

THE  
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# THE OPEN COURT

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science,  
and the Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea.

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## CONTENTS

GOETHE AS A LYRICAL POET <i>Professor Martin Schütze</i> .....	521
GOETHE IN CHICAGO <i>Rose J. Seitz</i> .....	538
MICHAEL NAIMY AND THE SYRIAN AMERICANS IN MODERN ARABIC LITERATURE <i>Martin Sprengling</i> .....	551
SPIRITUAL BELIEFS OF THE OVIMBUNDU OF ANGOLA <i>By Wilfrid D. Hambly</i> .....	564
LOCKE'S ESSAY CONCERNING HUMAN UNDERSTANDING AS A PARTIAL SOURCE OF POPE'S ESSAY ON MAN <i>Grant McColley</i> .....	581

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HOUSE OF MEDITATION

Where the king communes with ancestral spirits during drought.  
Ngalang, Angola.

*Frontispiece to The Open Court.*

# THE OPEN COURT

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## GOETHE AS A LYRICAL POET

BY MARTIN SCHÜTZE  
The University of Chicago

WHATEVER one's opinion about the eminence of German drama and German prose literature, and about the poetry of reflection, one must admit that in the song lyric, or "Lied," Germany excels the other modern cultural nations. The volume, the continuity, and the qualities of spontaneity, simplicity, and universal human appeal of modern German song have no parallel. Whether this unbroken stream of song, which has now continued more than a hundred and sixty years and shows no sign of lessening, is the result of the unequalled succession of musical composers of song from Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert to Wolff, Brahms, and Strauss, and their successors; or the result of the peculiar conditions of the German cultural revival during the last generation of the eighteenth century, conditions which were decisive in directing attention to the popular, or folk character, rather than to the more sophisticated type of personality; or whether it arises, together with the Märchen, from some spontaneous naïve sensibility characteristic of German race personality; or from a combination of all these sources, need not trouble us tonight.

Important for us upon this occasion is the realization that the modern German song lyric has developed a poetical attitude of mind and a way of transforming common experience which are unique and rare. The "Lied," the specifically German song, while it has often a dramatic and active character, is not concerned primarily with external events and actions; while it is naïvely interested in the realities of life and nature, it does not depict or describe in its characteristic utterance situations or natural scenes; and while it is not indifferent or ignorant of ideas, tendencies and ideals, it absorbs all reflective elements in apparently more concrete and more simple, but really more abstract, universal, profoundly rich consummations of total personal sentiment.



The poetry of thought, of abstract ideas, at least on the assumptions underlying a modern view of German lyrical poetry, is not superior but is inferior to a perfect song. It stops short of the complete integral unity essential to a supreme work of art. It is the product of a creative gift, not sufficiently potent to fuse in the glowing unity of song the elements of sentiment, sensation, perception, and reflection, together with the dynamic or motor elements inherent in every personal response to significant experience. In developing his theme in the direction of reflective, theoretical abstraction and generalization a poet must slight and ignore those elements of direct feeling and sentiment, and the immediate motor and emotional reactions, which are the deepest forces determining the movement, the lilt, rhythm, tempo, cadence, "music," the temperamental flow and fluctuations, which are the soul of song.

No degree of literary refinement in phraseology, imagery, rhetoric, no subtleness of differentiation and reflective intimations, can supply the integral quality of song. Literary poetry even in its finest forms—great as especially in English letters it has been and can be within its type—falls short of the ultimate consummation of song. Setting Keats' *Ode to a Grecian Urn*, or Wordsworth's *Intimations of Immortality* to music would spoil poems of reflection without producing song.

The modern German tradition of great popular song, which began with Goethe, is the unique and supreme German achievement in literature. If every other German work of literary creation were destroyed except its songs, Germany could still maintain its position in the front rank of literary nations.

Since a paper on the poetry of Goethe must be controlled by a considerable austerity of selection, the principal stress this evening will fall upon the greatest and most characteristic achievement of Goethe's genius, namely, his songs.

It is natural for those acquainted, as most of us are, with the deep and wide current of German lyrical poetry, to take it for granted that Germany has always been the home of song. But if one goes back a few years, about twenty, before Goethe's lyrical beginnings, one finds a condition so unexpected that it is shocking.

