens*, and many other translation and expository writings) and its significance as the main source for Goethe's *Divan*, Ingeborg Hildegard Solbrig's seminal work, *Hammer-Purgstall und Goethe*, is indispensable.<sup>60</sup> Along with a detailed study of Hammer-Purgstall's life and method of work, the structure of his translation and his other *Divan*-related works, she gives a comprehensive report of the studies dedicated to Hammer-Purgstall and of the way his translation was received in the German-speaking countries. According to her account, "von der Divan-Forschung wird der Hafis-Übersetzer bis auf G. Von Loeper und wenige Stimmen aus neuerer Zeit fast ausschliesslich negativ beurteilt."<sup>61</sup> This is a fact all the more remarkable considering the effect that this translation exercised on Goethe and considering the high esteem in which he held the translator. In the *Noten und Abhandlungen*, Goethe writes about Hammer-Purgstall:

Wieviel ich diesem würdigen Mann schuldig geworden, beweist mein Büchlein in allen seinen Teilen. Längst war ich auf Hafis und dessen Gedichte aufmerksam, aber was mir auch Literatur, Reisebeschreibungen, Zeitblatt und sonst zu Gesicht brachte, gab mir keinen Begriff, keine Anschauung von dem Wert, von dem Verdienste dieses außerordentlichen Mannes. Endlich aber, als mir im Frühling 1813 die vollständige Übersetzung aller seiner Werke zukam, ergriff ich mit besonderer Vorliebe sein inneres Wesen und

suchte mich durch eigne Produktion mit ihm in Verhältnis zu  
setzen.<sup>62</sup>

What did Goethe find in Hafiz that moved him to put himself into a relationship with him through poetic production? What kind of Orient did Hafiz present to him? And what kind of Oriental poetry? These are the questions that bear direct relation to the question of mysticism in the *Divan*, much in the same way that they bear direct relation to Hafiz' own mysticism. In order to address these questions let us read one of the most quoted poems from "Buch Hafis," *Offenbar*

*Geheimnis:*

Sie haben dich, heiliger Hafis,  
Die mystische Zunge genannt,  
Und haben, die Wortgelehrten,  
Den Wert des Worts nicht erkannt.

Mystisch heißest du ihnen,  
Weil sie Närrisches bei dir denken  
Und ihren unlautern Wein  
In deinem Namen verschenken.

Du aber bist mystisch rein,  
Weil sie dich nicht verstehn,  
Der du, ohne fromm zu sein, selig bist!  
Das wollen sie dir nicht zugestehen.<sup>63</sup>

The poem contains the very essence of Goethe's interpretation of Hafiz as well as his highly differentiated view of mysticism. The first stanza of the poem, while calling Hafiz holy, seems at first to reject the idea of Hafiz being a mystic.

"Mystische Zunge" is Hammer-Purgstall's loose translation of one of Hafiz' nicknames in the Persian literary tradition *lisan al-ghaib*,<sup>64</sup> which actually means, "tongue of the unseen world." That the "Wortgelehrten" have not realized "the value of the word," appears to be in opposition to the so-called mystical

interpretation of Hafiz' poetry, in which all that is indicative of joy in the physical and phenomenal world (wine, earthly love, etc.) is taken to have an allegorical meaning and referring in fact to spiritual/mystical matters. The rejection of this kind of interpretation of Hafiz continues in the second stanza. However, a mystical understanding of Hafiz is not flatly rejected here. For after all, the philologists are only wrong in so far as they have misunderstood the word "mystical." The possibility of Hafiz being a mystic, therefore, remains open.

The second stanza continues the condemnation of the mystical interpretation of Hafiz. This interpretation is on the one hand, attributed to the foolishness, and on the other, to the hypocrisy of the interpreters. The second point, the hypocrisy of the interpreters, is made through a highly interesting use of the idea of wine. This clearly refers to the prohibition of drinking alcohol in Islam and the problematic of whether Hafiz respected the interdiction or not. That is to say, again, whether wine in Hafiz's poetry is to be interpreted literally or mystically and allegorically as referring to a kind of means of intoxication, let us say, by the love of God. Goethe seems to be referring to the idea of the mystical interpretation of wine in Hafiz as exactly that foolish thing that the interpreters attribute to him. And this may indeed be Goethe's understanding of wine in Hafiz' poetry. Commenting on these lines, Ernst Beutler writes: "[B]ei Hafis fühlte [Goethe], daß ihm Wein Wein und Freude an der Trunkenheit eben Freude an der Trunkenheit war."<sup>65</sup>

In his own commentary to Hafiz 'Divan, criticizing the mystical interpretation, Hammer-Purgstall writes:

Damals [sc. Unmittelbar nach Hafis' Tod], als Heucheley und Mißgunst Hafisen so schwer sinnlicher Wollust und verbotener Lehre zeigten, mochte es noch Niemand in den Sinn gekommen seyn, in den Dithyramben des Genußes von Wein und Liebe nichts als mystische Allegorieen göttlicher Liebe und Himmlischer Ekstase suchen zu wollen. Als aber später die wahre oder Scheinfrömmigkeit der *Muftis*, *Scheiche*, *Ulemas*, *Sofis*, *Imame*, der *Derwische* und *Kalender* die Unmöglichkeit sah, Hafisens Lieder aus dem Munde des Volkes zu bringen, mußte sie wohl, um die Orthodoxie des Dichters und die ihre zu retten, die sinnlichen Bildern [...]für übersinnliche Allegorien, und die ganze Sprache Hafisens für mystische Sprache erklären.<sup>66</sup>

It seems completely plausible that equipped with such historical information, Goethe has attributed the allegorical interpretation of wine in Hafiz to the hypocrisy of the orthodox interpreters. However, this very hypocrisy is itself allegorized in the third and fourth lines of the second stanza by the “impure wine,” that the interpreters offer each other in Hafiz’ name. In other words, Goethe’s poem clearly makes use of the allegorical meaning of wine, except that the wrong and foolish idea is allegorized by the “impurity” of the wine. Thus the stanza destabilizes itself and the categorical judgment that wine cannot and should not be interpreted allegorically. What remains unaffected, however, is the idea that a certain notion of mysticism and mystical interpretation is impure while another, the one attributed to Hafiz, is pure. This theme is made explicit in the third stanza of the poem. Hafiz is indeed mystical, but he is a type of mystic that is not understood by the orthodox interpreters. It has been debated whether the word mystical in the first line of the stanza should be read as an adverb for the following word “rein.”<sup>67</sup> Most plausible seems to be that the two attributes are simply put into a relationship of identification so that the mysticism attributed to



Hafiz is, unlike the “impure” mysticism that is rejected in the previous stanzas, is a pure kind of mysticism.

Whether Hafiz respected the prohibition against drinking or not is a question that has always been posed and endlessly debated in Hafiz philology.<sup>68</sup>

Addressing the intrinsically multivalent character and the difficulties in the interpretation of understanding Hafiz’ poetry in general, Johann Christoph Bürgel writes:

Der Dichter, der die Kenntnis [der] verschiedenen Bedeutungen und Bedeutungsschichten beim Leser voraussetzen kann, spielt nun gleichsam ein mehrstimmiges Metaphernspiel: Anakreontik, Erotik, Panygerik und Mystik, mindestens zwei dieser Sphären vermischen sich ständig, indem etwa das inhaltsschwangere Wort “Freund” in der Anakreontik den jugendlichen Schenken, in der Erotik die Geliebte, in der Panygerik den fürstlichen Gönner und in der Mystik den göttlichen Freund und schließlich die Gottheit selber bedeutet.<sup>69</sup>

The fact is that there is no conclusive “historical” evidence for either opinion regarding Hafiz’ attitude towards the prohibition of alcohol in Islam.

However, there is every reason to believe that Hafiz was adamantly against the hypocritical piety of the orthodox and the Sufi ascetics of his time. His own *Divan*, and therewith as it were the original model of Goethe’s, an anti-hierarchical monument erected in opposition to the closed-mindedness of the jurists, doctors of law, orthodox religious authorities and the world-hostile mystics.

It is to this exact characteristic that the third line of the stanza refers, where Hafiz is described as “selig” without being pious. And this is the essence of the pure mysticism attributed to him. A type of mysticism that takes joy in the

phenomenal world and in it finds the visible, delightful manifestation of the divine. And it is this mystical world-view that constitutes the fundamental kinship between Goethe and Hafiz. An attempt at reading Goethe's *West-östlicher Divan* mystically must, in my opinion, begin and end with this conception of mysticism; a world-loving mysticism, *Weltfrömmigkeit*.

Grete Schaeder formulates the following suppositions concerning Goethe's conception of mysticism:

Für Goethe[...] ist die Voraussetzung des mystischen Umgangs mit Gott, daß der Geist, der ihn sucht, die Fähigkeit hat, Gott im unmittelbar gegebenen Leben zu begegnen. Daß er imstande ist, im Symbol die Einheit von Sinn und Zeichen, das göttliche Leben selber zu verehren. Wer diese Gabe besitzt, ist selig, ohne fromm zu sein und das Gesetz studiert zu haben. Goethe fand in Hafiz über Jahrhunderte hinweg einen Mann, der, wie er selbst, nicht zwischen einer sinnlichen und übersinnlichen Welt trennte und sich zwischen beiden hin und her bewegte, sondern der beide ineins zu leben verstand.<sup>70</sup>

For Goethe as a poet, this view of mysticism is tightly connected to the nature of the oriental/Persian lyrical poetry. Hegel, who had read the *Divan* by the time he delivered his *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, gives a concise description of this poetic tradition:

Indem sich [...] der Dichter das Göttliche in allem zu erblicken sehnt und es wirklich erblickt, gibt er nun auch sein eignes Selbst dagegen auf, faßt aber ebensosehr die Immanenz des Göttlichen in seinem so erweiterten und befreiten Innern auf, und dadurch erwächst ihm eine heitere Innigkeit, jenes freie Glück, jene schwelgerische Seligkeit, welche dem Orientalen eigen ist, der sich bei der Lossagung von der eignen Partikularität durchweg in das Ewige und Absolute versenkt und in allem das Bild und die Gegenwart des Göttlichen erkennt und empfindet. Solch ein Sichdurchdringen vom Göttlichen und beseligtes trunkenes Leben in Gott streift an die Mystik an. [...] Das Selbstleben des Geistigen in den Naturerscheinungen und in dem menschlichen Verhältnissen belebt und begeistert dieselben in ihnen selber und

begründet wiederum ein eigentümliches Verhältnis der subjektiven Empfindung und Seele des Dichters zu den Gegenständen, die er besingt. Erfüllt von dieser beseelten Herrlichkeit, ist das Gemüt in sich selber ruhig, unabhängig, frei, selbständig, weit und groß; und bei dieser affirmativen Identität mit sich imaginiert und lebt es sich nun auch zu der gleichen ruhigen Einheit in die Seele der Dinge hinein und verwächst mit den Gegenständen der Natur und ihrer Pracht, mit der Geliebten, dem Schenken, überhaupt mit allem, was des Lobes und der Liebe wert ist, zur seligsten, frohesten Innigkeit.<sup>71</sup>

Let us before going further, briefly mention the poem *Wink* (December 12, 1814, originally titled *Widerruf*<sup>72</sup>), which immediately follows *Offenbar Geheimnis* in “Buch Hafis,” and where Goethe once more addresses the issue of Hafiz’s mysticism. This time, he takes back, as it were, his earlier dismissal of the “Wortgelehrten,” and of their claim that Hafiz is a mystic.

Und doch haben sie recht, die ich schelte:  
Denn, daß ein Wort nicht einfach gelte,  
Das müßte sich wohl von selbst verstehn.  
Das Wort ist ein Fächer! Zwischen den Stäben  
Blicken ein Paar schöne Augen hervor.  
Der Fächer ist nur ein lieblicher Flor,  
Er verdeckt mir zwar das Gesicht,  
Aber das Mädchen verbirgt er nicht,  
Weil das schönste was sie besitzt,  
das Auge, mir ins Auge blitzt.<sup>73</sup>

A word, “mystic,” (or Goethe’s or Hafiz’s word) does not denote and signify simply and unequivocally. Here Goethe demonstrates to his readers that he is not simply dogmatically opposed to considering Hafiz a mystic. To this effect he gives them a signal. Here the word is likened to a fan that covers the face, but does not hide the beloved altogether. From in between the fan’s sticks a pair of beautiful eyes glances forward. Interestingly enough, here the “Wink” also refers to mysteries and properties of the erotic. The lovely veil, that covers, also reveals

the most beautiful possession of the beloved. While briefly addressing this poem, we should also remark that often in the poems of the *Divan*, an idea, a word, a name or a particle has the character of a signal, a “Wink.” This poem warns us not to assume them to have appeared merely cosmetically or for making the poem picturesque. I will try to show that these signals are in fact most revelatory of the significance of the poems in question.

I have already mentioned that the influence of Hafiz’ poetry on the composition of the *Divan* has been extensively studied from the perspective of the common motifs, with regard to the quality and reception of Hammer-Purgstall’s translation, and finally in connection with the two different conceptions of mysticism. The purpose of the present work is to approach the question of mysticism in Goethe’s *Divan* not from the standpoint of Hafiz philology, but through the hermeneutical application of certain key speculative philosophical concepts that underlie the type of (Oriental) mysticism that can be, and indeed is, attributed to the *Divan*.<sup>74</sup> But before embarking on this project, it is necessary to address one final encounter and a last source of poetic inspiration essential to the composition of the *Divan*.

On August 4, 1814, on his trip to his homeland in the Main region for the first time after 17 years, Goethe met Marianne Jung who was soon afterwards to be married to the Frankfurt banker, Jakob von Willemer. By this time, Goethe had already composed the first thirty or so *Gedichte an Hafiz*, including some of his best-known poems, such as *Selige Sehnsucht*. This first encounter does not seem to have had much effect on Goethe and his renewed poetic power. A second

meeting, however, took place in May of the following year, and from then on we can find the strong impact of this character and her encounter with Goethe on his poems and on the *Divan*. Already in July of that year, in two poems – “Daß Suleika von Jussuph entzückt war” and “da du nun Suleika heißt”<sup>75</sup> -- Goethe addresses Marianne with the name of the Qur’anic female character, Suleika, who fell passionately in love with Joseph the prophet. Marianne was also enchanted by Goethe. There is no evidence that the two ever crossed the boundaries of propriety. But the love between them occasioned not only some of Goethe’s best poems in the *Divan*, but also a remarkable display of poetic talent in Marianne. The poetic dialogue that thus ensued was then included, with the knowledge and consent of Marianne, in the “Buch Suleika,” of the *Divan*<sup>76</sup>. In this dialogue, Marianne remained the figure of Suleika, and Goethe chose for himself the name Hatem, a pre-Islamic Arab character known for his extraordinary generosity. Regarding the significance of the encounter between Goethe and Marianne von Willemer for the composition of the *Divan*, Hans Heinrich Schaeder writes:

Die Entstehungsgeschichte des Divans, zumal die aus [der] Zeit erhaltenen Briefe lehren, daß die Begegnung mit Hafis and die Begegnung mit Marianne von Willemer, die den Namen einer der großen Liebenden der orientalischen Überlieferung, der Suleika, erhält, in die engste innere Beziehung traten. Was Goethe Seherblick aus Hafis’ Poesie schöpft, das war die Formmöglichkeit, kraft derer er die neue Liebe zu Suleika in Geist verwandelte.<sup>77</sup>

In a similar observation and referring to Goethe’s “begnadeter Zustand” before his encounter with Marianne, Emil Staiger writes:

Diesen begnadeten Zustand hat Goethe schon vor der Begegnung mit Marianne auf der Reise von Weimar nach Frankfurt im Juli 1814 erreicht. Er gründet nicht in der Begegnung mit Suleika,

sondern umgekehrt: Marianne von Willemer kann nur als Suleika sichtbar werden, weil Goethe das Leben wieder mit neuen, unverbrauchten Organen wahrnimmt und nach der Drangsal der ‘Wahlverwandtschaften’ an eine neue Unschuld, an eine dem Schicksal, dem Fluch der modernen Sozietät entrückte Liebe glaubt.<sup>78</sup>

Therefore, if Hafiz was the spiritual guide to offer Goethe lessons on true love, then the “phenomenal” appearance Suleika gave him the occasion to exercise it like a young man again.

We can see the anticipation of rejuvenation and the coming of a new period of blissfulness in the poem *Phänomen*, composed a few days before the first meeting with Marianne. While staying at the Stadtschloß in Eisenach, on the morning of July, 25, 1814, after a rainy night, Goethe witness the appearance of a rainbow in the sky. Since sunshine had not penetrated through heavy fog the rainbow was white. The scenery occasioned the following poem:<sup>79</sup>

Wenn zu der Regenwand  
Phöbus sich gattet,  
Gleich steht ein Bogenrand  
Farbig beschattet.

Im Nebel gleichen Kreis  
Seh’ ich gezogen,  
Zwar ist der Bogen weiß,  
Doch Himmelsbogen.

So sollst du, munterer Greis,  
Dich nicht betrüben,  
Sind gleich die Haare weiß,  
Doch wirst du lieben.<sup>80</sup>

Here in addition to the anticipation of rejuvenation and the premonition of the new love that was soon to enter Goethe’s life—despite the white hair—in the figure of Marianne, we have the phenomenal world represented by the rainbow as

having epiphanic aspect of revelation: a true premonition of what was to come in the ongoing and subsequent creation of the *Divan*.

In this introduction, I have tried to touch upon and briefly discuss those elements of Goethe's life, thought and work –particularly those related to his attitude towards religious ideas—that I consider crucial to the approach adopted in the present work. With these elements in mind and with the benefit of the constellation of speculative mystical concepts introduced in the preface to this study, I shall now begin my attempt at highlighting and developing the mystical motifs in Goethe's *West-östlicher Divan*.

## Notes:

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- <sup>1</sup> Cf. Hans Heinrich Schaeder, *Goethes Erlebnis des Ostens*, Leipzig, 1938, p. 123.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>3</sup> *Goethes Dichtung und Wahrheit*, [FA I/14], Klaus-Detlef Müller (ed.), p. 155.
- <sup>4</sup> “Buch Hafis“ in *West-östlicher Divan*, [FA I/3], p. 28.
- <sup>5</sup> Grete Schaeder, *Gott und Welt*, Hamlen, 1947, p. 23.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 24.
- <sup>7</sup> Cf. ibid.
- <sup>8</sup> Hans Heinrich Schaeder, *Goethes Erlebnis des Ostens*, p. 25.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 29.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 28.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 31.
- <sup>13</sup> Hendrik Birus, “‘Im Islam leben und sterben wir alle’ Religion und Aufklärung in Goethes West-östlichem Divan” in : *Etudes Germaniques* 60, 2005, p. 265
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>15</sup> Megerlin was extremely hostile towards Islam and its prophet. The title page of his translation of the Qur’an bore the words: “*Mahomed der Falsche Prophet*.” He called Mohammad the Antichrist. The translation was to help the “Teutschen” know this Antichrist better and to make them pray for the destruction of his violent empire and his heretic religion. On Dec. 22, 1772, the following note was published in the *Frankfurter Gelehrten Anzeigen* about Megerlin’s translation: “Diese elende Produktion wird kürzer abgefertigt [als die zuvor erwähnten Bücher]. Wir wünschten, daß einmal eine andere unter morgenländischem Himmel von einem Deutschen verfertigt würde, der mit allem Dichter- und Prophetengefühl in seinem Zelte den Koran läse, und Ahnungsgeist genug hätte, das ganze zu umfassen...” Mommsen believes that the note was written by Goethe, cf. Katharina Mommsen., *Goethe und die arabische Welt*, Frankfurt am Main, 1988., pp. 176-177, while Hans Heinrich Schaeder attributes the review to Herder, cf. *Goethes Erlebnis des Ostens*, Leipzig, 1938, p. 39.
- <sup>16</sup> Katharina Mommsen., *Goethe und die arabische Welt*, p. 194.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 195.
- <sup>18</sup> [FA I/1], p. 193.
- <sup>19</sup> Cf. Hans Heinrich Schaeder, *Goethes Erlebnis des Ostens*, p. 40.
- <sup>20</sup> Katharina Mommsen., *Goethe und die arabische Welt*, 1988, p. 178.
- <sup>21</sup> Cf. ibid, pp. 179-193.
- <sup>22</sup> Cf. ibid, pp. 269-270.
- <sup>23</sup> [FA I/3], pp. 159-160.
- <sup>24</sup> Cf. Katharina Mommsen., *Goethe und die arabische Welt*, pp. 504-521.
- <sup>25</sup> Cf. ibid., pp. 51-156.
- <sup>26</sup> [FA I/3], p. 141.
- <sup>27</sup> Katharina Mommsen., *Goethe und die arabische Welt*, Frankfurt am Main, p. 52.
- <sup>28</sup> Cf. ibid, pp. 55-58.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 158.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 171.
- <sup>31</sup> Cf. Ibid., pp. 183-184.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 183.
- <sup>33</sup> [FA I/3], p. 65.
- <sup>34</sup> Katharina Mommsen., *Goethe und die arabische Welt*, pp. 239-240.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 244, citation from Spinoza’s *Ethik* II, 49.
- <sup>36</sup> [FA I/3], p. 45. Pend-Nameh is a book of poetry attributed to the Persian mystical poet Attar.
- <sup>37</sup> Katharina Mommsen, *Goethe und die arabische Welt*, pp. 284-285. Citation is from Spinoza’s *Ethik*, IV, 73.
- <sup>38</sup> Grete Schaeder, *Gott und Welt*, p. 8.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp. 116-117.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid., 118-119.



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- <sup>41</sup> Ibid., pp. 117-118.
- <sup>42</sup> Cf. Ibid., p. 120. The first verse is misquoted from “Buch Suleika.” The correct quote is “Unmöglich scheint immer die Rose,” Cf. [FA I/3], p. 76.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 115.
- <sup>44</sup> Cf. Ibid., p. 119, Citation from Goethe’s “Spinoza-Aufsatz” in Wilhelm Dilthey’s *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 2, Leipzig 1912, p. 391.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 121.
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 123.
- <sup>47</sup> Hans Heinrich Schaeder, *Goethes Erlebnis des Ostens*, pp. 124-125. The expression ‘dezidierten Nichtchristen’ was used in a letter to Lavater on July 29, 1782 and Goethe’s threefold self-characterization as polytheist, pantheist and monotheist in a letter to Jacobi on January 6, 1831.
- <sup>48</sup> [FA I/ 14], pp. 691-692. The “Lehre” to which Goethe refers here is the radical form of the idea of Sündenfall, whereby human nature is so deeply tainted by the original sin that there is not the slightest good to be found in its innermost core.
- <sup>49</sup> Hans Heinrich Schaeder, *Goethes Erlebnis des Ostens*, p. 127.
- <sup>50</sup> Cf. *ibid.*
- <sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 129.
- <sup>52</sup> Hermann August Korff, *Geist der Goethezeit*, Vol IV, Leipzig, 1955, p. 496.
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 498.
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid., pp. 501-502.
- <sup>55</sup> Cf. Katharina Mommsen., *Goethe und die arabische Welt*, pp. 42-43 & 256-258.
- <sup>56</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 256-257.
- <sup>57</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 257-258.
- <sup>58</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 42-43.
- <sup>59</sup> Cf. Hans Heinrich Schaeder, *Goethes Erlebnis des Ostens*, p. 48.
- <sup>60</sup> Regarding Hafiz as a source of motifs for the *Divan*, the concise summary of Wolfgang Lentz in his “Goethes *Divan* und die Hafisforschung” in *Studien zum West-östlichen Divan Goethes*, Edgar Lohner (ed.) is also a useful reference. In this article, Lentz discusses the problematic of the mystical interpretation of the *Divan*, and gives a report of various opinions on the issue.
- <sup>61</sup> Ingeborg Hildegard Solbrig, *Hammer-Purgstall und Goethe*. Bern, 1973, p. 149.
- <sup>62</sup> [FA I/3], p. 278. Cf. also *ibid.*, p. 1571: “Im Frühjahr 1814 (!) erhielt Goethe von seinem Verleger Cotta, die soeben in dessen Verlag erschienene, allerdings rückdatierte zweibändige Ausgabe [der Hammer-Übersetzung].”
- <sup>63</sup> [FA I/3], p. 32.
- <sup>64</sup> Cf. [FA I/3], p. 1014.
- <sup>65</sup> *West-östlicher Divan*, Ernst Beutler (Ed.), Bremen, 1956, p. 409.
- <sup>66</sup> Cited in [FA I/3], p. 1014.
- <sup>67</sup> Cf. [FA I/3], p. 1015, and Wender Herber and Robert Peter, “Mystische Zunge. Zu den *Divan*-Gedichten Offenbar Geheimnis und Wink”; in *Goethe-Gedichte: Zweieunddreißig Interpretationen* (Gerhard Sauder, ed.) Munich/Vienna, 1996, pp. 223-227.
- <sup>68</sup> For a summary of the debate, cf. B. Khorramshahi’s *Hafiz-Nameh*, vol. 1, p. 242; there a more comprehensive bibliography on the debate is also available.
- <sup>69</sup> Johann Christoph Bürgel, “Goethe und Hafis” in *Drei Hafis-Studien*, Frankfurt am Main, 1975, p. 11.
- <sup>70</sup> Grete Schaeder, *Gott und Welt*, p. 335.
- <sup>71</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, Frankfurt am Main, 1970, Vol. 1, pp. 474-475.
- <sup>72</sup> Cf. [FA I/3], p. 1017.
- <sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 33.
- <sup>74</sup> Cf. the Preface for a preliminary review of the basic concepts of the speculative mysticism as employed in this work.
- <sup>75</sup> Both poems are from “Buch Suleika” in the *Divan*, Cf. [FA I/3], p. 74. Cf. Emil Staiger, *Goethe*, Zürich, Freiburg, 1959, vol. 3, pp. 42-55, for a concise account of Goethe’s relationship with Mariane von Willemer and the role this relationship plays in the *Divan*. Also for another

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informative account of this relationship, cf. Hans Pyritz. "Goethe und Marianne von Willemer" in *Studien zum West-östlichen Divan Goethes*, Edgar Lohner (ed.), Darmstadt, 1971, pp. 352-371.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Hans Pyritz. "Goethe und Marianne von Willemer" in *Studien zum West-östlichen Divan Goethes*, Edgar Lohner (ed.), Darmstadt, 1971, pp. 369-370.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Hans Heinrich Schaeder, *Goethes Erlebnis des Ostens*, p. 69.

<sup>78</sup> Emil Staiger, *Goethe*, Zürich, vol. 3, p. 37.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. *West-östlicher Divan*, Ernst Beutler (Ed.), pp. 347-348.

<sup>80</sup> [FA I/3], p. 19.

## CHAPTER ONE

# Orientation

We will show them our signs in the  
horizons and in their selves, so it  
becomes manifest to them that He is  
the Truth.

The Qur'an 41:53

That water that gave Khidr life,  
Seek in the tavern, the goblet has it.

Hafiz

### Hegire

Nord und West und Süd zersplittern  
Throne bersten, Reiche zittern,  
Flüchte du, im reinen Osten  
Patriarchenluft zu kosten,  
Unter Lieben, Trinken, Singen,  
Soll dich Chisers Quell verjüngen.

Dort, im Reinen und im Rechten,  
Will ich menschlichen Geschlechtern  
In des Ursprungs Tiefe dringen,  
Wo sie noch von Gott empfangen  
Himmelslehr' in Erdesprachen,  
Und sich nicht den Kopf zerbrachen.

Wo sie Väter hoch verehrten,  
Jeden fremden Dienst verwehrten;  
Will mich freun der Jugendschranke:  
Glaube weit, eng der Gedanke,  
Wie das Wort so wichtig dort war,  
Weil es ein gesprochen Wort war.

Will mich unter Hirten mischen,  
An Oasen mich erfrischen,  
Wenn mit Caravanen wandle,  
Schawl, Caffee und Moschus handle.  
Jeden Pfad will ich betreten  
Von der Wüste zu den Städten.

Bösen Felsweg auf und nieder  
Trösten Hafis deine Lieder,  
Wenn der Führer mit Entzücken,  
Von des Maultiers hohem Rücken,  
Singt, die Sterne zu erwecken,  
Und die Räuber zu erschrecken.

Will in Bädern und in Schenken  
Heil'ger Hafis dein gedenken,  
Wenn den Schleyer Liebchen lüftet.  
Schüttelnd Ambralocken düftet.  
Ja des Dichters Liebeflüstern  
Mache selbst die Huris lüstern.

Wolltet ihr ihm dies beneiden,  
Oder etwa gar verleiden;  
Wisset nur, daß Dichterworte  
Um des Paradieses Pforte  
Immer leise klopfend schweben,  
Sich erbittend ew'ges Leben.

With these verses Goethe opens a wayfarer's report of a journey not only along the terrestrial horizon of cities, lands and landscapes towards a paradisiacal East<sup>1</sup>, not even only along the axis of the profane history back to a time of originary purity and harmony, but along an inner vertical axis of the soul, transhistorical and beyond geographical boundaries, at once toward the depth of consciousness and toward a northerly star, a 'midnight sun', the true celestial home of the spirit. Turning his back on a world of shattering cardinal points of the compass, bursting thrones and trembling empires, on a world only at the most minimal and most immediate level of the materiality of the journey - and of the poem - locatable on the map, he flees to a place equally unlikely to be placed geographically and cartographically. Here we are at the inaugural point of an 'emigration' and a 'homecoming,' the opening of a poetry akin to what the Iranian master of

Illumination, Suhrawardi, called ‘*Recital of Occidental Exile*.’<sup>2</sup> In this sense, the poem serves in a double sense as an “Orientation,” both in the sense of turning eastward in the spiritual direction of the journey and in the sense of the adoption of eastern phenomenal realities as the treasure house of the motifs running through the whole poetic cycle. Thus, *Hegire* alternates between the imagery of Truth and that of Appearance, of underlying and enduring realities and of earthly and profane human phenomena, of the esoteric and the exoteric, Earth and Heaven, life as lived and enjoyed in its earthly and temporal and its ultimate meaning at the gate of paradise in its divine and eternal dimension. *Hegire* thus acts as a preamble for the entire *Divan* - like a tapestry of interlaced warps and woofs in the fashion of a Persian carpet - with the fundamental bi-unity of its symbolics and imagery, a proper response to the call of the poet’s “twin,”<sup>3</sup> the master of ambiguity and elusion, Hafiz of Shiraz; the compact itinerary of the travel both “ins Land der Dichtung” and “in Dichters Lande.”<sup>4</sup>

Admittedly, at first glance, for a casual or superficial reading, this poem might seem to fulfill all of the Saidian and post-Saidian criteria of Orientalizing exoticism, escapism, of mere atmospherics and unscrupulous ahistorical and unfactual projection. Does Goethe himself not say that he is “fleeing” the catastrophic political and historical travails and crises of his age, the bursting thrones and splintering realms in North and West and South, to find a pure East of an archaic and sunken world of Abrahamitic patriarchy and life’s immediate, simple, and still innocent pleasures - wine, woman and song – Lieben, Singen, Trinken, in the beneficent proximity - this a particularly picturesque detail - of

Chiser's fount of rejuvenation? Such a reading would, however, disregard the profound seriousness of purpose, the disarming frankness, and - not least - the careful and scrupulous use of words, the exact and exacting construction of Goethe's poem, all of which cry out to be understood emphatically and precisely, and not as casual or vague Orientalizing atmospherics. "Wer den Dichter will verstehen, muß ins Dichters Lande gehen" - Goethe's prescription for the understanding of Hafiz and his Orient is also a prescription for the understanding of Goethe's own poetic project and poetic Orient in the *Divan*. They must be understood on their own, Goethean, terms. This applies, as we shall see, to the title of the poem, *Hegire*, in the reference to the decisive and here exemplary journey of the prophet Mohammed, as the designation of a personal, spiritual quest: for it is indeed thusly that the *Divan* must be grasped. It applies to the underlying project of "Orientation," that is to say, the search, not for an exotic and remote geographic, historical or cultural realm, but for a guide to right living in the lived immediacy of the here and now (that Goethe's "Orientalism" was enacted in the Gerbermühle in Frankfurt is in this sense not the refutation of it as a kind of frivolous masquerade, but in fact the confirmation of its ultimate seriousness of purpose). Indeed, it applies to the entire overarching narrative and vocabulary of the poem, which are by no means merely atmospheric, but programmatic, and demand to be understood in the light of its program. This applies, finally, as we shall see, to the reference to Chiser and his source, which is anything but incidental and must be read not "atmospherically", as a picturesque and evocative Orientalizing detail, but as invocation in the emphatic sense, and as

a reference and clue – a Goethean “Wink” or hint – as to the real purpose of the poem.

“Das erste Gedicht, *Hegire* überschrieben, gibt uns von Sinn und Absicht des Ganzen sogleich genugsame Kenntniß.” Thus Goethe reveals, in the announcement of the upcoming publication of the *Divan*,<sup>5</sup> the programmatic nature of the poem and his intention of placing it at the opening of his only collection of poems published as an independent separate book.<sup>6</sup> By the time of the completion of *Hegire*, December 24, 1814, thirty-six of the “poems to Hafiz”, *Gedichte an Hafis*, which were to eventually grow into a full-bodied cycle of poems *West-östlicher Divan*, had already been composed.<sup>7</sup> The word ‘Hegire’ consciously alludes to the prophet of Islam’s emigration out of Mecca to Medina to avoid religious persecution and to begin his political rule and his spiritual guidance over the fledgling community of the faithful as well. Muhammad’s Hegire also marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar and the starting point of Islamic civilization and culture. It has in the course of history become the paradigm of all emigrations as the foundational move toward a new birth, the symbol of starting afresh.<sup>8</sup> Goethe had already used the term before the composition of this poem, namely, in reference to his Italian Journey:

Eine ‘Hegire’ hatte Goethe schon – mit einiger Feierlichkeit, aber ohne nähere Erklärung – seinen fluchtartigen Aufbruch nach Italien 1786 gennant; so im Brief an den Herzog Carl August vom 14. Oktober 1786 und in der *Italienischen Reise*.<sup>9</sup>

Drawing a parallel between Goethe’s description of the political unrest of his time and his subsequent Hegire to Italy, “Wie sich in der politischen Welt irgend ein ungeheures Bedrohliches hervorthat, so warf ich mich eigensinnig auf das

Entfernste,”<sup>10</sup> and the image of a disintegrating world in the first two verses of the poem *Hegire*, some interpreters have described the *Divan* as Goethe’s “second Hegire,”<sup>11</sup> and as his “geistiger Aufbruch in den Orient.”<sup>12</sup>

Explaining - in two letters - the significance of the term as the title of the opening poem of the *Divan*, Goethe provides us with the first step of the interpretation of the first stanza of the poem and, in effect, the entire poem as the program for the whole of the cycle: “[M]an flüchtet aus der Zeit in ferne Jahrhunderte und Gegenden, wo man sich etwas Paradiesähnliches erwartet.”

Also:

Ich segne meinen Entschluß zu dieser Hegire, denn ich bin dadurch der Zeit und dem lieben Mittel-Europa entrückt, welches für eine große Gunst des Himmels anzusehen ist, die nicht einem jeden widerfährt.<sup>13</sup>

Interpreters have been prompt to see in the third and fourth verses’ imperative,

Flüchte du, im reinen Osten  
Patriarchenluft zu kosten,

a ‘deep longing for an auspicious beginning and for a pure origin,’ a ‘departure toward faith,’ and a clear reference to the ‘ideal world’ of the biblical ‘Erzväter.’<sup>14</sup>

Citing, moreover, the following sentences from *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, the conclusion has been drawn that the flight in the *Divan* is in fact a flight back to ‘our dear home,’ not at all a flight, therefore, only an ‘internalization.’<sup>15</sup>

Wenn es auch draußen noch so wild und wunderlich herging, so flüchtete ich gern nach jenen morgenländischen Gegenden, ich versenkte mich in die ersten Bücher Moses und fand mich dort unter den ausgebreiteten Hirtenstämmen zugleich in der größten Einsamkeit und in der größte Gesellschaft.<sup>16</sup>



The *Divan* is thus staged as the report of a wayfarer's journey, leaving behind a West in a state of chaos and disintegration, toward the East of purity and youth, an East whose 'Mythos und Gegenwart,' is elevated in a profusion of colorful and enticing images before our eyes.<sup>17</sup> Here are invoked the most characteristic Hafizian motifs of the joy of life: Loving, Drinking, Singing; here the poet, *as poet*, is to receive the same water of eternal life and youth which his oriental twin, Hafiz, has received, in the goblet at a tavern, from the legendary (Chiser) Khidr:

Unter Lieben, Trinken, Singen  
Soll dich Chisers Quell verjüngen.

It has been observed that these motifs of the exemplary activities of an idyllic anacreontic life-style, a life style which is excluded by the war-ridden rest of the world, provide the "pure East" of the poem with a double face, religious-ethical-mystical on the one hand, and sensual and hedonistic on the other.<sup>18</sup>

So zeigt sich bereits der 'reine Osten' dieser 1. Strophe bei näherem Hinsehen einen paradoxen Einstand von Einfachheit und Raffinement, Archaik und Synkretismus, Religiosität und Frivolität, der dann im Gang des Gedichts sukzessiv entfaltet wird.<sup>19</sup>

Following the introduction of the "Hegire" as an imaginary journey across the horizontal axis of geography, and the implicit identification of the poet with the prophet, the second stanza of the poem introduces the Orient of purity and righteousness as the destination of a vertical, that is to say, non-spatial and imaginary spiritual journey, both in historical and trans-historical sense, back to the depth of the origin of the human race, back "in den kern und mütterlichen Urgrund des Seins,"<sup>20</sup>

Dort im Reinen und im Rechten  
Will ich menschlichen Geschlechten  
in des Ursprungs Tiefe dringen

Thus the journey towards the Orient is not a form of escapism, but an orientation towards an authentic life whose characteristics are expressed by the attributes “rein” and “recht.” It is a journey back, to the point of “origin” and “orientation,” both of poetry as of religious belief, here however expressly understood not as religious orthodoxy of any kind, but as religion in the very idiomatic Goethean (as Hafizean) sense of “Weltfrömmigkeit” and thankfulness for and affirmation of the gift of Creation as of life. In other words, Goethe makes no pretence that the Orient he is referring to is a concrete geographic or social entity existing in actual historical time: it is constituted by the imaginary as by poetry, indeed self-referentially by the poem itself, which itself enacts that very break with the inauthentic, transient sphere of political discord and disintegration and the restitution of right living which it invokes, in this manner constituting its own sovereign realm. However, as such a sovereign imaginary, Goethe’s Orient is real: not simply in the often specious sense that anything imagined has a kind of reality, but in the sense that this imaginary, as “Orientation,” as the discovered and otherwise lost guide to the possibility of right living, is itself a force, and existentially compelling. Furthermore, this Orient is real in the sense that it is indeed through the medium of the Oriental, of genuine aspects and impulses of Islamic and Oriental, Arabic and Persian culture – as in the poetry of Hafiz and the cultural background, including Islamic theosophy, which informs it - that, by the later, contemporary, German and Occidental poet, this hidden guide is to be

and has indeed been found. Here, in this Orient, the deity has revealed itself and has spoken the “Himmelslehr” in the languages of the earth: the Goethean “Erdesprachen”. Here, at this point of origin, unlike in the rest of the “disoriented” world still torn into pieces with all its divisions, wars and conflicts, the – Goethean as Hafizean - faithful can still live their faith, free of agonizing and antagonistic dogmas as of worldly and religious hierarchies, content with the belief in the joys of earthly life itself as sheer and sufficient evidence of divine and numinous revelation.

Wo sie noch von Gott empfangen  
Himmelslehr in Erdesprachen,  
Und sich nicht den Kopf zerbrechen:

“In patriarchalischer Frühzeit war ‘Himmelslehr in Erdesprachen’ verständlich, d.h. ewig Gültiges unmittelbar mitteilbar und verstehbar.”<sup>21</sup> This statement, however, needs to be nuanced, both in reference to the divine teaching in earthly tongues and as far as the “eternally valid” is concerned. Here the “Erdesprachen” are not to be understood simply as the human vernaculars, but also literally and emphatically as the “languages of the earth”, that is to say nature, Eros and the entire phenomenal world, in which, in the sense of Herder - which remained Goethe’s own conviction for all of his productive life - human languages at least at their origin all participated.

Similarly, “sich nicht den Kopf zerbrechen” is assuredly a dour and succinct reference to that internecine sectarian conflict and rabulistic dogmatic dispute which are a hallmark of religious fanaticism as of institutional religious hierarchies, and with which the history of all the Abrahamic religions is all too

replete. They were anathema to Goethe as to Hafiz, and this shared hostility to worldly and religious hierarchies and to dogma is undoubtedly one of the decisive and key affinities between the two poets: we shall see what a salient role Hafiz and his poetry play in constituting Goethe's ideal "Oriental" realm in a moment. After elucidating what is to be derived at Chiser's fount – the touching of the very depths of human origins as of the divine origin of Creation and of human belief in it – the poem goes on to a carefully constructed depiction of life lived in the wonderful immediacy of revelation as Goethe understands it, describing an arc from this recovered origin, moving through images of fulfilled earthly life to finally end at the gates of Paradise itself.

The third stanza moves quickly but smoothly from a secular image of the East as the topos - to be sure, only as an imagined past , and not actual, reality - of harmonious societal and political structures,

Wo sie Väter hoch verehrten,  
Jeden fremden Dienst verwehrten,

to a religious image of a community, where spontaneous faith - and not religious hierarchy and dogma - preserves a kind of primordial youth by binding the individual as if in a 'heiliges Gefäß,'

Will mich freuen der Jugendschranke  
Glaube weit, eng der Gedanke

This is a place where words are important precisely because they are still spoken, that is, because they are the primary means of binding the members of the community together in a living and lived community of faith.

Wie das Wort so wichtig war  
Weil es ein gesprochen Wort war.<sup>22</sup>

As such, the third stanza depicts perhaps less

[e]ine in Religion und Sitte streng geordnete, die Tradition  
bewahrende, hierarchische,

than a still nomadic , non-hierarchical and freedom-loving

im Politischen autonome Gesellschaftform [...] als positives  
Gegenbild zu der Welt politischen Umsturzes und chaotischer  
Erschütterung.<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, in the depiction of this society the relations of humans to nature as to  
each other are largely unmediated and spontaneous, and it is rather in this almost  
anarchic form of freedom from state and religious hierarchy that “Religion,  
Staatsform und Sprache erscheinen in engster Beziehung aufeinander in einem als  
musterbildlich dargestellten Ordnungsgefüge.”<sup>24</sup> For it is to be remembered that  
the Goethean ideal of human society and its relationship to nature in the *Divan* is  
one of pure immediacy, not state or religious hierarchy, and is perhaps best  
expressed in the poem *Freysinn*:<sup>25</sup>

Laß mich nur auf meinem Sattel gelten!  
Bleibt in euren Hütten, euren Zelten!  
Und ich reite froh in alle Ferne,  
Über meiner Mütze nur die Sterne.

“Glaube weit, eng der Gedanke.” This is, Ernst Beutler writes, the leading  
theme of the *West-östlicher Divan*:

Goethe hätte nicht Dichter sein müssen, wenn ihm nicht die letzten  
Offenbarungen durch das Gefühl im Schauen und Erschauern  
geworden wären.[...] Für Philosophie im eigentlichen Sinne habe  
er kein Organ gehabt, sagte er.<sup>26</sup>

Beutler continues by offering evidence for the importance of “Glaube” in  
Goethe’s worldview, according to which the problems of ‘the nature of God,’

‘immortality,’ and ‘the essence of human soul and its relation to the body’ are eternal problems without satisfactory answers coming from the side of philosophy.<sup>27</sup> Man should therefore believe and has very right, ‘seiner Natur gemäß’, to believe; he is allowed to build upon religious promises. Goethe’s advocacy of religious faith is, however, neither the advocacy for any particular orthodox doctrine, nor a sign of a purely intellectual, abstract and scholarly-historical understanding and appreciation of different religions, as with Lessing, nor even a call to tolerance for the coexistence of different religious confessions. It is a rejection of ‘Gottlosigkeit’ as such, the godlessness of a time when man is severed from a solid bond and thrown into the void of doubt and despair. Goethe’s defense of faith is that of a poetic sensibility, that sensibility which allows him to elevate the isolation of the appearances of life to see behind them all the power of the sublime, the eternal; defense of faith as the heart of all art and knowledge: “Wer Kunst und Wissenschaft besitzt, Der hat auch Religion.”<sup>28</sup>

It is in this sense that Goethe values faith as such, regardless of its specific object and evaluates it as superior to knowledge:

Beim Glauben, sagte ich, komme alles darauf an, daß man glaube; was man glaube, sei völlig gleichgültig. Der Glaube sei ein großes Gefühl von Sicherheit für die Gegenwart und Zukunft, und diese Sicherheit entspringe aus dem Zutrauen auf ein übergroßes, übermächtiges und unerforschliches Wesen. Auf die Unerschütterlichkeit dieses Zutrauens komme alles an; wie wir uns aber dieses Wesen denken, dies hänge von unsern übrigen Fähigkeiten, ja von den Umständen ab, und sei ganz gleichgültig. Der Glaube sei ein heiliges Gefäß, in welches ein jeder sein Gefühl, sein Verstand, seine Einbildungskraft, so gut als er vermöge, zu opfern bereit stehe. Mit dem Wissen sei es gerade das Gegenteil; es komme gar nicht darauf an, daß man wisse, sondern was man wisse, wie gut und wie viel man wisse. Daher könne man über das Wissen streiten, weil es sich berichtigen, sich erweitern

und verengern lasse. Das Wissen fange vom Einzelnen an, sei endlos und gestaltlos, und könne niemals, höchstens nur träumerisch, zusammengefaßt werden, und bleibe also dem Glauben geradezu entgegengesetzt.<sup>29</sup>

The poem now continues the delicate process of intertwining (Verflechtung)<sup>30</sup> the imagery of the Oriental phenomenal life elements, the itinerant shepherds, oases, caravans, merchants of shawl and coffee and musk - all of whom the journeying poet accompanies, and a whole host of other images - with thoughts on poetry and the solace it brings the travelers. It will finally come to an intimate conversation with the “holy Hafiz”, our poet’s twin, and with that conversation, and with the words of the poet, it comes to the promise of paradise and eternal life; once again transforming the horizontal outward topographical axis of the “Hegire” into the vertical spiritual and inward one extending from “des Ursprungs Tiefe” all the way up to the gate of Heaven. By highlighting further the importance of the spoken word in the form of the sung word, therefore, the second half of the poem characterizes the pure Orient of the origin as a place of intimate bond between man and word, language and poetry as mediums of revelation and the integration of the earthly and the cosmic spheres. A place, moreover, that religion and poetry are not separate from each other; they form an evident unity in the spoken word which then informs lived human and popular life. In this, the absence of excessive intellectual reflection as of sectarian and factional squabble (in which the real history of Islam and the historical Orient is only too replete) is identified with the ‘Jugend der Menschheit,’ its happy existence in an immediate and spontaneous relationship to the earthly and to revelation, as contrasted with the disintegration of life in later times of distance

from and loss of this blessed human origin. All this and the “Hegire” toward this ideal world are restored in the consciousness of the poet *as poet*, rendering him thereby a surrogate for the emigrating prophet, and his words having the same sacred character as the “Himmelslehr in Erdesprachen.”<sup>31</sup> Thus the second half of the poem, as Grete Schaeder has usefully observed,

dämpft den Eindruck, als sei mit dem Ziel der Fahrt nur die Urheimat der Menschenreligionen gemeint. Der Orient ist ja nicht nur das Land des Propheten Mohammed und der noch viel älteren Glaubenslehre der Parsen, er ist in ersten Linie die Lebenswelt des Persers Hafis, den Goethe im ‘Westöslichen Divan’ als seinen ‘Zwilling’ bezeichnet.<sup>32</sup>

“[Ich fühlte mich höchst nöthig] aus der wirklichen Welt, die sich selbst offenbar und im Stillen bedrohte, in eine ideelle zu flüchten, an welcher vergnüglichen Theil zu nehmen meiner Lust, Fähigkeit und Willen überlassen war.”<sup>33</sup>

With this statement and many similar ones,<sup>34</sup> Goethe not only explained his urgent interest in the study of the Orient, but more importantly, his perception of the “reiner Osten” as an ideal destination rather than a real place.<sup>35</sup> Lest the ideality of this East not be clear, we are reminded that neither the Eastern Europe, nor the Near East of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and the first decade or so of the 19<sup>th</sup> century remained untouched by the Napoleonic wars.<sup>36</sup> Not even the 14<sup>th</sup> century Iran of Hafiz and other Persian classics could possibly be a remote actualization of this pure Orient.<sup>37</sup>

So where is this ideal East, this place without a spot on the map, this world which imposes itself so strongly upon the imagination of the poet, and sets him on a journey to far off places, so immediately palpable and so instantly attained in and by its pure imaginary? Where is this place of promise where eternal life and



youth is awaiting him? Where is exactly this land of poetry, this meeting place with Hafiz, and, through him, with Khidr? Who is he? How are these three figures, Khidr, Hafiz and Goethe<sup>38</sup>, to be mediated? What role does faith play in this? And what of the spoken word?

To begin the mystical journey through the *Divan*, we will have to begin - by way of our own Orientation - by looking at these motifs, which are not only tightly connected in the programmatic opening poem, the poem of Orientation par excellence, *Hegire*, but also intimately related in the framework of Islamic Mysticism, which will guide our entire study in this work. The mystical motifs of “the heavenly East,” “the heavenly twin,” “the Guidance of Khidr,” “Eternal Life,” “Faith,” and “Words” stand in such systematic and organic relation to each other that the invocation of all of them in a single poem by Goethe cannot but point to an underlying “vision,” an “intuition,” across long centuries and vast geographical distance, drawing upon the insights and sensibilities, the world of thought and feeling of the Islamic mystics. In other words, we are witness to a simultaneity and affinity of visions beyond habitual cultural boundaries and the putative, and supposedly uncrossable, divide of Orient and Occident, East and West.

Let us then start with the idea of the “heavenly pole,” which in Suhrawardi’s *Theosophy of Illumination*, one of the main currents of Islamic speculative mysticism, is equivalent to the idea of “mystic Orient.” Here the reference is clearly to a single point, the pole star, the heavenly north, which has since time immemorial been the organizational principle of, and the real point of

orientation in, the system formed by the ideal lines from east to west, and from north to south. This system has always been considered that “system of *a priori* spatial evidences without which there would be neither geographic nor anthropological orientation.”<sup>39</sup> But in the language of mysticism, the pole star does not signify only that vertical geographic direction, from the nadir or the zenith, which completes, or rather defines, the horizontal spatialization along the four cartographical directions. It signifies a shift in the mode of perception of the same vertical dimension, a modification of Orientation not only in space but also in time, leading to an entirely different experience of man’s “presence on earth, and the continuity of this presence within a kind of history,”<sup>40</sup> a new mode of perception corresponding to a new *sense* for this history. This is, in other words, the transformation of outwardly experience of the horizontal dimensions into an inwardly experience, or to use Annemarie Schimmel expression, “an interiorization of the concept of the Path.”<sup>41</sup> It is in the sense of this transformed perception that the phenomenon of the heavenly pole is not a “uniform phenomenon, physiologically regulated by constant laws,” but in fact regulated and diversified itself “by the very mode of the human experience *orienting* itself.”<sup>42</sup> And it is in this sense of the heavenly pole at the extreme north and at the threshold of the dimension beyond that the quest is of an Orient not located on the map, but instead, of a less idealized than ideational Orient, the place of the Origin and the return.<sup>43</sup> It is also in this sense that eastern, western, northern or southern men are no longer characterized through the usual anthropological attributions

and classifications. This will remind us, of course, of Goethe's verses in the Poem

*Talismane in Buch des Sängers of the Divan:*

Gottes ist der Orient!  
Gottes ist der Okzident!  
Nord – und südliches Gelände  
Ruht im Frieden seiner Hände. <sup>44</sup>

We are speaking, then, of the East not as the place where the sun rises and the day succeeds the night, but we are speaking of the East as the land of the “midnight sun,” of the daylight breaking in the middle of the night, of a Night of light, of the dark Noontide. We are concerned with the primordial image of Manifestation of the Divine as light. The extreme Occident, which is thus put into an opposition to this Orient, is also not the west of the maps, but it is the darkness of non-being, “where the sun of pure Forms declines and disappears.”<sup>45</sup> Here the Hegire is the flight from the Occident of pure phenomenality to the Orient of Archetypal realities,<sup>46</sup> which are the very Truth and Sense of the phenomena, their heavenly twins:

[W]e are concerned with primordial Images preceding and regulating every sensory perception and not with images constructed *a posteriori* on an empirical basis. For the *sense* of the given phenomenon depends on the primordial image; the heavenly pole situated on the vertical of human existence, the cosmic north. [...] Preceding all empirical data, the archetype-Images are the organs of meditation, of the active Imagination; they effect the transmutation of these data by giving them their *meaning*, and precisely in so doing make known the manner of being of a specific human presence and the fundamental *orientation* inherent in it.<sup>47</sup>

Here we have a universe of *physis*, the cosmic Occident, and the Orient, as the climate of the soul, and the journey to this Orient as withdrawal to one's own center. The wayfarer, the pilgrim, then, is a kind of Nordic man, not in the

ethnological sense, but in the polar sense, an “exiled Gnostic, a stranger who refuses the yoke of the ‘oppressors,’ because he has been sent to this world [of the Orient] for a purpose which they [in the occident] cannot recognize.”<sup>48</sup> That is to say, the mystic sojourner to the Orient is – like the Goethe of the *Divan* and of *Hegire* – not on a faux real journey of projection, nor on an exoticizing or merely geographic or atmospheric journey, but on an ideal quest leading him to a paradisiacal realm of eternal life.

We hear the same sentiment reverberating in the defiant tone of the last stanza of *Hegire*:

Wolltet ihr ihm dies beneiden,  
Oder etwa gar verleiden  
Wisset nur, daß Dichterworte  
Um des Paradieses Pforte  
Immer leise klopfend schweben,  
Sich erbittend ew’ges Leben.

And thus I suggest that we see, from the perspective of mysticism, the disintegrating North, West and South and the bursting thrones and trembling empires of the first stanza as this cosmic Occident of the oppressors (that is to say, the oppression of mere appearance, distraction and benightedness), and the pure East as the mystic Orient, as the depth of the Orient-Origin of the human race, and the *Hegire* as the spiritual ascent toward this heavenly pole, toward this magnet drawing “beings established in their eternal [realities] toward the palaces ablaze with immaterial matter,”<sup>49</sup> toward a “climate where what is bodily becomes spirit and what is spiritual acquires a body.”<sup>50</sup> *Hegire*, a journey in the “Himmelslande”<sup>51</sup> of the active Imagination, the return from *Occidental Exile*,<sup>52</sup>

the real history of the soul, “where every visionary event symbolizes a spiritual event,”<sup>53</sup> and, perhaps most importantly for Goethe, where the phenomenal and sensual world can be recast under the sign of the eternal and the archetype.

The idea of Orientation as this return to the origin and the archetypal true essence and meaning is intimately related in Mysticism to the notion of Exegesis - *Ta'wil* is the technical term in Islamic Gnosticism - as the interpretation of the holy writ, as returning it to its hidden original meaning. This is why the seeker's journey toward the mystic Orient is understood as the exegesis of his soul as well as well as his initiation into the esoteric exegesis of the sacred book.<sup>54</sup> The idea is also homologous to the mystic understanding of alchemy, not in the sense of a chapter in the history or prehistory of our modern sciences<sup>55</sup> but as meditations of physical metallurgical operations as symbols of invisible processes and of spiritual transformation,<sup>56</sup> and to the mystical understanding of physiognomy as the appearance of the true and hidden soul of man – another case of exegetical interpretation of the sensuous in relation to the spiritual.<sup>57</sup> Both ideas, we know, were of great interest to Goethe.<sup>58</sup>

In all this, we have already recognized the crystallization of the idea of the bi-unitary relation between Appearance and Reality, the hidden and the manifest, the earthly and the heavenly, the temporal and eternal, the phenomenon and the archetype, the occidental and the oriental. But for our most immediate concern here, we should now turn our attention to the way in which the approach toward the pole star and the orientation for the mystic itinerant imply his meeting with his own heavenly twin, with his personal guidance, with his archetypal image, with

the *Thou* of his personal *I*. It is extremely crucial to bear in mind that unlike in the classical Sufism of some of the early ascetics, in the speculative mysticism of a Suhravardi or an Ibn ‘Arabi<sup>59</sup>, “[t]he infinite price attached to spiritual individuality makes it inconceivable that salvation could consist in its absorption into a totality, even a mystical one.”<sup>60</sup> But what is essential here is that between the upward vertical direction of the soul in its mystical journey, that is, the internalization and orientation toward the heavenly pole, and “the discovery of the ego, the ego in the second person, the *Alter Ego, thou*,”<sup>61</sup> there is an intimate correlation. This is reflected in the fact that in all Sufi orders, the spiritual guide of the mystical wayfarers is called the *Qutb* or pole.<sup>62</sup>

In Suhravardi’s Theosophy of Illumination, every physical being has a counterpart in the heavenly Earth, its archetypal figure.<sup>63</sup> In this, Suhravardi brings the Platonic ideas into a type of correlation with the angelology of the ancient religion of the Persians. The world of the archetypal figures is the intermediary world between “the world of pure Lights,” and “the sensory universe.” This *mundus imaginalis* is

a concrete spiritual world of archetype-Figures, apparitional Forms, Angels of species and of Individuals; by philosophical; dialectics its necessity is deduced and its plane situated; vision of its actuality is vouchsafed to the visionary apperception of the active Imagination.<sup>64</sup>

The “pure East,” being this world of archetypal Figures, is the place where the mystic encounters, like the sun in the middle of the night, *his* archetype, the one who has given birth to him, his personal angel, his *Perfect Nature*, his *Khidr*, as it were. The possibility of reaching the cosmic north is, therefore, linked to the bi-

unity structure of human individuality, potentially including a transcendent dimension.<sup>65</sup> This Perfect Nature, acting as the guide of light of the spiritual individuality, “opens its transcendent dimension by making possible the crossing the threshold.”<sup>66</sup> He gives instructions to the bewildered exile, takes his hand and says: “Plunge into this water for it is the Water of Life! We are *two*, separated from one another, and yet *one*, of similar form.”<sup>67</sup>

[The mystic’s Perfect Nature] reveals to him the mystical hierarchy of all those who go before him in the suprasensory heights and at the same time, pointing to the one immediately before himself, declares: ‘He contains me just as I contain you.’<sup>68</sup>

It is in this sense that the reference to “Chiser’s source” in Goethe is anything but that merely picturesque or atmospheric Orientalizing detail for which the unsuspecting reader might be initially inclined to take it. For it is indeed a kind of “Wink” in the direction of a deepened understanding of the type of journey Goethe has here embarked upon. Goethe receives from the hands of Hafiz the goblet containing the water of life and youth which the latter has once upon a time received from Khidr: that is to say, Goethe is making a definite statement here as to who his guides on his journey are: and as to what the purpose of the journey might be: to align the world of the senses and the enjoyment of the senses with the realm of archetypes and eternal renewal embodied by his mystic guides.

