



ENCOUNTERS WITH ISLAM IN GERMAN LITERATURE AND CULTURE

EDITED BY JAMES HODKINSON
AND JEFFREY MORRISON

Encounters with Islam in German Literature and Culture

Edited by
James Hodkinson and Jeff Morrison



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Introduction

James Hodkinson and Jeff Morrison

THE VOLUME *Encounters with Islam in German Literature and Culture* developed out of the conference *German Encounters with Islam*, which took place at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth, in March 2007. The conference raised a number of important issues, issues that not only are interesting in their own right but also seem particularly pertinent, given the prevailing global political—and, sadly, military—situation. The relationship between Europe and the Islamic world once more appears undeniably strained, and so it has become the subject of serious reflection for political, church, and intellectual leaders as well as for the ordinary citizens who find themselves at the troubled interface of two cultures. Yet despite obvious points of geographical, military, and political tension, the model of a fundamental clash of civilizations is as much a product of existing tensions as it is evidence of absolute and insurmountable division between Islam and Europe. Indeed, as the Maynooth conference showed, talk in general of two monolithic cultural blocks, opposed or not, is increasingly inadequate as an approach: contemporary reality is far more complex. Whereas in earlier times any European engagement with Islam would have meant substantially engagement with a remote “Other,” it now involves also looking within at the developing Islamic presence within European culture. Islamic self-definition is likewise increasingly colored by global influences that problematize a simple sense of Islamic self.

The conference illuminated a range of largely germanophone literary and theoretical responses to Islamic culture and revealed important aspects of the dynamics of cultural interaction. The texts discussed were many and varied and included travelogues based on first-hand encounters with Islam; literary, essayistic, and theological writing on Islamic religious practice; texts incorporating characters, situations, or locations from the Islamic world into prose fiction or drama; and writing in German by Muslims, or those of a Muslim background. Each of these categories of writing, of course, revealed as much about the European “home” culture as it did of Islamic culture. The contributions cover an extraordinary chronological range—from the Middle Ages to the present day—a variety of genres, and

a wealth of attitudes; the theoretical premises of the contributions also vary widely. Fascinating continuities also exist, however, between texts across all periods: there are tendencies both to conspire in and reject the Western exploitation and exoticization of Islam; there is both the suppression of the autonomous Muslim voice within the German language, and the struggle to rehabilitate that voice; and there is implicit and explicit theological debate on Islam, be it of progressive or reactionary character. Of particular interest are the instances in which texts demonstrate how spurious the stark divisions between the Western, ostensibly Christian, world and Islam really are, together with the ongoing debate about how the division of the faiths relates to the political, ethnic, and social identity of the individual.

Until the fairly recent past it would have been possible to maintain the position that German (-language) culture was peripheral to the project of "Orientalism" analyzed most tellingly by Said.¹ While it required the wearing of historical blinkers, it was possible to see the German-speaking lands as only marginal participants in the history of colonialism and as less obviously represented in the process of intellectual ostracization or domination of the constructed "Orient" depicted in Said's influential text. Clearly, many have identified the flaws in this analysis over a long period, but the most substantial revision of the German position has taken place in the wake of the massive transformation of German society brought about by the arrival of Muslim, usually (though not exclusively) of Turkish *Gastarbeiter* to drive the German industrial resurgence after the Second World War. It had previously perhaps been possible to see Germany as quintessentially European, whether in its geographical location, its ethnicity, or its cultural traditions; indeed it would have appeared most actively European, whether in introducing Protestantism or providing the genetic backbone of the ruling dynasties of Europe. Even in its most sinister manifestation, under Hitler, German culture clearly saw itself in European terms; the Germania embraced by the National Socialists may have been based on a bizarre, mythical understanding of tradition, but it was robustly, if perversely, European.

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, however, German self-understanding and the outsider perception of Germany have been radically transformed by the increased visibility of a Muslim presence at the heart of German culture. At its simplest, it is difficult to ignore a Muslim population now numbering something in the region of 2.6 million. It is furthermore difficult to see Muslim communities as marginal any longer. Some groups, particularly those of Turkish origin, have already been present for several generations. Muslim communities have often moved beyond the physical boundaries of ethnic minority suburbs, crossed linguistic and professional boundaries, and thus taken a more visible role in the shaping of "German" culture generally. In fact, it has become nonsensical to talk in terms of homogenized and utterly distinct

