

## Goethe's *Werther* at the Crossroads: Love's Agony in *Taşawwuf* and *Metaphysica*

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Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werther*<sup>1</sup> (The Sufferings/Sorrows of Young Werther) has aroused the close interest of global literary critics and lay readership since 1774, the year of its publication. Being a prominent text of world literature, this thought-provoking epistolary novel lends itself to intellectual theorizations on the metaphysics of love. The present paper provides a cross-civilizational and interdisciplinary textual analysis of how the novel frames the concept of love, or more precisely how it is undergirded by the conceptual structure of love as illuminated by two paramount intellectual legacies, Islamic mysticism (*taşawwuf* or Sufism) and continental metaphysics.<sup>2</sup> Therewith, a gen-

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1 The revised 1787 version of *Werther* (abbreviated as *W* throughout the text) has been used for the present paper. See Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* (Leipzig: Weygand, 1787).

2 It is possible to argue that there are multiple approaches to love within the colorful spectrum of Sufi thought, yet there is a clearly a unanimous (*quasi-orthodox*) understanding and praxis of love as "submission to Allāh" in Sufism, as we will try to establish in the following sections. See also Louis Massignon, *La passion d'al-Hosayn-Ibn-Mansour Al-Hallaj: Martyr Mystique de l'Islam* (Paris: Geuthner, 1922), II vols; Helmut Ritter, "Philologika VII", *Der Islam*, 21/1 (1933): 84-109; Annemarie Schimmel, "Zur Geschichte der mystischen Liebe im Islam", *Die Welt des Orients*, 6 (1952): 495-99; Annemarie Schimmel, *The Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 130-48; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Garden of Truth: The Vision and Promise of Sufism* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 59-79. The same objection can also be made for the concept of love within the heterogeneous heritage of metaphysical thought. This

eral methodological clarification on the perspective of the paper and a concise examination of Goethe's relationship with Islam are also provided in the introductory section.

**Key words:** Goethe, Werther, Islam, Sufism, Continental metaphysics, love.

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To compile a text within the constraints of contemporary academic norms about a topic that is in part super-rational, even bordering on the metaphysics of love, is not only difficult, but also can prove to be provocative due to an underlying problem of methodological *méfiance*; thus, there is a need for this problem to be deconstructed beforehand. The prevailing secularity in post-Enlightenment philosophical traditions has been a key component for establishing contemporary epistemological frameworks. This secularity has generated a particular understanding of rationality that does away with the intrinsic metaphysical element by encapsulating the latter into compartments of subjectivity and normativity, hence an inability to falsify and an inadequacy of methodology. According to this exclusionist policy, which is criticized as one of the most conspicuous obstacles to the act of thinking, and which is epitomized by Heidegger in the concept of self-withdrawal (*Sich-entziehen*)<sup>3</sup>, the phenomenon of love, for instance, must be explained exclusively by mundane and reified variables. The present paper, while not brushing aside the mind-set of the contemporary spirit (*Zeitgeist*), takes the liberty of arguing that the aforementioned variables lead to oversimplified formulas which fall short of satisfactorily explicating the sufferings and suicide of Werther, and proposes the employment of metaphysical elements from the Sufi heritage of thought and continental philosophical tradition. In other words, the Schiller-Weberian disenchanted (*entzaubert*) type of secular thinking about love, as for instance represented in particular writings of Schopenhauer,<sup>4</sup> Freud and

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paper attempts to demonstrate that among selected authors of metaphysics, there exists an interpretation of love equivalent to that of Sufism.

3 Martin Heidegger, *Was heißt Denken?* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1954), 5-6.

4 "For all love, however ethereally it may bear itself, is rooted in the sexual impulse alone, nay, it absolutely is only a more definitely determined, specialized, and indeed in the strictest sense individualized sexual impulse." Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, trans. and ed. Richard B. Haldane and John Kemp (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co. Ltd., 1909), III, 339 — "Denn alle Verliebtheit, wie ätherisch sie sich auch geberden mag, wurzelt allein im Geschlechtstribe, ja, ist durchaus nur ein näher bestimmter, specialisirter, wohl gar im strengsten Sinn individualisierter Geschlechtstrieb." Arthur Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, ed. Julius Frauenstädt (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1888), III, 610. Obviously, Schopenhauer's secular usage of the term "metaphysics", as outlined in *Metaphysik der Geschlechtsliebe*, in essence differs from the Sufi approach.

a number of their contemporaries, is challenged by the ascending ethos of Sufism and metaphysics. The paper is written from the perspective that the obviously transcendental texture of the work corrodes the limits of standard positivistic thinking.<sup>5</sup> To genuinely understand the sufferings of Werther, one needs a fresh approach, a deep-rooted<sup>6</sup> and not oversimplified perspective that is accompanied by a profound sensation of *Einfühlung*.

The core of the paper, dedicated to explaining the suffering of Werther, is based upon three sequential stages of love in Sufism: “separation”, “submission” and “annihilation”. The first section focuses on the reciprocity of love and separation. It is argued that love is the agonizing aftermath of the traumatic “ur-separation” of humans from their Divine Origin. Deliberating on the delicate nexus between the Creator and the created, the intermediary section deconstructs Werther’s profane love as submission to God. The final section points to the annihilating objective and the resulting afflicting nature of love, which acquits Werther’s suicide. And the following introductory section contains relevant data on Goethe and his era, *Werther*’s background and implications, and finally Goethe’s relationship with Islam.

### **Background, Reverberations and Initial Thoughts**

Goethe’s *Werther* (1774; revised 1787) has been written as an epistolary novel (*Briefroman*) consisting of two parts; the story centers on the protagonist’s (Werther) tragic love relationship to an affianced young woman (Lotte). The story commences with a separation, as Werther relocates from his hometown to another city, proceeds with his letters that contain the sentimental accounts of his ambivalent and submissive passion to Lotte, and ends with another separation of transcendental nature, i.e., Werther’s tragic suicide. Classified by its subject, *Werther* is a standard love story in which diverse phenomena, dimensions and stages related to love are reintroduced.

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5 Goethe’s references to the contrast between “a scientific gardener” and “a feeling heart” in the beginning letter of *Werther* (*W*, 8, am 4. Mai) demonstrates a more balanced and rationalist attitude towards love and the absolute nature of love (*W*, 22, am 26. Mai). In addition, his approach to reason and drunkenness (*W*, 86-87, am 12. August) corroborates this position. See also Mahmud Erol Kılıç, *Tasavvufa Giriş* (Istanbul: Sufi, 2012), 16-19, 87-89.

6 As Schöffler, a trailblazing *Werther*-commentator, asserts, “There must be profound reasons if a created [work] flashes across its time, if a work created in 1774 still lives in all senses today.” — “Es müssen tiefe Gründe da sein, wenn ein Geschaffenes seine Zeit durchzuckte, wenn ein 1774 Geschaffenes noch heute in aller Sinnen lebt.” Herbert Schöffler, *Deutscher Geist im 18. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), 158.

Classified by the epoch, the novel is one of the archetypical works of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century German literary movement, *Sturm und Drang*; in this movement the proto-romantic spirit is almost unanimously<sup>7</sup> construed as being a sentimental reaction by the German literati to the rigorous rationalist tone of the *Aufklärung*, which was dominant at that time. Young Goethe's novel granted him a considerable reputation throughout Europe within a relatively short span of time. The resonances of his work were so compelling that Thomas Mann, an eminent figure of the 20<sup>th</sup> century German literature and a distinguished authority on Goethe's work, regarded it as the most significant accomplishment of Goethe's entire life:

The little book "Werther" or in its full title "The Sufferings of Young Werther: A Novel in Letters" was the greatest, most substantial and sensational success Goethe ever experienced as a writer. The lawyer from Frankfurt was twenty-four years old when he wrote this concise work, which is outwardly less extensive, as well as restricted by youth in terms of its world and life view, but incredibly loaded with explosive emotion.<sup>8</sup>

In view of the emotional pervasiveness and acute insight into the human soul in Goethe's powerful narration, it is not unexpected that we discover this tragedy as inspired by real events in the young author's life. As reported by a number of his critics and biographers, and even Goethe himself in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, Goethe's personal experiences,<sup>9</sup> such as Kestner's

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7 It is worth noting that there are dissenting voices with this mainstream interpretation. See Bruce Duncan, "Sturm und Drang Passions and Eighteenth-Century Psychology", *Literature of Sturm und Drang*, ed. David Hill (New York: Camden House, 2003), 48.

8 My own translation of "Das Büchlein 'Werther' oder, mit seinem ganzen Titel 'Die Leiden des jungen Werther, ein Roman in Briefen' war der grösste, ausgedehnteste, sensationellste Erfolg, den Goethe, der Schriftsteller, je erlebt hat. Der Frankfurter Jurist war ganze vierundzwanzig Jahre alt, als er dies äusserlich wenig umfangreiche, auch als Welt- und Lebensbild jugendlich eingeschränkte, aber mit explosivem Gefühl unglaublich geladene Werkchen schrieb." Thomas Mann, "Goethe's Werther", *Corona*, ed. Arno Schirokauer (Durham: Duke University Press, 1941), 186.

9 Goethe admits the relationship between Werther's and his own sufferings in the following remarks: "Rather it was owing to individual and immediate circumstances that touched me to the quick, and gave me a great deal of trouble; which indeed brought me into the frame of mind that produced 'Werther'. I had lived, loved and suffered much! That was it." Johann Peter Eckermann, *Conversations of Goethe with Eckermann and Soret*, trans. and ed. John Oxenford (London: G. Bell, 1883), 53 — "Es waren vielmehr individuelle, naheliegende Verhältnisse, die mir auf die Nägel brannten und mir zu schaffen machten, und die mich in jenen Gemütszustand brachten, aus dem der 'Werther' hervorging. Ich hatte geliebt, geliebt und sehr viel gelitten! Das war es." Johann Peter Eckermann, *Goethe's Gespräche mit J.P. Eckermann*, ed. Franz Deibel (Leipzig: Insel, 1908), I, 101.

letter acquainting him with details of Jerusalem's suicide<sup>10</sup>, as well as his own sufferings that stemmed from his unrequited love to Charlotte Buff,<sup>11</sup> constituted the wellspring for *Werther*.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the source of the graphic narration becomes clear. Likewise, Goethe's frank confessions exposing his anxiety<sup>13</sup> about his own work at the same time reveal his relationship with *Werther*:

That [...] is a creation which I, like the pelican, fed with the blood of my own heart. [...] Besides, as I have often said, I have only read the book once since its appearance, and have taken good care not to read it again. It is a mass of congreve-rockets. I am uncomfortable when I look at it; and I dread lest I should once more experience the peculiar mental state from which it was produced.<sup>14</sup>

