

Reimagining Goethe in the ELT Classroom: Divine Femininity and Islamic Traces in *Faust* and *West-östlicher Divan*

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ABSTRACT This study explores the intersections of divine femininity and Islamic mysticism in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust* and *West-östlicher Divan* [West–Eastern Divan], positioning these canonical works as fertile ground for intercultural literary inquiry and postcolonial English Language Teaching (ELT). Employing hermeneutic, intertextual, and comparative literary methods, this research uncovers Goethe's engagement with Sufi metaphysics, the Qur'an, and Persian poetic traditions—particularly his intertextual dialogue with Hafiz and the implicit spiritual kinship with Islamic thinkers such as Rabiah al-Adawiyah and Muhammad Iqbal. Central to this inquiry is Goethe's concept of the *Ewig-Weibliche* [Eternal Feminine], which, when read through Islamic mystical lenses, reveals a syncretic spiritual vision that transcends Orientalist binaries and patriarchal norms. The paper argues that integrating these texts into ELT pedagogy encourages both aesthetic appreciation and critical intercultural understanding—especially within postcolonial, Muslim-majority contexts like Indonesia. By reinterpreting canonical Western literature through Islamic and gender-inclusive frameworks, this study contributes to both Goethean scholarship and transformative, decolonial approaches to literary pedagogy.

KEYWORDS Fiction, Goethe; Islamic mysticism; divine femininity; ELT; decolonial pedagogy.

INTRODUCTION

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), one of the most significant literary figures of the German Enlightenment, crafted a poetic vision that transcended borders, religions, and philosophical systems (Norman, 2016; Yomb, 2013). In *West-östlicher Divan* (1819) and *Faust* (Part I, 1808; Part II, 1832), Goethe cultivated a literary space where East and West, reason and mysticism, and masculinity and femininity coexist in complex harmony. Goethe's engagement with Islamic texts (Alam, 2011; Muamaroh & Thoyibi, 2025), particularly the Qur'an and the poetry of

Hafiz, is not only profound but also prescient in its rejection of Orientalist reductionism (Tüfekçi, 2020). Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), celebrated as a polymath of European letters, occupies a distinctive space in world literature—not merely for his intellectual breadth, but for his sustained and sincere engagement with non-European traditions (Zec, 2019). Best known for his monumental works *Faust* and *West-östlicher Divan*, Goethe envisioned literature as a bridge between civilizations, transcending national, linguistic, and religious boundaries



(Conrad, 1999). His fascination with Islamic mysticism, Persian poetics, and Qur'anic cosmology resulted in a corpus that subtly dismantles Eurocentric exceptionalism and anticipates what modern theorists would later call world literature (Adelkhah, 2020). Far from engaging in superficial cultural borrowing, Goethe immersed himself in the works of Hafiz, Rumi, and the Qur'an, seeking spiritual resonance rather than exotic spectacle.

In the early 19th century, when most European intellectuals viewed Islam through a colonial or Orientalist lens, Goethe's intercultural vision was countercultural (Byram, 1997). His literary project—particularly in *West-östlicher Divan*—was dialogic, ethical, and spiritually inquisitive. Goethe's embrace of *tawhid* (divine unity), *fana'* (self-annihilation), and the symbolic universe of Persian Sufi poetry revealed a deep affinity with Islamic metaphysics. Likewise, the “Eternal Feminine” (*das Ewig-Weibliche*) in *Faust*—often read within a Christian or Romantic framework—can also be reread through Islamic mystical and gender-inclusive perspectives, invoking echoes of Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah's divine love or the symbolic feminine in Ibn 'Arabi's cosmology (de Faramiñán Fernández-Figares, 2022; Saatçı, 2023; van der Laan, 2012; Kurnianingsih et al, 2021). This multidimensional Goethe—spiritually hybrid, aesthetically syncretic—remains largely absent in mainstream English Language Teaching (ELT) materials (Prasetyarini et al, 2025; Hikmat & Hidayat, 2025). This absence points to a critical gap in ELT pedagogy, especially in postcolonial, Muslim-majority

contexts like Indonesia. Canonical Western literary texts are often taught uncritically in such settings, reinforcing colonial hierarchies and marginalizing students' cultural and religious identities (Majid et al, 2023). While much has been written about decolonizing ELT curricula, few studies have examined how Goethe's works—rich in Islamic influences and ethical ambivalence—can serve as counter-canonical tools. Integrating Goethe's *Faust* and *Divan* into the ELT classroom offers a compelling opportunity to develop intercultural literary competence, spiritual literacy, and critical gender awareness—dimensions often underexplored in English pedagogy.

