

The Roses' Joyful Kingdom: The Poetics of the Garden in Goethe and Sa'di

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ABSTRACT: This article discusses German and Persian poetries by exploring the poetics of the garden. The approach of this article is dialogical: the garden provides the scenery for an encounter, one that never took place, between the poets Goethe and Sa'di. Through comparative reading, the essay attempts to reveal the garden's conceptions, associations, and reflections as a poetic trope and as a (Eurasian) plan of world literature. Its point of departure is a brief discussion of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's gardens as incorporated in his works *The Sorrows of Young Werther* and *Elective Affinities*. The garden in Goethe's work is a realm of desire in which not only the surroundings are reshaped but the human subject as well. Reading Goethe's later work, the *West-Eastern Divan*, leads us, in a step back, to a short discussion of the opening of the *Golestān*, the Rose Garden, of the medieval Persian poet Sa'di. In Sa'di's work, the garden serves as an "entrance" to the field of poetry itself, associated with education and friendship. Exploring the poetics of the garden in both German and Persian literature offers a critical reflection of subjectivity attached to the notion of *Bildung/Adab*—the esthetic education of man. As such, the garden provides us with substance for reflection on translation, world literature, and ecological thinking.

I

THE GARDEN IS CONSIDERED A PRIMARY TROPE in world literature and culture. The biblical tale of Eden, among other ancient stories,¹ serves as a substance of poetical imagination affiliated with the dialectic of knowledge and sovereignty, the economy of desire

¹ Also, in the Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh and the Babylonian myth of creation, Enuma Elish, gardens play a similarly important role: Benjamin R. Foster, trans., *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (New York: W. W. Norton &

and gender difference, the blessing of creation, and the curse of labor and exile. In ancient and pre-modern literature, the garden served as a space in which the dichotomies of nature and culture, the demonic and the divine, the human and the creaturely, gained a depth of meaning. The garden was the origin, a place of birth, a womb² out of which the human was expelled. However, it also stood as a plan of return,³ projecting the myth of genesis and paradise lost and futuristic designs of the human condition.⁴ The garden is a space to imagine, to reform subjectivity, while affiliated with sensual, erotic values, ethics of love, and friendship. In contemporary literature, art, and film, the garden is associated, however, with the dangers of climate change and visions of global destruction. As a literary trope, it currently serves as a platform for corrective planetary thought formulating anew the question of man.⁵

This article discusses German and Persian case studies, exploring the garden's poetics and reflecting its literary value by means of comparative analysis. Our approach is dialogical: the garden provides the scenery for an encounter, one that never took place, between the poets Goethe and Sa'di. Through close reading, our essay attempts to reveal the conceptions of the garden as a poetic trope and to adopt it as a platform for drawing a (Eurasian) plan of world literature.⁶ Our primary argument, however, concerns the way in which the poetics of the garden is used for reforming human subjectivity. It is the notion of *Bildung/Adab*,⁷ the esthetic education of man, to which both Goethe and Sa'di were dedicated, that obtains here—in the imagined gardens—a bright perspective. Our own path of studying, exploring the poetics of the garden, begins with Goethe. For us, the work of this classical German poet serves as an opening.

Company, 2001); Wilfred G. Lambert and Simon B. Parker, trans., *Enûma Eliš: The Babylonian Epic of Creation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966).

² Cynthia R. Chapman, "The Breath of Life: Speech, Gender, and Authority in the Garden of Eden," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 138, no. 2 (2019): 241–62, <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/breath-life-speech-gender-authority-garden-eden/docview/2260394164/se-2?accountid=14765>.

³ Abū l-'Alā' al-Ma'arri, *The Epistle of Forgiveness*, vol. 1 and 2 (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 173–185.

⁴ Jean Delumeau, *History of Paradise: The Garden of Eden in Myth and Tradition* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 15–23.

⁵ As the ultimate intersection between culture and nature, the garden serves in many vital debates concerning the Anthropocene and climate change as a sign of further hope in a post-natural world. For further reading, see Gilles Clément, *The Planetary Garden and Other Writings*, trans. Sandra Morris (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); George McKay, ed., *Radical Gardening: Politics, Idealism & Rebellion in the Garden* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2011); Maria Paula Diogo, Ana Duarte Rodrigues, Ana Simões, and Davide Scarso, *Gardens and Human Agency in the Anthropocene* (London: Routledge, 2020).

⁶ The concept of world literature was and still is a notion for significant discussion in literary criticism, reflecting institutions, centers and peripheries, local and global markets, canonical receptions, and methods of distance reading. Compare with Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Franco Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature," *New Left Review* 1 (2000). For critical discussion regarding the colonial, Eurocentric view of world literature, see Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (New York: Verso, 2013); Aamir R. Mufti, "Orientalism and the Institution of World Literatures," *Critical Inquiry* 36 (2010): 458–93; Hamid Dabashi, *The World of Persian Literary Humanism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 301–27.

⁷ *Bildung* implies in German an aesthetical form of education and socializing into the society of enlightenment. It was a prominent genre in German literature around 1800, and its most profound example was Goethe's Wilhelm Meister. See Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, trans. Albert Sbragia (London: Verso, 1987). *Adab* implies in Arabic an educational form of literature which instructs the Muslim believer through life paths, yet does not abandon its commitment to aesthetic values. See Philip F. Kennedy, ed., *On Fiction and Adab in Medieval Arabic Literature* (Wiesbaden, Germany: Harrassowitz, 2005).

Stepping back from Goethe to Sa'di, from the world of German literature around 1800 to Persian poetry of the thirteenth century, not only challenges the chronological map of world literature but also demands an inversion in the order of reading, following Goethe's own poetical attempts of *reorientation*. This reading mode does not ignore the orientalist conditions and the colonial contexts of Goethe's engagement with Near Eastern literature, including Hebrew, Arabic, and Persian. Furthermore, it acknowledges the merits of a path that begins with a step back,⁸ from canonical Western literature to Eastern poetical tradition.

II

Our point of departure is a brief discussion of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's gardens.⁹ The German poet who, in his conversations with Eckermann, notably framed the term *Weltliteratur*,¹⁰ already incorporated the garden in his early works, implied as a site of readership, desire, and self-reflection, while serving as a platform of *Bildung*, education, and formation of the subject. The gardens, the orchard, and the forests appear in his novella *The Sorrows of Young Werther*¹¹ (1774) as poetical spaces—realms of readership used to design subjectivity and for cultural self-fashioning of its being. In the first letter in the novella, Werther hints at the French (the “scientific,” artificial, rational, well-structured) and the English (the seemingly natural, sensual, and wild) gardens as representing two different paradigms of culture (*Zivilisation, Kultur*),¹² reflecting not only major visions of *Aufklärung*,¹³ German enlightenment, but also the very idea of self-cultivation, *Bildung*. We recall the gardener scene in the opening of Goethe's novella:

The town itself is not attractive, but I find ample compensation in the indescribable beauties of nature surrounding it. That was what induced the late Count von M. to set his garden on one of

⁸ On the implications of “step back” (*Schritt zurück*) as an act of interruption in the metaphysical plan of Western civilization, compare Martin Heidegger, “Die onto-theologische Verfassung der Metaphysik,” in *Identität und Differenz* (Pfullingen, Germany: Verlag Günther Neska, 1986), 31–67. First published in 1957.