“immigrant” vis-à-vis “German” cultures when talking of the geographical space Germany (the same principle applies to a lesser extent to other German-speaking countries). The hybrid cultures produced within Germany’s physical borders and discussed in this volume often articulate the complex experiences and literary voices of Germans of non-European extraction.² What is true of these migrant communities in terms of their complex sense of national and ethnic identity is also true in terms of their identity as Muslims. The Muslim population as a whole has become increasingly diverse in its ethnic composition, given the arrival of further economic immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, and now includes Kurds, Afghans, Iranians, Bulgarians, Bosnians, and North Africans among others. Naturally, different Muslim communities in Germany approach Islam from differing, often culturally determined perspectives, which can entail radicalizing and secularizing tendencies, as well as from mainstream Shiite, Sunni, or other ways of life. To this must be added that German-born Muslims are not only Muslims but also the “hybrid” inhabitants and citizens of a historically non-Muslim German state.

Several contributions in this volume are dedicated to contemporary cultural manifestations of the German-Islamic encounter and demonstrate the multitude of themes and perspectives on the topic existing in German-language culture. Margaret Littler’s powerful chapter examines how Turkish-German writers have sought to fight against the homogenizing ideas of Turkish Islam within the medium of the German language. Littler uses texts by Emine Sevgi Özdamar, Feridun Zaimoğlu, and Zafer Şenocak to show how writers seek to render Islam heterogeneous, evoking traditions of Anatolian Sufism that make fluid the boundaries between the categories of the “sacred” and the “profane” through their provocative erotic content, and also offer critical warnings on the violence underlying fundamentalist thinking. All three writers’ works are shown to demand a nuanced understanding of Islam and of Ottoman poetic traditions.

Karin Yeşilada is concerned to explode the category of “German Muslim,” reminding us of the limitations of herding together diverse cultures and traditions under so crude a term. She focuses on a particular strand of Turkish-German thought represented by Şenocak, beginning with his essayistic work, before moving to contrast this with a “German” perspective offered in a novel by Christoph Peters. What interests Yeşilada is the way in which both authors construct real and imagined dialogues with Islam from differing perspectives and represent these as succeeding and failing to differing degrees: Şenocak writes against the dogmatic dimension of fundamentalism, calling for modern Muslims to adopt a more self-critical posture and appealing to earlier traditions of more flexible and “enlightened” Islam. Peters, on the other hand, writes of a fictional German protagonist who has converted to Islam and is arrested for becoming

involved in terrorist activities in Egypt. The German ambassador, who has past leftist-terrorist leanings, attempts to have his likely death sentence commuted. While the novel shows the mutual perceptions of European Christians and Muslims in terms of a complex series of differing attitudes—the “Muslim” Egyptian authorities oppose Islamist terrorism, for instance—the dialogue fails both ideologically and literally.

German perceptions of Islamic radicalism are dealt with in this volume by Monika Shafi’s chapter, which seeks to make subtle distinctions between differing responses. Shafi discusses H. M. Enzensberger’s controversial essay “Schreckens Männer: Versuch über den radikalen Verlierer,” in which he tried to explain how the “radical loser” can be co-opted into violent terrorist activity by a powerful ideological and religious force, Islamism. Shafi reviews the reception of the essay, both the praise it gained and the criticism of the model of a clash of civilizations that it ostensibly reproduces, before offering a contrast with Ian Buruma’s analysis of the assassination of the outspoken Dutch critic of Islam, Theo van Gogh, by a radicalized young Dutch Moroccan. For Shafi, Buruma’s essay offers a wider, “postmodern” survey of the complex forces acting upon young terrorists, and her aim is to illuminate the productive insights offered by Enzensberger, while demonstrating that only discussions taking into the account the full range of “social contexts and historical legacies” (257) offer a corrective view and help avoid the drift toward binary conceptions of Islam and the West.

The other issue touched upon briefly by Karin Yeşilada, namely that of European (and German) converts to Islam, is given a full examination by Edwin Wieringa. The author examines Michaela M. Özelsel’s *Pilgerfahrt nach Mekka; Meine Reise in eine geheimnisvolle Welt* (2005), making Wieringa’s chapter a unique discussion of popular literary treatments of Islam within this collection—though one with serious cultural implications nonetheless. Özelsel’s text is a journey narrative in various senses: it tells of the voyage of religious conversion and the physical journey of the *hajj* to Mecca undertaken by the narrator. These transitions, however, are also set in the context of the author’s own psychologized quest for self-development, and this is what makes Wieringa ultimately cynical about the narrative’s value. Özelsel chooses to pursue certain Sufi lines of thought, though in so doing she propounds a Western view of that tradition. Her take on Islam is placed in the context of Western “New Age” culture more generally and is thus in danger of re-projecting a vision of spiritualized otherness onto Islam, all of which render the author a kind of neo-Orientalist and not the most reliable of informants on contemporary forms of Islam.