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- 10 Thorsten Valk, *Melancholie im Werk Goethes* (Tübingen: Max-Niemeyer, 2002), 62-63.
- 11 Cf. August Kestner, *Goethe und Werther: Briefe Goethes* (Stuttgart und Tübingen: Cotta, 1854).
- 12 Cf. Carl Maria Weber, "Zur Vorgeschichte von Goethes 'Werther'", *Jahrbuch der Goethe-Gesellschaft*, 14 (1928): 82-92.
- 13 Goethe shared the following remarks about his psychological state concerning *Werther*: "That all the symptoms of this strange disease, as natural as it is unnatural, at one time raged furiously through my innermost being, no one who reads *Werther* will probably doubt. I know full well what resolutions and efforts it cost me in those days, to escape from the waves of death; just as with difficulty I saved myself, to recover painfully, from many a later shipwreck." Carl Friedrich Zelter, *Goethe's Letters to Zelter, With Extracts from those of Zelter to Goethe*, trans. and ed. Arthur Duke Coleridge (London: George Bell and Sons, 1887), 92 — "Dass alle Symptome dieser wunderlichen, so natürlichen als unnatürlichen Krankheit auch einmal mein Innerstes durchrast haben, daran lässt Werther wohl niemanden zweifeln. Ich weiß noch recht gut, was es mich damals für Anstrengungen kostete, den Wellen des Todes zu entkommen, so wie ich mich aus manchem spätern Schiffbruch auch mühsam rettete und mühselig erholte." Carl Friedrich Zelter, *Briefwechsel zwischen Goethe und Zelter in den Jahren 1796 bis 1832, Zweiter Theil, die Jahre 1812 bis 1818*, ed. Friedrich Wilhelm Riemer (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1833), 44. A recent thought-provoking inquiry into Goethe's psycho-pathology has been carried out by Rainer M. Holm-Hadulla, Martin Roussel and Frank-Hagen Hofmann, "Depression and Creativity: The Case of the German Poet, Scientist and Statesman J.W. v. Goethe", *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 127 (2010): 43-49; Rainer M. Holm-Hadulla, "Goethe's Anxieties, Depressive Episodes and (Self-) Therapeutic Strategies: A Contribution to Method Integration in Psychotherapy", *Psychopathology*, 46 (2012): 266-74.
- 14 Eckermann, *Conversations of Goethe with Eckermann and Soret*, 52 — "Das ist auch so ein Geschöpf, [...] das ich gleich dem Pelikan mit dem Blute meines eigenen Herzens gefüttert habe. [...] Ich habe es seit seinem Erscheinen nur einmal wieder gelesen und mich gehütet, es abermals zu tun. Es sind lauter Brandraketen! - Es wird mir unheimlich dabei und ich fürchte, den pathologischen Zustand wieder durchzuempfinden, aus dem es hervorging". Eckermann, *Goethe's Gespräche mit J.P. Eckermann*, I, 99-100.

In addition to the literary works mentioned in *Werther*,<sup>15</sup> it is clear that forerunners to this novel were Richardson's *Pamela, or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740) and *Clarissa, or, the History of a Young Lady* (1748), Rousseau's *Julie, ou, la Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761), Gellert's *Leben der Schwedischen Gräfin von G* (1748) and La Roche's *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* (1771). The one brought most often to the fore in *Werther*-research is Rousseau's work.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, *Werther* had a strong influence on its successors in literature. To name a few examples, Karamsin's *Bednaia Liza* (1792) is a Russian version inspired by *Werther*, while Mann's *Lotte in Weimar* (1939) is a response to the work and Plenzdorf's *Die neuen Leiden des jungen Werther* (1972) is an East German montage of Goethe's novel.

The consequences of *Werther*'s publication were overwhelming. As stated in an anonymous review dated 1775, "Werther has presumably aroused the curiosity of Germany's entire readership".<sup>17</sup> Swiftly traversing the German borders, the tragedy achieved far more than this accurate but shortsighted prediction. It triggered heated debates in the Anglophone world after 1779, the year it was first translated into English,<sup>18</sup> as well as in other nations (translated into French in 1775, and into Italian in 1781),<sup>19</sup> conceivably serving its author's aspiration of originating a *Weltliteratur*. *Werther*'s readers, enthralled by Goethe's powerful expression, launched a suicide trend, which was referred to in sociological and psychological circles as the "Werther-effect" and/or "Werther-fever".<sup>20</sup> Numerous "copycat suicides" terminated their lives

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15 These include *Klopstock, Emilia Galotti, Homer and Ossian*. For the extent of their interaction with *Werther*, see Mary A. Deguire, "Intertextuality in Goethe's 'Werther'" (Ph.D. diss. University of Illinois, 2011).

16 Cf. Ellie Kennedy, "Rousseau and Werther, in Search of a Sympathetic Soul", *Lumen*, 19 (2000): 109-19; Astrida Orle Tantilillo, "A New Reading of Werther as Goethe's Critique of Rousseau", *Orbis Litterarum*, 56/6 (2003): 443-65.

17 Valk, *Melancholie im Werk Goethes*, 57.

18 Orie W. Long, "English Translations of Goethe's Werther", *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 14/2 (1915): 169-203.

19 Cf. Johann Wilhelm Appell, *Werther und seine Zeit. Zur Goethe-Literatur*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oldenburg: Schulztesche Hof-Buchhandlung und Hof-Buchdruckerei, 1882), 8-50.

20 The pioneering study in social sciences about this phenomenon was written by David P. Phillips, "The Influence of Suggestion on Suicide: Substantive and Theoretical Implications of the Werther Effect", *American Sociological Review*, 39/3 (1974): 340-54. For a more recent and comparative analysis of the concept, see Walther Ziegler and Ulrich Hegerl, "Der Werther-Effekt: Bedeutung, Mechanismen, Konsequenzen", *Nervenarzt*, 73 (2002): 41-49. For a study concentrating on the nexus between media and violence with the example of Werther, see Martin Andree, *Wenn Texte töten: Über Werther, Medienwirkung und Mediengewalt* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 2006); Finally, for a counter-voice which argues that there was no such suicidal epidemic at all, see Jan Thorson and Per-Arne

in a similar way to *Werther*, which alerted their societies and led to the banning of the novel in Leipzig, Copenhagen and Milan. As a consequence, the book not only received approbatory and sympathetic reviews, but also created vociferous and contemptuous reactions. The central points of criticism, mostly issued by conservative circles, declared that it was the “justification/glorification of suicide” as well as a “violation of Christianity and morality.”<sup>21</sup>

Apart from religious presuppositions, as might be expected, an extensive range of interpretations devoted to Goethe's *Werther* and the reasons for his sufferings has emerged.<sup>22</sup> The majority comes from psychological and psychiatric etiologists who underline *Werther's* *amour propre*, his labile character and poor skills of adaptability.<sup>23</sup> They usually predicate their opinions on the diagnosis of *Werther* as a case history (*historia morbi*), which, according to Lavater, was made by Goethe himself.<sup>24</sup> However, Goethe himself also indicated the timelessness of *Werther*,<sup>25</sup> ruling out temporally limited interpretations.<sup>26</sup> Yet, other noteworthy critics have focused on *Werther's* political aspects, based on their theories of social history, mostly within a Marxist and Left Hegelian paradigm.<sup>27</sup> Although there might be a share of truth in the psychoanalytical

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Öberg, “Was There a Suicide Epidemic after Goethe's *Werther*?”, *Archives of Suicide Research*, 7/1 (2003): 69-72.

- 21 Cf. Georg Jäger, “Die Leiden des alten und neuen *Werther*”, *Literatur: Kommentare* (München, Wien: Carl Hanser, 1984), XXI, 129-46; and Bruce Duncan, *Goethe's Werther and the Critics* (New York: Camden House, 2005), 10-23. One can observe a similarity between these and the recurrent criticism of Sufi expressions by jurisprudential circles in Islam, inasmuch as they both objectify the ubiquitous tension between esotericists and literalists, in other words between *ahl al-bāṭin* (people of the inward) and *ahl al-zāhir* (people of the outward), as we will discuss in the following sections.
- 22 For a detailed list of alleged reasons and their authors, see Günther Sasse, “Woran leidet *Werther*? Zum Zwiespalt zwischen idealistischer Schwärmerei und sinnlichem Begehren”, *Goethe-Jahrbuch*, 116 (1999): 246; and for a more extensive analysis, see Duncan, *Goethe's Werther and the Critics*.
- 23 Jäger, “Die Leiden des alten und neuen *Werther*”, XXI, 12-107; Duncan, *Goethe's Werther and the Critics*, 61-65.
- 24 Johann Kaspar Lavater, *Vermischte Schriften* (Winterthur: Heinrich Steiner und Comp., 1781), II, 128.
- 25 Robert Ellis Dye, “Man and God in Goethe's ‘*Werther*’”, *Symposium* 29 (1975): 318.
- 26 A general aside about Goethe's remarks on *Werther*: Although these seem to ease the problems of understanding his work correctly, it becomes obvious, again from these remarks, that Goethe himself has not overcome the implications of the phenomenal love incarnated in *Werther*. He rather adopted an avoidant attitude towards his *Franckenstein -angst*; indeed this seems to be the most adequate word to describe his later dissociation. Therefore, the horizon is not limited to the author's remarks, but rather an attempt to theorize further about the *Wertherian* love is made in order to decode it more accurately.
- 27 An example of these would be the reading of the novel as a critique of nobility based

and political approaches, one can discern in these frames of reference the vestiges of a criticized shallow way of thinking which oversimplifies even the purely transcendental passages in which Werther experiences a spiritual state in the Divine Presence.<sup>28</sup> Hence, it would be distortive reductionism to read *Werther* merely from a psychiatric or political aspect.

The popularity of Goethe's oeuvre led to a large number of interpretations of *Werther* being made; as a result, it is now practically impossible to make an overall view. An inquiry on the keyword "Werther" returns more than five thousand results in *Weimarer Goethe-Bibliographie Online*, the most comprehensive Goethe bibliography.<sup>29</sup> Having said that, and while it is true that commentaries which concentrate on the religio-mystical elements in Goethe's works are in abundance, the reading of *Werther's* sufferings in light of Sufi love,<sup>30</sup> as done here, is a novel attempt. The religio-mystical elements of *Werther*, based on the Old and New Testaments, as well as pantheism, freemasonry and mythology, have been implemented by scholars. However, generally speaking, while Goethe's *Faust* and *West-östlicher Divan* have been studied in terms of their contextual relationship with Sufism/Islam, *Werther*

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upon the passages in which Werther juxtaposes the noblemen with the ordinary people around him. See also Georg Lukács, *Goethe und seine Zeit* (Bern: Francke, 1947); Klaus Scherpe, *Werther und Wertherwirkung: Zum Syndrom der bürgerlichen Gesellschaftsordnung im 18. Jh.* (Bad Homburg: Gehlen, 1970). For an overview, see Martin Swales, *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 49-58.