⁹ There is vast research on Goethe's concept of nature, including his scientific work and the gardens he cultivated in Weimar. See, for example, Heather I. Sullivan, “Goethe's Concept of Nature: Proto-ecological Model,” in *Ecological Thought in German Literature and Culture*, ed. Gabrielle Dürbeck, Urte Stobbe, Hubert Zapf, and Evi Zemanek (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017), 17–30; Dorothee Ahrendt and Gertraud Aepfler, *Goethes Gärten in Weimar* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009); Thomas Pfau, “All Is Leaf: Difference, Metamorphosis, and Goethe's Phenomenology of Knowledge,” *Studies in Romanticism* 49, no. 1 (2010): 3–41.

¹⁰ Johann Peter Eckermann, *Gespräche mit Goethe* [Conversations with Goethe] (Berlin: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 2011), 223–27. For further reading: Fritz Strich, *Goethe und die Weltliteratur* (Bern: Verlag A. Francke, 1946); Fawzi Boubia, „Goethes Theorie der Alterität und die Idee der Weltliteratur: Ein Beitrag zur Neueren Kulturdebatte.“ in *Gegenwart als kulturelles Erbe: Ein Beitrag zur Kulturwissenschaft deutschsprachiger Länder*, ed. Bernd Thum (München: Iudicium Verlag, 1985), 269–301; Hendrik Birus, „Goethes Idee der Weltliteratur: Eine historische Vergegenwärtigung,“ in *Weltliteratur heute: Konzepte und Perspektiven*, ed. Manfred Schmeling (Würzburg, Germany: Königshausen & Neumann, 1995), 5–28.

¹¹ Much research has been done on *The Sorrows of Young Werther* and the protagonist's perception of nature. See, for example, Heather I. Sullivan, “Nature and the ‘Dark Pastoral’ in Goethe's *Werther*,” *Goethe Yearbook* 22 (2015): 115–32.

¹² Norbert Elias, *Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation: Soziogenetische und psychogenetische Untersuchungen* [The civilizing process: Sociogenetic and psychogenetic investigations], vol. 2 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), 323–52. First published in 1939.

¹³ Horst Stuke, “Aufklärung,” in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur Politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, vol. 1, ed. Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck (Stuttgart, Germany: Klett-Cotta Verlag, 2004), 243–342; Jochen Schmidt, „Einleitung: Aufklärung, Gegenauflklärung, Dialektik der Aufklärung,“ in *Aufklärung und Gegenauflklärung in der Europäischen Literatur, Philosophie und Politik von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Jochen Schmidt (Darmstadt, Germany: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1989), 1–31.

the numerous hillsides that intersect here, forming the loveliest valleys. The garden is not elaborate, and the moment you walk into it, you feel that it was designed by a sensitive heart rather than a scientific gardener, a heart that sought to find its enjoyment there. I have shed a few tears myself for the departed gentleman in the little, broken-down summerhouse that used to be his favorite haunt and now is mine. Soon I will be master of the garden. The gardener seems to think well of me, though I have been here only a few days, and I will see to it that he enjoys working for me.

Die Stadt selbst ist unangenehm, dagegen rings umher eine unaussprechliche Schönheit der Natur. Das bewog den verstorbenen Grafen von M., einen Garten auf einem der Hügel anzulegen, die mit der schönsten Mannigfaltigkeit sich kreuzen und die lieblichsten Täler bilden. Der Garten ist einfach, und man fühlt gleich bei dem Eintritte, daß nicht ein wissenschaftlicher Gärtner, sondern ein fühlendes Herz den Plan gezeichnet, das seiner selbst hier genießen wollte. Schon manche Träne hab' ich dem Abgeschiedenen in dem verfallenen Kabinettchen geweint, das sein Lieblingsplätzchen war und auch meines ist. Bald werde ich Herr vom Garten sein; der Gärtner ist mir zugetan, nur seit den paar Tagen, und er wird sich nicht übel dabei befinden.¹⁴

The quote, while praising the “beauties of nature” which cannot be appropriately expressed (“eine unaussprechliche Schönheit der Natur”), exposes the conflict between the “scientific” (“ein wissenschaftlicher Gärtner”) and the “sensitive” (“ein fühlendes Herz”) modes of being, as represented in the “French” (geometrical, symmetrical, “rational,” artificial) and the “English” (free, unordered, “natural” plan) gardens, and expresses Werther’s attachment to the latter. Initially, Werther confesses that mastering the garden should serve his spiritual development. Not dwelling alongside and strolling within, but rather an act of sovereignty, defines his association with the garden: “Soon I will be master of the garden.” Yet, not autonomy alone—a vision of masculine subjectivity, governing its realm of being, but childish (“not elaborate”), affective (sensual, “sensitive”) mode prevails in this scene. There is a sense of the joy of beginning imprinted in Werther’s descriptions of the garden. In the garden, however, Werther also finds a poetic refuge, a free space for reading and reflecting on literature. In the garden, he reads the works of Homer¹⁵ and Ossian,¹⁶ alongside the English and French novels of his age:

You know my old habit of settling down in a place that suits me and of taking refuge there, however primitive it may be. Well, I have found such a spot here. About an hour away, there is a place called Wahlheim. Its location on the top of a hill is quite unusual, and if you take the footpath that leads to the village, you suddenly find yourself overlooking the entire valley. At the inn, a good woman, who is pleasant and lively in spite of her advanced years, serves wine, beer, and coffee; but the crowning glory of the place are two linden trees that stretch their wide branches over the little green in front of the church, which is surrounded by cottages, barns, and farmyards. I don’t think I have ever before seen a place which was so secluded and in which I

¹⁴ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther and Selected Writings*, book 1, trans. Catherine Hutter (New York: Signet Classics 2013). First published in 1771. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, “Die Leiden des Jungen Werther,” in *Die Leiden des Jungen Werther. Die Wahlverwandtschaften, Kleine Prosa, Epen*, ed. Waltraud Wiethölter with Christoph Brecht (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher klassiker Verlag, 2006), book 1, 12.

¹⁵ For further reading, see Carol E. W. Tobol and Ida H. Washington. “Werther’s Selective Reading of Homer” *Modern Language Notes* 92, no. 3 (1977): 596–601; Volker Riedel, “Ein ‘Grundschatz Aller Kunst’: Goethe Und Die Vossische Homer-Übersetzung,” *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 8, no. 4 (2002): 522–63.

¹⁶ For further reading, see Gerald Bär, “Ossian by Werther; or, the ‘Respect for This Author,’” *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 39, no. 2 (June 2016): 223–34.

could feel so much at home. I have them bring a table and chair outside for me, and there I sit, drinking coffee and reading Homer.

Du kennst von alters her meine Art, mich anzubauen, mir irgend an einem vertraulichen Orte ein Hüttchen aufzuschlagen und da mit aller Einschränkung zu herbergen. Auch hier habe ich wieder ein Plätzchen angetroffen, das mich angezogen hat.

