

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO



GOETHE

Edited by Lesley Sharpe

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ABBREVIATIONS

In order to make this volume accessible to those with no German, quotations in the main text have been given in English; unless otherwise indicated, translations are the chapter authors' own. Where Goethe quotations are not included for the sake of their literary qualities, they are usually given in translation only but with a reference to one of the standard editions (listed below) so that the original can easily be found. Translations are not given in the short section in Chapter Three on Goethe's poetic metres because the discussion presupposes some knowledge of German. The guide to further reading includes titles in English and German.

EDITIONS OF GOETHE'S WORKS AND LETTERS:

- | | |
|-----|--|
| FA | <i>Johann Wolfgang Goethe. Sämtliche Werke. Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche.</i> Ed. by Hendrik Birus and others. Two divisions, 40 vols. Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1987–99. |
| HA | <i>Goethes Werke.</i> Hamburger Ausgabe. Ed. by Erich Trunz. 14 vols. Hamburg: Wegner, 1948. (This edition has been revised and reprinted numerous times, and it is sometimes necessary to specify which impression is referred to, e.g. HA ⁴ .) |
| HAB | <i>Goethes Briefe.</i> Hamburger Ausgabe. Ed. by Karl Robert Mandelkow. 4 vols. Hamburg: Wegner, 1965–67. |
| LA | <i>Goethe. Die Schriften zur Naturwissenschaft. Vollständige mit Erläuterungen versehene Ausgabe im Auftrage der Deutschen Akademie der Naturforscher. Leopoldina.</i> Begun by Lothar Wolf and Wilhelm Troll. Ed. by Dorothea Kuhn and Wolf von Engelhardt. Two divisions, 28– vols. Weimar: Böhlau, 1947–. |
| MA | <i>Johann Wolfgang Goethe. Sämtliche Werke nach Epochen seines Schaffens.</i> Münchner Ausgabe. Ed. by Karl Richter in collaboration with Herbert G. Göpfert and others. 21 vols. in 30. Munich: Hanser, 1985–99. |
| WA | <i>Goethes Werke. Herausgegeben im Auftrag der Großherzogin Sophie von Sachsen.</i> Four divisions, 143 vols. Weimar: Böhlau, 1887–1919. |

OTHER FREQUENTLY CITED WORKS:

- Boyle Nicholas Boyle. *Goethe. The Poet and the Age*. Vol I: *The Poetry of Desire*; Vol. II: *Revolution and Renunciation 1790–1803*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, 2000.
- Eckermann Johann Peter Eckermann's collection of conversations, *Gespräche mit Goethe in den letzten Jahren seines Lebens*. As this work exists in numerous editions, quotations are identified by the date of the conversation; a volume number has been indicated only in the case of Eckermann III, as it begins a new sequence.
- Gespräche* *Goethes Gespräche. Eine Sammlung zeitgenössischer Berichte aus seinem Umgang auf Grund der Ausgabe und des Nachlasses von Flodoard Freiherrn von Biedermann, ergänzt und hg. von Wolfgang Herwig*. 5 vols. Zurich and Stuttgart: Artemis, 1965–87.
- Grumach *Goethe. Begegnungen und Gespräche*. Ed. by Ernst Grumach and Renate Grumach. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1965–.
- Handbuch* *Goethe-Handbuch*. Ed. by Bernd Witte and others. 4 vols. Stuttgart: Metzler, 1996–98.
- NA *Schillers Werke. Nationalausgabe*. Ed. by Julius Petersen and others, 42 vols. Weimar: Böhlau, 1943–.

CHRONOLOGY

- 1749 Johann Wolfgang Goethe born in Frankfurt am Main on 28 August to prosperous patrician parents.
- 1750 Birth of Goethe's sister Cornelia.
- 1765-8 Goethe studies law at the University of Leipzig.
- 1768-70 Falls ill and returns to Frankfurt.
- 1770-1 Studies law at the University of Strasbourg. Meets Herder, who interests him in folksong. Reads Shakespeare, Ossian, Pindar and Homer. Friendship with J. M. R. Lenz. Romance with Friederike Brion.
- 1771-4 Work as a lawyer. First version of *Götz von Berlichingen* written in 1771 after Goethe's return to Frankfurt. In Spring 1772 sent by his father to gain experience of the Imperial Court (Reichskammergericht) in Wetzlar. Falls in love with Charlotte Buff, who is already engaged. Returns to Frankfurt in September 1772.
- 1773 Publication of revised *Götz von Berlichingen*. Marriage of Cornelia.
- 1774 Publication of *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (The Sorrows of Young Werther).
- 1775 Engagement to Lili Schönemann (broken off later that year). Journey to Switzerland. In November arrives in Weimar at

CHRONOLOGY

the invitation of Duke Carl August. Parts of *Faust* and *Egmont* are already written.

