
Dirk von Petersdorff, „*Und lieben, Götter, Welch ein Glück*“. *Glaube und Liebe in Goethes Gedichten*. Wallstein, Göttingen 2019. 270 S., € 20,-.

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With the study of Goethe's poetry reviewed here, Dirk von Petersdorff has written a book that can be considered a model for scholars interested in breaking out of

20 Vgl. Stefan Lorenz, „Schleiermachers frühe Fragmente zu Leibniz (1797). Idealistische Kritik am Rationalismus“. In: Hans Poser (Hg.): *Nihil sine ratione*. VII. Internationaler Leibniz-Kongreß. Berlin, 10.–14. September 2001. Nachtragsband. Hannover 2002, S. 258–266.

21 Kuno Fischer, *Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. Leben, Werk und Lehre*. Fünfte, durchgesehene Auflage. (Geschichte der neuern Philosophie. Gedächtnis-Ausgabe. Dritter Band) Heidelberg 1920, S. 703. Zu Kuno Fischer vgl. Reinhold Hülseswiesche, *System und Geschichte: Leben und Werk Kuno Fischers*. Frankfurt/M. u. a. 1989.

the silo of irrelevance to which literary scholarship has condemned itself. Goethe, of course, is a lyric poet whose work is accessible in multiple editions and anthologies, and a considerable body of interpretive and biographical commentary specifically addressed to a non-scholarly readership is available. Von Petersdorff's book is clearly designed to reach this extra-academic readership. It aims to bring out the relevance of Goethe's poetry for "us" today, whereby the first-person plural pronoun refers to a community of readers much more extensive than the scientific community of Germanists. At the same time, the arguments of the book clearly rest on a detailed knowledge of the scholarship on Goethe's poetry as well as on the author's sovereign command of poetic technique. Moreover, von Petersdorff's interpretations of individual poems offer in many cases original insights that deserve the attention of specialists. This synthesis of popularity and scholarship is achieved by attending to the thematic level of poetic articulation and restricting the discussion of formal or philological questions to points that illuminate the thematic issues. The thematic focus makes possible a conversational mode of presentation that invites readers to compare the author's interpretive claims with their own experience of the poems.¹

The central thesis of the book stresses the variety of poetic forms, themes, and perspectives that distinguishes Goethe's lyric work even from that of such important contemporaries as Hölderlin, Eichendorff, or Heine. There is in Goethe's lyric work no prevalent style, no characteristic poetic myth constantly reworked, no consistent tone. In a late conversation with Frédéric Soret, Goethe characterized himself as a *Kollektivwesen*, a term that Kai Sina, following a suggestion of the 19th-century American writer Ralph Waldo Emerson, has recently brought to the center of Goethe scholarship.² Von Petersdorff's central claim is that this concept provides the correct framework for understanding Goethe's achievement as a lyric poet. Goethe's poetry is characterized by a multiplicity of voices and these correspond to the multiple functions that lyric expression serves in the complex economy of Goethe's poetic subjectivity. Moreover, just this inner plurality of the *Kollektivwesen* is what makes Goethe's work relevant to our present moment: "Goethe reagierte im Gegensatz zu anderen Autoren seiner Zeit – aber auch des frühen 20. Jahrhunderts – auf die steigende Heterogenität der Gesellschaft nicht mit Einheitsphantasien, sondern fing die Widersprüche ästhetisch ein" (pp. 216–217). The lesson to be learned from Goethe's work is one of intellectual agility and liberality.

To solicit the multiple voices and subjective standpoints that achieve lyric realization in Goethe's work, von Petersdorff selects poems that are oriented toward two broad experiential fields, both of which are deeply rooted in the European tradi-

¹ I have in mind the concept of "Gespräch" as developed by Hans-Georg Gadamer in *Wahrheit und Methode*. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Gesammelte Werke*. Vol. I. Tübingen 1990, pp. 388–389.

² Kai Sina, *Kollektivpoetik. Zu einer Literatur der offenen Gesellschaft in der Moderne*. (Quellen und Forschungen zur Literatur- und Kulturgeschichte 98) Berlin – Boston 2019.

tion of lyric poetry. As the book's subtitle indicates, these are the domains of amorous experience ("Liebe") and religious experience ("Glaube"), each of which is explored through discussions of eight to ten of Goethe's best-known poems stemming, of course, from different phases of his life. The interpreted poems are arrayed chronologically, but the purpose of this arrangement is not to provide yet another narrative account of Goethe's poetic development from the emotional immediacy of his early work to the symbolic-reflective wisdom of his late poetry. It is one of the productive features of von Petersdorff's study to break with this tired story and to invite us to consider the selected poems as exhibiting differing refractions of each thematic field. The principle of selection is not biographical exemplification, but perspectival variety. The selection of "love" as a thematic field is hardly surprising, but von Petersdorff's discussion of, for example, *Das Tagebuch* (1810) or *Elegie* (1823) demonstrates that Goethe's treatment of the love lyric enriches the tradition with such themes as the tenuousness of marital fidelity or the obsessive return of the experience of loss. Somewhat more surprising is the treatment of religious experience in the second section. The term "Glaube" that here designates the overarching thematic field is to be understood as embracing a range of possible experiences of an underlying order or of a governing power, experiences that include the rejection of conventional religious belief (*Prometheus*). Goethe's lyric can address a questionable natural divinity (*Gesang der Geister über den Wassern*) or a concept of divinity as reflective of the moral law (*Das Göttliche*). Poems of the *West-östlicher Divan* are discussed with respect to the theme of cultural dialogue while *Im ernsten Beinhaus war's* discloses the vision of a "Weiterleben im Unendlichen" (p. 208). As indicated above, the interpretations are not meant as definitive, but rather invite readers to participate in a *Gespräch*, in the hermeneutic sense of that term. In this respect, von Petersdorff's book embodies the liberality that it finds in Goethe's multi-voiced and multi-perspectival lyric *œuvre*.