Ungefähr eine Stunde von der Stadt liegt ein Ort, den sie Wahlheim* nennen. Die Lage an einem Hügel ist sehr interessant, und wenn man oben auf dem Fußpfade zum Dorf herausgeht, übersieht man auf einmal das ganze Tal. Eine gute Wirtin, die gefällig und munter in ihrem Alter ist, schenkt Wein, Bier, Kaffee; und was über alles geht, sind zwei Linden, die mit ihren ausgebreiteten Ästen den kleinen Platz vor der Kirche bedecken, der ringsum mit Bauerhäusern, Scheunen und Höfen eingeschlossen ist. So vertraulich, so heimlich hab' ich nicht leicht ein Plätzchen gefunden, und dahin lass' ich mein Tischchen aus dem Wirtshause bringen und meinen Stuhl, trinke meinen Kaffee da und lese meinen Homer.¹⁷

Werther's garden is a literary settlement. In this garden, Goethe's protagonist is born as an early reader (and an author) of *Weltliteratur*, practicing translation, literary criticism, self-reflection, and irony. In this garden, he seeks home: "I could feel so much at home" ("so heimlich hab' ich nicht leicht ein Plätzchen gefunden"), longing in vain to associate himself—not with the landscape alone, but with the community. However, his early death (which itself can be read as a literary gesture—to Lessing's *Emilia Galotti*)¹⁸ reveals the failures of his own literary project. Werther's garden—a garden of (literary) knowledge—was based on philological deception (Goethe's translation of James Macpherson's invented Ossian poems), dandyism (his famous clothes), and poetic exaggerations (sentimental readings and literary pathos). Werther's garden was left lifeless, like the garden of Eden. The novella (a German bestseller)¹⁹ left us with a sign of the inner failure of the German *Bildung* project. The protagonist of Goethe's story signifies the destructive tensions of modern subjectivity, finding no solution but suicide. Werther's garden is a site of "short life."

In his later novel *Elective Affinities* (1809), Goethe's garden displays much broader poetical implications, serving as a space of self-designing in which not only subjectivity but also social and political orders are reflected. As we learn in the opening of Goethe's novel, the garden is a space of human labor, a field of knowledge and work, implying measuring, planning, and building—the designing of the land. Working the garden is associated with the act of sovereignty (ruling over nature), scientific and technological skills, alongside sensual experience, the notion of freedom, friendship, hospitality, and marriage, coupled with strolling and paths of escape. The garden in Goethe's work, while inspired again by the "English garden" model, which Goethe knew well, is presented as a progressive enterprise, challenging the local, traditional, agrarian land planning.²⁰ The garden's plan, however, is gendered and lends itself to erotic play, exchange, combination, and inversions of the sexual discourse, where the masculine (patriarchal order) and the feminine are

¹⁷ Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, May 26th; Goethe, "Die Leiden Des Jungen Werthers", am 26. May, P.27.

¹⁸ See Bruce Duncan, "Emilia Galotti lag auf dem Pult aufgeschlagen: Werther as (Mis-)Reader," *Goethe Yearbook* 1 (1982): 42–50.

¹⁹ See Clara Tuite, "Speechless: Werther-Fever and the Media of Romantic Love," *Cultural and Social History* 17, no. 3 (2020): 333–53.

²⁰ Ann Leone, "The Reptonian Turn: Reassessing Landscape Design in Goethe's *Elective Affinities*," *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes* 31, no. 1 (2011): 26–39, DOI: 10.1080/14601171003683722.

in conflict. These tensions are well embedded in a conversation between the Captain, a guest at the estate, and the owner, his host, and a friend—Eduard, criticizing the enterprise of his wife, Charlotte, in the planning of a new garden:

“Confess it honestly,” said Eduard; “you don’t like the way she has laid out the park, do you?”

“If the conception, which is very fine, had been realized in the execution, there would be nothing to criticize. But she has laboriously toiled her way through the rocks, and now, if I may so put it, everyone she conducts up there also has to toil. Neither side by side nor in file can you walk with any real comfort. You have to break step every other minute; and there are many more objections that might be raised.”

“Would it have been easy to do it any other way?” Eduard asked.

Gesteh mir aufrichtig“, sagte Eduard, „du bist mit ihren Anlagen nicht zufrieden“.

„Wenn die Ausführung den Gedanken erschöpfte, der sehr gut ist, so wäre nichts zu erinnern. Sie hat sich mühsam durch das Gestein hinaufgequält und quält nun jeden, wenn du willst, den sie hinaufführt. Weder nebeneinander noch hintereinander schreitet man mit einer gewissen Freiheit. Der Takt des Schrittes wird jeden Augenblick unterbrochen; und was ließe sich nicht noch alles einwenden!“

„Wäre es denn leicht anders zu machen gewesen?“ fragte Eduard.²¹

The Captain, who finds Charlotte’s gardening plan offering no comfort, continues and provides corrections to the garden-planning while elaborating his critique:

“Quite easy,” the Captain replied. “All she had to do was cut away the angle of cliff which juts out there; the thing is in any case insignificant-looking, since it is composed of small segments; then she would have acquired a fine curving ascent; and at the same time a quantity of superfluous stone for building up the path where it would have been broken and narrow. But let this be in strictest confidence between us or it will confuse and upset her. And what has been done must be left alone. If you want to expend more money and effort, there are still plenty of pleasant things to do above the moss-hut and over the high ground.”

Gar leicht“, versetzte der Hauptmann; „sie durfte nur die eine Felsenecke, die noch dazu unscheinbar ist, weil sie aus kleinen Teilen besteht, wegbrechen, so erlangte sie eine schön geschwungene Wendung zum Aufstieg und zugleich überflüssige Steine, um die Stellen heraufzumauern, wo der Weg schmal und verkrüppelt geworden wäre. Doch sei dies im engsten Vertrauen unter uns gesagt; sie wird sonst irre und verdrießlich. Auch muß man, was gemacht ist, bestehen lassen. Will man weiter Geld und Mühe aufwenden, so wäre von der Mooshütte hinaufwärts und über die Anhöhe noch mancherlei zu tun und viel Angenehmes zu leisten.“²²

The Captain’s criticism directs Charlotte’s perception of space (*Raum*). The fragmented look of the cliff, which is made of small segments, is “insignificant” (“unscheinbar”). The cliff does not cast a strong impression on the viewers, as it should by the Kantian perception of the sublime

²¹ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Elective Affinities*, trans. R. J. Hollindale, part 1, book 3 (London: Penguin Books, 2005), e-book version; Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, „Die Wahlverwandschaften,“ in *Die Wahlverwandschaften*, 291–92.

²² Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Elective Affinities*, trans. R. J. Hollindale, part 1, book 3 (London: Penguin Books, 2005), e-book version; Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, „Die Wahlverwandschaften,“ in *Die Wahlverwandschaften*, 291–92.

(*Das Erhabene*).²³ We argue that the Captain's aesthetic critique is not free from gender implications. The garden-planning, serving as a site of reflecting and designing of subjectivity, a site of *Bildung*, is associated with acts of masculine formation of nature, extended, however, to the feminine realm.

Charlotte's reaction to the Captain's critique exposes an inner tension, understanding the Captain's arguments, yet tied to her imperfect, creative plan. Nevertheless, in light of the critique, she finally decides to withdraw, leaving the planning of the garden in the hands of the two men:

Charlotte was confounded. She could see at once the Captain was right, but what she had done contradicted him. It existed, and she had found it right and good. Even what was criticized was dear to her in every part and particular. She resisted conviction. She defended her little creation. She chided the men with flying off into the vast and grandiose, with wanting to turn a pastime into labor, with failing to think of what a more ambitious plan would cost. She was agitated, hurt, upset. She could not relinquish the old ideas nor entirely reject the new. However, she was a resolute woman, and she had the work stopped at once and gave herself time to reflect and let the thing mature within her.