- 28 For instance, Adams claims: "Werther cries out for interpretation as a narcissist, as in the letter of 10 May 1771 when he identifies himself with 'the All-loving One who, floating in eternal bliss, carries and sustains us.'" Jeffrey Adams, "Narcissism and Object Relations in Goethe's Creative Imagination", *Mimetic Desire: Essays on Narcissism in German Literature from Romanticism to Post Modernism*, ed. Jeffrey Adams and Eric Williams (Columbia: Camden House, 1995), 65-85.
- 29 *Weimarer Goethe-Bibliographie online (WGB)* contains works on Goethe's biography, works and effects: Weimarer Goethe-Bibliographie online. Available from: <http://opac.ub.uni-weimar.de/LNG=DU/DB=4.1/>. Accessed 10 October 2014. For other Goethe bibliographies, see Hans Pyritz, *Goethe-Bibliographie* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1965); Helmut G. Hermann, *Goethe-Bibliographie: Literatur zum dichterischen Werk* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1991); Siegfried Seifert, *Goethe Bibliographie 1950-1990* (München: K.G.Saur, 2000), 3 vols.
- 30 We are aware of the fact that in nature there is no such thing as "Sufi love", i.e., this paper does not defend a sterilized and exclusive type of love, which is only known to and experienced by Sufis. Instead, an attempt has been made to find common grounds in various schools of thought. Therefore, what we mean by the term "Sufi love" is the approach of Sufi poets and authors to love, one that still maintains its universal character. On the other hand, since Sufis have given a core importance to love, both in theoretical and practical terms, they have supposedly produced more crystallized ideas about it throughout the history of ideas, as for instance epitomized in Rûmî's *Mathnawi*.

has been a much neglected work, regardless of the large number of transcendental references that appear to coincide with Sufi literature about love.

Trunz, the editor of Goethe's *Hamburger Ausgabe*, postulates that *Werther* has been "outlandish (*fremdartig*) from its choice of words to the ideas represented in it."<sup>31</sup> Indeed, for Christian-Occidental cultural circles there is an exotic and alien element in *Werther*, and it is this that deflects their vision about the novel. Therefore, it is not surprising to see early commentators of *Werther* making an emphasis on the deistic, pantheistic<sup>32</sup> or even rationalist and impersonalized, thus that is, secular and non-Christian notions, of God; these notions allegedly were inherited from the earlier works of Kant, Descartes, Leibniz, Wolff, Bruno, Spinoza and Schleiermacher.<sup>33</sup> Thus, in the novel there is a secular and dissident substance, based first and foremost on *Werther's* profane love<sup>34</sup> to Lotte<sup>35</sup>, but also on "the [general] accusatory tendency" in the book which is contextualized upon Leibniz' theodicy.<sup>36</sup> In fact, as Schaefer indicates the esoteric nature of the novel with an emphasis on the Immanence of God, it is, he states, "not the Idea of God, but the Presence of God inside human beings [that] is the highest value in Goethe's novel."<sup>37</sup> In *Werther* one finds an austere life, a piety justified by sacrilegious love, irrespective of whom he loved outwardly; rather this is a love liberated from its initial object, combined with his rebellious expressions against orthodoxy,<sup>38</sup> a recurrent topic of tension between Sufis and outwardly circles in Islam. Goethe was not unfamiliar to this schism as he regarded Hāfez as a spiritual relative who, despite his complete submission, occasionally was

31 Dye, "Man and God in Goethe's 'Werther'", 314.

32 "*radikaler Gefühlspantheismus*" (radical emotional pantheism), Karl Grün, *Ueber Goethe vom menschlichen Standpunkte* (Darmstadt: Carl Wilhelm Leske, 1846), 93. For an early philosophical elaboration of the relationship between Goethe's worldview and nature, see Rudolf Steiner, *Goethes Weltanschauung* (Weimar: Emil Felber, 1897).

33 Schöffler, *Deutscher Geist im 18. Jahrhundert*, 170, 178, 181.

34 —which, in fact, is not that profane, as we will see in the second section on "love as submission".

35 Hermann Zabel, "Goethe's "'Werther': eine weltliche Passionsgeschichte?," *Zeitschrift für Religions- Und Geistesgeschichte*, 24/1 (1972): 60-61.

36 Dye, "Man and God in Goethe's 'Werther'", 316.

37 "Nicht die Gottesidee, aber die Gegenwart Gottes im Inneren des Menschen ist der höchste Wert in Goethes Roman" (as cited in Zabel, "Goethe's 'Werther' – eine weltliche Passionsgeschichte?" 58).

38 The best example for these can be found in the final sentence of the book, which can also be construed as Goethe's prediction of the clerical reaction to *Werther*: "No priest attended." Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, trans. and ed. R. Dillon Boylan (Boston: Niccolls & Company, 1902), 135 — "*Kein Geistlicher hat ihn begleitet.*" (W, 252).

cynical about the clerics.<sup>39</sup> From this angle, Goethe and Werther carry the hallmarks of Sufi iconoclasts, who, by attacking fixed, but often unquestioned and imitated, hence unjustified and to-be-internalized beliefs, rituals, figures, institutions and practices (briefly the “Establishment” in Schimmel’s words), aim to revive the authentic faith (*īmān al-taḥqīqī*). The famous *Gretchenfrage* in *Faust* reveals Goethe’s similar predilection towards religion.<sup>40</sup>

While not necessarily gravitating towards an Islamic-exclusive judgment about *Werther*, there are some historical facts to bear in mind: (1) Goethe’s well-documented personal affinity for Islam:<sup>41</sup> Luserke states that Goethe started to study the Holy Qur’an towards the end of 1771, roughly three years before the publication of *Werther*.<sup>42</sup> Goethe read Megerlin’s translation of the Holy Qur’an;<sup>43</sup> this is a work which gives a rather malevolent anti-Islamic portrayal. This is clear from the introduction about Prophet Muhammad, who is described as *Mahymet: der Falsche Prophet*. Goethe calls this work a “miserable production”,<sup>44</sup> and inferring from the bitter tone in his criticism,

39 Elisabeth Mommsen, *Goethe und der Islam* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 2001), 129.

40 “Nenns Glück! Herz! Liebe! Gott! / Ich habe keinen Namen / Dafür! Gefühl ist alles / Name ist Schall und Rauch / Umnebelnd Himmelsglut.” Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Goethes Werke: Faust* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau, 1887), XIV, 174.

41 Cf. Katharina Mommsen, “Goethe’s Relationship to Islam”, *The Muslim*, 4/3 (1967): 12-18; Said H. Abdel-Rahim, *Goethe und der Islam* (Augsburg: Blasaditch, 1969); Bayram Yılmaz, *Goethe ve İslâmiyet* (Konya: Esra, 1991); Katharina Mommsen, *Goethe und die arabische Welt* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1988), 264-477; Carl W. Ernst, *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism* (Boston&London: Shambhala, 1997), 147; Katharina Mommsen, “Goethes Morgenlandfahrten”, *Goethe-Jahrbuch*, 116 (1999): 281-90; Fred Dallmayr, “Doğu-Batı Divanı: Goethe ve Hâfız Diyalogu”, *Divan*, 9/2 (2000): 113-31. Mommsen, *Goethe und der Islam*, 20-25; Bayram Yılmaz, *Goethe ve Tasavvuf: Dava Safahatim* (Istanbul: NKM, 2006), 4-77; Nasr, *The Garden of Truth*, 156. For a critical analysis of early works, see Ian Almond, *The History of Islam in German Thought: From Leibniz to Nietzsche* (New York and London: Routledge, 2010), 71-89; Katharina Mommsen, *Orient und Okzident sind nicht mehr zu trennen: Goethe und die Weltkulturen* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2012), 87-104; Finally, Özkan posits that Goethe had turned towards the Islamic world with all his inquisitiveness, yet his sources, confined by translations of Orientalists, could not provide him sufficient materials. See Senail Özkan, *Mevlâna ve Goethe* (Istanbul: Ötüken, 2006), 28.

42 Matthias Luserke, *Der junge Goethe: “Ich weis warum ich Narr soviel schreibe”* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1999), 96.

43 Megerlin’s translation is known to be the first German translation of the Holy Qur’an made directly from the original Arabic. David Friedrich Megerlin, *Die türkische Bibel oder des Koran allererste teutsche Übersetzung aus der Arabischen Urschrift* (Frankfurt am Main: Garbe, 1772).

44 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, “Megerlins Koran“, *Frankfurter gelehrte Anzeigen vom Jahr 1772. Zweite Hälfte* (Heilbronn: Gebr. Henninger, 1772), 673. In this succinct review, Goethe not only criticizes “the misery” of Megerlin’s translation, but also expresses his wish to see the Qur’an translated into his native language by a compatriot who would

this demonstrates the competence and depths of his knowledge of Islam. It is further stated that Goethe also read Marraccio's Latin-Arabic edition and two more translations of the Qur'an (1698),<sup>45</sup> as well as Gagnier's *La vie de Mahomet* (1732) and Turpin's *Histoire de la vie de Mahomet* (1773) to increase his knowledge about Islam. (2) Goethe's admiration of Prophet Muhammad as "the best among the created":<sup>46</sup> Luserke also states that Goethe, under the influence of Herder, desired to correct the negative image of Prophet Muhammad, which had been created by Voltaire's play *Mahomet* (1741). The Prophet was primarily a "genius" for the leading figure of *Sturm und Drang*.<sup>47</sup> Two years prior to the publication of *Werther*, Goethe wrote a eulogy (*Mahomets-Gesang*) in memoriam; certain verses of it reveal an astonishing similitude to the former.<sup>48</sup> Goethe's broader project, *Mahomet-Drama*, was never completed, and remained only as a few pages. Yet, it is useful for those researching *Werther* to realise that there is a relationship between the beginning of the drama and the odes in *Klopstock*. (3) Goethe's employment of Sufi symbolism in his later work: In his *West-östlicher Divan*, the poet authoritatively employs symbols and leitmotifs peculiar to the Sufi thesaurus,<sup>49</sup> thus establishing his deep rapport with Sufism. Furthermore, the usage of the lyrical I from the mouth of Muslim characters in some of verses have led the critics to comment on Goethe's personal identification with Islam.<sup>50</sup> However, such approaches

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read it with a poetic and prophetic sentiment —his wish was fulfilled approximately half a century later with Rückert's (1834) translations of Qur'anic *sūras*, who unfortunately was unable to translate the whole Qur'an.

45 Taha Badri, "Zum Bild des Propheten Mohammed in Goethes Gedicht 'Mahomets Gesang': Goethes Einstellung zum Propheten Mohammed u. zum Islam aus der Sicht e. arab. Germanisten", *Kairoer germanistische Studien: Jahrbuch für Sprach-, Literatur- und Übersetzungswissenschaft; Jahrbuch für Germanistik*, 14 (2004): 65-90. Ludovico Marraccio, *Alcorani textus universus arabicus, cum versione latina, appositis unicuique capiti notis atque refutatione* (Patavii, 1698). In addition to these two, Goethe is also reported to have read Sales' English translation and Ruyser's French translation of the Qur'an.

46 "Oberhaupt der Geschöpfe"

47 Cf. D. Gustav Pfannmüller, *Handbuch der Islam-Literatur* (Berlin und Leipzig: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1923), 174.