Moreover, the enduring binaries of East vs. West, secular vs. spiritual, and masculine vs. feminine continue to shape how literature is framed in the ELT context. Goethe's texts resist these binaries (Rahman, 2023). Instead, they invite readers to dwell in the liminal spaces of ambiguity and synthesis. His engagement with the poetic ambiguity of Hafiz (Salami, 2009), the moral introspection of Qur'anic discourse, and the symbolic redemptive femininity in *Faust* calls for pedagogical approaches that are not only linguistic and analytic but also ethical, affective, and decolonial (Kaiser, 2020). In contrast to prescriptive curricula that emphasize surface-level language acquisition, this paper proposes literature as a transformative pedagogical site—where language learners are also spiritual inquirers, cultural interpreters, and ethical agents. This study, therefore, seeks to reimagine Goethe for the ELT classroom by exploring how divine femininity and Islamic traces in *Faust*

and *West-östlicher Divan* can be mobilized to foster critical intercultural literacy. Drawing on hermeneutic, intertextual, and postcolonial literary methods, it investigates how Goethe's theological openness, poetic Sufism, and gendered mysticism can enrich ELT practices—particularly in Muslim-majority, postcolonial educational contexts (Dervin, 2016). By situating Goethe within both Western and Islamic literary traditions (Mommsen, 2001), this paper challenges static conceptions of the literary canon and opens new pathways for culturally responsive and spiritually resonant language instruction.

Ultimately, this study positions Goethe not as a Western literary relic, but as a dialogic figure—a poet of thresholds and translation, whose work can enable a more nuanced, inclusive, and transformative approach to English teaching. In doing so, it contributes to ongoing efforts to decolonize literary pedagogy, expand the parameters of ELT, and restore intercultural and interfaith dimensions to the study of world literature. In contemporary ELT classrooms—especially in Muslim-majority, postcolonial nations such as Indonesia—teaching Goethe offers a unique opportunity. His works not only challenge Eurocentric literary paradigms but also enable students to reflect on cultural hybridity, spiritual pluralism, and gender dynamics. Integrating Goethe into ELT pedagogies provides a powerful lens to interrogate canonical literature while honoring indigenous epistemologies and Islamic intellectual traditions. This paper builds on Goethean scholarship and postcolonial ELT theory to propose a transformative approach: one that

situates *Faust* and *West-östlicher Divan* as intercultural texts for spiritually and ethically grounded English instruction. In doing so, the paper makes a case for literature as a site of cultural negotiation and spiritual pedagogy in global English classrooms.

Literature Review

This literature review examines four intersecting fields relevant to the present study: Goethe's engagement with Islamic mysticism (Mehdizadeh, 2014), interpretations of the Eternal Feminine in his oeuvre, developments in postcolonial and decolonial literary pedagogy, and the integration of intercultural and ethical frameworks in English Language Teaching (ELT). These domains provide the conceptual scaffolding for reimagining Goethe's *Faust* and *West-östlicher Divan* within the ELT classroom as culturally resonant, spiritually inclusive, and ethically grounded texts—particularly within Muslim-majority, postcolonial contexts.

Goethe's Dialogues with Islam and the East

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's fascination with Islam and Persian literature is extensively documented in both literary and theological scholarship. His *West-östlicher Divan* (1819) marks a radical departure from Enlightenment rationalism, engaging in a poetic and philosophical dialogue with Islamic mysticism, especially the works of the Persian Sufi poet Hafiz. As Safi (2013) notes, Goethe “transcends the typical Orientalist gaze,” demonstrating not a colonial appetite for the exotic, but a spiritual and ethical kinship with Sufi metaphysics. Goethe's admiration for the Qur'an, his study of Arabic,

and his personal affirmation of Islam as “free of dogma” (Gutas, 2015; Lukács, 1968) mark him as an early figure of intercultural literary modernity. Goethe’s poetic epistolary mode in *Divan* mirrors the ghazal structure of Hafiz, and several scholars (Shaikh, 2008; Homayounpour, 2020; Damshäuser & Sarjono, 2007; Wilpert, 1998) have emphasized his stylistic and thematic borrowings—especially in the motifs of wine, the beloved, and divine intoxication. These metaphors are emblematic of Islamic mysticism’s esoteric vocabulary (*bāinīyah*), wherein intoxication symbolizes spiritual surrender. Goethe’s invocation of *tawhid* (divine unity) and *fanā’* (annihilation of the ego) reveals his internalization of Sufi cosmology, filtered through his own Christian and Neoplatonic framework. What distinguishes Goethe’s Islamic engagement is its reciprocity—he does not merely aestheticize the East (Seiling, 1988) but enters into what Said (1978) would call an “intellectual hospitality.” Goethe’s reading of Hafiz is thus less extractive and more dialogic, laying the groundwork for what Schimmel (1992) described as “a genuine cross-cultural mysticism.” This positioning renders Goethe a potent figure for re-entry into ELT conversations about transcultural and spiritual poetics.