Charlotte stand betroffen. Sie war geistreich genug, um schnell einzusehen, daß jene recht hatten; aber das Getane widersprach, es war nun einmal so gemacht; sie hatte es recht, sie hatte es wünschenswert gefunden, selbst das Getadelte war ihr in jedem einzelnen Teile lieb; sie widerstrebt der Überzeugung, sie verteidigte ihre kleine Schöpfung, sie schalt auf die Männer, die gleich ins Weite und Große gingen, aus einem Scherz, aus einer Unterhaltung gleich ein Werk machen wollten, nicht an die Kosten denken, die ein erweiterter Plan durchaus nach sich zieht. Sie war bewegt, verletzt, verdrießlich; sie konnte das Alte nicht fahren lassen, das Neue nicht ganz abweisen; aber entschlossen wie sie war, stellte sie sogleich die Arbeit ein und nahm sich Zeit, die Sache zu bedenken und bei sich reif werden zu lassen.²⁴

The landscape planning in Charlotte's mind is transformed into an insight concerning her own subjectivity. She realizes that her plan has been condemned for being too ambitious while underestimating the topographic obstacles and restrictions. What she reflects in these lines, however, are not only the boundaries of the garden planning but also the borderlines of female autonomy.

Another notion, regarding the cultural implications of gardening and its role in representing *Bildung*, and the self-fashioning of the subject, is expressed in Goethe's novel in the reflection of the "English garden," as stated in the conversations between Charlotte and the Schoolmaster:

"If we are to enjoy our gardens, they have to look like open country; there should be no evidence of art or constraint. We want to breathe the air in absolute freedom. Do you think, my friend, that we could go back from this state of things to another, earlier state?"

Niemand glaubt sich in einem Garten behaglich, der nicht einem freien Lande ähnlich sieht; an Kunst, an Zwang soll nichts erinnern; wir wollen völlig frei und unbedingt Atem schöpfen. Haben Sie wohl einen Begriff, mein Freund, daß man aus diesem in einen andern, in den vorigen Zustand zurückkehren könne?"²⁵

²³ Matías Oroño, "The Dynamic Sublime in Kant's Third Critique," *Eidos* 27 (2017): 199–223.

²⁴ Goethe, *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, 292; Goethe, *Elective Affinities*, part 1, book 3.

²⁵ Goethe, *Elective Affinities*, part 2, book 8; Goethe, *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, part 2, chapter 8, 454.

Charlotte desires the garden as a space of “absolute freedom,” which connects to breath (“Wir wollen völlig frei und unbedingt Atem schöpfen”). This idea seems to echo the biblical Garden of Eden, an echo that gets stronger with Charlotte’s quest to turn back to an earlier stage of humanity (“Haben Sie wohl einen Begriff, mein Freund, daß man aus diesem in einen andern, in den vorigen Zustand zurückkehren könne?”). The garden, as imagined by Charlotte, bursts out from the walls, which hold the old tradition. It is a poetical, imagined space of self-design released from the principles of patriarchal order which reign within the estate’s wall. In another conversation, the old gardener, himself faithful to the conservative spirit, is aware of this ambitious vision of an open garden reflecting its foreign sense:

For although he knew perfectly well how to undertake everything demanded by an orchard or a kitchen garden, and was equal to the older type of ornamental garden—as indeed a man will succeed better with this task or that—and although in the management of an orangery, of flower-bulbs, of carnation and auricula plants, he could have challenged nature herself. However, the new ornamental trees and fashionable flowers were still, to some extent, strange to him, and of the endless field of botany that time was bringing to light, and of the strange names buzzing about in it, he had a kind of awe that put him out of humor.

Denn ob er gleich alles, was die Baum- und Küchengärtnerie betraf, auch die Erfordernisse eines ältern Ziergartens, vollkommen zu leisten verstand, wie denn überhaupt einem vor dem andern dieses oder jenes gelingt, ob er schon in Behandlung der Orangerie, der Blumenzwiebeln, der Nelken- und Aurikelstöcke die Natur selbst hätte herausfordern können, so waren ihm doch die neuen Zierbäume und Modeblumen einigermaßen fremd geblieben, und er hatte vor dem unendlichen Felde der Botanik, das sich nach der Zeit aufat, und den darin herumsommenden fremden Namen eine Art von Scheu, die ihn verdrießlich machte.²⁶

Charlotte and Ottilie, the young woman who joins the gardening enterprise at the estate, represent the new fashionable engagement with gardens as open realms implying freedom and self-expression, challenging the idea of the old walled fruit garden established by the former master—the father.

More can be told about the garden in Goethe’s novel as representing growth and blooming, as well as erotic desires and friendships shaded by the gender roles. The garden offers the protagonists a dynamic, organic development model governed by aesthetic categories. The garden, however, is also a venue of desperate relationships, broken marriages, and early death. In this novel as well, the garden represents the fragile structure of subjectivity doomed to a short life.

The garden is less explicit yet clearly implicated in Goethe’s *The West-Eastern Divan* (1819, 1827).²⁷ This late work is written as a poetic journey mainly following the *ghazals*, the love poems of Hâfiz, alongside other Persian and Arabic poetical sources. Hâfiz, the Persian poet of the fourteenth century, whose poetry Goethe was familiar with from the German translation of Josef von

²⁶ *Ibid.*, part two, book 9; *Ibid.*, part 2, chapter 9, 460.

²⁷ Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *West-östlicher Divan*, Werke, vol. 2 (München: C. H. Beck Verlag, 1981); „Meine Schatzkammer füllt sich täglich: Die Nachlaßstücke zu Goethes „West-östlicher Divan,“ in *Dokumentation—Kommentar*, vol. 1 and 2, ed. Anke Bosse (Göttingen, Germany: Wallstein Verlag, 1999).

Hammer Purgstall, provided the German poet with a model of contemplation on worldly beauty and joy, while simultaneously echoing impressions of political terror and anxieties.²⁸

Goethe's oriental model, although already anchored in his early writing in the 1770s, during which he studied and translated Hebrew and Arabic poetry, alongside Greek, Latin, and English, attained a more intensive character during his work on the *Divan*.²⁹ This work constitutes a poetical and scholarly enterprise of studying orientalist philological sources, lexicons, and travel literature, accompanied by reading, translating, commenting, and undertaking poetical adaptations (*Nachdichten*) of significant writings by Hâfiz, Sa'di, and Rumi. In this context, Goethe's poetical garden flourished anew, introducing unfamiliar symbols, motifs, and figures of speech, among them the rose—a flower that stands for beauty, an object of desire, sensual, yet embodying a spiritual connotation. The rose is not only a word but also a name for the essence of spirit. The garden itself, however, is only mentioned a few times in the *Divan*, notably in its last book—*Chuld Nameh*, the Book of Paradise, referring to Eastern and Western visions of Eden. There are also references to the Persian rose garden in the dialogues of the *Saki Nameh*, The Book of Saghi (The Cupbearer),³⁰ praising the beauty and scent of the roses and the singing of the bulbul, the nightingale, embodying the lover, the poet himself:

Schau! Die Welt ist keine Höhle,
Immer reich an Brut und Nestern.
Rosenduft und Rosenöle;
Bulbul auch, sie singt wie gestern.³¹

Look! the world is not a cave!
Rich in birds that nesting play
Rose aroma, oil—we crave
Bulbul, too, as yesterday.³²

In the luxurious Persian (poetical) garden, where the beauty of creation is celebrated and bodies of desire express their longing, poetry also finds its own reflection. Not only does the singing bird hint at the poet's own work, but so does the rose, for the flower itself, as mentioned above, is

²⁸ Edwin H. Zeydel, „Goethe and Hafis,” *Monatshefte* 49, no. 6 (1957): 305–7; Johann Christoph Bürgel, „Goethe und Hafis,” in *Drei Hafis-Studien* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1975), 5–42; Arjomand-Fathi Nushafarin, „Hefez and Goethe: Studien zum literarischen Einfluss und zu Goethes Hâfiz-Bild“ (dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1983).