48 "[...] Bruder! / Bruder, nimm die Brüder mit / Mit zu deinem alten Vater / Zu dem ew'gen Ocean / Der mit ausgespannten Armen / Unser wartet / Die sich ach! vergebens öffnen / Seine Sehnenenden zu fassen [...]" Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Goethes Schriften*, ed. Georg Joachim Göschen (Leipzig: G.J. Göschen, 1789), VIII, 183-86. It is hard to distinguish these ebullient verses of "*Mahomets-Gesang*" from Werther's invocations.

49 One of the most obvious examples of this employment can be observed in the Goethean usage of well-known Sufi symbols "light" and "butterfly" in his poem "selige Sehnsucht". See Mommsen, *Goethe und der Islam*, 207-23; and Annemarie Schimmel, *Sufismus: Eine Einführung in die islamische Mystik* (München: Beck, 2003), 33.

50 Cf. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *West-östlicher Divan: Goethes sämtliche Werke*, ed. Franz Schultz (Berlin: Th. Knaur, 1908), 43, 54, 73.

are not in keeping with Goethe's personal belief, as the Muslim characters in his book are brought into speech in themselves. However, the dividing line between Goethe and his lyrical I are not to make into an absolute, as some could and have deduced from his inexplicit expressions in some of his private letters that Goethe was a Muslim.<sup>51</sup> Again, Mommsen clarifies that Goethe began to write *West-östlicher Divan* shortly after his performance of Islamic prayer with Bashkir troops in a local Protestant high school.<sup>52</sup> (4) A *fatwa* issued stating that Goethe was a Muslim: this was issued by Sheikh 'Abdalqādir Al-Murābit (also known as Ian Dallas, the well-known Sufi author of *Book of Strangers*) in Germany.<sup>53</sup> Although numerous Muslims throughout the world were pleased by this, as a globally celebrated mind and a man of letters, the *crème de la crème*, had overnight become their coreligionist, Mommsen deems this *fatwa* as being unjustified; she argues against it by putting forward Goethe's criticism of Islam and the role of women and prohibition of wine in the religion.<sup>54</sup> Almond also emphasizes Goethe's self-attribution as a Pseudo-Mohammedan (*Aftermahometaner*).<sup>55</sup>

While it remains a challenge to arrive at a clear conclusion on this matter, there are no serious obstacles to evaluating Goethe's positive attitude towards Islam within the broader cadre of the so-called free-thinkers (*Freigeister*) of the time, such as Reimarus, Lessing, Herder and Carlyle. This brings us to a particular teleological hypothesis of a rather theo-political nature about Goethe's attitude towards Islam. It is a well-documented historical fact that Goethe was a Freemason.<sup>56</sup> The Masonic elements and ideas in his novels and poems are also familiar to literary researchers.<sup>57</sup> On the other hand, as elaborated by unbiased scholars, the Masonic ambition of uniting the

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51 Carl Friedrich Zelter, *Briefwechsel zwischen Goethe und Zelter in den Jahren 1796 bis 1832*, 151; Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Propyläen Ausgabe von Goethes sämtlichen Werken*, ed. C. Noch (Berlin: Im Propyläen Verlag, 1909), XXXII, 259; Thomas Carlyle, *Correspondence between Goethe and Carlyle*, ed. Charles Eliot Norton (London: Macmillan and Co., 1887), 18.

52 Mommsen, "Goethes Morgenlandfahrten", 284-85.

53 Sheikh 'Abdalqādir Al-Murābit, "Was Goethe a Muslim?" *Islamische Zeitung*, 19 December 1995.

54 "Goethes tiefe Neigung zum Islam": "...als dass ich mich auch hier im Islam zu halten suche", *Islamische Zeitung*, 17 March 2000. Available from: <http://www.islamische-zeitung.de/index.cgi?id=8463>. Accessed 24 October 2014.

55 Almond, *The History of Islam in German Thought*, 73.

56 Helmut Reinalter, *Die Freimaurer* (München: Beck, 2000), 102-3.

57 Robert A. Gilbert, "Freemasonry and Literature", *Handbook of Freemasonry*, ed. Henrik Bogdan and Jan A.M. Snoek (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2014), 529.

humanity as world citizens (*Weltbürger*) is not a conspiracy theory.<sup>58</sup> During a 2007 lecture at the University of TU Clausthal, Mommsen affirmed that, unlike Kipling and Huntington in more recent times, Goethe thought in global dimensions; his sense of responsibility led him to take the main role of a negotiator between the Orient and the Occident.<sup>59</sup> Thus, Goethe's openness to Islam and his efforts to build a bridge between the East and the West can also be contextualized within a broader political framework.<sup>60</sup> One can assume that Goethe and other Masonic figures of *Aufklärung* discovered some potential in Islam that was juxtaposed to the existing hostile, exclusionist and otherizing Christian anti-Islamic bias prevalent in their era. The Islamic creed of monotheism in its pure, uncorrupted and universally embracing form, along with its unifying rhetoric could have presented a resemblance to the idea of religious unity in their minds (e.g., the Islamic concept of *ahl al-kitāb*/people of the book and Lessing's ring parable<sup>61</sup>). Goethe's interest in the cultures of India, China, Japan and Korea<sup>62</sup>, and his well-known ambition to create a supranational *Weltliteratur*<sup>63</sup> give credence to this hypothesis. Yet

58 "Schließlich setzen sich die Logen nicht nur über die ständische und konfessionelle, sondern auch über die einzelstaatliche Zugehörigkeit hinweg. "Der Bruder war innerhalb der Logen kein Untertan der Staatsgewalt mehr, sondern Mensch unter Menschen." Folglich sahen sich die Freimaurer nicht nur als Untertan oder Staatsbürger, sondern als Weltbürger." Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, *Die Politik der Geselligkeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 42-43. "This defense intended for a Continental and largely Catholic audience, like so many other pieces of masonic literature, calls forth a single creed, one that could be embraced by a variety of Christians, as well as by Mohammedans and Jews. As another tract put it, only within freemasonry can that creed be practiced; this society alone "redounds to the honour of the great parent of nature, and architect of the universe . . . worthy . . . of man whose greatest happiness is society, whose supreme dignity is humanity [...]" "This universalism makes sense not only as propaganda but also as a true reflection of early masonic history." Margaret C. Jacob, *Living the Enlightenment: Freemasonry and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 66. "His listener reminds him, however, that human beings are hopelessly divided, into many states and religions. Predictably the masonic voice has the cure: Freemasonry will unite humankind, its universalism offers the first step toward unity [...]" "The recognition that 'all the nations will never be a single family' did not stop the masonic desire to create just that: Only the spirit of masonry operates [to produce] this astonishing revolution." Jacob, *Living the Enlightenment*, 150.

59 Katharina Mommsen, "Gottes ist der Orient, Gottes ist der Okzident, Goethes Blick auf die Islamische Welt" [Video file, 9 February 2007]. Available from: <http://video.tu-clausthal.de/film/36.html>. Accessed 24 October 2014.

60 Giles Morgan, *Freemasonry* (Sparkford: J.H. Haynes & Co., 2008), 22.

61 Zahim Mohammed Muslim, "Lessing und der Islam: Eine Studie zu Lessings Auseinandersetzung mit dem Islam" (Ph.D. diss., Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 2010), 190-98.

62 Mommsen, "Goethes Morgenlandfahrten", 283-84.

63 Cf. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Schriften zur Kunst, Schriften zur Literatur, Maximen*

it would be an injustice to the poet's genius to demarcate his personal affinity for Islam with political borders; rather, his approach to Islam seems to have had a deeply sentimental character.

Regardless of what Goethe's reasons may have been for developing a sympathetic relationship with Islam, the historical facts above reveal a resemblance of a deeper metaphysical substance between Goethean and Sufi loves; this, when considered with Goethe's personal understanding of religion and that of *homo islamicus* below, have been revealed by Mommsen's well-established studies. Indeed, Goethe's being comfortable with Islam and his employment of Sufi themes in his works are mirrored in the fact that Sufi readers are at home with Goethe's work. Thus, it would not be completely implausible to regard Wertherian "amor" as a recondite manifestation of Sufi love. Since there is a remarkable symmetry and harmony between the multiple manifestations of love in *Werther*, Goethe's additional works and Sufi thought and praxis, the Sufi interpretation of *Werther* should not be omitted. Not because Goethe would have tailored *Werther* with this specific intention, as can be observed in *West-östlicher Divan*, but rather by virtue of the poet's harmonious spiritual chemistry with the Sufi form of existence, which, in spiritual terms, precedes his political and social predispositions. By this not only the deeper influence of Islamic sources on Goethe's spirit are being referred to,<sup>64</sup> but also the harmony between non-Islamic and Sufi reasonings on love, which is unambiguous within the universality of love. Hence, it appears to be more plausible to conclude that *Werther* should be read within a sacred conception of love, the framework of which can be restructured based on the Sufi notion of love; however, this is also at home with metaphysics, as will be illustrated using the ideas of Plato, Spinoza and Hegel.

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*und Reflexionen. Goethes Werke*, ed. Erich Trunz (München: Beck, 1982), XII, 361-64.

64 For a concise bibliography of Goethe's oriental sources, see M. Ikram Chaghatai, *Iqbal and Goethe* (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 2000), 551-54.

### The Genesis of Love: *Separation*

Book of books most wonderful  
Is surely the book of Love;  
Heedfully I have read it through;  
Of joys some scanty leaves,  
Whole sheets writ o'er with pain;  
Separation forms a section,  
Reunion a little chapter,  
And that a fragment. Troubles run to volumes,  
Drawn out with due elucidations,  
Endless and measureless.

(Goethe, "Reading-Book")<sup>65</sup>

*Wunderlichstes Buch der Bücher  
Ist das Buch der Liebe;  
Aufmerksam hab ich's gelesen:  
Wenig Blätter Freuden,  
Ganze Hefte Leiden;  
Einen Abschnitt macht die Trennung.  
Wiederseh'n! ein klein Kapitel,  
Fragmentarisch. Bände Kummers  
Mit Erklärungen verlängert,  
Endlos, ohne Maß.*

(Goethe, "Lesebuch")<sup>66</sup>

Goethe, in his rather pessimistic poem "Lesebuch" above, decries in a realistic tone that volumes of love's miraculous book consist of endless worries. A few pages deliver joy to the heart, distinguishes the poet, but entire chapters have been written in agony, as we see in *Werther*. The emerging pessimistic enigma needs an adequate solution: how can this immeasurable pain stem from a blissful affection like love? An attempt to solve this problem can be accomplished by departing from an ontological point of view as outlined by Goethe in his "Wiederfinden":

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65 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *West-Eastern Divan*, trans. and ed. Edward Dowden (London and Toronto: J.M.Dent & Sons, 1914), 35.

66 Goethe, *West-östlicher Divan*, 19.

When buried deep the whole world lay  
In God's eternal breast, elate  
He summoned forth the primal day,  
Urged by the rapture to create.  
He spake the fiat  
"Let there be!"  
And with a dolorous "Alas!"  
Forth into actuality  
Outbrake the mighty, labouring mass! [...]  
And things had power to love anew  
Which each from each had fallen away.