It is difficult for our generation to form a true picture of the conditions of literature and especially of lyrical poetry in Germany at the time when Goethe began his poetical career, that is, about



1766. In the early part of the eighteenth century there was only one German maker of songs of the first rank: Christian Günther. He died 1723, only twenty-eight years old. He was so far beyond the general level of his contemporaries that he perished from physical and mental privation. He was misunderstood even by Goethe who wrote of him nearly a century after Günther's death: "He could not control himself and so wasted his life and his art." This unjust verdict, which appears in Goethe's autobiography, has prevented to this day, more than two centuries after Günther's death, the recognition due to one of the most gifted and most tragic figures in German poetry, a genius akin to Franz Schubert, who came a century after him and whose greatness also Goethe failed to understand. Fortunate indeed is the man like Goethe, whose genius matures together with, rather than before, the spirit of his age.

Among the poets of the middle of the eighteenth century whom we should regard as the forerunners of Goethe, Klopstock is the most important. He did most to release spontaneous feeling from the bondage of conventional ideas and rules. But in the development of song proper he takes a minor place. The other lyrists were either chiefly didactic-moralistic, or they represented the so-called "anacreontic" movement.

Goethe's first lyrical poetry having significance was written in Leipzig, 1766-1768, between his sixteenth and nineteenth year. It followed the "anacreontic" fashion, which was the literary expression of the rococo. Since it is on the whole imitative and significant chiefly from a historical point of view, we pass over it with a bare mention, to come as soon as possible to his first great period of song.

In 1768 Goethe returned to Frankfurt, ill and discouraged. After two barren years at home in 1770, at the age of twenty-one, he went to Straszburg to complete his law studies. In September 1770 there arrived also in Straszburg the man who was to open to him as if by a miracle, a new imaginative and creative world. Herder, five years older than Goethe, had within three years become the acknowledged leader of the new literary and cultural movement which was to be the source of the German Classic Era.

Herder's philosophy, from which arose his theories of poetry and art, history, "humanism" or Humanität, psychology, theology, and social and political structure, was the culmination of the vast

and outwardly confused, yet essentially rather simple intellectual development which brought about the overturn of the ruling combination of neo-classical formalism with rationalistic speculative absolutism. Neo-classicism began with the seven French poets, who formed, under the leadership of Ronsard, about the middle of the sixteenth century, a group calling itself the Pléiade, and reached its highest development in the doctrines of Corneille and Boileau, and the practice of Corneille, Racine, and to a far less extent, of Molière. Both theories came to Germany in adaptations made by Opitz, at the beginning of the seventeenth, and by Gottsched, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, respectively, of which the latter was particularly uninspired and crude. Gottsched ruled in German letters until 1740 and even somewhat later.

The reaction against this tradition advanced the theory of the supreme authenticity of total individual sensibility in all matters of personal experience, feeling, and value against the neo-classic-rationalistic doctrine of the "absolute, universal, necessary," super-individual "Reason," whose predominance had been extended to poetry and the arts by Boileau.

In the field of poetry, Herder developed from this central idea his theory of folk song. Folk song in his view is the type of song which embodies the authentic, emotional and imaginative, spontaneous experience, the total "Gemütsleben," which is fundamental to normal, sound, imaginative, and intelligent humanity, that is, to all persons not warped and desiccated by false and conventional training, specialization, preoccupation and self-absorption. The question, who made these songs, whether a learned, a socially distinguished, or an unlearned, rustic person, did not matter to Herder. The many later wire-drawn academic differentiations between folk poetry, folkish poetry, and "art"-poetry, have no significance within Herder's view of poetry. They are, in the main, the results of the belief underlying the theories of the Pléiade and Boileau that poets must be, as it were, duly licensed members of some guild of classical learning.

Herder insisted on the complete organic integrality of individuality, an integrality in which there are no separate faculties, no reason that is not also feeling, will, imagination; no feeling that is not also mind. This completely integrated person, who does whatever he undertakes "with all his heart and all his mind" ("mit

ganzem Herzen und mit ganzer Seele"), this indissoluble intelligent whole, was Herder's ideal of cultural personality. It became the ideal of the genius, the cultural and poetic hero of the entire German classic era, which was sustained by this fundamental conception. This is a conception of genius, of cultural ideal of personality, different indeed from the later conception of genius as more or less of a freak which was characteristically developed by nineteenth-century positivistic utilitarianism and sociology, with the support of medical notions of physical normality.

Herder communicated his ideas freely to Goethe in their daily intercourse during the year 1770-1771 in Straszburg. Goethe tells of this, intellectually the most quickening period in his life, in the tenth book of his autobiography. Herder's theory of genetic integral personality became the central subject, the "motif" of Goethe's view of life. It was the fundamental germinating force from which grew the substance of all his creative work. In his classic formulation in *Wilhelm Meister*, this "integral flame-fused totality"<sup>1</sup> is the essential principle distinguishing the genius, the cultural hero, from the ordinary, uncreative, utilitarian person.