A less polemical approach is adopted by Frauke Matthes in her study of *Zu den heiligen Quellen des Islam: Als Pilger nach Mekka und Medina* (2004) by Ilija Trojanow, a German speaker of Bulgarian descent. Matthes

does not deal with conversion as such but with how the author-narrator reconnects with his Muslim heritage, follows his own particular pathway, spiritual, cultural, and physical, to Islam, and recounts this (in part as a travel writer) in this travelogue on the hajj. Trojanow sought to see travel not as movement into alien or foreign territory but as an attempt at assimilation into the alterity of different cultures, and Matthes shows that he has a fascinatingly plural and flexible perspective on Islam. Theories of travel writing that refute the possibility of experiencing or writing a wholly authentic account of another culture will be elucidated later in this introduction: Matthes uses such theory as a lens through which to view Trojanow's text and sees it as a multi-layered narrative on Islam, in which the faith is both universal and communal and, simultaneously, part of the author's own relative, subjective experience.

However important these contemporary manifestations of German-Muslim encounter are, they must be viewed as part of a historical process of working through (if not out) the questions of that long-standing relationship. Although we do not seek to reduce the history of the German-Muslim to that of a transnational relationship between Germany and Turkey, we cannot overlook Germany's close historical involvement with Ottoman and post-Ottoman Turkey, as a number of contributions in the volume demonstrate. If the postwar German-Turkish encounter is well known, then the prewar flight of German liberals and leftists to Turkey after 1933 is less familiar. Few are aware that German refugees had a key role to play in the development of Turkish industry and institutions, particularly universities, at this time. This could, of course, be seen in terms of conventional colonialist discourse, with the Western imports having a formative, controlling role in producing a culture in the image of their own. It is, however, difficult to overlook the power structure at play there: Turkish Muslims were acting as host to these people, and they were dependent upon its charity; the Germans are clearly the representatives of the decadent culture in this case, and Turkey is identified with the positive alternative. So even this short journey back in time sees a shift in the dynamics of our encounter.

If we move back to the period around the First World War, then another dynamic emerges. We see the German Empire and Austro-Hungary in alliance with the Ottoman Empire: a perhaps unlikely union pitted against other more obviously European, Western nations. This was a pragmatic political alliance, designed to suit the German-speaking countries in the first instance, but it simultaneously offers proof that perceived barriers between cultures can be lifted where a need arises; if economic and institutional pragmatism allowed the presence of Germans in Turkey after 1933, then political and military necessity enabled compromise before the First World War. In her contribution, Rachel MagShamhráin investigates precisely this period, focusing on the dynamic that enabled an unlikely,

and perhaps unholy, "Holy War" against France and England on the part of unlikely allies. Her highly original study touches on the pro-Turkish (anti-Catholic) sentiments in the journalism of Hans Barth and in the Imperialist travel writings of Alfred Körte, before exploring how German military strategy ultimately embraced a form of this apparent Islamophilia: the diplomat Max Freiherr von Oppenheim is shown to have persuaded Wilhelm II to cease his attempts to control the spread of Islam and to seek instead to agitate for Islamic Revolution in the colonial territories of Germany's enemies. The great subtlety to emerge from MagShamhráin's piece is, however, that this German functionalization of Islam was not an instance of the unidirectional model of Orientalism, whereby a Christian West simply functionalizes a Muslim East: in seeking to "align" themselves with Turkey, the Germans had to negotiate the horrific issue of the Turkish oppression and massacre of (their fellow Christian) Armenians within Ottoman territory from 1915 onward. Barth, for instance, sought to make this more palatable by "Othering" Armenians, by passing them off as the sly instigators of apparent Kurdish barbarism—the Kurds themselves having been shown to represent a cruder form of Islam than that of the more culturally refined Turkish allies. Thus, as author shows "the mechanism called Orientalism . . . is a discursive missile that can be directed as easily at and by a German and a Christian as at and by a Turk and a Muslim."³