(Goethe, "Reunion")<sup>67</sup>

*Als die Welt im tiefsten Grunde  
Lag an Gottes ewger 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! [...]  
Und nun konnte wieder lieben,  
Was erst auseinanderfiel.*

(Goethe, "Wiederfinden")<sup>68</sup>

In his comparative analysis of Rümî and Goethe, Özkan introduces an enlightening exegesis of "Wiederfinden's" transcendental verses.<sup>69</sup> According to the Goethean account of genesis, all existence has been blessed with a tranquil unity with God before creation. In their pre-temporal non-being, God's eternal breast provided a Divine Nest for human beings, unencumbered by the sorrows or anxieties of independent existence. Yet, following their creation with the Divine Imperative "Es werde!"<sup>70</sup> they were detached

67 Goethe, *West-Eastern Divan*, 134.

68 Goethe, *West-östlicher Divan*, 67.

69 Özkan, *Mevlâna ve Goethe*, 96-97.

70 The imperative of "yehi!/fiat!" in the Biblical, and "kun!" in the Qur'anic terminologies.

from their erstwhile absoluteness, their earthly being became extracted from the homeland, which at the same time instigated their suffering. This ur-separation is what simultaneously excruciates human beings and what creates love between the once together, but now separated subjects. Consequently, humans are exiles who existentially yearn for a homecoming while love is their painful hope from the prison of life; in Werther's words a "Kerker" (*W*, 19, am 22. May).<sup>71</sup>

As soon as one reaches the consciousness of the self's evanescence and strangeness on Earth, consequently conceding to be a *gharīb*,<sup>72</sup> or simply a wanderer, as Goethe and Werther do,<sup>73</sup> one starts to sense a separation anxiety and a homesickness.<sup>74</sup> Goethe alludes to the suffering caused by this separation as a "*schmerzlich Ach*", which immediately succeeds the verse of creation. His exclamation presumably refers to the unbearable heaviness of being, caused by the perpetual human quest of the lost state of unity, which can also be noticed in the aforementioned angry utterance of Werther. It is in fact this transcendental urge, experienced by Werther in its spatio-temporal manifestation of longing for Lotte that causes an unbearable pain;<sup>75</sup> this is, as claimed by *Werther's* author, at home with the sensitive receptiveness of poets.<sup>76</sup> To justify Goethe, Rūmī, whose poetry focuses on longing and love as its central concepts, postulates that the longing of the soul is nothing but the lover's desire of unity with the Beloved. Probably the most crystallized

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71 Cf. "Abu Huraira reported Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) as saying: The world is a prison-house for a believer and Paradise for a non-believer." *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book 42, Number 7058.

72 The Sufi term for "stranger".

73 "Wanderer" is Goethe's epithet. "Once more I am a wanderer, a pilgrim, through the world. But what else are you!" Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, 79, July 16 — "Ja, wohl bin ich nur ein Wanderer, ein Waller auf der Erde! Seid ihr denn mehr?" (*W*, 146, am 16. Julius). The later affixation of this passage, which is missing in the first 1774 edition of *Werther*, presumptively discloses Goethe's particular emphasis onto it.

74 "Heimweh", according to Novalis, is nothing but the sheer definition of philosophy. Novalis, *Schriften*, ed. Jacob Minor (Jena: Diederichs, 1923), 179. This thought reveals a parallelism between the "love of wisdom" and love *per se*, both deprived of and searching for their homes.

75 "I suffer much, for I have lost the only charm of life: that active, sacred power which created worlds around me—it is no more." Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, 90, November 3 — "Ich leide viel, denn ich habe verloren, was meines Lebens einzige Wonne war, die heilige belebende Kraft, mit der ich Welten um mich schuf; sie ist dahin!" (*W*, 169, am 3. November)

76 "[N]one are distressed like thee! Then I read a passage in an ancient poet, and I seem to understand my own heart." Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, 94, November 26 — "[S]o ist noch keiner gequält worden; dann lese ich einen Dichter der Vorzeit, und es ist mir, als säh' ich in mein eignes Herz." (*W*, 176, am 26. November)

version of this idea in poetry can be found in the exordial eighteen verses of Rūmī's *Mathnawi*, one of the most radical insights into the essence of love.

Now listen to this reed-flute's deep lament  
About the heartache being apart has meant:  
'Since from the reed-bed they uprooted me  
My song's expressed each human's agony  
[...] When kept from their true origin, all yearn  
For union on the day they can return.  
[...] This reed relates a tortuous path ahead,  
Recalls the love with which Majnun's heart bled<sup>77</sup>

بشو از نی، چون حکایت میکند  
از جدائی با شکایت میکند  
کز نستان تا مرا بربیده اند  
از تغییرم مرد و زن نالیده اند  
[...]. هر کسی کو دور ماند از اصل خویش  
باز جوید روزگار وصل خویش  
[...]. فی حدیث راه پر خون می کند  
قصای عشق مجنون می کند<sup>78</sup>

### The Quintessence of Love: *Submission*

Although nearly everyone is acquainted to some extent with the phenomenon denoted by the word "love", as asserted by Ernst, "love" is hard to classify.<sup>79</sup> Throughout the history of thought, philosophers, poets, psychologists,

77 Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī, *The Masnavi: Book One*, trans. and ed. J. Mojaddedi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 4-5 (couplets 1-2, 4, 13).

78 Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī, *Mathnawi Ma'nawi* (Tehran: Sepās, 2011), 39.

79 Carl W. Ernst, "The Stages of Love in Early Persian Sufism, from Rābi'a to Rūzbihān", *The Heritage of Sufism*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (Oxford: One World, 1999), I, 435.

psychiatrists, men of letters, and other parties of the inquiry have contributed to the massive literature on love; however none of them managed to arrive at a definition which entirely encompasses the concept while leaving nothing outside. Rūmī confesses his own helplessness in this field in the following verses:

To capture love whatever words I say  
Make me ashamed when love arrives my way,  
While explanation sometimes makes things clear  
True love through silence only one can hear:  
The pen would smoothly write the things it knew  
But when it came to love it split in two,  
A donkey stuck in mud is logic's fate  
Love's nature only love can demonstrate.<sup>80</sup>

هر چه گویم عشق را شرح و بیان  
چون به عشق آیم خجل کردم از آن  
گر چه تفسیر زبان رو نمیکرد است  
لیک عشق بی زبان رو شتر است  
چون قلم اندر نوشتن می شنافت  
چون به عشق آمد، قلم بر خود شکافت  
عقل در شرحش چون خرد کل بنخت  
شرح عشق و عاشقی هم عشق گفت<sup>81</sup>

80 Rūmī, *The Masnavi: Book One*, 11 (couplets 112-115).

81 Rūmī, *Mathnawi Ma'nawī*, 42.

In order to partially unveil the hidden entity of love, one should re-read *Werther* with this specific question in mind. To start with, it is worth noting that Werther does not display a down-to-earth and stable inter-human attraction to Lotte in his letters, but rather an unconditional and absolute “submission” (*W*, 249). It becomes obvious that Werther’s love is not a profane one, in spite of earlier readings of the novel. Concordantly, in numerous passages of his work Goethe employs a thoroughly religious vocabulary that inspired many of his critics to interpret *Werther* from such a perspective.<sup>82</sup>

So why does Werther not explicitly verbalize his submission to God in his letters, instead of constantly glorifying Lotte, an ordinary human being? The question is in fact a tautology, since even if Werther does not seem to be aware of this fact, his love is shaped in such a way that it is directly aimed at the Complete, Perfect, Infinite and Absolute Attributes of God.<sup>83</sup> One can infer this from Werther’s various descriptions of Lotte throughout the text (*W*, 29-30, 43, 61, 62-63, 69, 103). Listening to Werther, it becomes obvious that Lotte is not merely a human being for him. She means for Werther *Eden* and *Inferno* together. In addition, Schöffler indicates Goethe’s usage of the biblical symbol *Kelch* (chalice) in a profane manner<sup>84</sup>; he indicates that the Divine Subject in the corresponding verse (John 18:11) has been replaced by Lotte in Werther’s text. Apart from the reference to the real Charlotte Buff, the name “Lotte” could have been adopted by Goethe as a cryptic linguistic innuendo to the German words *Liebe* (love) and *Gott* (God).<sup>85</sup> Working from this idea, it is possible to say that the key to understanding *Werther* is hidden in the name “Lotte”.

Nonetheless, transient (*fānī*) people, considered apart from the Divine Essence that is inherent in them, are imperfect; this is supremely true because they are transient. Therefore, in the end, the descriptions of Lotte (*or Layla*, *Beatrice* or *Laura*) transcend the ordinariness of transient beings.<sup>86</sup> This point,

82 See Jean-Jacques Anstett, “Werthers religiöse Krise”, *Goethes “Werther”: Kritik und Forschung*, ed. H. P. Herrmann (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1949), 163-73; Johanna Graefe, “Die Religion in den ‘Leiden des jungen Werther’: Eine Untersuchung auf Grund des Wortbestandes”, *Jahrbuch der Goethe-Gesellschaft*, 20 (1958): 72-98; Zabel, “Goethe’s ‘Werther’ – eine weltliche Passionsgeschichte?“, 57-69; Dye, “Man and God in Goethe’s ‘Werther’”, 314-29; Duncan, *Goethe’s Werther and the Critics*, 29-39.

83 For an explanation of these Divine Attributes, see” Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “God”, *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations* (New York and London: Routledge, 2008), 564.

84 Schöffler, *Deutscher Geist im 18. Jahrhundert*, 165-66, 176.

85 See the last two verses of Goethe’s poem quoted in the conclusion. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Werke Kommentare und Register. Hamburger Ausgabe in 14 Bänden*. 17<sup>th</sup> ed. (München: Beck, 2005), II, 122.

86 Mahmud Erol Kılıç, *Sûfi ve Şiir: Osmanlı Tasavvuf Şiirinin Poetikası* (İstanbul: İnsan, 2009), 56-57.

confusing at first, is clarified by the gifted Turkish poet Sezai Karakoç in his “Sürgün Ülkeden Başkentler Başkentine” (From the Exile Country to the Capital of Capitals):

[...] You are whom I recall in my poems  
Whenever I say Suna or Leyla, it is You  
To secrete You, I utilized images  
of Salome and Bilkis  
All was in vain since You are so obvious and clear [...]

(My own translation)

[...] *Bütün şiirlerde söylediğim sensin*  
*Suna dedimse sen Leyla dedimse sensin*  
*Seni saklamak için görüntülerinden faydalandım Salome'nin Belkıs'ın*  
*Boşunaydı saklamaya çalışmam öylesine aşıkarsın bellisin [...]*

(Karakoç, “Sürgün Ülkeden Başkentler Başkentine IV”)<sup>87</sup>

If we might permit a brief digression at this point and draw a Sufi parallel to *Werther*, we can affirm that love is less a profane phenomenon than a Divine one, inasmuch as it transcends the orbits of the mundane and exalts the human soul into an extraordinary and metaphysical apex.<sup>88</sup> According to Sufis, love that is carried to its ultimate consequences is nothing but existential submission<sup>89</sup>, the manifestations of which can also be traced in *Werther*.<sup>90</sup> Love is the essence of worship, since the latter connotes that one

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87 Sezai Karakoç, *Şiirler – V: Zamana Adanmış Sözler* (Istanbul: Diriliş: 2001).