- 1775–86 Takes on ministerial duties in Weimar. Growing interest in the natural sciences; meets and begins intense platonic friendship with Charlotte von Stein; writes prose version of *Iphigenie auf Tauris*, *Wilhelm Meisters theatralische Sendung* (Wilhelm Meister's Theatrical Mission) and draft of *Torquato Tasso*.
- 1777 Death of sister Cornelia. Travels in the Harz.
- 1779 Travels in Switzerland.
- 1782 Ennobled by the Emperor Joseph II at Duke Carl August's request.
- 1786 (September) Frustrated by administrative burdens and by the relationship with Frau von Stein, Goethe escapes to Italy.
- 1786–8 In Italy. Lives in Rome, travelling to southern Italy and Sicily. Studies classical art, geology and botany. Completes *Egmont*, *Torquato Tasso* and some scenes of *Faust*.
- 1787 Blank verse version of *Iphigenie* published.
- 1788 On his return to Weimar begins liaison with Christiane Vulpius. *Egmont* published.
- 1789 Birth of son August (other children died in infancy).
- 1790 Publication of *Faust. Ein Fragment* and of *Torquato Tasso*; also first publication on the natural sciences, *Versuch die Metamorphose der Pflanzen zu erklären* (Essay Explaining the Metamorphosis of Plants). Second Italian journey, to Venice.
- 1791 Becomes Director of the Weimar Court Theatre. Publishes *Beiträge zur Optik* (Contributions to Optics).
- 1792 Required to accompany Duke Carl August in the invasion of France by imperial troops.

- 1793 Present at the siege of Mainz.
- 1794 Beginning of the friendship and correspondence between Goethe and Schiller (1759–1805) when Schiller invites Goethe to contribute to his journal *Die Horen*.
- 1794–1805 Joint work of Goethe and Schiller on ballads, theoretical essays on literature and *Xenien*. Collaboration in the Weimar Court Theatre.
- 1795 *Römische Elegien* (Roman Elegies) published.
- 1795–6 Publication of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship).
- 1797 *Hermann und Dorothea* published. Goethe resumes work on *Faust*, with Schiller's encouragement. Travels in Switzerland.
- 1798–1800 Publication of Goethe's art history journal the *Propyläen* (Propylaea).
- 1805 Death of Schiller.
- 1806 Occupation of Weimar by French troops after the Battle of Jena; marriage to Christiane Vulpius.
- 1807 Death of Dowager Duchess Anna Amalia.
- 1808 Publication of *Faust I*. Meeting with Napoleon at Erfurt.
- 1809 Publication of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* (The Elective Affinities) and *Pandora*. Start of work on his autobiography, *Dichtung und Wahrheit* (Poetry and Truth).
- 1810 Goethe's theory of light and colour incorporated into *Zur Farbenlehre* (Theory of Colour).
- 1811–14 First three parts of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* appear.
- 1816 Death of Christiane, 6 June 1816. Goethe begins art history journal *Über Kunst und Altertum* (On Art and Antiquity) (to 1832).

CHRONOLOGY

- 1816-18 Publication of *Italienische Reise* (Italian Journey).
- 1817 Ceases to be Director of Weimar Court Theatre.
- 1819 Publication of *West-Östlicher Divan* (West-Eastern Divan, written 1814-18), which included some poems by Marianne von Willemer, to whom Goethe had developed a romantic attachment.
- 1821 Publication of first version of *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* (Wilhelm Meister's Journeymanhood).
- 1825-31 Completes *Faust*. Act III of the play published in 1827 under the title *Helena, klassisch-romantische Phantasmagorie. Zwischenspiel zu Faust* (Helena. A Classical-Romantic-Phantasmagoria. Interlude to *Faust*); part of Act I published in 1828.
- 1828 Death of Duke Carl August.
- 1829 New version of *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* published. First public performance of *Faust I*, in Brunswick.
- 1830 Death of Goethe's son August.
- 1831 *Faust II* completed.
- 1832 Death of Goethe on 22 March, in Weimar. *Faust II* published posthumously.
- 1833 Last part of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* published.