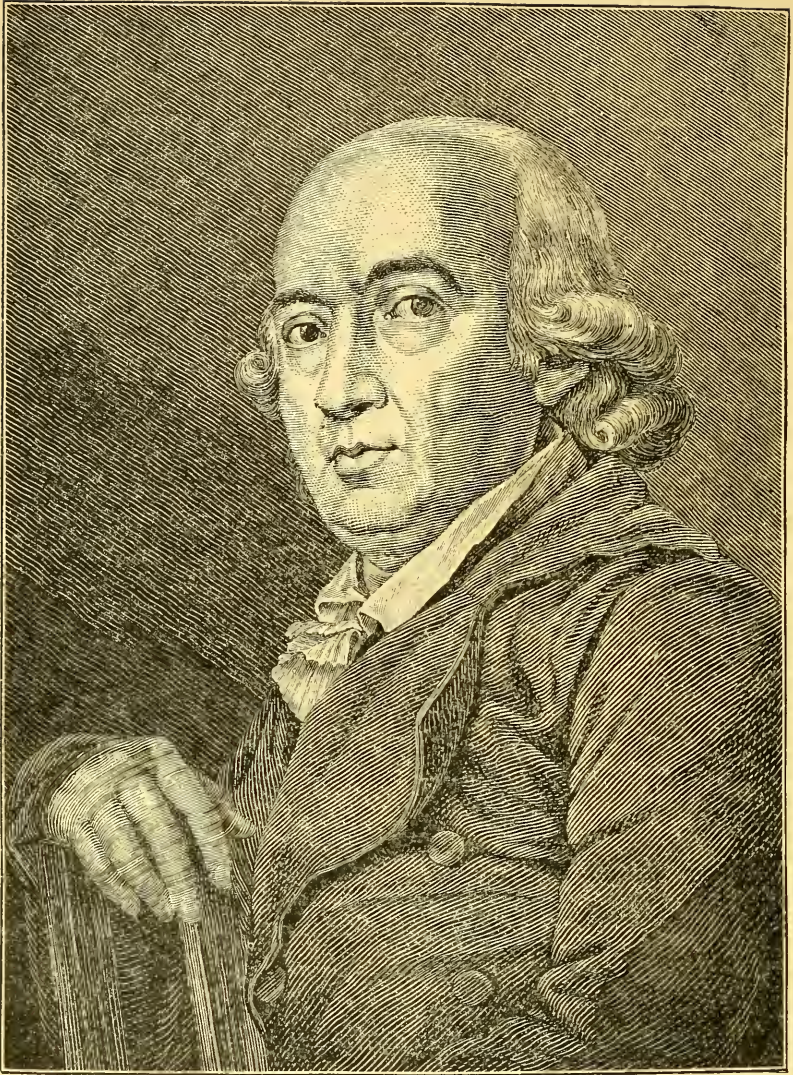
Herder released Goethe's literary aspirations and spontaneities. The young poet had been intimidated and constrained by universal literary conventions. Now at last, as if by magic, following the guidance of Herder, he had a transporting vision of an authentic test of truth and beauty. Whatever spontaneously and absorbingly engaged all his faculties, that alone was now significant.

But it required still another vitalizing experience to complete his release. Throughout his life, love was his supreme poetic impulse. During his first great creative period, beginning in 1771 and ending in 1775, with his departure for Weimar, he passed through three crises of passion which left enduring records in his nature and poetry. In the history of song the first one is by far the most important.

Suddenly, apparently without any preparation or transition, Goethe burst into song. It was a new voice and a new melody, such as had not been heard in Germany since the great days of the Minnesang, and has never again been repeated. Here was a sentiment so young and strong and right that it swept aside every self-conscious smirk and simper, every mediocre qualm of gentility, every

<sup>1</sup>See Martin Schütze. "Das zusammenbrennende, zusammentreffende Ganze in Wilhelm Meister," *Modern Philology*, vol. xxvi, No. 4, May, 1929.





JOHANN GOTTFRIED VON HERDER

pose of superiority and disillusionment, and also every false etherealism and tissue-paper tenderness characteristic of rococo poetry. And here also was a new language, so lyrical, so native and spontaneous, that all other singers of the eighteenth century, with the sole exceptions of Günther and Klopstock, seemed like empty shells. And even Klopstock seemed old-fashioned and only partly achieved. A true folk-poet, the greatest singer of songs of modern times, had arisen.