Unter Lieben, Trinken, Singen  
Soll dich Chisers Quell verjüngen.

Thus, we see the formation of a confraternity of a particular spiritual order. To see this, let us go a little further and see what exactly the figure of Khidr signifies in Islam and in Islamic mysticism and the central role that he plays, and

to which Goethe here refers in his poem, as a kind of “hint” and glimpse of esoteric knowledge, in an as seemingly casual as emphatic manner.

In the Quranic tradition Khidr is on the one hand grouped together with the prophets Enoch, Elijah and Christ as the only humans who were carried alive from death and up to heaven. On the other hand, he is identified with the young (looking) man figuring in a mysterious episode (The Qur’an, 18: 59-81) who appears to Moses as his superior and initiates him “into the science of predestination.” In their journey together, Khidr asks Moses three times to witness but keep silent about acts that Khidr commits but which Moses considers against the Law, a demand with which Moses fails each time to comply. This episode has proved extremely important for all esoteric traditions in Islam, for it demonstrates the superiority of the mystical truth of religion over its law, its Shari’a. For the Shi’a also, it is proof of the superiority of the Imam over the Nabi (prophet), the former being representative of the spirit of religion and the latter of its letter.<sup>69</sup> In Islamic Mysticism this episode has led to the image of Khidr as the patron of pious travelers, or more precisely, “the mysterious guide of the wayfarers.”<sup>70</sup> It is important to know that in all Sufi traditions and orders, it is considered necessary that the novice enters the mystical path under the guidance of a master, a *Sheikh*.

The sheikh helps [the wayfarer] to give birth to a true heart and nourishes him with spiritual milk like a mother as it is often repeated. The Sufis have always been well aware of the dangers of the spiritual path and therefore attributed to the sheikh almost unlimited authority.<sup>71</sup>



This is in keeping with the idea of the pole, the *Qutb*, as explicated above. Thus the sheikh of a Sufi order is considered to be “the master of spiritual alchemy,” someone who “can transform the base material of the novice’s soul into gold.” “He is the sea of wisdom.”<sup>72</sup> Ritually, on a day of festivities, the adept, after pronouncing the oath of allegiance, is invested by the sheikh with the *khirqā*, the Sufi mantle.<sup>73</sup>

Beyond all these exotericized rituals, what distinguishes Khidr from all other masters is that he takes the hand of his initiate, as it were, from the Beyond. He is the master of those who have no earthly masters. Khidr, “the verdant one,” “associated with every aspect of Nature’s greeness,” “the Eternal Youth,”<sup>74</sup> is the guide of the mystics on the highest spiritual level. Ibn ‘Arabi claimed that he had received his *khirqā* from none other than Khidr.

Thus Khidr is the invisible spiritual master of those who owe their investiture to no (earthly) authority. This will, in turn, provide them with a transcendent, transhistorical dimension.<sup>75</sup> But then the question arises whether Khidr is an archetype in the sense of Jungian analytic psychology, the reflection of a collectivity, or he is still an individual, a real person. The question is an extremely important one:

It is not hard to see how great a loss either answer would involve. If, taking the standpoint of analytical psychology, we speak of Khidr as an archetype, he will soon lose his reality and become a figment of the imagination, if not of the intellect. And if we speak of him as a real person, we shall no longer be able to characterize the difference in structure between Khidr’s relationship with his disciple and the relationship that any other *sheikh* on this earth can have with his. In this case Khidr, numerically one, faces a plurality of disciples in a relationship which is hardly compatible with the fervent sentiment of the one consorting with the one. In short,

these answers are not adequate to the *phenomenon* of Khidr's person.<sup>76</sup>

Suhravardi offers us the solution to the puzzle. In the visionary recital "The Red Intellect," the pilgrim in quest of the Spring of Life on the peak of Mountain Qaf, meets the Archangel Intellect. The angel instructs the apprehensive mystic to put on Khidr's sandals and tells him that if *he is Khidr*, he too can ascend the Mountain Qaf. The effect of the instruction, as to the relation of Khidr and his disciple, is "to identify the spiritual state of him who receives the investiture with the spiritual state of him who confers it upon him."<sup>77</sup>

Such a relationship implies that Khidr be experienced simultaneously as a person and as an archetype, as a person-archetype. Because he is an archetype, the unity and identity of Khidr's person is compatible with the plurality of his exemplifications in those who *are* by turn Khidr. To have him as a master and initiate and is to be obliged to *be* what he himself is. Khidr is the master of all those who are masterless, because he *shows* all those whose master he is how to be what he himself is; he who attained the Spring of Life, the Eternal Youth.<sup>78</sup>

Khidr is, therefore, exemplified by as many disciples as he has, and through him each disciple is revealed to himself. He leads each disciple to his own heavenly image, to his own "inner heaven", to his own eternal archetype<sup>79</sup>, to his own theophany. His mission is to enable the disciple to attain "the Khidr of his being," and there to find the Water of Life.<sup>80</sup> This will be the aptitude for the theophanic vision, for the meeting of the divine *Alter Ego*, the heavenly twin. Thus the mantle, *Khirqah*, of Khidr, is "a symbol of confraternity," a sign that all disciples of Khidr share in "the same spiritual culture, in the practice of the same *ethos*." Replacing, finally, a synchronism impossible in historical time with one possible

in the *tempus discretum* of the world of the soul<sup>81</sup> and in the world of eternal archetypes, we conclude:

Whether there are one or several intermediaries or none, the affiliation by identification with Khidr's state is accomplished in the longitudinal order connecting the visible with the invisible, an ordering cutting vertically across the latitudinal order of historical succession, generations, and connections.<sup>82</sup>

Brotherhood in Khidr, drinking from the Water of Youth and Eternal Life from the same goblet; this is the kinship of Hafiz and Goethe from the perspective of speculative mysticism. Thus, in the medium of *Hegire* specifically and of the *Divan* generally, Goethe indeed enters into a realm of the imaginary: but it is not an imaginary which he "projects" onto a hapless and defenseless Orient. It is rather an imaginary whose presence he has intuited and which answers for him to a pressing personal, intellectual and spiritual need: an imaginary which is both "really there," in that the tradition of Islamic theosophy, here embodied by the figure of Khidr, has a genuine existence as a voice and presence within Islamic culture, and indeed provides him with a framework within which to articulate his own particular view of "Weltfrömmigkeit" and the dignity of the phenomenal, temporal and sensual world *sub specie aeternitatis*.

We have already heard from interpreters of the *Divan* about the programmatic nature of the opening poem *Hegire*, the characteristic for which I have used the word Orientation. Orientation is here used, let us remember, simultaneously in the sense of locating the Orient as the destination of a fictive emigration along the geographic horizon, in the sense of a turn toward the "pure East," as the goal of the mystical wayfarer's journey, and finally in the sense of

introducing the opening poem as the roadmap for the poetical journey throughout the *Divan* itself, its “Programm in nuce.”<sup>83</sup> Accordingly, we have already seen in the first three stanzas of the poem a pattern of interlacing expressions of the exoteric and esoteric, of the world of *Erscheinungen* and of their underlying spiritual realities, of the horizontal outward sphere of phenomenality and the vertical inner sphere of its epiphanic archetype, of the subtle impregnation of the profane with the numinous and the sacred. This intricate pattern, as it has been observed, continues to be unfolded in the whole *Divan*.<sup>84</sup> This is clearly in keeping with the expectation from the *Divan* as the result of Goethe’s interest in the East in all its historical, societal, metaphysical, and above all, literary aspects. Any attempt at a ‘purely mystical’ reading of the *Divan*, even if possible, would amount to limiting the scope of its phenomenology and reducing Goethe’s various points of interest only to the metaphysical and the esoteric. This would be entirely contradictory to the very spirit of the *Divan*. For not even in an Islamic mystical reading – where it is applicable – can we at all talk about a direct influence coming from speculative theosophy of an Ibn ‘Arabi or a Suhrawardi beyond that which would be common to mysticism as such, and in all spiritual and/or biblical traditions. And much less, of course, can one talk about an intellectual superimposition of esoteric considerations on the poetic creative process. Least of all, of course, can we talk of the influence of classical Sufism, where one hardly finds a loving attention to the exoteric as an indispensable and respectable partner for the esoteric. The purpose of the speculative apparatus of Islamic theosophy used in this chapter and in the rest of this work, is, therefore, to

help demonstrate a meeting of minds across vast expanses of history and geography, to point to a common vision through the Active Imagination as the proper organ of the perception of theophanies, and also to highlight the potential inherent with the poetic creation, quite independent of the poet's conscious decisions, as the guarantor of its life's continuation, its 'Fortleben.'<sup>85</sup>

The fact remains that if one is to speak of a strong and decisive influence in the *Divan* in terms of a direct initiation and in terms of a confraternity of *ethos* and the same spiritual and creative aptitude, one can only speak of Hafiz. It is Hafiz as brother and twin who provides the medium for the transmission of theosophic attitudes and positions, as of the overall poetic and imaginary of the Orient in the sense we have here outlined it, to his German colleague. For the figure of Hafiz establishes an archetypal correspondence that with its rejuvenating effect allows Goethe to receive spiritual inspiration in the most intense manner from the phenomenal world—and not least from the phenomenal appearance of the beloved, Suleika<sup>86</sup>--and express his delight at this phenomenal world in exhilarated and exhilarating poetry. For as we shall see, a fundamental aspect of this exhilaration is the sense of release from the travails of transience, though not of temporality. Through the "Orientation" to Hafiz and his own particular imaginary Orient in its affinity to theosophic attitudes, Goethe can experience his love as both within time and timeless, in the alignment with the archetype. In the poem *Unbegrenzt* from "Buch Hafis," beginning with an allusion to the non-linear structure of the form, *Ghazal*, in Persian lyrical poetry and its prime example in

Hafiz, Goethe speaks of this archetypal correspondence and the delight in the phenomenal world that has resulted from it:

Daß du nicht enden kannst, das macht dich groß,  
Und daß du nie beginnst, das ist dein Los.  
Dein Lied ist drehend wie das Sterngewölbe,  
Anfang und Ende immerfort dasselbe,  
Und was die Mitte bringt, ist offenbar  
Das, was zu Ende bleibt und Anfangs war.

Du bist der Freuden echte Dichterquelle,  
Und ungezählt entfließt dir Well' auf Welle.  
Zum Küssen stets bereiter Mund,  
Ein Brustgesang, der lieblich fließet,  
Zum Trinken stets gereizter Schlund,  
Ein gutes Herz, das sich ergießet.

Und mag die ganze Welt versinken!  
Hafis, mit dir, mit dir allein  
Will ich wetteifern! Lust und Pein  
Sei uns, den Zwillingen, gemein!  
Wie du zu lieben und zu trinken,  
Das soll mein Stolz, mein Leben sein.

Nun töne, Lied, mit eignem Feuer!  
Denn du bist älter, du bist neuer.

The last two lines of the poem show that the Hafiz-Goethe spiritual correspondence has resulted in an archetypal homology between their poems. Itself renewed through its reunification with its older and primal model, and having become itself rejuvenated with its contact with its ancient predecessor of origin, Goethe's "song" now stands in a supratemporal, that is, archetypal relation with it, which exists in a sphere of time which, precisely by returning to its origin and beginning, rejuvenates and regenerates itself even anew. For the history of religion, Mircea Eliade, friend and co-thinker of Henry Corbin, has well

summarized this process in a way that may also be applied to the Goethe of the *Divan* and the particular exhilaration of his discovery of Hafiz and the Orient. For Eliade emphasizes that – much like Goethe in the *Divan* - the archaic understanding of origin is a revolt against concrete historical time and a quest for the supraemporal temporality of human life as understood in alignment with its archetypal origin, which permits life to be lived both within time and outside it, as something at once ephemeral and eternal. In his discussion on “the abolition of time through the imitation of archetypes and the repetition of paradigmatic gestures” in the context of archaic ontology, Eliade writes:

[Through imitation of archetypes] man is projected into the mythical epoch in which the archetypes were first revealed. [...] Insofar as an act (or an object) acquires it through that alone, there is an implicit abolition of profane time, of duration, of “history”; and he who reproduces the exemplary gesture thus finds himself transported into the mythical epoch in which its revelation took place.

The abolition of profane time and the individual’s projection into mythical time do not occur, of course, except at essential periods—those, that is, when the individual is truly himself: on the occasion of rituals or of important acts.[...] The rest of his life is passed in profane time, which is without meaning: in the state of “becoming.”<sup>87</sup>

It is precisely this type of archetype and origin which Goethe seems to have discovered in Hafiz and the Orient.

For all this is crucial exactly for the reason that in Hafiz, and consequently in Goethe’s *Divan*, one can neither search for pure sensuality nor for pure spirituality, nor can one claim that the physical allegorizes the metaphysical. What makes Hafiz a singularity among all mystical Persian poets is his indissoluble and irresolvable ambiguity, his *seeing* all and everything as God’s

manifestation, his loving the heavenly beloved, not through, but *in* the earthly beloved. For the literate or the illiterate Iranian who precisely for this reason enjoys reading Hafiz and can recite many of his poems by heart, this doesn't make him less of a mystic—quite the contrary, this is the exact and correct form of mysticism; seeing and rejoicing in all Creation in its bi-unitary structure as both eternal and temporal.

In her *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Annemarie Schimmel addresses the question of the nature of Persian lyrical poetry, that is, whether it is mystical (in the purely allegorical sense) or erotic, and mentions that the defenders of both view are equally vehement in their claims. She maintains that both claims are equally off the mark, and that it is in the very essence of Persian lyrics that religious ideas turn into symbols of a purely aesthetic character:

Thus the poetry provides almost unlimited possibilities for creating new relations between worldly and otherworldly images, between religious and profane ideas; the talented poet may reach a perfect interplay of both levels and make even the most profane poem bear a distinct 'religious flavor.[...] It seems futile, therefore, to look for either a purely mystical or a purely profane interpretation of the poems of Hafiz, Jami or 'Iraqi—their ambiguity is intended, the oscillation between the two levels of being is consciously maintained, and the texture and flavor of the meaning of a word may change at any moment much as the color of the tiles in a Persian mosque varies in depth according to the hour of the day. [...] [T]he tension between the worldly and the religious interpretations resolved, in the poems of the outstanding masters of this art, in perfect harmony of the spiritual, psychic, and sensual components. Confronted with the supreme beauty in love experience, the poet was able to create works of art that reflect this glory in small, lucid, prismatic fragments, which, taken together, may be able to convey an idea of the original brightness of this glorious beauty.<sup>88</sup>



And this is exactly, as we will see, the way Goethe perceives Hafiz' mysticism, and this is exactly the secret of their spiritual kinship. Initiated into the mystical dimension of love, by the common master Khidr (or perhaps, Goethe initiated into the Orient by Hafiz as 'the Khidr of his being'), and into poetry as expression of the creative power of this love; in short, initiated into the Orient as the "Land der Dichtung."

In *Hegire*, Goethe carefully creates a hierarchy for the earthly life represented by a hierarchy of phenomena of sense perception. Starting from a life among the shepherds and wandering along caravans with their merchandise, and going through cities with their bathhouses and taverns, the journey is depicted as climbing a ladder leading to the gate of paradise, while along the way poetry, the word and song are the very means to bring this celestial ladder into place. Thus an arch is drawn, by virtue of poetry, from a life almost purely in nature, pure phenomenality, through a more spiritual life, up to a heavenly state of life, where poetry remains delightful even to the angelic Huris. For the Paradise of the poem, the final stage of the journey, is the place of love and delight of the Huris. This is tantamount to the redemption of the earthly life, of the sphere of earthly phenomena as of erotic sensual love itself. As such, in the stanzas 4, 5 and 6 of *Hegire*, it is poetry that, representing the Divine, co-mingles with the phenomenal life of the Orient, and offers - in the last stanza - eternal life to the traveler, just as religion did in the first three stanzas. If there "das Kosten der Patrirachenluft" signifies "the most intensive appropriation of the religious-ethical posture which is nonetheless captured at the same time in the joy of life in loving and drinking

and singing”,<sup>89</sup> now it is the thought of the holy poet, and of his fervent love  
whispers exciting even the angelic Huris, that accompanies the pilgrim in Persian  
taverns and bathhouses, as the beloved unfurl her veil and the intoxicating scent  
of her locks is released into the air.

Will in Bädern und in Schenken  
Heil’ger Hafis dein gedenken,  
Wenn den Schleyer Liebchen lüftet,  
Schüttelnd Ambralocken düftet,  
Ja des Dichters Liebeflüstern  
Mache selbst die Huris lüstern.

If there the pilgrim searches for the depths of the origin, the immediacy of God  
and the ‘Himmelslehr’ in the earthly tongues of the faithful, here he accompanies  
the caravans up and down the “Bösen Felsweg,” and hears the exhilarated  
Caravan-masters riding their ‘Maulthier,’ singing the consoling words of the poet  
to the heights of the skies, waking the stars, scaring bandits away. Thus, a salient  
role is already attributed to poetry at this key interval and transition, both in  
bringing forth the stars of guidance and celestial orientation and in securing safe  
passage without outside threat or interference:

Bösen Felsweg auf und nieder  
Trösten Hafis deine Lieder,  
Wenn der Führer mit Entzücken,  
Von des Maulthiers hohem Rücken,  
Singt, die Sterne zu erwecken  
Und die Räuber zu erschrecken.

So he moves slowly through the ‘Land des Dichters,’ mingling with shepherds in  
the Arabian desert, resting at oases, like a merchant of silk and coffee and  
Perfume, walks upon all paths, coming into the cities of Iran:

Will mich unter Hirten mischen,  
An Oasen mich erfrischen,

Wenn mit Caravanen wandle,  
Schawl, Coffee und Moschus handle.  
Jeden Pfad will ich betreten  
Von der Wüste zu den Städten.

All the way through places, where fathers were honored and any form of  
subjection to another's will was rejected, to the place enclosed in youth, to the  
place of vast and spontaneous faith – "Weltfrömmigkeit" - and not too much  
mind-racking dogma or reflection.

Wo sie Väter hoch verehren,  
Jeden fremden Dienst verwehren;  
Will mich freun Jugendschranke;  
Glaube weit, eng der Gedanke.

It is the word, the important word, the spoken word, that comes in between, that  
moves us from the Himmelslehr to Dichterworte, both in Erdesprachen.<sup>90</sup>

Wie das Wort so wichtig war,  
Weil es ein gesprochen Wort war.<sup>91</sup>

Here, in the land of the immediacy of the word, the mystic with and because of  
his preoccupation with the revealed word of God, with the Holy Writ (let us not  
forget that the name Hafiz is only the poet's sobriquet, meaning he who knows  
and can recite all of the Qur'an by heart), considers his poetry - notwithstanding  
the admonition of the poets in the Qur'an (Sura 26) and the strong tension  
between the words of revelation and poetry<sup>92</sup> - the 'spontaneous outpouring of the  
word inspired by a higher power,' 'God's treasures hidden under his tongue,' the  
'lawful magic.'<sup>93</sup> Here the mystic, once upon a time 'a solitary wayfarer,'  
becomes - after Sufism turning into a social movement - a 'wanderer in every  
valley,' compelled by an inner urge to look for people to tell them of the  
'marvelous experiences on the way to God.'<sup>94</sup>

It is then the word that identifies poetry with religion, the poet with the prophet, and it is the word that makes the Orient at once “das Land der Dichtung” and “das Land des Dichters.” It is the word in its primordial state that is its own body and its own soul, its own matter and its own spirit, its own appearance and its own truth.<sup>95</sup> With the same breath of God which spoke the word “Be!” and created – in the easterly sunrise of His manifestation – the world and became the world’s body and spirit,<sup>96</sup> man spoke his own creation, his word, the very meaning and definition of his being.

It is, therefore, not simply the opposition between the “spoken word” and the “written word” in their human manifestations that must be stressed here, but rather the opposition between the “spoken word” and the “unspoken word,” between the “inner word” and the “uttered word,” and ultimately and primordially, between the spoken word and its very origin, the divine word of Creation itself. In this we see, from the mystical standpoint, the process of God’s self-revelation, and the same time the legitimacy of the appearance and its exegesis. The “inner word” corresponds to the eternal archetype of each being, to its truth and meaning, in the intermediary world between the purely physical universe and purely spiritual world. With His breath of existention God utters the word “Be!” and thus every being becomes a “spoken word.”<sup>97</sup> Thus not only the words of the Scripture, but all nature, are “spoken words,” both are God’s books.<sup>98</sup> And in this sense, the proximity to the “spoken word” which Goethe so emphatically evokes in his poem is also a proximity, an immediate potential

nearness of the human community in its manner of speech, indeed its realization within that speech, to the archetypal word itself.

Thus the ideal reality of the Word as Breath itself, as well as the possibility and legitimacy of Exegesis, *Ta'wil* (which I have discussed above as the mystical initiation and the entrance of the seeker in the realm of the cosmic Orient), is established. In discussing the mystical pilgrim in Avicenna's visionary recital "*The Celestial Ascent*," who like Moses asks for the vision of the Divine, Henry Corbin writes:

It is not [...] to the impossible Vision that the Archangel Michael Holy Spirit guides him. He experiences the divine presence as a traversal of infinite veils of light; only a *Voice* summons him: 'Come yet nearer.' He does not see, does not apprehend, for that which transcends all categories cannot be apprehended. [...] The Voice itself does not vibrate like a discourse composed of word, letters, and sounds. It is the ideal reality of the Word that is established and erection of pure *gnosis* in the mind. [...] [S]upreme gnosis, the end of all the preceding angelic 'pedagogies,' is the mystery of the inner Word that then permits the prophet to declare the Revelation communicated to him, to set forth in an outward (*zahir*, exoteric) discourse such that it contain the hidden (*batin*, esoteric) spiritual meaning, yet without the veil being lifted.[...] The conclusion [...]: [T]he legitimacy of the *ta'wil* that the supreme experience of prophetic gnosis authorizes by originating the polarity *zahir-batin*, exoteric and esoteric.<sup>99</sup>

I will discuss the central mystical themes of the Divine Manifestation and Divine Names and Attributes as the Breath of Creation in the following chapters of this work, especially in chapters 3 and 4. But here, by way of anticipation and in relation to what we have already heard from Goethe about the importance of faith, and the fact that "[beim Glauben] komme alles darauf an, daß man glaube;

was man glaube, sei völlig gleichgültig,” I will make a few remarks about the idea of the “God created in the Faiths,” in the mysticism of Ibn ‘Arabi.

The absolute manifests itself in the epiphanies of its divine attributes in the created concrete beings. But this manifestation is proportional to the capacity of the forms which receive and reflect these attributes like a mirror. This implies that the divine epiphanizes itself in the heart of every faithful believer in accordance with the aptitude of his heart, that is, it takes the Form corresponding to the receptivity constituting this aptitude.<sup>100</sup> There is thus a perfect correspondence between the knowledge and revelation one has of God with the knowledge the God has of him, that is to say, his image in God’s mind. Whereas a mystic might be predisposed to the reception of all forms of theophany, a non-mystic is predisposed to the reception of only a single one, his own Lord, his own God, and this is what Ibn ‘Arabi calls the “God created in the faiths.”<sup>101</sup>

For indeed neither the heart nor the eyes of the believer ever see anything other than the Form of the faith he professes in respect to the Divine Being. This vision is degree of the theophany that is given to him personally, in proportion to his capacity. As such, it is part of the Creation which is itself theophany, that is, the theophanic Imagination of the creator, imagining to himself the world and the forms that reveal Him to Himself. The form here assumed by the Creator-Creature, the ‘God of who all things are created’—that is the ‘God created in the faiths.’ [...] To each believer, the Divine Being is He who is disclosed to him in the form of his faith. If God manifests Himself in a different form, the believer rejects Him, and that is why the dogmatic faiths combat one another.<sup>102</sup>

The mystic, though having a theophanic vision of his own lord, “unravels the knot of all the particular faiths”, because his vision “is no longer given him in the form of this or that faith prescribed and imposed by a religious or social collectivity.”<sup>103</sup>

In these words and in the strikingly similar words of Goethe, we hear the sharp schism that opens between the mystical and orthodox views on the Divine and on different religious dogmas.<sup>104</sup> We also see the root of that (often wishfully overemphasized)<sup>105</sup> religious tolerance attributed to the Sufis. Sufi literature is replete with (perhaps allegorical) expressions of the superiority of a sincere good-hearted non-believer over the hypocritical Muslim, with the essential equality of all Houses of God, with the idea that “it is the Landlord who matters, not the Ka’ba or the house of the Idols.” It is this understanding soul whose voice we here in the loving and longing words of Hafiz:

Everyone longs for the Beloved, whether sober or intoxicated  
Everywhere is the house of Love,  
Whether the mosque or the Knesset (Synagogue).<sup>106</sup>

The vassal of his Lord, the mystic has no goal but the communion with him. He is encouraged to keep, guard and strengthen his faith and trust in his God. Not much good, if any at all, comes from philosophical reflection. The realm of the divine is not the realm of discursive knowledge; it is that of intimate experience. It is not thinking, but believing and loving that leads to God. It is not through understanding the philosophers’ words, but through the contemplation of the revealed divine word and in the faith in it, through the observance of the divine law, and in the trusting submission to the divine will, that the doors of unveiling open.

Citing a verse of the Qur’an, “Be Godfearing and God will teach you,” in his colossal book of mystical contemplations, *al-Futuh al-makkiya* (The Meccan

Openings), Ibn ‘Arabi writes: “Nothing is opened up to any friend of God except the understanding of the Mighty Book.”<sup>107</sup> In the same book he writes:

The perfect inheritor of the Prophet among the friends of God is he who dedicates himself exclusively to God through His Shari’a. Eventually God will open up his heart the understanding of what He has sent down upon His messenger and prophet, Muhammad, through disclosing Himself to him in his inward dimension.<sup>108</sup>

Finally, to quote one last paragraph pertaining to the problem of faith and reflection: “We are not one to quote the words of the philosophers, nor the words of anyone else, since in this book and in all our books we only write that which is given by unveiling and dictated by God.”<sup>109</sup> The same aversion for discursively attained knowledge is echoed in Jalaluddin Rumi’s famous verse:

The legs of Istidlalyyun (people of arguments) are made of wood,  
Wooden legs are stiffly noncompliant.<sup>110</sup>

But our poet, Goethe, has a pact of brotherhood, not with any mystic, speculative or otherwise, other than with his “lustiger Bruder” and “lieblicher Lebensgeleiter,”<sup>111</sup> Hafiz. It was he who warned the seeker about the dangers of the Path and implored him to keep Khidr’s company unceasingly:

Quit not this station without the company of Khidr  
There is Darkness, fear the peril of going astray.<sup>112</sup>

But it was also he who detested the fanatic legalists of his time just as much as the hypocritical pseudo-Sufis, and who added Piety to the list of useless virtues in the mystical Path and wrote so of Trust instead:

Leaning on Piety and Knowledge in the Path is Infidelity  
The seeker, even with a hundred virtues, is still in need of Trust.<sup>113</sup>



Sie haben dich heiliger Hafis  
Die mystische Zunge genannt,  
Und haben, die wortgelehrten,  
Den Werth des Wortes nicht erkannt

Mystisch heißt du ihnen,  
Weil sie närrisches bey dir denken,  
Und ihren unlautern Wein  
In deinem Namen verschenken.

Du aber bist mystisch rein  
Weil sie dich nicht verstehen,  
Der du, ohne fromm zu sein, selig bist!  
Das wollen sie die nicht zugestehen.

In the introduction to this work we looked at this poem, “Offenbar Geheimniss,” from *Buch Hafis*, in which Goethe expresses his view of mysticism, the type of mysticism that he attributes to Hafiz, and the secret of his feeling of affinity and kinship with the Persian poet. Let us remind ourselves again that, in this poem Goethe turns his words against those who attempt to interpret Hafiz’ poetry from the standpoint of a mysticism dominated by purely allegorical images. He takes the side of the poet against the pious and praises Hafiz’ indefatigable lyrical power, which “drehend wie das Sterngewölbe,”<sup>114</sup> sings the praises of “eternally old, eternally new joys of Life.”<sup>115</sup> In Book 13 of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* Goethe writes:

Die wahre Poesie kündigt sich dadurch an, daß sie, als ein weltliches Evangelium, durch innere Heiterkeit, durch äußeres Behagen uns von den irdischen Lasten zu befreien weiß, die auf uns drücken. [...] Die muntersten wie die ernstesten Werk haben den gleichen Zweck, durch eine glückliche geistreiche Darstellung so Lust als Schmerz zu mäßigen.<sup>116</sup>

In Hafiz and his poetry Goethe finds exactly such poetic perfection, such an exemplary articulation of the project of—and one may note here the seemingly

casual but highly significant crossover of the secular and the sacral in Goethe's use of the term—"weltliche Evangelium," the embedding of earthly and temporal enjoyments in a cosmic and eternal dimension which qualifies Hafiz so particularly for the role of Goethe's mystic guide:

Nur wenig sagen wir von diesen Dichtungen, weil man sie genießen, sich damit in Einklang setzen sollte. Aus ihnen strömt eine fortquellende, mäßige Lebendigkeit. Im Engen genügsam froh und klug, von der Fülle der Welt seinen Theil dahin nehmend, in die Geheimnisse der Gottheit von fern hinein blickend, dagegen aber auch einmal Religionsübung und Sinnenlust ablehnend, eins wie das andere; wie denn überhaupt diese Dichtart, was sie auch zu befördern und zu lehren scheint, durchaus skeptische Beweglichkeit behalten muß.<sup>117</sup>

Goethe thus points to the heart of the ambivalence and the symbolic character of Hafiz's poetry and of his specific form of mysticism. That mysticism which Goethe disparages is the one that uses allegorical interpretation of poetry, a mysticism which separates the sensible appearances from the spiritual world standing behind those appearances. That kind of mysticism would for him destroy the infinite life that humans live and enjoy here and now. And it was exactly this kind of mysticism which, to his great relief, he did not find in Hafiz. He saw in him a poet who did not sever the sensual from the suprasensual, but moved constantly between the two. A poet of the mysticism of the symbol,<sup>118</sup> in the Goethean understanding of the term, in the sense that the apparent and the hidden, the exoteric and the esoteric, are involved with each other in a fundamentally binary relation, in the field of epiphanic vision and in the active Imagination. Without this "Symbolerlebnis," which the poet shares with the "religious genius," mysticism is impossible:

Für Goethe aber ist die Voraussetzung des mystischen Umgangs mit Gott, daß der Geist, der ihn sucht, die Fähigkeit hat, Gott im unmittelbar gegebenen Leben zu begegnen. Daß er imstande ist, im Symbol die Einheit von Sinn und Zeichen, das göttliche Leben selber zu verehren. Wer diese Gabe besitzt, ist selig, ohne fromm zu sein und das Gesetz studiert zu haben. Goethe fand in Hafiz [...] [e]inen Dichter, der – ohne je einen bewußten Begriff vom Symbol gefaßt zu haben – Symboliker und nicht Allegoriker war und dessen Poesie sich deshalb jeder einseitig-rationalen Deutung entzog.<sup>119</sup>

The symbolism characteristic of this kind of mysticism and the poetry inspired by it, the marriage of word and spirit in the Symbol, is formulated in the most compact form in the short epigraphic poem at the beginning of Buch Hafis:

Sey das Wort die Braut genannt,  
Bräutigam der Geist;  
Diese Hochzeit hat gekannt  
Wer Hafisen preist.

Thus the word, just as any phenomenon in the physical world, at once conceals and reveals; everything is the locus of the divine Manifestation. And this is exactly what distinguishes the type of mysticism which Goethe attributes to Hafiz from the ‘neueste christliche Mystik,’ which he, Goethe, dismisses as “charakter- und talentlos.”<sup>120</sup> In Hafiz, Goethe finds ‘Mystik nach seinem Sinn,’<sup>121</sup> a Hafiz ‘mystically pure, ‘blessed without being pious’:

[N]icht aus dem Dunkel des Gefühls, sondern aus der vollen Helligkeit des Bewußtseins hervorströmend, aus einem schöpferischen Überfluß der sich inmitten der bedrängenden Lebensfülle die innere Freiheit wahrt.<sup>122</sup>

As the “Programmgedicht” of the *Divan*, then, as its Orientation and point of departure, as the “Musterbild”<sup>123</sup> of its global context, *Hegire* is the inauguration of the journey into the pure East in its divine as well as profane aspects, at once solemn and serene; a journey along the horizons of time and space, but

simultaneously in the realm of the beyond, back to the primordial origin, into the depths of the soul as upwards to the arches of the firmament. The attainment of this oriental purity, of eternal youth and life, finds its poetic expression in the poem itself, a poem that will be handed down and will make its poet immortal: this and that both are one and the same goal of *West-östlicher Divan*. The poem also draws the trajectory of the journey from the profane and earthly through a sequence of increasingly spiritual modes of life towards the divine, thereby emphasizing however the heavenly and supratemporal character of the phenomenal and temporal world itself.

Edith Ikeweazu, who has studied *Hegire* as the explication of the idea of ‘das Reine,’ and has argued, on that basis, for the function of *Hegire* as the representative of the entire texture of the *Divan*, has offered the following admirable summation:

Die Seinsverfassung des Reinen ist Ewigkeit, Unsterblichkeit, Lebendigkeit. Im Irdischen ist das Reine mehr oder weniger verhüllt präsent als die Gesetzmäßigkeit göttlicher Ordnung der Schöpfung als Kosmos. Der ‘reine Osten’ ist auf der Erde ein Raum exemplarischer Präsenz und Zugänglichkeit des Reinen, Raum der Konservierung des Ursprünglichen. Das Paradies als Pendant dazu ist eine zeitlose Welt des ‘Reinen’, jenseits des Irdischen, ist dessen ‘reinere’ Form, steht zwischen dem Höchsten, dem abstrakt Reinen, das nicht mehr die gefällige Form des Paradieses annimmt, und dem irdischen Bereich, in dem das Reine präsent, aber nicht immer offenbar ist. Dieses im Irdischen zu erkennen bedarf es eines göttlichen ‘reinen’ Organs, das der Mensch, und im höherern Maße der Dichter besitzt. Dichten heißt in diesem Sinne: Erkennen, Aneignen und Gestalten des Reinen.”<sup>124</sup>

The poem ends with the image of the poet softly knocking on the gate of Heaven claiming his Eternal Life. This reminds us of Hafiz’s verse:

At dawn came from the Throne in Heaven a roar,  
Reason said:  
'Tis as if the Pure are learning Hafiz's poem by Heart.'

Goethe found in Hafiz a mirror for himself and, as Grete Schaeder has observed,<sup>125</sup> the same suspension of the feeling between the two worlds of Earth and Heaven, ardency and tenderness and the love for the divine creator which strives to express itself in the love for the earthly creation, that is to say, in the Symbol. Thus in a manner reminding us again of the ambiguity and symbolism of Hafiz, he wrote:

Wißt ihr denn, was Liebchen heiße?  
Wißt ihr, welchen Wein ich preise?<sup>126</sup>

In this, in the Hafiz-Goethe archetypal brotherhood as disciples of Khidr, and all that we are dealing with in the present work, we will run into the structure of bi-unity as the defining character of mystical vision, as the body and soul of the Symbol: for "the possibility of reaching the cosmic north, is essentially linked to the binary structure of human individuality, potentially including a transcendent dimension of light."<sup>127</sup> It is, then, to this fundamental structure, to the idea of Symbol in mysticism, and to a striking poetic image of both, that we must now turn.

## NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> As discussed in the preface to this work, *Hegire* has been taken by Edward Said in his *Orientalism*, (New York, 1984), and by his proponents as an example of the typical European Orientalist discourse of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and its representation of the East. The purpose of this chapter and the following chapters of this work is to offer an interpretation of this and other selected poems of the *Divan* from the perspective of Oriental theosophy, thus offering a hermeneutic best suited for an exposition of the specificities of Goethe's poetic creation. As will be shown, from this particular perspective, the notion of the Orient is clearly differentiated from the actual and real Orient. Nevertheless, it is an important contention of this work, that exactly this approach will prove the *Divan* not only *not* a typical Orientalist work, but an example of the best kind of antidote against the typical imperial or colonial attitude of the Europeans towards the East.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Henry Corbin, *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*. New Lebanon, 1994, p. 22.

<sup>3</sup> "Und mag die ganze Welt versinken / Hafis mit dir, mit dir allein / Will ich wetteifern! Lust und Pein / Sey uns den Zwillingen gemein! / Wie du zu lieben und zu trinken / Das soll mein Stolz, mein Leben seyn." (*Buch Hafis; Unbergrenzt*). Cf. [FA I/3], p. 31.

<sup>4</sup> The reference is to the epigraphic short poem at the beginning of the prose part of the *Divan*, *Noten und Abhandlungen zu Besserem Verständnis*: Wer das Dichten will verstehen / Muß ins Land der Dichtung gehen; / Wer den Dichter will verstehen / Muß in Dichters Land gehen, [FA I/3], p. 137. Cf. also the Introduction to this work.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. [FA I/3], p. 549. The announcement was made in *Morgenblatt für gebildete Stände* on February 24, 1816. The first edition of the *Divan* was published in 1819.

<sup>6</sup> "[A]bgelesen von den kurz zuvor *Im Namen der Bürgerschaft von Carlsbad* veröffentlichten Huldigungsgedichten für die dort anwesenden Kaiserinnen und Kaiser." *ibid.*, p. 725.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Edith Ihekweazu, *Goethes West-östlicher Divan: Untersuchungen zur Struktur des Lyrischen Zyklus*. Hamburg, 1971, p. 45. For an interesting account of the different plans for the title of the book and the use of the word *Divan* for it, cf. [FA I/3], pp. 875-877.

<sup>8</sup> For the role of Hijrah in the life of the prophet and its role in the development of Islam, cf., Tariq Ramadan's *In the Footsteps of the Prophet*, New York, 2007, pp. 81-94.

<sup>9</sup> Hendrik Birus, "Poetische Emigration"; in *Interpretationen: Gedichte von Johann Wolfgang Goethe* (Bernd Witte, ed.), Stuttgart, 1998, p. 188. The reference is to the expression "meine Hegire von Carlsbad" that Goethe used in a letter to Herzog Carl August on October 14, 1786, Cf. *Italienischer Reise*, [FA I/ 15], p. 429f.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 188.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Konrad Burdach, "Die Kunst und der dichterisch-religiöse Gehalt des West-östlichen Divans"; in *Studien zum West-östlichen Divan Goethes* (Edgar Lohner, ed.), Darmstadt, 1971, p. 77.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Edith Ihekweazu, *Goethes West-östlicher Divan: Untersuchungen zur Struktur des Lyrischen Zyklus*, Hamburg, p. 46.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Hendrik Birus, "Poetische Emigration", p. 189.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 191, also Ernst Beutler, *Goethes West-östlicher Divan*, Bremen, 1956, pp. 311-313.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Ernst Beutler, *Goethes West-östlicher Divan*, p. 313.

<sup>16</sup> *Wahrheit und Dichtung* [FA, I/ 14], p. 155. Cf. also Edith Ihekweazu, *Goethes West-östlicher Divan: Untersuchungen zur Struktur des Lyrischen Zyklus*, Hamburg p. 49: "Politische und kriegereische Wirren kennzeichnen den Raum, aus dem die Flucht erfolgt; ihr Ziel ist der 'reine Osten.'" Ihekweazu objects, however, to the identification of the literal Hegire to Italy, as reported in Goethe's letters, and the poetical Hegire in the *Divan* and in the opening poem. She warns against the identification of the author with the lyrical I and against the use of biographical information in the interpretation of the poem. She, therefore, claims, as part of her larger goal to verify the role of *Hegire* as the 'Programmgedicht' of the poetic cycle, that "[d]as Gedicht 'Hegire' ist nicht, wie oft gesagt wird, geistiger Aufbruch, sondern konstituiert einen konkreten fiktionalen Zusammenhang, in dem ein räumlicher Aufbruch stattfindet." In a somewhat contradictory and confusing manner, I believe, she describes the entire processes of the composition of the *Divan* as follows: "Die Beschäftigung mit der orientalischen Literatur geschieht unter dem Gesichtspunkt der Flucht vor unliebsamen zeitgeschichtlichen Entwicklungen;

aus der Flucht wird Gedanke der Flucht und seine poetischen Erträge, die den Beginn einer neuen dichterischen Epoche ahnen lassen, verdichten sich im Bild der "Hegire", einem Gedicht, das als Programm und Summe des Zyklus fungiert. Das poetische Bild wird auf die biographische Situation zurückübertragen. Goethe hat damit nicht nur ein Leitbild für seinen Zyklus, sondern auch für eine Epoche seines Lebens und Schaffens gefunden." Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 46-49. All this seems to me to be an excellent description of a "geistiger Aufbruch." At any rate, it seems best for the purposes of this work, to agree with Gisela Henckmann that "[d]er Unterschied zwischen dem fiktionalen Zusammenhang des Gedichts und den brieflichen Äußerungen, den Ihekweazu betont, soll [nicht] überspielt werden." Gisela Henckmann, *Gespräch und Geselligkeit in Goethes "West-östlicher Divan"*, Stuttgart, 1975, p. 163.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Ernst Beutler, *Goethes West-östlicher Divan*, p. 313.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Edith Ihekweazu, *Goethes West-östlicher Divan: Untersuchungen zur Struktur des Lyrischen Zyklus*, pp. 5.

<sup>19</sup> Hendrik Birus, "Poetische Emigration", p. 192. Cf. also *Gespräch und Geselligkeit in Goethes "West-östlichem Divan"*, pp. 24-34, where Gisela Henckmann studies different motifs of "Hegira" from the perspective of "Gespräch und Geselligkeit" in the *Divan*.

<sup>20</sup> Ernst Beutler, *Goethes West-östlicher Divan*, p. 313.

<sup>21</sup> Edith Ihekweazu, *Goethes West-östlicher Divan: Untersuchungen zur Struktur des Lyrischen Zyklus*, p. 55.

<sup>22</sup> In commenting on these verses, Hendrik Birus refers to the pre-Islamic Bedouin tribes' refusal to submit to any foreign rule and refusal to be employed by any foreigner. He also refers to the domination of Orality in the old Arabic culture. Cf. [FA I/3] pp. 887 & 889.

<sup>23</sup> Edith Ihekweazu, *Goethes West-östlicher Divan: Untersuchungen zur Struktur des Lyrischen Zyklus*, p. 53.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> [FA I/3], p. 14.

<sup>26</sup> Ernst Beutler, *Goethes West-östlicher Divan*, p. 314.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 314-317.

<sup>28</sup> Cited in *Ibid.*, p. 317.

<sup>29</sup> Cited from *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, part 3, [FA I/ 14] p. 668, in [FA I/3], p. 194.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Edith Ihekweazu, *Goethes West-östlicher Divan: Untersuchungen zur Struktur des Lyrischen Zyklus*, p. 46.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>32</sup> Grete Schaeder, *Gott und Welt*, Hamlen, 1947, p. 326.

<sup>33</sup> Cited from Tag- und Jahres-Heften 1815 in "Poetische Emigration" ; in *Interpretationen: Gedichte von Johann Wolfgang Goethe* (Bernd Witte, ed.), Stuttgart, 1998, pp.190-191.

<sup>34</sup> Cf., for example, *ibid.* p. 189 and Gisela Henckmann, *Gespräch und Geselligkeit in Goethes "West-östlichem Divan"*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>35</sup> Edith Ihekweazu, *Goethes West-östlicher Divan: Untersuchungen zur Struktur des Lyrischen Zyklus*, p. 396: "Daß dieser 'reine Osten' poetische Utopie ist, eine 'ideele' Welt, wird deutlich in den [Noten und Abhandlungen], vor allem in den Despotie-Kapiteln, wo der Osten nicht als Raum zeitloser Gültigkeit und ewiger Werte erscheint, sondern als historischer und politischer Raum." Also cf. Gisela Henckmann, *Gespräch und Geselligkeit in Goethes "West-östlichem Divan"*, p. 25.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Hendrik Birus, "Poetische Emigration", p. 189

<sup>37</sup> Goethe had certainly read the following description of the Iran of Hafiz' time in Hammer-Purgstall's "Vorrede" to his translation of Hafiz: "Dynastien, die sich haßten und bekämpften, eine auf den Trümmern der andern sich erhoben, und dann wieder über einander stürzten, unterhielten immerfort den Brand des Krieges, bis daß durch Timurs alles verheerenden Eroberungsbrand ganz Asien aufflammte, eine weite schreckliche Feuersbrunst. [...] Die Gräuel politischer Stürme, welche damals den Orient erschütterten, bilden einen merkwürdige Contrast mit der ungetrübten Heiterkeit des Dichters, der, während rund um ihn her Reiche zusammenstürzten, und Usurpatoren donnernd empor schoßen, mit ungestörtem Frohsinn von Nachtigall und Rosen, von Wein und Liebe sang," cited in . Hendrik Birus, "Poetische Emigration", p. 190.

- <sup>38</sup> From the perspective of this study, the question of the relation between the empirical author and the lyrical I is an entirely irrelevant one. For the precise purposes of this work, there is – up to a recurring and fundamental bi-unity - only one “Subject” in the *Divan*; one can call it the lyrical I, or as I will, Goethe. Cf. the Introduction to this study, also note 14 above.
- <sup>39</sup> Cf. Henry Corbin, *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, p. 1.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 2.
- <sup>41</sup> Cf. Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*. Chapel Hill, 1975, p. 252
- <sup>42</sup> Henry Corbin, *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, p. 2.
- <sup>43</sup> Cf. ibid.
- <sup>44</sup> [FA I/3], p. 15.
- <sup>45</sup> Cf. ibid., p. 6.
- <sup>46</sup> In the chapter “Sigh of Creation” in discussing the poem *Wiederfinden* as well as in the prologue to this work, I have discussed in detail the Idea of Light as the principle of Divine Manifestation and its relation to the archetypal realities and Images. Moreover, the organ of the perception of these images from the perspective of Islamic Mysticism, that is, the Active Imagination, is discussed in the Introduction and elsewhere in this work.
- <sup>47</sup> Henry Corbin, *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, pp. 4-5.
- <sup>48</sup> Cf. ibid., p. 46.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 11.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 45.
- <sup>51</sup> Another term Goethe used for “reiner Osten” : Liebchen, ach! im starren Bande / Zwängen sich die Freyen Lieder, / Die im reinen Himmelslande / Munter flogen hin und wieder. *Buch der Liebe*, poem no. 8, *Neuer Divan*. Cf. [FA I/3], p. 333.
- <sup>52</sup> As in Suhrawardi’s “*Recital of the Occidental Exile*,” where returning to the East for the exile, who is summoned *home to himself*, is to climb Mountain Qaf, the Emerald Rock, the mystical Sinai, the *Terra lucida* situated at the heavenly north. Cf. Henry Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, Princeton, 1990, p.23. This is also the Goethe’s *Oberland* of “the Friend of God.”: All [friends of God] inhabit the same heights inaccessible to those who are unaware of their *orientation*, like the ‘Friend of God’ in *Oberland*, the ‘high country,’ where Goethe’s inner vision will nevertheless know how to find these heights, in a great poem which remained unfinished: *die Geheimnisse*”; Henry Corbin, *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, p. 54.
- <sup>53</sup> Cf. Ibid., p. 44. Also, “the history of an invisible spiritual mankind whose cycle of earthly pilgrimages refer to ‘events in Heaven, not to the evolutionary fatality of successive generation.” Cf. ibid., pp. 10-11.
- <sup>54</sup> Cf. the preface to this work for more details.
- <sup>55</sup> Cf. Henry Corbin, *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, p. 3.
- <sup>56</sup> Cf. ibid., p. 15.
- <sup>57</sup> Cf. Henry Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, Princeton, 1990, p. 155.
- <sup>58</sup> For an interesting work on Goethe and Alchemy and Physiognomy, Cf. Ronald’s D. Gray’s *Goethe The Alchemist*, Cambridge, 1952.
- <sup>59</sup> For an excellent review of various historical currents in Islamic mysticism Cf. Annemarie Schimmel’s *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* [SA75]. Also Cf. the prologue to this work.
- <sup>60</sup> Cf. Henry Corbin, *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, p. 16. Also cf. the chapter 5 of this work of the poem *Selige Sehnsucht*.
- <sup>61</sup> Cf. Henry Corbin, *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, p. 59.
- <sup>62</sup> For the role of the spiritual pole in Islamic mysticism cf. Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, pp. 199-203.
- <sup>63</sup> Henry Corbin, *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, p. 33: “After the *exitus* at death, the earthly person abandons his body and takes on the subtle body of his heavenly *Alter Ego*.” The singularity of the mystic lies in the fact that he will achieve this before his death. Or as the Islamic Tradition says, he dies before his death. Cf. also the chapter 5 on *Selige Sehnsucht*.
- <sup>64</sup> Henry Corbin, *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, pp. 42-43. In the Chapter 3, “Sigh of Creation,” I have dealt with the world of eternal archetypes as a stage of the divine self-manifestation. Here we will focus on the archetypes as counterparts of individual humans.
- <sup>65</sup> Henry Corbin, *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, p. 49



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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>69</sup> The mainstream of Shi'a believes in 12 infallible Imam all whom in rank superior to all past prophets (Nabis). It should be strongly stressed that some prophets, including the prophet of Islam, are considered both prophet *and* Imam. Imamology of Shiism has proved extremely compatible with Islamic Mysticism's notion of Perfect Man, the Pole as the supreme spiritual guide.

<sup>70</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, pp. 119& 169.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 237.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 234.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone; Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*, Princeton, 1998, p. 56.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. *ibid.* p. 54.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Here we have already arrived at the idea of "eternal archetypes" as discussed in Chapter 2 "Sigh of Creation."

<sup>80</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>83</sup> Edith Ihekweazu, *Goethes West-östlicher Divan: Untersuchungen zur Struktur des Lyrischen Zyklus*, p.49.

<sup>84</sup> Cf., for example, *ibid.*, p.50: "Die erste Strophe des Gedichts 'Hegire' enthält eine Reihe von Motiven und Themen, die im gesamten Zyklus unschwer wiederzufinden sind. Nicht von ungefähr wird der 'Divan' in der Forschungsliteratur abwechselnd als Buch der Liebe, der Verjüngung, der Dichtung bezeichnet." In fact, a major part of Edith Ihekweazu's study of the structure of the *Divan* as a lyrical cycle is devoted to the way 'Hegire' functions as the 'Progrmmgedicht' of the entire book. For more details, cf. the prologue to this work as well as the discussion above. Also, in her study of the leitmotifs of *Gespräch und Geselligkeit* in the *Divan*, Gisela Henckemann writes about 'Hegire': "Die wichtigsten Themen werden darin bereits angeschlagen, darunter auch Gespräch als 'gesprochen Wort' und Geselligkeit als 'Lieben, Trinken, Singen'." p. 24.

<sup>85</sup> For a detailed discussion of the methodology, cf. Introduction to this work.

<sup>86</sup> For a discussion of Suleika, cf. Introduction, Chapters 2, 3 and 4 of this work.

<sup>87</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return*, translated: W.R. Trask. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991, p. 35.

<sup>88</sup> Annemarie Schimmel's *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, pp. 288-289

<sup>89</sup> Cf. Edith Ihekweazu, *Goethes West-östlicher Divan: Untersuchungen zur Struktur des Lyrischen Zyklus*, p. 52

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., pp. 55-56: "In patriarchalischer Frühzeit war 'Himmelslehr in Erdesprachen' verständlich, d.h. ewig Gültiges unmittelbar mitteilbar und verstehbar. In diesen Bereich wünscht der Dichter zurückzukehren. Bis in die Zeit Hafis' hat sich dieser Zustand erhalten; sein Lied ist in aller Munde. Diese Art der Kommunikation ist offensichtlich in der zersplitternden Welt, von der anfangs die Rede ist, nicht mehr möglich. Das nicht mehr unmittelbar wirksame, geschriebene Wort ist zeichen der Isolation, Zeichen des Auseinanderbrechens von Himmel und Erde. Nur eine Dichtung wie die Hafis', die gleichermaßen in 'Bädern und in Schenken' beheimatet ist und 'Himmelslehr' verkündet, kann Zugang zum Paradies finden. Die Huris hören auf das 'Liebesflüstern' eines Dichters, der irdisch und heilig zugleich ist."

<sup>91</sup> A decisive transition from the first part of the poem to the second, entering the Land of Dichtung with a rare use of monorhyme in the manner of a Ghazal of Hafiz.

<sup>92</sup> Verses 221-227: "Shall I tell you on whom the Satans come down? They come down on every guilty impostor. They give ear, but most of them all liars. And the poets – the perverse follow them; hast thou not seen how they wander in every valley and how they say that which they do

not? Save those who believe, and do righteous deeds, and remember God oft, and help themselves after being wronged; and those who do wrong shall surely know by what overturning they will be overturned.” Noting Islam’s emphasis on the fact that Muhammad is a prophet and not a poet, Goethe identifies them as obsessed with the same spirit: “Wollen wir nun den Unterschied zwischen Poeten und Propheten näher andeuten, so sagen wir: beyde sind von einem Gott ergriffen und befeuert, der Poet aber vergeudet die ihm verliehene Gabe im Genuß, um Genuß hervorzubringen, Ehre durch das Hervorgebrachte zu erlangen, allenfalls ein bequemes Leben. Alle übrigen Zwecke versäumt er, sucht mannigfaltig zu seyn, sich in Gesinnung und Darstellung gränzenlos zu zeigen. Der Prophet hingegen sieht nur auf einen einzigen bestimmten Zweck; solchen zu erlangen, bedient er sich der einfachsten Mittel. Irgend eine Lehre will er verkünden und wie um eine Standarte, durch sie und um sie die Völker versammeln. Hiezu bedarf es nur daß die Welt glaube, er muß als eintönig wereden und bleiben. Denn das Mannigfaltige glaubt man nicht, man erkennt es.” *Noten und Abhandlungen* [FA I/3], p. 157.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Annemarie Schimmel, *As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam*, New York, 1982, pp. 12-15.

<sup>94</sup> Cf., *ibid.*, pp. 16-17. This roughly corresponds to Gisela Henckmann’s conception of the “spoken word” in the context of *Gespäch und Geselligkeit* in the *Divan*: “Um [...] seine Dynamik zu entfalten, muß das Wort ‘gesprochen’, d.h. immer wieder neu geäußert und in den Lebensvollzug hineingestellt werden; ob dies mündlich oder schriftlich geschieht ist von sekundärer Bedeutung und hängt davon ab, wer angesprochen werden soll. [...] Die Krönung und eigentliche Erfüllung des ‘gesprochen Wort’ ist das wirkliche Miteinandersprechen im Gespäch, das zwischen dem Dichter und einigen wenigen geliebten Menschen in vollendeter geselliger Form geführt wird und das einen inneren Bezirk im Divan schafft, in dem das Reine und Rechte in besonderer, musterhafter Weise sich neu bestätigt. Denn auch die Liebe stellt sich unter die Bedingung, die in der Hegire gerühmt wereden; Die Liebenden sehen sich in Übereinstimmung mit dem Göttlichen und der von ihm geschaffenen Natur, mit den Vorbildern der Tradition, in einer Freiheit, die ihnen gerade auch die Geselligkeit garantiert; ihre Liebe äußert und erfüllt sich im ‘gesprochen Wort.’” *Gespäch und Geselligkeit in Goethes “West-östlichem Divan”*, Stuttgart, 1975, pp. 30-31.

<sup>95</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam*, p. 23: “[Louis] Massignon’s musings about the consonants being the body of the [Arabic] word and the vowels, which change according to the meaning, being the spirit, lead further into the area of enigmatic Arabic sayings, when he states that every word has a *zahir* [the exoteric appearance] and a *batin* [the esoteric truth], an external and an interior sense, this holds true for mystical poetry in the whole Islamic world.”

<sup>96</sup> For the idea of Breath of God, cf. the chapter 3 on *Wiederfinden*, The Sigh of Creation.

<sup>97</sup> Thus also the Suhrawardian ideas of human souls as “minor divine Words,” cf., Henry Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, Princeton, 1990, p. 78, and the spiritual Angels separate from all Matter as “greater divine Words,” *ibid.* p. 358.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. *As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam*, pp. 3-4, where Annemarie Schimmel discusses the etymology of the German word *Einbildung* and writes: “Typically, the word *Einbildung* was coined by the medieval German mystics to point to the act of forming images (imagining) the Divine in the mystic’s mind. The medieval Christian poet finds his images, *Bilder*, in ‘God’s two books, in Nature and Scripture.’”

<sup>99</sup> Henry Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, pp. 176-177.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone; Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn ‘Arabi*, Princeton, 1998, pp. 195-196.

<sup>101</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 196-197. For the difference between the Absolute as the sum of all its attributes (in Islam, *Allah*) and the Absolute in one of its attribute, the Lord of his Vassal (in Islam, *Rabb*), Cf. chapters 3 and 4 of this work.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198.

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<sup>104</sup> Referring to Goethe's sentences cited above, Ernst Beutler writes: "Dieses Wort Goethes würde niemals die Zustimmung Martin Luthers und auch nicht die der Väter des Tridentinischen Konzils gefunden haben", *Goethes West-östlicher Divan*, p. 315.

