

# Cultural Values in “Das Schenkenbuch” by Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe and Its Relationship to the Malay World and Islam

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## Abstract

This study aims to identify cultural values present in “Das Schenkenbuch” by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. This study uses qualitative analysis through text analysis approach. Data for this study is focused on cultural values where it is obtained through reading, recording and scoring techniques. Data validity was obtained through an appointed intrarater. The results reveal that there are few cultural values conveyed by Goethe in this poem which resonates with 7 cultural elements proposed by Edmund Anderson (1996). Among the elements that were discovered in the poem are values on religion and belief, confidence, value of human practice and the knowledge system is also found in the Malay culture, including the development of human knowledge and community practices. There is no doubt that this poem also contains artistic value that is so subtle and distinctive.

**Keywords:** values; religion; beliefs; practices; society

## Introduction

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (Goethe) was born in Frankfurt am Main, 28 August 1749. His father was Johann Kaspar Goethe (29 July 1710 - 25 May 1782) and his mother was Katharina Elisabeth Textor (19 February 1731 - 15 September 1808). Goethe is known as a great German poet and popular in the history of European literary scholarship. He is also known as a statesman, scientist, and philosopher. Goethe was an important figure in German literature during the era of Neoclassicism and European Romanticism in the late 18th and early 19th centuries (Rötzer, 2002).

His creations show the journey of his life. Goethe’s work is a source of inspiration for music, drama and poetry. On March 22, 1832, Goethe died in Weimar and was buried in the Vault. To date, his name is used for the German Language and Culture Center, the Goethe Institute, around the world. His name is also immortalized as the name of a Goethe University in Frankfurt am Main. Goethe differed from the writers of his contemporaries in terms of the scientific and philosophical principles he espoused. Based on these differences, this study focuses on Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s (Goethe) poem “Das Schenkenbuch” (DS) contains the meeting of two cultures, namely Eastern and Western cultures. DS has a special charm of words because it involves elements of Eastern and Western culture because at the time this poem was written, Goethe had a strong admiration for Eastern culture that was profused with Islam. He considers that there is a midpoint of East -West relations where it is not always Western culture that influences the East, or vice versa. But instead, it is a way of adaptation that these two cultures influence and complement each other.

## Highlights of Past Studies

### Poetry and Cultural Values

The humanities cover the field of literature, culture and the values contained therein. Cultural knowledge leads to the study of the problem of human values as cultured beings. A literary work is an abstract but philosophical thought that uses a certain style of language. The fact is that human beings and cultures are never separated. Where

there are human beings, a culture will inevitably be formed. The impact of literature and culture produces the values of love, happiness, freedom and others that are cultivated by philosophy. In addition, it catalyzes a sense of beauty, pleasure, information, cultural heritage, insight setting and at the same time strengthens the values of humanity, thoughts and feelings (Edmund Anderson, 1996).

### **Das Schenkenbuch and Cultural Values**

The cultural values contained in this poem are interesting if studied with a more specific cultural theory approach. The elements of cultural value in this work will be even clearer if studied with the theory of cultural values of Edmund Anderson (1996) who explains the value through the seven elements of Western and Eastern culture contained in the poem DS. This is because Goethe's work proves that the role that human beings have can determine the pattern of cultural structure. Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1963) explain that culture is composed of patterns of behavior, both explicit and implicit acquired and conveyed through symbols, that form different achievements for particular groups of people.

In the German language, poetry is Lyrik or Gedicht (Kröner Sachwörterbuch, 1969). The essence of poetry does not lie in its formal form. Poetry is a work of literary art. Meanwhile, literary artwork is a branch of art or aesthetics. Culler & Jonathan (1983) state that the aesthetic function is dominant i.e. its powerful art function. Aesthetic elements are such as diction (choice of words), rhythm, and language style (Riffaterre, 1984). Poetry will have poetic elements when it contains aesthetic elements (Culler & Jonathan, 1983). The poet chooses the right words to represent the essence of the story to be presented in a poem. Poetry is a form of literary work that expresses the thoughts and feelings of the poet imaginatively and is arranged with the integration of language within terms of physicality, essence and message (Mohd Affandi, 1992 ; Masuri S.N., 1998).

Basically, poetry always changes with the passage of time and usually a poem has allusions that express something with an implicit meaning. The inconsistency of this expression or implied content according to Riffaterre (1984), is caused by displacing of meaning, distorting of meaning and creating of meaning. Thus it can be explained that,

the fact of poetry is never detached from the function and elements of art, density, and indirect expression through the choice of words that carry a certain meaning according to the audience of its readers.

### **Elements in Poetry Formation**

According to Kristeva (1980), the word poetry comes from the Greek "poesis" which means creation. Freund (2000) refers to the fact that poetry is to replace the content of the poem from the physical or external form of the poem. The content of the poem involves feeling, sense, tone, and intention. Meanwhile, the physical form of poetry consists of diction, the concrete word, figurative language, and sounds that produce rhyme and rhythm (Freud, 2000).