*Mailed* is a perfect spring song. All nature is radiant, loud with song and laughter, transfigured to the young lover whose heart is bursting with fervor and happiness, as are the branches and bushes with buds and voices. The sentences are almost without grammatical structure. Subordinate clauses, complexities of relations, are absent. Even faults in construction occur. The poet does not care to order and constrain in formal sentences the glories and riches of love and the multitudes of joy. The utterance as it rushes forth, continually breaks into sparkles and showers of exclamation, like a fountain.

The diction is extraordinarily compact and direct. Only the most significant features of the situation and sentiment are chosen. They are cast in the most terse, pregnant, and poignant imagery. Qualifying terms are avoided or limited to their simplest matter-of-fact meanings. They are either merely quantitative as "tausend," "jedem," "jeder," "volle," "ewig," or directly denominative of the glory, the freshness, the fervor, the blossom-promise and morning-purity, and the heavenly blissfulness of young love, as "Morgen—," "Blüten—," "Himmels—," "frische," "warmem," "neuen." Only one word having a transferred meaning, and that one so little unusual that one hardly feels it as figurative, is the adjective "golden," meaning "resplendent."

*Heidenröslein*, a true folk song, begins abruptly in the middle of the event, without preamble or descriptive setting characteristic of less accomplished song. Its sentences are brief, compact, declaratory, almost without conjunctions. Articles and the preparatory "es," common at the beginning of sentences in German narrative style, are elided or omitted, especially at the beginnings of lines. Dramatic intensification is accomplished chiefly by the two most common devices of folk song, the dialogue and the refrain.

Another characteristic which this song has in common with all

great songs, is its almost wholly unadorned and verbally unemotionalized manner of statement. As in *Mailed*, only once, and therefore with particular emphasis, in the adjective "morgenschön," does the fervor of the imaginary singer insinuate itself into the utterance. This word is also the only striking and unusual image in the song.

In *Der König in Thule*, another great folk song, the diction is even more compact than in the preceding songs. Every line is quick with substance. The great creators of song are impatient of anything but the main parts of the story. They disregard and eliminate all explanations, minor qualifications, subtleties and ornaments, painstaking stylistic bridges and linkages. Herder calls this characteristic of great song, "das sprunghafte," that is, "saliency." This salience is usually explained as naïveté, or a sort of stylistic helplessness resulting from an elementary, untrained mentality supposedly pertaining to "the people." In reality, it is the characteristic of superior minds, whose substantive selectiveness has not been thwarted and blurred by the pseudorefinements and sterile subtleties of petty self-consciousness and phrase- and image-hunting. The so-called "art"-poetry, i.e., the consciously literary poetry, represents not a higher but a lower poetic stage than true song.

Again in *Der König in Thule* Goethe is sparing of direct emotional expressions. Adjectives, "goldnen," "hohen," "alte," "letzte" are few and matter-of-fact. This economy gives particular and salient poignancy to the sacredness of a life-long wedded love symbolized in "heiligen," the only attribute of expressly pathetic import. A few slightly archaic words, "Buhle," "gar," "täten," appropriate to the situation, and a great economy in the sentence structure, aid in giving to the story the appearance of naïve pathos and the heroic force and simplicity essential to the greatest poetry.

In the last three stanzas, extraordinarily terse and graphic, the action moves with ever-increasing impressiveness toward the final climax. We see the old King sitting "there," in his high castle by the sea. In the next view of him, which passes immediately, he is standing "there." Thereupon, in other glimpses, we see the goblet falling, "drinking," sinking into the sea, and immediately after, the king sinking into death. The bare matter-of-fact statement of the last two lines has more pathos, force and universal significance than could have been attained by a more emotionalized and insistent manner of expression.



Goethe's rhythmic fineness and justness is unequalled in German lyrical poetry. But it is supreme only in his use of native lyrical forms. In the Greek, Latin, Romance and Oriental forms, with which he experimented in later years, he never achieved mastery.

The meter of the *König in Thule* is in the main monopodic, i.e., each foot is stressed singly and has the same weight as every other:

Es war/ ein König/ in Thule

The meters of most of the others are, in the main, dipodic. Two feet are combined to make a rhythmic unit. In such a combination one foot is subordinated to the other. The dipodic meter tends to speed the tempo, as in *Mailed*:

Wie herrlich leuchtet  
Mir die Natur!  
Wie glänzt die Sonne!  
Wie lacht die Flur.