Earlier periods show similarly complex relationships between German-speaking and Ottoman, Christian and Muslim territories—relationships exhibiting both instances of political and economic compromise and periods of heightened tension. One might take a look at the broad pattern of exchange between the houses of Habsburg and Osman, between Austro-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire, as an instance of sustained, if fraught and sometimes violent, encounter. From the establishment of a shared border in 1526 after the substantial conquest of Hungary and Croatia by the Ottoman Empire after the Battle of Mohács, until the disappearance of that same border in the wake of the Balkan Wars (1912–13), there was constant although largely negative interaction between the two opposing power blocs, which were to re-emerge as allies in the First World War. Silke Falkner makes an all-too-rare contribution on the period between the 1453 Ottoman conquest of Constantinople and circa 1700, a point at which earlier European understandings of the so-called "Orient" were transformed by the changing political, military, and cultural relationships between Ottoman Turkey and Europe. Falkner examines German-language literature on Turkish Muslims, known collectively as *turcica*, examining both Dionysius von Rickell's refutation of the *Koran* of the 1540s and Stephan Gerlach's diaries chronicling his travels in Ottoman territory between 1573 and 1578. While von Rickell's text seeks to distinguish between the uncontaminated truths of the Bible and the allegedly corrupted half-truths of the *Koran*, Gerlach's text represents Turks

as sexually perverse practitioners of sodomy and bestiality. Both texts are complicit in practices that establish boundaries and transgress them: von Rickell seeks to delineate between Christianity and Islam, which he sees as a bastardized religion impinging on the “true” faith, while Gerlach depicts Turkish-Muslim transgressions from normal/moral to abnormal/immoral forms of sexuality: such images of violation form the basis of the main two negative stereotypes about Muslims prevalent in the period: religious fraudster and sexual pervert.

In studying the Christian-Muslim encounter before 1526, however, we find that it no longer maps so directly onto the history of German-Turkish relations. In this period we have to acknowledge German participation in the Crusades, particularly the role of the Teutonic Knights and their antagonistic encounters with Middle Eastern, Arabic Muslims. Initially our contributions in this area acknowledge the fundamental crudity of many medieval European perspectives on the Muslim Other. Timothy Jackson’s opening chapter, for instance, surveys medieval religious writing, which ranges widely in genre and mode to include narrative, didactic, gnomic, homiletic, and allegorical texts. The authors dealt with are in no doubt that Christianity alone provides the means of salvation, and the more orthodox locate Muslims along with Jews and heretics as an inferior (and on occasion demonized) group hierarchically below Christians. However, the medieval Christian/Muslim encounter can produce unexpectedly differentiated responses, with instances of polemical skepticism toward certain forces within the church being found alongside a degree of tolerance toward the representatives of Islam.

Cyril Edwards’s chapter, however, focuses more exclusively on Wolfram von Eschenbach’s major works, the Grail romance *Parzival* and the most likely unfinished epic *Willehalm*. Edwards shows how in the former text the figure of Gyburc/Arabel, a convert from Islam to Christianity, preaches an extraordinary message of tolerance, given that Wolfram is writing during the Crusades and contemporaries such as Hartmann von Aue and Walther von der Vogelweide were writing poetry encouraging knights to crusade against the infidel. Interesting for different reasons in *Parzival* is the figure of Feirefiz, the other son of Parzival’s father Gahmuret and the black queen Belacane, who is literally and symbolically of black-and-white, magpie countenance. He appears as an adherent of a falsely polytheistic vision of Islam and is shown as a burlesque figure, redeemed later by his conversion to Christianity. Edwards shows Wolfram to have certain sympathies with Feirefiz, despite the fact that he represents yet another Muslim convert to Christianity—a view not as surprising as one might think.⁴ Edwards does not contend that Wolfram offers a wholly egalitarian treatment of Islam, but rather that he has subtle (if Christian) sympathies with the other faith. Complementing each other thus, the contributions by Jackson and Edwards in this volume offer a

treatment of medieval manifestations of the encounter more nuanced than non-medievalists might have thought.

