Poems of Goethe

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Preface

In the volume *Goethe the Lyrist*, published as No. 16 of this series in 1955, it was stated that another collection of Goethe's shorter poems in English would be attempted if it seemed desirable. The response to the earlier volume has been so cordial on the part of reviewers and many others who have spoken or written words of appreciation, that it appeared proper to prepare the present volume, with emphasis upon the later lyrical output of the poet which is less known in the English-speaking world. Over one-half of the poems here presented are from the last twenty years of Goethe's life. The rest fall into the periods 1769-1777 and 1783-1807.

As in the previous volume, an attempt has been made to exhibit Goethe's versatility. The pure lyric and the thought lyric, the ballad and the idyl, the ode and the dithyramb, the epigram and the elegy, the aphorism and the humorous poem, all find a place, with their widely varying meters, rhythms and themes. If the middle years are less copiously represented, it is because they have found a fuller hearing in *Goethe the Lyrist*.

The principles of translation laid down in the previous volume—careful attention to details of substance, form and style, and to the spirit of the original, as well as simplicity and naturalness of language, so characteristic of Goethe—have been observed in the present volume, too. The feminine rhymes, of which Goethe is very fond, have been retained insofar as it was felt that the genius of the English language would tolerate them. The judicious remarks "On Translating Feminine Rhymes" by Bayard Quincy Morgan in "On Romanticism and the Art of Translation, Studies in Honor of Edwin Hermann Zeydel," edited by Gottfried F. Merkel, Princeton University Press for the University of Cincinnati, 1956, pp. 163 ff., have been kept constantly in mind. The German originals again face the translations, and the Introduction aims to serve as a running commentary on the poems.

The slight debt which these new renderings owe to predecessors can be summed up briefly. I, 2, 5, 6, 7, also IV, 1 and 6 are indebted in very small degree to Bowring. II, 1 and 2 owe one rhyme each to Ludwig Lewisohn's *Goethe, the Story of a*
Man (New York, 1949, I, 296 and 400), while IV, 5 is in a small way beholden both to Lewisohn and to Bayard Q. Morgan’s rendering of one stanza in Karl Viëtor’s Goethe the Poet (Cambridge, Mass., 1949, 169). IV, 2 owes a slight debt to Aytoun-Martin; VI, 6 to Charles Tomlinson in the Oxford edition of Goethe’s Poems and Aphorisms, edited by Friedrich Bruns (New York, 1932), and to Morgan in the Viëtor volume. VI, 16 and 26 are similarly indebted to Morgan in Viëtor.

For the references to musical compositions, sketchy as they necessarily are, I have used the lists of Willi Schuh in vol. II of the Goethe Gedenkausgabe (Zürich, 1949), edited by Ernst Beutler, pp. 665 ff., although Schuh is guilty of serious omissions (e.g. Ethelbert Nevin) and pays no attention to opus and number.

As in Goethe the Lyrist, my introduction is again indebted to Clarence W. Eastman’s Goethe’s Poems (New York, 1941) and to Barker Fairley’s Goethe, Selected Poems (New York, 1955). In addition, Karl Viëtor’s book, referred to above, has been used to advantage, as have Boyd’s Notes.

This will be my last attempt to present shorter poems of Goethe to English-speaking readers. After much thought four poems were omitted for special reasons. “Ilmenau” (1783) on the birthday of Duke Karl August, was left out because of its length and rather biographical character. “Der neue Pausias,” on the advantage of the painter over the poet in reproducing sensual life; “Euphrosyne” on the lawless caprice of death; and “Amyntas,” Goethe’s reply to those who criticised him for taking Christiane as his common-law wife—all of 1797-1798—were discarded because they would have weighed down the volume with too many elegiac distichs.

Again I hope that my efforts will serve to bring Goethe, the lyric poet, a little closer to English-speaking readers.

EDWIN H. ZEYDEL

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