CONTENTS

<i>List of contributors</i>	page ix
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	x
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	xi
<i>Chronology</i>	xiii
 Introduction	 I
LESLEY SHARPE	
 1 The world Goethe lived in: Germany and Europe, 1750–1830	 6
THOMAS P. SAINÉ	
 2 Goethe the writer and literary history	 23
NICHOLAS SAUL	
 3 Goethe the poet	 42
JOHN R. WILLIAMS	
 4 Goethe the dramatist	 66
DAVID V. PUGH	
 5 <i>Faust</i>	 84
JANE K. BROWN	
 6 Weimar Classicism: Goethe's alliance with Schiller	 101
T. J. REED	
 7 Goethe and the Weimar theatre	 116
LESLEY SHARPE	

CONTENTS

8	Goethe's prose fiction	129
	MARTIN SWALES	
9	Autobiographical writings	147
	DENNIS F. MAHONEY	
10	In defence of experience: Goethe's natural investigations and scientific culture	160
	DANIEL STEUER	
11	Goethe and gender	179
	BARBARA BECKER-CANTARINO	
12	Goethe and the visual arts	193
	BEATE ALLERT	
13	Goethe and the political world	207
	W. DANIEL WILSON	
14	Religion and philosophy	219
	H. B. NISBET	
15	Reception in Germany and abroad	232
	GERHART HOFFMEISTER	
	<i>A guide to further reading</i>	256
	<i>General index</i>	268
	<i>Index of Goethe's works</i>	275

LESLEY SHARPE

Introduction

Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749–1832) was the first German writer of unquestioned European stature. And no other writer of his stature has his range and diversity. Author at the age of twenty-five of the first German international bestseller, *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* (The Sorrows of Young Werther), his impact on the literary scene at home and beyond Germany's borders was immense. Throughout his long productive life (he finished the second part of *Faust* only months before his death in 1832) he continued to surprise his contemporaries with the freshness and unexpected new departure of each work. He was a supreme lyric poet who also produced masterpieces in the genres of drama, prose fiction and verse epic. He was a serious natural scientist, an art critic and art historian as well as a painter, a chronicler of his own life and times, a theatre director and actor, a Privy Councillor and administrator. He conducted a vast international correspondence and was acquainted and had dealings with many of the prominent political players of the time. His collected works, the amount known about his life, the amount written about it and about his works are all huge. While this volume cannot begin to do justice to its subject, it aims to give the reader approaching Goethe for the first time some sense of the character of his work, some impression of his achievement, and some awareness of and orientation in the critical debates that have raged and still rage over aspects of his work and status.

For Goethe's dominant position in the world of German letters no longer seems secure and self-evident. The year 1999 was the 250th anniversary of his birth on 28 August 1749 in Frankfurt am Main. The small town of Weimar, where he spent much of his adult life, was European City of Culture for the year. The huge number of newspaper articles that marked the anniversary in Germany indicated the complexity of his position and its history in the cultural life of that country. Like most great canonical authors of world literature he is little read in his homeland, though his words are quoted often unawares by his countrymen in their everyday speech. It is

significant that several journalists supplied chronologies to accompany their articles, no longer confident that such basic facts would be known to their readers. Many articles alluded to the diverse and often negative opinions expressed about him in his lifetime, particularly towards its end, by gifted and not so gifted contemporaries who criticized not only his literary work as unapproachable but also his sexual morality, his political conservatism, his Olympian aloofness, his blindness to new writers of talent. The Goethe jubilee of 1999 saw a revival of complaints that, far from being the Sage of Weimar, Goethe was unprincipled, callous, an exploiter of those closest to him, an emotional cripple – in other words, anything but a role model for the new millennium. Yet at the same time the very abundance of articles also bespeaks the huge fascination still exerted by his writing and personality, the sense one has, now as in his day, of being confronted with extraordinary intellectual and poetic gifts, gifts that issued in works that still convey with astonishing perception the experience of men and women in a modern world.

That Goethe today provokes such a variety of responses in Germany, and among them so much personal criticism, is not just a reaction to the admiration shown the nation's greatest writer in the past or to the tedium of school lessons or to the postmodern scepticism about the value traditionally attached to certain texts (though such factors doubtless play their part). It is also the product of the peculiar position occupied by Goethe in the German cultural tradition. For it was Goethe's fate to become a national icon, to embody the nation's cultural aspirations, and thus reception of his work has always reflected the vicissitudes of German national identity. He lived his entire life in a Germany that did not exist as a political entity, a nation state, and would not become one until 1871. The Holy Roman Empire into which he was born was made up of over three hundred states, ranging from the large to the tiny. After the abolition of the Empire by Napoleon in 1806 and the settlement of the Congress of Vienna in 1815 the patchwork of states was rationalized and simplified but it remained a patchwork, over which Prussia would eventually attain hegemony. In this situation of political fragmentation a sense of cultural identity and tradition assumed political significance as a unifying factor. Those who in the middle decades of the nineteenth century promoted political unification and liberalization were often those who invoked Germany's literary heritage, in particular Goethe and Schiller, as the figureheads of the *Kulturnation*. If self-cultivation (*Bildung*) was the goal of the educated German, Goethe was the paradigm of that process and study of him and his works the means to achieve it.