This volume does not, however, offer a solely chronological reconstruction of German Islamic encounters. Katherine Roy bucks the trend toward strictly periodized studies to offer an innovatively transhistorical chapter that connects the culture of Imperial Germany, in the form of the memoirs of a national of Oman and Zanzibar who emigrated to Germany, Salme/Emily Ruete (1844–1924), with the contemporary writing of the well-known German-Turkish writer Emine Sevgi Özdamar. What connects the two women for Roy and makes them a point of comparison across history is that both have chosen German as the language of their literary expression, and both provide literary responses to Islamic culture in a German setting that problematize understandings of “Islamic heritage.” Both writers also complicate the dynamics of intercultural communication, though they do so differently, with Ruete being thought to “pare down” her language in comparison with other memoir writers of the time, while Özdamar “overloads” her language.⁵

Almost any snapshot of the history of the German-speaking lands will reveal an instance of real encounter between Christian-European and Muslim cultures. Although these encounters are generally remembered in terms of faith, politics, or institutions, they clearly had more intimate aspects, were processed (multi-) linguistically, and led to cultural cross-fertilization at a microcosmic, familial, individual level; it is often at this level that the encounter manifests itself in literature. Indeed, the encounter with Islam is not necessarily predicated upon an instance of concrete commercial, political, or military encounter, or even upon personal experience. The contributions to this volume show many examples of motifs, themes, characters, and genre traits that have been derived remotely from literary, philosophical, or theological traditions rather than from any “literal” source. Often enough the deployment of these motifs in germanophone literature was essentially decorative, constituting the application of a gloss of (alternative, exotic) culture; one might look, for example, at the deployment of oriental motifs in popular journals and literature of the nineteenth century for evidence of how aspects of a literary culture can be downgraded to fashion accessories. However, this brand of intercultural intertextuality need not necessarily be trivial in its implications, be they positive or negative. This is made very clear in contributions on the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a period in which such intertextual encounters were rife. The Enlightenment and Romantic periods produced increasingly sophisticated, philosophically derived conceptual tools with which they could grapple with concepts such as “ethnic identity” and “religion,” yet they also reacted in an overtly and covertly emotional way to Islam, being both fascinated and appalled

by it, feeling its allure though seeking also to categorize it and control it through writing. Writers and thinkers from this period examine the faith through some incredibly limited, though in some cases also remarkably refined, lenses and this diversity is reflected in the varied findings of this volume's contribution on the period.

Daniel Wilson continues, for the most part, the tradition of critiquing German Enlightenment thought on Islam, examining the works of Meiners and Herder. Wilson finds that the works of these prominent figures not only propounded an image of Muslims as collectively passive, treacherous, and in need of civilizing, but also displayed another alarming trend: anti-Semitism. The writers in question propose expelling the partly Europeanized though essentially "Oriental" Jews from Europe and returning them to Palestine, where they would cause no further damage to Europe and might, in part, civilize Muslims. Indeed, in Wilson's view there is a "secret Other in these German discussions of Islam, just as Muslims are the unseen Other in the project of 'resettling' Jews in Palestine" (85). Wilson's contribution resonates with that of Jackson, which shows how the radically prejudicial formation of Muslim identity in much medieval German writing is predicated upon a simultaneously loaded treatment of the Jews, among others. These chapters point to the fact that historical discourses that appear to stereotype one particular group are often also complicit in reductive thinking about others. Both discussions thus serve as a reminder to other contributors and to readers that methodologies conceiving of cultural encounters in terms of the oppressive treatment of one grouping by another must not disregard the hidden oppression of other Others, those groups that may, temporarily, go unremarked given a particular thematic focus.

Seeking out less one-dimensional manifestations of the German-Islamic encounter in the period are the contributions by Yomb May and James Hodkinson. May accepts the received view that Goethe's *West-östlicher Divan* is a formal and thematic literary experiment synthesizing Western and Eastern culture across religious, cultural, and linguistic divides. The experiment, though, has mixed results. Building on existing scholarship, May warns that the modern reader risks overlooking the colonial tendencies of Goethe's endeavor, given contemporary enthusiasm for the poet's apparently enlightened stance on matters intercultural. The Enlightenment, however, was itself complicit in the process of devaluing non-European cultures and religions, while flying the flag of ostensible universalism: May reminds us that Goethe is part of this tradition, as the poet's own comments in his notes on the *Divan*, his lectures on the subject, and other letters from the period show. The work is still of value for us today, particularly given its openness to its apparent Other in the form of Islam and the modern world's apparent anxiety about an alleged clash of civilizations. That value is only to be found, however, if

postcolonial techniques are used to demonstrate both the strengths and the weaknesses of Goethe's poetic achievement.