*Der König in Thule*, by virtue of its monopodic meter, aided by a prevalence of long, heavy, "dark" vowels, moves with a solemn, stately gravity that suggests a funeral march.

By his unfailing sense of the natural movements of words, Goethe is the greatest master of the two subtlest qualities of song, namely its inherent rhythm and its proper tempo, ultimate qualities which can be acquired by no learning.

*Gretchen am Spinnrade*, sung by Gretchen in *Faust*, prepares us dramatically for her undoing. But the song is complete within itself. If the drama of *Faust* and Gretchen had never been written, the song could have no more complete meaning. The supreme anguish of love which contains the extremes of longing and dread, of triumph and terror, of heaviness of heart and exaltation, of desolation and exuberance, of confusion of mind and clearest recognition of one overmastering impulse, speaks in a language almost bare of qualification and ornament, and abrupt, "sprunghaft," in its transitions; in a meter impetuous as that of *Mailed*, yet with a tragic movement wholly different; and in the repetitions of the first stanza which produce the sympathetic effect of a refrain. There is not one image in the song but is so fully part of common speech that it is not felt as an image. This song, as all the greatest ones of Goethe, shows the falseness of the notion that poetry calls for images. True song is hurt by conscious originality in imagery. The

essence and real freshness of song are not contained in details but in the integral unity of the whole.

Gretchen is overmastered by her passion; breathless, hunted by it. Her pulses cannot rest. When her mind pauses as in a moment of exhaustion, she cannot pause; she fills the gap with a reiteration of her first distracted outburst. In the last two stanzas she surrenders herself wholly to her ecstasy of desire. This ending is more tragic than a distressful ending or another repetition of the refrain-like stanza could have been. We know that nothing can save her. She will plunge to ultimate destruction, but through the gate of utter bliss. She will not perish like a poor wretch, dragged down in weakness and despair of defeat, but self-determined, in a blaze of glorious passion.

In this passion, in the strength, completeness, and purity of her impulse, Gretchen rises to the one moment of supreme greatness in her life. Her pathos is truly tragic. She arouses, this innocent and simple-minded girl, not merely individual pity, but beyond it a vision of rare possibilities of happiness, of a being heroic and infinitely precious.

To the present speaker this is the greatest song of the tragic ruin of a loving girl in all literature.

Even at the risk of seeming presumptuous the speaker feels that he should not now, after many years of hesitancy, withhold his conviction, that Schubert, whom he loves and reveres as he does few creators of music, did a serious injury to this song by repeating the first stanza once more at the end. The sentiment of that refrain has been completely overcome in the the last two stanzas of Goethe's song. It is no longer real after them. Its repetition in Schubert's composition reverses, weakens, and sentimentalizes the tragic course of the whole. It makes the song drop back to a state of undecided distraction, instead of maintaining its rise to the highest exaltation of tragic self-fulfilment. Schubert's last stanza should be omitted. The song should end with Goethe's last stanza.

Klärchen's song in *Egmont*, expresses a less tragic side of the longing of love in its sudden and extreme oscillations. The mood, stripped of all detail of occasion, locality, time and event, season and weather, appears in its lyrical essence. It is individual, yet free from the limitations of individuality; general and yet rich and various in emotions and substance. Again there is no imagery which

as such draws our attention. The rhythm and meter are exquisite expressions of the tense and yet elastic mobility, the electric resiliency, the rhythmic energy of young love. In its supreme abstraction the song is as nearly absolute as can be anything uttered by the human mind.

This brief utterance, which seems effortless and unpremeditated, is one of the rarest flows of song. The highest spontaneity and naïveté are not lapses of ignorance and artlessness, as is often assumed in learned discourses on the differences—mainly imaginary—between “folk song” and “art-poetry”; but the final gifts of knowledge and art in which the self-consciousness of selection, composition, and intention is fused into the unity of direct integral sentiment.

This perfect song completes our picture of the essence of the first great, and in our opinion, the greatest period of Goethe's song.

The chief characteristic common to all the greatest songs of this period is that the sentiment, the imaginative experience, and the statement of each exclude everything except the indispensable substance, which remains after the elimination of all secondary qualification, ornament, and conscious appreciation or conscious emotionalization, both in the sentiment and in the statement. This supreme substantivity is usually interpreted as objectivity; and the quality of objectivity is then, in accordance with individual preoccupation regarded as inferior to “subjectivity,” when it occurs in folk song, especially in comparison with “art”-song, and at the same time as superior when it is found in Goethe.