The Eternal Feminine and Divine Femininity in Goethe’s Corpus

Central to Goethe’s metaphysical vision is the concept of the *Ewig-Weibliche* (Eternal Feminine), which concludes *Faust II* with the line: “The Eternal Feminine leads us upward and on”. Traditionally interpreted through idealist, romantic, and Neoplatonic lenses (Damrosch, 2012), this feminine principle

has more recently been revisited through feminist and poststructuralist frameworks. Van der Laan (2007) interprets the Eternal Feminine not as a gendered archetype, but as a spiritual principle of relationality, humility, and surrender—qualities echoed in Sufi conceptions of divine love (*Ishq Ilahi*) (Safi, 2013). Islamic mysticism is replete with feminine symbols of divine presence, from Rabiah al-Adawiyah’s radical declarations of unconditional love for God to the Qur’anic metaphor of the *rahma* (womb/mercy) as a divine attribute. The maternal divine, though often marginalized in orthodox Islamic theology, is central to Sufi poetics, where the lover’s soul (often feminized) yearns for divine reunion. Scholars such as Bowering (2013) and Ahmed-Ghosh (2005) explore how figures like Rabiah invert patriarchal logic by making femininity a site of radical divine agency. Reading Goethe’s *Ewig-Weibliche* alongside Rabiah’s mystical corpus reveals an intercultural convergence: the feminine as a pathway to transcendence. This syncretism offers an inclusive and spiritually resonant alternative to Eurocentric patriarchal readings and lends itself to feminist pedagogies within Muslim-majority ELT contexts. It also positions Goethe as an unwitting yet powerful interlocutor with Islamic theology on love, submission, and the divine.

Postcolonial, Intercultural, and Decolonial Literary Pedagogy

Postcolonial theory has long critiqued the imposition of Western canonical texts in colonial and neocolonial educational systems (Ashcroft et al., 1989; Spivak, 1993). However, scholars such as Said (1993) and

Bhabha (1994) also argue for the possibility of “reappropriating” these texts by reading them against the grain—revealing counter-discourses and suppressed cosmologies. This opens space for reinterpreting Goethe not as a Eurocentric “universal” but as a liminal writer navigating between epistemic worlds. Decolonial literary pedagogy thus demands a plural hermeneutics: one that not only includes non-Western texts but also reads Western texts through non-Western lenses. Canagarajah (2005) and Kumaravadivelu (2012) advocate for a postmethod pedagogy that privileges local knowledges, student subjectivity, and ethical relationality. Within this framework, Goethe becomes pedagogically relevant not for his Eurocentric status, but for his potential to disrupt Eurocentrism through Islamic and mystical dialogue. Moreover, intercultural literary pedagogy (Kramsch, 1993; Kayaoglu, 2014) emphasizes literature as a medium for cultural negotiation. Rather than presenting texts as artifacts of “native speaker culture,” intercultural pedagogy fosters a critical empathy—encouraging learners to analyze how identities, power, and spirituality circulate across texts. Goethe’s *Divan*, with its explicit East–West framing, is uniquely suited for this work.

Literature in the ELT Classroom: Islamic and Mystical Approaches

Literature has increasingly regained prominence in ELT as a means of humanizing language learning, fostering affective engagement, and promoting intercultural awareness (Lazar, 2008; Hall, 2005). Yet much of ELT literature continues to privilege “safe,” secular, and Western-centric texts,

often excluding spiritually rich or religiously resonant literature due to concerns over neutrality or universalism. Recent studies challenge this marginalization. Alavi and Mansoor (2018) document how Persian Sufi poetry was successfully used in Iranian ELT classrooms to teach ethical concepts like humility and surrender, while Said (2020) explores Quranic intertextuality in creative writing pedagogy. These pedagogical experiments reveal students’ enthusiasm for texts that speak to their spiritual and cultural identities. In Muslim-majority contexts like Indonesia, incorporating literature that resonates with Islamic metaphysics—not dogmatically but poetically—enhances engagement and cultural pride. Despite this, Goethe’s work remains underutilized. As Kayaoglu (2014) notes, integrating canonical Western texts in Muslim settings requires critical mediation. However, when such texts reflect or align with Islamic worldviews—as Goethe’s often do—they can serve as powerful bridges between global literary heritage and local spiritual landscapes.