James Hodkinson examines how Romantic thought and literature thinks and rethinks the Christian-Islamic encounter with varying outcomes. Romantic theoretical writing might seem to promise a more flexible image of Islam, given its apparent distaste for static, dogmatic categories of thought, though in practice both (the later) Friedrich Schlegel and, perhaps disappointingly, the theologian Schleiermacher ultimately stereotype and subordinate Islam to their own vision of Christendom-cum-Christianity. It is rather in the realm of literary practice that Romanticism becomes more progressive, through poetic experimentation with concepts such as "identity" and "intersubjective communication," and so the prose fiction of Novalis (*Heinrich von Ofterdingen*) begins to open out a dialogue between Muslim and Christian subjects. Yet even then Hodkinson returns to the later Romanticism of E. T. A. Hoffmann to find in his story *Das Sanctus* a less dialectical narrative of Muslim-Christian conflict, in which Christian Europeans triumph on various levels: Romanticism offers a typically ambivalent vision of the encounter.

Of course, there is a brand of literature that is predicated upon actual experience of the alternative culture, namely travel literature. For someone writing about Turkey, the Middle or Far East, or North Africa in the nineteenth century or earlier the act of travel was a serious, perhaps life-threatening enterprise, as becomes clear in the contribution by Jeffrey Morrison, who deals with the often undercover travel of a Swiss agent of the British Africa Association. Surprisingly, given the disturbing implications of exotic travel, the reports and itineraries produced often betray a striking lack of serious engagement with different cultures. Morrison's findings sensitize us to a wider issue, for many of the writers dealt with throughout this volume exhibit narratorial attitudes that mirror the common prejudices of their age, apparently in an unreflecting manner unmediated by positive experience. Once again, however, this is not always the case and in the chapters that follow a number of works come to light, which demonstrate varying degrees of serious engagement with Islam, despite the fact that their authors, eras and ideological origins might lead one to expect otherwise.

The one certainty is that almost any view of the German-Muslim encounter, whether synchronic or diachronic, whether at the level of politics or at the level of literature, reveals a highly problematized moment of interface. What methods are scholars to use, though, to examine such complexity? German Studies has equipped itself with the theoretical tools that enable a more differentiated understanding of such encounters as they manifest in culture. Fine work has been conducted by scholars both in German-language *Germanistik* and in anglophone German Studies dealing critically, for instance, with German-language treatments of eighteenth- and nineteenth century European colonial experiences, and studies

have been made into how contemporary German-language culture is codetermined by the works of immigrant writers not seen as conventionally German.⁶ The subject matter of this collection has required many of its contributors to pursue a number of theoretical refinements.

The history of encounters between European cultures and the Islamic world has been placed within various theoretical frameworks by cultural historians since the late 1970s. Within this tradition, Islam has been subsumed, both helpfully and unhelpfully, into the wider concept of the “Orient.” In this context, the “Orient” refers to a vast sprawling set of geographical, cultural, ethnic, and religious associations generated by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European cultures, generally understood as including the regions of the Middle East, Africa, and the Far East, with their exotic, darker-skinned peoples, who were in essence culturally and racially “Other” to Europeans and for the most part adherents of other fanatical or heathen religions. The seminal work in this field—one to which many contributors in this volume refer both critically and with admiration—has to be Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1977). Those interested in German-language discourses on the so-called Orient have been generally critical of Said’s lack of attention to this area, self-confessed though this may be (*O*, 17–19). Of course, he does engage with some of the more obvious points of interface between German culture and Middle-Eastern and Asian culture in *Orientalism*. Goethe, for instance, whom he presents as a “gifted enthusiast” among Orientalists, receives the fullest treatment, particularly his collection of poems the *West-östlicher Divan*. Said, of course, applies his model to Goethe, emphasizing within the collection the positive mysticization of the Middle East (particularly Persia), as cradle or origin of humanity, to which one “always returned” (*O*, 167) and which functioned as a “form of release” for the Western mind, an opportunity for Westerners to experience the “completion and confirmation of everything one had imagined” (*O*, 167). But Said has by no means had the last word on his subject.

A swath of Germanists continue to enrich the debate on how German thinkers and writers engaged with and represented their fantasy of the Orient. This involves both broadening the scope of German culture to be considered and refining the approach, such that idealized representations of the East are not simply seen as homogeneous products of Western colonial power. Most recently, Todd Kontje’s *German Orientalisms* (2004) places itself directly in dialogue with Said, self-consciously building on Said’s *Orientalism* yet offering, according to the book’s sleeve notes, a “more nuanced version as seen through the lens of German literature of the last thousand years.” Not only is Kontje’s scope specifically German, but it also stretches from the medieval to the contemporary period. Acknowledging Said’s obvious point that, given its diffuse political structure prior to 1871, Germany had no colonial interest in Asia or the Middle East, he asserts that the “very lack of a unified nation-state and