<sup>105</sup> The mysticism of an Ibn 'Arabi often proved too radical for many mystics, especially for those in the tradition of the early classical Sufis. Islamic mysticism remains, according to many, a distinctly Islamic mysticism committed not only to the spirit of the revealed religion, but to its very letter. Too often for our modern sensibilities, the Sufi, just like the fanatic orthodox, values an animal, which praises God by virtue of its very existence, in the only way it knows and it can, more than an infidel who has gone astray from the straight path. The all-encompassing love for all God's creatures remains in many cases an abstractum, an odd view according to which persecuting an infidel or a heretic and burning him at the stake for his beliefs is the sign of divine mercy. It should also be mentioned that Ibn 'Arabi himself believes in the superiority of Islam, in Muhammad as the seal of prophecy and as the highest divine theophany in human form and in the Qur'an as the all-encompassing Divine Book, a microcosm on its own right, reflecting the Divine and the whole Creation like a perfect mirror, if nonetheless veiled in layers of esoteric meaning available only, in its totality, to the prophet of Islam.

<sup>106</sup> Translation mine, cf. Bahaoodin Khorramshahi, *Hafiz-Nameh: A Selective Commentary On Hafiz' Ghazals* (Persian), Tehran, 1987, vol. 1, Ghazal 50.

<sup>107</sup> William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*. Albany, 1989, p. xii.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. xiii.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. xv.

<sup>110</sup> Translation mine, cf. Masanvi, Jalal-addin Moalana Rumi, *Masnavi*. Tehran, 1996, vol. 1, v. 2128.

<sup>111</sup> Cf. [FA I/3], p. 177.

<sup>112</sup> Translation mine; cf. Bahaoddin Khorramshahi, *Hafiz-Nameh: A Selective Commentary On Hafiz' Ghazals* (Persian), Tehran, 1987, vol. 2, p. 1234, Ghazal 244.

<sup>113</sup> In the mystical path, trust and faith are intimately connected to each other; one can say they are almost identical. For an excellent exposition of the stages of the mystical path in Sufism, cf. Annemarie Schimmel's *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, pp. 98-186.

<sup>114</sup> "Dein Lied ist drehend wie das Sternengewölbe / Anfang und Ende immer fort dasselbe" ("Unbegrenzt," Buch Hafis). Cf. [FA I/3], p. 31.

<sup>115</sup> Cf. Grete Schaeder, *Gott und Welt* p. 335.

<sup>116</sup> Cited in *ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> *Noten und Abhandlungen*, [FA I/3], p. 175.

<sup>118</sup> For a detailed discussion on Symbol and Allegory, cf. Preface and Chapter 2: "Bi-Unity and Dialectic of Love."

<sup>119</sup> Grete Schaeder, *Gott und Welt*, pp. 335-336.

<sup>120</sup> *Noten und Abhandlungen*, [FA I/3], p. 186.

<sup>121</sup> Cf. Grete Schaeder, *Gott und Welt*, p. 340

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Edith Ihekweazu, *Goethes West-östlicher Divan: Untersuchungen zur Struktur des Lyrischen Zyklus*, p. 52.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., pp. 229-230.

<sup>125</sup> Cf. Grete Schaeder, *Gott und Welt*, p. 342

<sup>126</sup> *Aus dem Nachlaß*; [FA I/3], p. 595.

<sup>127</sup> Cf. Henry Corbin, *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, p. 49.

## CHAPTER TWO

# Bi-Unity and Dialectic of Love

Whatever name I may mention in this work, it is to her that I am alluding. Whatever the house whose elegy I sing, it is of her house that I am thinking. But that is not all. In the verses I have composed for the present book, I never cease to allude to the divine inspirations, the spiritual visitations, the correspondences with the world of the angelic intelligences; in this I conformed to my usual manner of thinking in symbols; this because the things of the invisible world attract me more than those of actual life, and because this young girl knew perfectly what I was alluding to.

Ibn ‘Arabi – *The Interpretater of Ardent Desires*<sup>1</sup>

### Gingo Biloba

Dieses Baum’s Blatt, der von Osten  
Meinem Garten anvertraut,  
Giebt geheimen Sinn zu kosten,  
Wie’s den Wissenden erbaut.

Ist es Ein lebendig Wesen?  
Das sich in sich selbst getrennt,  
Sind es zwey? die sich erlesen,  
Daß man sie als eines kennt.

Solche Frage zu erwidern  
Fand ich wohl den rechten Sinn;  
Fühlst du nicht an meinen Liedern  
Daß ich Eins und doppelt bin?

The striking thematic affinity - symbolics of love, esoteric knowledge and more - between the words of the greatest master of Islamic theoretical mysticism, Ibn ‘Arabi, in the prologue to his *Diwan*, and Goethe’s short programmatic poem will soon cease to surprise us. Placed at the heart of “Buch Suleika”, itself the

lyrical/dialogical core of the entire *West-Östlicher Divan*, *Gingo Biloba* offers in a remarkably compact form, and no doubt much more in the form and shape of “Gedankenpoesie” and “Reflexionsfigur” than “Liebes- or Erlebnislyrik”,<sup>2</sup> the interdependence of a network of fundamental notions in Oriental theosophy, in the particular form of Islamic mysticism classically espoused by Ibn ‘Arabi. It will, above all, present itself as a “poetically guised theory of doubling.”<sup>3</sup> This latter notion, *doubling*, or more precisely, *Bi-Unity*, will prove most crucial not only in the analysis of Dialectic of Love, that is, the bi-unity of Lover/Beloved, which goes to the heart of the first-level hermeneutics of the poem from the perspective of mysticism. It will also prove itself as the fundamental structure of a vast number of mystical and philosophical “Dualities” (such as God/World, Lord/Vassal, Spirit/Body, Esoteric/Exoteric, Symbol/Meaning, Heavenly Twin or Subject/Object, Reality/Appearance, etc.), thereby putting these dualities into a relation of homology with each other. It will, therefore, accompany us, directly or indirectly via one of its equivalent forms, in our search for mystical motifs in Goethe’s *Divan*.

Being a most specific poetic symbolization - as incarnation - of this notion, moreover, *Gingo Biloba* lends itself also to a second-order hermeneutics, that is to say, it represents itself as a doubling of doubling and a symbol for the symbol as such. In addition to the poem itself, a cluster of writings and conversations related to Goethe’s composition of it, confirms, I will argue, this multiplication, or hierarchy, of different layers of doubling, giving it its highly programmatic character. This programmatic character, however, does not reduce

the poem to a mere mental exercise or to a poetic experiment with mystical and philosophical concepts. It is my contention that *Gingo Biloba* confronts us with a moment of epiphany and inspiration in the life of the poet, in which “Epiphany” itself is ephiphanized in the shape of the leaf of a certain tree from the East, and in which

Das echte Symbol wendet sich an alle Seelenkräfte; es führt von der sinnlichen Anschauung zur Erkenntnis, es setzt das sittliche Empfinden in Bewegung und vereinigt alle diese Wirkungen in der gläubigen Ahnung des göttlichen Geheimnisses.<sup>4</sup>

Gingo biloba is the leaf of a tree with the same name which originally grew in Japan and was brought to Europe in 1754. The heart-shaped leaf has a cut across the middle, which makes it difficult to discern whether it is one leaf that is divided in two or in fact two leaves attached to each other. Attentive to this peculiar physiology and its potential for symbolic meaning, Goethe first sends a Gingo biloba leaf to Marianne von Willemer, the Suleika of “Buch Suleika”, “als Sinnbild der Freundschaft.”<sup>5</sup> A week later, walking with Marianne and Rosette Städel in Schloßgarten Heidelberg, the leaf becomes the topic of conversation:

Auch hier wird ein Blatt gebrochen und mit Marianne und Willemers Tochter, Rosette Städel, von neuem die botanische Merkwürdigkeit des Baumes und der symbolische Sinn, den man der Blattform unterlegen könne, erörtert.<sup>6</sup>

Finally on Sept. 27, 1815, in a letter addressed to Rosette Städel, Goethe sends the draft of the poem, intended indeed for Marianne/Suleika<sup>7</sup>, and prefaced with the words:

Da jedoch jenes bekannte wunderliche Blatt durch seine *prosaische Auslegung* einigen Anteil gewonnen, so stehe hier die *rhythmische Übersetzung*.<sup>8</sup>

We will later have the opportunity to deal in more detail with the exact circumstances that had occasioned the expression “prosaische Auslegung.” Let it suffice to say here that we already recognize a layer of doubling in the opposition between that expression and its “rhythmic translation.” In fact, the theme of a (secret) meaning calling for its revelation dominates this dedicatory letter:

Kaum als ich dieses geschrieben, erfreute mich eine lange Unterredung mit Hofrat Creuzer, deren Resultat war: es sei am besten getan, etwas Faßliches und Begreifliches, Gefälliges und Angenehmes, ja Verständiges und Liebenswertes vorauszusetzen, weil man viel sicherer sei, alsdann den rechten Sinn herauszufinden, oder hineinzulegen.<sup>9</sup>

The letter closes on a note leaving no doubt as to the programmatic intentions of the poem it prefaces:

Hiermit nun, liebe Rosette [...] überliefere ich Ihnen, mit den sämtlichen Geheimnissen der neuern Philologie, auch meine eignen, zu beliebigem Privatgebrauch.<sup>10</sup>

The interrelated motifs of “secret meaning”, “exegesis” and “gnosis” constitute a fundamental theme of *Gingo Biloba*. Distributed within the first and third stanzas, they serve as the frame to the middle stanza – and thereby to the entire poem – which is the formulation of a question, true nature of the “Wesen” of the Gingo biloba leaf, a question the answer to which is not given, or more precisely, assumed to be known, like a secret meaning, only to him who knows, “der Wissende.” This brings us inevitably and immediately in contact with mystical traditions. In Islamic mysticism, in particular, the notions of secret meaning and gnostic exegesis go far beyond their application to the Holy Book. The technical term in Islamic mysticism used for exegesis is “*Ta’wil*”, which literally means

“carrying back to the origin”. It is certainly true that the mystics believe in multiple layers of meaning assigned to the scripture, and in fact a definition for becoming a mystic is initiation into the hidden meaning of the Book, initiation into the *Ta’wil*. In his exposition of the three stages of the way in the course of which, according to Ibn ‘Arabi, God bestows his light upon the Sufi, Henry Corbin writes:

The first stage, purely exoteric, consists in the practice of the *shari’a*, or literal religion. Ibn ‘Arabi symbolizes it by the stars whose brilliance darkens as soon as the full moon of the other two stages rises, the stages in the course of which the Sufi is initiated into the *Ta’wil*, the symbolic exegesis which “carries back” the literal statements to that which they symbolize and of which they are “cipher,”—taught, in other words, how to interpret the external rites in their mystic, esoteric sense.<sup>11</sup>

But as we have already seen in our discussion of the opening poem of the *Divan*, *Hegire*, and our discussion of the notion of the Symbol from the perspective of mysticism in the latter part of this chapter will further demonstrate, the notion of exegesis itself goes considerably further. It is also a correlate of “the idea of a divine anthropomorphosis ‘in Heaven’ exemplified in earthly persons who are not its incarnation but its theophanic figure”, and as such, “not an allegorical exegesis but a transfiguration of the literal text, referring not to abstract truths, but to Persons.”<sup>12</sup> This, then, not only implies carrying back the letter to its original spirit, coming into contact with the esoteric meaning of the word of God, it also implies a personal exegesis as well, that is, the return to “des Ursprungs Tiefe”, to the “Cosmic East”, reunion with one’s “Heavenly Twin”, with one’s “personal Khidr (Chiser).”<sup>13</sup>



Hence the renewed invocation of the East (verse 1), from where the Gingo biloba leaf, entrusted to the poet's garden (verse 2) originates. Verses 3 and 4 propose the leaf (and the poem, the leaf's poetic equivalent) as the carrier of a "secret meaning" which is to be "tasted", partaken of by him who knows the secret, "der Wissende", and who is thereby "edified." I will later return to a comparison of allegory and symbol from a mystical standpoint. What is, however, striking in this stanza, is the use of the verb "kosten", to taste, partake, as the faculty of perception (or rather, intimate experience) of secret meanings.<sup>14</sup> Here we witness again a remarkable affinity between our poet and Islamic mysticism.

Under the heading "The Heart as a Subtile Origin", Corbin writes:

In Ibn 'Arabi as in Sufism in general, the heart (*qalb*), is the organ which produces true knowledge, comprehensive intuition, the gnosis (*ma'rifa*) of God and the divine mysteries, in short, the organ of everything connoted by the term 'esoteric science' (*'ilm al-Batin*). It is the organ of a perception which is both experience and intimate taste (*dhawq*)....<sup>15</sup>

In the final stanza of the poem, the poet equips himself with the appropriate sense and the requisite knowledge to answer the fundamental question at the center of the poem, the question of true meaning of the Gingo biloba being "Eins und doppelt." This does not mean, however, that the answer is to be offered unequivocally. In fact, the answer lies precisely in the ambivalence inherent in the situation. Hence the affirmation of the simultaneous unity and duality (bi-unity) of not only the leaf, but also of the poet in his very act of singing his songs. Here we witness, once again, another layer of doubling, identification and symbolization. The poem which begins by the problematic of the peculiar

physiology of a leaf ends in assigning the same peculiarity to the poet/singer, thereby putting the two into a relation of symbolic identity. That the poet now introduces himself into the scene with his songs, “Lieder”, is not a haphazard move. The sublation of the pure ambivalence of the bi-unity unto a higher level of esoteric understanding hinges precisely upon this final move. For a singer sings for someone, the poem has an addressee, and *Gingo Biloba* is a part of an ongoing conversation; here then we are at the heart of a dialogical situation, and we have the mystery of a “*thou*,” “secrets of an encounter.”

Fühlst du nicht an meinen Liedern  
Daß ich Eins und doppelt bin?

We know that in the composition of the “Buch Suleika”, Marianne von Willemer had a direct contribution, participating in a unique conversation with Goethe.<sup>16</sup> In his commentary of the *Divan*, Ernst Beutler contends that with the three well-known stanzas on the leaf of Gingo biloba we are again in the middle of high days of encounter between Goethe and Marianne.<sup>17</sup> Gisela Henckmann has also identified three conversation cycles in the entire *Divan*, among which the “Buch Suleika” is highlighted as the richest and most important for her project, that is, the study of *Gespräch und Geselligkeit* in the *Divan*:

Das zeigt sich bereits rein formal: Es enthält die Hälfte aller im  
Divan vorkommenden direkten Gespräche, und es ist das einzige  
Buch, das aus einem *fortlaufenden Miteinandersprechen* der  
Partner von Anfang bis Ende besteht.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, she isolates the symbol of Gingo biloba leaf as one of the two symbols expressing better than the rest the particular character of the love between Hatem (Goethe) and Suleika (Marianne).<sup>19</sup>

In locating affinities between the *Divan* and the fundamental motifs in mysticism, it is the primary task of this chapter to investigate the notion of bi-unity, which is put into the form of a question in the third stanza of *Gingo Biloba*, and therefore placed at the heart of the “Buch Suleika” and indeed of the whole *Divan*, in light of this dialogical situation and in light of what Henry Corbin, in his exposition of Ibn ‘Arabi’s mysticism, calls “Dialectic of Love.”<sup>20</sup> I should, however, mention in passing that the standard interpretations of *Gingo Biloba* have applied Plato’s theory of love as the key to the understanding of bi-unity as the central concept of the poem; a theory which, in my opinion, for all its vast metaphysical and imposing historical associations, falls short of a full explication of the nuances of the specifically mystical dialogical character of love (and its lyrical expression) as formed and celebrated by Goethe in the *Divan*:

Das ‘lebendige Wesen, das man in sich getrennt’ erinnerte an den Androgynenmythos in Platons Symposion, nach dem die Menschen, die sich auf Erden mit unstillbarer und unzerstörbarer Liebe suchen müssen, nur zwei Hälften sind, die vor Urzeiten ein Ganzes gebildet hatten.<sup>21</sup>

Our point of departure in the mystical approach to the question of bi-unity and dialectic of love<sup>22</sup> is the provisional and commonplace homological relation attributed to two modes of love; “physical or profane love” and “spiritual or divine love.” Following Henry Corbin, or rather Ibn ‘Arabi, I will shortly refine and redefine this classification. But for the present, let us recall the ongoing discussion and debates regarding the relation between these two modes of love, whether the former symbolizes the latter, and whether in the interpretation of many instances of love/lyric poetry, such as in chivalric poetry and in the works

of the figures like Hafiz, one should approach the poems from one standpoint or the other.<sup>23</sup> The question is often reduced to trivialities such as the suffering caused by love's afflictions drawing the lover's attention to the mercy and loving kindness of God, or mere platitudes of the type that the figure of unrequited love symbolizes the unreachability and unattainability of God.

Nonetheless, we can of course already anticipate Ibn 'Arabi's answer, which is: "a being does not truly love anyone other than his Creators."<sup>24</sup> The same conviction moves him to vigorously declare in the prologue to his Divan, *The Interpreter of Ardent Desires*, a book of poetry inspired and occasioned by an encounter with his "mystic Sophia", that

the amatory imagery of his poems as well as the central and dominant figure are nothing more nor less than allusion, as he says, 'to the spiritual mysteries, to the divine illuminations, to the transcendent intuitions of mystic theosophy, to the awakenings provoked in the hearts of men by religious admonition.'<sup>25</sup>

But now we are faced with a fundamental question: "What does it truly mean to love God?" Neither positive religion of the various orthodoxies nor the negative theologies based on philosophical considerations are capable of offering a satisfactory answer. For the former, with all attributes it assigns to God, ends up having to admit that God is like nothing else, thereby expunging him from the realm of any possible human experience, while the latter, by establishing the impossibility of any attribution to God from the outset, directly places him at such a radical transcendence, which denies the human beings any possible contact with him. In both cases, fear, or awe, infinitely more than love or tenderness, is the appropriate emotional and spiritual response while facing such darkness.

But what does the mystic mean by “love of God?” In order to understand the dialectic and different modes of love according to mysticism, we need to begin with this dialectic’s first key concept, that is, “the theophanic mode of apperception”, a mode characteristic of the *Fedeli d’amore*, without which one cannot hope to penetrate the secret of their vision.” A theophany is a “concrete Figure,” sensible or imagined, rendering a divine archetypal figure outwardly or mentally visible and accessible, thereby making it an object of contemplation.<sup>26</sup> We should take utmost care not to confuse this use of the term archetype with that of the definition used in Jungian or Analytic Psychology, as an element of a collective unconscious, just as we should not identify Imagination as used here, with fantasy, with an organ which produces unreal imaginings, nor even with the organ of aesthetic creation. Imagination as used here, following Henry Corbin, is “an absolutely basic function, correlated with a universe peculiar to it”, a perfectly objective universe of “Idea-Images, of archetypal figures, of subtile substances, of immaterial matter” and the intermediary between the purely physical world and the purely spiritual universe.<sup>27</sup>

We should never lose sight of this distinction. Because it is precisely through the specific organ of perception peculiar to this universe, the Active Imagination in Corbin’s and Ibn ‘Arabi’s terms, that the theophanies are apprehended. This will enable us to approach the question of “love for God” anew by focusing our attention on “the visionary aptitude” of the mystic, “who invests the concrete form of the beloved [human] being with an “angelic function” and, in the midst of his meditations, discerns this form on the plane of theophanic

vision.”<sup>28</sup> The dialectic of love as detailed in the school of Ibn ‘Arabi, establishes a “sympathy between the invisible and the visible, the spiritual and the sensible,”<sup>29</sup> whereby basing the homological relation between what we have so far called profane and divine love upon solid foundations:

[F]or only this con-spiration makes possible the spiritual vision of the sensible or sensible vision of the spiritual, a vision of the invisible in a concrete form apprehended not by one of the sensory faculties, but by the Active Imagination, which is the organ of theophanic vision.<sup>30</sup>

The terms *sympathy* and *con-spiration* are carefully chosen. They point to the very heart of Islamic mysticism. To understand this clearly, let us recall that, for the mystic, God can be known to us in what we experience of him, and as the Beloved, and that indeed, he is never visible except through a form, in which he has revealed or epiphanized himself to us. This corresponds to the desire on his part to be revealed, to his yearning to manifest himself, as we shall most particularly see in our next chapter, “Sigh of Creation.”

Although the unique form, in which he epiphanizes himself in “each instance and for each individual”<sup>31</sup>, conceals him at the same time, although, or perhaps precisely because, the form without which he would not be able to disclose himself, simultaneously hides him, there has to be a relation of sympathy and con-spiration between the real Beloved (God) and the concrete form that makes him manifest.<sup>32</sup>

Lest this is still not clear, let us finally come to a new definition of “divine love”. This is a love situated within the divine itself, but has two aspects:

[I]n one aspect [divine love] is the desire of God for the creature, the passionate Sigh of God in His essence (the hidden Treasure),

yearning to manifest Himself in beings, in order to be revealed for them and by them; in its other aspect, divine love is the Desire of the creature for God, or in actual fact the Sigh of God Himself epiphanized in beings and yearning to return to himself. In reality the being who sighs with nostalgia is *at the same time the being toward whom His nostalgia sighs*, although in his concrete determination he differs from Him. They are not two heterogeneous beings, but one being encountering himself (at once *one* and *two*, a bi-unity, something that people tend to forget). One and the same ardent Desire is the cause of the Manifestation and the cause of the Return. [...] Thus love exists as an exchange, a permutation between God and creature; ardent Desire, compassionate nostalgia, and encounter exist eternally, and delimit the area of being.<sup>33</sup>

Thus the relationship in divine love is what Henry Corbin calls *unio sympathetica* as the main character of the usual mystical notion of *unio mystica*. This is clearly a sharing in that com-passion that joins the lover to the beloved and “the being of the lord and the being of his vassal of love into a unity which is an essential passion split into two terms, each yearning for the other.”<sup>34</sup> Here is perhaps the appropriate place to mention a crucial distinction in the esoteric teachings of Islam: the distinction between the Divine Name Al-Lah (roughly translated God) and the Name al-Rabb (the Lord). Whereas the first designates the divine essence in the sum of all his attributes, the second is “considered in respect of the relations between the divine essence and concrete individual beings both spiritual and corporeal.”<sup>35</sup> The relation of this latter aspect of the divine being with the being whose God it is, is that of sym-pathetism. This “divine suzerainty”, in other words, has a secret, and this secret is a *thou*, a thou without which this suzerainty ceases to be:

[F]or his being-known depends on *thee* (which means that when He is known by *thee*, it is because He knows Himself *in thee*)—

and here we find an essential dialogical situation which no monism can impair.<sup>36</sup>

We have progressed considerably towards establishing the affinity between the central theme of bi-unity in *Gingo Biloba* and the same motif in mysticism by way of putting the emphasis on the dialogical character fundamental to both. However, we have not yet reached the full scope of the homological relation between different modes of love. And that is essential to our argument.

Let us, therefore, consider two other modes of love, which along with divine love, constitute Ibn Arabi's classification. What we will now call "spiritual love", is the love whose sole aim is to be adequate to the divine Beloved and to comply with his wishes. It is a love situated in the creature "always in quest of the being whose Image he discovers in himself, or of which he discovers that he himself is the image."<sup>37</sup> The third mode of love, also situated in the creature, now called "natural love", "desires to possess and seeks satisfaction of its own desires without concern for the satisfaction of the Beloved."<sup>38</sup> The first step in putting into a conjunction divine love (in which God is at once the Lover and the Beloved) and natural and creaturely love, whereby answering the question of what it means to love God, is to see the possibility of the reconciliation between the two modes of creaturely love, because

[O]nly then we can ask whether it is possible for us to love God with this twofold, spiritual love, *since God Himself is never visible except in a concrete form (imagined or sensible) that epiphanizes Him. A sympathy must be restored between the spiritual and the physical if love is to flower in the creature as a theopathy corresponding to the divine yearning to be known, in other words, if the bi-unity, the unio sympathetica, of the lord of love and his vassal is to be realized.*<sup>39</sup>



The possibility of this reconciliation will, in turn, depend on the answer to the question, whether we love God for himself, for ourselves, for both or for neither. For according to Ibn ‘Arabi, loving God simultaneously for him and for oneself, is the mark of the most perfect mystic lovers, for in this they manifest their capacity to reveal their “twofold nature,” their ability to combine mystic knowledge with concrete and epiphanic vision. All vision in mystic experience presupposes a Form of the experienced object, a “composite” form corresponding to the lover’s being. The duality in the structure of the lover’s soul, implies, on the one hand, that its love for God or any other being, inspired by hope of finding itself or fear of losing itself, proceeds from its physical nature, and on the other hand, implies that his love only for the sake of the Beloved proceeds from its spiritual nature.

In order to “synchronize” this dual nature by joining the forms of love springing from the two facets of the soul, the divine Beloved, who defines Himself as admitting no division, as desiring that the soul should love no one but Him and should love Him for Himself, manifests Himself to the soul, that is, produces Himself for the soul in the *physical form* of a *theophany*. And He grants him a *sign*, which makes it so plain that it is He who is manifesting Himself to the soul in this Form, that the soul cannot deny it. [...Apprehending this theophany, the soul] recognizes that the Beloved *is* this physical Form (sensible or mental, identified by Active Imagination); at once in its spiritual and its physical nature, it is drawn toward that Form. It “sees” its Lord.<sup>40</sup>

Coming full circle, recalling the nostalgia of the “Hidden Treasure”, let us finally remark, that in the conjunction of physical love and spiritual love, the soul of the mystic gains awareness that it is not through itself, but through *him* that it “sees God” and through *him* that it loves; it is through God’s gaze seeing all beings, and not through its own, that it contemplates God in other beings. Through him alone,

the soul loves and contemplates. The acting image within the soul and the organ of its perception is its “Lord of love” just as the soul is God’s organ of perception.

God’s vision of the soul corresponds fully with the soul’s vision of its divine

Lord:

Thus since the soul is His organ, the organ of *Him* who demands a total devotion in *sym-path*y with Him, how could the soul love anyone but Him? It is He who seeks and is sought for, He is the Lover and He is the Beloved. [...] Still, we must never forget that if He is the Lover and the Beloved, it is in his essence to be *both* one and the other, just as He is the Worshiped, the Worshiper, and the eternal dialogue between the *two*.<sup>41</sup>

“The divine Lover is spirit without body; the purely physical lover is body without the spirit; the spiritual lover (that is, the mystic lover) possesses spirit and body.”<sup>42</sup> In this way may be summed up, then, the process of putting different modes of love in a relation of homology and thus resolving the bi-unity ambivalence which shapes the hermeneutic crux of *Gingo Biloba*, by placing the focus on its manifold dialogical character—a self-realizing dialogue of lovers which is simultaneously a self-realizing dialogue of Created and Creator, and ultimately, of the Creator with himself. This brings the poem into an unmistakable kinship with the most central motifs of mysticism, and more than justifies its strategic poetological position in the “Buch Suleika” and in the *Divan*. In this, moreover, we clearly discern one instance of “Duality” or “Doubling” (Spirit/Body), a dense constellation of whose instances invoked - in a multiplicity of layers, no less - in the poem provides it with its programmatic character. Turning now to these different instances of doubling, I will argue that the program of the poem is to offer a symbolics of the symbol, to present itself as the poetic

symbol of the symbol as such, which amounts to, yet again, to the doubling of doubling. This could perhaps be simply called a “theory of doubling,” were our attention not drawn, by the intensification of the doubling operation along both the horizontal and vertical axes, to the fundamental nature of the symbol as far as mysticism is concerned.

Detlef Kremer who employs the term, “poetisch verstellte Theorie der Doppelung,”<sup>43</sup> enumerates an interesting series of doublings in the text of *Gingo Biloba* as well as in the circumstances surrounding its composition. The title and the first verse of the poem put it into a relation of Identity (the more appropriate term, it should by now be clear, is bi-unity) with a “Naturblatt”. Simultaneously poetry and nature, Goethe’s poem is the poetical metamorphosis of the Gingo leaf.<sup>44</sup> Referring, furthermore, to Goethes “erotische Beziehung zur [...] Marianne von Willemer,” and the special role of the *Divan* in this relation, Kremer writes:

Ihr [Marianne] hatte er [Goethe] kurz vor dem 15. September ein Blatt des Ginkgo-Baumes als Liebesemblem geschickt. Grünes Blatt und das weiße Blatt Papier, das die poetische Handschrift trägt, stehen in einem metonymischen Verhältnis derart, daß das eine doppelsinnig auf das andere verweist und umgekehrt. Gingo biloba ist Element eines chiffierten erotischen Briefwechsels, in dem Goethe und Frau von Willemer [...] korrespondierten.<sup>45</sup>

Along the same line of thought, Kremer mentions two further poems, both also belonging to “Buch Suleika”, “Die schön geschriebenen”<sup>46</sup> and *Geheimschrift*,<sup>47</sup> composed a few days after *Gingo Biloba*. He then writes that the *Geheimschrift* poem builds a semantic bridge to “Gingo-Gedicht” by using the figure of

doubling on the title and by formulating the same figure as “Geheime Doppelschrift.”<sup>48</sup>

I will shortly continue following Kremer’s footsteps in locating instances of doubling in *Gingo Biloba*. But it is necessary to pause for a moment here and point out what I consider to be a fundamental error in Kremer’s reading of the ambivalence of “Eins und doppelt” in the poem, and in his use of the adjective “unauflösbar” for this ambivalence. This results from the fact that he places the instances of doubling in the poem neither into horizontal relations of structural homology (whereby rendering them logical equivalents), nor along a vertical line of multiplication of doubling layers (whereby intensifying the content of the symbol). Furthermore, this error corresponds to the judgment that *Gingo Biloba* indicates a shift - in the latter years’ of Goethe’s literary creation - towards “the allegorical” and away from his earlier classical theory of the symbol. This judgment, though perhaps valid according to common definitions of allegory and symbol, and considering the general Oriental tendency of the *Divan* towards the use of metaphors,<sup>49</sup> proves to be completely inadequate - as I will have the occasion to argue in the last part of this chapter – in understanding *Gingo Biloba* and its exposition of the notion of Symbol when considered from the perspective of Oriental mysticism.

Referring to the biographical and private significance of *Gingo Biloba* and *Geheimschrift* for Goethe and Marianne, Kremer writes:

Zwischen dieser biographisch interpretierbaren privaten Kommunikation und dem veröffentlichten *Divan*-Gedicht tut sich eine unüberbrückbare Kluft auf. Der briefliche Austausch zwischen Liebenden ist darauf ausgerichtet, wie es in

*Geheimschrift* heißt, “ins Gleiche gestellt” zu werden, also eindeutig entziffert zu werden. Als Literatur hingegen erhebt die erotische Botschaft den Anspruch, eine doppelte Geheimschrift zu sein, eine, die sich nicht in einer zufälligen biographischen Konstellation auflösen läßt, sondern darüber hinaus als autonome Gestalt poetischer Differenz überdauert. In poetischer Gestalt entwickelt die “Geheimschrift” eine kontinuierliche doppelte Bewegung, die gleichzeitig offenbart und verschweigt. Der “geheime Sinn” des Gingo-Blattes läßt sich nicht über einen bestimmten Code identifizieren, sondern er besteht gerade darin, wie es die letzte Zeile des Gedichts sagt, die unaufhebbare Ambivalenz von “Eins und doppelt” fortzuschreiben.<sup>50</sup>

Here we detect not only too static a view of the notion of bi-unity, but also too narrow of a conception of erotic love, brought in no way into a dynamic relation with other modes of love. It is certainly true that the ambivalence of bi-unity is never to be sublated - as I have had occasion to point out - if by sublation we understand a decision either for unity or for duality exclusively and if by such a resolution we are thus aiming either at a form of monism or a radical and formalized dualism. But this does not mean that the two terms, sublated onto the visionary epiphanic plane, do not perfectly mirror each other. As for the “secret meaning”, it goes without saying that it is never exhausted and it is much denser and more intensely coded than the mere “erotic relationship” between two historical persons. The secret *is* Bi-unity, as the symbol and as the symbolized, as form and content, with all its mysteries and wonders. And the key to this secret, as the poem explicitly puts forward, is indeed given, but only to those who know, those who have “partaken.”

Let us now return to the instances of doubling enumerated by Detlef Kremer: Next we have the East/West doubling in the first two verses of the poem. The *Divan*, in accordance with the Persian meaning of the word, and the

intertextual foundation of the book, that is Hafiz' *Diwan* <sup>51</sup>, is the encounter of the West with the East.<sup>52</sup>

A further doubling is occasioned by the transformation of the poet into a singer and his poems into his songs in the final stanza of *Gingo Biloba*. This, in turn, brings up the ambivalence of the letter and the voice, of the written and spoken word. By recalling the Neoplatonic-Christian conception of the script as "breath", Kremer remarks that in this conception, the clear privilege is conferred on "living" speech and exchange in conversation over the "dead" letters of the writ.<sup>53</sup> As for this doubling thematized in *Gingo Biloba*, Kremer writes:

Bei aller Schriftreflexivität und allem 'Schriftästhetismus' auf der Basis von Kalligraphie, Naturschrift und ursprachlicher Schrift ist für den *Divan* auffällig, daß 'die Geltung der platonischen Stimme-Schrift-Opposition ganz ungebrochen ist,' und zwar in der Weise, daß die poetische Schrift immer wieder auf die Präsenz und Aktualisierung im Lied in der singenden Stimme verwiesen ist.<sup>54</sup>

The last example of doubling mentioned by Kremer, the doubling art/nature, is in a definite sense the obverse of the previous doubling, in the sense that it privileges the written word over the spoken. The key idea here is permanence. Speech and song are in fact living (lebendig), but have no permanence at their disposal. Goethe's Gingo leaf, in other words, is capable of 'Traditionsbildung' and immune to the comings and goings of nature and history, only from that moment on that it is transformed into that page of poetic and literary art which carries the same name as the green, deeply cut double-leaf of the Gingo tree.<sup>55</sup>

Before going further, let us recall yet another instance of doubling, to which I have already alluded in connection to the letter Goethe sent - along with

the poem - to Rosine Städel. There, we remember, he referred to the poem as the “rhythmische Übersetzung” of the Gingo leaf’s “prosaische Auslegung.”

It would be a useful exercise to try to conceive a flat (that is to say, horizontal) network or constellation of all these doublings, mutually standing in a relation of structural homology with each other, by contemplating the dialectic inherent in the bi-unitary nature of each. Does this last doubling, for example, not closely (and in a more than a merely trivial way) resemble or replicate the song / written poem or art / nature doubling? But a much more interesting exercise would be to place different bi-unitary structures into a hierarchical order, to expand them along the vertical axis, to contemplate the multiple layers of doubling. Let us consider two examples: the first we have already seen. Goethe sends a Gingo leaf to his beloved as “Sinnbild der Freundschaft.” Here we have two highly bi-unitary phenomena, one placed, as it were, on top of the other: A spiritual one, “friendship” which cannot possibly be properly understood other than in the bi-unitary way, and a physical one, the Gingo leaf, which is so distinguished by its inherent physiological “One and Two-ness” that it has become the very symbol of Bi-unity as such; the epiphany of epiphany.

Lest this not be fully clear, we may ask this question: Would not the symbolism of the gesture have undergone drastic and definitive change, would not the gesture itself have been radically altered and indeed lost its meaning, if Goethe in this instance had sent any other plant or leaf or flower as the “Sinnbild der Freundschaft?” There is no arbitrariness in this symbolism. That is why the Gingo leaf is invested with an epiphanic nature, why it is a true symbol in the

mystical sense of the word, and why the gesture of sending it to Marianne is an outward expression of an epiphanic experience. And further, this is why the poem is the symbol for the symbol, why it epiphanizes, for the initiate, for those who know, the epiphany itself.

The second example is just as striking. It is again related to the circumstances surrounding Goethe's discovery of the Gingo leaf and his composition of the poem. It clearly demonstrates Goethe's awareness of the multiple layers of the doubling operation; in his letter to Rosine Städel Goethe writes:

[...] Aus dem Niedergeschriebenen [...] ist es ersichtlich daß ich mit grundgelehrten Leuten umgehe, welche sich zwar an dem, was uns mit äußeren Sinnen zu fassen erlaubt ist, gerne ergötzen, zugleich aber behaupten, daß hinter jenen Annehmlichkeiten sich noch ein tieferer Sinn verstecke; woraus ich, vielleicht zu voreilig, schließe, daß man am besten täte, etwas ganz Unverständliches zu schreiben, damit erst Freunde und Liebende einen wahren Sinn hinzulegen völlig Freiheit hätten<sup>56</sup>

Here this writing "something entirely incomprehensible" is Goethe's slightly tongue in cheek way of acknowledging his concealing a "secret meaning" in his composition, calling for a genuine exegesis by those and only those who know and have tasted of this particular fruit of knowledge. For the statement comes to an apparent contradiction with a later part of the letter (quoted above), thereby wrapping the content of the letter in a thick layer of ambiguity. Moreover, that the objects of sensual perception may have deeper meanings is hardly an original idea, which Goethe would need to learn about from "Grundgelehrte Leute." The same attitude is manifest in a compact and abrupt exclamation by Goethe during a



conversation with these learned people, the same conversation to which the letter alludes:

[Der Altphilologe Georg Friedrich] Creuzer erzählt: er habe, als Goethe 1815 Heidelberg besuchte, mit diesem bei einem Spaziergang im Schloß ein langes und interessantes Gespräch über die symbolische Deutung und Sinnigkeit der hellenischen mythologischen Personen und Erzählungen geführt; er habe versucht, Goethe auseinanderzusetzen, wie jede hellenische Gestalt doppelt anzusehen sei, weil hinter der bloßen Realität ein höheres Symbol verborgen liege. Die einfachen Fälle seien bekannt genug: Ares als Kriegesgot bedeutet auch den Krieg, Hebe als die Jugendgöttin auch die Jugend. Dieser Doppelsinn sei in allen antiken Mythen immanent, wenngleich nicht immer leicht herauszufinden. Den Glaubenden genüge das strikte Wortverständnis, den Wissenden ward der höhere Sinn in geheimen Weihen aufgeschlossen. Goethe ging auf diese Erörterungen mit regstem Eifer ein, als sie gerade bei dem Gingo biloba stillstanden; er pflückte ein Blatt und sagte: "Also ungefähr wie dieses Blatt: eins und doppelt!"<sup>57</sup>

In the tiny particle "wie" of this curt and slightly dismissive, even gently mocking exclamation, we clearly recognize the multiplication of the symbolic layers. For at this moment, in the midst of an abstract and "gelehrt" discussion, the phenomenon itself steps in, to both affirm the abstract discussion and at the same time reveal and surpass its limitations: thus demonstrating the singular epiphanic "state of grace" which the Gingo leaf, as a symbol in the mystical sense, both represents and incarnates: for at this moment, in such a discussion, the leaf fortuitously appears – if the expression may be permitted - as the epiphany of the epiphany, as the epiphany of the epiphanic itself. For it is evident that what is here being mystically symbolized is the mystic symbol itself, to whose very character belongs the circumstance that, in the Goethean sense of the phenomena, it appears, that it have, in all its particularity and singularity and significance, embodiment

and manifestation in empirical lived reality. Therefore, there can be no arbitrariness in this symbolization. For, once again, we clearly see that no other leaf could serve this particular purpose. The Gingo biloba leaf is therefore the epiphanic form of the symbol as such, that is to say, it is the topos where a spiritual/mental idea (the symbol) comes to its full manifestation in a physical appearance (the leaf) on the horizon of the Active Imagination. *Gingo Biloba* is, therefore, the poetic expression of this double doubling and the epiphanic expression of an epiphanic moment, a full Symbolics, based precisely on bi-unity as a fundamental and universal principle. I may add that the moment Goethe refers to in his conversation with Creuzer is itself highly epiphanic in the sense dear to Goethe: in the very moment when the discussion has touched upon the “double” nature of the symbol, the abstract symbol itself assumes phenomenological and sensuous manifestation as the leaf, and Goethe, the poet vis-à-vis the theorist, plucks the leaf at the culminating moment of the whole discussion, which thus returns to the ground of sensuous incarnation and phenomenological manifestation; and the poet, both in plucking the leaf and telling of the occasion, demonstrates the irreducible bond of the abstract and the concrete and holds this bond of doubling fast.

I will conclude this chapter with a few brief remarks regarding the particular use of the term “symbol”, and its difference with notions such as “sign” and particularly “allegory”, from the standpoint of the mystical doctrine at issue here.

It was already mentioned that Detlef Kremer—in his analysis of *Gingo Biloba*—sees indications of a shift from a classical symbol theory toward the use of the allegorical in Goethe's later literary creations, and in particular in the *Divan*. In this he attaches a certain self-evidence to the notion of the symbol (symbolische Selbstausslegung)<sup>58</sup>, which comes to a clear opposition to the conscious effort on the part of the poet to conceal the true meaning(s) of his words in the form of a riddle in a poem such as *Gingo Biloba*.

Citing Goethe's own *Maximen und Reflexionen*, Kremer writes of the irreconcilable contrast between symbol and allegory, and of the fact that at some point, by the admission of the poet himself, his poetry and prose hardly corresponded any more to the demand for "immediate revelation" of the early works, but much more to a "rhetorical-allegorical hiding and concealment of meaning."<sup>59</sup> At this time, however, one could still detect a certain animosity toward the Romantics on the part of Goethe and in his call for a classical symbolics, "wo das Besondere das Allgemeine repräsentiert, nicht als Traum und Schatten, sondern als lebendig- Augenblickliche Offenbarung des Unerforschlichen."<sup>60</sup> But later, as the Klassik-Romantik conflict has faded away,

kann Goethe seinen Standpunkt abmildern und sich generös zeigen. Am 27. September schreibt er an Jakob Ludwig Iken: 'Es ist Zeit, daß der leidenschaftliche Zwiespalt zwischen Klassikern und Romantikern sich endlich versöhne.'<sup>61</sup>

We are, to be sure, at this point already more than a decade beyond the time of the composition of the *Divan*, but it is instructive to follow Kremer's short history of Goethe's attitude towards, and understanding of, symbol and allegory.

[Goethe] räumt zwischen den Zeilen ein, daß dieser Zwiespalt eigentlich

nie dort bestanden habe, wo er selbst ihn bevorzugt angesiedelt hat, nämlich in der Unversöhnbarkeit von (klassischem) Symbol und (romantischer) Allegorie.<sup>62</sup>

According to Kremer, Goethe means nothing but the allegory, though not mentioning it explicitly, when he writes in the same letter:

Da sich gar manches unserer Erfahrungen nicht rund aussprechen und direct mittheilen läßt, so habe ich seit langem das Mittel gewählt, durch einander gegenüber gestellte und sich gleichsam in einander abspiegelnde Gebilde den Geheimeren Sinn dem Aufmerkenden zu offenbaren.<sup>63</sup>

Kremer correctly sees in this “seit langem” a time stretch covering the periods of writing die *Wahlverwandtschaften* and of the composition of the *Divan*, in both of which (and especially in the later with its application of “allegorical doubling”) that “means of revealing secret meaning”, to which Goethe refers, is heavily used.<sup>64</sup> Kremer further characterizes the modern allegory not as the “conversion of a concept into an image”, but rather as the “successive charging of an image with meanings” and concludes that the esoteric knowing and the secret meaning is no longer to be arrived at - as in the case of older allegorical methods of the Renaissance and the Baroque - by looking up an encyclopedic catalogue of meanings. As opposed to the symbolic self-revelation and emblematic one-dimensionality, the modern allegory consists of the “unsublatable” semiotic double structure of the literary text, which oscillates between presence and withdrawal and devices meaning as a process of deferment.<sup>65</sup>

In sum: opposing allegory, as a device involving a deferment and multiplication of (layers of) meaning, or more aptly for our purposes here, a simultaneous revelation and concealment of (the secret) meaning, to the self-

revelation and one-dimensionality of the classical symbol, one inevitably comes to the conclusion that *Gingo Biloba* is indeed to be read and understood in light of an allegory, and not a symbol.

But symbol as used in the words of the mystic has an entirely different meaning. It is, first of all, not an arbitrary and artificially constructed sign. To be sure, when Hegel uses the term in his discussion of the motif of the Rose and the Nightingale in the classical Persian poetry,

Bei den [...] Persern ist die Rose kein Bild oder bloßer Schmuck, kein Symbol, sondern sie selbst erscheint dem Dichter als beseelt, als liebende Braut, und er vertieft sich mit seinem Geist in die Seele der Rose,<sup>66</sup>

he is using it precisely as an arbitrary and artificial sign. But he is also aware of the way in which the mystical poet uses the symbol in the sense we are discussing here. Observe the similarities:

[The symbol] flowers in the soul spontaneously to announce something that cannot be expressed otherwise; it is the unique expression of the thing symbolized as of a reality that thus becomes transparent to the soul, but which in itself transcends all expression.<sup>67</sup>

Goethe has strikingly expressed this very relationship at the highest point of exaltation in Hatem's relationship to his mystical and earthly beloved Suleika. Suleika, let us recall, plays in the *Divan* a crucial role as the archetype of erotic attraction and created living beauty in the divine image. And it is this created beauty that is the human medium in accessing the cosmic and the eternal. But both the bi-unity of Creation, as sensual and suprasensual, and the bi-unity of the symbolic itself is perhaps most strikingly manifest in the very mystical quality of the beloved's erotic embrace. It lets Creation itself, in the very moment of its most

intense sensual enjoyment, simultaneously appear and be illuminated in its mystical and suprasensual dimension, where two of its archetypal and themselves symbolically highly charged exemplars, Rose and Nightingale, also appear in their mystical quality as incommensurable expressions of the unfathomable “Word” of the divine. In this way, the traditional mediums of symbolic heightening and transfiguration are themselves transfigured as love’s exaltation is itself exalted: a kind of quintessence of the peculiar poetic intoxication so characteristic Goethe in the *Divan*:

Ists möglich, daß ich Liebchen dich kose,  
Vernehme der göttlichen Stimme Schall!  
Unmöglich scheint immer die Rose  
Unbegreiflich die Nachtigall!<sup>68</sup>

The problematic of symbol versus allegory has a long tradition within the history of Western, and in particular German, thought. Two prime examples of the extensive treatment of the topic are to be found in Hegel’s dismissal of allegory and apology of the symbol in the part devoted to Classical Art in his *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* and in Walter Benjamin’s apology of allegory in his *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*. A study of the history and details of this problematic is beyond the scope of the present work. I shall thus limit the discussion only to the distinction that exists between the two notions from the perspective of Oriental mysticism and to the affinity that exists between this perspective and Goethe’s views on the matter. Symbol understood from the perspective of Oriental mysticism is fundamentally different from allegory in that allegory is typically conceived of as a rational operation of decipherment involving no transition to a new plane of being or a new depth of consciousness,

whereas the symbol announces a level of consciousness other than that of a rational construct. Whereas allegory is a figuration of what might be known in other ways, the symbol is the “cipher” of a mystery, a unique way of apprehending a secret; it cannot be explained, it has to be incessantly re-experienced; its proper abode is the plane of epiphanic vision, the faculty of its apprehension is Active Imagination.<sup>69</sup> The symbol is in this mystical understanding a unique meeting of the visible and the invisible, appearance and reality, the hidden and the revealed sides of *Truth*, and as such, the bi-unitary structure par excellence.

In his exposition of the central mystical theme of “*haqiqa*”, which designates “essential Reality,” Henry Corbin writes:

Insofar as [*haqiqa*] is the Hidden in every form and is the *determinant* which determines itself in every determinate thing of which it is the origin, it is *agens*; insofar as it is the Manifested and Apparent and consequently the *determined* in this epiphanic form which at once manifests it and veils it, it is *patiens*; and every epiphanic form presents the same structure in the eyes of him who knows.<sup>70</sup>

It is precisely in this sense that *Gingo Biloba*, both the poem and the leaf, are symbols, for just as the symbol is the bi-unitary structure par excellence, bi-unity too can only be truly apprehended on the symbolic level and on the plane of epiphanic vision, in other words, both in the experience of its sensuous incarnation and the conscious realization of the higher meaning which this sensuous embodiment itself incarnates.

In aphorism 1.308 of Goethe’s *Maximen und Reflexionen* we read:

Das Höchste ware, zu begreifen, daß alles Factische schon Theorie ist. Die Blüte des Himmels offenbart uns das Grundgesetz der

Chromatik. Man suche nur nichts hinter den Phänomenen; sie selbst sind die Lehre.<sup>71</sup>

Goethe's classic statement and advice, which seem situated at the most anti-esoteric and thus anti-allegorical pole of his understanding of the symbol, are given in a spirit in fact quite close to the mystical teachings on the symbol we have been discussing here: Revelation is to best be sought not beyond or outside the phenomenal world of the sensuous and manifest aspect of Creation, but within and through that world itself. The phenomena are themselves the mystical teaching, for those truly attentive to them and initiated into their at times immediately evident and transparent, at times mysterious and hidden language. There is indeed reason to believe that for Goethe as for the school of Islamic mysticism, the bi-unitary nature of the symbol corresponds to a fundamental principle of Creation, and thus of revelation itself. This causes us to also propose it as our primary heuristic principle in approaching the imaginative world of the Goethean *Divan*.

The symbol and bi-unity are, then, one and the same thing (and yet not the same). Once we recognize that bi-unity is not just another instance of doubling, but the very structure of a genuine doubling (genuine in a sense that cannot be understood other than in bi-unitary terms again), we will recognize it as the underlying idea of our most ontological and epistemological, as well as logical and linguistic distinctions. Bi-unity follows us everywhere. For like its intimate correlates, love and sympathy, it is the fundamental principle of Creation, a principle inexhaustibly celebrated and explored throughout the entirety of the Goethean *Divan*.



## Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone; Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*, Princeton, 1998, p. 138.

<sup>2</sup> Detlef Kremer, "Ein allegorisches Lesezeichen des West-östlichen Divan"; in *Interpretationen: Gedichte von Johann Wolfgang Goethe* (Bernd Witte, ed.), Stuttgart, 1998, p. 219.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 218.

<sup>4</sup> Grete Schaeder, *Gott und Welt*, Hamlen, 1947, p. 353.

<sup>5</sup> Ernst Beutler (Ed.), *Goethes West-östlicher Divan*, Bremen, 1956, p. 581, cited from Boisseree's Journal entry of September 15, 1815, relating a conversation with Goethe.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> [FA I/3], p. 1194: "Denn zwar berichtet Emilie Keller, Marianne v. Willemer habe bei ihrem letzten Besuch auf dem Heidelberger Schloß im Herbst 1860 auf [die] Blätter mit den Worten gewiesen; 'Dies ist der Baum, von welchem er [Goethe] mir damals ein Blatt brachte und schenkte und mir dann das Gedicht machte und zuschickte.'"

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 1195, Italics are mine.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 1192.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone; Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.88.

<sup>13</sup> In the Chapter Orientation and in the interpretation of the opening poem of the *Divan*, *Hegire*, to be found there, I have had the opportunity to expound upon this constellation of concepts further.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. [FA I/3], p. 1196.

<sup>15</sup> Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone; Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*, p. 221.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. [FA I/3], 1197.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Ernst Beutler (Ed.), *Goethes West-östlicher Divan*, p. 580, translation and italics mine.

<sup>18</sup> Gisela Henckmann, *Gespräch und Geselligkeit in Goethes "West-östlichem Divan"*, Stuttgart, 1975, p.36.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p. 38; italics mine. The other important symbol is "Ballspiel" as in the poem "Die schön Geschriebenen": "Wenn du Suleika/ Mich überschwänglich beglückst/ Dein Leidenschaft mir zuwirfst/ Als wär's ein Ball/ Daß ich fange/ Dir zurückwerfe/ Mein gewidmetes Ich/ das ist Ein Augenblick." Cf. [FA I/3], p. 82.

<sup>20</sup> It cannot be emphasized too often that bi-unity is a fundamental structure attached to a network of mystical (as well as philosophical) ideas, putting them all into a series of homological relations. "Dialectic of Love" or "Bi-Unity of Lover/Beloved" is only one member of this constellation of ideas.

<sup>21</sup> Grete Schaeder, *Gott und Welt*, Hamlen, 1947, p. 353. Cf. also [FA I/3], p. 1197 and Detlef Kremer, "Ein allegorisches Lesezeichen des West-östlichen Divan", p. 219.

<sup>22</sup> I have closely followed Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone; Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*, pp. 136-157 in the discussion of bi-unity and dialectic of love.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. [FA I/3], p. 1195.

<sup>24</sup> Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone; Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*, p. 146, cited from Ibn 'Arabi.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. ibid., p. 139.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. ibid., pp. 3-4.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. ibid., p.144, italic mine.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. ibid., p. 144.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

- <sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 147. The passionate sigh and the hidden treasure and *unio sympathetica* are the most fundamental ideas in the Islamic mystical view of creation. We will deal with these ideas in detail in chapter 3 devoted to the interpretation of the poem *Wiederfinden* from the *West-östlicher Divan*.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 148.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 122.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 123.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 149.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp. 149- 150.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 150-151.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 152. More than once in his writings Corbin adamantly points out the incompatibility of theosophies such as Ibn ‘Arabi’s, and the particular understanding of bi-unity fundamental to them, with not only official theological doctrines (for example, the official Christian dogma of Incarnation), but also with “what is commonly called ‘monism’ in the West.” Cf. also *ibid.*, p. 153: “It is not in the realm of an already given and fixated reality that this mediating faculty [Active Imagination] brings about the theophanic union of the divine and the human and the reconciliation between the spiritual and the physical which, as we have seen, is the condition of perfect, that is to say, mystic love.”
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 157, cited from Ibn ‘Arabi.
- <sup>43</sup> Detlef Kremer, “Ein allegorisches Lesezeichen des West-östlichen Divan”, p. 218.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid., pp. 217-218.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid., p.220
- <sup>46</sup> [FA I/3], pp. 82-84.
- <sup>47</sup> [FA I/3], pp. 98-99: “Laßt's euch, o Diplomaten!/ Recht angelegen sein,/ Und eure Potentaten/ Beratet rein und fein!/ Geheimer Chiffern Sendung/ Beschäftige die Welt,/ Bis endlich jede Wendung/ Sich selbst in's Gleiche stellt!// Mir von der Herrin süße/ Die Chiffer ist zur Hand,/ Woran ich schon genieße,/ Weil sie die Kunst erfand./ Es ist die Liebesfülle/ Im lieblichsten Revier,/ Der holde, treue Wille/ Wie zwischen mir und ihr.// Von abertausend Blüten/ Ist es ein bunter Strauß,/ Von englischen Gemüthen/ Ein vollbewohntes Haus;/ Von buntesten Gefiedern/ Der Himmel übersät,/ Ein klingend Meer von Liedern,/ Geruchvoll überweht.// Ist unbedingten Strebens/ Geheime Doppelschrift,/ Die in das Mark des Lebens/ Wie Pfeil um Pfeile trifft./ Was ich euch offenbaret,/ War längst ein frommer Brauch,/ Und wenn ihr es gewahret,/ So schweigt und nutzt es auch.”
- <sup>48</sup> Detlef Kremer “Ein allegorisches Lesezeichen des West-östlichen Divan“, 1998, p. 221; Cf. the last stanza of *Geheimschrift*, note 47.
- <sup>49</sup> This judgment is of course valid as regards the entire *Divan* and its general allegorical style of poetry, Hermann August Korff, *Geist der Goethezeit*, Vol IV, Leipzig, 1955. Cf. Also the introduction to this work as well as Chapter 5 on *Selige Sehnsucht*.
- <sup>50</sup> Detlef Kremer “Ein allegorisches Lesezeichen des West-östlichen Divan“, 1998, p. 221.
- <sup>51</sup> The relevant meaning of the word in Persian is simply the collection of one’s poems.
- <sup>52</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 227; here the script is clearly a composite of speech and letter, akin, as Kremer points out, to a cabbalistic conception of *Ursprache*.
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid., pp. 227-228.
- <sup>55</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 228.
- <sup>56</sup> [FA I/3] p. 1192.
- <sup>57</sup> Ernst Beutler (Ed.), *Goethes West-östlicher Divan*, pp. 581-582.
- <sup>58</sup> Detlef Kremer “Ein allegorisches Lesezeichen des West-östlichen Divan”; p. 219.
- <sup>59</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 224.
- <sup>60</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, cited from Hamburger Ausgabe 12, p. 471.
- <sup>61</sup> Ibid., pp. 224-225.
- <sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 225.
- <sup>63</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>64</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>65</sup> Ibid., pp. 225-226.

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<sup>66</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, Frankfurt am Main, 1970, p. 476.

<sup>67</sup> Henry Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, Princeton, 1990, p. 30.

<sup>68</sup> “Buch Suleika”, [FA I/3], p. 76.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone; Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn ‘Arabi*, p. 14.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>71</sup> *Maximen und Reflexionen*, Frankfurter Ausgabe, [FA I/13], p. 49.

## CHAPTER THREE

# Sigh of Creation

Creator of heavens and the earth! When He  
decrees a thing, He but says 'Be' and it is.

The Qur'an, 2:17

Thus everything is contained in the bosom  
of the Breath, just as the bright light is in  
the very darkness before dawn.

Ibn 'Arabi – *Fusus al-Hikam* (The Bezels  
Of Wisdom)<sup>1</sup>

### Wiederfinden

Ist es möglich! Stern der Sterne,  
Drück' ich wieder dich ans Herz!  
Ach, was ist die Nacht der Ferne  
Für ein Abgrund, für ein Schmerz!  
Ja, du bist es! meiner Freuden  
Süßer, lieber Widerpart;  
Eingedenk vergangner Leiden  
Schaudr' ich vor der Gegenwart.

Als die Welt im tiefsten Grunde  
Lag an Gottes ew'ger Brust,  
Ordnet' er die erste Stunde  
Mit erhabner Schöpfungslust  
Und er sprach das Wort: "Es werde!"  
Da erklang ein schmerzlich Ach!  
Als das All mit Machtgebärde  
In die Wirklichkeiten brach.

Auf tat sich das Licht: so trennte  
Scheu sich Finsternis von ihm,  
Und sogleich die Elemente  
Scheidend auseinander fliehn  
Rasch, in wilden wüsten Träumen  
Jedes nach der Weite rang,  
Starr, in ungemessenen Räumen,  
Ohne Sehnsucht, ohne Klang.

Stumm war alles, still und öde,  
Einsam Gott zum erstenmal!  
Da erschuf er Morgenröte,  
Die erbarmte sich der Qual;

Sie entwickelte dem Trüben  
Ein erklingend Farbenspiel,  
Und nun konnte wieder lieben  
Was erst auseinander fiel.