Goethe had been internationally famous and an object of admiration, indeed veneration, for many since he burst onto the literary scene in the 1770s. He enjoyed extraordinary literary authority throughout his life and towards

its end was increasingly seen as the embodiment of wisdom. His prestige and dominance called forth dissenting voices, however, even in his own lifetime, for example the writers of a younger generation in the 1820s, such as the liberal critic Ludwig Börne, who saw him as a servant of princes. Moreover, to many Germans Goethe was a dubious figure as both a pagan and a man of many love affairs. He was not a writer for the people in the way that his friend and ally Schiller, whose work seemed to contain clear statements of liberal and national sentiment, was held to be. Yet Goethe's status grew in the nineteenth century, both as a writer and as an exemplary figure. He became an ideal human being, 'the genuine and proper embodiment of German art' (Herman Grimm). By the time unification came in 1871 Goethe was even linked with Frederick the Great or with Bismarck as one of the founders of the (now Prussian-led) German nation, in a skilful blending of the political and cultural aspirations of the prosperous middle classes. His universalism and cosmopolitanism, it was claimed, had helped the Germans rise above local patriotism and find their identity in the new nation state. Faust's land reclamation project in the second part of *Faust* was even read as enshrining a vision of colonial expansion. The pursuit of the cult of Goethe in the later decades of the nineteenth century also gave rise to much serious Goethe scholarship and the publication of a great amount of material documenting aspects of his life and work, but the nationalist strain could often be heard through it.

The year 1918 brought the collapse of Imperial Germany. The symbolic importance of Goethe was redefined, however, when the first German republic was founded in Weimar. Its leading politicians invoked 'the spirit of the great philosophers and poets' as an inspiration for a nation recovering from military defeat and in need of a tradition to hold on to (a tradition, arguably, that tapped into existing bourgeois cultural traditions at a time of threat from proletarian uprisings). Fifteen years later that republic had been swept away. Goethe's cosmopolitan outlook, amongst other things, made him less exploitable than some writers by the leaders of the Third Reich. After 1945 Goethe enjoyed a renaissance of popularity in both East and West Germany. In the East great efforts were made by the new socialist state to boost its legitimacy by laying claim to the classical tradition (Weimar itself was in the GDR) and trying to blend it with the official doctrine of Socialist Realism. The West was glad to turn to him as representative of the German humanist tradition that had been so devastatingly submerged during the Third Reich. In the wake of 1968, however, a new generation looked with suspicion on those who had survived that regime, rejecting their parents' cultural norms and questioning their past. The elevation of the Goethe of the humanist tradition in the Adenauer years seemed more like a way of

obscuring the guilt of those who had consented to the Nazi regime. As part of this critical reassessment Goethe's preeminence was challenged and he too was subjected to *Ideologiekritik* as a cultural elitist, political conservative, servant of princes, perpetuator of his own myth.

The shock was in some ways salutary. Present generations of German pupils and students grow up largely in ignorance of Goethe's work. A recent survey of students of German literature at Cologne University found that some believed Schiller to be a play by Goethe. Yet the fascination still exerted by this writer is strong and scholarship has continued to flourish. And while ignorance that would have shocked Germans who grew up in the 1950s is indeed widespread, the liveliness of response by critics and commentators to the recent 250th anniversary is also testimony to the possibility of a rediscovery of Goethe. As one journalist wrote, Goethe's work is a territory much charted and yet unknown, and he went on to express his delight in discovering the youthful intensity of Goethe's poetry of the 1820s, written when the poet was in his 70s. Two major critical editions were completed in the anniversary year, the Munich edition published by C. H. Beck and the Frankfurt edition published by the Deutscher Klassiker Verlag. Both offer significant new research set out in critical apparatuses that are accessibly written. The new version of the *Goethe-Handbuch* (1996–8) shares this freshness, accessibility and attractive presentation. Nicholas Boyle's two volumes of biography (1990–9), published in English and German and covering the years up to 1803, combine cutting-edge scholarship with an enthralling introduction to Goethe's intellectual world as well as to his life and work.

English-speaking readers of Goethe are mostly unaware of the cultural and political baggage loaded onto the writer and the man. Goethe is preserved as a canonical writer on many university German courses but has disappeared from others, many of which have shifted their focus from the eighteenth and nineteenth to the twentieth century. For many students Goethe must appear a daunting monolith, a writer of works so numerous, so varied and (in some cases) so long that it is hard to find a way in. This volume is designed to ease such problems for it aims, like all the Cambridge Companions, to provide an overview of the subject and to combine information with critical evaluation in a sophisticated and yet approachable manner. All contributors have an eye to the European as well as to the specifically German context. Though they have been sparing with the traditional apparatus of scholarship, their essays bring readers up to date with the fruits of recent as well as older scholarship, while the guide to further reading suggests routes to further study.

The volume begins with two chapters designed to give orientation to those new to the subject. The first is an introduction to the world in which Goethe lived, showing how the momentous political changes in Europe impinged