### **Theoretical Foundations**

A document analysis data (text) is presented to obtain qualitative data by collecting cultural lists from the text. Data was analyzed based on the study of Edmund Anderson (1996), which lists cultural elements into seven types, namely the study of religious or belief systems, social organization systems, livelihoods, knowledge & technology and practiced knowledge such as language and art.

### **Problem statement**

Most researchers are impressed with Goethe through his work which is so strange because of the ability to accept and understand the Eastern world while Goethe himself is from Germany, namely from the West. In Malaysia, Goethe may be known by comparative language and literature activists (Arndt Graf, 2009). This paper is an attempt to explain a little of Goethe's perception of the world, especially East Asia, the Malay world.

### **Research Questions**

Goethe has a unique relationship with the Eastern world, proven through his poems adopting the relevant words of the East, Islam and Malay such as the Quran, the names of Allah and Islamic personalities like Yusuf and Zulaikha Hafiz. Therefore, this study focuses on the following research questions:

- 1) How does DS relate to the viewpoint of

the Eastern world culture, particularly the Malay World and Islam?

- 2) Is Goethe's writing in line with the theory of cultural values proposed by Edmund Anderson?

### Research Objective

In general, this study aims to list the cultural values in Goethe's poetry. Specifically, this study aims to list the following:

- 1) DS's relation to the viewpoint of the Eastern world culture, particularly the Malay World and Islam.
- 2) Whether Goethe's work is in line with the theory of cultural values proposed by Edmund Anderson.

### Research Significance

This research aims to elevate the genre of poetry related to the Malay world from the perspective of the European, especially by the German writer. It is hoped that this study can illustrate the extent to which German writers give a positive view of the Malay world as a list of values proposed by Edmund Anderson (1996). It is hoped that this study will be able to increase the number of researchers on Goethe because there are still fewer researchers from Malaysia studying his work.

### Research Limitation

This study only examines Goethe's poem entitled DS (1814-1819). The focus of the study is on the culture and its relationship with the Malay world only because this poem has a style that is brief but mentions the East clearly.

### Methodology

This research employs qualitative method, which is a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or oral words from certain people (authors or authors) and behaviors that can be observed. The approach of the study was text analysis. The data of this research is focused on cultural values for which data are obtained by reading, note taking and scoring techniques. Data validity was obtained through an appointed intrarater.

## Results and Discussion

### 1) Belief System and Religion

This system is concerned with beliefs and concepts which man and God in the Malay world itself cannot be separated from these elements. Through poetry this element is evidenced in the following stanza;

*Wein ist ernstlich untersagt.  
Soll denn doch getrunken sein,  
Trinke nur vom besten Wein:  
Doppelt wärest du ein Ketzer  
In Verdammnis um den Krätzer.  
Solang man nüchtern ist,  
Gefällt das Schlechte;*

**Wine** is seriously prohibited.  
Despite intoxication,  
Drink only the best **wine**:  
You would be a heretic twice  
In damnation for the scabies.  
As long as you are sober  
Like the bad;

A type of fruit called grape is a fruit that can be fermented to become an intoxicating liquor. The result of fermenting the grapes will result in the drink becoming intoxicating and being in the stanza d "Wein" or grapes explains it is something of a negative nature. The Islamic belief that is adopted by most Malays (in Malaysia) explains that the fermented grape causes intoxication. The following is the English translation of verse 67, Surah An-Nahl:

*"And from the fruits of date-palms and grapes, you obtain (date and grape juice) and a goodly provision. Most surely there is a Verse in this for a people who use their intelligence."*

Goethe being in the Western world who professes Christianity. gives a picture of the wealth of insights he has, including ones based on Islam which is practiced by the people of the East. The reprimand by Goethe is found in the following stanza;

*Schenke  
Herr, du hast genug getrunken;  
Nennen dich den wilden Zecher!  
Dichter*

*Sahst du je, daß ich gesunken?*

**Schenke**

*Mahomet verbietet's*

**Waiter**

Sir, you're pretty drunk  
We call you a wild drinker!

**The poet**

Did you ever see that I had drowned?

**Waiter**

Mahomet forbades that.

## 2) Community Organization System

Goethe also incorporated Islamic elements in his work and if observed, this poem seems to give a depiction of the free life of society in Europe. Yet if analyzed from the aspect of literature, in the following stanza, it shows that there is a time and a moment when man is stuck in a circle of error that always leads man towards destruction. Sometimes, people change and realize their mistakes and then make changes.

*Da wird nicht mehr nachgefragt!*

*Wein ist ernstlich untersagt.*

*Soll denn doch getrunken sein,*

*Trinke nur vom besten Wein:*

*Doppelt wärest du ein Ketzer*

*In Verdammnis um den Krätzer.*

*Solang man nüchtern ist,*

*Gefällt das Schlechte;*

*Wie man getrunken hat,*

*Weiß man das Rechte;*

*Nur ist das Übermaß*

*Auch gleich zuhanden;*

*Hafis, o lehre mich,*

*Wie du's verstanden!*

There is no longer any demands!

Wine is seriously prohibited.