Und mit eiligem Bestreben  
Sucht sich was sich angehört;  
Und zu ungemeßnem Leben  
Ist Gefühl und Blick gekehrt.  
Sei's Ergreifen, sei es Raffen,  
Wenn es nur sich faßt und hält!  
Allah braucht nicht mehr zu schaffen,  
Wir erschaffen seine Welt.

So, mit morgenroten Flügeln,  
Riß es mich an deinen Mund,  
Und die Nacht mit tausend Siegeln  
Kräftigt sternenhell den Bund.  
Beide sind wir auf der Erde  
Musterhaft in Freud und Qual,  
Und ein zweites Wort: "Es werde!"  
Trennt uns nicht zum zweitenmal.

"Is it possible!" Not a question, but an ecstatic exclamation, an expression of disbelief. With full orchestration - to use Emil Staiger's words - the celebration of the unexpected reunion with the beloved is set off.<sup>2</sup> Yes, it is she ("it is you!"), Marianne/Suleika, Goethe's "sweet, lovely partner" in "joy", who has returned.<sup>3</sup> And "pressing her to his heart", "remembering past sufferings", the "pain" and the "abyss" of "the night of separation", and at this "present" moment of finding the beloved again, he shudders at her presence. A passionate opening with all requisite elements neatly put into classical simultaneities of the poetic depiction of the moment of reunion after a period of separation: present versus past, distance versus. proximity, joy versus suffering, not to mention the well-known

rhyiming pairs such as “Schmerz” and “Herz.” After this passionate opening, as Staiger observes:

[E]rwartet man ein ganz anders Gedicht. Zum mindesten sollte man meinen, daß Goethe, nach seiner gewohnten Art, für einen sanfteren Übergang besorgt sei. Er scheint es aber eilig zu haben und der Geliebten nicht rasch genug den Schöpfungsmythus, der sich ihm aufdrängt, mitteilen zu können.<sup>4</sup>

We will later have the opportunity to discuss this abrupt move as essential to the poem and in connection with its “Handlung”, which has been identified as “ein Augenblick der Schöpfung.”<sup>5</sup>

In her study of *Wiederfinden* in the context of light and color motifs in the *Divan*, Edith Ihekweazu interprets the exclamation in the first line of the poem as not just an emphatic, passionately moved opening, but as a highly significant one which prepares for the “scheinbar so unmittelbaren Sprung zur Kosmogonie in der nächsten Strophe.”<sup>6</sup> Recalling, moreover, the last two lines of “Lesebuch” from “Buch der Liebe,” of the *Divan*:

Unauflösliches wer löst es?  
Liebende sich wieder findend,

she writes: “In dem Ausruf zeigt sich das Staunen von der Lösung des ‘Unauflöslichen’, die nur im Erlebnis des Augenblicks möglich ist.”<sup>7</sup> The moment of the lover finding the beloved again, and the portrayal of the passionate relationship between the two in the framing stanzas, are thus put into immediate identification - into an analogical relation - with the “moment of creation” and with the cosmogony developed in the four central stanzas of the poem.

Ernst Beutler, clearly privileging Goethe’s religious tendencies in the composition of the *Divan* and its love poetry - that is to say, the *Divan* after and

under the influence of the event of meeting Marianne - over and against its earthly aspects, writes:

Dann begegnet Goethe Marianne, Marianne wird Suleika. Aber wiederum wird dadurch die religiöse Tendenz der Dichtung nicht zugunsten der irdischen verdrängt, sondern umgekehrt, wie im *Faust*, wird die Liebe in die Metaphysik hinaufgesteigert. Das geschieht im *Divan* am offenbarsten im "Buch des Paradieses" und im "Buch Suleika" in dem Gedicht "Wiederfinden."<sup>8</sup>

The same strict ordering of earthly/metaphysical echoes in Beutler's reading of the form of address "Stern der Sterne"; here the beloved is "allem Irdischen enthoben." Moreover, "Himmel" has thus become the scene of the poem.<sup>9</sup>

Stating the apparently opposing view, that is, we are dealing here with the "passionate presence, completely on Earth", Ihekweazu writes:

Zum Wesen des Symbolischen gehört es, daß ein Gegenstand ohne seine konkrete, irdische Bedeutung zu verlieren, ohne aufzuhören, er selbst zu sein, zugleich dem 'Himmel' angehört, auf höhere Verhältnisse verweist. [...] 'Stern der Sterne' ist nicht nur die individuelle irdische Geliebte Suleika, die in leidenschaftlichem Überschwang verherrlicht wird, sondern auch die 'ewige Geliebte', der Prototyp der Schönheit, die in ihr erscheint.<sup>10</sup>

This latter view, though not arrived at from specifically mystical perspective, is fully in tune with the spirit that informs our analysis of the phenomenon of love and its symbolics in the *Divan* in general, and in *Wiederfinden* in particular.

In the chapter "Bi-Unity and Dialectic of Love", I tried to show that from the standpoint of Islamic mysticism, the passionate human love need not and cannot be sublated – if by sublation we mean sublimation – onto the metaphysical divine love, thereby reduced to a mere metaphor for it. The homological relation between the two, that is, the bi-unitary structure fundamental to both, is infinitely more than a casual and contingent common feature; it produces a symbol with the

full mystical archetypal force of the term. The high degree of entanglement - to the point of so-called undecidability - of human/divine love imagery in the poems of the great masters of Sufi Persian poetry, just as in Goethe's *Divan*, is, to use the Scholastics' terms, not accidental but of the essence. Divine love can be neither conceived, nor perceived, nor experienced, nor represented in the absence of human love.

As already noted, on the ambiguity intended in the use of the idea of love in Persian Sufi poetry Annemarie Schimmel has written:

It seems futile [...] to look for either a purely mystical or a purely profane interpretation of the poems of Hafiz, Jami, or Iraqi—their ambiguity is intended, the oscillation between the two levels of being is consciously maintained (sometimes even a third level may be added), and the texture and flavor of the meaning of a word may change at any moment, much as the color of the tiles in a Persian mosque varies in depth according to the hour of the day.<sup>11</sup>

The relation between human love and divine love is that between macrocosm and microcosm. Perhaps this relation can be best described as the relation of manifestation and revelation, an idea whose principle is formulated in Islamic mysticism - be it in Ibn 'Arabi or in Suhrawardi's "Philosophy of Illumination" - through the notion "Light."

In the sections "Der Bildbereich von Licht und Feuer" and "Der Bildbereich der Farbe" of her book *Goethes West-östlicher Divan: Untersuchungen zur Struktur des Lyrischen Zyklus*, Edith Ihekweazu has studied the motifs of light and color in the *Divan* and in the poem *Wiederfinden*.<sup>12</sup> Light, she claims, is in the *Divan* the privileged symbol for the abstract notion of "purity" and its closest concretization.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, Light carries with it another



crucial aspect, the aspect of Truth, Logos. Darkness frequently appears in the *Divan* as “Unwissenheit.” The opposition of the dark night and light is simultaneously the opposition of concealment and revelation of God.<sup>14</sup> Night also symbolizes, especially in “Buch Suleika”, the remoteness from the beloved,<sup>15</sup> although - as we will see in the case of *Wiederfinden*- it also carries in love the seed of light, and as such, is not always the absolute negative.<sup>16</sup> Light is, therefore, the prime concentration point where different conceptual and abstract formulations of the “highest,” as “purity”, as “truth” and as “love,” assume one and the same image.

Unlike the sun whose effect is experienced in the immediacy of illumination and warmth, stars are only to be contemplated from a distance and the intellectual experience of them outweighs the sensory experience.<sup>17</sup> They are the static symbol of the cosmic order, immune to the constant changes of the earthly existence. They appear in the *Divan* primarily as the image of love and of the poetry in which love is sublimated, as of the reflection of “göttliche Gesetzmäßigkeit und Weltordnung.”<sup>18</sup> They appear distant and unreachable, and not the force behind an immediately effective dynamic:

[I]n dieser Enthobenheit aus dem Irdischen garantieren sie zugleich Objektivität und Gültigkeit, sind entgegen dem augenblicklichen Aufblitzen des Schönen im irdischen Bereich dauernd anschauliches Abbild der kosmischen Ordnung, die der göttlichen Liebe entstammt. In diesem Sinne können sie auch als Garanten der Möglichkeit der Liebe innerhalb des Irdischen gedeutet werden, wie es in “Wiederfinden” geschieht.<sup>19</sup>

Regressing back- so it seems - to the sublimation of earthly love in poetry and divine love, introducing the beloved as paradigm of the unreachable divine and

the poem as embodiment of love in the symbol of “Sternenhimmel”, Ihekweazu reads the address “Stern der Sterne” as the hyperbolic naming of the beloved.<sup>20</sup> The rhyming pair “Sterne-Ferne” (verses 1 and 3) also serves for her as evidence that the pure and transfigured character of the star and, presumably, of the beloved, is conditional on its removal from the earthly and the corporeal.<sup>21</sup> But recalling the discussion on the “pole of orientation” in Chapter 1, I must make the remark, that “Stern der Sterne” is not simply a hyperbolic evocation of the beloved, but an exact description of her role as mediator between the earthly and the divine. She is the polar star, the point of orientation in the heavens and that exact point that mediates between Heaven and Earth. As such, she is the “star” of “stars”, rendering the latter perceptible in the human significance of their cosmic function, and thus offering, in that firmament in which humans traditionally seek their cosmic orientation, much like the Polar Star the fixed and unshakeable point through which to achieve that orientation.

The night of separation, however, is simultaneously the image of the pain of the beloved’s absence, and the condition of her re-appearance. The beloved’s being a star is the cause for separation and regained intimacy. The pain of separation and the joy of the embrace come together are thus conjoined. Night is then identified with another spatial metaphor, that is, the abyss, and also with the notion of pain. Night remains the dominating metaphor in this constellation.<sup>22</sup> In verses 5 and 6, the lover ascertains once again that the star is indeed his beloved, and through the realization of her presence, pain transforms into joy. The conscious simultaneity of suffering and joy in the present moment brings about

the feeling of shuddering. In the moment of reunion, the poet experiences the mediation between the unreachably remote Heaven and the earthly region of night and pain:

Damit ist das kosmische Bild der folgenden Strophen vorbereitet, die Vereinigung der Liebenden in der Trennung findet ihr Analogon im Wiederfinden von Licht und Finsternis, die nicht einander verdrängen, sondern sich in gleichzeitiger Präsenz in einem Dritten vereinigen, ohne miteinander zu verschmelzen.<sup>23</sup>

Hence it is to the “Eins und doppelt,” - and not to a full unity – that the reunion leads, a reunion arising from separation and carrying it potentially within itself.<sup>24</sup>

Ihekweazu characterizes the cosmogony developed in the four central stanzas as a “Mythos der Vermittlung.” In this myth the emphasis is placed not so much on the “Ursprung” of the world as on its “Belebung,” established through two acts of creation: the destruction of a stable “Ureinheit,” leading to a chaotic multiplicity, and the emergence of a living-harmonic diversity as unity within multiplicity through mediation.<sup>25</sup>

The original unity is the complete unity of God and World. The world is still “im tiefsten Grunde... an Gottes ew’ger Brust.” In the first act of creation, God destroys this unity and creates in its stead the God/World duality. “Das All” is broken into “Wirklichkeiten,” and on place of the “one Idea” steps the unordered multiplicity of realities.<sup>26</sup> The sublime creating desire pronounces, in a gesture of Power, the word: “Es werde!” and the isolation of the particular elements thus ensues:

Das “schmerzlich Ach!” ist der letzte Ton des “Alls” im Augenblick des Zerbrechens; die neu entstehenden Wirklichkeiten können schon keinen Schmerz mehr über den Verlust der Einheit

empfinden, sie streben mit selbstherrlicher “Machtgebärde”  
auseinander.<sup>27</sup>

The third stanza proposes the separation of light and darkness as representative of the “Urwiespalt” of God and the world. Next, the elements separate and flee from each other. This separation takes place without consciousness, “in wilden wüsten Träumen,” and with the great dynamic of “zentrifugale Bewegung ins Unermeßliche.”<sup>28</sup>

The creation of time brings about the extension in space. But these are not yet taken as “Ordnungskategorien”: the velocity of the motion corresponds to the immeasurability of space. Lifeless elements dissipate and isolate themselves from each other “with no longing and no sound”, that is, without harmonic unification, and without mediation over separation.<sup>29</sup>

Longing and sound anticipate the second act of Creation in which God completes his work. The fourth stanza begins with summarizing the first act: the world is mute and barren. God is standing before nothingness and is for the first time lonely. Now the cosmogony is set in motion with full force again. Just as the separation began from God, the “Wiederfinden” must also find its place here. Just as the first visible manifestation of separation was that between light and darkness as “Urphänomenen des Irdischen”, the second act of creation, the mediation, also begins here. The longing of God for the world, his solitude, expresses itself in the creation of *Aurora*, in the sign of reconciliation with the world, in the visible mediation of heaven and earth:

Mit diesem Schöpfungsakt läßt Gott aus dem Dualismus von Licht  
und Finsternis Polarität entstehen, Licht und Finsternis fliehen

nicht mehr auseinander, sondern vereinigen sich miteinander in der Farbe.<sup>30</sup>

The “Morgenröte” is thus, as a natural phenomenon of the mediation between light and darkness, identified as the symbol of divine love, a point of contact between God and the world, these two being not in strict duality anymore, but in a relation of bipolarity. Now taking pity on the agony of separation, the “Morgenröte” assumes creative activity and continues its mediation further in a harmonic multiplicity of sounds and colors.<sup>31</sup> The cloudy and dim elements that had once, upon the separation of light and darkness, fallen apart without longing and sound, are now brought back together, rendered capable of loving each other. The “erklingendes Farbenspiel” is the multitudinous appearance of the Urphenomenon of polarity in the chromatic and sonorous fields. Color and sound are the models of the universal expansion of the mediation affected by God.<sup>32</sup>

The various and intensive strivings of “was sich angehört” towards each other form a poetic parallel, in the fifth stanza, with the corresponding centrifugal movements in the third stanza. The “ungemeßenes Leben” corresponds to the “ungemeßenen Räumen.” And the “Gefühl und Blick,” with which the elements turn to each other, correspond to their “wilden wüsten Träumen,” in which they once turned away from each other. Love and creation are thus clearly identical events. Here, creation is not producing something out of nothingness, but rather brings together and to life and sound that which was isolated, lifeless and mute; this is the contribution of each element to the “Gesamtschöpfung” by joining its “Widerpart” in love, by becoming whole<sup>33</sup>:

Indem die durch Vermittlung der göttlichen Liebe zur Liebe untereinander befähigten Geschöpfe einander “ergreifen” und “raffen”, schaffen sie die Welt als Kosmos, als Zusammenhang dessen, “was sich angehört”. Das göttliche Wirken ist in diesem Vorgang gegenwärtig, jede Liebe zwischen einzelnen Individuen vollzieht sich nach dem Muster der göttlichen Liebe.<sup>34</sup>

We are thus back from a cosmic past to the present moment, to the moment of encounter between the lover and his beloved, to the “Wiederfinden.” With this love Creation has come to its culmination, to its end: invoking the name of God, the lovers set to continue the work of divine creation. But before this name is invoked, we interrupt the story to tell it once again, this time from the perspective of speculative mysticism.

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*Allah is the light of heavens and the earth. His light is a niche wherein is a lamp within a crystal of a star-like brilliance, kindled from a blessed Tree, an olive that is neither from the East nor from the West whose oil well nigh would shine, even if no fire touched it; **Light upon Light**; Allah guides to His light whom He will...*

The Qur'an 24:35

God's Light as Light upon Light, as Light of Lights.

Let us, then, make allowance for another level of interpretation for the form of address “Stern der Sterne”: one definitely above and beyond the identification of the earthly beloved and the divine beloved by way of a metaphysical sublimation, and much more in line with the symbolical/mystical identity of the two through the “principle of manifestation.” This will bring us to the story of Creation as the account of the different stages of God's self-revelation, and to a central theme of Islamic mysticism, that is, the theme of the

“hidden treasure,” which yearns to be discovered. This will give us, in turn, the opportunity to approach the question of the real nature of God’s “Schöpfungslust”, the teleological question of why God would wish to create a world, split the Ur-Einheit, and subject his creation to the pain of separation. Is the painful sigh (schmerzliches Ach) issued from the created beings at the moment of separation, or is it the sound of the breath relieving God’s bosom from its own inner tension? Is there not reverberating through all of this the absolute’s love for itself, its mercy upon itself?

It is also here, that is, in “Creation as God’s self-manifestation” and the corresponding “symbolism of light,” that the two main strands of Islamic theosophy, Ibn ‘Arabi’s *Transcendental Unity of Being* and Suhravardi’s *Philosophy of Illumination* come to a perfect convergence. According to the former, the “various stages of being are nothing other than so many self-manifestations of the Absolute”, and therefore, “the whole world, ranging from Mystery of mysteries to material things, is ultimately and metaphysically one.”<sup>35</sup> The latter, on the other hand,

establishes, in place of ‘existence’, as something really ‘real’ the spiritual Light which is one and single reality having an infinite number of degrees and stages in terms of intensity and weakness, the highest being the Light of all lights and the lowest being Darkness.<sup>36</sup>

We have already noticed the homology between the two terms: Mystery of mysteries and Light of lights. For both theosophists, this designates the aspect of existence/light in its absoluteness, in its being existence/light pure and simple, One and not Many, beyond any possible manifestation, not even in the highest

state of mystical experience. However, at the same time, this Light of lights is the one and only condition of the possibility of all manifestations; a dark night, a black light, which makes all manifestations possible and in fact necessary, an invisible light which *brings about vision*. Manifestation of nothing in any particularity at all, but of manifestation itself, the very principle of manifestation:

The darkness above is the blackness of the stratosphere, of stellar space, of the black sky. In mystical terms, it corresponds to the light of the divine Self in-itself, the black light of *Deus absconditus*, the hidden treasure that aspires to reveal itself, “to create perception in order to reveal to itself the object of its perception,” and which thus can only manifest itself by veiling itself in the object state. [...] [This] black light is that of the divine Ipseity as the light of Revelation, which *makes one see*. Precisely what *makes one see*, that is to say, light as absolute *subject*, can in no wise become a visible *object*. It is in this sense that the Light of Lights, that by which all visible lights are made visible, is both light and darkness, that is, visible because it *brings about vision*, but in itself invisible.<sup>37</sup>

Thus the absolute in the state of unconditional transcendence, at the level of absolute unity, without a shadow of multiplicity, is beyond any manifestation; “The absolute Reality *in itself* remains for ever a ‘hidden treasure’, hidden in its own divine isolation.”<sup>38</sup> Manifestation is only expected of it in so far as it is the very source of manifestation which has not yet begun. It is extremely important to bear in mind that in the invocation of the name *Allah*, just as in the “Stern der Sterne” of *Wiederfinden*, we are already facing the absolute, strictly speaking, not in its aspect of transcendence, but in its aspect of self-revelation. For the absolute in itself is *unnamable*. And “even God cannot describe Himself *in words* without delimiting Himself.”<sup>39</sup>

Properly speaking, in the name of *Allah* we should see the self-manifestation (*tajalli*) of [the] Mystery already at work, although,



to be sure, it is the very first beginning of the process and is, in comparison with its remaining levels of *tajalli*, the highest and the most perfect form assumed by the Mystery as it steps out of its abysmal darkness.<sup>40</sup>

We are, therefore, at the moment (Augenblick) of the re-appearance of the beloved like the star of stars, in and after the dark night of abyss, separation and pain, standing before the pre-eternal moment of the divine self-revelation, at the sight of the absolute stepping out of darkness; Creation proper starts here. It is, therefore, not by way of preparation, as Ihekweazu states, and still less through a rushed and hurried move uncharacteristic of the poet, as Staiger claims, that the first stanza leads to the second. The instantaneity and simultaneity of the sequence of images is inherent - and corresponds - to the atemporality of the pre-eternal divine self-manifestation.

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*I was a hidden Treasure, and I desired (ahbabbtu, 'loved') to be known. So I created the creatures and thereby made Myself known to them. And they did come to know Me."*

This *Hadith Qudsi* or sacred saying<sup>41</sup> is the cornerstone of all accounts of Creation in Islamic mysticism. The mystics never tire of meditating on its secret meanings, for the saying at once refers to the Absolute in its aspect of Transcendence and Unknowability, and to its aspect of self-manifestation.

The technical terms for these two aspects, common among traditional theologians and the mystics, are "*tanzih*" and "*tashbih*." The former is an assertion of divine transcendence "by declaring God", according to the literal meaning of the word, "absolutely free of all imperfections, that is, from all qualities that resemble those of creatures even in the slightest degree."<sup>42</sup> The

latter, on the other hand, means “to liken God to created things.”<sup>43</sup> In traditional theology, the two concepts are radically irreconcilable, for the simple reason that *tashbih* tends to become a crude anthropomorphism. But according to the mystics, a radical *tanzih* too, in purifying the absolute to such an extent as to reducing it to something having nothing at all to do with the world of the created and of its creatures, is another way of falsely delimiting divine existence. Therefore, “any religious belief based exclusively on *tanzih* is essentially imperfect.”<sup>44</sup> The perfect mystical attitude toward the absolute is, then, the combination of both *tanzih* and *tashbih*, although

[E]ven the combination of the two cannot be perfect [...], for delimitations will remain delimitations in whatever way one combines them. But by combining these two delimitations which of all delimitations are the most fundamental and most comprehensive in regard to the Absolute, one approaches the latter to the utmost extent that is humanly possible.<sup>45</sup>

Later, in interpreting the last stanza of *Wiederfinden*, I will return to the above *Hadith Qudsi*, and, by placing the emphasis on the interrelated notions of love, sympathy and bi-unity - notions that help us to much better understand the juxtaposition of the account of the lovers’ reunion with the story of Creation – will have occasion to discuss it in rather more detail. But I will first take a closer look at the *Hadith* as it bears a direct relation to the story of Creation according to Islamic mysticism. The fundamental mystical notion here is that of divine mercy, or *rahmah*. The ordinary denotation of the word signifies an emotive attitude, that is, the attitude of compassion and benevolence. For the mystic, however, divine mercy is primarily the act of making things exist; it is the bestowal of existence. In other words, divine mercy is nothing other than the self-manifestation of the

divine through the act of Creation itself. Further, if the name of God, Allah, is itself an act of divine mercy, the aspect of the eternal and boundless divine in its temporal manifestation, then God, or Allah, cannot be properly and fully invoked without restaging that act of Creation: and this is indeed what we see happening in Goethe's poem.

Let us recall that in the opening verse of the Quran, which is also the opening verse of all but one of its chapters, "In the Name of God, the *Compassionate (Rahman)*, the *Merciful (rahim)*," both attributive words have the same root, that is, *rahmah*. In particular, the first of these two derivations, *Rahman*, refers to the merciful in relation to all and everything upon which the merciful has indiscriminately bestowed the gift of existence. This aspect of mercy is consequently called 'Mercy of gratuitous gift.'<sup>46</sup> Ibn 'Arabi writes:

God has put the 'Mercy of gratuitous gift' above all restrictions when He declares: 'My Mercy covers everything' (7:156). So it covers even the Divine Names, i.e., the realities of all relative determinations (of the Divine Essence). God has shown 'Mercy of gratuitous gift' to the Names by (very act of bestowing existence to) us (i.e., the world).<sup>47</sup>

The mystic's answer to the question of how mercy comes to issue forth from the absolute, that is, how the absolute manifests itself through the bestowal of existence, is that God 'breathes out' existence, exhales, as it were, the created. In the strong image of the air compressed in the chest causing unbearable pain and its gushing forth in violent outburst of a breath, we see the full force of the extreme inner tension released in the act of creation. Because of an excessive amount of things accumulated inside and in order to relieve itself of the unbearable tension,

the absolute breathes out. The breath is attributed to the Merciful (and called the ‘breath of the Merciful’, [*al-nafas al-rahmaniya*]) because the (Absolute under the Name) of Merciful shows Mercy by means of this breath toward the Divine Relations (i.e., the Names) and responds to their demand that the forms of the world be brought into existence.<sup>48</sup>

It cannot be stressed enough that the image of the breath is not a haphazard metaphor; it is an essential one and in fact, must be understood as a symbol in the mystical sense. As an ontological phenomenon it coincides with the physiological phenomenon of human breathing and shares its basic characteristic attributes.<sup>49</sup>

Finally, with this sigh of creation comes a word, the divine command.

Citing Bali Efendi, an interpreter of Ibn ‘Arabi, Izutsu writes:

[The] phenomenon of Divine ‘breathing’ is the same as God’s uttering the word ‘Be!’ (*kun*) to the world. ‘He breathed out’ means ‘He sent out what was in His Interior to the Exterior by means of the word Be. Thus He Himself, after having been in the Interior, has come to exist in the Exterior.’<sup>50</sup>

From the mystical point of view, then, God’s “Schöpfungslust,” the word “Es werde!,” and above all, “das schmerzlich Ach” upon which “das All” scattered “in die Wirklichkeiten” after being until then “im tiefsten Grunde/ ... an Gottes ew’ger Brust,” are not (just) signs of God’s mercy and love for the created world, not (just) the cause and the expression of the pain of separation, but first and foremost the absolute’s mercy upon itself, its inevitable way of relieving its own bosom from its excruciating inner tension.

The idea of Creation as God’s self-manifestation was present in Goethe’s mind even before the *Divan*. Commenting on the second stanza of *Wiederfinden*, Hendrik Birus introduces the story of Creation in the poem as a “variant of the

Neoplatonic-Kabbalistic cosmogony of the young Goethe”, and cites the evidence from *Dichtung und Wahrheit*:

Ich mochte mir wohl eine Gottheit vorstellen, die sich von Ewigkeit her selbst produziert; da sich aber Produktion nicht ohne Mannigfaltigkeit denken läßt, so mußte sie sich notwendig sogleich als ein Zweites erscheinen, welches wir unter dem Namen des Sohns anerkennen.<sup>51</sup>

Before going further, let us mention in passing that in one of his late poems, *Gott, Gemüt, Welt*, Goethe expresses similar anti-transcendentalist and immanentist viewpoint:

Was wär ein Gott, der nur von außen stieße,  
Im Kreis das All am Finger laufen ließe!  
Ihm ziemt's, die Welt im Innern zu bewegen,  
Natur in Sich, Sich in Natur zu hegen,  
So daß, was in Ihm lebt und webt und ist,  
Nie Seine Kraft, nie Seinen Geist vermißt.<sup>52</sup>

According to Birus, what in contrast to Goethe's early cosmogony is missing in *Wiederfinden*, is the “concentration” of Creation, following the creation and the fall of Lucifer, this concentration also being the pre-condition of the eventual expansion of Creation.<sup>53</sup> The disparity between these two accounts signals, in my opinion, a turn toward a conception of Creation much more in tune with the mystical interpretation outlined here. The concentration of Creation is a primordial and pre-eternal one within the bosom of the divine itself.

Correspondingly, it is the divine night, the abscondity of the essence, and not the darkness here below, that causes the light to be revealed. Ahrimanian darkness is this darkness here below, the darkness of matter, and it only *later* seeks to engulf the epiphanies of light.<sup>54</sup>

In this precise sense, then, light creates darkness. And that is another way of saying that that which reveals, conceals at the same time. Light brings shadows and veils into being:

[T]he things of this world, both material and non-material, are, on the one hand, so many forms of the Divine self- manifestation, but on the other hand, they act exactly as veils hindering a (complete) self-manifestation of God. They cover up God and do not allow man to see Him directly.<sup>55</sup>

That is to say, the Created, as emanating from the Creator, reveals the absolute as much as it, through its very contingent and temporal nature, obscures it. Similarly, darkness as part of Creation is no longer that darkness preceding Creation, but darkness now as part of the dialectic of the Created, and therefore of darkness and light. Light rises and darkness timidly separates itself from it. This darkness is thus not a primordial and pre-existing darkness. It is the darkness coming into being, simultaneously accompanying and distinguishing itself from light in the act of revelation, in the phenomenal world. Here the phenomenal world should be understood as nothing more or less than the world of all of God's self- manifestations, whether sensible and phenomenal in the narrow sense of the word, or invisible and spiritual. Nature, too, is primarily understood not as the material sensible nature, but as the entirety of God's creation.

And it is with this image, the rising light and the separation of darkness, in the first two verses of the third stanza of the poem, that the story of Creation - so far told only in its barest outlines - is re-told in the loving and comprehensive detail of its total manifestation. Stanzas 3, 4, and 5 are the story of the creation of nature in this general sense, starting from the very first divine manifestation, the

rising light, going through the creation of the phenomenal nature, “Morgenröte,” ending and culminating in the creation of man, the microcosm and God’s own likeness, who continues the work of divine creation.

In the ontological scheme of Ibn ‘Arabi, there are three categories of Being. On the one extreme there is Being *qua* Being, the absolute in its pure unity, and on the other, the world of concrete beings of the sensible world. There is, however, an intermediary world, which is the world of the so-called “permanent archetypes” or “eternal hexeities”<sup>56</sup> (‘*ayan thabitiyah*). These are the ‘essence’, the ‘spirit’, the ‘inward’ aspect of the concrete existences in which the absolute manifests itself. The archetypes are the index of the existences’ ‘preparedness for coming into being.” From the perspective of the concept of divine mercy, they correspond to the appearance of mercy, in that in them divine attributes or names are objectified, become things. From the perspective of different stages of divine self-manifestation (*tajalli*), these archetypes bring us one step closer to the external world of sensible experience. They are the results of the first light, the first holy emanation.<sup>57</sup> At the stage of these archetypes, therefore, the divine self-manifestation is still not an external manifestation. It is still within the realm of the unseen. But the unseen is “no longer a primordial state of total indiscrimination, because the essential forms of the things are already clearly discernible.”<sup>58</sup> It is only in the third stage of the appearance of divine mercy, or the divine self-manifestation, that the individual things come to be concrete actualization as divine attributes. In this sense, the world of archetypes is the self-manifestation of the absolute to *itself*, the appearance of the

form of all the possible existents, *in potentia*, in the absolute's consciousness.<sup>59</sup>

This potentiality means that the consciousness of the absolute is split into plurality, but as an event occurring only in the state of possibility. In other words,

the first self-manifestation of the Absolute brings into being the permanent archetypes which are the self-manifesting forms of the Divine Names, i.e. are the ontological possibilities contained in the Absolute. These archetypes are 'recipients' waiting for concrete existentialisation.<sup>60</sup>

The unity of the absolute, therefore, is not yet actually split into many. A shadowy and potential multiplicity has, however, appeared in the original unity. The archetypes are the place where the shadow of the absolute is cast, but it is in the moment that the shadow is cast on them, Creation has begun, because although they are not the 'world', they are the 'locus of the appearance of the world.'<sup>61</sup>

[A]rchetypal essences [...] are not luminous by themselves. (They are not luminous) because they are non-existent (*ma'dum*). True, they do possess an ontological status intermediary between sheer non-existence and pure existence but they do not possess Being by themselves, because Being is Light.<sup>62</sup>

Nonetheless, it is extremely important to remind ourselves again, that

"theologically," the archetypes are "*realities* in the Knowledge of God, i.e., intelligibles existing permanently and eternally in the Divine Consciousness alone."<sup>63</sup> In this, they are clearly akin to the ideas / universals of Plato, with the crucial difference, of course, that in Ibn 'Arabi's view

[A]ll individual existents are nothing other than Universals. And yet Universals in themselves never cease to be pure intelligibles. Thus they are 'exterior' in respect to their being concrete existents, but 'interior' in respect to their being intelligible.<sup>64</sup>



Thus, as the content of the consciousness of God, the archetypes not only exist, they are far more real than what one usually calls the real world, and therefore, part of nature as the entirety of Creation and as the ‘breath of the Merciful’:

[I]n reality, Nature is no other than ‘breath of the Merciful’. All the forms of the world become manifest in the latter, ranging from the highest forms to the lowest, in virtue of the ‘breath’ through the material substance in the world of physical bodies in particular.<sup>65</sup>

It is also important to remark that between the first stage of the divine self-manifestation, that is, in the world of the permanent archetypes, and its second stage, that is, in the actualization of the divine names and attributes in the phenomenal world, there is no relation of priority and posteriority. Both natures occur at one and the same time and perfectly mirror each other.<sup>66</sup>

I would now like to suggest a reading of the stanzas 3, 4 and 5 of *Wiederfinden* and its story of Creation as different stages of absolute’s self-manifestation in this Nature, starting from the world of permanent archetypes, going through the creation of the humanly perceptible nature and ending in its final act, the creation of mankind.<sup>67</sup> These stages, once again, are not to be understood as forming a chronological and temporal order. Creation is both “at once” and “perpetual.” Properly speaking, temporality (and spatiality) comes into being together with physical, visible nature. Therefore, all references to these notions prior to the creation of this (second) nature, signaled by the appearance of *Morgenröte*, are to be understood themselves as instances of time and space as archetypes.

The “wild and chaotic dreams,” in the immeasurable space of which “the elements escape each other hurriedly and without longing and sound,” are God’s

own. In the Absolute's pluralized Consciousness, albeit *in potentia*, every archetype is "essentially independent" of all others:

[...] Nature itself tends by essence to be split into opposed poles. And the essential opposition among the Divine Names, i.e., the Divine Relations, has been caused only by the 'breath of the Merciful'. Do you not see even in the Divine Essence which is in itself completely free from such a property (i.e., polarization) there appear (at the level of the Divine Names [archetypes]) the definite property of essential independence?<sup>68</sup>

In the potentiality of the world of archetypes, in the incompleteness of the act of creation, all is still quiet and barren. There is stillness because there is no perception yet, there is no one to hear. And the unknown God, the hidden treasure which has not yet found its partner, the one who can come to know it, is therefore lonely. This is what is termed in Islamic theosophy the "pathetic God": the God who experienced pain at the lack of the Created, and who later experiences pain at the lack of the Created's unity with him. Therefore, he creates, through Genesis, an initial disunity within himself, a disunity which in the further history of Creation, is then to be overcome. In a certain sense, Creation may be likened to a mirror which the Absolute created in order to regard itself, but a mirror through which the Created, not least through human consciousness, also returns that divine gaze, and regards the Creator. In this way, Creation may be termed the other of the Creator, and the returned gaze of Creation the moment when disunity is once more overcome: in a final moment, as we shall see, erotic love being the moment when humans are potentially closest to the divine, and closest to overcoming, and enacting the overcoming, on the human plane, and thus the plane of earthly manifestation, of all cosmic disunity.

It is therefore only in the completion of Creation, that is, in creating visible and perceptible nature, that all comes back together. In creating “Morgenröte,” in this single most paradigmatic symbol of the East, God signals the beginning of the last stage of Creation. Day symbolizes *tashbih* and night symbolizes *tanzih*; in the meeting of point of the two, the absolute manifests itself both in its invisible and in its visible aspects<sup>69</sup>; the phenomenal world is born, conditions of perception have been provided. And now polarities can be resolved, though not in the form of an original and lost unity, but in their phenomenal multiplicity. Those who belong to each other seek each other. Life becomes vast and feeling and sight returns to it. The curtain is drawn, the stage is set for the entrance of the human.

“Allah need not create any more. We create his World.” Thus, as the signal of the transition from cosmogony to the personal experience of love, and in addressing his beloved Suleika, Hatem the lover stresses the participation of the lovers, through their love, in the act of creation.<sup>70</sup> In this we see, then, not only the creative power of love and the consciousness of its personal experience situated within a cosmic context, but also the idea of the ‘Human as God’s vicegerent.’ The idea is synonymous in Islamic mysticism with the idea of “Man as Microcosm” and as “the comprehensive being.”<sup>71</sup>

Another term used for this idea is the Perfect Man. This term has two related denotations. In one, it refers to the individuals who in their mystical journey have reached the stage of “unveiling the veil.” In this sense, the term does not apply to all human beings equally. There are a number of degrees among

humans. In the sense with which we are dealing here, however, it refers to ‘man’ as species, as ‘mankind.’ From this standpoint the human is viewed as a ‘perfect epitome of the universe, the very spirit of the world of Being, a being summing up and gathering together in himself all the elements that are manifested in the universe”, in short, “the *Imago Dei*.”<sup>72</sup> The Perfect Man is the ultimate fulfillment of the absolute’s wish to see the manifestation of the realities of its divine attributes.

The universe, the macrocosm, possesses existence. Its existence is not absolute, it is relative, that is to say, determined and delimited in various ways. But it is, at the same time, a direct reflection of absolute existence. It is the locus of the self-manifestation of the absolute in all possible and particularized existents; it is the reflection of the absolute, the mirror of its self-contemplation, the ‘other’ in which the divine sees itself in externalized form. But the primary feature of this macrocosm is that “every single existent in it represents one particular aspect of God, and one only, so that the whole thing lacks a clear delineation and a definite articulation.”<sup>73</sup> In contrast to the macrocosm, which God created first,

the second thing which God created for the purpose of seeing Himself as reflected therein, namely, Man, is a well-polished mirror reflecting any object as it really is. Rather Man is the polishing itself of this mirror which is called the universe. Those discrete things and properties that have been diffused and scattered all over the immense universe become united into a sharp focus in man.<sup>74</sup>

The universe is ‘one’ but it lacks consciousness, and thus does not constitute real unity. Only in man, in humankind are all the forms of the divine self-

manifestation—as ‘realities’ and not in their concrete individuations—synthesized and brought to consciousness, thereby establishing a correspondence with the consciousness of the absolute.<sup>75</sup>

There is, then, a divine comprehensiveness attributed to the absolute itself and represented with the supreme divine name in Islam, *Allah*, comprehending all other positively creative divine names. On the other extreme, there is the comprehensiveness of the ‘purely creaturely and essentially passive reality of the physical world.’<sup>76</sup> And finally, as the intermediary between these two realms, we have the comprehensiveness of man ‘comprising within itself both properties, positively creative on the one hand, and passively receptive on the other.’<sup>77</sup> Man as God’s vicegerent; “to take care of the things (i.e., the world and everything in it) in His stead.”<sup>78</sup> The absolute has created two worlds, the inner and the outer, corresponding to its own inward (hidden) and outward (revealed). Correspondingly it has given man, too, the inner and the outer. In his inward form, man is the absolute, and in his outward form, a creature, and in this he alone is the true *image* of the absolute.<sup>79</sup>

With the emphatic ‘So’ at the beginning of the sixth stanza of *Wiederfinden*, at once a gesture of logical inference and coming back, as if from a reverie, that is, from his inner world of the epiphanic vision of the entirety of Creation, the poet/lover returns to the moment of facing his beloved in the first stanza. What was only implicit in the trembling at the moment of ‘revelation,’ has been in the course of the account of the cosmogony elaborated and made explicit.

Just as by creating the “Morgenröte,” God has made, out of the chaos, a world united in love, Hatem’s love for Suleika as the reflection of the divine love is

von der Art der Morgenröte, Analogon zur göttlichen Liebe, die in der Morgenröte ihren symbolischen Ausdruck findet. Suleika und Hatem gehören einander an, ihre Liebe ist Bewußtwerden eines ursprünglichen Zusammenseins zu dem Zeitpunkt, an dem das All noch in seiner Ganzheit bestand.<sup>80</sup>

This love is not an arbitrary and subjective feeling; it stands in an objective connection with the world. The lover is carried by “morgenroten Flügeln,” and that means that he accomplishes the mediation initiated by divine love.<sup>81</sup> With the “Morgenröte,” love is created, but is not perfect and seamless unification. The fact of separation is not altogether eliminated. Instead, a shift between separation and unification is introduced: night is not abolished, it is illuminated. The “exemplary joy und anguish” of the lover’s separation and reunion is a part of the “Wiederfinden” of the elements after the chaos of the first act of Creation.<sup>82</sup>

In the motif of dispersing and reassembling elements in suffering and love, commentators have detected traces of an Empedoclean cosmogony.<sup>83</sup> Empedocles is credited for the invention of the theory of the four elements. These elements could not be transmuted, as Aristotle thought, but only mixed in various combinations. Love brings them together and strife separates them.<sup>84</sup> John Walbridge, who has studied the influence of the Greek philosophers, from the pre-Socratics to Aristotle, on Suhrawardi’s Philosophy of Illumination, sees a direct use of a distinctly Empedoclean doctrine in [Suhrawardi’s] view that the divine lights are characterized by the relations of love and dominance.

At the root of the deficient light is passion for the higher light. At the root of the higher light is dominance over the lower light [...]  
Thus, all existence is ordered on the basis of love and dominance.

He goes on to discuss the “aspects of love and dominance” in the immaterial lights as bases of their differentiation and the differentiation of their effects in the sublunar world.<sup>85</sup>

Walbridge goes on to argue that the Empodoclean notion of strife is equivalent to Suhrawardi’s view of dominance. Moreover, since love and strife are both binary relations, they could be regarded from the standpoint of two levels of light intensity, corresponding to the two entities that stand in relation (of love or dominance) to one another.

Another pertinent Empodoclean tenet is summarized in the statement “only like knows (attract) like.” This is an idea perfectly matching our discussion here, and quite appropriately Goethe’s *Physiology of colors* elaborated in his *Farbenlehre* as well.<sup>86</sup>

To return to our poem: the last stanza of *Wiederfinden* shows Hatem and Suleika to us as ‘both on the earth’, and as the representation of the “Typus menschlicher Liebe durch ihr individuelles Leben.”<sup>87</sup> In its exemplarity, their love is not transitory, though they might separate again on this earth. After the mediation that has taken place, another separation is no longer possible.<sup>88</sup> Human Love is born. Creation has perfected itself. No more ‘Es werde!’ The night is no longer the abyss, no longer the time of pain. The bond between the lovers is fortified by the “thousand seals of stars.” I close this section with an image which can well summarize all that has been so far discussed. In the words of Ibn ‘Arabi:

(The perfect Man) is man, temporally produced (in his body), but eternal (i.e., having no temporal origin, with regard to his spirit), something that grows up forever, the Word that distinguishes (between possibility and necessity) and gathers (them) together. The universe reached completion when he came into existence. He is to the universe what the bezel is to the seal. He is (comparable to) the place (of the seal) where there is engraved the device with which the King seals his treasure.<sup>89</sup>

Thus, if humanity is the seal of Creation, the love of Hatem and Suleika and their “Wiederfinden” are like the bezel of the seal, where the cosmological condition and drama of separation is once more exemplarily re-experienced and happily overcome. “Und ein zweites Wort: ‘es werde!’/ Trennt uns nicht zum zweitenmal.“

Taking another look at the *Hadith Qudsi* of the “hidden Treasure”, I finally come to highlight in more detail one of the most central motifs of Islamic mysticism, namely “the Pathetic God.” This will, in turn, enable us to conceive of the idea of the Sigh of Creation (as in *das schmerzlich Ach* in *Wiederfinden*) as a bridge between the ideas of Bi-Unity and the Dialectic of Love (in the figure of *Gingo Biloba*) discussed in the previous chapter, and the motif of divine names (“In tausend Formen magst du dich verstecken”), which I will investigate in detail in the next chapter.<sup>90</sup> The idea of a pathetic God is clearly abhorrent to the orthodoxy of all positive religions. In his absolute transcendence, the god of these religions remains unconcerned and untouched by the affairs of humans and all other creatures. To speak of a personal contact with such a divinity could therefore not be either an expression of wishful thinking or an act of human pride and arrogance. To speak of loving such a divinity would be at bottom an absurdity, and expressing such love a sign of unknowing, if not of the hypocrisy



characteristic of the moralizing of these religions. Only in the Christian figure of God the Son, in the figure of Jesus Christ, has one spoken of the passion of God. The pathetic God of whom we are talking here, however, is not to be understood as a similar incarnation of the absolute in the physical human realm. Islamic mystics, along with all orthodox theologians, flatly reject the idea of a hypostasized God. To them,

[t]he *subjectum Incarnationis*, if it is necessary to speak of it, will never be found on the plane of materially realized existences, of events accomplished and known once and for all, but always in the transcendent dimension announced by theophanies.<sup>91</sup>

Let us recall, then, that there is the God which “originates”, is unknowable and impredicable; it is the *Theos agnostos*. And then there is the revealed God, who maintains the divine attributes and is capable of relations. It is by maintaining the simultaneity of the two notions that we can speak of a pathetic God, and of a passage from “the silent emptiness of Above-being to Figures and statements possessed of a positive foundation.”<sup>92</sup> Correspondingly, there is the aspiration of the revealed God yearning to know the absolute he reveals, which is, in turn, identical with the sadness of the *Theos angostos* yearning to be known by and in the highest of creatures. The issue concerns, then, the meaning of the sadness of a “pathetic God” and the way it determines the sympathy between the visible and the invisible, a human-divine *Sym-pathetism*.

*I was a hidden Treasure and I yearned to be known. Then I created creatures in order to be known by them.*

With the help of this holy saying I (re)constructed a cosmogony based on a succession of manifestations of being, a progress of differentiation – through

theophanies – within the originally undifferentiated absolute. It followed that thorough its attribute and names, first at the level of the archetypes and then in their actualization in the visible beings, the divine describes itself, to us and, in effect, to itself. Thus the divine attributes have meaning and full reality only through and for the forms in which they are manifested. The permanent archetypes' aspiration is "the nostalgia of the Divine Attributes yearning to be revealed" and sadness of the unrevealed Absolute in its unknownness.<sup>93</sup>

[The Sigh of Compassion] marks the release of the divine sadness *sym-pathizing* with the anguish and sadness of His divine names that have remained unknown, and in this very act of release the Breath exhales, arouses to active being, the multitude of concrete individual existences by which and for which these divine names are at last actively manifested. Thus in its hidden being every existent is a Breath of existentiating divine Compassion, and the divine Name *Al-lah* becomes purely and simply equivalent to *Al-Rahman*, the Compassionate.<sup>94</sup>

Delivering the divine from the solitude of its unknownness, the concrete existents join a pre-eternal pact of "*sympathetism* which will forever unite the Godhead and his *fedeles*, the Worshipped and the Worshiper, in 'compassionate' dialogue."<sup>95</sup>

We can now also speak of *Unio Sympathetica* as the true essence of *Unio Mystica*, as the articulation of the essential bi-unity in the mystical union. This notion is related to the distinction between the Divine Name Allah, that is the Divine in the totality of its names, and the Name al-Rabb, the Lord, which refers to the Divine as particularized in one of its aspects, standing in a personal relation to individual existents. Every divine name is, in this view, the lord of the being who manifests it. "Each being is the epiphanic form of this lord,"<sup>96</sup> "the form of a lordly name."<sup>97</sup> That is to say, each being manifests only that aspect of the Divine

which is individualized in a particular divine name. For the divine to be known as the Lord, therefore, it needs a particular being as its vassal, a *thou*, in whom the absolute knows itself; an essential dialogical situation which we know as the “secret of divine suzerainty.”<sup>98</sup>

Explicating a passage in Ibn ‘Arabi’s *The Bezels of Wisdom*, Henry Corbin offers us the following summation:

The divinity seeks [desires, yearns for] a being whose God it is; suzerainty seeks a being whose lord it is; without these both are deprived of actual or even virtual reality.” This is an eminently “pathetic” text, which serves to remind us that on the one hand of the primordial sadness of the divine Names anguished in the expectation of beings who “will name” them, that is, whose being will manifest them *in concerto*—and on the other hand of the compassion of the Divine Being, “sympathizing” with Sadness of the Names which name His essence, but which no being yet names, and triumphing over His solitude in this Sigh (*nafas*) that actualizes the reality of the “thou” which is henceforth the secret of His divine Suzerainty; consequently it is to “thee” that the divinity of thy lord is entrusted, and it is up to thee to “make thyself capable of thy God” by answering *for* Him. And it seems to us that for this correspondence between the divine lord and his *fede*le, this *passion* of the one for the other, each actualizing through the other the *significatio passiva* of his Name, there can be no better term than *unio sympathetica*.<sup>99</sup>

It is for the Lord’s *fede*le to make himself capable of God, to substantiate with his passion the passion of the “pathetic God,” the God who is beloved and yet the first lover, adored but summoned to adoration in the adoration of the creatures.

An absolute who has brought to flowering the ‘image of primordial beauty’ in its manifestations, and has invested them with this beauty as “the secret of suzerainty of love” and “pledge of this secret.” This is to feed the creatures on the divine, to bring to blossoming their theophanic luminosity.<sup>100</sup>

Let us now, recalling, on the one hand, the dialectic of love, and on the other, Hatem and Suleika's (Goethe and Marianne's) Adam-and-Eve-like exemplary love, at once on the earth and in the heavens, conclude this chapter with this image:

[T]here is a perfect homology between the appeasement of divine sadness represented by the existentiating and liberating Compassion in beings, and Eve as Adam's nostalgia, leading back to him, to his Lord whom she reveals.<sup>101</sup>

This in turn gives us a deepened appreciation of the "cosmic" and theophanic dimension of the beloved in the *Divan*, as of the lines I have, already in the previous chapter, had occasion to quote:

Ist's möglich, daß ich dich Liebchen kose  
Vernehme der göttlichen Stimme Schall!  
Unmöglich scheint immer die Rose,  
Unbegreiflich die Nachtigall.

For the kiss of the beloved does not simply connect the lover and poet to all the splendor and wonders of the phenomenal world, but to their divine origin: and in that kiss, the pain of separation, of the created from each other, of the created from the Creator, and even – in this most daring thought of Islamic mysticism – of the Creator from himself – is finally and exultantly overcome and the bezel is placed upon the seal. This is the cosmogonic drama of human love as enacted by Goethe's *Wiederfinden*.

## NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> Cited in Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A comparative Study of Philosophical Concepts*, Berkeley, 1984, p. 135.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Emil Staiger, *Goethe und das Licht*, München, 1982, pp. 68-69.

<sup>3</sup> [FA I/3], p. 1280: "Das Gedicht [...] wurde während des letzten Wiedersehens mit Marianne v. Willemer – am Tag nach ihrer Ankunft [24. September, 1815] in Heidelberg – verfaßt."

<sup>4</sup> Emil Staiger, *Goethe und das Licht*, p. 69.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 1284, cited from Boisseree's journal entry of Oct. 3, 1815.

<sup>6</sup> Edith Ihekweazu, *Goethes West-östlicher Divan: Untersuchungen zur Struktur des Lyrischen Zyklus*, Hamburg, 1971, p. 304.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 305.

<sup>8</sup> Ernst Beutler (ed.). *Goethes West-östlicher Divan*, Bremen, 1956, p. 646, Italics mine.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Edith Ihekweazu, *Goethes West-östlicher Divan: Untersuchungen zur Struktur des Lyrischen Zyklus*, p. 305.

<sup>11</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Chapel Hill, 1975 p. 288.

<sup>12</sup> This section of this chapter is by and large a brief summary of Ihekweazu's discussion in the two above-mentioned sections of her book, *Goethes West-östlicher Divan: Untersuchungen zur Struktur des Lyrischen Zyklus*, pp. 267-288 & 304-319.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 267.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 269.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p.273.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 267.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p.281.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p.282.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 283.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 306.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *ibid.* pp. 116, 118, 122.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 307.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 308.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 308.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 308-309.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 310.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 311.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 313-314.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 313.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Toshihiko Izutsu, *The Fundamental Structure of Sabzawari's Metaphysics*, Tehran, 1969, p. 8.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6. This is at odds with John Walbridge's interpretation of Suhrawardi, where Light cannot be identical with existence "since both light and darkness exist." Cf. John Walbridge, *The Leaven of the Ancients: Suhrawardi and the Heritage of the Greeks*, Albany, 2000, p. 24. This is not the only point of contention between Walbridge and other interpreters of Suhrawardi, for instance, Henry Corbin. I will briefly comment on these points later. Cf. Note 84 below, also Henry Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis*, London, 1983.

<sup>37</sup> Henry Corbin, *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, New Lebanon, 1994, pp. 100-102.

<sup>38</sup> Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A comparative Study of Philosophical Concepts*, Berkeley, 1984, p. 28.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>41</sup> A *Hadith* in general designates the saying of the prophet (or in Shi'a tradition, one of the infallible Imams). A *Hadith Qudsi*, however, is a particularly precious saying in that, while not a quranic verse, its speaker is God Himself. As a general rule, God refers to Himself in the Qur'an with the plural pronoun, while in a *Hadith Qudsi* with the singular pronoun, whereby giving it an extremely intimate and personalized context.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>47</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, pp. 122-123.

<sup>48</sup> Ibn 'Arabi, cited in *ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>51</sup> [FA I/3], p. 1282.

<sup>52</sup> From *Gedichte* 1800-1837: [FA I/ 2] p. 379.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Henry Corbin, *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, pp. 94-110. The word 'later' is very crucial here. Ahriman (the Zoroastrian equivalent of 'Satan' in Abrahamic religions) is not a creator, it is itself created. Its darkness is not the primordial darkness of the Divine Night, it is its very antithesis. That is to say, this darkness is itself created through manifestation.

<sup>55</sup> Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A comparative Study of Philosophical Concepts*, p. 33.

<sup>56</sup> The first translation is used by Izutsu and the second is coined by Corbin. These entities, or individualities, are closely related to the archetypes as discussed and briefly mentioned in the first and second chapters respectively. Their connection is explained elsewhere in this work, but they can be understood here independently and in the explicit context of this chapter. I have closely followed Izutsu's exposition of these archetypes, Cf. Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A comparative Study of Philosophical Concepts*.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 119-120. Strictly speaking, they are the first self-manifestation of the Absolute in form of the created world, and as such, and as distinct from the very 'principle of Manifestation' and from the Light of Lights, of a secondary order, the first being, in Ibn 'Arabi's terminology, 'the most holy emanation.' The same is also the case in view of the notion of Mercy. "In the bosom of the absolute Absolute, or the abysmal Darkness, there appears first a faint foreboding, a presentiment, so to speak, of the Mercy. Since, however, the Mercy, before it begins positively to manifest itself is non-existent, it need something which would bestow upon it 'existence', that is, another Mercy preceding it. But there can be no Mercy preceding the Divine Mercy. The only possibility, then, is that the Divine Mercy is exercised upon itself. The self-Mercy of the Mercy constitutes the very first stage in the appearance of Mercy.[...] [This] means that 'the first object of the Mercy is the thing-ness (*shay'iyah*) of the Essence (i.e., the absolute Divine Essence) which, with its own Mercy, brings Mercy into existence'. It implies that by the very first manifestation of its own Mercy, the absolutely Unknown-Unknowable turns into a 'thing' (*shay'*), *ibid.*, pp. 119-120. While this first stage of Mercy is called 'the Mercy of the Essence' (*rahmah dhatiyah*), the Mercy which is bestowed upon the archetypes (loci of the Divine Attributes and Names) is called 'the Mercy of the Names' (*rahmah asma'iyah*).

<sup>58</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>59</sup> Cf., *ibid.*, pp. 154-155.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 156-157.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>62</sup> Ibn 'Arabi, cited in *ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 163.

<sup>64</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, p. 164.

<sup>65</sup> Ibn 'Arabi, cited in *ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 157.

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<sup>67</sup> We should be suspicious of the attempt to apply - per force - a particular theoretical scheme in the hermeneutic of a text, in a tight and point to point parallelism. That being said, I believe that from the perspective of mystical motifs in the *Divan*, what is and remains quintessentially mystical in “Wiederfinden”, are the Interpretation of the “Schmerzlich Ach” as the sigh of compassion of God for Himself, as the symbol of His pathos, and the bi-unitary formation inherent within God/World sympathy which is symbolized in Human Love.

<sup>68</sup> Ibn ‘Arabi, cited in *ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Edith Ihekweazu, *Goethes West-östlicher Divan: Untersuchungen zur Struktur des Lyrischen Zyklus*, pp. 314-315.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A comparative Study of Philosophical Concepts*, Berkeley, 1984, pp. 218-246.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 218.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 220-221.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 222.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 227.

<sup>77</sup> Cf., *ibid.*,

<sup>78</sup> Ibn ‘Arabi, cited in *ibid.*, p. 234

<sup>79</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 228.

<sup>80</sup> Edith Ihekweazu, *Goethes West-östlicher Divan: Untersuchungen zur Struktur des Lyrischen Zyklus*, pp. 315-316.

<sup>81</sup> Cf., *ibid.*, p. 316. It would be perhaps interesting to briefly refer here to two images occurring in Suhrawardi’s short Visionary Recitals. One is the image of the Archangel Gabriel, which is identified in Islam and in its traditional theology with the angel of Revelation and the Holy Spirit, in Islamic philosophy with the Active Intelligence, and in Islamic Mysticism with them all. “This angel is shown to us in Suhrawardi’s [*Recital of Occidental Exile*] with two outspread wings, one of light, the other darkened; from the first proceeds our soul, from the second, the elementary Matter in which our souls are captive: “[The image of the bird in Suhrawardi’s recital is the] Imago of the soul perceiving itself as a winged being in the likeness of the Angel, and recognizing its Self in the vision of this celestial being.” Cf. Henry Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, Princeton, 1990, pp. 182-183. The second image is that of the soul created in the form a falcon. The falcon-soul escapes into the wilderness where he meets the Red Intellect. There it sees someone approaching. It goes forward and greets him. He replies as politely as possible. The falcon looks at the person and sees that his countenance and color are red. Thinking him young, it says, “young man, where do you come from?” “My son,” he replies, “you have addressed me mistakenly. I am the first child of creation. You call me young?!” “Why are your features not white?” the falcon asks. “My features are white,” he says. “I am a luminous elder. But that person who captured you in the snare and placed these disagreeable fetters on you and appointed the warders over you threw me long ago into a black pit. This color of mine, which appears red to you, is because of that. Otherwise I am white and luminous. Every white thing that is connected to light appears red when admixed with black, like the sunset at the beginning of evening or the end of dawn, which is white where it is connected to the sun’s light. One side of it is toward the light, which is white, while the other side is toward the night, which is black. Therefore it appears red.” Cf. Shahbuddin Yahya Suhrawardi, *The Philosophical Allegories and Mystical Treatises* (Wheeler M. Thackson, tr.), Costa Mesa, 1999, pp. 21-22. For Suhrawardi’s recitals, or as John Walbridge calls them, Allegories, Cf. also John Walbridge, *The Leaven of the Ancients: Suhrawardi and the Heritage of the Greeks*, Albany, 2000, pp. 105-112.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Edith Ihekweazu, *Goethes West-östlicher Divan: Untersuchungen zur Struktur des Lyrischen Zyklus*, p. 316

<sup>83</sup> Cf., for example, [FA I/3], p. 1282

<sup>84</sup> Cf. John Walbridge, *The Leaven of the Ancients: Suhrawardi and the Heritage of the Greeks*, Albany, 2000, p. 49.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 48-49. Here is perhaps the place to mention a few points of contention between Walbridge and other interpreters of Suhrawardi. First is the question of influences. Unlike Corbin

who considers Iranian pre-Islamic theosophy as the main source of inspiration in Suhrawardi, Walbridge locates this main source in the Greeks and the Greek philosophy. Moreover, he believes that Corbin ignores – almost intentionally – the philosophical side of Suhrawardi, in favor of the mystical side. Accordingly, Walbridge believes, Corbin renames Suhrawardi's *Philosophy of Illumination*, as *Oriental Theosophy*, pushing the etymological kinship between the words "East" and "Light" somewhat too far. Another point of contention is related to the position of the above-mentioned Visionary Recitals. Unlike Corbin, who believes they represent Suhrawardi's thought in a high form of Visionary symbolism, Walbridge calls them allegories and thinks of them as propaedeutic writings designed for the novice and the non-expert. Finally, as we remarked in note 36 above, Walbridge finds the statement 'Existence is identical with Light' at odds with Suhrawardi's philosophy, stating instead that 'light and darkness both exist.' This is, however, truly puzzling. For firstly, Darkness cannot, according to Suhrawardi, possess an independent existence. What he considers darkness is different levels of dim(med) light moving down from pure light toward the so-called dark matter. Secondly, a full-fledged duality of Light/Darkness in the Manichaeic sense is flatly rejected not only by the original non-Manichaeistic Zoroastrianism of the ancient Persians, but also, obviously, by all Abrahamic religions, and therefore, by the admission of all interpreters including Walbridge himself, flatly rejected by Suhrawardi as well. This view is abundantly clear, I believe, in the quotation cited above and in the allusion to the 'deficient light.' For more details Cf. John Walbridge, *The Leaven of the Ancients: Suhrawardi and the Heritage of the Greeks*, especially pp. 223-229.