88 Nasr, *The Garden of Truth*, 25.

89 Kenan Gürsoy, *Etik ve Tasavvuf: Felsefi Diyaloglar* (Istanbul: Sufi, 2008), 73-74.

90 “A warmhearted youth becomes strongly attached to a maiden: he spends every hour of the day in her company, wears out his health, and lavishes his fortune, to afford continual proof that he is wholly devoted to her.” Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, 12, May 26 — “Ein junges Herz hängt ganz an einem Mädchen, bringt alle Stunden seines Tages bei ihr zu, verschwendet alle seine Kräfte, all sein Vermögen, um ihr jeden Augenblick auszudrücken, dass er sich ganz ihr hingibt.” (*W*, 21-22, am 26. Mai.)

recognizes their own passivity and nothingness in the presence of a higher entity, discerns in one's heart an unlearned, *a priori* (*fiṭrî*) urge to submission and converting this spiritual ripening into praxis and creed.<sup>91</sup> Therefore, mystics regarded love as the most immediate and *bona fide* path to submission.<sup>92</sup> In virtually all religious traditions, one stumbles on a certain mystical dimension in which there is a connection between the lover (*âshiq*) and Beloved (*ma'shûq*), i.e., between the created and the Creator.<sup>93</sup> This analytical knowledge about love is also symbolized by Abraham's search for God in the Qur'an. In the related verse (Qur'an 6/76), which also caught Goethe's attention,<sup>94</sup> Abraham uses the expression *lā uhibbu* (I do not love) and not *lā a'bidu* (I do not worship) in order to express his disappointment caused by the confutation of his previous conviction of the sun's divinity, which becomes obvious when it sets. Although the context in the passage refers to Abraham's search for the true Divine Essence to worship, the sentimental term "love" is used instead of a religiously more technical term, proving that love and worship may signify the same interrelation in the language of the Qur'an.<sup>95</sup>

Seen from an initial level of existence, there are two fundamental categories of love in Sufism; these are the metaphoric love (*ishq al-majāzî*) and true love (*ishq al-ḥaqīqî*). The former has been associated with non-Divine subjects, whereas the latter distinguishes love between God and human beings. Be that as it may, when one looks from a higher existential level, this differentiating model begins to disintegrate. According to the Judeo-Christian (cf. Genesis 1:26, 5:1 and 9:6; 1 Corinthians 11:7 and Jacob 3:9) and perennialist accounts<sup>96</sup> of human genesis, and Goethe's own credo,<sup>97</sup> humans were created as *imago dei*, in one sense metaphors of God. The Islamic account (Qur'an 15/28-29 and 38/71-72) slightly differs, inasmuch as it more strictly disqualifies the negligence of God's transcendence as a cardinal sin of polytheism.<sup>98</sup> The

91 Cf. Süleyman Uludağ, "İbadet", *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, XIX, 247-48.

92 Emin Işık, *Aşkı Meşk Etmek* (Istanbul: Sufi, 2010), 140.

93 Cf. Louis Dupré, "Mysticism [First Edition]: Mysticism of Love", *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., IX, 6348-352.

94 Goethe intended to start his *Mahomet-Drama* with these Qur'anic verses, which he himself had translated from Latin into German; with them he focused on the idea of Divine Eternity. See Badri, "Zum Bild des Propheten Mohammed," 65-90.

95 See also Qur'an 2/165.

96 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), 144-68.

97 "[...] Almighty, who formed us in his own image [...]" Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, 5, May 10 — "[...] des Allmächtigen, der uns nach seinem Bilde Schuf [...]" (*W*, 9, am 10. Mai.)

98 Nasr, *The Garden of Truth*, 12-13.

Creator cannot be equalized to the created, yet the Qur'an also states that Allah has breathed from His Spirit (*Rūḥ*) into the human being He created (Qur'an 32/9).<sup>99</sup> Therefore, there resides a Divine Breath in each human being, as formulated in Yünus Emre's laconic dictum<sup>100</sup> and/or in Hölderlin's revelatory couplet in "Die Liebenden".<sup>101</sup> Relying on these metaphysical connections, one can affirm that the inter-human love is a metaphoric love, which indicates Divine Love.<sup>102</sup>

Furthermore, as one dives into deeper waters of ontology and recalls the Absolute and All-embracing Attributes of God, there are some problems in setting a clear border between God and human beings. The simple but obvious fact that in everyday life, for the most part, people lack the insight about what they ultimately love in each other corroborates this predicament. Sufis have come up with a key that precedes and reminds one of the Hegelian abstractions of *Geist* and love.<sup>103</sup> God is loved in the inter-human love by man in man.<sup>104</sup> Accordingly, Sufis discern that people love the Divine Essence in each other; this is epitomized in the love between Rümî and Shams al-Dîn Tabrîzî. When Rümî calls Shams *khodāye man*, the literal reading of which infuriated orthodox circles in Islam,<sup>105</sup> he is clearly referring to this given.<sup>106</sup> Manşûr al-Ḥallāj's well-known outcry is not that different,<sup>107</sup> as

99 Therefore, one observes a linguistic affinity between the Qur'anic concepts of "soul" (*nafs*) and "breath" (*nafas*). The same affinity is also to be found in the Latin word *spiritus* and the Greek *ψυχή* (*psukhē*).

100 "Bir ben vardır bende benden içeru." Mustafa Tatcı, *Yunus Emre Divanı* (Istanbul: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2005), 279.

101 "Ach wir kennen uns wenig / Denn es waltet ein Gott in uns." Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke. KSA. Gedichte bis 1800*, ed. Friedrich Beissner (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1944), 251.

102 Süleyman Derin, "Mevlâna Celâleddin Rumi'nin Sevgi Anlayışı", *Doğu Batı*, 7/26 (2004): 288.

103 "In der Liebe nämlich sind nach selten des Inhalts die Momente vorhanden, welche wir als Grundbegriff des absoluten Geistes angeben: die versöhnte Rückkehr aus seinem Anderen zu sich selbst. Dies Andere kann als Andere, in welchem der Geist bei sich selber bleibt, nur selbst wieder Geistiges, eine geistige Persönlichkeit sein." Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, ed. Heinrich Gustav Hotho (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1843), II, 149.

104 Ritter, "Philologika VII," 89-90.

105 Cf. Ignác Goldziher, "Die Gottesliebe in der islamischen Theologie", *Der Islam*, 9 (1919): 144-58; and for a general explanation of the underlying Sufi concept "shaḥḥ", see Carl W. Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism* (New York: SUNY Press, 1985), 25-26 and Schimmel, *Sufismus*, 29-30.

106 Şefik Can, *Mevlânâ ile Bir Ömür* (Istanbul: Sufi, 2008), 111-13; Emin Işık, *Belh'in Güvercinleri: Mevlâna Celâleddin Rûmî* (Istanbul: Ötüken, 2008), 70.

107 Cf. Massignon, *La passion d'al-Hosayn-Ibn-Mansour Al-Hallaj*, II, 525-30.

Sufis identify the lover, the Beloved and love itself with God.<sup>108</sup> According to this reading, profane love is a temporary delusion, bereft of any ontic basis. Rûmî reminds us that love is explicitly Divine Love; it is submission, and the ontological actions of humans, including submission, are categorically not directed to peripheral glimmers of Divine Light:

Escape from here! Love of forms in this place  
Is not for forms themselves like a girl's face;  
In truth, love's not inspired by forms you see,  
Though it seems like it superficially—  
Why else would you abandon forms you love  
The moment that their souls ascend above?  
Their forms persist, so why must your love end?  
Find out who your beloved is, my friend!  
[...] A ray of sunlight shines across a wall,  
It's just a temporary loan, that's all—  
Why give your heart to a mere wall of clay?  
Seek the light's source which shines each single day!<sup>109</sup>

این رهاکن، عشق های صورتی  
نیست بر صورت نه بر روی ستی  
آنچه معشوق است، صورت نیست آن  
خواه عشق این جهان، خواه آن جهان  
آنچه بر صورت تو عاشق گشته ای

108 Schimmel clarifies this metaphysical ambiguity in her assiduous essay on the history of mystical love in Islam. Schimmel, "Zur Geschichte der mystischen Liebe im Islam," 496-99. Goethe's position, which is formulated as "Gefühl ist alles!" in *Faust*, approaches this Sufi attachment. Moreover, a 19<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman-Turkish poet of the Mawlawî path, Yenişehirli Avni, summarizes this vein in Sufi thought in two couplets: "Kendi hüsnün hüblar şeklinde peydâ eyledin / Çeşm-i âşıkdan dönüp sonra temâşâ eyledin" and "Çünkü sen âyine-i keвне tecellâ eyledin / Öz cemâlin çeşm-i âşıktan temâşâ eyledi". Halil Erdoğan Cengiz, *Divan Şiiri Antolojisi* (Istanbul: Bilgi, 1983).

109 Jalâl ad-Dîn Muhammad Rûmî, *The Masnavi: Book Two*, trans. and ed. J. Mojaddedi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 43 (couplets 702-705, 708-709).

چون برون شد جان، چرلیش هشته ای؟  
صورتش بر جاست، این سیری ز چیست؟  
عاشقا! و احو که معشوق تو کیست؟  
[...] پرتو خورشید بر دیوار یافت  
تدش عاریتی دیوار یافت  
بر کلونخی دل چه بندی ای سلیم؟  
و اطلب اصلی که تابد او متیم<sup>110</sup>

Wandering back in the history of ideas, we find three essential personalities known to have influenced Goethe's *Weltanschauung*.<sup>111</sup> Firstly, analogous thoughts subsist in Hegel's definition of love as "the human identification of man with God" and "a pure forgetfulness and a complete self-surrender".<sup>112</sup> Another prominent metaphysician, Spinoza, after a deductive reasoning of twelve steps in his *Tractatus de Deo et homine*, ends up at the conclusive formula that "love must rest solely in God".<sup>113</sup> Further, Plato's *Symposion* (201d-212c) substantiates the statements of Rūmī and Hegel. In it, the wise figure Diotima of Mantinea, employs elements of Greek mythology and sheds light on the successive levels of love, which end with the love of the essence of beauty. To summarize these levels: one is first attracted to someone through the exterior beauty, as we have also witnessed in Werther's love to Lotte; having seen numerous exterior beauties (of various people), love climbs to the domain of ideas and eventually ascends to the essence of perfect beauty, or the Divine Beauty (*jamāl*), in Sufi terminology.<sup>114</sup>

110 Rūmī, *Mathnawi Ma'nawī*, 181.

111 Cf. Steiner, *Goethes Weltanschauung*.

112 Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, II, 152-53.