²⁹ On Goethe's orientalist model and its contexts in his reception of Islam, see Hans Heinrich Schaefer, *Goethes Erlebnis des Osten* (Leipzig, Germany: Hinrichs, 1938); Katharina Mommsen, *Goethe und der Islam* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 2001); Francesca Bocca-Aldaqr, „Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: A Life With Islam,” *Intellectual Discourse* 27, no. 2 (2019): 507–30; Konrad Burdach, „Goethes West-östlicher Divan in Biographischer und Zeitgeschichtlicher Beleuchtung,” first published in 1896, in *Studien zum West-Östlichen Divan Goethes*, ed. Edgar Lohner (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1971), 310–51; Annemarie Schimmel, „Der Islamsiche Orient: Wege seiner Vermittlung nach Europa,” in *Goethes Morgenland Fahrten*, ed. Jochen Golz (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1999), 16–27; Norbert Nerbes, „Orientalistik im Aufbruch: Die Wissenschaft vom Vorderen Orient in Jena zur Goethezeit,” in Golz, *Goethes Morgenland Fahrten*, 66–91. For further reading: Monika Lemmel, *Poetologie in Goethes west-östlichem Divan* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1985); Marcel Lepper, *Goethes Euphrat: Philologie und Politik im West-östlichen Divan* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2016).

³⁰ The Persian wine poetry tradition has influenced European poetry since the sixteenth century. See Paul Losensky, „Vintages of the Sâqî-Nâma: Fermenting and Blending the Cupbearer's Song in the Sixteenth Century,” *Iranian Studies* 47, no. 1 (2014): 131–57.

³¹ Johan Wolfgang von Goethe, „Neuer Divan 1819–1827,” in *West-östlicher Divan*, Taillband 1, ed. by Hendrik Birus (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 2010), 413.

³² Johan Wolfgang von Goethe, *West-East Divan: Poems, with "Notes and Essays": Goethe's Intercultural Dialogues*, trans. Martin Bidney (Albany, NY: Global Academic Publishing, 2010), 89.

considered as a word: what the rose is in the garden, so the word is in language—an expression of natural beauty.

How does this Persian garden serve the poetic model of Goethe's *Divan*? As argued, the *Divan* represents an attempt at reorientation, reforming Western subjectivity by associating it with creative potentialities, sensual motives, erotic discourses, and modes of "free spirit" borrowed from Eastern literature. The garden adds a robust framework to this enterprise; visions of rebirth, youth and wealth, naturalistic views, and sensual atmosphere (smell, colors, voices) were among the values of Goethe's undertaking, imagining an oriental form of life in German verse. Not only is nature associated with Goethe's gardens, as mentioned in the verses—the scent of the rose and the singing of the bulbul—but so is cultivation and manufacturing: the rose oil. In Goethe's work the Persian garden signified a cultural project, a design of human subjectivity. Here, too, the very notion of subjectivity lies in an erotic play that is governed by the conventions of friendship, love, and marriage, but is also expressed in broken, fragmented relations, sorrow, and short life.

The garden is celebrated in Goethe's work also in "Buch Suleika," the Book of Suleika, the most significant group of love poems in the *Divan* written under the influence of his affair and correspondence with Marianne von Willemer.³³ The poem compares the beauty and the blessing of the garden and its healing potential with the appearance of Suleika, whose love and beauty are a comfort.

Seh' ich Rosen, seh' ich Lilien,
 Aller Gärten Zier und Ehre,
 So Zypressen, Myrten, Veilchen,
 Aufgeregt zum Schmuck der Erde,
 Und geschmückt ist sie ein Wunder,
 Mit Erstaunen uns umfangend,
 Uns erquickend, heilend, segnend,
 Daß wir uns gesunder fühlen,
 Wieder gern erkranken möchten³⁴.

Roses I behold, and lilies,
 All the gardens' charm and honor;
 Myrtle, violet, and cypress
 Earth adorning in arousal.
 What an ornamental wonder,
 An astonishing surrounding,
 Healing, livening, and blessing!
 We can feel we're now recovered
 And prepared again to suffer.³⁵

All the garden's flowers are *Schmuck*, an ornament adorning earth. The aesthetic value of the garden, however, is also therapeutic. Here man finds comfort and senses again the blessing of being and the association with the work of creation. In Goethe's *Divan*, however, the garden serves as a poetical texture. The poem itself is configured as a sensual unit. The garden in the *Divan* is a garden of desire, well expressed in the verses of the ginkgo tree³⁶ to which the poem "Gingo Biloba"³⁷ is dedicated. The leaf of the "Eastern tree," which Goethe borrows from China for his poetical garden, resembles in form the human heart, a unit (unification) of two divided parts, serving as a reference to the dialectic of separation and togetherness that governs the discourse of love in his work. The leaf, like the flower, refers to the word itself and hints at the nature

³³ Dorothee Metlitzki, "On the Meaning of 'Hatem' in Goethe's West-Östlicher Divan," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 117, no. 1 (1997): 148–51.

³⁴ Goethe, *West-östlicher Divan*, 380.

³⁵ Goethe, *West-East Divan*, 92.

³⁶ Siegfried Unseld, *Goethe und der Ginkgo: Ein Baum und ein Gedicht* [Goethe and the Ginkgo: A tree and a poem] (Frankfurt: Insel-Verlag, 1998).

³⁷ Goethe, *West-östlicher Divan*, 380–81.

of poetical expression. In German, *Blatt* (leaf) is also the word for a sheet of paper, alluding to the world of script and writing.

Goethe's garden represents a form of being, sensual and prosperous, providing a plane of poetic re-formation, *Bildung*, of subjectivity, *oriented* in the sensual world, yet affiliated with scripts, readership, and literary traditions. The association of the garden with Eastern poetic motifs—the rose, the singing of the bulbul, and the ginkgo—while referring to erotic images, organic potentialities, and visions of origin and rebirth, cannot be separated from orientalist imagination, Western self-projections, and double irony (false loyalty and betrayal). As such, the garden offers us a creative, dynamic literary model associated with journeys and paths of departure,³⁸ efforts of reorientation and experience of loss, associated with acts of translation and moments of self-foreignization.³⁹ Goethe's garden, as represented in his *Divan*, serves as a plan of *Weltliteratur*, offering its readers a Eurasian map of poetical encounters, dialogues, translations, and adaptations of both Western and Eastern traditions. One of the paths in this garden leads us to Sa'di's work.