<sup>86</sup> In his "Entwurf einer Farbenlehre," Goethe thematizes the relation between the essence of light and the possibility of its perception by the eye. "Das Auge hat sein Dasein dem Licht zu danken. Aus gleichgültigen tierischen Hilfsorganen ruft sich das Licht ein Organ hervor, das seinesgleichen werde, und so bildet sich das Auge am Lichte fürs Licht, damit das innere Licht dem äußeren entgegentrete." In the introduction Goethe further writes: "[S]o hat sich das Licht im Auge ein Organ hervorgerufen, das seinesgleichen werde." In this work Goethe also quotes the following verses from an anonymous ancient mystic: Wäre nicht das Auge sonnenhaft / Die Sonne könnt' es nie erblicken / Läg' nicht in uns des Gottes eigne Kraft / Wie könnt' uns Göttliches entzücken? All citations from [FA I/23], p. 20.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Konrad Burdach, "Die Kunst und der dichterisch-religiöse Gehalt des West-östlichen Divans"; in *Studien zum West-östlichen Divan Goethes* (Edgar Lohner, ed.), Darmstadt, 1971, p. 57.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Edith Ihekweazu, *Goethes West-östlicher Divan: Untersuchungen zur Struktur des Lyrischen Zyklus*, p. 317.

<sup>89</sup> Cited in Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A comparative Study of Philosophical Concepts*, p. 235.

<sup>90</sup> In this discussion, I have closely followed Henry Corbin in *Alone with the Alone; Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*, Princeton, 1998, especially pp. 112-135.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 153. Incidentally, Goethe too finds the dogmatic Christology quite problematic. He calls Jesus Christ, as the 'letztgültige Gestalt' of God's 'geschichtliche Selbstmitteilung', "ein höchst bedeutendes, aber problematisches Wesen.": in conversation with von Müller, on June 8<sup>th</sup>, 1830, cf. [FA II/11], p. 278. Cf. also, Peter Hofmann, *Goethes Theologies*. Paderborn, 2000, p. 25.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone; Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*, Princeton, 1998, p. 112. A certain mystical sect, the Ismailian Gnostics, takes the idea to such extreme limits as to derive the word Al-lah from a root connoting to be sad, being overwhelmed by sadness, to sigh forward, to flee fearfully toward. They also consider God or Al-lah to be a created being, the Most-Near and sacrosanct Archangel-Logos, not the supreme Godhead itself. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 112-113.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Chapter 2: Bi-Unity and Dialectic of Love.



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<sup>99</sup> Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone; Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*, p. 112, pp. 123-124.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161.

## CHAPTER FOUR

# Divine Names

He is Allah, the Creator, the Evolver, the Bestower of Forms. To Him belong the Most Beautiful Names: whatever is in the heavens and on earth, doth declare His Praises and Glory: and He is the Exalted in Might the Wise. The Qur'an 59:24

In tausend Formen magst du dich verstecken,  
Doch, Allerliebste, gleich erkenn' ich dich:  
Du magst mit Zauberschleiern dich bedecken,  
Allgegenwärt'ge, gleich erkenn' ich dich.

An der Zypresse reinstem, jungem Streben,  
Allschöngewachsne, gleich erkenn' ich dich,  
In des Kanales reinem Wellenleben,  
Allschmeichelhafte, wohl erkenn' ich dich.

Wenn steigend sich der Wasserstrahl entfaltet,  
Allspielende, wie froh erkenn' ich dich;  
Wenn Wolke sich gestaltend umgestaltet,  
Allmannigfalt'ge, dort erkenn' ich dich.

An des geblühten Schleiers Wiesenteppich,  
Allbuntbesternte, schön erkenn' ich dich;  
Und greift umher ein tausendarm'ger Eppich,  
O Allumklammernde, da kenn' ich dich.

Wenn am Gebirg der Morgen sich entzündet,  
Gleich, Allerheiternde, begrüß' ich dich,  
Dann über mir der Himmel rein sich ründet,  
Allherzerweiternde, dann atm' ich dich.

Was ich mit äußerem Sinn, mit innerm kenne,  
Du Allbelehrende, kenn' ich durch dich;  
Und wenn ich Allahs Namenhundert nenne,  
Mit jedem klingt ein Name nach für dich.

With this concluding poem of 'Buch Suleika' we come to an explicit allusion to the Quranic topic of God's names and attributes and to another reference to the all-comprehensive name of God in Islam, Allah. In Islamic speculative

mysticism, as well as in the mystical traditions of other Abrahamic religions, the theme of divine names has been treated in connection with the problematic of the relation between God and the created World, between the Creator and Creation, whereby admitting a certain pantheistic interpretation of this relation and the belief in the immanence of the divine in the natural world. As we will shortly discuss in detail, the poem clearly reflects such an attitude towards the God/World relationship. However, this relation of immanence is affected in the poem through another central motif in Oriental mystical/lyrical poetry, that is, the identification of the divine and the absolute with the beloved:

Das den Schluß des *Buch Suleika* bildende große Preisgedicht ist eine "Apotheose der Allerliebsten als Naturkraft und doch ein Göttliches, das tausend Formen gemeinsam hat mit der strebenden, lebenden Natur wie mit der Gottheit".<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, unlike in the orthodox religious tradition in Islam, where the adjectives attributed to God are in the masculine form, the beloved in the poem is decidedly feminine. This will be crucial in our interpretation of the poem as it points to the idea of the Eternal Feminine in Goethe in correspondence with the notion of Creative Feminine in the mysticism of Ibn 'Arabi.

The beloved of the poem is of course Suleika, the inspiration, the addressee and the partner in the on-going dialogue in "Buch Suleika." Goethe's *Tagebuch* indicates March 16<sup>th</sup>, 1815 as the date of the composition of the poem and "Beynahmen der Allgeliebten" as its title.<sup>2</sup> But in the separate publication of the poem in "Morgenblatt" on September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1819, the poem bears the title *Suleika*.<sup>3</sup> In addition to this, the designation of the beloved as *Allerliebste* in the second line of this last poem of "Buch Suleika" has been mentioned as the return

to the same designation in penultimate line of the “Einladung” poem at the beginning of the same book: <sup>4</sup>

Mußt nicht vor dem Tage fliehen:  
Denn der Tag, den du ereilest,  
Ist nicht besser als der heut’ge;  
Aber wenn du froh verweilst  
Wo ich mir die Welt beseit’ge,  
Um die Welt an mich zu ziehen,  
Bist du gleich mit mir geborgen:  
Heut ist heute, morgen morgen,  
Und was folgt und was vergangen  
Reißt nicht hin und bleibt nicht hangen.  
Bleibe du, mein Allerliebstes;  
Denn du bringst es und du gibst es.

The poem “In tausend Formen” is itself formally a free imitation of the classical Persian Ghazal form:

Die Form des Gedichtes ist die des Ghasels, aber frei gehandhabt und durch den Wechsel: ‘erkenn’ ich dich’, ‘da kenn’ ich dich’, ‘begrüß’ ich dich’, ‘dann atm’ ich dich’, ‘kenn’ ich dich’, verinnerlicht und gesteigert.<sup>5</sup>

We will later come back to this “Verinnerlichung” and “Steigerung” in connection with the ritual of the repetitive recitation of Divine Names in Islamic mysticism. But let us begin our study of the poem with the observation that Goethe had learned from the essay *Über die Talismane der Moslimen* in Hammer-Purgstall’s “*Fundgruben des Orients*” of the ninety-nine most beautiful names of God and the rosary that is used in the ritual of recollecting God through the recitation of these names in the Islamic tradition:

Hier fand Goethe die Information, “daß die hundert Korallen des mohammedanischen Rosenkranzes neun und neunzig Eigenschaften Gottes sammt seinem arabischen Namen *Allah* bedeuten” so wie eine Liste der 99 arabsichen Beinamen Gottes samt ihrer Übersetzung, die [...] sämtlich die höchste Steigerung irdischer Prädikate durch Präfix “All-” ausdrücken.<sup>6</sup>

In his remarks on Rumi in *Noten und Abhnadlungen* Goethe mentions the Islamic rosary and its use as a “Lob- und Preis-Litanei”:

Schon der sogenannte mahometanische Rosenkranz, wodurch der Name Allah mit neunundneunzig Eigenschaften verherrlicht wird, ist eine [...] Lob- und Preislitanei.<sup>7</sup>

With the use of the superlative form of the attributes through the prefix ‘All,’ the poem imitates the canonical Islamic litany in praise of God. However, from this canonical litany, which starts with “der Allmilde,” “der Allerbarmende,” “der Allherrscher,” Goethe only borrows the last name *Allah* and the name “Allgegenwärtige.”<sup>8</sup>

We will now take a closer look at the superlative attributes, the corresponding natural phenomenon mentioned in conjunction with each and the way in which the identification of the divine with the world, on the one hand, and with the beloved, on the other hand, is thus established in the poem. But before doing that let us make the remark that according to the “Wiesbadener Register” of Goethe’s collected works, at the end of the month of May of 1815, he had used the attribute “Allgegenwärtige,” the only “Beiname Gottes” borrowed from the canonical Islamic litany, as the title of the poem, emphasizing the omnipresence and immanence of the divine in the world of creation.<sup>9</sup>

The first stanza of the poem introduces the theme of the identification of the divine with the beloved before the second part of the equation, that is, the manifestation of the divine in the nature, is elaborated in the next five stanzas. Moreover, this identification is established in a quite direct and explicit manner on the one hand and in an abstract (as compared to the following five stanzas)

way on the other. Here, as well as in the last stanza, there is no mention of any concrete phenomenon of nature. Instead, the thematic of the simultaneous hidden-ness and self-manifestation of the divine/beloved is concisely formulated.

Correspondingly, the concomitant epistemological aspect of the situation, that is, the intuition and recognition of the self-manifestation of the beloved by the lover, is introduced. This aspect will be repeated systematically and with slight but important variations throughout the poem, thereby giving the poem the character of the “litany of praise” that it strives to imitate.

The first line of the poem speaks of the hidden-ness of the beloved in “thousand forms.” It is clear that by the word thousand no definite number, and in fact no finite number, is intended. Rather, this number refers here to an infinity of forms. In other words, the lover addresses his beloved thus: “In no matter how many forms you may hide yourself, I will immediately recognize you.” I have already mentioned that with the use of the attribute “Allerliebste,” Goethe connects and identifies the beloved with Suleika, the beloved of the opening poem of “Buch Suleika,” and the entire *Divan*. But let us emphasize certain crucial elements of the first two lines of this poem in order to anticipate the way in which the poem admits an interpretation from the perspective of Oriental mysticism. First, we have the central idea of the simultaneous concealment and manifestation of the absolute in the forms of the phenomenal world. The phenomenal world manifests the absolute just as it conceals it. In more precise words, the essence of the absolute can only be manifested in so far as it takes shape and form and thus, as it is concealed within and through the forms. Secondly, the question of the

manifestation from the side of the subject, to whom the absolute is manifested, is a question of recognition and intuition, a sort of seeing, and not (at least not at first) a question of cognition or discursive knowledge. From the finite forms themselves no full knowledge of the absolute is possible. Yet, a kind of recognition of it is available to the human spirit. And finally, this recognition and intuition is founded upon love; the faculty responsible for such perception is love, and the perception itself is the perception of beauty: two notions (love and beauty) that are tightly related to one another in Oriental mysticism and are often connected together in the *Divan*. Observe the poem immediately before the concluding poem in “Buch Suleika”:

Die Welt durchaus ist lieblich anzuschauen,  
Vorzüglich aber schön die Welt der Dichter;  
Auf bunten, hellen oder silbergrauen  
Gefilden, Tag und Nacht, erglänzen Lichter.  
Heut ist mir alles herrlich; wenn's nur bliebe!  
Ich sehe heut durchs Augenglas der Liebe.

It is through the lens of love, then, that the world appears all beautiful.

Let us also mention the slight but enhancing deviation that is brought about by the use of the prefix “Aller” instead of “All” in the rest of the superlative attributes in the poem:

Dieses erste Glied der Beinamen-Kette weicht so unauffällig wie  
gravierend von den übrigen ab, in dem es mit dem Präfix “Aller-“  
statt “All-“ gebildet ist.<sup>10</sup>

The next two lines of the first stanza rephrase the same ideas and motifs.

The beloved may cover herself with veils, but the veils are veils of magic, and that again conveys the sense that they not simply and exclusively function as concealment, but are also revelatory of the magical and divine character of the

phenomenal world. This reminds us of the poem *Wink*, where the fan covers the face of the lover but does not hide the beloved, because what is most beautiful in her, the eye, still glances forth through it; thus a concealment and revelation at the same time.<sup>11</sup> And here, in the poem “in tausend Formen,” the beloved is addressed by the only superlative attribute borrowed from the canonical Islamic litany of praise: *Allgegenwärtige*. Thus, once again the immanence and omnipresence of the absolute in the world is emphasized.

In the next five stanzas, Goethe puts a number of attributes in their absolute form--as attributes of the beloved--into relation with corresponding natural phenomena and continues to emphasize the recognition of the beloved available to the lover through the contemplation of those phenomena. But before looking at those stanzas let us also mention that the identification of the beloved with the multiplicity of phenomenal forms was present even in the mind of the Goethe of a much younger age. Already in 1782, in a letter to Charlotte v. Stein he had written:

Ich schäme mich dir zu wiederholen, wie und wie immer ich an dich dencke. Du bist mir in alle Gegenstände transsubstanziert, ich seh alles recht gut und sehe dich doch überall, ich bin weder abwesend noch zerstreut und doch immer bey dir und immer mit dir beschäftigt.<sup>12</sup>

In the next five stanzas a relation of homology is established between natural phenomena and the beloved with the superlative form of the same attribute that characterizes each of those phenomena, thereby establishing the symbolic and epiphanic correspondence of the phenomenal with the Absolute. And in each instance, this correspondence is intuited by the lover and occasions the



recognition of the beloved. The five middle stanzas do not deal, as the first stanza does, with the idea of recognizing (greeting, knowing) the beloved “trotz der sie verdeckenden Naturformen”, but with the idea of a “Wiedererkennen gerade auf Grund einer wesentlichen Ähnlichkeit zwischen ihnen.”<sup>13</sup>

In the pure and ever new striving and growth of cypresses, the lover sees the beautiful growth of the beloved just as in the pure undulating life of the canals he sees her life-giving and flattering character, both in absolute forms. Also here in the first and third line of the stanza (as in the third line of the sixth stanza), the natural forms revealing the attributes of the absolute are described by the adjective “rein,” which is a constant characterization of the manifestation of divine beauty in the *Divan*.<sup>14</sup>

Next, in the third stanza, the expansion of the rising water beams occasions the image of playfulness that is descriptive of the carefree presence of the lover and the beloved near each other; the lover gaily/ joyfully recognizes the beloved as playful in the superlative. In the play, moreover, the fundamentally dialogical character of the relationship between the lover and the beloved is to be discerned.<sup>15</sup>

Regarding the motifs of cypresses, play, water, springs and canals in this poem, Hendrik Birus makes the observation that these motifs are taken up once more six months after the composition of this poem and are used in the dialogue poem between Hatem and Suleika, which is eventually placed in the middle of “Buch Suleika.”<sup>16</sup> In a section of this dialogue Suleika says:

An des lust'gen Brunnes Rand,  
Der in Wasserfäden spielt,

Wußt' ich nicht, was fest mich hielt;  
Doch da war von deiner Hand  
Meine Chiffer leis gezogen,  
Nieder blickt' ich, dir gewogen.

Hier, am Ende des Kanals  
Der gereihten Hauptallee,  
Blick' ich wieder in die Höh,  
Und da she' ich abermals  
meine Lettern fein gezogen:  
Bleibe! bleibe mir gewogen!

And to this Hatem answers:

Möge Wasser, springend, wallend,  
die Zypressen dir gestehn:  
Von Suleika zu Suleika  
ist mein Kommen und mein Gehn.<sup>17</sup>

The third line of the stanza conjures the image of the transfiguring cloud, through which the manifold-ness and the multiplicity of forms once again occasion the absolute's attribute of multiplicity, where the lover nevertheless recognizes the beloved.

It may be remarked that the poem *Alleben* which precedes *Selige Sehnsucht* in the "Buch des Sängers" similarly conjoins the natural phenomena of dust, wind and rain in the image of the beloved and thus implicitly of the divine, just as the "greening" of the desert as a symbol of the presence of the eternal in earthly life is one of the foundational metaphors of Islam.

Staub ist eins der Elemente,  
Das du gar geschickt bezwingest,  
Hafis, wenn zu Liebchens Ehren  
Du ein zierlich Liedchen singest.

Denn der Staub auf ihrer Schwelle  
Ist dem Teppich vorzuziehen,  
Dessen goldgewirkte Blumen  
Mahmuds Günstlinge beknieen.

Treibt der Wind von ihrer Pforte  
Wolken Staubs behend vorüber,  
Mehr als Moschus sind die Düfte  
Und als Rosenöl dir lieber.

Staub, den hab' ich längst entbehret  
In dem stets umhüllten Norden,  
Aber in dem heißen Süden  
Ist er mir genugsam worden.

Doch schon längst, daß liebe Pforten  
Mir auf ihren Angeln schwiegen!  
Heile mich, Gewitterregen,  
Laß mich, daß es grunelt, riechen!

Wenn jetzt alle Donner rollen  
Und der ganze Himmel leuchtet,  
Wird der wilde Staub des Windes  
Nach dem Boden hingefeuchtet.

Und sogleich entspringt ein Leben,  
Schwillt ein heilig heimlich Wirken,  
Und es grunelt, und es grünet  
In den irdischen Bezirken.<sup>18</sup>

In the fourth stanza, the meadow's veil-like carpet of flowers and its beauty becomes another manifestation for the absolute and its superlative attribute "Allbuntbesternte." It is perhaps worth mentioning in this context that a similar motif had been already present in Goethe's *Pandora*, another symbol of feminine beauty, who also receives an attribute in the absolute form, Allbegabte: "Der Allbegabten wusst' ich nicht zu geben mehr."<sup>19</sup> In this play we have

die motivverwandte, allerdings Wörtliches und Metaphorisches genau umgekehrt verteilende Beschreibung von Pandoras 'vielgeblühten Kleides Feld, wie es wunderbar / Mit Frühlings reichem bunten Schmuck die Brust umgab'.<sup>20</sup>

In the same play we have the praise of Pandora's beauty, who appears in "tausend Gebilden":

Sie steigt hernieder in tausend Gebilden,  
Sie schwebt auf Wassern, sie schreitet auf Gefilden,  
[...]  
So neu verherrlicht leuchtete das Angesicht  
Pandorens mir aus buntem Schleier [...].<sup>21</sup>

Then in the next lines the thousand grasping arms of the ivy tree become a metaphor for the all-enveloping character of the beloved and in that again the lover finds and knows his beloved.

The ignition of morning on the mountaintop in the fifth stanza becomes a cheerful and bright greeting, reminding the lover of the superlative brightening effect of the beloved, moving him to immediately reply to her greeting. Finally, in the last two lines of the sixth stanza, as the sky shaping itself into a vault above the lover, its vastness becomes symbolic of the beloved attribute "Allherzerweiternde," and with the expanded spirit, the lover breathes the beloved. In regard to this last absolute attribute, Hendrik Birus makes a reference to Edward Scott Waring's *Reise nach Sheeraz* and the description of a garden in this city of Hafiz' birth with the name "dil goosha," literally meaning "das Erweitern des Herzens" as well as Goethe's notice of the name in his reading of that book.<sup>22</sup> With these lines the inventory of the natural phenomena that symbolize and metaphorize the beloved and identify her with the absolute concludes. It seems reasonable to claim, however, that more significant than these specific concrete phenomena are the superlative attributes placed into correspondence and the repeated invocation of the beloved with those attributes. I

will come back to this issue in the second part of this chapter where I offer an exposition of the topic of Divine Names from the perspective of Oriental mysticism.

The last stanza of the poem moves away from these concrete natural phenomena and reintroduces the epistemological aspect of the motif of divine attributes that was alluded to in the first stanza in a different form. Here all sources of knowledge, whether attained through the external senses, that is, the empirical knowledge of the phenomena, or through the inner sense, that is, the intuition and knowledge of the (divine) essence of the phenomena, are attributed to the beloved. Here the beloved also receives the superlative adjective “Allbelehrende,” and it is through the medium of her person that all is learned. Here we have the essence of the symbol from the Oriental mystical perspective. The sensible phenomena are at once objects of empirical knowledge, and, by virtue of their being symbols, the locus of the manifestation of the absolute, and thus, objects of spiritual/mystical knowledge. Moreover, the former mode of knowledge without the latter would be utterly impoverished and faulty, while the latter mode can only be attained for the human subject on the basis of the former. What mediates between the two modes and unites them in the field of theophanic visions is the fundamental driving force in the mystical enlightenment: love. Thus, the beloved becomes the “Allbelehrende” just as the “Allbelehrende” cannot but be the beloved.

The final two lines of the last stanza effectuate the identification of the beloved with the divine and the absolute in the most explicit form throughout the

poem; in the invocation of the name Allah, the hundredth name of God and his name in the entirety of his absolute essence, there lingers the sound of a name also for the beloved. Thus, the thematic of Divine Names and Attributes proposed in the first stanza and in the expression of “tausend Formen” comes, after five stanzas of exposition, to a “conclusion” in the second part of the frame, the last stanza. The conclusive character of this stanza can be perhaps made more clear with the observation that whereas in all other stanzas, the even verses end with the repeating “ich dich” thus juxtaposing the I and the Thou immediately next to each other, this proximity is not maintained in the last stanza. In the second line the “ich” is separated from the “dich” by the word “durch”. And in the final two lines, which are no longer a direct invocation of the beloved at all, the I and the Thou are separated from each other and only a fact is stated; that in the invocation of the name Allah, the “I” hears the lingering of a name for the Thou.

We will now take a look at the question of the Divine Names in Oriental theosophy in order to demonstrate the affinity of the Goethe’s vision with this system of speculative mysticism. In Islamic mysticism, as well as in the Neoplatonic mysticism of other Western religions, the question of the Divine Names is closely connected with the idea of the absolute’s self-manifestation. Put into the most concise form, the absolute manifests itself through the names. Consequently, one may say that the Names are the causes of Creation. So long as the absolute remains in its transcendence and absoluteness, there is no world. But as soon as relations are to be established between the absolute as the creator and

his creation, the realities of these relations are to be constituted by the divine names. According to the speculative mysticism of Ibn ‘Arabi, in its essence the absolute remains transcendent and above all qualities. But in the state of self-manifestation, it bears internal articulations and attributes that we have previously identified with “Eternal Archetypes.” These archetypes are manifested in the phenomenal world through Divine Names, or in other words, Creation is the effusion of Being upon the eternal archetypes:<sup>23</sup>

In Ibn ‘Arabi’s thought a transcendence across categories, including substance, is maintained. God is above all qualities—they are neither He nor other than He—and He manifests Himself only by means of the names, not by His essence. On the plane of essence, He is inconceivable (transcending concepts) and nonexperiential (transcending even nonrational cognition). That means that in their actual existence the creatures are not identical with God, but only reflections of His attributes.<sup>24</sup>

Thus each name is one aspect of the divine essence actualized and particularized. Each name, in so far as it has its own reality and in so far as it is one specific actualization of the divine, is distinguished from all other names. But in so far as it refers to the absolute, it is one and the same as all other names. This is in fact another formulation of the double principle of “multiplicity within unity and unity within multiplicity.” Moreover, the relations that the absolute can bear to the world are infinite in number, or in other words, the forms of divine self-manifestation are infinite. Each creature is, therefore, a name for the absolute and the world is the sum of the concretely actualized Divine Names:

[E]very thing in this world, every event which occurs in this world, is an actualization of a Divine Name, that is to say, a self-manifestation of the Absolute through a definite relative aspect called Divine Name. The conclusion to be drawn from this is that there are as many Divine Names as there are things and events in

the world. The Divine Names in this sense are infinite in number.<sup>25</sup>

However, in the Quranic tradition and in the esoteric tradition of its exegesis, the infinite number of the names are classified and reduced to ninety-nine basic (most beautiful) names and these names are those that are recited in the most minimal and canonical litany which we have mentioned before. Here we can return to the opening line of our poem and see that in Goethe's "tausend Formen," the idea of the infinity of divine self-manifestations (and the concomitant concealment) is implicit. Goethe speaks

in seinem Preislied von 'tausend' Formen [...], während die islamische Tradition sich mit 'hundert' göttlichen Attributen begnügt. Doch hier wie dort haben wir es lediglich mit 'runden Zahlen' zu tun. Der gebildete Muslim versteht die neunundneunzig Beinamen des Rosenkranzes als Auswahl aus den unendlichen Attributen Gottes, während den schlichteren Gemütern kein Harm geschieht, wenn sie den Ausspruch des Propheten wörtlich nehmen: 'Gott hat neunundneunzig Namen; wer sie weiß, geht ins Paradies ein.'<sup>26</sup>

I will shortly discuss a basic classification of Divine Names in the Islamic tradition in order to offer an interpretation of the type of the superlative attributes that Goethe uses in the five middle stanzas of the poem to describe the beloved. But before that, let us remind ourselves of a distinction that we discussed in the chapter on "Wiederfinden" between the name *Allah* and all other Divine Names, most specifically the name Lord (*Rabb*).

Let us recall that the Lord is the manifestation of the absolute through a particular name, whereas Allah is "the Absolute who never ceases to change and transform Himself from moment to moment according to the Names."<sup>27</sup> Thus, Allah is not just a name for the Absolute, but is the all-comprehensive name of the



Absolute, or the Lord of the whole world of being, or the absolute Absolute. Ibn

‘Arabi writes:

Know that the object designated by the Name *Allah* is unitary in regard to the Essence, and a synthesis in regard to the Names. Every being is related to *Allah* only in the form of his particular Lord; it is impossible for any being to be related to *Allah* directly in the original form of synthesis...<sup>28</sup>

Every Divine Name in order to actualize itself needs a particular being, whose Lord it is, and it is this Lord that can be invoked in a prayer.<sup>29</sup> But Allah, being the all-comprehensive name of the Absolute is the Lord of no particular being and thus, cannot be, properly speaking, invoked in a prayer:

The Lord has a rigid ‘fixity’ in the sense that it is the Absolute in one particular aspect being bound and determined by one particular Name or Attribute suitable for the occasion. Hence a very particular relation between the Lord and man; namely, that man, whenever he prays to God and makes petition or supplication to Him, he must necessarily address himself to *his* Lord.<sup>30</sup>

Applying this distinction in our interpretation of the poem, we can see that in all its stanzas where either the multiplicity (without the absolute unity and synthesis) of the forms of manifestation is emphasized (first stanza) or the beloved is described by one superlative attribute, the invocation is possible and is the invocation of a Lord. Moreover, each invocation ends in the juxtaposition of the “ich” and “dich” immediately next to each other, depicting the bi-unitary of the relation between the lover and the beloved, the relation of sympathy and mutual need between them. This pattern is radically changed in the final stanza. Once again, in the multiplicity of the phenomenal world the source of all knowledge (whether with the external or inner sense) is attributed to the beloved. This is because every single phenomenon manifests the beloved in one particular aspect.

But once the name Allah is mentioned, a direct invocation is no longer possible. A certain distance between the “ich” and “dich”, and therefore, a form of transcendence is established. Moreover, the last line of the poem only speaks of the “lingering of a name *also* for the beloved,” upon the pronouncement of the name Allah; a name only echoing and manifesting the all-comprehensive name Allah. The name Allah itself, unlike all other names in the previous stanzas, is never applied to the beloved (the Lord) directly. Thus, according to my reading, the poem does not permit a purely pantheistic and immanentist interpretation, where the equation between God and Creation is one of a hypostatic union and there is absolutely no trace of a transcendent God at all in the picture. Needless to say, this Transcendence has nothing to do with the absolute transcendence of God in the religious orthodoxies. The absolute from the perspective of Oriental theosophy is *at once* immanent and transcendent. It is immanent in that everything is its real and concrete manifestation; every being is an articulation and particularization of the absolute. But the absolute is also transcendence, because in its absolute absoluteness is beyond and above all qualifications, relations and predication and is never graspable.

With the above discussion, we have already come to the characterization of the invocation of the beloved with the specific superlative attributes in the poem as the invocation of the Lord as particular manifestation and actualization of the absolute. In this aspect, as we have seen, the poem imitates the canonical Islamic litany of praise of God. But let us now mention two important aspects of the poem where it diverges from this litany. In order to see these differences, we

must first introduce a basic classification of the Divine Names in the Islamic tradition.

Divine names are classified in the Islamic tradition into two groups: One connected with God's beauty and loving-kindness, the so-called names of *lutfiyya*, and one connected with his wrath and majesty, names of *qahriyya*.<sup>31</sup> For example, just as the attribute "der Allmilde" is mentioned for God, there is also the attribute "der Allzwingende."<sup>32</sup> Regarding the presence of these two apparently contradictory sets of attributes among God's attributes, Annemarie Schimmel writes:

The Sufis have written repeatedly about the qualities of [the] divine names, which are divided into [two categories...]. These two categories constantly work together to produce the whole fabric of the world and are mysteriously connected with human beings. Even the difference between mystical teachers have been ascribed to the various divine names they reflect.<sup>33</sup>

In the passage on Rumi in the *Noten und Abhandlungen* and in connection with the Islamic rosary, Goethe writes about these contradictory attributes of God: "Bejahende, verneinende Eigenschaften bezeichnen das unbegreiflichste Wesen; der Anbeter staunt, ergibt und beruhigt sich."<sup>34</sup>

Based on this passage, Katharina Mommsen has argued against the claim that Goethe would have felt repulsed by the "'innere Widersprüchlichkeit' der Beinamen Allahs."<sup>35</sup> Mommsen finds the quoted passage from *Noten und Abhandlungen* in complete harmony with "der Haltung Goethes in reiferen Jahren, nach dem er die ersten Erschütterungen über die 'Widersprüchlichkeit' des höchsten Wesens überwunden hatte."<sup>36</sup> She furthers her argument by citing the

following passage from Johann Peter Eckermann's *Gespräche mit Goethe* written after and in response to his reading of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*:

Da [...] das große Wesen, welches wir die Gottheit nennen, sich nicht bloß im Menschen, sondern auch in einer reichen gewaltigen Natur, und in mächtigen Weltbegebenheiten ausspricht, so kann auch natürlich eine nach menschlichen Eigenschaften von ihm gebildete Vorstellung nicht ausreichen, und der Aufmerkende wird bald auf Unzulänglichkeiten und Widersprüche stoßen, die ihn in Zweifel, ja in Verzweiflung bringen, wenn er nicht entweder klein genug ist, sich durch eine künstliche Ausrede beschwichtigen zu lassen, oder groß genug, sich auf den Standpunkt einer höheren Ansicht zu erheben.[...] Einen solchen Standpunkt fand Goethe früh in Spinoza, und er erkennet wie sehr die Ansichten dieses großen Denkers den Bedürfnissen seiner Jugend gemäß gewesen. Er fand in ihm sich selber, und so konnte er sich auch an ihm auf das schönste befestigen.<sup>37</sup>

The claim regarding Goethe's feeling of repulsion with the contradictions in the names for Allah in the canonical litany seems to be occasioned by the fact that in the poem discussed in this chapter, none of the superlative attributes used are of the second category of the divine names mentioned above, that is, the name of God's majesty and wrath. And whether we accept or reject the claim, the absence of those types of attributes must be mentioned as the first fundamental difference between this poem and the canonical Islamic litany of praise of God. It is true, that with the exception of *Allgegenwärtige* and *Allah*, none of the superlative attributes used in the poem is in the canonical litany, and Goethe has introduced them into his poem as his own innovation, but it is also true that all those names can be understood as God's attributes of beauty, mercy and love.

This will immediately bring us to the second fundamental difference between the Islamic canonical litany and the poem: whereas in the Islamic litany, the attributes are in the masculine form, in the poem, they are all in feminine and

thus the beloved, and by extension the divine, is, as stated earlier, decidedly feminine. We can see the fusion of the praise of the feminine beloved and the divine in the *Chorus mysticus* in the second part of Faust (verses 12104-12110), a passage that not only speaks of the Eternal Feminine, but also of the metaphoric status of all that is transient relative to the Eternal, a constant and central theme of our interpretation of the *Divan* from the perspective of Oriental mysticism:

Alles Vergängliche  
Ist nur ein Gleichnis;  
Das Unzulängliche  
Hier wird's Ereigniß;  
das Unbeschreibliche  
Hier ist's getan ;  
Das Ewig-Weibliche  
Zieht uns hinan.<sup>38</sup>

In our poem “In tausend Formen...” we have the fusion of Suleika the beloved and the divine, the same Suleika who is the inspiration of the *Divan* and the active contributor to the most dialogical part of it, “Buch Suleika.” I mentioned earlier that in one of its published versions, this poem too was also *named* Suleika.<sup>39</sup> In the chapters on *Gingo Biloba*, I further discussed the fundamental bi-unitary and dialogical structure of love. Moreover, I emphasized the notion of divine love can only be understood through and from the perspective of human love. Introducing the concept of *devotio sympathetica* and substituting it for the notion of *unio mystica* in the chapter on *Wiederfinden*, I discussed the notion of sympathy as constitutive of the bi-unitary relation between the lover and beloved, the divine and the human subject, molding both into the form of the relation between the lord and the vassal. At this point and summarizing what we have discussed once again from the perspective of love and beauty, the driving forces of the mystical

journey as well as the most central and crucial motifs in the *Divan*, we arrive at the feminine principle of the Divine Creator and are ready to address the question of the Eternal Feminine.

Let us once again emphasize that the key notion here is that of pathetic God, the Lord that desires to be loved by *her* vassal. The key is not *unio mystica*, it is *devotio sympathetica*. This was, we recall from the chapter on *Wiederfinden*, the secret of the divinity of the Lord; his inter-dependence with his vassal, their bi-unity. The secret was, we remember from the chapters on Dialectic of Love and Sigh of Compassion, the “thou,” the “Du” to which one prays. We also remember that the Sigh of Compassion liberated the divine attributes out of their occultation, by manifesting them in sensible form:

[T]his Compassion which makes itself into the substance of the forms whose being it puts into the imperative [Be!] suggests a twofold, active and passive dimensions in the being of the Godhead who reveals himself. Necessarily then, the being who will be and reveal His perfect image will have to have the same structure: he will have to be at once *passion* and *action*, that is, according to the Greek etymology of these words, *pathetic* and *poietic*, receptive and creative.<sup>40</sup>

This is the fundamental and decisive intuition: contemplation of the image of the feminine being as the “highest theophanic vision” obtainable by the mystic:

“Because it is in the Image of the Creative Feminine that contemplation can apprehend the highest manifestation of God, namely, creative divinity.”

Thus, the spirituality of an Ibn ‘Arabi, just as that of Hafiz and Goethe, contrary to all dogmas and exoteric religions, and even the Sufism of early ascetics, is esoterically “led to the apparition of the Eternal Womanly as an Image of the Godhead.” In her the mystic looks for “the secret of the compassionate God”<sup>41</sup>:

“Here the feminine is not opposed to the Masculine as the *patiens* to the *agens*, but encompasses and combines the two aspects, receptive and active, where as the Masculine possesses only one of the two. This intuition is clearly expressed in a distich of Jalaluddin Rumi:

Woman is a beam of the divine Light.  
She is not the being whom sensual desire takes as its Object.  
She is the creator, it should be said.  
She is not a Creature.<sup>42</sup>

A corresponding poem in Goethe is *Suleika Spricht*, the concluding poem of the “Buch der Betrachtungen.” In it, a characteristically Goethean bi-unity is created of the beloved as ephemeral *and* eternal, with her transient earthly beauty held fast by the divine, so that it in its very transience can act as a medium of the eternal itself. The contrast to the traditional “*Vanitas*”-motif so characteristic of Christian homiletics on this theme could therefore not be greater:

Der Spiegel sagt mir ich bin schön!  
Ihr sagt: zu altern sei auch mein Geschick.  
Vor Gott muß alles ewig stehn,  
In mir liebt Ihn, für diesen Augenblick.<sup>43</sup>

The bi-unity of the Lord with his *fedeles* is, as we are also aware, one of self-knowledge. Just as in pre-eternity the absolute yearned to be known, the *fedeles* also receives self-knowledge by attaining the knowledge of the divine attribute that is his particular Lord. The apprehension of the Sigh of Compassion as the creator on the part of the mystic is the result of his own yearning for his Lord, that is to have the revelation of himself. In this, he is in a situation like Adam's :

The nostalgia and sadness of Adam were also appeased by the projection of his own Image which, separating from him like the mirror in which the Image appears, finally revealed him to himself. That is [...] why we can say that God loved Adam as Adam loved

Eve: with the same love; in loving Eve, Adam imitated the divine model.<sup>44</sup>

This is how at the level of theophanic vision, at the level of manifestation of the Eternal Beloved, physical and spiritual love for woman turns into mystical love. The relation, as before, is not one of allegorical resemblance. There is a relation of homology, a symbolic relation, between the two. In order to be able to contemplate the passive-active totality of his Lord, the mystic has to contemplate it in a being posited simultaneously as created and creator. This is the mystical Eve, “the feminine being who, in the image of the divine compassion, is the creatrix of the being by whom she herself was created.”<sup>45</sup> This is also the reason why the feminine is the supreme object of mystical love—in its double spiritual/sensual aspect—as the “theophanic Image par excellence.”<sup>46</sup> Reciprocally, this develops the motif of Beauty as theophany par excellence into and exaltation of the form of being which is invested with beauty, the feminine. Because beauty is the supreme theophany and the feminine is contemplated as the image of wisdom and creative divinity, there can be no talk of a fall of man because of contemplating her. The conjunction of the divine nature and human nature, their epiphany, “corresponds to a necessity immanent in the Divine Compassion aspiring to reveal its being.”<sup>47</sup> Accordingly, it will not be through some kind of incarnation on the level of the phenomenal world, but by an assumption of the sensible to the plane of theophanies and events of the soul, that the divine manifests itself in the attributes of the human. And this is how, in speculative mysticism, the harmony and the sympathy between the spiritual and



the sensible elements in humans is accomplished, a harmony achieved by mystical love as *devotio sympathetica*.

Thus we have come to an interpretation of the second fundamental difference between the canonical litany of praise in Islam and Goethe's poetic creation, the Creative Divine as Feminine. This is a difference that goes to the very heart of his conception of love, beauty and the manifestation of the divine in the phenomenal world in his visionary poetry. All this will perhaps help us see how Goethe's imagination was stimulated and excited anew by his study of a foreign tradition and how he passionately and creatively transmuted the material he had received. It is these kinds of creative innovation that compels commentators to evaluate this final poem of "Buch Suleika" in words such as these:

Das letzte Gedicht des Buches Suleika ist, wenn man sich so ausdrücken darf, unbeschreiblich groß, und gerade da schwelgt der Spieltrieb metaphorischen Preisens am unersättlichsten. 'Allschöngewachsene, Allbuntbesterte, allbelehrende.' Keine Wendung zuviel für den immer neu begleitenden Gedanken, daß der Dichter ihre Gestalt brauchte, damit sich ihm alle Seelen der Natur erschlossen.<sup>48</sup>

Having discussed two fundamental differences between the Islamic litany of names and the poem, I will conclude this chapter with a major similarity between the two. This will be the "Verinnerlichung" and "Steigerung" that I referred to at the beginning of the chapter. I have already mentioned that the poem is a free imitation of the classical Persian Ghazal form. But in the highly repetitive pattern of its rhymes and in the invocation of one superlative attribute in each verse containing the repeated rhymes, the poem also closely resembles the ritualistic

recitation of the Divine names, the recollection of God through the repetitive naming of God's attributes. This is done, both by more traditionally pious Muslims and by the more heterodox Sufis alike, with the help of the rosary. The practice of recollection is technically called "*dhikr*," and is indispensable in the process of initiation and in the different stages of the mystical journey virtually according to all schools of mysticism, speculative or otherwise. "In modern terminology," Annemarie Schimmel writes, "one may say that concentrated recollection sets free spiritual energies that provide help in the progress on the Path."<sup>49</sup> Unlike the ritual Islamic five-time-a-day prayers, the practice of *dhikr* requires no specific time or ritually clean place. The practice is also considered to be the first step in the mystical Path and the formal acceptance of a disciple in Sufi orders always includes the instruction of one particular *dhikr* (either a divine name or a phrase containing it) by a master. This initiative *dhikr* will be the novice's personal *dhikr*, it is not to be shared with the others nor to be changed by any other person than the master. But of course, for solitary wayfarers, "the *dhikr* could be learned [...] from Khidr, the mysterious guide of the wayfarers."<sup>50</sup> At any rate, the practice of *dhikr* is considered to be the first step in the way of love: "for when somebody loves someone, he likes to repeat his name and constantly remember him."<sup>51</sup>

In one classification, there are two kinds of *dhikr* or recollection: the recollection of the tongue and the recollection of the heart, and the latter is considered superior to the former<sup>52</sup>: "In the increased proximity [of the seeker and

God] brought about by the *dhikr* of the heart the seeker becomes, eventually completely heart; `every limb of his is a heart recollecting God.”<sup>53</sup>

The practice of *dhikr* has also been used as a means of bringing groups of practitioners into an ecstatic state: “The repetition of the word *Allah*, or of the rhythmical formula *la ilah illa Allah*, accompanied by certain movements, could easily induce a state of trance.”<sup>54</sup> Though the first step of the mystical journey, the practice of *dhikr*, in one form or another, will be a constant part of the path, so long so, that with every coming and going of his breath, the mystic is mindful of God. Thus the recollection of God remains with the wayfarer until he reaches the final station, be that final station love or gnosis:

Whether the final station be seen as love or as gnosis, the disciple has to continue in his preparatory activities, like *dhikr* and concentration, which may eventually lead him to the goal, *fana’* and *baqa’*.<sup>55</sup>

Having compared the repetitive quality of our poem in this chapter, I will move to investigate these two concomitant goals reached at the last stage of the mystical journey, *Fana’* or Annihilation and *Baqa’* or Perpetuation, in the next chapter.

## Notes:

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- <sup>1</sup> [FA I/3], p. 1304, cited from Fest-Ausgabe III, S. 327, Heraus. Robert Fetsch.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 74& 1306.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid., cf. also [FA I/3], pp. 1304-1305.
- <sup>6</sup> [FA I/3], p. 1305. Citation is from Hammer's *Fundgruben des Orients*, vol. 4, p. 160.
- <sup>7</sup> [FA I/3], pp. 171-172.
- <sup>8</sup> Name number 49 in the canonical litany: cf. Mommsen, Katharina Mommsen, *Goethe und die arabische Welt*, Frankfurt am Main, 1988, p. 312, also [FA I/3], p. 1305. Some other names are "der Allfehlerfrei," "der Allrettende," "der Allgerechte," "der Allgeduldige," "der Allsanftmütige," "der Allzwingende," "der Allnehmende," "der Allerniedernde," "der Allherabsetzende," cf. Mommsen, Katharina Mommsen, *Goethe und die arabische Welt*, Frankfurt am Main, 1988, p. 306, and Ernst Beutler (ed.), *Goethes West-östlicher Divan*, Bremen, 1956, p. 664.
- <sup>9</sup> Cf. Mommsen, Katharina Mommsen, *Goethe und die arabische Welt*, p. 312 and [FA I/3], p. 1304.
- <sup>10</sup> [FA I/3], p. 1306.
- <sup>11</sup> Cf. the discussion of the poem *Wink* in the Introduction. .
- <sup>12</sup> Cf. Ibid.
- <sup>13</sup> Cf. Ibid.
- <sup>14</sup> Cf. Ibid. For a comprehensive study of the use of the adjective "rein" in the *Divan*, cf. also Edith Ihekweazu, *Goethes West-östlicher Divan: Untersuchungen zur Struktur des Lyrischen Zyklus*. Hamburg, 1971, pp. 217-229.
- <sup>15</sup> For the thematic of Play in the *Divan*, cf. Gisela Henckmann, *Gespräch und Geselligkeit in Goethes "West-östlichem Divan"*, Stuttgart, 1975.
- <sup>16</sup> Cf. [FA I/3], p. 1306.
- <sup>17</sup> [FA I/3], pp. 90-91.
- <sup>18</sup> [FA I/3], pp. 23-24.
- <sup>19</sup> [FA I/6], p. 684.
- <sup>20</sup> [FA I/3], pp. 1306-1307, cited poem from [FA I/6], p. 683.
- <sup>21</sup> Verses 673-4 and 683-4, [FA I/6], p. 685. Also cf. Katharina Mommsen, *Goethe und die arabische Welt*, p. 313.
- <sup>22</sup> Cf. [FA I/3], p. 1307. Here we also find a reference to a section of another book in Goethe's reading list about the Orient, Heinrich Friedrich von Diez' *Denkwürdigkeiten aus Asien*, vol 1, p. 74 :“ ‘Der Wohlthaten beste ist des Herzens Weitigkeit’; mit der Anmerkung: ‘Des Herzens Weitigkeit heisst ein frohes Herz, denn Weitigkeit ist das Gegentheil von des Herzens Beklemmtheit.’”
- <sup>23</sup> Cf. Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Chapel Hill, 1975, p.268.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>25</sup> Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A comparative Study of Philosophical Concepts*, Berkeley, 1984, p. 103.
- <sup>26</sup> Katharina Mommsen, *Goethe und die arabische Welt*, p. 316. The citation is an orally transmitted tradition from the prophet translated by Hammer in his *Fundgruben des Orients*.
- <sup>27</sup> Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A comparative Study of Philosophical Concepts*, p. 110.
- <sup>28</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, p. 112.
- <sup>29</sup> I discussed the mutual relation of need between a being and its Lord in terms of the notion of *Sympathy* in the chapter on *Wiederfinden*.
- <sup>30</sup> Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A comparative Study of Philosophical Concepts*, p. 110.
- <sup>31</sup> Cf. Cf. Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 177.
- <sup>32</sup> Cf. Katharina Mommsen, *Goethe und die arabische Welt*, p. 306 and note 8 above.
- <sup>33</sup> Cf. Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Chapel Hill, 1975, p. 177.
- <sup>34</sup> [FA I/3] pp 171-172.

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. Katharina Mommsen, *Goethe und die arabische Welt*, p. 306. The claim has been made by Hans A. Maier in his commentary on the *Divan*, cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p.307, Cf. also note 3 in *ibid.*, where the first shock is attributed to the earthquake in Lisbon in 1755, “das den Knaben Goethe an der ‘väterlichen’ Natur Gottes zweifeln ließ.”

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 307-308. For a brief discussion of Goethe’s reception of Spinoza and the question of theodicy in Goethe cf. *ibid.*, pp. 305-310.

<sup>38</sup> [FA I/7], p. 464.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Note 3.

<sup>40</sup> Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone; Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn ‘Arabi*, Princeton, 1998, p. 159.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160. The Rumi distich is cited from *Mathnawi* of Rumi (I; 2437). In her “Eros—Heavenly and not so Heavenly—In Sufi Literature and Life” ; in *Society and the Sexes in Medieval Islam*, Malibu, 1979, Annemarie Schimmel quotes the same distich and calls it ‘one surprising passage,’ p. 130. Here it would perhaps be interesting to mention that Schimmel considers, rightly, the attitude of the majority of the Islamic mystics towards “not so heavenly eros” as at best ambivalence. With the same emphasis with which she abstains from discussing a Hafizean/Goethe’s Eros in the context of mystical love, she considers Rumi the greatest hero of “chaste love,” hence the qualification ‘surprising’ for the quoted passage. In this brief article, she inventories a considerable number of utterances and expressions that show the ambivalence of Eros and the Feminine in the thought of early Sufis and ascetics, which clearly diverge from Ibn ‘Arabi’s conception of the feminine. Here is a brief sample; “A study of early Sufism reveals the picture of a predominantly ascetic movement with strong control of body and spirit. Utter avoidance of anything unlawful, even doubtful, was a condition of the Path; the discipline was extremely strict, (p. 121). See also the quotes on the pages 121-128: Referring to the sexually obscene stories in Rumi’s *Mathnawi*, she writes: “In all of them, the poet suddenly plunges into a hymnical praise of true, Divine, love.” “There was no mercy for those who did not follow the path of asceticism and in early Sufism that meant largely sexual restriction.” “The lower instincts, the ‘flesh’ were made to undergo a strict education in which hunger played a dominant role.” “[T]hey were disgusted by the world and had therefore also to hate women, since through woman this world is renewed and continued.” “[E]ven if they got married, or permitted marriage, they still found it dangerous and certainly not advantageous for man.” “Some Sufis would practice asceticism even though married.” Only by some later mystics, “who enjoyed the pleasure of the body and of love,” “[the] somewhat functional and loveless lovemaking (lawful marriage)’ is counteracted.” It seems reasonable to conclude that generally speaking, Schimmel has a more conservative attitude than Corbin when it comes to the role of Eros in Islamic mysticism.

<sup>43</sup> [FA I/3], p. 49.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>48</sup> Max Kommerell, *Gedanken über Gedichte*, Frankfurt am Main, 1968, p. 306.

<sup>49</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*. For an informative discussion on “dhikr” and its importance in the mystical Path, *ibid.*, pp. 167-176.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>52</sup> There are other classification of the types of dhikr, cf. for example, *ibid.*, p. 174.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

## CHAPTER FIVE

# Annihilation and Perpetuation

Die Before Ye Die!  
*Prophetic Hadith*

The adventure between me  
and beloved has no end—  
That which has no beginning  
cannot have an end.  
*Hafiz*

Kill me, o my trustworthy friends,  
for in my being killed is my Life.  
*Hallaj*

### Selige Sehnsucht

Sagt es niemand, nur den Weisen,  
Weil die Menge gleich verhöhnet,  
Das Lebend'ge will ich preisen  
Das nach Flammentod sich sehnet.

In der Liebesnächte Kühlung,  
Die dich zeugte, wo du zeugtest,  
Überfällt dich fremde Fühlung  
Wenn die stille Kerze leuchtet.

Nicht mehr bleibest du umfassen  
In der Finsterniß Beschattung,  
Und dich reißet neu Verlangen  
Auf zu höherer Begattung.

Keine Ferne macht dich schwierig,  
Kommst geflogen und gebannt,  
Und zuletzt, des Lichts begierig,  
Bist du Schmetterling verbrannt.

Und so lang du das nicht hast,  
Dieses: Stirb und werde!  
Bist du nur ein trüber Gast  
Auf der dunklen Erde.

With this poem we will come to the culmination of the mystical visions and the poetic expressions that motivate, inspire and organize the composition of the entire *Divan*. We shall try to demonstrate that the harmony between vision and expression is neither fortuitous nor the result of a masterful superimposition of two essentially divergent fields of human existence, that is, perception and language. Rather, these are both integral to a single and crucial “moment” of what we have previously called a “theophanic vision,” which is in turn transformed, of necessity, into a symbolic expression. As such, *Selige Sehnsucht* will be characterized as the “visionary Poem” par excellence. In the most decisive moment of the poem, in its bewildering “Stirb und werde,” we will locate a central idea of the type of mysticism for which we have argued throughout this work and in our reading of the *Divan*. This idea distinguishes what we call “Mysticism of Perpetuation,” in which the individuality of the mystic is decisively restored at the end of the mystical journey, from “Mysticism of Annihilation,” where the last stage of journey is envisioned as “total annihilation” of the particular individual into the universal whole. This will serve to further demonstrate the commonality of vision between Goethe and oriental theosophers whose speculative mysticism we have used here as the hermeneutical basis of our exposition. In the overall constellation of these mystical ideas, however, another central idea has been facing us again and again. We will continue in this chapter to argue that the type of mysticism at issue here, and the type of mysticism that is common between Goethe and his oriental twin, Hafiz, is one of the “Redemption of Phenomenon.” Here the phenomenon is dignified as the locus of the theophanic

vision and as such, its denunciation has no place in this type of mysticism. The demonstration of this point will lead us to a crucial aspect of the poem as a visionary poem, that is, the above-mentioned harmony between expression and vision. In such a poem, the form is the exact correlate of the content, for it is the report of a theophanic vision, of a visitation in the realm of *Mundus Imaginalis*, a creation of *Active Imagination*. Here, then, what we have called Symbolic Vision within the field of mystical imagination, will transform into a precise poetological and tropological expression. This, as we will see, takes place along the “metaphorical” axis. In the investigation of the revival of a dead metaphor, that of the butterfly and the flame, we will try to show how precise philological considerations are integral to the hermeneutics of the poem. All this needs to be complemented with the perhaps most important dimension of such visionary poetry, that is, surprising perhaps for some, its ethical dimension. For what makes a poem visionary is not only the beauty of the idea and images, nor the absolute harmony of the vision and expression, in short, its aesthetics, but also its ethics. In its being the report of a genuine experience, in its being the expression and the ineffable, the visionary poem becomes the expression of an ethics, it includes decisive injunctions, a poetic guideline of a particular mode of living and being. Such completion of dimensions and aspects makes up a visionary poem. And *Selige Sehnsucht* is the poem of such completion. It is a poem about completion or, said more comprehensively, it is a poem of consummation--in every possible sense of the word.



Of the different but tightly connected denotations and connotations of this word, “consummation,” those of “to perish” and “to come to completion” will clearly connect us to the mystical ideas of annihilation and perpetuation. Perhaps more interestingly, however, consummation as in “consummating a marriage” will provide us with the most central image of the poem, that is, the marriage of the moth and the flame, and that will ground our philological/tropological assertions. But it is the more dynamic notion of the word, that is, the sense of being “overwhelmed” as if being burned with “fire”, in this case the “fire of desire,” that proves to be the driving force of the poetical expression as well as the mystical vision.

Thus the hero of this poem is “Sehnsucht.” It is the matured transformation of the same “Sehnsucht” that is the centerpiece of Goethe’s dialectics of love. It has now become “blessed.” It is rejuvenated as the result of the new Orientation, as a result of the return, at the level of mystical experience, to an originary archetype, mediated through the Persian poet, connected, as it were, to a spiritual and poetic tradition where love and beauty are praised in their cosmic dignity and mystical worth. At the poetological level, this return, as we will see, manifests itself in the renewal of the metaphor of the moth burning in flame. The “moment,” whose history the poem recounts, occasions with the full force of its logic a singular and symbolic poetic creation. It not only stands in the full bloom of an extraordinary new burst of poetic fecundity, only a few weeks after the first *Divan* poems, on July 31<sup>st</sup>, 1814,<sup>1</sup> it anticipates in its own way, much like *Hegire*, but at an entirely different poetological and symbolic level, the

entire *Divan*. The result has been acknowledged by most critics as one of the most fascinating, seductively bewildering and best known poems of the entire German lyrical tradition.