There is no objective art in any definite sense. All art is subjective in its essential and crucial relations. Not only art, but all authentic experience. “Objective” poetry would be no less absurd, no less a contradiction in terms than “subjective” mathematics. The difference between great and poor poetry and art generally is not that of objectivity and subjectivity but of degree of substantivity or essentiality. The greatest art of all times has been distinguished by the elimination of minor details and a combination of all the elements essential to a poetic or artistic “idea.” Such an “idea” is an integral central unity of sentiment, so justly expressed that it conveys substantially the same poetic meaning, or imaginative sentiment, to all persons gifted with sufficient intelligence and with capacity for sentiment.

## WEIMAR

On November 7, 1775, Goethe arrived in Weimar, where he was to spend the remaining fifty-seven years of his life. He entered into a totally different environment. The foot-loose free-lance of poetry, who had troubled himself little about social formality, now had to adjust himself to the life of a small court. Friend and companion to the young duke, loved and hated by courtiers, the lover of Frau von Stein, who was the most intellectual of the ladies at the court; holder of many offices, including after only six years that of the President of the Ducal Chamber who was practically the ruler of the state, he was subject to a vast and complex pressure which affected every part of his mind and sentiment.

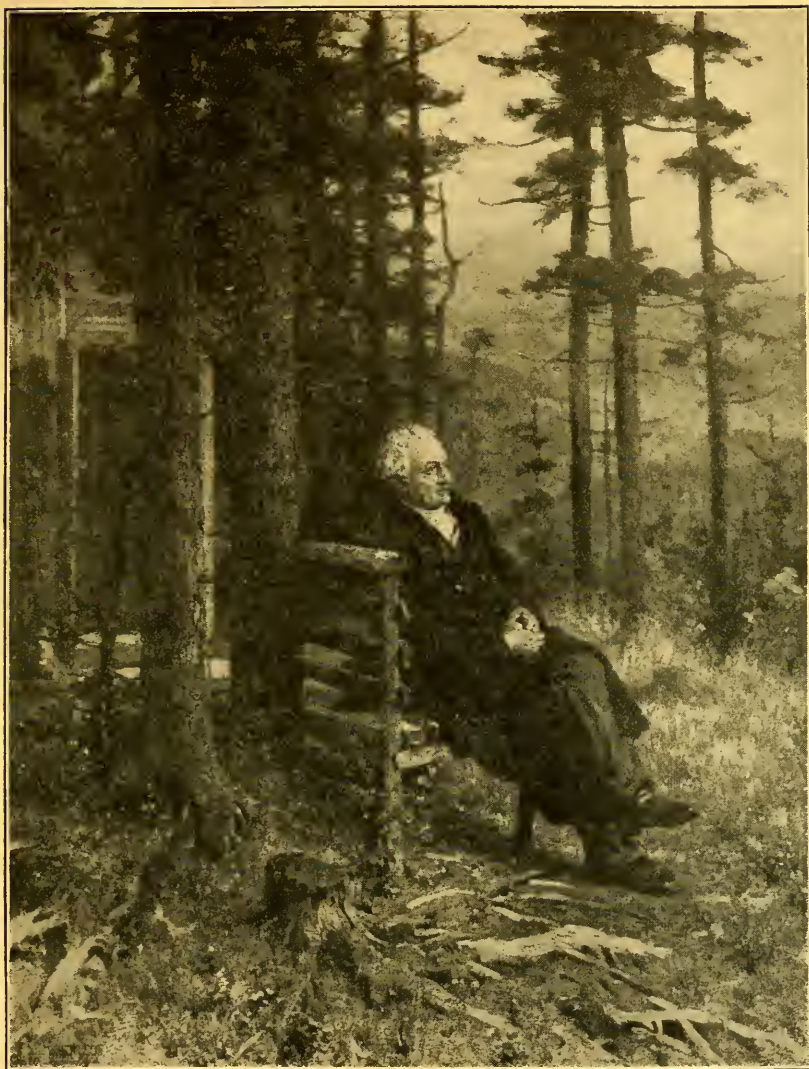
The influence of this environment began to appear soon in his poetry. Among the greatest songs written during the first decade of his life in Weimar, until his Italian Journey are *Der Fischer*, *Erkönig*, *Mignon*, *Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt*, *An den Mond*, and *Ueber allen Gipfeln ist Ruh*.