113 Baruch Spinoza, *Opera: Tractatum hucusque ineditum de Deo et homine* (Amsterdam, 1862), 122.

114 Diotima's gradual instructions have an astonishing resemblance to the stages of love illuminated in the Sufi literature.

Nevertheless, profane love cannot be stigmatized as a “fallacy”. Even if the lovers are not completely aware of the fact that they are being pulled to unification with the Absolute by their entire existence, love will help them to spiritually mature, outgrow “the human misery”<sup>115</sup> and break out from the “prison of ego”<sup>116</sup> with its transforming desire.<sup>117</sup> If nothing else, it will bring a new spiritual consciousness about the banality and futility of the material world,<sup>118</sup> as it did for Werther (*W*, 70, am 18. Julius). Hence, secular forms of love may ultimately lead to Divine Love, the motif of which can also be found in the legendary love of *Laylā and Majnūn*. Furthermore, the inter-human love in Sufi thought cannot be separated from God, who created it with His Infinite Grace (Qur’an 30/21).<sup>119</sup>

In light of what has been said above, we can infer that the addressee of *l’amour à la Werther* is in fact God. However, Werther himself seems to ignore this fact. This is a further central source of his sufferings; if one does not recognize the profane love as an interim stage towards the true love, but rather sees it as the ultimate goal *per se*, one inescapably becomes imprisoned in a Socratic aporia. Accordingly, profane love cannot vouchsafe *eudaimonía* (human flourishing), owing to the fact that one grows dejected if one cannot entertain the Beloved’s love, and thus fails to appease the impulse to unite with the Beloved. On the other hand, an ephemeral and imperfect fellow creature cannot placate the hunger of absolute love. This *cul-de-sac* invariably leads to disappointment and suffering<sup>120</sup>, even in cases when the lover reaches the Beloved. Sufis construe this as a self-explanatory consequence of the Divine Attribute *al-Ġayūr*.

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115 Nurettin Topçu, *İslâm ve İnsan, Mevlâna ve Tasavvuf*, ed. Ezel Erverdi and İsmail Kara (Istanbul: Dergâh, 2005), 32-35.

116 This, according to Shari’ati, is the fourth and most insidious prison of human beings. One can escape from it only with the assistance of *ithâr* (altruism) substantiated by love. See Ali Shari’ati, *İnsân wa İslâm* (Tehran: Intishâr, 1963).

117 İsmail Yakıt, *Mevlânâda Aşk Felsefesi* (Istanbul: Ötüken, 2010), 107-14.

118 Emphasizing the adjacency of love (*mahabbah*) and gnosis (*ma’rifah*), it is anonymously narrated within the Sufi tradition that a *murshid* examined willing *murâds* with a single question: “Have you ever been in love my son?” The ones who answered “no” were declined until they personally experienced love and returned. One of them is reported to have responded: “I have never been in love with someone, but I am a simple farmer and deeply love my cattle.” This jejune but genuine answer granted him the admission into the fraternity.

119 Şefik Can, *Mevlânâ ve Eflâtun* (Istanbul: Kurtuba, 2009), 206-7.

120 Annemarie Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun: A Study of the Works of Jalâloddin Rumi* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), 333.

### The Ultimatum of Love: *Annihilation*

“*Ich will sterben! — Es ist nicht Verzweiflung, es ist Gewißheit, daß ich ausgetragen habe, und daß ich mich opfere für dich.*”<sup>121</sup>

(*W*, 211, am 20. December)

In its terminal phase love, with its uncompromising anima, commands the lovers to wholly submit themselves to the Beloved; this results in the formers' symbolic death/annihilation since submission involves renunciation of the self in order to embrace the Self.<sup>122</sup> Lovers find life in death as the outcome of their blessed yearning (*selige Sehnsucht*), a painful process of *Entwerden*.<sup>123</sup> This selflessness mostly emerges through the discovery of the Beloved's beauty and charm, which is followed by the state of intoxication and spiritual bliss, both of which are intensively relished by Werther. Since happiness is an instinctive and unselfconscious<sup>124</sup> goal for the human soul, humans can even sacrifice their worldly existence under the euphoric psyche of love. Can we throw light on the Wertherian suicidal trend with the help of this self-contradictory nature of love? The answer is in the affirmative; Werther and his followers did terminate their lives in the paradoxical dualism of the bliss and agony of the annihilation in love. This enigma can further be

121 “To die! It is not despair: it is conviction that I have filled up the measure of my sufferings, that I have reached my appointed term, and must sacrifice myself for thee.” Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, 112-13, December 20.

122 Nasr, *The Garden of Truth*, 128.

123 Schimmel, *Sufismus*, 34.

124 The bliss emanating from submission never incorporates a modern rational choice of an egocentric nature: “My dear friend, my energies are all prostrated: she can do with me what she pleases.” Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, 91, November 8 — “Bester ich bin dahin! sie kann mit mir machen, was sie will“ (*W*, 171, am 8. November). Love is rather a superrational phenomenon in which one loses himself and the world around himself. Fuzûlî's following couplet is a paragon for this spiritual state aroused by love's drunkenness: “*Öyle sermestem ki idrâk etmezem dünyâ nedir / Ben kimem sâki olan kimdir mey-i sahbâ nedir.*” Fuzûlî, *Leylâ vü Mecnûn*, ed. Hüseyin Ayan (Istanbul: Dergâh, 2005), 379/2605. Werther describes the same state in the following confession that mirrors his inner world: “She consented, and I went, and, since that time, sun, moon, and stars may pursue their course: I know not whether it is day or night; the whole world is nothing to me.” Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, 26, June 19 — “[S]eit der Zeit können Sonne, Mond und Sterne geruhig ihre Wirtschaft treiben, ich weiß weder daß Tag noch daß Nacht ist, und die ganze Welt verliert sich um mich her“ (*W*, 47, am 19. Juni). Particularly Rûmî's effusive poems in the *Dîwân-i Kabîr* give place to this indescribable exuberance and joy, making Karakoç regard it as Rûmî's “subjectivity”, while the *Mathnawî* his “objectivity”. See Sezai Karakoç, *Mevlâna* (Istanbul: Diriliş, 2006), 71.

deciphered with Ibn 'Arabî's analogous thought on the afterlife in which he traces the word 'azâb (torment) to its root 'uzb (sweetness).<sup>125</sup>

Lovers become enamored in the beloved and the pores of their *Dasein* are filled by the light of the latter.<sup>126</sup> Within this relationship, the beloved grows with the love of the lovers in an existential modus; this is described in Sufi literature through the analogy of the ivy plant, the etymological root of the Arabic word for love ('*ishq*). This is an essential reason why Lotte does not reject Werther's love at first, although she is aware of and welcomes the fact that she is "das Eigenthum eines anderen [the property of someone else]" (W, 207, am 20. December). Thus, she accepts and feeds his love in a subtle way, until the affair becomes unsustainable.<sup>127</sup>

That love simultaneously may bring forth the happiest and the saddest is a cosmic *ironia fati*, one which is also faced by Werther.<sup>128</sup> As forewarned by Goethe in his "Lesebuch", the pages of agony in the book of love are far more numerous and spacious than those of happiness. Sufis explained this mystery in love's nature by contending that God tests His servants when they are close. Schimmel declares that those who are the closest to God in their love, such as prophets and friends of God (*awliyâ'*), are also the most afflicted ones.<sup>129</sup> In addition, comparing ideas of Sufis and Meister Eckhart, Schimmel maintains that affliction (*balâ'*) is the most effective means of maturing the human soul.<sup>130</sup> Therefore, Werther's dilemmatic and desperate utterance above rejoins its metaphysical basis.

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125 Ibn 'Arabî, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, ed. A. 'Afifi (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabî, 1946), 94.

126 "I cannot pray except to her. My imagination sees nothing but her: all surrounding objects are of no account, except as they relate to her." Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, 56, August 30 — "Ich habe kein Gebet mehr als an sie; meiner Einbildungskraft erscheint keine andere Gestalt als die ihrige, und alles in der Welt um mich her sehe ich nur im Verhältnisse mit ihr" (W, 103, am 30. Aug.).

127 In fact, in a solitary moment, "[a]mid all these considerations she felt deeply but indistinctly that her own real but unexpressed wish was to retain him for herself [...]." Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, 115, December 20 — "Ueber allen tiefen Betrachtungen fühlte sie erst tief, ohne sich es deutlich zu machen, daß ihr herzliches heimliches Verlangen sey, ihn für sich zu behalten [...]" (W, 215, am 20. Dezember).

128 "Must it ever be thus, — that the source of our happiness must also be the fountain of our misery?" Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, 52, August 18 — "Mußte denn das so sein, daß das, was des Menschen Glückseligkeit macht, wieder die Quelle seines Elendes würde?" (W, 93, am 18. Aug.).

129 Fuzûlî stresses this catastrophic nature of love with the following verses in his *Leylâ vü Mecnûn*: "Cân verme gamî 'aşka ki 'aşk âfet-i cândır / 'Aşk âfet-i cân olduğı meşhûr-ı cihândır." Fuzûlî, *Leylâ vü Mecnûn*, 150/935.

130 Schimmel, *Mystical dimensions of Islam*, 136-37; Annemarie Schimmel, *Rumi: Ich bin Wind und du bist Feuer* (Köln: Diederichs, 1986), 140-41.

We have tried to demonstrate above that the entire process of love is concerned with the unification of the lover and the Beloved. Most love stories end with death; this process of unification must end with the symbolic death of the lover's self<sup>131</sup>, or in some cases, like Werther's, even in physical death.<sup>132</sup> There can be no unification in which both subjects are disposed to be alive; the absolutist essence of love leaves no room for two separate egos. According to Nasr, the unification of humans with God is only possible if they erase their ego with the help of God.<sup>133</sup> To support this standpoint, Nasr quotes two couplets from Ḥallāj and Hāfēz:

Between I and Thou,  
my I-ness is the source of torment  
Through Thy I-ness  
Lift my I-ness from between us.

فارغ بطنک انی من الین  
بینی و بینک انی نیاز معنی

There is no veil between the lover and the Beloved  
Thou art thine own veil o Hafiz remove thyself!

میان عاشق و معشوق هیچ حائل نیست  
تو خود حجاب خودی حافظ از میان بر خیز

131 Emine Yeniterzi, *Mevlânâ Celâleddin Rûmî* (Ankara: TDV, 2001), 87-92.

132 "She does not feel, she does not know that she is preparing a poison which will destroy us both ; and I drink deeply of the draught which is to prove my destruction." Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, 56, November 21 — "Sie sieht nicht, sie fühlt nicht, dass sie ein Gift bereitet, das mich und sie zugrunde richten wird; und ich mit voller Wollust schlürfe den Becher aus, den sie mir zu meinem Verderben reicht." (W, 173, am 21. Nov.)

133 Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, 279.