Ernst Beutler in his commentary on the poem calls it “die Krone des ganzen Divans. Es ist auch die Krönung dieses ersten Buches.”<sup>2</sup> The poem has also been called the “most interpreted poem in the *Divan*.”<sup>3</sup> This is undoubtedly related to the fact, also acknowledged by many, that *Selige Sehnsucht* is that poem where the poet most rivals his Persian brother Hafiz, with singular success, in his art and his love poetry and lyricism. Here we have a prime example of the creative achievement of a poet who-- to use Max Kommerell’s formulation--“eine nur gewußte Welt zu einer gefühlten, eine fremde zur eignen macht.”<sup>4</sup> In fact, we may say that this poem is, of all the ones we have discussed, also perhaps the most extraordinary as an example of the intercultural encounter at its very apex, where the question of “expropriation” recedes before the fact of poetic genius. For Goethe in his assumed role and garb as Oriental poet here not only enters into the Persian poetical tradition itself, but renews it both from without and within in a way that is itself truly “bi-unitary,” possible only for someone at once both working within that tradition with the easy familiarity of a kind of insider and at the same time with the uninhibited freedom of the outsider, one who is neither dogmatically nor by routine and habituation bound by it. If Goethe, in the *Noten und Abhandlungen* spoke of the necessity of going to the source itself of Persian and Oriental poetry, *Selige Sehnsucht* is perhaps the richest and most compelling result of this “going to the source.”<sup>5</sup> This

will empower Goethe to not simply “appropriate” or emulate the tropes of Persian and Oriental poetry, but to revitalize them, to, as Kommerell puts it, break through the “Starre und Fertige der orientalischen Poesie” to achieve the resuscitation, the awakening of the “getrockneten Redeblume”, the dead metaphor of butterfly and candle to new life.<sup>6</sup> Or, as another commentator has put it:

Das für Divanstil typische Ineinandergreifen abstrakter und bildlicher Ebene intensiviert die Verklammerung und bewirkt zugleich jenen Schwebenzustand, der jede abstrakte Formulierung wieder ins metaphorisch-mehrdeutige zurücknimmt.<sup>7</sup>

Hans Heinrich Schaeder connects the stylistic aspects of the poem, as well as the relation between the ideas and the images merged into one another in it, to the very ambiguity intended in the poem as well as to an “Erlebnisstärke”:

Bei kaum einem anderen Gedicht Goethes ist der Bildzusammenhang so eindringlich und der gedankliche Zusammenhang so gelockert: die Bilder selber wachsen von Vers zu Vers über sich hinaus und reißen uns mit. Wir erleben das Gedicht als eine Einheit und finden uns doch außerstande, es von Zeile zu Zeile fortschreibend auszulegen: dies allein zeigt die Erlebnisstärke, in der es konzipiert wurde.<sup>8</sup>

It has been observed that apart from the metaphor of the moth already known as an idea of Plato;<sup>9</sup> the set of key motifs used in *Selige Sehnsucht* had been available to Goethe through his study of the translations of great masters of Persian lyrical poetry, Sa’di and Hafiz.<sup>10</sup> From Holsteiner Olearius’ translation of Saadi’s “Persianischer Baumgarten” Goethe had read the account of the conversation between a man and the moth:

Die Mücke wurde einst von einem Manne also angeredet: Armes Blut! suche jemanden zu lieben der deines gleichen ist. Nimm einen Weg vor dich, da du das Glück haben magst, wieder heraus

zu kommen. Du und das Licht, deine Geliebte, sind so weit voneinander als Nacht und Tag. Wie kan die Kertze, du armes Thierlein, dich zu ihren Freund annehmen, da die Augen der Könige und Fürsten auff gerichtet seyn? Halt die Kertze vor so albern nicht. Daruff antwortete die verliebte Mücke: Was ist denn nun daran gelegen, sterb ich schon, so bin ich dem Abraham gleich. Ich habe Feuer in meinem Herzen. Die Funcken der Kertzen kommen mir vor als Blumen. Mit Willen werffe ich mich nicht selbst ins Feuer, aber die Ketten der Liebe zu der Kertzen ziehen mich dahin. Da ich ferne davon war, brandte ich schon und nicht eben jetzo, da du die Funcken umb mich fliehen siehst. Ein weiser Mann hat wohl geredt: Die Liebe ist wie Feuer, so durch einen starken Wind angeblasen wird. So bald ich mich der Liebe zur Kertzen ergeben, zoge ich mein Herz stracks ab von allen weltlichen Dingen. Solche sind erst recht verliebet, die also thun, nicht aber, die sich selbst lieben. Mein verborgenes und mir unbekanntes Verhängnis wird mich einmahl tödten. Ists dann nicht besser, daß ich durch meinen Bulen die Kertze umgebracht werde, nachdem an meiner Stirn geschrieben stehet, daß ich wahrhaftig einmal sterben muß.<sup>11</sup>

More importantly, a ghazal attributed to Hafiz in Hammer-Purgstall's translation seems to have been the main source of the motifs that form the basic imagery of Goethe's poem:

Keiner kann sich aus den Banden  
 Dienes Haars befreien,  
 Ohne Frucht vor der Vegeltung  
 Schelepp'st du die Verliebten.  
 Bis nicht in des Elends Wüsten  
 Der Verliebte wandert,  
 Kann er in der Seele Inners  
 Heiligstes nicht dringen.  
 Deiner Wimpern Spitzen würden  
 Selbst Rustem besiegen  
 Deiner Brauen Schütze würde  
 Selbst Wakaß beschämen.  
 Wie die Kerze brennt sie Seele,  
 Hell an Liebesflammen  
 Und mit reinem Sinne hab' ich  
 Meinen Leib geopfert  
 Bis du nicht wie Schmetterlinge  
 Aus Begier verbrennest,  
 Kannst du nimmer Rettung finden

Von dem Gram der Liebe.  
 Du hast in des Flatterhaften  
 Seele Gluth geworfen,  
 Ob sie gleich längst aus Begierde  
 Dich zu schauen tanzte.  
 Sieh' der Chymiker der Liebe  
 Wird den Staub des Körpers,  
 Wenn er noch so bleiern wäre,  
 Doch in Gold verwandeln.  
 O Hafis ! kennt wohl der Pöbel  
 Großer Perlen Zahlenwerth?  
 Gieb die köstlichen Juwelen  
 Nur den Eingeweihten.<sup>12</sup>

In her careful study of the cyclic structure of the entire *Divan*, and in particular “Buch des Sängers,” which is basically concluded with *Selige Sehnsucht*,<sup>13</sup> Edith Ihekweazu discusses the programmatic nature of the poem relative to this opening cycle of the *Divan* and consequently relative to the whole *Divan*. Tracing the fundamental motifs of this West-East poetic and spiritual journey introduced from the beginning in *Hegire*, in their transformations and repetitions into this concluding poem of the first poem Ihekweazu posits these two poems as complementary components of one image.<sup>14</sup> Thus the motif of “journey” remains a dominating motif throughout the whole book,

[i]m “Buch des Sängers” findet sich die ganze Fülle der in “Hegire” angedeuteten Motivkreise unter der Dominanz des Reise-Dichter-Motivs wieder.<sup>15</sup>

But whereas in “Buch Suleika”, a “regelrechte Topographie” of this journey, as “zeitlich begrenzter Aufenthaltsort des reisenden Dichters”, is developed and a “szenische Gestalt” is thus obtained, “Buch des Sängers” belong to those books in the *Divan* where the “geistiger Raum” of the same journey emerges.<sup>16</sup>

The opening and concluding poems of this book, *Hegire* and *Selige Sehnsucht* already sharing the “moment of unhappiness at the present situation,”<sup>17</sup> both aim at immortality and eternal life, not just as their main motif, but also as the ultimate aspiration of the Poet/Singer/Wayfarer.<sup>18</sup> However, the destination of the journey, which is designated as the “pure East” in *Hegire*, in *Selige Sehnsucht* becomes abstract and “ins Enge gezogen.” Consequently, “[d]as Subjekt des Vorgangs ist [...] zugleich ein Abstraktum, ‘das Lebend’ge’ und ein Konkretum, der ‘Schmetterling’.”<sup>19</sup> This “Enge” is clearly not so much a physical and spatial narrowness as it is the metaphorical expression of the spiritual and inner space within which the mystical journey is undertaken. Thus, in this sense, as we shall see in the course of this analysis, even at this point the usual Germanistic distinction of “abstract” and “concrete” made here, though describing a real tension in the poem, is in itself and in its rigidity questionable and ultimately untenable: for “das Lebendige” is as little a pure abstractum as “Schmetterling” is a pure concretum: the boundaries between the two have become fleeting, and this very instability is in a certain sense the meaning of the poem. “Das Lebendige,” too, is only an abstractum from a simple linguistic/grammatical perspective of the abstract/concrete distinction. Goethe’s “das Lebendige” is both demonstrative and particular - “jenes Lebendige” - as well as universal and encompassing - “alles Lebendige.” The living which Goethe celebrates is that intensified and exemplary archetype of the living to which all the living may aspire - the quintessence of the living, the life of life itself. Therefore, Goethe says “Lebendige” - not “Leben” - to already indicate the living, concrete incarnation of life, which then, as a kind

of “Leben des Lebens”<sup>20</sup> will embark upon that primordial and defining moment of the living, the process of becoming as end and as beginning, as annihilation and perpetuation. Similarly, the poetic “Schmetterling” for the moth, is, as we shall see, already at its first appearance a metaphorical heightening of the concrete and phenomenal, and not merely its simple denotation. Therefore, the thematics of “Verwandlung,” “Aufbruch” and “Erneuerung im reinen,” already introduced in *Hegire*, find new forms of representation in *Selige Sehnsucht*.<sup>21</sup> Both poems also carry the “Ton der Ankündigung” that is characteristic of “almost all” poems of “Buch des Sängers.”<sup>22</sup>

Thus the rejuvenated poet undertakes one of his most remarkable West-East poetic creations. And in such singular a moment of perfect meeting, perfect “symbolic understanding,” felicitous coincidences, archetypal affinities inevitably abound. The Occidental way-seeker becomes a perfect Oriental and for that accomplishment, he becomes even more genuinely orientalized without having lost his own unique individuality: “In der Hafis-Gestalt des West-östlichen Divan wird Goethe sich selbst gegenständlich, wie er damals war – wie er damals zu werden sich anschickte.”<sup>23</sup> But also more Oriental, in that the poem, by its being a “blessed desire” and with its identification with the butterfly, which longs for the flame of its annihilation, returns the hackneyed and worn symbolism, the within the established and venerable Persian tradition already “dead metaphor” of moth and candle back to its originary and symbolic significance—it regenerates the symbol by repeating it, by referring to its archetype and by *becoming* it. That is to say – in a moment of great import for all discussions of Orientalism and

interculturality – Goethe does not simply quote, or worse still, “expropriate” the Islamic and Oriental trope for some nefarious or distortive purpose of othering, projection or domination, he intrinsically reconstitutes it, in a genuine meeting of East and West, both on its own as on his poetic trajectory. For we will see throughout this chapter that *Selige Sehnsucht* reiterates with utmost economy the main motifs of the two Persian poems that were mentioned as Goethe’s sources of poetic inspiration in the composition of his poem. Apart from the central motif, that is, the image of the butterfly desiring the light of the candle, these motifs include the apparent incompatibility of the butterfly and the light, the question of butterfly’s death in flame as contrasted with a natural death, and the instantaneity of the desire and its particular dynamic, as well as, finally, the esoteric meaning and the lesson that the story is assumed to offer to the willing and mystically desirous human souls. However, it is crucial to once again emphasize here that the image of the moth and its death in the flame as a metaphor for mystical annihilation is no longer in effective use in Persian lyrical poetry and has long since been reduced to an empty linguistic shell, a poetic cliché.<sup>24</sup> A simple poetic reconfiguration of the aforementioned motifs would not *reveal* any new dimension of the reality of the mystical union or the driving force that initiates the journey towards it. I will therefore try to demonstrate how *Selige Sehnsucht* introduces crucial additional motifs within this particular metaphoric expression for the mystical process. Regarding Goethe’s attitude towards the inventory of the fixed motifs in oriental poetry, Max Kommerell writes:

Merkwürdig ist Goethes Verhalten gegenüber dem Starren und Fertigen, jenem Vorrat an dichterischer Wendung, der den Neuling



an orientalischer Poesie so sehr ermüdet. Wie dem Leser von Tausendundeiner Nacht geläufig ist, steht dieser Vorrat in einer Wechselbeziehung zum Spontanen; gerade er ermöglicht die Improvisation. Auch dies findet eine Entsprechung in Goethes damaligen Zustand. Er hatte Stil, er griff in seinem Ausdruck wie in seinem Handeln auf Gepflogenheit zurück.[...] Spontan zu sein ist das Prinzip seines Dichtens; auf Ausgebildetes zurückzugreifen ist das Prinzip des Alters und der Kultur, und erst recht der Kultur dieses Gelehrten! Goethe benutzt jetzt den Tropenreichtum, die Fertigkeit verblühten Sprechens, die Phrasen und die Variantenbildung der Dichtersprache – Dinge, die er schon als Jüngling an der Anakreontik zu schätzen wußte, er schwelgt darin. Aber Schwelgen ist mehr als Benutzen, ist fast wieder spontan! Kann man ein Herbarium in einen Blumengarten zurückverwandeln? Er tat so mit den getrocknenen Redeblumen!<sup>25</sup>

Here, in this poem, we have one of these “getrocknenen Redeblumen”: not from the stock of motifs in Goethe’s own earlier poems, but from an entirely different poetic tradition. And I will now try to show how he gives it a new life. This will also help us recognize the type of mysticism subscribed to in this poem and in the whole *Divan* not only as a mysticism of Perpetuation (as opposed to a mysticism of Annihilation), but also as a mysticism within which the phenomenon is redeemed and dignified, and not simply something that must be overcome and forsaken in order to arrive at the destination of the mystical journey. All this will be directly related to the poetological innovations that are introduced by Goethe within the original metaphoric image.

Already the first stanza of the poem makes unmistakable reference to a limited, but quite representative, set of key ideas, that are constitutive of an aesthetics and a hermeneutics based on mystical experience as understood according to an oriental theosophy, and in the precise sense in which Hafiz himself tends to be (mis)interpreted. At the very outset, a form of esoterics, a

hierarchy and an order are established. Just as in the last lines of the ghazal attributed to Hafiz, the poet issues a warning against sharing the secrets with the multitude: “O Hafis! kennt wohl der Pöbel / Großer Perlen Zahlwert? / Gib die köstlichen Juwelen / Nur den Eingeweihten,” Goethe begins the poem by issuing an injunction, replacing the “Pöbel” with the milder “Menge,” and identifying his “Weisen” with Hafiz’s “Eingeweihten.”<sup>26</sup> This, however, should not be confused with the type of hierarchy established in the traditional mystical or Sufi orders in Islam, Christianity or any other religion. Just as Hafiz offers the wisdom he has gained through his mystical journeys to all willing souls, Goethe shows the way of the mystical initiation to all desiring souls and as such, he engages just like his Persian twin in the subversion of the well-established traditional and orthodox hierarchies of the so-called mystical. Let us begin then by the simple observation that the addressee of the injunction is in the plural, is a form of community, a form of audience with whom the singer/poet is in some pact of trust and secrecy. It is with those whom he is sharing his wisdom, and to this wisdom belongs, that whatever they are to hear and learn from it, they shall only share with the similarly initiated. Thus a form of paradoxical advice is offered here. On the one hand the poet himself opens up the esoteric and mystical meaning freely to all those willing to experience it. And this is indeed a form of democratization of the initiation process and the mystical experience. In a seeming paradox we then also have the injunction against divulging the secret to the “crowd.” We have a community, then, whose condition of admittance is to already intuitively wish to belong to it, and where the type of wisdom it offers can only be gained by those

who are in this sense “wise” already, that is to say, already open, willing and thus to some extent insightful. The key to the paradox is perhaps exactly this type of wisdom itself, which is not primarily of a discursive nature, but as in all true mystical knowledge is more fundamentally intuitive or *experiential*. This is not to say that absolutely nothing can be uttered or expressed discursively about this mode of knowledge or experience, and indeed the poet and the poem go on to actually expound upon this mystical/experiential knowledge and the key ingredient of it, that is, the process of Annihilation and Perpetuation. Rather the full scope of this knowledge is accessible only through a particular experience and that which *can* be genuinely expressed about it is in the symbolic mode, that is, in the form of an image whose intuition is in the realm of theophanic visions and through active imagination. That is to say, the true exegesis of this image is rendered to the initiated wayfarer through the process of initiation itself, which itself is double, symbolic-imaginary as well as experiential and real. It is the access to this experiential knowledge and intuitive exegesis that is denied to the unwilling, who, through their very unwillingness, have chosen their status of unknowing. Thus the warning against mockery of the crowd with its incomprehension of the mystery; as they will only be in bewilderment at or hostility to its true meaning, fall into discord over the rhyme and the reason of it, and falter when singing it.

We will see--when we come to the last stanza of the poem--that the question of metrical and musical particularities of this poem has from the beginning been one of the main sources of its bewildering nature and the diverse

reactions it has elicited. Relating a report to Goethe by his musician friend, Zelter, on a conversation about the troubles that the phrase “trüber Gast”—which comes in the penultimate line of the poem and will be the equivalent of the unknowing crowd—has caused, Ernst Beutler writes:

Zelter berichtet im Februar 1828 an Goethe, er sei von einem durchaus achtungswerten, in keiner Weise zu tadelnden Manne angesprochen worden: “Freund, was haben Sie eine göttliche Melodie gemacht auf Goethes ‘Selige Sehnsucht’! Aber was für Worte! noch einmal, was für Worte! Ich kann sie nicht verstehen.” –Zelter: “Singen Sie denn die letzte Strophe nicht mit?” – “Allerdings! doch der ‘trübe Gast’, was ist der ‘trübe Gast’?” – Zelter: “Nun ja, der ‘trübe Gast’ sind Sie.”<sup>27</sup>

Interpreting this lack of understanding as the “incapability to imagine the metamorphosis” that the poem represents, performs and demands, Beutler goes on to recount Goethe’s reaction to the report:

Goethe meinte: “Über die ‘trüben Gäste’ wollen wir kein Leid haben, ob es gleich schwer ist, daß jemand ein Lied gerne singt, ohne die letzte Zeile begreifen zu können.”<sup>28</sup>

The “trüben Gäste” are those who do not accept the invitation to embark on the initiation, and the daring, even harrowing mystical transport, contrary to all merely earthbound understanding, which it entails. With absolute precision, the warning against the incomprehension of the crowd re-enacts the symbolic and ultimate mockery unleashed against “revelation of secrets” in the scene of the legendary Martyr’s, Hallaj’s<sup>29</sup>, bitter end. Hallaj is the martyr of mystical love who has become “in the course of time, a symbol for both suffering love and unitive experience, but also for a lover’s greatest sin: to divulge the secret of his love.”<sup>30</sup> About this sin Hafiz too recites as a form of brotherly advice to those who listen to his song:

That friend with whose head the gallows' neck is erect,  
His crime was that he revealed secrets.

It was Hallaj who, some 900 years before Goethe, used the symbol of the moth, the candle and the fate of the moth that approaches the flame and gets burned in it, to allude the state of Annihilation, the state of *unio mystica* where the union between the wayfarer and God is complete and final, and where there remains no trace of individuality of human existence in his mystical journey, the state which in Islamic mysticism is called *Fana'*.<sup>31</sup> It was he who exclaimed: “*ana'l-Haqq*” (I am the Truth, God), and was accused of blasphemy, was considered by some as a secret Christian and by some as a pure monist and a pantheist and was condemned to death. His hands and feet cut off, he was put on the gallows, then beheaded, then burned and his ashes thrown in the Tigris.<sup>32</sup> “The story goes that Hallaj went dancing in his fetters to the place of execution, reciting a quatrain about mystical intoxication.”<sup>33</sup> It is Hallaj who said: “Suffering is He Himself, whereas happiness comes from Him.”<sup>34</sup> Thus, it may be pointed out that the secret of mystic initiation which Goethe offers here is, in its historical context, and vis-à-vis the traditional religious orthodoxies and hierarchies, not only a heterodox, but also a potentially dangerous and heretical one – another compelling reason for the conspiratorial injunction to secrecy. Yet the reference to the historical origin of the use of the image of flame and moth in Islamic mysticism has also been used to suggest that Goethe's *Selige Sehnsucht*, in its clear citation of the annihilation of the moth in the light of the candle, and in reenacting the destiny of Hallaj, is in fact a depiction of the mystical process that ends in *Fana'*. But as we will see

presently, the story does not end here, neither in the tradition of Islamic mysticism itself nor indeed with Goethe:

Through the medium of Persian poetry the same symbol (of the moth and candle) reached Europe. Goethe's famous poem 'Selige Sehnsucht' in his *West-Östlicher Divan*, reflect this very mystery of dying in love and reaching a new, higher life in union. The Goethean *Stirb und werde*, translates very well the Prophetic tradition "die before ye die" (in order to gain new life), formed one of the cornerstones of Sufism and, of course, of Hallaj's theories.<sup>35</sup>

I will later introduce the notion of *Baqa*' (Perpetuation) as a correlate of the notion of *Fana*' in order to offer my interpretation of the poem. In reference to these two concomitant notions Annemarie Schimmel writes:

To gain a higher life through death and spiritual resurrection is the goal of the lovers; it is the constant interplay of *fana*' and *baqa*', as expressed through the ritual of enrapturing dance. And the mystics know that this first dying implies more and more acts of spiritual surrender, each of which ends on a higher level of spiritual life—the Goethean '*Stirb und Werde*.'<sup>36</sup>

The first stanza proceeds to concisely announce the poem's program. It is the song of praise to be sung about "das Lebendige," about that *which lives*. And here we come to one of the many instances of polarity that we are to encounter throughout the poem. These dualities in fact will provide the key to its understanding. For on the one hand, right at this opening of the poem the emphasis is placed upon the Living, upon that which lives. With highlighting "das Lebendige," as the protagonist of the poem, the emphasis is placed indeed on Life itself. In this sense the protagonist of the poem is all living creatures as well as each specific living creature, or as we have seen, the life of Life, its defining and archetypal quintessence, the living within the Living itself. This living creature is to come to life, it is to be given life, and it is to be born. Hence one of the most

central motifs of the poem: *Birth*. I shall argue that it is exactly this motif, the motif of birth, that distinguishes Goethe's use of the moth and candle metaphor from the previous uses within the tradition of Persian/Oriental lyrical poetry, and it is this motif that carries the weight of the renewal of the dead metaphor. But on the other hand, the poem is not only about the birth of this living creature, not just about Life, but also about the living creature that "desires" its death in the flame, "Flammentod," its desire to be annihilated in the light of the candle. This will lead us, as I will later come to offer my reading of the poem from the perspective of Oriental theosophy, to the theme of "mystical annihilation." But it is one of the main contentions of this chapter that the annihilation that is depicted in this poem, as well as in the type of mysticism I am here proposing as its hermeneutics and its ethics, is not an absolute annihilation resulting in the complete disappearance of all traces of the individuality of the wayfarer. The poem will teach us that this annihilation is the necessary preparation for a new becoming, and just as the begetting and the birth that is spoken of in the poem is of a "higher" order, so is the death a different kind of death than simply natural death or a free fall into nothingness.

Let us once again recall that it is, first and foremost, a living thing about which the poet sings. This is its definition; it is that which lives. And it is, as to be argued, to go on living, albeit after a certain kind of death.<sup>37</sup> It will be instructive to mention here that in one of the earlier versions of the poem, Goethe had used the word "Flammenschein," instead of "Flammentod."<sup>38</sup> The change from the early version to the finalized version marks a sharpening of focus on the polarity

of Life and Death, thereby strengthening both concepts and images. It is also crucial to highlight at the outset the two essential and tightly connected features of the death depicted here. First, this death is of a very specific form, that is, of the form of death in Light. And this, as we have also seen in the case of Sa'di's poem, will bring about the main theme of the apparent incompatibility of the lover and the beloved, and therefore, the idea of the union of the two as a "higher" union. But secondly, this death in the flame cannot be perceived as a suicidal act pure and simple, for it is thoroughly charged and fueled with desire. Desire is the essence of life and motion and *rushing* towards one's death is here the expression of the very desire for a higher life. At the passionate meeting point of death and the living, being and not being, there comes life again, not with being again, but by Becoming; and this will be the program of the poem. The relation between these two features is neither accidental nor simply that of empirical cause and effect. It is an archetypal relation and the correspondence is of a symbolic and epiphanic nature. In desiring as in the total submission to its death, the butterfly, which is the animation of the blessed desire, rushes towards its orient, towards its own origin, and becomes a being of Light. And thus, exactly as this longing sanctifies an act of self-destruction, sanctity flows through a desire which could otherwise be blind, wandering and unwise. Thus the desire itself is no longer unqualified, vain or unfulfilled, it is "selig," it is blessed. If "Sehnsucht" of the young Goethe expresses itself in the cry: "Könnt ich doch ausgefüllt einmal/ Von dir, o Ew'ger, werden," "der reife Goethe hatte erfahren, daß der Ewige dieser Sehnsucht durch die Gnade der immer neuen Wandlung antwortet."<sup>39</sup>



Thus the first stanza justifies itself as a true *incipit* anticipating the entire poem and the entire west-east movement. It shapes itself as a concise handbook of mystical experience. Community of esoteric wisdom, praises of the Living sung, Annihilation, Fire and Desire, these are the elements that are joined together forming the shape of a butterfly called Blessed Desire.

It will be interesting to mention the transformation which the ‘name’ of this living creature of the form of a butterfly undergoes in the successive changes of the title of the poem. This in itself shows a sharpening of the vision which is symbolized by the poem. This transformation, just like the small variations on certain words in the poem, and indeed every last detail of the text has been interpreted by various commentators—albeit in divergent ways—as integral to the formation of a hermeneutics of the poem. Hendrik Birus, in his commentaries on the *Divan*, reports of the order of the titles of the “Einzelveröffentlichung” of the poem before the publication of the entire *Divan* in 1819<sup>40</sup>. First, the poem is simply called *Buch Sad, Gasele I.*<sup>41</sup> Then *Vollendung*, and finally just before arriving the definitive title, *Selbstopfer*. Here with this definitive title of the poem, and with the repetition of the letter “S,” we see the first instance of a number of doubling operations that permeate the poem’s poetological/mystical structure. But more importantly, this transformation of the title clearly shows a refinement of poetic/speculative vision away from a concept of completion as the end result of the wayfarer’s journey or an overtly religious notion of his martyrdom, towards a highly dynamic concept and image of mystical desire and the accompanying sense of blissfulness and intoxication. The Eros that underlies

this movement is highlighted in the finalized title: “Eros ist die treibende Kraft in der Hervorbringung des Lebens und in dem Verlangen nach Flammentod.”<sup>42</sup>

Along with a significant change of register, the second stanza begins to unfold the central idea in the shape of a biography, the birth, the journey, the death and the after-life of the butterfly. This task will be accomplished in the course of the three middle stanzas of the poem, once again creating a classical frame, starting with an *incipit*, often startling but in a particular and distinct register, ending in a conclusion, a sort of resume, a lesson or another formulation of the original lesson, but in distinctly new register, an elevated, sublimated and sublated register, and one now based on our having been, in the medium of the butterfly, conducted through the initiatory experience itself:

Eine Strophe Einleitung mit der Ankündigung, eine Strophe Schluß mit der Lehre, dazwischen drei Strophen mit der Darstellung des Symbols, worauf die Einleitung hindeutet und woraus der Schluß ein Lebensgesetz ableitet. Der Aufbau des Gedichts ist also streng gefügt und durchsichtig und leistet der Auslegung des Ganzen willkommene Hilfe.<sup>43</sup>

The discovery of this “Lehre”, this decisive and final turn of the phrase, the gesture of joining the thread as if to finish the necklace, but on a higher level and register, is the aim of a possible hermeneutics of the *Divan* from the perspective of an Oriental theosophy; the discovery of that knot that makes the entire artistic creation Eastern. Indeed, it is this intuitive, instantaneous and almost imperceptible return to an absolute *incipit*, an absolute beginning, a primal chaos of formlessness, a primordial dark ground, an Urszene of Genesis, of Creation and Pro-Creation out of which all specific being and living being then emerges and takes form, which is the perhaps most extraordinary moment of this extraordinary

poem: also in its unique and daring “bi-unitary” character in being both the formless night of Creation - as mythologically in Hesiod or biblically in the Book of Genesis - and of Pro-Creation, of the sexual act, of “Begattung”, in a characteristic but unprecedented Goethean transmutation of the primal scene of Genesis as a now also immediately organic one of birthing and re-birthing of the living. In this way, Goethe enacts a true “return to the source” of all created as pro-created being, laying the groundwork for the generation of new archetypes out of the pure night of formlessness, as of the rejuvenation of his central images, candle and moth, by letting them literally be born and formed anew from nothing.

But all this always goes through a process of exposition. A story, a form of myth of Genesis and Creation, is to be told. Equally notable, however, is the manner in which the second stanza affects a change of register through a simple syntactical variation. The addressee changes into the singular. It is addressed with the familiar Du. This Thou will haunt us throughout the entire poem.<sup>44</sup> The singer begins telling this Thou what has happened to it. That is to say that the “du” is not simply the addressee of the poem, but it is also depicted as its protagonist as well. This is in keeping with the notion that the poem opens the mystical path and teaches the secret of the initiation to any addressee sufficiently desirous of accompanying the poet on his journey. It is telling the creature which has commenced its potential flight, and will not until the final denouement assume its final identity of “Schmetterling,” of its own birth, flight, love, and the most startling twists in its life course. It is telling the story of the “Selige Sehnsucht” to itself. The poet speaks to and sings for himself,<sup>45</sup> yet at the same time as part of a

larger potential community of the initiate; telling that community what—despite all derision of the uninitiated—awaits them if they chose this path.

The second stanza begins the exposition of the kind of life and longing that “*Selige Sehnsucht*” symbolizes. Once again, continuing the felicitous poetic accomplishments in rivalry with the Persian high form of lyricism, the second stanza establishes with the aid of two rhyming pairs the semantic polarities that guide the movement of the central ideas and images. First there is the distinction *Kühlung*/*Fühlung*, quite an unusual pairing in itself, but even more so when we look closer to the qualifications of each term. One of the difficult knots to untie for the scholarship of *Selige Sehnsucht* has been this very distinction.<sup>46</sup> Before going further, let us mention that before the finalized version of the poem, Goethe had used the adjective “*neue*” instead of “*fremde*” to describe the “*Fühlung*”.<sup>47</sup> In the change from the early version to the final one, therefore, we not only have another operation of doubling (repetition of the letter “*f*”), but more importantly, a heightened emphasis on the particular and extraordinary nature of the feeling that the protagonist of the poem suddenly, as if in an altered state, perceives within himself. Indeed one may ask what kind of “*Kühlung*” is meant here; is it a sign of death, darkness, stillness, passionlessness, or is it that night that is “*pregnant*” with desire, the night that is the condition of the birth and passion, the night awaiting the midnight sun? For it is, this “*Kühlung*,” whether active or passive, unsettling or soothing, the “*Kühlung*” of a night. A night, however, of love. This darkness, therefore, seems to have the double aspect of fecundity and barrenness.<sup>48</sup>

Die 'stille Kerze' erscheint noch simultan mit dem Gegenbereich der Nacht. Im Gefühl der Liebe ist die Verbindung beider Bereiche gegeben. Nacht ist damit nicht das absolut negative, sondern trägt in der Liebe auch Keim des Lichts in sich, das sich in der Kerzenflamme offenbart, deren Wirkung im Lebendigen eine neue Liebesehnsucht erweckt.<sup>49</sup>

On the one hand, therefore, a certain level of fulfillment of natural desire and Eros is represented in the "cooling" of the night of love. Moreover, through the polarity created through the rhyming pair, this "Kühlung" is a state of release and familiar stillness and equilibrium which is invaded by a "strange feeling" as the result of the appearance of the light of the candle. This appearance is the first determinate form of warmth and light in the formlessness, darkness and coldness of the night. But on the other hand, a releasing of desire turns into the birth of the unleashing desire of a different order. Yet, as the first cooled-off passion is procreative, the second one too, which is of the nature of heat and light, will be ultimately one of Pro and Re-Creation. It will be a marriage with an offspring, but on a different level. We have already come to one of the most central and innovative elements of *Selige Sehnsucht* regarding the metaphor of the moth and the candle: the image of birth and of "Begattung." For the natural birth depicted here is at once the symbol of another birth. More precisely, the natural birth to which the second stanza alludes begins its function as the metaphor for the mystical birth. Thus the specific, humanly, earthly, procreative and erotic nature of the blessed desire that is being celebrated here, is established immediately in the second line of the second stanza. The "Kühlung" of the night of love is where the butterfly—and the "Thou"—were given birth and is where it in turn has given birth: "Die dich zeugte, wo du zeugtest." It is initially perhaps procreational

biological intra-species love, but love and creation nonetheless. The imperfect tense of the verbs in the second line signifies the “gesetzmäßige Generationenfolge in der Erhaltung des Lebens.”<sup>50</sup> The final line of the stanza names the cause of the disturbance of the equilibrium and the birth of a new and blessed longing through the *zeugtest/leuchtet* (non)rhyming pair. This half-rhyme has been much discussed as one of the particularities of the poem. For Werner Kraft “könnte ‘zeugtest’ das unreine Dunkel sein, das in ‘leuchtet’ zum reinen Licht würde, sprachlich gesehen und vor allem gehört.”<sup>51</sup> In the cooling of the desire in the night of love, a silent sun, an origin of light, begins illuminating and sets a different but related feeling in motion. Thus, this illumination causes the longing to move away from one mode of creation inevitably to a different and as yet unknown mode of being..

This is perhaps the moment to stop and reflect for a moment on the rather wondrous nature both of the genesis and of the ontological status of candle and butterfly in the poem. For it may be asserted that their presence and status here is from the very outset no less paradoxical and arresting than the ultimate paradox of the fate of immolation chosen by the butterfly. Again, as with his *incipit*, his invocation of the formless night of chaos and Creation, Goethe proceeds with such spontaneity and naturalness that we do not at first even notice the rather extraordinary nature of what is unfolding before us, but regard it as evident and self-explanatory. In this we are aided by our own associations of moth and flame and above all by our ‘prosaic’ routine of thought, which suggests to us that they

indeed are to be understood as natural objects which exist objectively outside the poem, independently of it, and were there long before the poem began.

This natural and naive reading - to which Goethe certainly would have had no objection - is, however, perhaps less illuminating than a co-extant one which is no less natural and naive, and no less supported by the textual evidence, and which would regard moth and candle as having been generated above all by the poetic act itself, first emerging as forms from the formless, fecund void of generation which the poem created at its outset. Indeed, within the reality of the poem, the candle is not initially “there” at all - as little as is the butterfly - and is created neither by natural causality nor by denotation nor by any other form of discursive linearity or logic, but is instead generated along a metaphoric axis: in other words, it is created through the associative polarity of images -against the formlessness and darkness of the night stands the specific form and light of the candle, something certainly vouchsafed by experience - one lights a candle in the night - but in the context of the poem, it is to be remembered that it is nonetheless the night itself which here generates - and lights - the candle. That is to say, from the outset the candle is endowed with magical and symbolic, with metaphorical as well as real and natural properties, coming as it does from such an origin. It is from the very beginning itself a “bi-unitary” entity, a metaphor and a natural object. The same must be said of the butterfly. Goethe’s use of “Schmetterling” instead of the neutral “Falter” or lowly “Motte” is anything but conventional poetical adornment and elevation. In the first place, it should be noted that the “Schmetterling” is the form which, drawn to the light in the formless void, the

initial “Du”, the interpellated “Thou” of the poem, has taken. It is therefore equally plausible to regard it in its traditional quality as a designation for the soul as of the moth. In point of fact, it is always both - “sinnlich” wie “übersinnlich”- metaphor and denotation, a suprasensual and a sensual being: this is indicated by the ambiguity of its status, origin and function as both natural and supranatural. It always is an image, it does not subsequently “become” one: and its genesis and trajectory are as magical as they are real, summoned forth as they are along the metaphorical axis by the candle and existing in a kind of perpetual *statu nascendi*, which exists almost for the whole duration of the text. For in the poem, the butterfly not only does not appear until the candle’s light has summoned it—it is in no wise seen before—it is in point of fact not actually named until it has embarked upon and achieved the very mortal apex of its flight. In this way, it could be said that mystical desire creates both its object and the longed-for fusion with it, and the butterfly’s “birth” in the poem, its coming to be, almost perfectly coincides with the moment of its burning.

The dynamic and the destination of this motion are to be elaborated in the two following stanzas. Yet, it must be pointed out here that the stillness of the candle adds to the complexity of that dynamic. It would be perhaps false to say that the candle with its burning and illuminating “actively” contributes to the creation of the “fremde Fühlung.” This strange feeling, in its active form, rises within the coolness of the butterfly’s satisfied natural desire. But the candle is still and it is only by virtue of its illumination, that is, only by its correspondence with something constitutive of and internal to the butterfly itself, that it causes the



motion. It requires neither time nor space for this unification and marriage with the flame of the candle to occur. It is not mediated through any substance. The identification is instantaneous. The illumination coincides with the motion. At the moment that the light of the candle appears, the butterfly knows that it is a being of Light and instantly joins it. This kind of dynamic and geometry is further developed in the next two stanzas.

The third stanza functions both as the explication of the second stanza and as the place where the transition from the natural and phenomenal order towards the mystical order takes place. Variations on the key motifs continue to outline the contours of the animated and animating being, the blessed desire, and the silhouette of the creature which has been born and has been set to fly and draw the peculiar and by no means Euclidean or Newtonian geometry of mystical desire. The rhyming pairs create a gesture of the doubling of the classical Persian ghazal, two rhyming couplets, a doubling that corresponds to a doubling of a Symbol through a poetic symbolization of it; to the regeneration of the Symbol by merely re-using it; a sort of returning the Symbol to its original archetype by re-singing it. The rhyming words, moreover, in re-establishing the key polarities, reveal the intrinsic dynamic and the confluence of the forces that is materialized in the movement. First is the polarity between, on the one hand, a state of being surrounded as if in a confinement, where one is deprived of movement (*umfängen*), and on the other, a new force which acts forcefully upon this static state with transformative violence and instantaneously ignites the motion. This force of desire, “*Verlangen*,” moves the newborn out of its state of non-motion,

that is, effectively state of non-living, as though in a form of tearing away life out of death, light out—but also in the middle of—darkness. Hence the surrounding, suffocating and death-like darkness of the shadows. This darkness of shadows clearly corresponds to the night of love, and its “Kühlung” in the previous stanza, just as the new “Verlangen” that tears the blessed desire out of its concealment corresponds to the strange feeling (*fremde Fühlung*) that is occasioned by the illumination of the candle. However, this darkness of the formless shadows—which is just established as the place where the butterfly has been born and where it has given birth—comes into the polarity, and consequently forms the dynamic of forces together, with a new and a higher form of Begetting, to another regenerative event, albeit of a higher order. This will prove to be the crucial point in our present context and will go to the heart of the interpretation of the poem from the perspective of speculative mysticism. For although the butterfly can no longer remain in the darkness of the shadows, in which, as a first step, there is procreation, desire and begetting, the new longing that has torn it away from this darkness leads it not simply to death, not just to annihilation (as will be stressed later), and even not to just another beginning, not to just another state of undifferentiated unity, but to a new begetting, a new re-productive, re-generative event. This begetting is at a higher and suprasensual level, a break not only with the formless shadows but in mystical terms, as we shall see, with the shadows of unknowing. It is at a “higher” level than the normal begetting<sup>52</sup> of the biological creature, it is not simply a “Fortsetzung”, but also an “Umwandlung” and “Erneuerung”<sup>53</sup> (and this point has been stressed again and again). However (and

this is what will be stressed here), it is a begetting nonetheless. This is once again another instance of the various bi-unitary structures that permeate the entire *Divan*. For we have the polarity of light and shadow which is at once phenomenal and mystical; mystically speaking, the natural light and shadow are symbolic of the mystical light and shadow and poetologically speaking, light and shadow are metaphoric expression for the mystical ones. Correspondingly, in the doubling of the birth (natural and mystical) that we witness here, we find the same “eins und doppelt” phenomenon that we have seen throughout this work. What is crucial here, and what I have tried to highlight on all occasions in the course of this study, is this: the second and the higher order of begetting is not merely a sublimation of the first and the lower order, or in other words, it is not simply allegorized by it. Rather, this homology is of the symbolic order; the former begetting is the symbolic representation of the latter, as the latter is the archetypal form of the former and can only be perceived through it. The higher begetting is a begetting and should be understood as such, hence the further confirmation of the blessed nature of the desire and the force of the motion towards self-annihilation. The story of this annihilation is, once again, not a story of losing all identifications and differentiations, in the manner of the darkness of the shadows and as a form of unleashed living force and potentiality; it is the story of rebirth and rejuvenation, much in the manner of the Goethean West-East journey itself.<sup>54</sup> The story is the story of the marriage between the earthly being with its origin, its archetypal form, its heavenly twin, as a being of light. The passion with whose force this marriage takes place does not simply resemble that of conjugal/erotic passion; it

rather is *symbolized* by this “earthly-unearthly” desire, exemplified and embodied by it, thus sanctifying the earthly passion as well. And this is exactly what a reading of *Selige Sehnsucht* from the perspective of Oriental theosophy suggests as its distinguishing feature from a mystical or religious reading from the Christian perspective or from that of early Sufism. There will be—as I have already stressed the difference in other chapters—a fundamental difference between the bi-unity achieved (and depicted in this poem) from the perspective of Oriental theosophy with the following—and typical—evaluation of the sublation of the “lower begetting” onto the “higher”;

So wird, was geschieht, Bild für Goethes Grundlehre von der Polarität, der Zweiheit, die zur Einheit drängt, aber verbunden mit der Idee der Steigerung. Und damit wird das Ganze eben doch in den metaphysischen Bereich hinaufgehoben.<sup>55</sup>

Here is also the appropriate place to return to the question of the metaphor and address the specific innovation that Goethe brings into the specific example of the moth and the candle, thereby renewing a dead metaphor incapable of transmitting new meaning.

In their interpretation of *Selige Sehnsucht*, Michel Böhler and Sabrielle Schwieder propose a metaphoric reading of the poem grounded on the introduction of the expression “höhere Begattung” in the poem. While I will here suggest a far more radical reading of this poem, where at every moment the forces of denotation and connotation, of designation and metaphor, are in a delicate and “bi-unitary” balance with each other - a perfect Goethean realization of that oscillation “zwischen dem Sinnlichen und Übersinnlichen... ohne sich für das eine oder andere zu entscheiden”<sup>56</sup>, which the poet recognized as characteristic of the

Oriental lyric - these authors have thus stated a position which in its very one-sidedness is expressive of a whole tradition of Germanistic dealings with *Selige Sehnsucht*:

Eine metaphorische Lektüre kann etwa beim Ausdruck der “höheren Begattung” von Vers 12 ansetzen, wo in “höher” figurativ ein uneigentliches Sprechen angezeigt wird. Davon ausgehend lassen sich dann weitere transfiguarale Metaphorisierungen konstituieren, etwa die einer Aufspaltung der “doppelten Zeugung” in Vers 6 in einen spirituellen und einen sexuellen Vorgang, fortführbar unter Einbezug der Hell-Dunkel-Metaphorik von Vers 5-8 und 19f. in den Aufbau zweier sich polar gegenüberstehender Bereiche eines Körperlich/Gesitigen bzw. Irdisch/Göttlichen, was dann den Bildbereich des Schmetterlings mit dem ideellen Postulat des “Stirb und werde!” in der Gesamtvorstellung eines plötzlichen stufenlosen Wandlungsvorgangs der spirituellen oder gar mystischen Transfiguration zusammenschließen läßt.<sup>57</sup>

This view seems to suffer from the usual conception of the mystical, whereby the spiritual and the physical realms are sharply separated from each other and the transition from the one to the other can only be understood as sublimation. I have repeatedly stressed that this is not the conception of mysticism which is used as the hermeneutical basis in my interpretation. In the system of speculative mysticism I apply here, all that is phenomenal is to be considered, in the field of theophanic visions, as having symbolic or “higher” significance. However, the useful suggestion that the expression “higher begetting” is the central motif in the metaphor that *Selige Sehnsucht* as a whole creates does indeed go to the heart of the poetical accomplishment. This poetic innovation is the inseparable concomitant of the mystical experience—the co-existence, and not disjunction of the phenomenal and noumenal, earthly and transcendent—that underlies the creation of this visionary poem. In order to see this more clearly, we have to take

a closer look at the function of metaphor in poetic language, particularly in a sacral context.

In his article “Stellung und Funktion der Metapher in der biblischen Sprache“, Paul Ricoeur proposes the following characteristics for the metaphor and its use in the poetic (as well as biblical) language:<sup>58</sup>

As opposed to the conception that metaphor is a trope that is simply and only related to the operation of “Naming,” that is, only a “deviation from the meaning of a single word,” and consequently, only a rhetorical device, Ricoeur considers metaphor as belonging to the semantics of the sentence, thereby grounding the meaning within a larger statement. In other words, metaphor is a phenomenon of predication. As a result of this, a metaphor is not simply an extension of “Naming” through deviation from the proper meaning of the word. Rather, it exists within an interpretation, and thus, the metaphorical interpretation pre-supposes the literal interpretation which it subverts: “die metaphorische Auslegung besteht darin, einen sinnwirdigen Widerspruch in einen sinnvollen Widerspruch zu verwandeln.”<sup>59</sup>

The role of similarity in a metaphorical expression can further not be reduced to the traditional function assigned to images in poetic language; rather, “in der metaphorischen Aussage geht es tatsächlich darum, da eine Verwandschaft aufscheinen zu lassen, wo das gewöhnliche Hinsehen keine gegenseitige Übereinkunft festzustellen vermöchte.”<sup>60</sup>

Unlike in the rhetorical conception of metaphor, according to which the trope of metaphor is a mere substitution, in the statement-semantic conception the

tension between the words and in particular the tension between the two interpretations (one literal and one metaphoric) generates a veritable creation of meaning:

In dieser Beziehung ist die Metapher eine Schöpfung, die nur im Augenblick lebt, eine semantische Neuerung, die keinen Status in der festgelegten Sprache hat und nur in der inkonsistenten Attribution eines ungewohnten Prädikats besteht. Die Metapher gleicht dadurch mehr der Auflösung eines Rätsels als der einfachen Assoziation durch Ähnlichkeit.<sup>61</sup>

A genuine metaphor, therefore, far from being a mere substitution containing no new information and only adding emotional, rhetorical or decorative charge to the statement, reveals dimensions of reality otherwise inaccessible or hitherto unnoticed. That is to say, the metaphor in its deepest poetic realization is not simply a trope of rhetoric and aesthetic enhancement, but a medium of cognition, a cognition otherwise not available to discursive logic or the human imagination. The proximity that a metaphor creates between meanings occasions a new vision of reality which resists the ordinary intuition attached to the literal use of the words. And this is exactly the relation between poetic language and the use of the metaphor in it with reality. A genuine metaphor allows us to see the world in a new light:

Die Zweideutigkeit, die Verdopplung weitet sich aus auf das *ist* der metaphorischen Wahrheit. Die dichterische Sprache sagt nicht wörtlich, was die Dinge sind, sondern metaphorisch, *als was* sie sind; gerade auf diese schiefe Weise sagt sie, was sie sind.<sup>62</sup>

Equipped with this conception of metaphor, we should now be able to see how the expression “höhere Begattung,” gives a new life to the dead metaphor of the moth and the candle. Moreover, we will be able to see how this innovation cannot be

simply interpreted as a poetic innovation, but as an integral part of the poem as a visionary poem. The motif of “Begetting” is, as I have already mentioned, absent in the previous uses of this metaphor in the tradition of Persian lyrical/mystical poetry. Thus its introduction in this poem reveals an important aspect of the reality of the mystical journey. In the use of the metaphor “begetting” for the union of the moth and the candle and the annihilation in the flame, we come to see the process of the mystical union anew and as a process of regeneration and reproduction and, of course, charged with desire and Eros. A new life is given birth in this process; a claim that the poem goes on to further demonstrate in the following stanzas. Thus we also see the process of initiation and spiritual birth of the mystic in light of natural birth, the coming into being of an actual new life. But conversely, and perhaps more importantly, we may read the poem as a metaphorization of the natural birth by the image of the moth burning in the flame of the candle, and hence the process of mystical initiation and the new birth in the spiritual realm. Here, birth—the “mother of all metaphors”—is itself metaphorized. Things are habitually likened to birth, here – another instance of bi-unity – birth is likened to itself. With this doubling and re-polarization of direction of “Bildspender” and “Bildempfänger,” the metaphor will amount to a genuine dignification of the natural and the phenomenal. “Alles Vergängliche ist nur ein Gleichnis.” We see that all that is transient and perishable is a metaphor for that which is eternal and immortal, and thus endowed with value and dignity. In making a metaphor from the “lower begetting” for the “higher begetting,” we will not only see the regenerative aspect of the mystical union, we will also



perceive the natural pro-creational union in a genuine kinship with the higher mystical union. Therefore, there can be no talk of the sublimation of the natural in the spiritual. The natural and the spiritual are the mirror of each other and their relation too is “eins und doppelt,” one of manifestation and revelation, as the metaphor is the revelation of an aspect of reality. Thus we not only have a metaphor for natural birth and life, we also have a metaphorical expression for the true Life of Life, the birth beyond birth, of which natural birth itself is the phenomenal image. In this way, Goethe installs a kind of closed poetic circuitry of birth becoming the metaphor and archetype of itself, that is to say, of the “higher” birth which it too potentially embodies. This, already containing the ethical lesson of the poem, is of great consequence to the life of the poet as poet also. In reference to Goethe’s reception of and Hafiz, and in describing the two poets’ lives as poets, Max Kommerell writes:

[D]as zarte Ehren und jauchzende Begrüßen des schattenhaften Kumpanen [wird] beinahe ein ja Goethes zu sich selber! Das Dichten des einen wie des Andern ist ein *savoir vivre*, ein Meistern des Lebens, ein Leben des Lebens.<sup>63</sup>

I have repeatedly discussed the phenomenal/spiritual bi-unity from the perspective of mysticism and the notion of symbol in Oriental theosophy. But the poetological exposition of this idea through the study of the use of metaphor helps us in our understanding of this poem and the *Divan* as visionary poetry. Visionary poetry, being a poetic report of a genuine mystical vision, finds its precise tropes and metaphors itself; where we have the perfect correspondence of the mystical idea, the poetic expression and ethical implication, we have in all likelihood a visionary poem before us.

To the poetic realization of this vision, however, belongs as intrinsically as the mystical conception of bi-unity characteristic of speculative mysticism the empowerment of the metaphor and the metaphoric axis which Goethe as a poet so exhilaratingly discovered in Oriental and Islamic poetry. We may also note that it is precisely the mystical empowerment of this metaphorical axis - as a medium for achieving imaginative cognition of a noumenal dimension of phenomena not otherwise accessible - that here makes this vision and its poetic realization at such a level possible.<sup>64</sup> In the following I will now trace the concrete unfolding of this metaphorical axis to its close.

The fourth stanza of the poem concludes the short itinerary of the life and journey of the butterfly towards its origin of light, and towards a death and a new birth. The first line quickly establishes the magnetism that is the driving force of the whole movement. It is a very special kind of magnetism and gravitational force; it is one in violation of the empirical laws of purely physical attraction or physical survival.<sup>65</sup>

[D]ieses Verlangen ist stärker als der Geschlechtstrieb, es ist ein freiwilliges Streben ('kommst geflogen') und zugleich ein Müssen unter einem von außen wirkenden Zwang ('gebannt'), die beide so stark sind, daß der Falter auch durch eine weite Entfernung nicht in einen schwierigen Zustand gebracht wird.<sup>66</sup>

Neither a "distance" nor a "weight"<sup>67</sup> hinders the movement; in a most striking imagery, the "heaviness" and "massful-ness" are named as an effect of distance, and the two are overcome simultaneously and instantaneously. The distance that is thus overcome is not a physical distance, but a distance between states, "Zustände" of existence. Moreover, the journey is of the form and dimension of a

flight, as has always been the means of transportation for burning longing and passion. And finally, there is a particular geometry to this flight outside time and space. It is a flight with the “directness,”<sup>68</sup> with a form of linearity, characteristic of being “under the spell.” As soon as the silent candle in the night of love began illuminating, like the offering of the Water of Life by the hand of Khidr in the middle of the night of the soul, the born creature went under the spell. It is crucial once again to note that it is not until this fateful moment that for the first time in the poem, the individual living creature, the story of whose birth, death in the flame and survival is being narrated, makes its appearance, assumes form and is explicitly named: “Schmetterling.” And here it is vital to recall what the poetic term “Schmetterling,” in addition to its natural form as moth, in every moment embodies: it is above all the concretization of the formless “du” and at the same time the “higher” incarnation of the moth not simply as poetic euphemism, but as metaphor in its empowerment. For the “Schmetterling” (not least as form of the Thou) is “Pysche,” the Soul as much as it is moth, and it is this in every moment of its Goethean existence. For this metaphorical dimension of meaning is here at all times equally elemental, equally primal and thus absolutely coeval with the denotative and natural one, more, the two levels of meaning simultaneously co-exist in the term “Schmetterling”, which here is equally name and metaphor, denotation and connotation, being and “higher” being. That is to say, the butterfly that has only now come to its full “Entstehung” does so as a bi-unitary entity; it comes to being in the moment of its being burned: thus, its birth is its annihilation. This simultaneity of “Entstehung” and “Verbranntsein,” annihilation

and survival, the butterfly being “eins und doppelt,” is the central bi-unitary motif in the poem and will be once again reformulated in the last stanza. The verb “Bist” at the beginning of the last line of the fourth stanza indicates, on the one hand, the butterfly’s “being,” and on the other hand, coupled with “verbrannt,” it indicates the state of annihilation in the flame. Thus it is only in the moment of its being burnt that the butterfly comes fully into being. Max Kommerell, who believes that it is not the Orient or the poetry of Hafiz, but the *moment* of the discovery of the Orient, the moment of *Verjüngung* of the poet,<sup>69</sup> that makes the *Divan* possible, interprets *Selige Sehnsucht* too as the “Hingabe an den Moment” and as the

selige Haft in [dem Moment], ein weltliches Verhalten, das doch in seiner Besinnung fromm wird. Denn Gott reicht sich im Augenblick beständig hin, die Mücke ist so gut sein Gleichnis wie Suleika, und diese überwindet durch ihre weisere Weisheit die Lehren von Wahn und Allvergänglichnis.[...] Liebenden ist das Leben jederzeit vollständig, und wem es seinem Gehalt nach ewig ist, der fragt nicht nach Dauer. Die Liebe ist der weiseste Zustand: denn der Liebende genießt sich selbst und ist ein Vorbild im Denken; er ist aber auch am bereitesten sich aufzugeben, und also ein Vorbild in der Sehnsucht, die Goethe als eine zwar unendliche, aber auf Gestalt gerichtete, von der Sehnsucht des Mystikers unterscheiden hat und mit der er den unentbehrlichen Begriff des Eros westöstlich zu verdeutschen glaubt.<sup>70</sup>

There is of course the ambiguity whether the last line of the stanza describes the total annihilation and death of the butterfly and the “bist” is not an existential verb but only a simple copula; whether the line and the poem describe the triumph of life over death or the reverse. In his interpretation of the poem, Werner Kraft connects this ambiguity to two different possibilities regarding our understanding of the word “Schmetterling” itself: If this ambiguity is intended by the poet,

dann wäre auch die allem Anschein nach unauflösbare Zweideutigkeit des “Schmetterling” von Goethe gewollt: daß “du” entweder *wie* ein Schmetterling verbrannt bist (oder verbrannt: bist) oder “du, Schmetterling”, das du *als* ein Schmetterling verbrannt bist (oder verbrannt: bist).<sup>71</sup>

However, based on the Oriental mystical interpretation offered in this work, not only the story is not one of annihilation and the death cannot be understood as falling into nothingness, but also this annihilation is simultaneous with another life where the “individuality” of the mystic is positively restored. I will shortly propose a reading of the last stanza that will serve as a demonstration of this claim. According to this reading, under the spell of the strong magnetism of the flame, in meeting and the union with its heavenly archetype and its being of Light, the butterfly is for the first time truly born. Thus we have the image of a creature born, the “Selige Sehnsucht” itself, which extends its existence from the shadowy world of potentiality of all its essence of Light out into the open, and captivated with the full force of its desire flies straight into its own death, uniting with the beloved. This affecting of a “höhere Begattung,” qualifies life of the Schmetterling above and beyond a simple regeneration:

Gegenüber der Regeneration kann [das Leben] eine neue Qualität, eine intensivere und reinere Lebendigkeit gewinnen durch die “Selige Sehnsucht”, durch die Annäherung an das Licht, durch die Lösung vom Materialen zum Geistigen hin.<sup>72</sup>

However, as opposed to the idea of the “highest stage of material sublimation” accomplished by burning in light, the manner of the movement and the trajectory of the unfolding of the life of the butterfly, *Selige Sehnsucht*, has also been

interpreted, for good reason, as a poetic account of Metamorphosis among all living species:

Im begrifflichen und symbolischen Bezugssystem des ganzen Zyklus gewinnt das Gedicht "Selige Sehnsucht" eine präzise Bedeutung, die ohne Einbeziehung christlicher oder mystischer System möglich ist.<sup>73</sup>

This has been supported by evidence of Goethe's intense interest in this natural philosophical topic, particularly as regards plants.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, the symbolic reference to butterfly as the product of a highly aesthetically charged process of transformation and metamorphosis has been in use since antiquity and was, as I have mentioned, quite well known to Goethe in that context and independent of his Oriental interests.<sup>75</sup> This appears, in turn, to have provided evidence against an interpretation of the poem from a Christian/mystical perspective:

Die Flamme der höchsten Liebe und Reinheit ist mit dem göttlichen Licht, das der Mystiker sucht, wesensgleich. Aber der Weg zu ihr ist kein Sprung aus dem Nichts der Weltverleugnung in die Unendlichkeit. Er ist aufwärtsführende Bewegung, die sich im Kreislauf der ewigen Naturerneuerung vollzieht.<sup>76</sup>

Thus there has been a divergence of interpretations, one in favor of a Darwinistic and naturalistic understanding based on the notion of metamorphosis, and the other in favor of a Platonic and purely spiritualistic understanding interpreting the process depicted in the poem in terms of sublimation from the realm of the matter into the realm of the spirit. But as it has been repeatedly stressed, this distinction is altogether irrelevant and artificial in the system of speculative theosophy that is suggested here as our hermeneutical tool. As Ihekweazu points out:

Beide Modi des Lebens, Regeneration und Sublimation sind nicht ohne einander denkbar. Sublimation führt 'zuletzt' zur Selbstauflösung; Lebendiges muß immer neu entstehen, um sich

steigern zu können. Was wichtig ist, ist allein die permanente Lebendigkeit und Verwandlung.<sup>77</sup>

Much in the manner of Heliotrope extending itself in time and space towards the Sun, its heavenly origin, by the sheer force of its own nature, with centrifugal as well centripetal forces at the same time—in other words, in a manner essentially outside time and space and all their curvatures—every transformation, including that of the butterfly, and every form of straight, circular or spiral motion, including that of planets and stars, are dictated by passion, divine burning and mystical desire. Thus the end comes quickly: the butterfly dives straight into its own death with the “lightness of uncontrollable desire and eagerness for light”, and the rest is just a simple fact; the butterfly is burned, burned under the spell. It has been united with, annihilated by the flame.