SA'DI'S GOLESTĀN

Goethe's *Divan* represents the "Persian garden" as a poetical construction of beauty and desire, a garden of roses that stands for the poem itself (the flower—a word), as a sensual unit, a texture of expression. Goethe's reception of the Persian poetic tradition, which was not free from orientalist misconception, nevertheless offers a creative, dialogical model challenging the notion of Western subjectivity and interfering with its autonomy and self-reflection by foreign text and image. On that path, we encounter the garden of Sa'di—the *Golestān*.⁴⁰

The rose garden (*Golestān*) and the orchard (*Bustan*) are major tropes of Persian classical poetry, serving as sites of gathering in which beauty and friendship are celebrated. The garden is an expression of a civilized form of being, associated, however, with the world of nature—the seasons, blooming, growth, and the blessing of creation. In the garden the subject is again at home. This, we recall, was Werther's wish, echoing the longing of man for return and homecoming. Rudaki, one of the earliest poets of the New Persian in the Samanid court of the tenth

³⁸ On Goethe's concept of path and the idea of a poetical journey to the Orient, compare Young-Ae Chon, *Sich erbittend ew'ges Leben*: *Sieben Essays zu Goethes "Westöstlicher Divan"* (Göttingen, Germany: Wallstein Verlag, 2017), 18–22. On the figure of the traveler in the *Divan*, compare Anke Bosse, „Reisender und Handelsmann in Sachen orientalischer Poesie—zu einer Handschrift aus Goethes Nachlaß zum West-östlichen Divan,“ in Golz, *Goethes Morgenland Fahrten*, 112–29. For further reading on Goethe's oriental path, see Abdel-Rahim H. Said, "Goethes Hinwendung zum Orient. Eine innere Emigration," in *Zeitschrift der deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* (Wiesbaden, Germany: Harrassowitz Verlag, vol. 132 (1982): 269–88.

³⁹ Compare with Goethe's remarks on the work of translation, to which he attached the idea of foreignization while discussing the "third" and "final" period. Goethe, "Übersetzung," *Der West-östliche Divan*, 255–58. On the concept of foreignizing in the work of translation, compare Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (London: Routledge, 2018). On the effect of foreignization in translation, compare with Franz Rosenzweig's comments in the *Nachwort* to his translation of Yehuda Halevi's poems. According to Rosenzweig, who mainly refers to the achievement of Luther's enterprise, the Bible translation—due to the effect of foreignization—contributed to the development of German as a primary world language beyond the national frameworks: Franz Rosenzweig, *Jehuda Halevi, Zweiundneunzig Hymen und Gedichte* (Berlin: Verlag, Lambert Schneider, 1927), 155–57.

⁴⁰ For further reading, see Franklin Lewis, "GOLESTĀN-E SA'DI," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 11/1, 79–86.

century,⁴¹ expressed this vision of the garden in his famous poem calling his master, the Amir, to return home and join him in the *Bustan* at his hometown Bukhārā:⁴²

یاد یار مهربان آید همی زیر پایم پرنیان آید همی خنگ مارا تا میان آید همی میر زی تو میهمان آید همی ماه سوی آسمان آید همی سرو سوی بوستان آید همی	بوی جوی مولیان آید همی ریگ آموی و درشتی های او آب جیحون از نشاط روی دوست ای بخارا، شاد باش و دیر زی میر ماه است و بخارا آسمان میر سروست و بخارا بوستان
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Juye-Muliyān scent drifts my way,
 As do memories of a kind friend.
 The Āmuy is hard to cross, but its stones
 Feel silken soft beneath our feet.
 Thrilled to see a friend, the Jayhun's waves
 Leap halfway up our horses' flanks.
 O Bukhārā, be happy, live long:
 The cheerful Amir is returning to you.
 The Amir is the moon, Bukhārā, the sky.
 The moon is returning to the sky.
 The Amir is a cypress, Bukhārā, the garden.
 The cypress is returning to the garden.

The poet, in his longing for his master and friend, sends him this poem—written as a love letter expressing the joy of re-gathering. In the final stanza, the *Bustan*, the garden of smell, is referred to as a site of belonging:

The Amir is a cypress, Bukhārā, the garden / The cypress is returning to the garden.

The cypress stands in the lexica of classical Persian poetry as a sign of strength, beauty, and sovereignty. The Amir, the cypress, is like a pillar to his court.

Rudaki's garden is a place where belonging and being together are celebrated.⁴³ Friendship is one of the values represented in Sa'di's work, the *Golestān* (1258), the Rose Garden. This work

⁴¹ On the Samanid court and its literary enterprises, see Michael Burgan, *Empires of Ancient Persia* (New York: Chelsea House, 2010), 111–27; John R. Perry, “New Persian: Expansion, Standardization,” in *Literacy in the Persianate World: Writing and the Social Order*, ed. Brian Spooner and William L. Hanaway (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 70–94; Nile Green, ed., *The Persianate World: The Frontiers of a Eurasian Lingua Franca*, 1st ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2019); On Rudaki, see Sassan Tabatabai, *Father of Persian Verse: Rudaki and His Poetry* (Leiden, Netherlands: Leiden University Press, 2011); and Iraj Bashiri, “Abu ‘Abd Allah Rudaki: An Appreciation,” in *Rudaki and Culture Traditions of Central Asian and Indian Peoples*, Institute of History, Archeology and Ethnography, Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan, Dushanbe, 2008, pp. 330–344.

⁴² Tabatabai, *Father of Persian Verse*, 56–57.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 1–28.

is considered one of the canonical literary works of Classical Persian writing, contributing to the world of *Adab*.⁴⁴ Sa'di's *Golestān* consists of didactic prose with classical verses (alongside Arabic quotations, mainly from the Quran). The work was written a year after the compilation of Sa'di's other great work—*Bustan* (1257). Sa'di also composed many *ghazals*, love poems, gathered in his *Diwan*.⁴⁵

The stories of the *Golestān* include tales and anecdotes about the sovereign and the poor, kings and dervishes, the wise and the fools, as well as discussing matters of ethics and faith, love and friendship. Sa'di's prose contributes to the tradition of advisory literature (*Pand Nameh*), including the genre of travel literature. Its primary purpose, however, seems to be *ethical*: defining proper education and conducting a free (Islamic) form of being. The *Golestān* does not offer an orthodox life plan, but rather a dialogical, ethical framework associated with Sufi values⁴⁶ in which degrees of freedom, critical engagement, and irony are addressed in depth. Not coincidentally, the *Golestān* is considered a masterpiece of Persian *Adab* literature. Although its central ideological schema is patriarchal and partly abounds with xenophobic sentiments, the *Golestān* does not prescribe a “nationalistic” view but rather maintains a particular “cosmopolitan” perspective.⁴⁷ The stories of the *Golestān* can thus be read as a contribution to world literature. This argument, however, requires further discussion. Sa'di, like Hāfiz, was also “discovered” by European poets and travelers in the eighteenth century. The translation of his work was well received, providing his readers with a valuable document of the Eastern world and attesting to its multiplicities. The *Golestān* is a poetical document of a world: imperial yet lyric, religious but free, oriental but of-the-world. It brings together liturgical and profane figures and undermines the binaries of the gender discourse. Dealing with the *Golestān* in terms of world literature thus demands attention to its own “worldly” measures (the profane and the sacred, the global/imperial and the local), canonical status, and vast readership, challenging the modern (Western, secular) conventions and categories of “what is literature?”

In this context, we read Sa'di's work as providing another perspective on the poetics of the garden as a site of human engagement. In the introduction to his book, Sa'di gives the garden a comprehensive interpretation. Like the court, the garden is one of its sites—a place (or a space) of encounter, gathering, and exchange. However, it also stands as a sign of the poetical texture itself, namely the literary enterprise's substance. His book names itself as a garden, referring both to its material, organic aspects (growth and blooming/withering) and allegorical implication (God's love, creation, and union/separation). As such, Sa'di's garden maintains the tensions between the work of man—the artificial, the artistic—and the work of nature.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Hamid Dabashi set the *Golestān* at the core of his claim on Persian literary humanism. See Dabashi, *Persian Literary Humanism*.