A comparison of these songs with those of the preceding period reveals significant differences. The songs composed under the influence of the Weimar environment are marked by many refinements of style and meter. Some, like *Der Fischer*, *Erkönig*, *Mignon*, *An den Mond*, have a spell-like power resulting from an extremely artful use of mysterious suggestions, repetitions and sound symbolisms, very different from the direct simplicity of *Heidenröslein* and *Der König in Thule*. The force of the earlier songs seems to rest more in their substantive experience and pathos. The later ones aim with extreme verbal and metrical skill at an enhancement of the inherent force of their conceptions by creating a mysterious emotional preoccupation in the hearer. No more momentous in substance, they push farther the self-conscious, elaborately knowing pressure of their modes of statement. They are, particularly *Der Fischer* and *Erkönig*, somewhat loaded with deliberate skill.

*Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt* retains much of the tragic directness of *Gretchen am Spinnrade*. Yet with all its tragic poignancy and depth, it does not attain to the overwhelming poetic power and universality of the latter. It is more self-conscious; it does not rise to the glorious self-forgetfulness of *Gretchen*.

*Ueber allen Gipfeln ist Ruh* sounds a new note in Goethe's poetry. It is one of the most perfect songs of the evening peace of nature.





GOETHE ON THE GICKELHAHN

It is, however, not really what is usually called a nature song. Nature songs do not as a rule sing, though their musical composers tell them that they must. In most literary compositions of this type, the imaginary person expressing his feelings is in some way found to be outside of his scene. He is an attentive, often sensitive and sympathetic observer of natural scenes or events. These he records faithfully in metrical language which is often subtly worded and ornamented with much interesting and fresh, though not rarely, far-fetched imagery. But his song will not sing. The fundamental necessity for song is a complete imaginative unity of the speaker and his story. As long as the two are perceptibly separate, the tale is prose for all its imagery and labored indirectness of discourse, which is supposed—without the least reason, as is shown by *Gretchen am Spinnrade* and all of Goethe's greatest songs—to be essential to poetry.

Goethe's *Ueber allen Gipfeln ist Ruh* sings and is one of the most beautiful songs of its kind, because in some way the "mood of nature" expressed in it does not seem merely to be reflected upon the state of mind of an independent observer, but the imaginary speaker is so completely unified with the whole of nature that the mood and voice and emotional physiognomy of that particular scene are really an integral part of his own soul. The imaginary speaker of *Ueber allen Gipfeln ist Ruh* does not give us primarily a picture of nature, or tell us what he has observed and felt in the presence of nature, but he seems the veritable soul and voice of nature itself. The distinction is difficult, and I do not know whether I have succeeded in making it clear. But its essence is real. Upon it hinges the difference between true nature-song and laborious literary comments upon what might have become a nature-song.

It was one of the fundamental qualities of Goethe's mind, the one upon which his view of life and his conception of characters in all his dramas and prose narratives rest, that he saw life whole, as only one other man of his age saw it, namely Herder.

The Italian Journey, 1786-1788, had on the whole an unfavorable effect upon Goethe's lyrical genius. He became absorbed in classical rhetoric and meter to such an extent that the free flow of his native spontaneity was troubled and checked. It took him nearly ten years to shake off some of the formal bonds of this neo-classicism. The "ballad year," 1797-1798, marks a partial return to his



native forms. These ballads, however, are not songs. Indeed, they have all been set to music. But the music merely serves to emphasize their non-musical substance. They are not, like *Heidenröslein* or *Der König in Thule*, balladic songs, but long, narrative, moralistic romances. Goethe never lost his interest in this type of narrative poems, which are fitted for declamation, and whose serious sentiment is often interestingly mingled with a peculiar didactic irony. Both this declamatory tone and didactic humor became intensified in his later ballads, especially *Die wandelnde Glocke* and *Totentanz*, both written in 1813. Another, very impressive one of these ballads, *Johanna Sebus*, written 1809, achieves again much of song. It is a tragic cantata.

The year 1813 was poetically fruitful. In it Goethe wrote one of his most beautiful love songs, *Gefunden*, addressed to Christiane Vulpius, now his wife, upon the twenty-fifth anniversary of their first meeting.