We are now at the alleged “break” between two stanzas, an “dem sich die Meinung der Mystik- und Metamorphoseanhänger teilen.”<sup>78</sup> Of course, we have already seen throughout this work, that the ambiguity and ambivalence of the poem vis-à-vis opposing interpretations is an integral part of the symbolic/mystical nature of the highest Persian lyrical poetry, and thus inevitably in Goethe’s *Divan* and in *Selige Sehnsucht*. It is also at this juncture that, in the words of Hans Heinrich Schreider (alluding also to the change in verb tenses):

nach dem hinreißenden Schwung der vierten Strophe,[...] schwingt in den neuen Ton der letzten Strophe[...] die [den Dichter] zur gegenwärtigen Wirklichkeit zurückrufende Vorahnung mit, daß die neuerliche Verjüngung, die ihm zuteil geworden ist, sich nur vollendet, wenn ihm dies eine Erlebnis noch einmal widerfährt. Es ist einer der Augenblicke in Goethes Leben, in denen Vergangenheit und Gegenwart mit gleicher Empfindungsstärke und Lebendigkeit ineinander fließen.<sup>79</sup>

At any rate, together with the first stanza, this last stanza will create the classical framing pattern of coming back—answering—to the original idea over an exposition in the final image:

In den beiden Rahmenstrophen des Gedichts wird ankündigend und zusammenfassend formelhaft die Quintessenz des in den Mittelstrophen dargestellten Vorgangs ausgesprochen: “Das Lebend’ge, ...das nach Flammentod sich sehnet” und “Stirb und werde!” Beide Formulierungen scheinen in sich paradox und stehen zueinander in Widerspruch. Die Sehnsucht des Lebendigen nach dem Tod verkehrt sich in das Hervorgehen des Werdens aus dem Sterben.<sup>80</sup>

This stanza has been most puzzling to most interpreters. The peculiarities of the rhyming patterns in this stanza in relation to the poem as a whole have been widely discussed. For Wilhelm Schneider this stanza with its hard one-syllable rhymes in the first and third lines, with its “ungeheure Wucht” becomes the “Gipfel [nicht nur des Gedichts, sondern auch] aller Dichtkunst.”<sup>81</sup> In the final section of his article on *Selige Sehnsucht*, Wilhelm Schneider outlines these peculiarities:

Die Strophen bestehen aus vier trochäischen Versen, also ohne Auftakt, mit Wechselreim. In den drei ersten Strophen endigen alle Verse auf weiblichen Reim, so daß der gleichmäßige rhythmische Fluß außer am Strophenende durch keine merkliche Pause aufgehalten wird. In der vierten Strophe erleben wir eine überraschende Änderung des metrischen Schemas: der zweite und vierte Vers schließen mit einem kurzen einsilbigen, männlichen Reimwort, das zudem auf einen harten Konsonanten endigt. Es sind eben die beiden Worte “gebannt” und “verbrannt”. Wie Ruck und Bruch geht es jedesmal durch den Rhythmus, und es braucht nicht gesagt zu werden, daß dies mit dem Sinngehalt dieser Worte und der ganzen Strophe übereinstimmt. Eine größere Überraschung steht uns in der Schlußstrophe bevor. Auch hier haben zwei Verse einsilbigen Ausgang, und zwar diesmal der erste und dritte, so daß auf den Vers mit dem Reimwort “verbrannt” unmittelbar der Vers mit dem Reim “hast” folgt. “Hast” und das entsprechende Reimwort “Gast” sind ebenfalls kurze Wörter mit



hartem konsonantischen Ausgang. Beobachtet man nun noch, daß die Zahl der einsilbigen Worte gegen Ende stark zunimmt, so faßt man einige Gründe dafür, daß Sprache und Rhythmus gegen Ende des Gedichts fester, härter, bestimmter werden.<sup>82</sup>

These peculiarities have caused some interpreters, such as Konrad Burdach, to propose the conjecture that this stanza was only subsequently added to the first four, a conjecture for which no evidence from the manuscripts can be found.<sup>83</sup> The unfounded conjecture has also been related to the incapability of reconciling two apparently divergent modes of interpretation of the poem, that is, the naturalistic and Darwinistic interpretation based on the notion of metamorphosis and the spiritualistic and Platonistic one based on the notion of sublimation:

Seit Konrad Burdachs weitausgreifender Deutung hat sich die Ansicht durchgesetzt, daß sich in der "Seligen Sehnsucht" zwei Motive durchdringen: der aus der persischen Vorlage übernommene Gedanke der mystischen Auflösung der individuellen Seele im göttlichen Allwesen und die Idee der Metamorphose als einer im diesseitigen Leben sich vollziehenden sinnlich-sittlichen Wiedergeburt. Burdach sieht selbst die Schwierigkeit, diese beiden Motive in dem vorhandenen Wort- und Bildzusammenhang zu vereinigen; nur wenn man Goethe das Erlebnis der Ekstase zuschreibt, wäre dies möglich. Burdach neigt deshalb zu der Ansicht, daß die letzte Strophe mit dem "Stirb und Werde" später hinzugedichtet sei – eine Annahme, für die es keinen äußeren Anhaltspunkt gibt.<sup>84</sup>

The most puzzling part of the stanza is, however, its second line: "Dieses: Stirb und werde!" This is where interpretations wildly diverge away from each other. Florens Christian Rang, who proposes a thoroughly Christological reading of the poem, writes:

"Stirb und Werde"—es zusteht uns nicht, es zu verwässern in "Stirb gleichsam und werde". Noch einmal: Goethe meint was er sagt. Wenn er von Sterben spricht, meint er: wirklichen Todes sterben, so tötenden wie er den Schmetterling verbrennt.<sup>85</sup>

Werner Kraft, who advances a sharp critique of Rang's method and conclusions, brings up the problem of the causal relation between *Stirb* and *werde* and their conjunction with *und*:

Es is aber nun eine offene Frage, die sich kaum eindeutig beantworten läßt, ob "stirb" und "werde" auf gleichgeordnete Entitäten deuten, die neben- und ineinander erfahren werden, oder ob zwischen ihnen ein Kausalverhältnis besteht, kraft dessen man lebt, indem man stirbt. Das "und" läßt beide Möglichkeiten zu.<sup>86</sup>

Also in connection with the fundamental question "Ist die höhere Begattung gelungen?" and in his polemic against Rang, Kraft addresses the question of the repetition of vowels in this stanza. He writes:

Rang schreibt "Meint Goethe mit dem Du am Ende gar sich? Mahnt sich selb und zagt für sich selb? Könnte Er fürchten, der trübe Gast zu sein?"...Auf die Trauer der U-Laute in dieser Strophe weist Rang zwar hin, hat aber nicht gesehen und gehört, wie dieses Du in Dunkel gehüllt ist, daß "dunklen" seine beiden ersten Buchstaben ihm entnimmt.<sup>87</sup>

This second line of the stanza will provide us with the main key in the interpretation the poem from the perspective of Oriental theosophy. In order to advance this interpretation I will offer in the second part of this chapter an exposition of the dual notions of *Fana'* and *Baqa'* in the speculative mysticism of Ibn 'Arabi in order to ground our claim that if the poem is to be read mystically, then that mysticism is not one of "Annihilation," but instead a mysticism of "Perpetuation," and exactly in this lies the kinship between Goethe and his Persian twin Hafiz. However, before coming to that exposition let us take a close look at the crucial ingredients of this stanza.

The first line of the stanza contains the ethical core of the poem. This ethical core can be considered from two related perspectives. First, the line

begins, with a decisive and explicit tone, to issue the instruction that the previous stanzas of the poem have so far been anticipating, gradually explicating and pictorially depicting. This will tell us that the poem is neither purely an aesthetic creation nor a piece of idle speculation; it offers *the* guideline for a way of life, and, considering how the stanza and the poem end, the true life at that: “Und so lang du das nicht hast/.../ Bist du nur ein trüber Gast.” Secondly, the line offers this instruction, this “Lehre,” to all willing addressees, to anyone who is willing to listen, learn and go through the experience. It shows the way of true life, a higher order of living, to everyone. The “du” that is being addressed here is a “du” that has survived the annihilation and the death in the flame. The poem has not come to its end with the burning of the butterfly; it continues and offers to all the secret of perpetuation after such death. This is already a clear demonstration of the claim of the poem and of this stanza and a proof for the validity of its ethical injunction. Further evidence comes in the second line: it explicitly and finally specifies the lesson. But this lesson is expressed in the imperative and not in the infinitive. What we have here is “Stirb und werde!” an injunction, not “Sterben und werden,” a piece of information. In this “Stirb und werde,” we will have the bi-unity of death of the lover in the beloved and their mystical union on the one hand and their individual survival on the other. Moreover, here as everywhere else in the poem we witness quite a felicitous and ingenious poetic accomplishment which helps strengthen the evidence. From the one syllable “Stirb,” the poem and the wayfarer move to the two-syllable “werde,” thereby replicating the bi-unitary structure, and the doubling move, that characterize this

stanza, the poem and indeed the whole *Divan*; that doubling operation that determines the basic structure of the process of the mystical union. The extraordinary and unprecedented injunction to the “Du” of the reader and “Schmetterling” to die in order to be born, underscores the fact that what is at stake here is existential initiation and interpellation and not abstract philosophical discussion - something Ricoeur has emphasized in a wider context when writing of the ethical dimension of the sacral metaphor: at the same time the finality of annihilation - “Stirb” the monosyllable with the hard consonant at its close - is startlingly completed by the paradox of perpetuation, in the coupling with the two syllables of “werde”. Thus, at the very climax of his poem of mystical bi-unity and its incarnation in moth and flame, Goethe embodies this spiritual bi-unity in the very materiality, and as it were “phenomenality” of his words.

The next stanza tells us what the consequence of not going through this experience of dying and becoming is. The addressee is warned that not going through the experience is tantamount to remaining a “trüber Gast” on the dark earth. “Trüb” as we have seen in the chapter on *Wiederfinden* is the characteristic of the realm between the realms of pure light and pure darkness. The word “guest” itself contains a similar ambivalence. A guest is present in one place without being quite “at home” there. Thus the expression “trüber Gast” once again offers us an instance of the doubling operation. The human soul, being of essence of light, would remain a guest never feeling quite at home in the realm caught between the realms of light and darkness, if it does not die in mystical union and does not (be)come alive again.

Thus, in a crowning act of “perpetuation” after the only momentary and apparent finality of “annihilation”, the closing stanza - in a delicate reference to one of the most remarkable properties of the “Schmetterling”, that of metamorphosis - the shell of “Trübheit” is sloughed off, as the butterfly enters fully into the “higher” realm of light.<sup>88</sup> For let us conclude this section with one crucial implication of this stanza: Should the wayfarer succeed in his experience of dying and becoming, he would no longer remain “trüb”; he becomes united with light and reaches its essence of light. But simultaneously, he would no longer be a guest. That is to say, his dwelling too will be a place where he is completely at home. Thus the earth, where he lives, is also no longer a “dark” earth. As such, the experience of mystical union not only transforms the soul’s inner world but also the outer world of his living and his experience. This is absolutely essential to the type of mysticism that we consider the key to the understanding of the *Divan*. The phenomenal world for the mystic is not a dark place, it is not to be dismissed or escaped from. Rather, in the eye of the mystic it continuously occasions celebration. The phenomenal world, the earth with all that is in it, is the place of theophanic visions, is also of essence of light, and as such, endowed with symbolic significance.

*It is greater than a hundred resurrections,  
For the resurrection is a limit, whereas love is unlimited.  
Love has got five hundred wings, each of them reaching  
From the Divine Throne to the lowest earth.<sup>89</sup>—Rumi*

We have thus come to the end of the mystical East-West journey. We have come to the point that the butterfly has met its destiny, its heavenly other, has become one with it, has been annihilated, has Become again and has been perpetuated. We have arrived at the moment that Goethe has met Hafiz, has spoken with his words and voice and rhyme and reason, has spoken him through his own voice, and has become his tongue. But the individuality and uniqueness of Goethe is nonetheless preserved. For in this section I will propose an interpretation of the “Stirb und werde,” that locates the end of the mystical journey not in Annihilation, but instead in Perpetuation, and this will be one of the main elements in the constellation of motif that permeate the *Divan* and will allow us to offer a hermeneutic of it from the perspective of a particular conception of mysticism, one in which not only the phenomenal world receives and maintain its dignified position within the entirety of Creation, but also the ultimate destiny of the mystic is not an undifferentiated union with God or the whole Being; his individuality is to be positively restored but on an entirely different level. Let us once again recall the story of Hallaj, that martyr of mystical love, who danced in fetters as he was led to his execution, and by his death symbolized the Symbol--the butterfly burning in flame—and thus symbolized the mystical annihilation. We know that this legend, through the medium of Persian poetry, reached Goethe and contributed in the creation of *Selige Sehnsucht*.<sup>90</sup> And we

know that this is the enraptured dance of the mystic towards his death in passion for a life at a higher spiritual level: this is the goal of the mystical Lover, a higher life through death and spiritual resurrection. This is the end of the mystical journey. Love is the last station, first in Annihilation, in *Fana'* and then there is, as we will see, Perpetuation, spiritual life, and this is what we called *Baqa'*. The driving force of this is indeed "Sehnsucht." This desire has not always been part of the picture in the mystical journey, and it may very well be the case that the very nature of this journey, its destination, hinges upon the fate of this longing. It is significant that the introduction of Passion into mystical concepts, and in the speculative mysticism of Ibn Arabi, marks a decisive turn in Islamic/Iranian metaphysical thought and in mystical/lyrical Persian poetry.<sup>91</sup> Annemarie

Schimmel writes:

[S]ome mystics [...] deny the station of "longing," for one longs for someone absent, and God is never absent [...] Others would boast of their longing. [...] Others again, would claim that genuine longing has no end, since the beloved has no end. The more the mystic approaches the divine beloved, the more he apprehends the fathomless depth of His qualities, the abyss of His essence.<sup>92</sup>

Then there is the problem of the word for "love" or "passionate love":

when the first attempts were made to introduce *'ishq*, "passionate love" into the relation between man and God, even most of the Sufis [let alone the pious] objected, for this root implies the concept of overflowing and passionate longing a quality that God, the self-sufficient, could not possibly possess; nor was it permissible that man should approach the Lord with such feelings.<sup>93</sup>

But the question is not the word *'ishq*, it is the introduction of a God who was "a hidden treasure that longed to be known," a God who desires to love and to be loved, a God who is "like us, a prisoner of Desire."<sup>94</sup>

The question, as we have discussed in detail in chapters 2 and 3 and in the contexts of Bi-unity and Sigh of Creation, is intimately tied to the question of the Feminine, to the so-called profane love, for love may be that power which “causes the possibilities of perfection in every human to unfold.”<sup>95</sup> It may be “the most genuine quality of the human race.” But if “the mystery of loving union is celebrated” in Hallaj’s symbol and in his own poetry is “free of any trace of the symbolism of profane love,”<sup>96</sup> then this is not the sophianic poetry of the author of “The Interpreter of Ardent Desire,” nor Hafiz’ poetry and nor least of all Goethe’s. For none of these mystics/poets acknowledges any love as being profane.<sup>97</sup>

I have in previous chapters discussed the homological/symbolic relation between human/earthly love and divine love. I have also discussed passion as cause and reason of Creation within the cosmogony according to the speculative/mystical vision proposed by Oriental theosophy, be it in Suhrawardi’s Philosophy of Illumination or Ibn ‘Arabi’s Unity of Existence doctrine. We will now see how this Oriental theosophy helps us understand *Fana’* and *Baqa’* as the last stages of the mystical path. This I will do by a primarily ontological/epistemological discussion from the perspective of the theory of Unity of Existence, which has dominated Islamic/Oriental Philosophy/speculative mysticism since ‘Ibn Arabi. I will closely follow Toshihiko Izutsu’s analysis of the two concepts of *Fana’* and *Baqa’* (Annihilation and Perpetuation) in The Basic Structure of Metaphysical Thinking in Islam.<sup>98</sup>



Let us recall that the theory of Unity of Being of Ibn ‘Arabi is the culmination of the general preoccupation of the Islamic/Iranian metaphysical thought, as “an unremitting search for something eternal and absolute beyond the world of relative and transient things,” with the notion of “Being.” This will turn out to be the decisive turn in the birth and growth of an authentically Oriental metaphysical speculation. Here, along with “Unity of Being,” a new concept of it, a new Perception of Being is proposed; a clear articulation of its primacy, as opposed to the primacy of quiddity. The turn is away from an idea of Being, where considered as an Accident to some Substance, the Being of the Whole phenomenal world turns into something like a shadow picture, something which is not entirely illusory but which approaches the nature of an illusion. Like the man and the butterfly, each in the other’s dream, both the phenomenal world [as some kind of Real Substance] and its Being [as that Substance’s Accident] begin to look like things in a dream.

But this new perception, new Being, reverses the substance-accident order. There is no real substance of a phenomenal world to which its being is then added. The only reality is being. Then the being of anything, a table, a flower, let us say, a butterfly, is nothing “but an inner modification of this reality, one of its self-determinations.” The being-a-butterfly of the butterfly (the Schmetterling of “Bist du Schmetterling”) is not being. Rather, Being is, in this particular articulation of it, being-a-butterfly. However, this vision of reality, this conception of Being, is not available to normal consciousness, in everyday experience. The mind has to undergo an “experience of total transformation,” whereby the

consciousness “transcends the dimension of ordinary cognition of the experienced world as consisting of “solid, self-subsistent things.” The mind then sees the world “in an entirely different light.”

In more concrete terms, the basic idea here is that an integral metaphysical world-view is possible only on the basis of a unique form of subject-object relationship....[M]etaphysics or ontology is inseparably connected with the subjective state of man, so that the selfsame Reality is said to be perceived differently in accordance with the different degrees of consciousness.<sup>99</sup>

This is what in this metaphysical system is formulated as the “unification of the knower and the known” (and in some variants unification of those two with knowledge itself). This is an equivalent of other formulations such as the unification of lover and beloved (and love). No matter what the object of knowledge, the highest form of knowledge of it is to be unified and identified with it, removing all distinctions and differentiations. But for this theory of being, the highest object of knowledge is Being itself. And once again, the real knowledge of “Being” is obtainable not by rational reasoning, but only through a very peculiar kind of intuition. This would be knowing being “not from the outside an ‘object’ of knowledge”, but from inside, “by *becoming* or rather by *being*” being itself, by self-realization. Here being will not be an object, for then it would be only a distortion of its own reality. But this is strictly a matter of Gnosis; this is exactly that which the wise share with each other and not with “trübe Gäste”:

The common people who have no access to the transcendental experience of Reality are compared to a blind man who cannot walk safely without the help of a stick in his hand. The stick giving guidance to the blind man here symbolizes the rational faculty of the mind. The strange thing about this is that the stick

upon which the man relies happens to be the very cause of the blindness. Only when Moses threw down the stick were the veils of the phenomenal forms removed in his eyes. Only then did he witness, beyond the veils, beyond the phenomenal forms, the splendid beauty of absolute Reality.<sup>100</sup>

Here we again encounter the motif of the sun rising in the middle of the night, or as it pertains our poem, the candle beginning to burn in darkness (and one might even say: *because* of darkness), whereby the desire is set in motion and the butterfly moves towards its death in flame, so that it is annihilated and the differentiations are overcome:

Even from afar, the overwhelming effulgence of the sun blinds the eye of reason. And as the eye of reason goes up to higher stages of Reality, gradually approaching the metaphysical region of the Absolute, the darkness becomes even deeper until everything in the end turns black. As man comes close to the vicinity of the sacred region of Reality, [...], the brilliant light issuing forth from it appears black to his eyes. Brightness at its ultimate extremity becomes completely identical with utter darkness.<sup>101</sup>

Thus to the eye of the uninitiated man “Being” absolute and pure is as “invisible as sheer nothing.” The ordinary man does not know what Light is. What he sees is “the faint reflections of the light on the screen of the so-called external world.” He is a “trüber Gast auf der dunklen Erde.” Neither he nor the world he sees is outside Being for being shadowy things. Shadowy things are also beings, just not pure light, but dim(med) lights, and not the pure reality of Being.

Now, a metaphysician or a mystic, “worthy of the name,” is one who witnesses in every single being “the underlying Reality of which the phenomenal form is but a self-manifestation and self-determination.” And this is only possible through “inner witnessing,” “tasting,” “presence,” and “illumination”:

[S]uch an experience of Reality is not actualizable as long as there remains the subject of cognition as a “subject,” that is to say, as long as there remains in man the ego-consciousness....[T]he subsistence of the individual ego places of necessity an epistemological distance between man and reality of “existence,” be it his own “existence.”<sup>102</sup>

This annihilation of the “ego-consciousness” into the “Consciousness of Reality” and the “Consciousness which *is* Reality” is what our speculative mystics call *Fana’*. Here the butterfly is burned, has died. This is the “Stirb,” the “die,” before “ye die.” It is essential to view the “human aspect of the experience *Fana’*,” as involving a conscious effort on the part of the wayfarer to “purify himself from all activities of the ego.” These efforts are called “*tawhid*,” literally meaning “making things one” or “reunification.” This cleansing of the mind of “its relation with everything other than absolute Reality” goes so far as ending the very consciousness of one’s *Fana’*: Thus there is the “Annihilation of Annihilation, “Total Annihilation”: “For even the consciousness of *Fana’* is a consciousness, of something other than absolute Reality.”<sup>103</sup>

Thus, *Fana’* is a subjective experience, but not only experience, or not at all his experience, because the subject experiences it no longer as himself. The subject of this experience is the absolute reality, Being itself. The subject of the experience is the light of the candle, not the butterfly that is burnt in it. In other words, the burning, the dying, the *Fana’* is “itself the self-actualization of Reality.”<sup>104</sup> Here the self-manifesting aspect of the absolute takes over its self-concealing aspect, thus “the experience of *Fana’* is in this respect nothing but an effusion of the metaphysical light of Absolute Reality”, of Being: “Bist du

Schmetterling verbrannt.” It is “Selige Sehnsucht,” one moment of effusion of Light, with its terrible consequences:

[I]n the phenomenal world, Reality reveals itself, only through relative, and spatio-temporal forms. In the absolute consciousness of a mystic-metaphysician, on the contrary, it reveals itself in its original absoluteness beyond all relative determinations. This is what is what is technically known as the experience of “unveiling”.<sup>105</sup>

But this is not the end of the story, for this story does not end in death. It ends in becoming. And this will provide us with the key to the understanding of our poem and its “Stirb und werde.” Just as in the poem “Stirb” is followed by a “werde,” in the speculative mysticism we are dealing with *Fana*’ is together with a higher stage, called *Baqa*’, “Survival” or “Perpetuation;” “eternally remaining in absolute Reality *with* absolute Reality.”<sup>106</sup> Moreover, in the experience of “unveiling” and in the consciousness of the mystic, the phenomenal and the transient becomes a symbol/metaphor of the absolute and the eternal itself. If at the stage of annihilation, the relative self vanished completely, in the stage of perpetuation a new self is resurrected out of nothingness, “completely transformed into an absolute Self:”

What is [resurrected] is outwardly the same old man, but he is man who has transcended his own determination. He regains his normal, daily consciousness and accordingly the normal daily, phenomenal world of multiplicity again begins to spread itself out before his eyes. The world of multiplicity appears again with its infinitely rich colors.<sup>107</sup>

The mystic, who has reached the stage *Fana*’, has now a world view in which everything around him is so many manifestations of one single reality, being itself. In the language of eternal archetypes or divine attributes, that is to say, via

the organ of Active Imagination, in the form of epiphanic vision, the mystic has perceived the absolute's inner articulations: Thus the epistemological significance of the matter. At this stage the state of consciousness *is* the state of the external world. If at the stage of *Fana'*, in the disappearance of the self, the phenomenal differentiations dissolved into unity (stage of Unification), in the stage of *Baqa'*, corresponding to the rebirth of the self, "the world once more unfolds itself before the man's eyes in the form of surging waves of multiplicity." This stage is thus called "separation after unification." But this is decidedly a separation very different from the pre-*fana'* separation. In this second separation all phenomena are "unmistakably distinguished" from each other, each having "its own essential demarcation." This multiplicity now is not pure multiplicity; it is multiplicity within unity. In the dialogical language, it is bi-unity."

[T]he Unity at the stage of *fana'* is simple, absolute Unity without even inner articulation, while the Unity at the stage [*baqa'*] is an internally articulated Unity. And Reality as observed at this latter stage is philosophy called *coincidentia oppositorum* in the sense that Unity is Multiplicity and Multiplicity is Unity.<sup>108</sup>

This metaphysical situation is described by Mahmud Shabastari in his *Gulshan-e Raz* through a combination of contradictory terms as "bright night amidst the dark daylight." And this is the stage of *coincidentia oppositorum* reached in the state of *baqa'*, after *fana'*.<sup>109</sup> 'Bright night' because it is the night that nothing is discernible, all differentiations are vanished. However also bright in that the absolute reality, in which all differentiations are vanished, is luminous itself; "illuminating its own self as well as all others" and the dark daylight, because it is

the daylight of the absolute revealing itself again in all colors and within the multiplicity in visible forms, in phenomenal daylight, the daylight which is dark.

The intuition of this perpetual self-manifestation of the absolute is the experience of *Baqā'* after *Fanā'*. This is, I propose, a mystically adequate way of reading “Dieses: Stirb und werde!”

We can now formulate the state of finite consciousness which is to be overcome at the end of the mystical journey:

[The] act of self-manifestation on the part of Reality is due to the inherent limitations of the finite human consciousness. The Absolute or pure [Being] in itself is sheer Unity. The Absolute remains in the original Unity in no matter how many different forms it may manifest itself. In this sense the world of Multiplicity is essentially of the very nature of the Absolute; it is the Absolute itself. But the original Unity of the Absolute appears to the finite human consciousness as differentiated into countless finite things because of the finitude of the consciousness. The phenomenal world is the Absolute that is hidden its real formless form under the apparent forms which are caused by the very limitations inherent in the epistemological faculties of man.[...] But in the unconditioned consciousness of a real mystic-Philosopher, it is always and everywhere the Absolute that is manifest while the phenomenal remains in the background.<sup>110</sup>

And this is what I have consistently proposed as a way of understanding the love of our mystic/poet for the phenomenal world and the dignity it has in his eyes. To him the phenomenal world is the field of theophanic vision, the place where the bi-unity of the phenomenal and the physical with the spiritual and the sensible becomes manifest, but after the experience of annihilation and perpetuation, or in other words, after the full activation of Active Imagination. Here, then, we are dealing with realities of the symbolic order, of the order of inner articulations of the absolute manifested in the sensible, we are in the world of theophanies or

epiphanies, the world of archetypes and heavenly others. We are dealing with the visitations on *Mundus Imaginalis* with the organ of Active Imagination. We are speaking about events taking place in the heaven of physical spirits and spiritualized bodies. Moreover, the recurrence of Creation, or perpetual becoming from the perspective of the Unity of Being is the “pre-eternal and continuous movement by which [B]eing is manifested at *every instant* in a new cloak.” This is Creation as the “rule of Being.”

An eternal archetype in the world of Active Imagination “takes on one existential determination after another, or changes place, yet remains what is in the world of Mystery,” the world of theophanic visions, *Mundus Imaginalis*. This is perpetual existentionation by virtue of the manifestations of the absolute, divine epiphanies. In this system of thought, *Fana*’ or annihilation,

will not designate the destruction of the attributes that qualify the [Mystic’s] person, nor his passage into a mystic state that annuls the individuality, merging it with the so-called ‘universal’ or the pure inaccessible Essence. The word *fana*’ will be the ‘cipher’, symbolizing the passing away of the forms that appear from instant to instant and their perpetuation (*baqa*’) in the one substance that is pluralized in its epiphanies. In this sense *fana*’ is not incompatible with an activity on the part of the creature, or more precisely, it is one aspect of the activity, the other being its perpetuation (*baqa*’) in the Divine Being.<sup>111</sup>

In each created one theophanic form is manifested and one is concealed. The concealment is the *fana*’ of the forms of being in the one divine being, and at the same instant their *baqa*’, their perpetuation, in their manifestation in other theophanic forms, or in nonterrestrial worlds and planes of existence.”<sup>112</sup>

We also remember from the chapter on *Wiederfinden* that the relationship between the beloved and the lover, between the Creator and the Creation, is one in



which each party is “the safeguard and guarantor of the other.” We remember that pathos underlies Creation; the absolute as creator, needs the Creation just as Creation needs the absolute. Without having experienced *Fana*’, however, the lover, discriminates between divinity and humanity:

But when he discriminates [between the two] after his experience of the *fana*’ it is the awareness of what *Haqq* (Truth, Creator) and *Khalq* (Creation) [...] are: although there is an essential unity between the two, the creature is distinguished from the Creator as the form is distinguished from the substance of which it is the form. [Here we have] the state of *baqa*’; [...] discrimination after unification. This is perhaps the most characteristic sense in which Ibn ‘Arabi employs the terms *fana*’ and *baqa*’: to return to oneself after dying away, to endure annulment. [...] The organ which establishes and perceives this *coincidentia oppositorum*, this simultaneity of complementaries determining the twofold dimension of beings, is man’s Active Imagination, which we may term creative insofar as it is, like Creation itself, theophanic.<sup>113</sup>

The last point about the Active Imagination being the organ responsible for establishing this *coincidentia oppositorum* is infinitely important. In fact, the entire final turn in the interpretation of *Selige Sehnsucht* from the mystical perspective I am proposing here, revolves around this proposition. This is the claim of this dissertation; that it is this principle that makes Goethe’s *Divan* Oriental-mystical. This is a mysticism of Symbols, a mysticism of heavenly bodies and bodily heavens. And this is, as we remember, the notion of the East we proposed in the first chapter as the destination of Goethe in the *Divan*. It is through Active Imagination the mystic perceives all phenomena in their symbolic significance. The phenomenal world is the place of theophanic visions and as bearer of symbolic significance all phenomena are endowed with divine dignity. All this will help ground the claim that the dignity which the phenomenal world,

the butterfly in the case of *Selige Sehnsucht*, have in the eyes of Goethe, and the mystery of “Stirb und werde” can best be explained from the perspective of Oriental theosophy. This will also allow us to read “Dieses Stirb und werde” in the context of a “Sehnsucht” which is “selig,” and selig is, to use Max Kommerell’s words, “mehr als die höchste Stufe des Glücks. Selig ist froh in Gott.”<sup>114</sup>

In this “Glaube an die Welt,” then, we have a religious attitude that neither accords with any of the religious orthodoxies nor is compatible with any of the mystical school where the world is bereft of any intrinsic value and must be overcome in the mystical process; it is a “Glaube an die Liebe”:

Der Glaube, für den Goethe Kämpfer war, ist der Glaube an die Liebe, ist der Glaube an die Welt; die Wunden, die er in ihr empfangt, sind Wunden, die erlitten sind durch Hingabe.<sup>115</sup>

In this, we see again the secret of the kinship between Goethe and Hafiz:

Dieser aber, Hafiz, ist froh in Gott aus eigener Kraft und selbst gewagter Annäherung, er braucht kein Oblatensurrogat wie der Romantiker; er hat Gott in der Mücke und im Auge der Geliebten, und es gibt keinen feierlich abgesonderten Gottesdienst. Die schönsten und liebsten Lüste, das Verliebtsein, das Gedenken, das Umarmen, das ist auch, gerade das ist froh in Gott, wie alles, worin sich der Mensch verschwendet. Nie ist so leichtthin von hohen Dingen geredet worden in deutscher Sprache und nie waren sie wahrer als hier.<sup>116</sup>

It is, then, not addressing Hafiz alone, but also himself, that Goethe sings:

“Der du, ohne fromm zu sein, selig bist!”<sup>117</sup> And if Goethe spoke with admiration of the metaphorical and mystical empowerment of the Persian poets to transform even the lowly mosquito into worthy images of divine Creation, so the German poet has, in return, accomplished this with the image of the moth.

And thus we come to hear the voice of the man, transformed like in the mystical alchemical process, knocking with his words at the threshold of paradise in the East. After all, the poet's Persian counterpart said in his moth and candle poem:

Sieh' er Chymiker der Liebe  
wird den Staub des Körpers  
Wenn er noch so bleiern wäre  
Doch in Gold verwandeln.<sup>118</sup>

## Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Cf. [FA I/3], p. 964.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Ernst Beutler (ed.), *Goethes West-östlicher Divan*, Bremen, 1956, pp. 376-377. Beutler continues: "Fühlen wir nicht, wie viele der Gedichte, die in den Reisentagen entstanden, Vorbereitungen zu diesem 'Stirb und Werde' waren?" Reference is clearly not only to the programmatic nature of the poem, but also the position of the poem as a point of culmination in poetic ideas and attempts. All this is supported by the date of the poem (July 31, 1814), its assignment to "Divan poems", that is, about 30 or so poems written "innerhalb von etwa sechs Wochen." Furthermore, the reference is here made to the most important and controversial turn of the phrase in the poem, which comes in the last stanza. Beutler, as most commentators, refutes the hypothesis that the last stanza was added to the first four at a later time. I will return to the hypothesis and its significance in the interpretation of the poem in the course of this chapter.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Edith Ihekweazu, *Goethes West-östlicher Divan: Untersuchungen zur Struktur des Lyrischen Zyklus*, Hamburg, 1971, p. 113. Also "vielleicht schwierigste aller Gedichte Goethes", cf. Ewald Rösch, "Goethe's 'Selige Sehnsucht'—Eine Tragische Bewegung"; in *Interpretationen zum West-östlichen Divan Goethes*, Darmstadt, 1973, p. 229. Also Wilhelm Schneider, *Liebe zum deutschen Gedicht*, Freiburg/Basel/Wien, 1960, p. 307: "Gipfel aller Dichtkunst."

<sup>4</sup> Max Kommerell, *Gedanken über Gedichte*, Frankfurt am Main, 1968, p. 250.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Noten und Abhandlungen*, [FA I/3], p. 200.

<sup>6</sup> Max Kommerell, *Gedanken über Gedichte*, p. 268-9.

<sup>7</sup> Edith Ihekweazu, *Goethes West-östlicher Divan: Untersuchungen zur Struktur des Lyrischen Zyklus*, p. 115.

<sup>8</sup> Hans Heinrich Schaeder, *Goethes Erlebnis des Ostens*, Leipzig, 1938, p. 88.

<sup>9</sup> In the Greek language the word for "butterfly" is "psyche." Thus butterfly is used in Greek mythology, and in Plato, as a metaphor for the soul, especially in the love story between "Psyche" and "Eros." Cf. Jacob Minor & August Sauer, Wien, 1880, p. 21.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. for example, Ernst Beutler (ed.), *Goethes West-östlicher Divan*, pp. 378-9. Cf. also Ewald Rösch, "Goethe's 'Selige Sehnsucht'—Eine Tragische Bewegung" 1973, p. 237.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. [FA I/3], pp. 964-965. It has been established, since Goethe's time, that the ghazal is not Hafiz'. Goethe, however, bent on imitating the Persian lyricist, goes so far as calling the poem *Selige Sehnsucht*, emphasizing the letter S in direct reaction to the ghazal which is included in Book "Sad" (that means that the rhyming pattern of the concluding words of the couplets ends in letter S) of the translation of Hafiz's Divan. For a discussion of the name of the poem, cf. discussion in the text.

<sup>13</sup> There remains a four-line stanza at the end of "Buch des Sängers:" "Tut ein Schliff sich doch hervor, / Welten zu versüßen! / Möge meinem Schreiber-Rohr / Liebliches entfließen!"

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Edith Ihekweazu, *Goethes West-östlicher Divan: Untersuchungen zur Struktur des Lyrischen Zyklus*, pp. 103-122.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 103-104.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>18</sup> Cf., ibid., p. 118.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Max Kommerell, *Gedanken über Gedichte*, p. 255.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Edith Ihekweazu, *Goethes West-östlicher Divan: Untersuchungen zur Struktur des Lyrischen Zyklus*, p. 104.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. "Wisset nur, daß Dichterworte..." in *Hegire* with "Sagt es niemand, nur den Weisen," and "Und so lang du das nicht hast," in *Selige Sehnsucht*, cf. ibid., p. 105.

<sup>23</sup> Max Kommerell, *Gedanken über Gedichte*, p. 253.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Nima Mina, *Les Traduction de la Poésie Hafisienne du Persan en Allemand par Josef von Hammer-Purgstall (1774-1856) et leur Impact sur Goethe*, Université de Montreal (dissertation), 1998, p. 81.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 268-269.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Ernst Beutler (ed.), *Goethes West-östlicher Divan*, pp. 380-382. Beutler, who is a strong proponent of a religious reading of the *Divan* (and a mystical one as well, but in a sense in which earthly love becomes sublimated onto the metaphysical plane, that is, in the case of the moth, the passionate love for the flame and “Entselbstung” is the allegory for divine love), also hears in the opening injunction of *Selige Sehnsucht* the echo of Jesus’ homily not to throw pearls before the swine: “Goethe hat immer gemahnt, man solle seine tiefsten, vor allem seine religiösen Überzeugungen nicht aussprechen. Sie würden doch von anderen nie verstanden und nur zerredet.” Similar warnings are issued, as Beutler reminds us, by Plato against making public the ‘truth of First Questions.’ For he who commits this folly ‘würde ja nur der Feindseligkeit und Verständnislosigkeit der Menschen zur Beute werden.’ ---such secrets are to be guarded in the “heart of the Friend.”

<sup>27</sup> Ernst Beutler (ed.), *Goethes West-östlicher Divan*, p. 377. I have quoted this anecdote in connection with the musical and metrical properties of the poem as a song, for the reason that the phrase ‘trüber Gast’, as we shall mention later, not only marks a semantic unfamiliarity, but also corresponds to a sharp and bewildering rhymic irregularity causing some to propose the conjecture that the last stanza has been added to the end of the poem at a later time. Cf. also note 2 above. For a brief discussion on the metrical peculiarities, cf. [FA I/3], pp. 965-976.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Ernst Beutler (ed.), *Goethes West-östlicher Divan*, pp. 377-378. The question remains, nonetheless, primarily that of understanding: “Aber schon in einem früheren Briefe hatte Zelter davon geschrieben, wie ihm erzählt worden sei, daß man die Verse ‘Worauf kommt es überall an’ immer wieder gesungen habe: ‘Wir können uns aber die Worte und ihren Sinn nicht recht erklären.’”

<sup>29</sup> Husayn ibn Mansur al-Hallaj, Persian mystic, (858-922). For a brief biography of Hallaj and in his significance in the history of Islamic/Iranian Mysticism, as well as a brief discussion of Western Orientalist research on Hallaj, cf. Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Chapel Hill, 1975, pp. 62-77

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 70 and 145. Schimmel sometimes uses the word allegory for the symbol. Also cf. *ibid.*, p. 142: “[The stage] of ‘real certitude,’ [...] which is the place of God’s friends [...] is attained in *fana*’; it has been symbolized by Hallaj [...] as the way of the moth, which experiences [knowledge of certitude] when it sees the candle, [vision of certitude] when it draws near and feels its heat, and [real certitude] when it is, finally, burned and consumed by the flame.”

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 69

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 72. Cf. also *ibid.*, pp. 62-64: “When Hallaj was in prison, he was asked ‘What is love?’ He answered: ‘You will see it today and tomorrow and the day after tomorrow.’ And that day they cut off his hands and feet, and the next day they put him on the gallows, the third day they gave his ashes to the wind” quoted from Attar’s *Tadhkirat al-auliya*.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 70, also cf. Annemarie Schimmel, *As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam*, New York, 1982, p. 34. The prophetic tradition alluded to in the quote has also been esoterically interpreted as the process of *Fana*’ and *Baqa*’.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 323.

<sup>37</sup> Just to anticipate, let us mention that the question whether the living creature that is being created and depicted here is meant to “live on,” of course goes to the heart of the interpretation of the poem. It is not an undisputed conclusion. Just to cite one example: “Der Schmetterling ist zuletzt ‘verbrannt,’ er ist ein für allemal tot’. Von einem Nachher ist hier keine Rede. Daß ihm ganze Serien solcher Flammentode zugebracht sein können, ist vom Sinnbild her ausgeschlossen.” Ewald Rösch, “Goethe’s ‘Selige Sehnsucht’—Eine Tragische Bewegung”, p. 245.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. [FA I/3], p. 968.

<sup>39</sup> Ernst Beutler (ed.), *Goethes West-östlicher Divan*, p. 384. For the concepts “Sehnsucht” and “selig” also Cf. [FA I/3], p. 966.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. [FA I/3], pp. 964-966. Birus also mentions the small variations and corrections between the handwritten first draft of the poem and the published version, refuting, however, the possibility of different versions of the poem beyond the change of the title.

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. also note 8 above.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Edith Ihekweazu, *Goethes West-östlicher Divan: Untersuchungen zur Struktur des Lyrischen Zyklus*, p. 116.

<sup>43</sup> Wilhelm Schneider, *Liebe zum deutschen Gedicht*, Freiburg/Basel/Wien, 1960, p. 307.

<sup>44</sup> The “Du” with which one speaks, to which one prays. This and other aspects of the “Du” have been discussed incessantly as the key to the interpretation of the poem. It has been discussed at all philological, grammatical, philosophical, musical, religious levels. Our work will also be inevitably dealing with this “Du.” In particular I will deal with this important issue in the second part of this chapter and in a dialogue with Florens Christian Rang’s interpretation of the poem. It has been observed, for example, that there seems to be a change of register between the “Du” in the three middle stanzas and the last one. This is, once again, regarded by many as highly significant in the interpretation of the poem. Referring to this change of register, Wilhelm Schneider writes in *Liebe zum deutschen Gedicht*, p. 301: “Was sollte man dann wohl mit der letzten Strophe beginnen, deren “Du” zweifellos nicht mehr der Schmetterling ist.” On the other hand, this “du” is clearly not necessarily part of the privileged fraternity that is addressed in the first stanza: “dieses Du steht nicht mehr in der selbstverständlichen Identifikation mit dem Eingeweihten, sondern kann auch trüber Gast sein.” Ewald Rösch, “Goethe’s ‘Selige Sehnsucht’—Eine Tragische Bewegung”, p. 244. Finally: “die Trauer der U-Laute: wie dieses Du so in Dunkel gehüllt ist.” Werner Kraft, *Goethe: Wiederholte Spiegelung aus 5 Jahrzehnten*, München, 1986, p. 249.

<sup>45</sup> This is in keeping with Ihekweazu’s observation that “Buch des Sängers” is “zunächst eine Selbstdarstellung des Dichters,” whereby a type of “Poetik des geselligen Liedes” is at the same time developed, cf. Edith Ihekweazu, *Goethes West-östlicher Divan: Untersuchungen zur Struktur des Lyrischen Zyklus*, p. 106.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. for samples of the discussion on this polarity Ewald Rösch, “Goethe’s ‘Selige Sehnsucht’—Eine Tragische Bewegung”, p. 240 and Wilhelm Schneider, *Liebe zum deutschen Gedicht*, p. 302.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. [FA I/3], p. 968.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Werner Kraft, *Goethe: Wiederholte Spiegelung aus 5 Jahrzehnten*, p. 249, p. 245.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., also Edith Ihekweazu, *Goethes West-östlicher Divan: Untersuchungen zur Struktur des Lyrischen Zyklus*, p. 267.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>51</sup> Werner Kraft, *Goethe: Wiederholte Spiegelung aus 5 Jahrzehnten*, p. 245. Florens Christian Rang hears in this place the “Knot und Halt”, “wo das Wort die Reihe nicht mehr fortsetzt, denn die Kraft des Bild ist ihm erlahmt.” Florens Christian Rang, “Selige Sehnsucht”; in *Interpretationen zum West-östlichen Divan Goethes* (Edgar Lohner, ed.), Darmstadt, 1973, p. 17.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. [FA I/3], p. 970: “Von der ‘niederen’ [Begattung] schreibt Goethe in *Diderot’s Versuch über die Malerei*: ‘die Begattung und Fortpflanzung kostet dem Schmetterlinge das Leben, dem Menschen Schönheit.’”

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Edith Ihekweazu, *Goethes West-östlicher Divan: Untersuchungen zur Struktur des Lyrischen Zyklus*, p. 116.

<sup>54</sup> For what is worth, the biographical data related to the time of the composition of the poem indicate “das Erlebnis der Verjüngung, die ihm in der neu erwachten lyrischen Schöpferkraft halb Ahnung halb Gewißheit wird.” cf. Hans Heinrich Schaeder, *Goethes Erlebnis des Ostens*, Leipzig, 1938, pp. 84-85.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Ernst Beutler (ed.), *Goethes West-östlicher Divan*, p. 383.

<sup>56</sup> *In Noten und Abhandlungen; Künftiger Divan, Buch der Betrachtungen*, cf. [FA I/3], p. 219.

<sup>57</sup> Michael Böhler and Gabriele Schwieder, “Selige Sehnsucht”; in *Interpretationen: Gedichte von Johann Wolfgang Goethe* (Bernd Witte, ed.), Stuttgart, 1998, pp. 206-207. The authors, who interpret the poem as the poetic creative moment made into the subject matter of the poetry (cf. *ibid.*, p. 213) also propose a metonymic reading which “setzt [...] an die Stelle des plötzlichen, unvermittelten Übergangs die Begriffe von Metamorphose und Steigerung, die durch den (freilich nirgends im Text selbst abstützbaren) Bildspender des aus der Raupe hervorgehenden Schmetterlings evoziert werden mögen.” *Ibid.* p. 207.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Paul Ricoeur, “Stellung und Funktion der Metapher in der biblischen Sprache”; in *Metapher: Zur Hermeneutik religiöser Sprache*, München. 1974, pp. 45-54.

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>63</sup> Max Kommerell, *Gedanken über Gedichte*, p. 255.

<sup>64</sup> In the section “Allgemeines” of *Noten und Abhandlungen*, Goethe writes: “Die Fruchtbarkeit und Mannigfaltigkeit der persischen Dichter entspringt aus einer unübersehbaren Breite der Aussenwelt und ihrem unendlichen Reichtum. Ein immer bewegtes öffentliches Leben, in welchem alle Gegenstände gleichen Wert haben, wogt vor unserer Einbildungskraft, deswegen uns ihre Vergleichen oft so sehr auffallend und mißbeliebig sind.” Cf. [FA I/3], p. 178. Also in the section “Allgemeinstes,” *ibid.*, p. 181: “Der höchste Charakter orientalischer Dichtkunst ist, was wir Deutsche *Geist* nennen, das vorwaltende des oberen Leitenden; hier sind alle übrigen Eigenschaften vereinigt, ohne daß irgend eine, das eigentümliche Recht behauptend, hervortrage.[...] Jene Dichter haben alle Gegenstände gegenwärtig und beziehen die entferntesten Dinge leicht aufeinander, daher nähern sie sich auch dem, was wir Witz nennen.” For a highly instructive introductory discussion of the role of metaphor in Islam, cf. Annemarie Schimmel’s *Das Buch der Welt: Wirklichkeit und Metapher im Islam*, Würzburg, 1996.

<sup>65</sup> Here we have another telling opposition of Goethe to a Newtonian natural philosophy much in the same way that Goethe’s “Farbenlehre” goes against Newtonian optics. In a conversation that remarkably ends in Goethe’s exclamation that “about many things [he] can only talk to God,” he speaks of incomprehensibility of the phenomenon of Magnetism and what one presumes to be a Newtonian explanation essentially based on the principle of Action from Distance and the proportionality of the gravitational force relative to the masses of mutually attracting bodies. We read the report of the conversation between Goethe and Sulpiz Boisseree in Wiesbaden on August 2, 1815: “Man geht von den Forschungen über Magnetismus aus. Goethe meint, man komme sicherlich nie dahinter; deshalb kümmere er sich auch nicht darum und wolle nichts davon wissen. ‘Er ehre und erkenne die Erfahrung an, aber damit sei es auch abgetan.’ Und das Gespräch endet bei der ‘wunderlichen Bedingtheit des Menschen auf seine Vorstellungsart,’ was Kant sehr richtig mit Antinomie der Vorstellungsart ausdrückte.-- ‘Diese Antinomie der Vorstellungsart ist es nun, warum wir Menschen nie aufs Reine kommen können mit einem gewissen Maß von Wissen, sondern immer alte Wahrheiten und Irrtümer auf eine neue Weise aussprechen—warum wir über viele Dinge uns nie ganz verständlich können – und ich daher oft zu mir sagen muß: darüber und darüber kann ich nur mit Gott reden.’” Cf. Ernst Beutler (ed.), *Goethes West-östlicher Divan*, p. 386.

<sup>66</sup> Wilhelm Schneider, *Liebe zum deutschen Gedicht*, p. 301.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 303: “Der Begriff der Ferne, die ‘schwierig’ macht, vertauscht seinen Raumsinn, den einzig die Auffassung vom Schmetterling aus zuläßt, gegen eine metaphysische (übersinnliche) Bedeutung; es ist die Scheide zwischen der sinnlichen Welt und der Welt jenseits von Raum und Zeit, zwischen dem engen menschlichen Bereich und der göttlichen Unendlichkeit.” For an etymological discussion on the word “schwierig,” Cf. Werner Kraft, *Goethe: Wiederholte Spiegelung aus 5 Jahrzehnten*, München, pp. 247-248.

<sup>68</sup> Already on the night of February 23, 1776 Goethe uses this image in a letter to Charlotte von Stein: “Ich habe nun wieder auf der ganzen Redoute nur deine Augen gesehen—und da ist mir die Mücke ums Licht eingefallen.” Cited in Hans Heinrich Schaeder, *Goethes Erlebnis des Ostens*, p. 86.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Max Kommerell, *Gedanken über Gedichte*, p. 258.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 266.

<sup>71</sup> Werner Kraft, *Goethe: Wiederholte Spiegelung aus 5 Jahrzehnten*, p. 246. For a similar discussion on the verb “Bist,” Cf. also Edith Ihekweazu, *Goethes West-östlicher Divan: Untersuchungen zur Struktur des Lyrischen Zyklus*, p. 243.

<sup>72</sup> Edith Ihekweazu, *Goethes West-östlicher Divan: Untersuchungen zur Struktur des Lyrischen Zyklus*, p. 119.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 268. This seems to go contrary to a previous statement in her book. Cf. note 35 below.. This is, in our opinion, rooted in the confusion about mystical sublimation as understood by Goethe and by speculative theosophists.

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<sup>74</sup> Cf. for instance Edith Ihekweazu, *Goethes West-östlicher Divan: Untersuchungen zur Struktur des Lyrischen Zyklus*, and Wilhelm Schneider, *Liebe zum deutschen Gedicht*, p. 304.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. [FA I/3], p. 967, 971, and Ernst Beutler (ed.), *Goethes West-östlicher Divan*, p. 379.

<sup>76</sup> Hans Heinrich Schaefer, *Goethes Erlebnis des Ostens*, pp. 86-87.

<sup>77</sup> Edith Ihekweazu, *Goethes West-östlicher Divan: Untersuchungen zur Struktur des Lyrischen Zyklus*, p. 119.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 267. However, she describes the state of *Selige Sehnsucht* scholarship at the time of the writing of her book with regard to the hermeticism of the poem thus: “Die Hermetik des Gedichts und die bewußte Mehrdeutigkeit der syntaktischen und metaphorischen Bezüge haben bisher in der Forschungsliteratur keine einhellige Interpretationsmeinung entstehen lassen.” Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>79</sup> Hans Heinrich Schaefer, *Goethes Erlebnis des Ostens*, p. 87.

<sup>80</sup> Edith Ihekweazu, *Goethes West-östlicher Divan: Untersuchungen zur Struktur des Lyrischen Zyklus*, p. 114.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Wilhelm Schneider, *Liebe zum deutschen Gedicht*, p. 307.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. p. 308.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. [FA I/3], p. 965, also note 1 above.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Hans Heinrich Schaefer, *Goethes Erlebnis des Ostens*, p. 84.

<sup>85</sup> Florens Christian Rang, “Selige Sehnsucht”; in *Interpretationen zum West-östlichen Divan Goethes* (Edgar Lohner, ed.), Darmstadt, 1973, p. 14.

<sup>86</sup> Werner Kraft, *Goethe: Wiederholte Spiegelung aus 5 Jahrzehnten*, p. 249.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 248, for reference to Rang, cf. Florens Christian Rang, “Selige Sehnsucht”, p. 21.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Max Kommerell, *Gedanken über Gedichte*, p. 296, for “die Trübe”, which within optics represents “das überall in dem Natur- und Seelenreiche aufzuchende Vermittelnde,” and corresponds to “das durch den Eros aufregte Grenzgebiet des Sinnlich-Seelichen” in humans.

<sup>89</sup> *Mathnawi-I Manawi* (5: 289-290) cited in Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 134.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 323.

<sup>91</sup> For a brief but informative discussion on the history of mystical trends in Islam Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 137. Cf. also note 118 below.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. Ibid., p. 139. The last expression, “like us, a prisoner of Desire,” is from Muhammad Iqbal, who has written an East-West Divan in reply to Goethe’s *Divan*. The hadith qudsi “hidden treasure” has been discussed in other chapters of this work, particularly the chapter on “Wiederfinden.”

<sup>95</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>97</sup> For Ibn Arabi’s “The Interpreter of Ardent Desire,” cf. Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone; Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn ‘Arabi*, Princeton, 1998, Chapter 2, also Chapter 2 of this work.

<sup>98</sup> Toshihiko Izutsu, “The Basic Structure of Metaphysical Thinking in Islam”; in *Collected Papers on Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism*. Tehran, 1971, pp. 41-72. Izutsu uses the word “Survival,” “Remaining” or “Self-Subsistence” for *Baqa*. Throughout this chapter I will use Henry Corbin’s translation, “Perpetuation.” In what follows, unless explicitly mentioned, the citations are from Izutsu’s text in strict order.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 46. Here Izutsu emphasizes a much neglected aspect of the oriental metaphysics, that is, its epistemological ramifications. Along this Epistemology/Ontology: Subject/Object axis an West-East philosophical dialogue is possible and necessary.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 52, emphasis mine.



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- <sup>107</sup> Ibid., I have taken the slight liberty of replacing the word Izutstu uses - “resuscitated” - with “resurrected.”
- <sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 56.
- <sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 58.
- <sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 65.
- <sup>111</sup> Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone; Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn ‘Arabi*, p 202.
- <sup>112</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 202-203.
- <sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 212.
- <sup>114</sup> Max Kommerell, *Gedanken über Gedichte*, p. 257.
- <sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 286.
- <sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 257.
- <sup>117</sup> Buch Hafis: “Offenbar Geheimniss”, [FA I/3], p. 32.
- <sup>118</sup> Cf. [FA I/3], p. 965.

## CHAPTER SIX

### **The Poet's Paradise**

Wer das Dichten will verstehen  
Muß ins Land der Dichtung gehen;  
Wer den Dichter will verstehen  
Muß in Dichters Lande gehen.

In the opening poem of the *Divan*, *Hegire*, Goethe gave a concise itinerary of the journey that was to be undertaken in the course of the book. In the last two stanzas of that poem, invoking Hafiz and the poetry which delighted the “Huris” in Paradise, he invested his hopes on his own poetry to bestow upon him eternal life and entrance into Paradise as well:

Will in Bädern und in Schenken,  
Heil'ger Hafis, dein gedenken;  
Wenn den Schleier Liebchen lüftet,  
Schütternd Ambralocken düftet.  
Ja des Dichters Liebesflüstern  
Mache selbst die Huris lüstern.

Wolltet ihr ihm dies beneiden,  
Oder etwa gar verleiden:  
Wisset nur, daß Dichterworte  
Um des Paradieses Pforte  
Immer leise klopfend schweben  
Sich erbittend ew'ges Leben.

At the end of this journey, the poet has arrived at the gate of Paradise and is engaged in a conversation with a huri who is one of the gatekeepers of Heaven. Five poems, *Berechtigter Männer*, *Vier Frauen* ( later *Auserwählte Frauen*), *Vier Tiere* (later *Begünstigte Tier*), *Siebenschläfer* and *Gute Nacht* from the early plan for the *Divan*,<sup>1</sup> were later supplemented with additional poems and formed the final book of the collection, “Buch des Paradieses.” Beauty, love, delight in the world of Creation, eternal youth, immortality and poetry, all now at the threshold

of Paradise, reappear as the motifs permeating this book, making it the second part of the frame corresponding to the first part “Buch des Sängers,” for the entire *Divan*.

The first poem of the book, *Vorsmack* (April 1820) <sup>2</sup> speaks of Paradise in Islam and the way “der echte Moslem,” perceives it.

Der echte Moslem spricht vom Paradiese  
Als wenn er selbst allda gewesen wäre  
Er glaubt dem Koran, wie es der verheiße,  
Hierauf begründet sich die reine Lehre.

But being in Paradise is the fulfillment of all earthly desires in their superlative form and without their earthly imperfections. Chief among these desires and wishes is human love. Yet, the prophet of Islam knows that even among his most pious followers, the belief in the heavenly fulfillment of their earthly desires is threatened by doubt:

Doch der Prophet, Verfasser jenes Buches,  
Weiß unsre Mängel droben auszuwittern,  
Und sieht, daß trotz dem Donner seines Fluches  
Die Zweifel oft den Glauben uns verbittern.

Thus he sends from the eternal regions “Ein Jugendmuster,” in the form of the earthly beloved, to rejuvenate all things; the earthly love is indeed the foretaste of the eternal love.

Deshalb entsendet er den ew’gen Räumen  
Ein Jugendmuster, alles zu verjüngen;  
Sie schwebt heran und fesselt, ohne Säumen,  
Um meinen Hals die allerliebsten Schlingen.

Auf meinem Schloß, an meinem Herzen halt’ ich  
Das Himmelswesen, mag nichts weiter wissen;  
Und glaube man ans Paradies gewaltig,  
Denn ewig möcht’ ich sie so treulich küssen.

The poem thus establishes the connection between Paradise and earth:

Während in 'Hegire' das Dichterwort hinaufstrebt zu den Huris und 'des Paradieses Pforte', ist hier die Richtung, in der die Verbindung hergestellt wird, umgekehrt.[...] Dem Heraufschweben der Dichterworte kommt das Herabschweben der Huri entgegen, der Verjüngung durch eigene Aktivität die Verjüngung im Geschenk des 'Jugendmuster'. In der Liebe zu diesem 'Himmelswesen' vollzieht sich die Vermittlung zwischen 'ewigen Räumen' und 'irdischen Bezirken', in Jugend und Schönheit der Geliebten erscheint das 'Paradies' auf Erden.<sup>3</sup>

The two following poems, *Berechtigte Männer* (first draft, March 1815; final version, September 1818)<sup>4</sup>, and *Auserwählte Frauen* (first draft July 1814; final version, after December 12, 1817),<sup>5</sup> describe Paradise and its inhabitants in earthly forms but free from the turbidity and dimness of earthly things:

Alles Sinnliche erscheint 'verklärt,' ohne sich jedoch ins Gestaltlose zu verlieren. Verjüngung, die im irdischen Bereich notwendig unvollkommen bleiben muß, ist hier Dauerzustand.<sup>6</sup>

The subtitle to *Berechtigte Männer*, "Nach der Schlacht von Bedr, unterm Sternenhimmel," introduces the poem as the prophet's speech after victory in the decisive battle of Bedr (624 A.D.) between his followers and the troops of idol-worshippers, where he promises, in the most sensual manner, the entrance into Heaven to the martyrs of faith and where, once arrived, all the numerous and lovely huris will tend their wounds and serve them unselfishly thereafter.