Should be drunk after all,

Drink only the best wine:

You would be a heretic

in damnation for the scabies.

As long as you are sober

the longer like the bad;

Like a drunkard,

one knows what is right;

That advantage is

Also ready to hand;

Hafis, teach me

How you understood it!

Hafiz is one of the famous Islamic poets and his life is very simple but he emphasizes the teachings of Islam to practice manners and decency in his society. Hafiz inspired Goethe in the writing of poetry including this poem. This stanza explains that Goethe used Hafiz as a mediator about the teachings of Islam and the community of his followers and took inspiration in the writing of his work.

## 3) Equipment Systems, Technology and Human

The system of equipment, equipment and technology of human life, is a system that exists because humans are able to create things and something new. For example the processing of wine into wine. Examples are as follows;

*Sitz ich allein,*

*Wo kann ich besser sein?*

*Meinen Wein*

*Trink ich allein,*

*Niemand setzt mir Schranken,*

*Ich hab so meine eignen Gedanken.*

I sit alone,

Where can i be better

My wine

I drink alone,

Nobody sets me any barriers

I have my own thoughts.

## 4) Livelihood System

Goethe gives the reader a picture of the work of a society which does not run far from the East or the West. Both societies need to work to sustain life. The occupations of waiters and poets are no strangers in both cultures. Examples are as follows;

**Dichter**

*Schenke, komm! Noch einen Becher!*

**Schenke**

*Herr, du hast genug getrunken;*

*Nennen dich den wilden Zecher!*

**Dichter**

*Sahst du je, daß ich gesunken?*

**Schenke**

*Mahomet verbietet's.*

**Dichter**

*Liebchen!*

*Hört es niemand, will dir's sagen.*

**Schenke**

*Wenn du einmal gerne redest,  
Brauch ich gar nicht viel zu fragen.*

**Poet**

Waiter, come! Another mug!

**Waiter**

Lord, you have drunk enough;  
Call yourself the wild reveler!

**Poet**

Did you ever see that I drown?

**Waiter**

Mahomet forbids it.

**Poet**

Sweetheart!  
Nobody wants to hear what is told to you.

**Waiter**

If you like to talk once  
I don't need to ask a lot.

**5) Knowledge System & Technology and Knowledge**

The knowledge system is the knowledge of nature, the knowledge of the environment, the knowledge of the nature and behavior of fellow human beings, the knowledge of space and time. In this poem there is a system of knowledge related to the nature and behavior of fellow human beings namely in the following stanza;

*Trunken müssen wir alle sein!  
Jugend ist Trunkenheit ohne Wein;  
Trinkt sich das Alter wieder zu Jugend.  
So ist es wundervolle Tugend.  
Für Sorgen sorgt das liebe Leben,  
Und Sorgenbrecher sind die Rehen*

We all have to be drunk!  
Youth is drunkenness without wine;  
Old age drinks back to youth.  
So it is wonderful virtue.  
The dear life takes care of worries,  
And trouble-breakers comes from the vineyard.

It is found that DS portrays the knowledge and influence of Islam in Europe or the knowledge and influence of oriental culture in Europe through a literary perspective.

**6) Art**

The entire poem is a beautiful work that highlights art and art appreciation. Both cultures, East or West, appreciate works of art with the verses of fine language. Easterners, in particular the Malay world, is rich in sugar coated words if you want to criticize things that break the tradition. This is because the Malays are collective in nature and are in the zone or high cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 1997).

**7) Language**

Language is an arbitrary system of sound symbols, used by members of a society to collaborate, interact, and identify themselves. As for the value found in this poem related to language, that is the value of beauty in the style of language. Goethe wrote this poem in a beautiful language. The language is not just simple and unpretentious but meaningful with deep meaning. One example can be seen in the following stanza;

*Laß mich jetzt, geliebter Knabe,  
Mir will nicht die Welt gefallen,  
Nicht der Schein, der Duft der Rose,  
Nicht der Sang der **Nachtigallen**.*

Leave me now, dear boy,  
I don't want to like the world.  
Not the glow, the scent of the rose,  
Not the singing of the **nightingales**.

The interpretation of the stanza is so beautiful but loaded with meaning. Especially the stanza found in the last line which ends with the word *Nachtigallen* or nightingale. This is very distinctive of the Malay culture. These birds often appear at night in the Eastern Townships (Malay) and is said to be able to sing to her partner all night. From the West side, this bird is called *Nightingales* because it often sings at night and during the day. In addition to using the nightingale as a parable, Goethe also uses the word "Eule" or owls, which also is present in the Malay world environment.

**Conclusion**

This poem is a unique poem that describes to the reader about Western culture, but it also brings along the eastern side and with a strong Islamic value that are intertwined with the Malay world. This shows that Goethe was so concerned about

Eastern values that he considered it capable of being a reference for the Western world. The seven values applied in the DS represent Western perspectives (according to Goethe's thoughts) towards Easterners. Thus, this poem shows indirectly that Western society tries to understand the values of Eastern society despite being in a different geographical zone and practicing very different values.

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