During the Napoleonic wars Goethe sought refuge in Oriental poetry. The poetic result was a very large collection of lyrics, called the *Western-Eastern Divan*. There are beautiful songs among these, especially love songs, written under the influence of Goethe's passion for a gifted woman, herself a poetess, who contributed a few songs to the collection, but on the whole, they are fatiguingly erotic in sentiment, and exotic in tone and form. Goethe was the greatest master of the German language since Luther. Through that gift he was so fundamentally and integrally German in feeling, thought, and disposition, that he could not, in spite of his mental and emotional flexibility, adapt himself to any essentially alien idiom. It was only in those works in which Goethe proceeded from his native inner "totality" of which he speaks so much, especially in *Wilhelm Meister* and *Faust*, and in which he ignored with sovereign indifference alien purposes, forms, and values, that he rose to his greatest heights. Whenever he wrote with deferential gaze fixed upon alien models, as in *Iphigenie* and in the *West-Oestliche Divan*, his work loses some of the supreme excellence, characteristic of no modern poet as much as of him, namely, his flawless poetic integrity.

The last decade of his life brought an astonishing revival of Goethe's poetic powers. The so-called *Marienbad Elegy*, the exquisite song called *The Warder*, upon his gift of poetic vision, and some other lyrics included in the Second Part of *Faust*, especially the

concluding one upon the *Eternally Feminine* closely approach his greatest works.

The *Elegy* is a fundamental expression of the quality in him from which all his great songs sprang. A great passion once more, and for the last time, quickened him. The love of the septuagenarian for Ulrike von Levetzow who had barely passed the threshold of womanhood, and his inevitable disappointment, inspired one of his most truly tragic lyrics. All his need and love of life, his eagerness for the fulness of being, his spiritual vigor, his wistfulness and warmth, flamed once again into a great passionate realization before they succumbed to a final and heroic resignation. This cry of an old man, who is done with life, not through spiritual decrepitude or creative decay, but through the mere physical inadequacy of nature, is without a touch of disgusting or ludicrous sentimentality. It is not the voice of a morbid, unbecoming senile desire, but of the tragic rebellion of an unconquered spirit against the tyranny of earth.

Goethe's songs upon other subjects can be grouped chiefly among *Gesellige Lieder*, or songs of sociability; songs of friendship; lighter occasional and anecdotal songs; odes, among which his *Epilog zu Schillers Glocke*, an ode, and the *Marienbad Elegy* are the greatest; and a vast number of miscellaneous lyrics written upon every conceivable occasion of ordinary life.<sup>2</sup>

The distinguishing quality of Goethe as a maker of songs rests not in the objective richness, variety of range and greatness of his subject matter. Most of his subjects are common and fundamental to normal life. He was a man of the people by nature and disposition, and remained a man of the people even in the elaborate reserve laid upon him by the life of a very busy official who had to protect himself from indiscriminate contacts. He understood best the naïve, fresh, spontaneous, "whole" personalities like Gretchen, Klärchen, Christiane Vulpius, Lotte, and even Philine in *Wilhelm Meister*, their joys and sorrows, desires and interests. His aristocratic court ladies and court gentlemen never exhibit the full, warm, close-textured, thickly-tissued reality of his simpler characters. The former he felt immediately and spontaneously; the latter he had to construct laboriously and never quite successfully.

Neither was it as a philosopher or a scientist as such that he ex-

<sup>2</sup>For a discussion of other parts of Goethe's lyrical genius and of his philosophical lyrics, see Martin Schütze's edition of *Goethe's Poems* (Ginn & Co.), introduction, pp. xvii—lxxviii.

celled. Most of his scientific experiments were barren of objective results. His great discovery of the intermaxillary bone in man is no longer of crucial significance. His technical-philosophical conclusions, including particularly his later theories on beauty and the arts, lacked from the beginning fundamental originality and coherence, and are, in the main, no longer valid as such but only as elements in his creative characters.

His consummate greatness lies in that central magnitude of spontaneous personality which he brought to everyone of his occupations, creations, and thoughts. Whatever he did, he did with his entire being. The richness of his work was that of his whole nature. That nature was richer and more complete than that of any other modern personality. It was of a different calibre, of a scale incommensurable with most modern personalities. When he sings a tune, his voice is mightier, reaches farther, and moves more profoundly, because it is the voice of the whole of Goethe.

It is through this greatness of his personality as a whole that he is the representative of the chief cultural significance of his age. And because this greatness finds its completely unified and spontaneous embodiment in his songs, his greatest songs will stir more hearts and appeal to more people, and will, I believe, live longer than any other works of his era, including even his own.

Ideas grow old and die even as the gods, but perfect song, like that of Goethe, will live and remain fresh as long as there are men and women to love and suffer, to rejoice and strive and hope.