⁴⁵ We know little about his life, but following his scriptures, the researchers assume that he traveled through much of Asia and worked under the Seljuk local leader Atabak Abubakr ibn Sa'd ibn Zangi.

⁴⁶ On the Sufi tradition in Persian poetry, see Reynold A. Nicholson, trans., *The Kashf al-Mahjub, The Revelation of the Veiled: An Early Persian Treatise on Sufism* (Harrow, UK: The Gibb Memorial Trust, 2000); Muhammad Ibn al-Munawwar, *The Secrets of God's Mystical Oneness*, trans. John O'Kane (New York: Bibliotheca Persica, 1992); and Farid al-Din Attar, *Farid ad-Din 'Attār's Memorial of God's Friends: Lives and Sayings of Sufis*, trans. Paul Losensky (New York: Paulist Press, 2009). For further reading, see Leonard Lewisohn, ed., *The Heritage of Sufism: Classical Persian Sufism from its Origins to Rumi* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1999).

⁴⁷ We are aware of the anachronistic implications of these terms, which were not part of Sa'di's own vocabulary and might seem to “colonize” the discourse on his work. However, we suggest applying these terms as key figures of our own reading, acknowledging its belatedness and afterwardness (*Nachträglichkeit*).

⁴⁸ Domenico Ingenito, *Beholding Beauty: Sa'di of Shiraz and the Aesthetics of Desire in Medieval Persian Poetry* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Studies in Middle Eastern Literatures, 2020), 100: “Few topoi are more apt than the motif of

Engaging Sa'di's *Golestān* after reading Goethe's work thus provides us with a counter-perspective, comparative, but not in its chronological, positivist, binary implications. Rather, based on acts of translation, it is an attempt at dialogue based on maneuvers, associations, and the acknowledgment of differences.⁴⁹ Unlike Hâfiz, who is highly praised in Goethe's *Divan* and serves as a key figure in its poems, Sa'di is only mentioned briefly in a few verses and commentaries by the German poet.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, we suggest that Sa'di's garden's vision, as presented in his *Golestān*, is significant for our discussion of the garden as a poetic space of human self-fashioning, in which the very idea of poetry is represented. The poet's work is reflected in the garden that serves as a site of *Bildung/Adab* associated with knowledge, sovereignty, the dialectic of desire, and gender differences. The poem, like the garden, is a texture of separation and gathering, encounter and loss. The words, like the roses, are sensual signs, images, and voices, bearing witness to the wealth of being and the experience of short life. We thus suggest reading Sa'di's *Golestān* as an echo of our reading of Goethe's work, bearing in mind the historical and cultural differences and the Germanic orientalist perspective that governed his own engagement with Persian poetry.

Sa'di's garden, as argued, may well be applied in a counter-reading that challenges and resists Goethe's own model of *Weltliteratur*. The *Golestān* provides its readers, including contemporary Western readers, with a view of a world that is not yet "universal" and does not obey the Western perception of being,⁵¹ but instead is a world not yet governed by secularism and nationalism. If we may apply contemporary terms, Sa'di's work signifies a world based on multiethnic, intercultural, and interreligious affinities.⁵² Sa'di's rose garden is not only a proper name for a courtyard, a local, domestic site, but also refers to journeys, encounters, and exchanges in which subjectivity gains experience, education, affinities, and self-reflection.

In the Prologue (دیباجه) to the *Golestān*, the garden offers the reason and the frame for the entire work.⁵³ It begins with praising the wealth and beauty of God's work—the creation of this world as marvelously represented in the garden during springtime. Sa'di invites his reader into a blossoming environment, prosperous and ever young:

He tells the custodian of the zephyr to spread a carpet of emerald, and he orders the wet-nurse of the spring-time cloud to nurture the daughters of plants in the cradle of the earth. He clothes the trees in a green raiment of leaves with the robe of spring, and he places caps of blossoms on the heads of the children of the branches with the arrival of the vernal season. Through his power, the

the rose garden to embody the interfusion of artificiality and natural genuineness that characterizes the space of lyric poetry as what we could call an 'artificial professionalism of the lyric self and its mediated subjectivity.'

⁴⁹ This research engages in a critical conception of comparative literature as a method of disrupting European canonical writing by an association of non-Modern, Eastern poetical sources, challenging its Western, universal, colonial views. Compare: Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*; Emily Apter, *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 243–51; Dabashi, *Persian Literary Humanism*, 1–41. For further reading, see Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1986).

⁵⁰ Goethe, *West-östlicher Divan*, 78.

⁵¹ On the conditions of comparative research in the "global age," compare with David Damrosch, *Comparing the Literatures: Literary Studies in a Global Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020).

⁵² As an alternative to these perceptions, we might refer to Spivak's notion of "Planetary" in *Death of a Discipline*, 71–103.

⁵³ Ingenito, *Beholding Beauty*, 103: "As a result of this conflation, the entire book exudes a fascinating coexistence of the erotic, the political, and the spiritual. This conflation emerges with particular evidence in the introduction of the book, the lack of analytical study of which remains a major lacuna in Sa'di scholarship."

nectar of a reed becomes superior honey, and a date seed turns into a towering palm through his nurturing.⁵⁴

Nature, earth, trees, flowers, and fruits embody the work of creation, the blessing of God. The garden of man, the *Bustan*, carries with it this wealth of being. Sa'di thus tells a short story about "a man of understanding" ("man of the heart," God's man, *صاحبدل*), who went into a trance, a deep meditation, and was released from himself. This state of the spirit echoes the Talmudic tale of the four scholars who entered the *Pardes*.⁵⁵ This word, itself of Middle Persian origin, refers to a grove, an orchard, and the place of Jewish mystical knowledge.⁵⁶ This might hint at a common perception of the garden as an allegory of mystical knowledge.⁵⁷ When the friend emerges from the prophetic state, the poet asks him:

What gift have you brought us from the garden (*بوستان*) you were in?

And the answer follows:

"I had in mind," he said, "when I came to a rose bush (*درخت گل*), to fill my skirt with roses as gifts for my friends. However, when I arrived, the scent of roses so intoxicated me (*مست کرد*) that I lost my skirt."⁵⁸



Attributed to Govardhan / Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Gift of the Art and History Trust in honor of Ezzat-Malek Soudavar, F1998.5.6, recto.

⁵⁴ Shaykh Mushrifuddin Sa'di of Shiraz, *The Gulistan (Rose Garden) of Sa'di*, trans. Wheeler M. Thackston (Bethesda: Ibex Publishers, 2008), 1.

⁵⁵ § The Sages taught: Four entered the orchard [pardes], i.e., dealt with the loftiest secrets of Torah, and they are as follows: Ben Azzai; and ben Zoma; Aher, the other, a name for Elisha ben Avuya; and Rabbi Akiva. Rabbi Akiva, the senior among them, said to them: When, upon your arrival in the upper worlds, you reach pure marble stones, do not say: Water, water, although they appear to be water, because it is stated: "He who speaks falsehood shall not be established before My eyes" (Psalms 101:7). ⁹The Gemara proceeds to relate what happened to each of them: Ben Azzai glimpsed at the Divine Presence and died. And with regard to him the verse states: "Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of His pious ones" (Psalms 116:15). Ben Zoma glimpsed at the Divine Presence and was harmed, i.e., he lost his mind. And with regard to him the verse states: "Have you found honey? Eat as much as is sufficient for you, lest you become full from it and vomit it" (Proverbs 25:16). Aher chopped down the shoots of saplings. In other words, he became a heretic. Rabbi Akiva came out safely, in Tosefta Chagigah 14B, https://www.sefaria.org/Tosefta_Chagigah.2.2?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ For further reading on the connections between Talmud and Persian writings from the same age, see Shai Secunda, *The Talmud's Red Fence: Menstrual Impurity and Difference in Babylonian Judaism and Its Sasanian Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020). (Secunda's research is not about New Persian literature and culture, but rather on pre-Islamic periods.)