The lovers gradually diminish in the Beloved through the process of annihilation. Thus, their desires, hopes, whims, eccentricities, egoisms, interests, habitudes and addictions as well as valued things and people, shortly everything related to their person, will be adjusted according to the acceptance of their Beloved; this is without any expectation of reward.<sup>134</sup> They deliberately abandon their existence in order to “be one” with their Beloved, as explained in the analogy of a raindrop that forsakes its idiosyncrasies and throws itself into the infinity of the ocean.<sup>135</sup> Paradoxically lovers find existence in grasping their nothingness.<sup>136</sup> Although humans cannot be free of their desires or the ambitions of their *nafs* until their last breath, it is possible to reach certain spiritual stations (*maqāmāt*) with perseverance;<sup>137</sup> this has been adjured by the Prophetic Wisdom: “Die before you die!”

When all is said and done, love of an evanescent being leads to disappointment and desperation, whereas love for God leads to selflessness in God, as indicated in the Sufi literature by the station of *fanāfillāh*. It is, however, not the final station for the Divine Love, supposing that it is followed by *baqābillāh*, i.e., subsistence in God,<sup>138</sup> which constitutes the ultimate intention of the human *raison d'être*. This brings us back to *Wiederfinden* of Goethe, who poetized it in the human spiritual state before the immortal approached the forbidden tree. Hence, *al-insān al-kāmil* (the universal man) in Sufism is the one who, by the Grace of God, completes the circular pursuit of existence with the homecoming to the day of *alastu*;<sup>139</sup> this is when souls cry out “*balā!*”. That is, this is briefly the pre-creation,<sup>140</sup> or as denoted by al-Attas, the foremost ideal of *dīn*.<sup>141</sup> Being heralded by the Divine Contentment (*riḥā*) (Qur’an 89/27-30), the universal man embodies the apotheosis of the fleshly. Seen from this Sufi viewpoint, Werther neglected the fact that only the Divine Love endows the actual *Zuhause* to the human soul; failing to do this, he encapsulated his *Gemüt* into the unreliable and ungrateful cage of the passing (cf. Qur’an 9/109).

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134 Reynold A. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2002), 76.

135 Tuğrul İnançer and Kenan Gürsoy, *Gönül Gözü* (Istanbul: Sufi, 2008), 29.

136 Mahmud Erol Kılıç, *Evvele Yolculuk* (Istanbul: Sufi, 2008), 13-14.

137 Nasr, *The Garden of Truth*, 89.

138 Nasr, *The Garden of Truth*, 135.

139 Ernst, *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism*, 44; Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1995), 192-93.

140 Schimmel, *Sufismus*, 31.

141 Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *İslām and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1993), 58, 61-62, 68.

### Conclusion

An image may I not devise,  
If such my pleasure be?  
God gives an image of our life  
In every midge we see.  
An image may I not devise,  
If such my pleasure be?  
For imaged in my true love's eyes  
God gives Himself to me.

(Goethe, "Universal Life")<sup>142</sup>

*Sollt' ich nicht ein Gleichnis brauchen  
Wie es mir beliebt?  
Da uns Gott des Lebens Gleichnis  
In der Mücke gibt.  
Sollt' ich nicht ein Gleichnis brauchen  
Wie es mir beliebt?  
Da mir Gott in Liebchens Augen  
Sich im Gleichnis gibt.*

(Goethe, "Alleben")<sup>143</sup>

Although it is not possible to eliminate the prevailing psycho-pathologic and socio-economic variations of explanations, their simplistic character seems to be unpersuasive, hence insufficient to explain the true reasons of Werther's sufferings. In addition, such explanations remain unable to give a sound explanation for the pervasive Wertherian suicidal trend. What is represented in *Werther* is a more profound phenomenon that is concerned with the metaphysics of love, as this paper has attempted to elucidate. Predictably, it is the abysmal nature of these deep-rooted rudiments which intimidated contemporaneous figures of *Aufklärung*, such as Lessing, Mendelssohn, Lichtenberg and Nicolai.<sup>144</sup>

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142 Goethe, *West-Eastern Divan*, 18.

143 Goethe, *West-östlicher Divan*, 11.

144 Goethe's rage at their simplistic and occasionally derisive approach is expressed in his venomous poetic answer ("Nicolai auf Werthers Grabe") to Nicolai. See Appell, *Werther und seine Zeit*, 181-85.

In conclusion, according to the paradigmata of *taşawwuf* and *metaphysica*, Werther suffers merely because he is in love and yearns for unification with his Beloved. He copes with the ontological agony of separation from God. In order to solve the complexities of this puzzle, one also needs to cast a glance into the very nature of love. Love is the lovers' submission to their Beloved. As a result, submission requires annihilation so that the lover and the Beloved can be one. Hence, agony is intrinsic to love. Having said this, love has a contradictory nature and may simultaneously prepare eternal bliss and unbearable sufferings. Werther savours the ecstasy and euphoria of love until his hopes of unification with his beloved become extinct. Subsequently, he crashes into sheer desperation and his *Dasein*, which is embraced by his beloved; this is represented in Sufi literature with the analogy of a miserable plant entwined and squeezed by an ivy, thus ruthlessly losing its meaning and ground. Still, again seen from a Sufi perspective, Werther commits the sin (cf. Qur'an 2/165) to devote his love to a transient existence, thus to give a meaning to his own existence through Lotte. By wholeheartedly devoting his unreserved and unconditional love to Lotte, under the influence of love's ecstasy, Werther takes a risk, the consequences of which he does not foresee.

While it is true that Werther's sufferings cannot be explained only by the steepness of the Sufi path, he faces a more overwhelming challenge. The chapter of the Sufi annihilation might have a happy ending (*baqābillāh*); Werther's annihilation, however, does not. Although wanting to welcome death from Lotte's hands (*W*, 244), Werther is rejected by his beloved<sup>145</sup> and flung irreversibly into the bottomless obscurity of meaninglessness<sup>146</sup> by her

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<sup>145</sup> Even seen from the Freudian secularized perspective, i.e., as detached from the metaphysical nature of love, which is essentially criticized within this essay, the loss of the beloved or its love makes one most unprotected to agony. See Sigmund Freud, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (Wien: Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, 1930), 11.

<sup>146</sup> Werther earlier was aware of the terrifying abyss between being and nothingness: "Why should I be ashamed of shrinking at that fearful moment, when my whole being will tremble between existence and annihilation" Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, 92, November 15 — "Und warum sollte ich mich schämen, in dem schrecklichen Augenblick, da mein ganzes Wesen zwischen Seyn und Nichtseyn zittert" (*W*, 172, am 15. November). In addition, Goethe suggests the innermost spirit of Werther in an earlier dialogue between Werther and Albert: "She floats in a dim, delusive anticipation of her happiness; and her feelings become excited to their utmost tension. She stretches out her arms finally to embrace the object of all her wishes — and her lover forsakes her. Stunned and bewildered, she stands upon a precipice. All is darkness around her. No prospect, no hope, no consolation—forsaken by him in whom her existence was and! She sees nothing of the wide world before her, thinks nothing of the many individuals who might supply the void in her heart; she feels herself deserted, forsaken by the world; and, blinded and impelled by the agony which wrings her soul, she plunges into the

hands, despite having completely submitted his existence to her.<sup>147</sup> Werther's tragedy once again manifests that lovers are ready to sacrifice their existence for their Beloved, yet they cannot survive desertion, which denotes for them a *terra incognita* even beyond nothingness.<sup>148</sup>

Finally, it is possible to add that Werther would change his yellow vest for the woolen coat of the dervishes; that is to say, he would search further if he reached Lotte, as suggested, for instance, in Nicolaï's parodic *Die Freuden des jungen Werther*. The resulting aporetic disappointment would motivate him to do so; he might have realized en route that his true Beloved and ultimate intention cannot be a human being, but in the end only God. The recurrent theme of "Einschränkung" in *Werther* can also be read from this point of view. However, even if those who devote their love to God also suffer due to the afflicting nature of love, Divine Love is not destructive in the end, but constructive and constitutive; lovers perceive God as Almighty and Compassionate. Apparently, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, the author of "selige Sehnsucht" and the following verses in the renewed introduction of the 1825 edition of *Werther*, chose this path in his life.

*Zum Bleiben ich, zum Scheiden du erkohren,  
Gingst du voran und hast nicht viel verlohren.*

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deep, to end her sufferings in the broad embrace of death." Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, 50, August 12 — "[s]ie schwebt in einem dumpfen Bewußtseyn, in einem Vorgefühl aller Freuden, sie ist bis auf den höchsten Grad gespannt, wo sie endlich ihre Arme ausstreckt, all ihre Wünsche zu umfassen – und ihr Geliebter verläßt Sie. – Erstarrt; ohne Sinne steht sie vor einem Abgrunde, und alles ist Finsterniß um sie her, keine Aussicht, kein Trost, keine Ahndung, denn der hat sie verlassen, in dem sie allein ihr Daseyn fühlte. Sie sieht nicht die weite Welt, die vor ihr liegt, nicht die Vielen, die ihr den Verlust ersezzen könnten, sie fühlt sich allein, verlassen von aller Welt, – und blind, in die Enge gepreßt von der entsezlichen Noth ihres Herzens stürzt sie sich hinunter, um in einem rings umfangenden Tode all ihre Quaalen zu erstikken." (*W*, 92, am 12. August).

147 Schöffler, *Deutscher Geist im 18. Jahrhundert*, 175.

148 In his eulogy to the Prophet of Islam "Naat", the Turkish poet İsmet Özel utters the following verses in which he refers to that place "beyond nothingness": "[...] Gitti giden, yerine gelmedi başka biri / Orada / Duyumsatmadı kendini hiçlik bile [...]" İsmet Özel, *Bir Yusuf Masalı* (İstanbul: Şule, 2000).

**Yolların Birleřtiđi Yerde Werther: Tasavvuf'ta ve Metafizik'te Ařk İstirabı**

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe'nin *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* (Genç Werther'in Acıları) isimli eseri yayımlandığı yıl olan 1774'ten bu yana dünya genelinde edebiyat eleřtirmenlerinin ve akademi dıřındaki hevesli okuyucuların ilgisini cezbetmiřtir. Dünya edebiyatının önde gelen metinlerinden biri olan bu mektup-roman, ařk metafiziđi üzerine yapılacak entelektüel teorileřtirmeler için oldukça elverişli bir zemin oluřturmaktadır. Bu makale, romanın ařk kavramını nasıl biçimlendirdiđine dair veya daha açık bir ifadeyle insanlığın iki büyük entelektüel mirası olan İslâm tasavvufu ve Kıta Avrupa metafiziđinin aydınlattığı, ařkın kavramsal yapısının, eseri nasıl desteklediđine dair özgün bir medeniyetler ve disiplinlerarası metin çözümlemesi sunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bunun yanında, giriř kısmında makalenin bakıř açısı hakkında genel bir metodolojik açıklama ve Goethe'nin İslâm'la iliřkisi üzerine muhtasar bir deđerlendirme de yer almaktadır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Goethe, Werther, İslâm, tasavvuf, Kıta Avrupa metafiziđi, ařk.

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