The poem starts with these two stanzas:

Seine Toten mag der Feind betrauen  
Denn sie liegen ohne Wiederkehren;  
Unser Brüder sollt ihr nicht bedauern:  
Denn sie wandlen über jenen Sphären.

Die Planeten haben all sieben  
Die metallnen Tore weit getan,  
Und schon klopfen die verklärten Lieben

Paradieses Pforten kühnlich an.

The last two lines of the second stanza clearly serve as a connection between the entrance of the martyrs of faith into Heaven and the poet knocking at the door of Paradise with his “Dichterworte,” in the opening poem of the *Divan*, *Hegire*. This theme would be further elaborated in the dialogue that will soon follow between the Poet and Huri, who is the gatekeeper of Paradise.

In the poem *Auserwählte Frauen*, the biblical/Qur’anic figure of Suleika from the story of Joseph the Prophet is counted among the four women whose entrance in paradise is guaranteed according to the Islamic tradition:

Frauen sollen nichts verlieren,  
Reiner Treue ziemt zu hoffen;  
Doch wir wissen nur von vieren,  
Die alldort schon eingetroffen.

Erst Suleika, Erdensonne,  
Gegen Jussuph ganz Begierde,  
Nun, des Paradieses Wonne,  
Glänzt sie der Entsagung Zierde.

Mary, Mohammad’s wife, and his daughter, Fatima, are mentioned in the next three stanzas as the other three women with guaranteed place in Heaven. The last stanza then grants all those who praise women also a place in Paradise:

Diese finden wir alldorten;  
Und wer Frauenlob gepriesen  
Der verdient an ew’gen Orten  
Lustzuwandeln wohl mit diesen.

But it is the Suleika of the *Divan*, who, transformed into the shape of a huri, interrogates the poet at the gate of Heaven. In the poem *Einlass*, which was composed in April of 1820,<sup>7</sup> that is, after the first publication of the *Divan* and

then retroactively added to “Buch des Paradieses,” the huri asks the poet why he thinks he should enter Heaven along with the heroes of Islam:

Heute steh’ ich meine Wache  
Vor des Paradieses Tor,  
Weiß nicht grade wie ich’s mache  
Kommst mir so verdächtig vor!

Ob du unsern Mosleminen  
Auch recht eigentlich verwandt?  
Ob dein Kämpfen, dein Verdienen  
Dich ans Paradies gesandt?

Zählst du dich zu jenen Helden?  
Zeige deine Wunden an,  
Die mir Rühmliches vermelden,  
Und ich führe dich heran.

To this the poet answers that he has been a human being and has loved and that, independent of any dogmatic belief, this is the proof of his faith:

Nicht so vieles Federlesen!  
Laß mich immer nur herein:  
Denn ich bin ein Mensch gewesen  
Und das heißt ein Kämpfer sein.

Schärfe deine kräft’gen Blicke!  
Hier durchschaue diese Brust,  
Sieh der Lebenswunden Tücke,  
Sieh der Liebeswunden Lust.

Und doch sang ich gläub’ger Weise:  
Daß mir die Geliebte treu,  
Daß die Welt, wie sie auch kreise,  
Liebevoll und dankbar sei.

Thus at the very gates of Paradise, the huri and the poet continue the poetic conversation between Hatem and Suleika in “Buch Suleika.” In the poem *Anklang*,<sup>8</sup> the poet has already arrived in Paradise by virtue of his poetry and addresses the huri as his “ewige Geliebte.” First, the huri speaks about the strange

sounds and tones which she had heard at the gates of Heaven and had reminded her of the poet's songs:

Draußen am Orte,  
Wo ich dich zuerst sprach,  
Wacht' ich oft an der Pforte,  
Dem Gebote nach.  
Da hört' ich ein wunderlich Gesäusel,  
Ein Ton- und Silbengekräusel,  
Das wollte herein;  
Niemand aber ließ sich sehen,  
Da verklang es klein zu klein;  
Es klang aber fast wie deine Lieder,  
Das erinnr' ich mich wieder.

The poet replies that on the wings of spirit his songs ascended towards Heaven and thus deserve double reward in both worlds. Invigorated through the voices of huris, poetry should raise its voice again on earth and please everyone:

Ewig Geliebte! Wie zart  
Erinnerst du dich deines Trauten!  
Was auch in irdischer Luft und Art,  
Für Töne lauten,  
Die wollen alle herauf;  
Viele verklingen da unten zu Hauf;  
Andere mit Geistes Flug und Lauf,  
Wie das Flügelpferd des Propheten,  
Steigen empor und flöten  
Draußen an dem Tor.

Kommt deinen Gespielen so etwa vor,  
So sollen sie's freundlich vermerken,  
Das Echo lieblich verstärken,  
Daß es wieder hinunter halle,  
Und sollen Acht haben,  
Daß, in jedem Falle,  
Wem er kommt, seine Gaben,  
Jedem zu gute kommen;  
Das wird beiden Welten frommen.

The following dialogue poem (May 1820)<sup>9</sup> contains one of the key ideas of the speculative mysticism, that is, the correspondence of the earthly phenomena with

their heavenly archetypes. First, the poet tells the huri that she has once been called Suleika:

Deine Liebe, dein Kuß mich entzückt!  
Geheimnisse mag ich nicht erfragen;  
Doch sag' mir ob du an irdischen Tagen  
Jemals Teil genommen?  
Mir ist es oft so vorgekommen,  
Ich wollt' es beschwören, ich wollt' es beweisen  
Du hast einmal Suleika geheißten.

To this, the huri answers that all huris are created immediately, that is, archetypally, from the four elements, and that the earthly scent is repugnant to their being and thus, they have never descended upon earth. However, as the faithful often long for their beloveds on Earth—even in Heaven—and wish to return to them on earth, upon the order of the prophet, huris are all to look like earthly partners:

Nun sieht ein jeder, was er sah,  
Und ihm geschieht was ihm geschah.  
Wir sind die Blonden, wir sind die Braunen,  
Wir haben Grillen und haben Launen,  
Ja, wohl auch manchmal eine Flaue,  
Ein jeder denkt, er sei zu Hause,  
Und wir darüber sind frisch und froh  
Daß sie meinen, es wäre so.

Du aber bist freiem Humor,  
Ich komme dir paradiesisch vor;  
Du gibst dem Blick, dem Kuß die Ehre,  
Und wenn ich auch nicht Suleika wäre.  
Doch da sie gar zu lieblich war,  
So glich sie mir wohl auf ein Haar.

The (German) poet then shows his delight at the diligence of the huri in trying to please him by speaking in a particularly German poetic form:

Du blendest mich mit Himmelsklarheit,  
Es sei nun Täuschung oder Wahrheit,



Genung ich bewundre dich vor allen.  
Um ihre Pflicht nicht zu versäumen,  
Um einem Deutschen zu gefallen,  
Spricht eine Huri in Knittelreimen.

The huri assures the poet, in turn, that he can speak in just a manner as his souls desires:

Ja, reim' auch du nur unverdrossen,  
Wie es dir aus der Seele steigt!  
Wir paradiesische Genossen  
Sind Wort- und Taten reinen Sinns geneigt.

Moreover, even speaking of such supposedly crude earthly things such as animals which, in Islamic belief, are also not excluded from admittance into Heaven, would not unduly disturb the huri:

Die Tiere, weißt du, sind nicht ausgeschlossen,  
Die sich gehorsam, die sich treu erzeigt!  
Ein derbes Wort kann Huri nicht verdrießen;  
Wir fühlen was vom Herzen spricht,  
Und was aus frischer Quelle bricht,  
Das darf im Paradiese fließen.

Finally, in the last two lines of the fourth dialogue poem,<sup>10</sup> the huri asks the poet to sing for her his songs to Suleika, since these are both the tokens and the medium for his admission into Paradise, the earthly anticipation and indeed the earthly realization of the paradisiacal archetype of love itself:

Sing mir die Lieder an Suleika vor:  
Denn weiter wirst du's doch im Paradies nicht bringen.

In reference to the huri's statement about the inclusions of animals, the next poem *Begünstigte Tiere* (February 1815)<sup>11</sup> continues the enumeration of those granted entrance into Paradise, that is, *Berechtigte Männer*, *Auserwählte Frauen*, and the poet himself.<sup>12</sup> With this poem, the description of Paradise according to what the

prophet of Islam promised his followers ends. But before “Buch des Paradieses” and the *Divan* come to an end, Goethe feels compelled to speak of the last things and to tell us how he sees and thinks of Paradise.

The title of the next poem *Höheres und Höchstes* (September 23-25, 1818), already reminds of idea of “Steigerung,” crucial to Goethe’s world-view. In this poem, the description of Paradise is reflected upon from a new and higher perspective. First, in a somewhat apologetic tone, the explanation of the reason why such crude things, that is, all the earthly sensuous things, are attributed to Heaven is delegated to the inner depth of the listener:

Daß wir solche Dinge lehren  
Möge man uns nicht bestrafen:  
Wie das alles zu erklären,  
Dürft ihr euer Tiefstes fragen.

This inner depth will answer, that man’s true wish is to save his ‘liebes Ich,’ to be happy on earth as in Heaven, and thus to also have all that is beautiful and enjoyable in the earthly life for all eternity:

Und so werdet ihr vernehmen:  
Daß der Mensch, mit sich zufrieden,  
Gern sein Ich gerettet sähe,  
So da droben wie hienieden.

Und mein liebes Ich bedürfte  
Mancherlei Bequemlichkeiten,  
Freuden wie ich hier sie schlürfte  
Wünscht‘ ich auch für ew’ge Zeiten.

So gefallen schöne Gärten,  
Blum‘ und Frucht und hübsche Kinder,  
Die uns allen hier gefielen,  
Auch verjüngtem Geist nicht minder.

This could be then the higher state to which the title of the poem refers. Or perhaps this higher state is the Paradise of the poet, the expression of a transfigured existence in the medium of poetry, his wish to be a poet and to be able to use his language before the audience of his friends even in Paradise:

Und so möchte ich alle Freunde,  
Jung und alt, in *eins* versammeln,  
Gar zu gern in deutscher Sprache  
Paradiesesworte stammeln.

There is yet a higher stage, the highest stage. The idea of Paradise projected from earthly perspective loses all relevance, language is replaced by an immediate perception integrating all senses within itself, all things become God's words without sound and tone, finitude is overcome and all of being becomes one single vision:

Doch man horcht nun Dialekten  
Wie sich Mensch und Engel kosen,  
Der Grammatik, der versteckten,  
Deklinierend Mohn und Rosen.

Mag man ferner auch in Blicken  
Sich rhetorisch gern ergehen  
Und zu himmlichem Entzücken  
Ohne Klang und Ton erhöhen.

Ton und Klang jedoch entwindet  
Sich dem Worte selbstverständlich,  
Und entschiedener empfindet  
Der Verklärte sich unendlich.

Ist somit dem fünf der Sinne  
Vorgesehn im Paradiese,  
Sicher ist es, ich gewinne  
Einen Sinn für all diese.

Now the rejuvenated soul moves lightly through the “ewige Kreise,” which have their own corresponding “rein-lebendige” dynamic originating from God’s creative word. And finally, word and love integrate with each other as the origin and destination. The transfigured soul strives with “heißem Triebe” towards this destination in ever more intensive transfiguration until at the end the union is achieved<sup>13</sup>:

Und nun dring’ ich aller Orten  
Leichter durch die ew’gen Kreise,  
Die durchdrungen sind vom Worte  
Gottes rein-lebend’ger Weise

Ungehemmt mit heißem Triebe  
Läßt sich da kein Ende finden,  
Bis im Anschau ew’ger Liebe  
Wir verschweben, wir verschwinden.

The penultimate poem of the “Buch des Paradieses” and the *Divan*, *Siebenschläfer*, narrates the Christian/Qur’anic story of the seven young noblemen who refused to acknowledge and pray to an emperor and fled into a cave to escape persecution. The emperor had the opening of the cave closed by a wall. The seven men, together with their dog, went to sleep and slept for three hundred years, tended and protected by the Archangel Gabriel. Gabriel turned the bodies of the young men regularly to the right and left sides so that their limbs would not be injured. He also split the rocks so that sunshine would keep their cheeks fresh:

Aber jene schalfen immer,  
Und der Engel ihr Beschützer,  
Sagt vor Gottes Thron berichtend:  
“So zur Rechten, so zur Linken  
Hab’ ich immer sie gewendet,

Daß die schönen jungen Glieder  
Nicht des Moders Qualm verletze.  
Spalten riß ich in die Felsen,  
Daß die Sonne steigend, sinkend,  
Junge Wangen frisch erneute:  
Und so liegen sie beseligt. –  
Auch, auf heilen vorderpfoten,  
Schläft das Hündlein süßen Schlummer.”

While the youth is preserved in the timelessness of the cave, the wall, the arbitrarily set means of separation from the world is subject to decay and falls. After three hundred years, the young men wake up and return to the outside world, which is seemingly very much changed. The poem names one of the young men, Jamblika, “der Schöne,” who tries to buy bread with the gold coin he has with him from three hundred years earlier. The baker wants to know if Jamblika has happened upon a treasure. They quarrel. The case is brought before the king who also wants to have a share of the treasure—the world has not changed much. Here as Jamblika appears as the *Urvater* to his *Urenkel*, the miracle of his life and youth is proven:

Nun betätigt sich das Wunder  
Nach und nach aus hundert Zeichen.  
An dem selbsterbauten Palast  
Weiß er sich sein Recht zu sichern.  
Denn ein Pfeiler durchgegraben  
Führt zu scharfbenamsten Schätzen.  
Gleich versammeln sich Geschlechter  
Ihre Sippschaft zu beweisen.  
Und als Urvater prangend  
Steht Jambilkas Jugendfülle.  
Wie von Ahnherrn hört er sprechen,  
Hier von seinem Sohn und Enkeln.  
Der Urenkel Schar umgibt ihn,  
Als ein Volk von tapfern Männern,  
Ihn den Jüngsten zu verehren.  
Und ein Merkmal übers andre  
Dringt sich auf, Beweis vollendend;

Sich und den Gefährten hat er  
Die Persönlichkeit bestätigt.

But the appearance of the miraculous and the beautiful is immediately  
withdrawn from the world again and is assigned once more to Paradise:

Nun zur Höhle kehrt er wieder,  
Volk und König ihn geleiten. –  
Nicht zum König, nicht zum Volke  
Kehrt der Auserwählte wieder:  
Denn die Sieben, die von lang her,  
Achte waren's mit dem Hunde,  
Sich vor aller Welt gesondert,  
Gabriels geheim Vermögen  
Hat, gemäß dem Willen Gottes,  
Sie dem Paradies geeignet,  
Und die Höhle schien vermauert.

Interpreting this poem, Edith Ihekweazu writes:

Die Verewigung von Schönheit und Jugend als Prozeß der ständigen Erneuerung ist nach der Siebenschläfer-Legende nur möglich im 'Verborgenen', 'von der Welt gesondert'. Das Auftauchen Jamblikas aus der Höhle zeigt zugleich die Möglichkeit der Erscheinung und Unmöglichkeit der Dauer des Schönen in der Welt, in einer Welt, die sich zwar äußerlich verändert, aber nicht zu Wandlung und Erneuerung fähig ist. [...] das Gedicht postuliert eine gesonderte, autonome Welt des Schönen, sei es in der Höhle, sei es im Paradies. Über Generationen hin ist der 'Welt' der Zugang 'vermauert', bis ein glücklicher Moment ihr den Anblick eines Jamblika schenkt. Das Schöne beweist von Zeit zu Zeit seine Existenz und entzieht Sich 'gemäß dem Willen Gottes' wieder.<sup>14</sup>

This poem was composed in close temporal proximity with the opening poem of the *Divan, Hegire*, at the end of December of 1814.<sup>15</sup> It was for a while planned to be the epilogue to the *Divan* and it clearly repeats the main theme of the opening poem, that is, the flight which leads to eternal youth and entrance into Paradise:

Die Richtung der Flucht erfolgt aus der Weite und Buntheit des Hoflebens in die Verborgeneit und Enge der Felsenhöhle. Diese Flucht dokumentiert zugleich den Weg von der Abhängigkeit in

der Despotie, dem Zwang falscher Abmaung in eine Freiheit  
eigener Gotteserkenntnis und eignen Glaubens.<sup>16</sup>

The poem is, equally importantly, an allegory against the background of which the final poem of the *Divan*, “*Gute Nacht*,” is to be understood. The poet is going to sleep, fatigued by the long journey, and like the seven sleepers he rests in his cave hoping to wake up gain, joyous, rejuvenated, his limbs and organs tended and protected by the Archangel, hoping the rocks be split for his sake letting the light into this cave. Thus the poet glimpses from this aperture in the rocks the wide Paradise where he wishes to roam together with heroes of all times, where the beautiful, ever new, grows from each and every quarter, and where not just the heroes but an innumerable multitude are joyous and even the little dog is allowed to follow the master. With all this, and with a wish, Goethe and the *Divan* bid farewell to the reader, and that wish is for his songs to find their place in the bosom of his nation:

Nun so legt euch, liebe Lieder,  
An den Busen meinem Volke!  
Und in einer Moschuswolke  
Hüte Gabriel die Glieder  
Des Ermüdeten gefällig;  
Daß er frisch und wohl erhalten,  
Froh, wie immer, gern gesellig,  
Möge Felsenklüfte spalten,  
Um des Paradieses Weiten,  
Mit Heroen aller Zeiten,  
Im Genusse zu durchschreiten;  
Wo das Schöne, stets das Neue,  
Immer wächst nach allen Seiten,  
Daß die Unzahl sich erfreue:  
Ja, das Hündlein gar, das treue,  
Darf die Herren hinbegleiten.

Thus concludes the mystical journey through the *Divan*, which took us from the initial question of “Orientation” through the various phases of mystically charged insight and experience to the very gates of the Islamic Paradise, to which Goethe rather cheekily seeks admission as a very German and not particularly, in the sense of religious dogma, “Islamic” poet.

Above I briefly discussed the last book of the *Divan*, “Buch des Paradieses.” My purpose in doing this was twofold. First, by pointing out the recurrence of the basic motifs of the first book of the *Divan*—and especially in the prologue poem *Hegire*—in the last book, I wished to show that “Buch der Paradieses” is the appropriate epilogue to the entire *Divan*, constituting together with “Buch des Sängers” its complete frame, and completing the trajectory of the journey that starts with the discovery of the Orient and with the first impulses of a new mode of poetry, and ends in the heavenly state of the poet. It is because of the density of mystical ideas and motifs that “Buch des Paradieses,” should be included, along with “Buch des Sängers” and “Buch Suleika,” as the most crucial books in the mystical interpretation of the *Divan*.

But secondly, I wished to touch upon an issue that is highly relevant to our understanding of the *Divan* as a West-East cultural production, namely, the *Divan*’s own self-perception as such a product. This will, in turn, bear relevance to the phenomenon that has come to be called *Orientalism*, with all its cultural, academic and political aspects. In the preface to this study, I summarized the main characteristics of the phenomenon of Orientalism as proposed and studied by Edward Said. I also mentioned that in his analysis of this phenomenon, Said



categorizes Goethe's *Divan* as belonging to the general trend of the European Orientalism of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. It would now be perhaps worthwhile to put the above discussion in the context of the current discourses of post-colonialism and the critique of Orientalism as they concern Goethe's *Divan*.

Said's views on the Orientalism of the *Divan* have received numerous and diverging receptions. While Mirjam Weber, based on certain passages in the *Noten und Abhandlungen*, and with a singular lack of philological concern, claims that "[d]ie von Said kritisierte grundlegende Dichtotomie (Orient/Okzident) in der Betrachtung wird [...] offenbar auch von Goethe nicht überwunden,"<sup>17</sup> Anil Bhatti writes in a reference to the poems,

Orient und Okzident [lassen] sich nicht mehr trennen, seitdem das Moment des Übergreifen als Erkenntnisakt zwischen einem selbst (im Singular!) und den Anderen (im Plural!) im Schreibprozess der *Divan*-Lyrik poetisch entworfen wurde. Dies ist ein Akt des Verbindens, wie er bei Goethe auch in anderen Zusammenhängen vorkommt. [...] Hier wurden auch transkulturelle Verwandtschaft gestiftet, und zwar in dem konkreten Sinne, den Goethe bevorzugt, um eine leere, nichtssagende Universalität zu vermeiden.<sup>18</sup>

Thus Bhatti sees in the *Divan* a postcolonial attitude that avoids the firm West/East demarcation and offers "die Möglichkeit eines nicht-hegemonialen Diskurses als Gegenbild zum hegemonialen Diskurs des im Kontext des Kolonialismus entstandenen Orientalismus."<sup>19</sup>

Referring to Hammer-Purgstall's translation of Hafiz as the "springboard" for Goethe's own poetic vision in the *Divan*, Volker Dörr writes:

[E]inen "orientalischen Text"—noch dazu in deutscher Übersetzung—als "Sprungbrett" für eine "Vision" zu benutzen, auch dann ein Spezifikum eines orientalischen Diskurses ausmacht, wenn man nicht "jeglichen literarischen Diskurs des westlichen Schriftstellers mit dem Orient" als solchen versteht.<sup>20</sup>

Also in agreement with Mirjam Weber, Dörr goes on to point out that Goethe's dialogue with Hafiz is "nicht frei davon, Hafiz die *burden of representation* zuzumuten." In other words, in spite of the claim of equality and affinity of the two twin poets, "dominance and authority" of Goethe makes from Hafiz a mere "Materialspender," over whom he exercises his authority.<sup>21</sup>

Reflecting the attitude towards mysticism that associates it with asceticism and with a sharp separation between the phenomenal world and divinity—die mystisch-asketische Abtötung des Leibes mit dem Ziel der Vereinigung mit Gott als *unio mystica*<sup>22</sup>-- Mirjam Weber claims that "[d]ie Gedichte 'Selige Sehnsucht' und 'In tausend Formen' zeigen, wie Goethe mystische Inhalte umwandelt, damit sie seiner Leserschaft gefallen." This will, in turn, lead to the conclusion, that "[d]as Eigene wird zum Maßstab, an den das Fremde angeglichen wird." Consequently, "[d]ie Begegnung mit dem Orient bleibt einseitig, eine fruchtbare Begegnung mit dem Fremden findet nur eingeschränkt statt."<sup>23</sup> It is not surprising, then, that she concludes that by widely distancing himself from practices and theories of mysticism while using mystical motifs, in short, by "eine Art Profanisierung von Mystik," Goethe falls for "exotistische Tendenzen."<sup>24</sup>

In a similar fashion, in her evaluation of the theme of "Flucht" to the Orient Weber reduces Goethe's work to an aesthetic program, whereby Goethe's "Orientbild [ist] reines Kunstprodukt, das mit empirisch erfahrbarer Relität wenig gemein hat."<sup>25</sup>

In Chapter 1 of this work, I argued that the Orient in the *Westöstlicher Divan* is not the geographical or historically real Orient and has equally little to do

with its actual empirical reality. For the poetic world of the Goethean *Divan* is an imaginary, but an imaginary which does not purport to be anything other than an imaginary, and whose fundamental act of “Orientation”, as I have sought to show, is not a topographical but a conceptual and existential one, indeed spiritually and poetically inspired by an Oriental example but not otherwise, historically or physically, ultimately bound to the Orient in any fashion, as much as the poet delights in the sheer phenomenality of the Orient, which delight, however, derives perhaps less from mere exoticism and atmospherics as from the fact that here he finds himself in the realm of true orientation, that is to say, in a realm where the phenomenal world so dear to him exists in alignment with its timeless and eternal archetype. For the above mentioned examples clearly show how an uncritical presupposition which *a priori* excludes any existential or experiential, that is to say, in this case, mystical, aspect of the *Divan* easily results in reducing it to an exercise of appropriation of motifs and artistic virtuosity. This will in turn create the demand and implicit or indeed explicit expectation for some form of unattainable precision and exactness of empirical and historical representation of the Orient in Goethe’s *Divan*, a demand or expectation that is bound to frustrate those who have from the outset assumed that there is no mysticism to look for in the *Divan*, and which singularly fails to account for, nor even locate or in fact suspect, the true dimensions of the intercultural encounter in the text. For these are in fact based, as we have tried to show, not upon Goethe evoking an atmospheric or exoticist Orient, nor even merely adopting certain Oriental motifs and poetic practices as a kind of formal exercise, but in seeking and finding true

“Orientation” in Hafiz and the world of Islamic, Persian and Arabic culture as part of what may fairly be termed his own spiritual quest, that is to say, his own preoccupation with what we have termed here the redemption of the dignity of sensuous and earthly phenomena *sub specie aeternitas*, which he providentially found for himself in the thought and figures of thought of Islam and Hafiz in general, and of Oriental theosophy in particular. Indeed, it may almost be said that some of the most vehement “anti-Orientalizing” authors we discuss here end by “Orientalizing” Goethe: that is to say, in a classic move of objectifying projection, they do not attempt to understand the Goethean project on its own terms and in its own “phenomenality” – much less in the dimensions of its genuine engagement with motifs of Oriental thought and culture, of which they seem singularly ignorant - but rather simply find, upon a very superficial reading of Goethe, what they assumed at the outset: a casual and ragtag assemblage of Oriental motifs, at best extraneous and merely picturesque, and worst positively sinister, and whose inner coherence and necessity, whose depth of productive engagement with figures of Oriental thought and poetry, of the Oriental imaginary, then utterly escapes them.<sup>26</sup> In this way, Said himself – whose work proceeds from the preoccupation with achieving genuine intercultural respect and engagement and the profound distress at its absence - becomes turned, by his acolytes, into its very opposite: and the discourse of “Orientalism” itself becomes a means, not of the appreciation and elaboration, the exploration and articulation of the specific parameters of what remained for Said himself an exemplary intercultural encounter, but of the pre-emptive hermeneutic blockage of such an

exploration. This question may perhaps be best elucidated on the basis of what is in our view a fundamental difference between the poetic and prose part of the *Divan* which is to our mind of a very different order than the one often asserted in the literature. For as far as the critique of Orientalism is concerned, it seems in general to be appropriate to distinguish between the poetic part of the *Divan* and the *Noten und Abhandlungen*. Regarding this distinction Volker Dörr writes:

Wenn [...] danach gefragt wird, ob Goethes West-östlicher Divan ein orientalistischer Text ist, dann bietet sich die Antwort die These an, dass die “Noten und Abhandlungen,” mindestens in teilen, *orientalistisch* sind, während der lyrische Teil eher *orientalisierend* ist—in dem Sinne, dass er seine Sujets als “orientalisch” inszeniert.<sup>27</sup>

In unison with Andrea Polaschegg, and as evidence for the orientalist character of the prose part of the *Divan*, Dörr mentions a “‘synechdochales Prinzip,’ das ‘heterogene Zeiten, Räume, Völker und Phänomene [...] gemäß den Regeln des orientalistischen Diskurses’ schlicht ‘*pars pro toto* für das Ganze des Orients’ nimmt.”

However, this view of the *Noten und Abhandlungen* is not universally accepted. While admitting the existence of certain clichés characteristic of the Orientalist discourse in the prose part of the *Divan*,<sup>28</sup> Hendrik Birus for example refers to it as “[s]chönstes Zeugnis für [die] intellektuelle Kapazität von Goethes ‘imaginativem Orientalismus.’”<sup>29</sup> The notion of Imaginative Orientalism is based on Goethe’s understanding of Productive Imagination which “statt in’s Leere [zu] schwärmen, das Angefaßte belebt, entwickelt, erweitert, verwandelt.”<sup>30</sup>

The exposition of “Macht- und Herrschaftsverhältnisse,” “Materialität der Zivilisationen und Kulturen des nahen Ostens,” “West-östliche Reise- und

Handelsbeziehungen,” “Wachsende Bedeutung der gelehrten Orientalistik,” and “Prinzipielle westliche Zugangsprobleme zum Orient” are the factors brought up in the *Noten und Abhandlungen*.<sup>31</sup> At the same time, “expansion of information,” “classification,” “historical comparison,” and finally, “sympathetic identification,” all characteristic tendencies of the advanced Orientalism of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries according to Edward Said, have left their stamp on the prose part of the *Divan*.<sup>32</sup>

Following Birus’ lead in using the term Imaginative Orientalism, Anke Bosse discusses three recurring themes in the “orientalisierenden Dichtungen” of the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as critically treated by Goethe in the *Noten und Abhandlungen*: “die imaginäre Reise,” “die Verjüngung,” and “der reine Orient.”

Bedeutsam ist, dass der Dichter sich nicht selbst als Reisenden identifiziert, sondern dies in die Immaginationskraft und Verantwortung des Lesers legt. [...] Zugleich aber arbeitet Goethe im Topos des Reisenden nicht nur Möglichkeit, sondern auch Grenzen interkultureller Begegnung heraus. Denn ein Reisender hat immer die eigene kulturelle Prägung “im Gepäck.” [...] Auch den beiden anderen Topoi [...] steht im Prosateil des *Divan* ein abwägender Relativismus gegenüber. Denn die erste Hälfte des Prosateils bietet in lockerer Folge ohne jeden Anspruch auf Vollständigkeit oder Systematik eine kurze Kultur-, Politik und Literaturgeschichte des näheren Orients, in deren Verlauf der Topos vom “reinen” Osten dekonstruiert wird. Und im Hinblick auf die “verjüngende Inspirierung” legt Goethe in der zweiten Hälfte des Prosateils seine orientalischen “Quellen und Bäche” dar und beschreibt seinen Zugang zum Orient unkaschiert als einen subjektiven, als den eines Laien.<sup>33</sup>

If, however, it is useful to remember that the prose part of the *Divan* is not the work of a scholar, it should perhaps at the same time not be forgotten that the poetic section is the work of a poet: and that is to say, that the assessment of that

poetry must take place in a fundamentally different dimension from that of the prose section. Focusing mainly on the poems of the *Divan*, the approach of the present work has been a philological/hermeneutical one aiming at the demonstration of the inner affinity between the poetic creation of an Occidental poet and a particular spiritual tradition in the Orient. For it is perhaps important at this point to reiterate that the poetry of the *Divan* is above all that which it says it is: not the attempt to describe an actual historic or empirical Orient, but to, in the encounter with Hafiz, constitute an Orient in the imaginary, which could not exist without reference to the real Orient and its life-worlds, but is in no wise to be identified with it, much less simply equated with an effort at its accurate empirical depiction. To be sure, no positive result attained through our own approach can render the results coming from a discourse analysis of the type Said professes obsolete or useless. But that is not to say that the results of such a discourse analysis – legitimate in itself - should, in turn, be allowed to reduce a work of art to a through and through politically or ideologically charged product, thus rendering the serious hermeneutical investigation of the specific prerequisites and articulations of its inner conceptual and aesthetic form superfluous. As Edward Said would perhaps have been the first to recognize, such an extremist and reductionist attitude, which views the “Orientalizing” works of Western authors exclusively in terms of appropriation and projection, would perhaps be more of a hindrance than a help in advancing a genuine West-East dialogue project substantially, particularly in the case of a work *sui generis* such as the Goethean *Divan*, which marks a point of East-West encounter where such concepts as

projection and appropriation begin to reach the limits of their usefulness. In connection with this, let us also mention that some thirty five years after the publication of *Orientalism* - in the immediate aftermath of the American invasion of Iraq, and in a time when instead of an increased level of understanding between West and East, the dominant concept explaining the West-Islamic world relation and justifying the military action of Western powers against Muslim nations had turned out to be a putative and apparently immutable “clash of civilizations” – Edward Said defended “Humanism” as the last defense against barbarism and referred to the very case of German humanist tradition, Goethe and his *Divan* as great examples of this approach to the issue of the West-East relations. In an article in “Le Monde Diplomatique” titled *L’humanisme, dernier rempart contre la barbarie* (September 2003), which can in retrospect almost be regarded as his testament, he wrote:

Avec *L’Orientalisme*, je voulais m’appuyer sur la critique humaniste afin d’élargir les champs de lutte possibles et de remplacer par une pensée et une analyse plus profondes, sur le long terme, les brefs éclats de colère irraisonnée qui nous emprisonnent. Ce que je tente ainsi de faire, je l’ai appelé « humanisme », un mot que, têtu, je continue à utiliser malgré son rejet méprisant par les critiques postmodernes sophistiqués.

Par humanisme, je pense d’abord à la volonté qui poussait William Blake à briser les chaînes de notre esprit afin d’utiliser celui-ci à une réflexion historique et raisonnée. L’humanisme est également entretenu par un sentiment de communauté avec d’autres chercheurs, d’autres sociétés et d’autres époques : il n’existe pas d’humanisme à l’écart du monde. Chaque domaine est lié à tous les autres, et rien de ce qui se passe dans le monde ne saurait rester isolé et pur de toute influence extérieure. Nous devons traiter de l’injustice et de la souffrance, mais dans un contexte largement inscrit dans l’histoire, la culture et la réalité socio-économique. Notre rôle est d’élargir le champ du débat. [...]

Humaniste œuvrant dans le domaine de la littérature, je suis assez vieux pour avoir reçu, il y a quarante ans, un enseignement en



littérature comparée dont les idées fondatrices remontent à l'Allemagne de la fin du XVIIIe et du début du XIXe siècle. Il faut aussi rappeler la contribution fondamentale de Giambattista Vico, le philosophe et philologue napolitain dont les idées anticipent celles de penseurs allemands comme Herder et Wolf - elles sont reprises par Goethe, Humboldt, Dilthey, Nietzsche, Gadamer, et, enfin, par les grands philologues du XXe siècle, Erich Auerbach, Leo Spitzer et Ernst Robert Curtius.

Pour les jeunes de la génération actuelle, la philologie évoque une science aussi antique que surannée, alors qu'elle est la plus fondamentale et la plus créatrice des méthodes d'interprétation. L'exemple le plus admirable en est l'intérêt de Goethe pour l'islam et en particulier pour le poète Hafiz - cette passion dévorante l'amènera à écrire le *West-östlicher Diwan* et influencera ses idées sur la *Weltliteratur* (littérature du monde), l'étude de toutes les littératures du monde comme une symphonie totale que l'on pourrait comprendre théoriquement comme préservant l'individualité de chaque œuvre sans pour autant perdre de vue l'ensemble.<sup>34</sup>

The following passage by Fritz Strich on the notion of *Weltliteratur* brilliantly

reflects the much needed inter/transcultural spirit embodied in the creation of

*West-östlicher Diwan*:

Weltliteratur [...] ist nach Goethe die zwischen den Nationalliteraturen und damit zwischen den Nationen überhaupt vermittelnde und ihre ideellen Güter austauschende Literatur. Sie umfaßt alles, wodurch sich die Völker auf literarischem Wege gegenseitig kennen, verstehen, beurteilen, schätzen und dulden lernen, alles, was sie auf literarischem Wege einander näherrückt und verbindet. Sie ist ein literarischer Brückenbau über trennende Ströme, ein geistiger Straßenbau über trennende Gebirge. Sie ist ein geistiger Gütertausch, ein ideeller Handelsverkehr zwischen den Völkern, ein literarischer Weltmarkt, auf den die Nationen ihre geistigen Schätze zum Austausch bringen. Solcher Bilder aus der Welt des Handels und Verkehrs hat Goethe selbst sich zur Verdeutlichung seiner Idee besonders gern bedient.[...] Weltliteratur: Sie ist der geistige Raum, in welchem die Völker mit der Stimme ihrer Dichter und Schriftsteller nicht mehr zu sich selbst und von sich selbst, sondern zu einander sprechen. Sie ist ein Gespräch zwischen den Nationen, eine geistige Teilnahme aneinander, ein wechselseitiges Geben und Empfangen geistiger

Güter, eine gegenseitige Förderung und Ergänzung in den Dingen  
des Geistes.<sup>35</sup>

We can now finally come back to what we have alluded to already in this chapter: in both parts of the *Divan*, Goethe always has the education and edification of his own nation in mind. There might be found some elements of Orientalization of the Orient in the *Divan*, but Goethe, being a man always concerned with *Bildung*, with the destiny and spiritual and cultural growth of his nation, always has the Occident foremost in mind, and what it can in fact learn and gain from the Orient. In the prose part, he tries to serve his compatriots as an honest and diligent teacher by introducing them to a foreign world in a disinterested and scientific manner possible. But above all, one should consider the purpose of the prose part to serve as the prolegomena to the *Divan*, to Goethe's own *Oriental* poetic creation. In the poems, he simply but generously confronts his nation with the ethical imperative that the belief in the manifestation of the divine in the world would entail. He acts as a guide to his fellow Germans, speaking to them about divinity and faith as he understands them and in the excitement of having found, in the Orient, a cultural, philosophical and "mystical" model which corresponds to that understanding. There is, to be sure, an apprehensive echo in the *Divan* when it comes to its possible reception. We hear this echo already in *Hegire*:

Wolltet ihr ihm dies beneiden  
Oder etwa gar verliehen,

in *Selige Sehnsucht*:

Sagt es Niemand, nur den weisen  
Weil die Menge gleich verhöhnet,

and in *Höheres und Höchstes*:

Daß wir solche Dinge lehren  
Möge man uns nicht bestrafen.

But we also hear a much more jovial or at least hopeful voice. In the same poem we read:

Und so möcht' ich alle Freunde,  
Jung und Alt, in *eins* versammeln,  
Gar zu gern in deutscher Sprache  
Paradiesesworte stammeln.

We read that in Paradise,

Um einem Deutschen zu gefallen  
Spricht eine Huri in Knittelreimen.

And finally, it is the voice of love for his own people and his hope for a better and more conscious and blessed life for them that we hear in Goethe's wish in the opening lines of the last poem of the *Divan*, *Gute Nacht*:

Nun so legt euch, liebe Lieder,  
An den Busen meinem Volke!

Goethe did in fact have a *national* interest while composing the *Divan*. It was not to support a German empire that did not exist. It was to educate and form his fellow Germans in a non-dogmatic and *diesseitsfreudige* form of religious and personal belief, just as he had tried to do at least since the time of his friendship with Schiller. It was therefore not to introduce them to a foreign and exotic land, or transport them on "wings of song" to some imaginary exotic and carefree realms, that Goethe embarked on the project of the *Divan*, nor is it such a program or agenda which ultimately informs his text . It was rather to introduce his compatriots to a revelatory and exemplary mode of life, to the life of Life, which

he himself had found in Hafiz's poetry and in the type of mysticism--Oriental theosophy--which informs it.

Goethe did not travel to the land of the poet, if by the land of the poet we mean the geographical Shiraz of Hafiz. It is, incidentally, also thought that Hafiz himself never left his hometown, with the possible exception of one short journey to central Persia or possibly to the shores of the Persian Gulf. He was, nevertheless, a universal soul whose voice could be heard and absorbed by a poetic and spiritual twin across the distance of many thousand miles and several hundred years, and despite a long century-long tradition of religious conflict and cultural difference. If his real land, however, was the Orient of the soul, if it was nothing but the land of poetry, of the wondrous and manifest, and otherwise perhaps elusive and concealed intersection of earthly and heavenly love and beauty, of the phenomenal with the archetypal and eternal, then Goethe indeed visited both, the land of the poet and the land of poetry, on one and the same journey; a journey which rather than embodying or inscribing in fact serves at a stroke to momentarily dissolve and suspend both the temporal and spatial, as well the cultural and religious distances between East and West. The present study has been the attempt to trace out the mystical dimension and trajectory of such a journey.

## Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Edith Ihekweazu, *Goethes West-östlicher Divan: Untersuchungen zur Struktur des Lyrischen Zyklus*. Hamburg, 1971, pp. 126.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. [FA I/3], p. 1618. The poems of the „Buch des Paradieses“ are discussed in this chapter in the order that they appear in the *Divan*. For the complete texts of these poems, cf. [FA i/3], pp. 127-136.

<sup>3</sup> Edith Ihekweazu, *Goethes West-östlicher Divan: Untersuchungen zur Struktur des Lyrischen Zyklus*. pp. 126-127.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. [FA I/3], p. 1378.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 1385.

<sup>6</sup> Edith Ihekweazu, *Goethes West-östlicher Divan: Untersuchungen zur Struktur des Lyrischen Zyklus*, p. 127.

<sup>7</sup> [FA I/3], p. 1661.

<sup>8</sup> For the date of the composition, cf. *ibid.*, p. 1665: “Wohl vor dem 3. 5. 1820, spätestens bis zum 7. 6. 1820.”

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1667.

<sup>10</sup> For the date of the composition, Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 1671: “Vor dem 7. 6. 1820.”

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 1387.

<sup>12</sup> Regarding the order of these poems Edith Ihekweazu makes the following remark in *Goethes West-östlicher Divan: Untersuchungen zur Struktur des Lyrischen Zyklus*, pp. 129-130: “Die Aufnahme des Dichters unter die Berechtigten, Auserwählten und Begünstigten dokumentiert sich so in der Anordnung, daß die Dialoggruppe Dichter-Huri vor ‘Begünstigte Thiere’ zu stehen kommt. Dieser Zug ist kennzeichnend für die Unfeierlichkeit der Dichter-Apotheose in diesem Buch.”

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. [FA I/3], p. 1396.

<sup>16</sup> Edith Ihekweazu, *Goethes West-östlicher Divan: Untersuchungen zur Struktur des Lyrischen Zyklus*, p. 123.

<sup>17</sup> Miriam Weber, *Der “wahre Poesie-Orient”*, Wiesbaden, 2001, p. 16.

<sup>18</sup> Anil Bhatti, “Der Orient als Experimentierfeld. Goethes “Divan” und der Aneignungsprozess kolonialen Wissens,” in *Goethe-Jahrbuch*, vol. 126, 2009, p. 116.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>20</sup> Volker Dörr, “Orient und Okzident: *Der West-östliche Divan* als postkoloniales Paradigma,” in: *Goethe Yearbook*, XVI, 2009, pp. 220-221. This is in response to Andrea Fuchs-Sumiyoshi who writes: “Der orientalische Text fungiert als Sprungbrett für Goethes eigene Überlegungen; einerseits provozierte der Orient den westlichen Dichter zu seiner Vision, und andererseits führte er ihn.” The passage quoted in *ibid.* from Andrea Fuchs-Sumiyoshi, *Orientalismus in der deutschen Literatur; Untersuchungen zu Werken des 19. Und 20. Jahrhunderts, von Goethes Westöstlichem Divan bis Thomas Manns Joseph-Tetralogie*, Olms, 1984, p. 14.

<sup>21</sup> Volker Dörr, Orient und Okzident: *Der West-östliche Divan* als postkoloniales Paradigma, p. 221.

<sup>22</sup> Mirjam Weber, *Der “wahre Poesie-orient”*, p. 25.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27. Similarly in her brief and rather shallow treatment of “*Selige Sehnsucht*” and the motif of “*Leuchten*,” and the associated motif of “*Vergehen*,” in the poem she writes: “Wieder ist ein Zeichen aus mystischem Kontext übernommen, das in einem zweiten Schritt inhaltlich abgewandelt wird. Das “*Vergehen*” ist Kennzeichen der Liebe, von *Gott ist aber nicht die Rede*.” (*ibid.*, p. 93). This last sentence particularly shows the simple-mindedness of such arguments; as though what makes a poem mystical is the mentioning of God, and as though human love and the earthly beloved have not always been used symbolically in mystical poetry for divine love, cf. also, Orient und Okzident: *Der West-östliche Divan* als postkoloniales Paradigma, p. 223, where Volker Dörr, following Andrea Polaschegg (*Der andere Orientalismus: Regeln deutsch-*

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*morgenländischer Imagination im 19. Jahrhundert*, Berlin/New York, 2005, p. 355) sees in *Hegire* “eine ‘Kulturmorphologie des Orients,’” where Goethe “aus seinem ‘morphologischen Modell’ die ‘Idee eines altpersischen Urzustandes und die Annahme einer Kontinuität dieses Ursprungs bis zu Hafiz’ ableitet.”

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>26</sup> It may be noted that the Western scholars with the greatest knowledge of the world and imaginary in question – Corbin, Schimmel, Said himself – have been as unanimous as emphatic in their high appreciation of the *Divan*, something which the authors we are criticizing here do not even seem to notice.

<sup>27</sup> Volker Dörr, “Orient und Okzient: *Der West-östliche Divan* als postkoloniales Paradigma,” pp. 226-227.

<sup>28</sup> Henrik Birus, “Goethes imaginativer Orientalismus,” in *Jahrbuch des Freien Deutschen Hochstifts*, 1992, p. 128.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pp. 113-114.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 116-122.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 122-129.

<sup>33</sup> Anke Bosse, “Interkulturelle Balance statt ‘clash of cultures’. Zu Goethes West-östlichem Divan,” in: *Etudes Germaniques* 60, 2005, pp. 242-243. In the same article, Bosse enumerates several intertextual operations used in the composition of the poems in the *Divan*: die wörtliche Übernahme des Quellenwortlauts, das wörtliche Zitat, das in Eigenpoetisches eingebettet wird, leichte Retuschen, versification, etc... Cf. p. 237-241.

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2003/09/SAID/10386>.

<sup>35</sup> Fritz Strich, *Goethe und die Weltliteratur*, Bern, 1946, p. 16.

## Conclusion

Throughout this work, I addressed the question of mysticism in Goethe's *Divan* from the perspective of Islamic speculative mysticism or Oriental theosophy. We saw that the application of the term "mystical" to the *Divan* has been a main problematic of the scholarship on this cycle of poetry. Interpreters' opinions on the issue have ranged over a wide spectrum covering extreme views, such as a completely non-mystical interpretation and a thoroughly orthodox Christological/Christian mystical reading. In all this, Goethe's own frequent equivocations have aggravated the confusion. The problem seems to be, first and foremost, related to the meaning of mysticism. Fundamental to Goethe's world-view is the belief in the manifestation of the divine in the phenomenal world and the dignification of and the love for the phenomenon that results from it. A radically non-mystical reading in which the "divine" nature of the phenomenal is denied or suppressed in favor of its sheer phenomenality or sensuality does not in my view do justice either to Goethe's world-view or to the *Divan*. On the other hand, a mysticism that is exclusively transcendentalist and essentially based on the deprecation and overcoming the earthly and the phenomenal similarly cannot explain Goethe's poetry or do full justice to the *Divan* either. The sound and hermeneutically adequate position seems in this case to indeed lie, in Rilke's phrase, in an "unerhörte Mitte", that is in a limbo, in, for those used to the bifurcations of Western thinking – transcendentalist versus earthly – a kind of uncharted territory, a true *terra incognita* somewhere in between sheer earthliness and pure transcendence. In the teachings of Oriental theosophy, so close to

Goethe's own project of the redemption of the phenomenal, I have thought to find this otherwise elusive center. But this realization in itself, important as it is, was not yet by any means sufficient; the task still remained to show what this mystical reading is and what basic characteristic it has beyond the constant and trivialized reference to Goethe's *Weltfrömmigkeit*. In this work I tried to show that a mystical reading of the *Divan* based on Oriental theosophy is both a possible and perhaps even the most fitting and appropriate to this singular work, provided that the basic coordinates and terms of the mysticism that constitutes the basic hermeneutic are duly clarified and then demonstrated as being indeed operative and formative in Goethe's text, both in their individual *Ausformung* and as an underlying conceptual prerequisite and foundation of the entire cycle. This I hope to have accomplished by mapping certain crucial elements of the poems onto the basic tenets of Oriental theosophy. These basic tenets form a constellation of ideas that are elucidated collectively, and although they evolve around some most fundamental concepts, such as Unity of Being or Light as principle of manifestation, each can lead to the others through speculative steps. Correspondingly, a mystical interpretation of the *Divan* cannot possibly be based on the demonstration of one or even several key motifs akin to such mysticism on the basis of a single poem. Only in the collectivity of a representative selection of the poems, as in their multilateral support of each other, can the validity of this hermeneutical approach be made manifest and the full mystical picture emerge. As such, the validity of the interpretation should be demonstrated and evaluated based on the overall consistency and internal coherence of the exposition of the



sum of the texts here presented and discussed, both in their overall interdependency and interrelatedness, as in the specificity of each individual poem. For not only – in a grand cyclical design such as the *Divan* – is the whole greater than the sum of its parts, but the very individuality, the specific quality and, as it were, beauty of each text can perhaps only be adequately articulated and appreciated, or even be rendered fully visible, within the framework of this larger whole.

I also used the existing and exhaustive scholarship in locating Goethe's sources in his discursive understanding and knowledge of the Orient and Oriental/Persian poetry, as well as his views on religions and mysticism. But my own approach was not and could not have been based on locating empirical positivistic sources in the sense of a traditional "Einflußgeschichte" or history of influence. Nor would such empirical approach yield the most fundamental result that this work has strived to demonstrate. If, in the first chapter of this work, I discussed the appearance of *Khidr* in the poem *Hegire* in connection with the idea of *Archetypal correspondence* between the phenomenal and the spiritual worlds and with the idea of *personal guide* in Suhrawardi's Philosophy of Illumination, if in my interpretation of *Gingo Biloba*, I expounded upon the Ibn 'Arabian notion of *Bi-Unity* in love and Creation as their fundamental and underlying structure, if I interpreted the *schmerzlich Ach* of *Wiederfinden* as signifying the *pathos of God*, if in the interpretation of the poem "In tausend Formen magst du dich verstecken," I examined the idea of the *divine feminine* in Ibn 'Arabi's speculative mysticism, and if in *Stirb und werde* of *Selige Sehnsucht*, I saw the

fundamental distinction between the two mysticisms of *fana'* and *baqa'*, of *Annihilation and Perpetuation*, none of this was based on an assumption of empirical evidence, or indeed as a proof for the claim that Goethe was actually personally familiar with Suhravardi's philosophy or Ibn 'Arabi's mysticism.

Beyond his knowledge of Oriental/Persian poetry and mysticism through translations and works of the Orientalists, beyond what he knew of Western and Eastern mystical traditions, he as far as we can determine had no direct discursive knowledge of Muslim philosophers and speculative mystics, Suhravardi and Ibn 'Arabi included. But this absence of discursive knowledge is perhaps more fruitful, in my opinion, than a possible awareness of the works of these thinkers on Goethe's part. For it will serve as a further demonstration for the basic thesis of this work, that is, the thesis that a fundamental, one might say primordial, commonality of visions overcoming both historical and geographical distance and the lack of exact familiarity or discursive knowledge of another cultural tradition, is indeed possible. For it must be said that this commonality of vision, coupled with the force of Goethe's poetic intuition, is such that Goethe does not simply "appropriate" or "project" in his encounter with Persian poetry and Islamic mysticism, but comes to a position of renewing these for him supposedly so "exotic" and ultimately inaccessible traditions almost from within, as himself a poet of these traditions or for whom they are in fact no longer simply "foreign." To borrow an expression from Henry Corbin, this is an instant of "the meeting that takes place between the genius of Goethe and the Iranian genius."<sup>1</sup> And this encounter of visions is not to be searched for on the empirical horizon of scholarly

sources, but on the horizon of souls, that is to say, in the exploration of an “elective affinity” or communicating elements between two imaginaries: in an underlying correspondence and communication of sensibilities and ideas which is both transcultural and transtemporal, , and ultimately not bound by cultural or linguistic difference, something which Goethe himself emphasizes in the at once dramatic and disarmingly insouciant scene of the entrance of the German poet and his dialect into the realm of the Islamic-Oriental Paradise.

Thus, there can be no useful talk of cosmetic borrowing and simple cultural appropriation in Goethe’s Orientalism, just as at the same time, there can be no talk of Goethe’s adherence to any form of religious orthodoxy, Christian or Islamic, nor even to a doctrinal mysticism, even Suhrawardi’s or Ibn ‘Arabi’s with all their philosophical and metaphysical refinements, heterodoxies and commitments. We have seen that in his poetic or scientific endeavors, Goethe utilized ideas, motifs and images drawn from other thinkers and poets only in so far as they contributed to his own independent world-view, and to the way he lived his own unique and singular life. Even in his encounter with Hafiz, with whom he perhaps identified more emphatically than with any other figure, he was keenly aware of his individuality and his embeddedness in his own time, place, and above all language and poetic tradition. For Goethe, it did not require precise scholarly sources and masterful translations to create the *Divan* as a reaction to Hafiz, as though in an experiment of a purely formal, artistic, or exoticizing nature. Rather, it took a Goethe, with his extraordinary sensibility and receptivity, to respond experientially and existentially to Hafiz in spite of the

relative lack of sources and in spite of a less than perfect translation: the key element of this response however seems to have been the commonality of vision, a profound correspondence and related philosophical and poetic project, of Goethe and Oriental theosophy, not least in the form in which it was imbued and manifest in Hafiz's poetry.

Let us, therefore, conclude this work with some final observations regarding the evaluation of the *Divan* as a West-East project.

First, we need to state, one last time, the basic thesis that the present work has strived to demonstrate: the *Divan* is a proof of the existence of a common vision that overcomes the arbitrary West-East distinction, because it is the expression of a spiritual state equally accessible to westerners and easterners alike as members of larger human community. Once such possibility is recognized and appreciated, the likelihood of a mutually understanding and sympathetic relation between the Orient and the Occident is bound to increase. Secondly, while, as we have seen, the poetry of the *Divan* is indeed the travelogue of a wayfarer in the realm of an imaginary (and as this imaginary, in some measure idealized) Orient, - who then brings, as it were, his Oriental treasures home - the prose part *Noten und Abhandlungen* strives to be as precise, objective and honest a description of the actual historical Orient as possible, while at the same time serving as an introduction and foundation to the poet's own creative project of intercultural encounter and synthesis. Moreover, in both parts of the *Divan*, what Goethe has primarily in mind is the edification of his own nation. Thus, paradoxically enough, the poetic sojourn in the Orient culminates, in the "Buch des Paradieses"

in the direct interpellation of the poet's German audience, as in the – self-ironic to be sure, but nonetheless deeply serious - heavenly apotheosis of the poet in all his *Knittelvers* -producing Germanness. For what Goethe's portable Oriental imaginary offers, is available to every German through a similar initiatory and imaginary act to the one the *Divan* itself as much embodies as evokes. Thus, although there might be found some elements of orientalization of the Orient in the *Divan*, they do not touch the core project of the work, nor its intention. For Goethe, a man always concerned with *Bildung*, and with the spiritual and cultural growth of his nation, is primarily concerned with what it can in fact learn and gain from the Orient, namely, right living, that is to say, the particular project of a life “oriented” along an archetypal Hafezean axis, one of whose primary aspects we have here attempted to articulate under the rubric of Oriental theosophy and the redemption of the phenomenal world. Thus, Goethe distills in the poetry of the *Divan* what he regards as exemplary, instructional, and even inspirational for himself and, as he hopes, for his own German audience and nation.

Once that is understood, the West-East distinction is simply rendered arbitrary and inconsequential. An analysis of a work like the *Divan* exclusively and merely based on its putative contribution to the formation of a discourse of Western imperial domination would therefore grossly neglect the humanistic, ethical and educational core of that work, as the expression of a genuinely intersubjective intercultural encounter, based on the thoroughgoing recognition and acknowledgement of the cultural other. We recall that Goethe considered an

honest orientation towards the original “sources,” as imperative in the appreciation of Oriental poetry:

Wollen wir an diesen Produktionen der Herrlichsten Geister teilnehmen, so müssen wir uns orientalisieren, der Orient wird nicht zu uns herüberkommen. Und obgleich Übersetzungen höchst löblich sind, um uns anzulocken, einzuleiten, so ist doch aus allem vorigen ersichtlich, daß in dieser Literatur die Sprache als Sprache die erste Rolle spielt. Wer möchte sich nicht mit diesen Schätzen an der Quelle bekannt machen.

Thus, the project of the *Divan* is clearly stated: not to “Orientalize” the Orientals but to “Orientalize” Westerners and Germans in the particular Goethean sense we have here tried to demonstrate. Therefore, it is not to give Goethe points for “political correctness” that we have embarked on the current study, but rather to attempt to explore and articulate the truly imposing and remarkable results, as well as the inner conceptual and hermeneutical workings and prerequisites, of that extraordinary and unique Goethean encounter itself.

And lastly, in the study of a work such as the *Divan* as a work of West-East dialogue, there is much to learn for the Orient, and for the Orientals. For domination and exploitation is only one side of the coin of the West-East relation. The other side, the lot of the Orient, has consisted in real historical terms in becoming exploited and dominated. If the Occident has advanced its own brand of the Orient and has created an elaborate discourse and a sophisticated academic discipline called Orientalism, the Orient has done nothing remotely resembling that kind of effort regarding the Occident. Since the introduction of modern Western thought, literature and culture in the East, the Oriental response has almost always oscillated violently between two extremes of vehement rejection

and mindless acceptance, between a refusal to listen and learn and an infatuation too intoxicated to discern and distinguish what is useful to one's own needs, from what is not. In both cases, the "Oriental" falls doubly victim, the first time at the hands of the Occident, and the second time, he falls, at his own hands, victim to his original victimization. The study of a work like the *Divan* allows us "Orientals" to go beyond the self-flattery and the misplaced delight at the deep sense of kinship and admiration that a towering figure such as Goethe displayed for one of our poets; and allows us to see, along with the remarkable similarities of ideas, a potential commonality and spiritual vision that can in fact be shared by both East and West on the "horizon of souls" beyond all real-political conflicts, dogmatisms and fundamentalisms and cultural and religious differences, real or imagined. It allows us, more importantly, to see through a luminous poetic example, how one reads, one listens, one learns, how one chooses what can be integrated within one's own authentic world-view and life. It is in this sense that the Goethean *Divan* can be regarded, for both West and East, and by Occidental and Oriental alike, as a project that was and remains exemplary.

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Note:

<sup>1</sup> Henry Corbin, *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*. New Lebanon, 1994, p. 12.

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