⁵⁸ Sa'di, *The Gulistan*, 1.

The garden, the Bustan (بوستان), visited by the Sufi friend, is sensual and worldly, yet serves as an allegory of divine knowledge. This man, we are told, failed to collect the roses, the garden's secrets, because of their intoxicating smell. This anecdote is typical of the garden in Persian literature as representing desire and longing—unfulfilled.⁵⁹ The smell of the roses is associated with the state of drunkenness (مست), referring to sensual ecstasy, self-forgetfulness, and spiritual experience (being with-God). This scene points to the erotic dimension of the garden and its elusive and volatile nature.⁶⁰

Bustan, the Persian name for the orchard mentioned in Sa'di's Prologue, means, "The Scent's Place." The intoxication carried in the air by the smell of the blossoms blurs the senses and brings about confusion, yet simultaneously prepares the spirit for the revelation of the divine secret. The garden in Sa'di's work, while associated with divine knowledge, with the inner, secret layers of *Adab* (education), is a space in which the Self is deconstructed, experiencing a rupture, a separation within itself. The esthetic refashioning of subjectivity, as attested to in Goethe's gardens, gains in Sa'di's work a radical implication. Subjectivity is reframed as a (self-destructive) opening toward the Other.

The Prologue of the *Golestān* continues with a (self-ironic) remark on Sa'di's poetry and its merits, praising mainly his patron, Ibn Saad Ibn Zangi, the "King of (this) World" (خداوند جهان), "the shadow of God" (سایه خدا) upon Earth and the land of Shiraz. The garden in Sa'di's work is not free from the perception of sovereignty. However, it is not the regime and authority that are the fundamental measures of this garden represented in the introduction of Sa'di's work, but rather beauty, friendship, and poetic affinities.

The next part of the Prologue of the *Golestān*, titled, "The reason for composing the book" (سبب تالیف کتاب),⁶¹ poses a fundamental question: Why, for what, and for whom is poetry written? The poet, while reflecting on his life and deeds, is filled with sentiments of regret. He thus condemns himself to isolation and silence, following the Sufi method of self-withdrawal. One of his friends, however, demands that he speak, acknowledging the merits of conversation and proper speech. As spring emerges, the two spend a night together in a most beautiful garden—a Bustan.

A garden with water in channels like snaky chains; a large tree with birds rhyming harmoniously.

One full of colorful tulips; another full of various fruits,

The breeze had spread out an iridescent carpet in the shade of its trees.⁶²

These verses are to be read as poetical textures—sensual, imaginative, harmonious, as if the blessing of creation lies within them. The water sparkles, the birds sing, the wind and the shade restore strength. Springtime brings with it the message of youth, renewal, and blossoming. The

⁵⁹ Solmaz Mohammadzadeh Kive shows that the earlier Persian-writing poet Nizami draws in his "Haft Pakyar" unreachable, perfect gardens which expose the inherent imperfection of the human existence. See Solmaz Mohammadzadeh Kive, "The Other Space of the Persian Garden," in *Polymath: An Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences Journal* 2, no. 3 (Summer 2012): 85–96.

⁶⁰ Ingenito, *Beholding Beauty*, 103: "The bewildering effect of the experience—narrated in a vein that is both ludic and socio-historically abstracted—is akin to the aphasic commotion that Sa'di exposes in his writings when describing the lover's mental or visual access to the beloved's beauty, either as a manifestation of the divine splendor or as an intoxicating catalyst of sexual desire."

⁶¹ Sa'di, *The Gulistan*, 5.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 7.

flowers, red roses, embody desire and beauty, which the poet (associated with the nightingale) is doomed to praise, but in vain.

In the English translation, the political sense of this quote is lost, while in the Persian source, Sa'di writes, "The days of the Roses' rule has arrived"⁶³ (ایام دولت ورد رسیده). A garden is a form of governing and organizing nature. Its forms of sovereignty do not employ dogmatic measures and (institutional) character, but rather the implication of freedom and erotic affinities. In this garden, the friends speak about the beauty of the roses.

At dawn, the friend arrives carrying an armful of flowers and herbs—the beautiful "secrets" of the garden. The poet approaches him with a lesson:

Orchard flowers, as you know, do not last, and the garden has no fidelity. The wise have said, "What does not last is not worthy of attachment (دل بستگی)."

The poor friend asks: "What should be done?" The poet promises him:

I can compose, for the delight of spectators and the enjoyment of those present, a book called Rose Garden, upon the leaves of which the chill wind of autumn will make no inroads and the spring-time harmony of which the vicissitudes of time will never transform into the stridency of autumn.

Of what use to you is a natural rose? Take a leaf from my rose garden.

A rose may last for five or six days, but this garden is always fresh.

Immediately I had said this, he dumped his armful of roses and clung to my skirt, saying, "When a nobleman makes a promise, he keeps it."⁶⁴

Again, we learn that the attempt to collect the garden's flowers, the proper names for the secrets of creation, is doomed to failure. The flower, in its sensual appearance, is a representation of short life. Its true spiritual meaning cannot be delivered but in poetry. The Rose Garden of Sa'di is a poetic representation of divine knowledge, which in itself is irrepresentable.

Poetry, however, while devoting itself to the representation of divine knowledge, God's "secrets," is not deaf to the rhythm of the being, the life of the garden of this world, its cycle of birth and death, attachment and farewell, presence and loss. Sa'di's garden thus represents the theory of the *Golestān*, written in human language, faithful to the measures of man, created in God's name.

EPILOGUE

Let us return to the first picture drawn by Sa'di in his garden. The intoxicating scent of the flowers that blurs the senses is part of the disciplined garden and establishes the "joyful kingdom of roses." The garden serves as a realm of readership, friendship, and sensual eroticism. Reading the *West-Eastern Divan* alongside the *Golestān* enables us to portray a learning tradition in which text and space conflate and shed light on each other, to see how literature flourishes and blooms, and how a garden writes and is being written.

⁶³ Our translation here is based on the reach lexical values this term holds. The adjective دولتی which derived from دولت for example, stands in Steingass' dictionary for, "Rich, fortunate, prosperous, happy; prosperity; royal, belonging to the State." Also, Dekhoda online Lexicon gives a few relevant examples from Persian classical literature. See: https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/steingass_query.py?qs=%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D8%AA&matchtype=default and <https://dekhoda.ut.ac.ir/en/dictionary/153278/%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D8%AA>

⁶⁴ Sa'di, *The Gulistan*, 7.

The way in which the garden transcends language, time, and spaces is made possible thanks to its liminal nature as a penetrable, torn border between culture and nature, the artificial and the wild, sovereignty and freedom. As such, the garden provides us with a realm of reflection on translation, world literature, and ecological thinking of/for our age, by virtue of being a space of encounter, transition, and negotiation between man, God, and the world, and of literature itself. A