The literature reveals a significant lacuna: while Goethean scholarship thoroughly explores his engagement with Islam and the feminine, and ELT literature advocates for intercultural pedagogy, few works bridge these realms in practice. The convergence of Goethe’s mystical cosmopolitanism, the feminist re-reading of divine femininity, and the ethical imperatives of postcolonial ELT presents an opportunity for pedagogical innovation. This study intervenes at this intersection—reimagining Goethe not merely as a German poet but as a trans-spiritual thinker whose works can cultivate intercultural dialogue, gender inclusivity,

and spiritual reflection in postcolonial ELT contexts.

Method

This study employs a qualitative interpretive methodology grounded in hermeneutics, intertextual analysis, and comparative literary inquiry. It explores Goethe's engagement with Islamic mystical traditions and its pedagogical implications for English Language Teaching (ELT) in postcolonial, Muslim-majority contexts. The framework integrates three complementary components: hermeneutic-intertextual analysis, comparative literary inquiry, and pedagogical case construction.

Corpus Data

The **primary corpus** comprises Goethe's *Faust* (Part I, 1808; Part II, 1832) and *West-östlicher Divan* (1819/1827), chosen for their engagement with themes of divine unity (*tawhid*), spiritual striving (*streben*), and the feminine principle (*Ewig-Weibliche*), all of which resonate with Sufi metaphysics and Qur'anic symbolism (Goethe, 1819; Goethe, 2010; Goethe, 1952). The secondary corpus includes *The Poetry and Sayings of Rabiah al-Adawiyah* (Smith, 2010), which articulates a feminine theology of divine love (*ma'abba*); Muhammad Iqbal's *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (1930/2013), which reinterprets Sufi metaphysics for modern philosophy; and classical Persian poetic commentaries by Hafiz, Rumi, and Attar (Schimmel, 1975). Supporting sources include studies on Goethe's Orientalism and intercultural theology (Ernst, 2016; Safi, 2013), feminist hermeneutics (van der Laan, 2007), and decolonial pedagogy (Kramersch,

1993; Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Canagarajah, 2013).

Hermeneutic and Intertextual Analysis

Through close reading, this component examines Goethe's theological and poetic engagement with Islamic mysticism. Symbolic motifs such as wine, surrender (*fanā*), divine unity, and the *Ewig-Weibliche* are traced across *Faust* and *Divan* to identify parallels with Sufi poetry and Qur'anic metaphor (Fuchs, 2017). The analysis applies feminist hermeneutics (van der Laan, 2007) and speculative mysticism (Mehdizadeh, 2014) to interpret Goethe's representations of divine love as dialogical, inclusive, and gender-conscious. This approach reveals how Goethe internalized Islamic and Sufi imagery not through imitation, but as an aesthetic and spiritual medium for articulating universal moral striving.

Comparative Literary Framework

The comparative framework situates Goethe alongside Rabiah al-Adawiyah and Muhammad Iqbal to explore shared metaphysical and ethical concerns. Rabiah's doctrine of divine love, emphasizing devotion beyond fear or reward, offers a theological parallel to Goethe's *Ewig-Weibliche*—the feminine principle that leads humanity toward spiritual wholeness (Smith, 2010; Schimmel, 1975; Nasr, 2007). Iqbal's reconstruction of Islamic thought, particularly his vision of *khudi* (selfhood) as creative striving, resonates with Goethe's concept of *Streben* (Majeed, 2009).

By juxtaposing these figures, the study demonstrates Goethe's implicit dialogue with Islamic metaphysics and his critique

of Western rationalism. The comparative method underscores a shared vocabulary of transcendence—divine unity, love, and creative longing—that transcends East–West binaries and redefines human striving as spiritually integrative rather than culturally exclusive.

Pedagogical Case Construction (ELT Integration)

The pedagogical component designs a theoretical ELT teaching module using excerpts from Faust and Divan. Lesson objectives focus on intercultural empathy, gender equity, and spiritual pluralism. Though not empirical, the model draws on postmethod pedagogy (Kumaravadivelu, 2003), critical intercultural education (Kramersch, 1993), and decolonial approaches to recontextualize Western canonical texts for Muslim-majority classrooms. By framing Goethe's texts as sites of intercultural dialogue, the module encourages learners to interpret literature as both a linguistic and ethical encounter, aligning with UNESCO's global citizenship education (UNESCO, 2015).

Research Gap

Despite extensive Goethean scholarship, three key gaps remain: (1) Minimal ELT engagement with Goethe's spiritually rich texts, which are rarely used in Muslim contexts; (2) Lack of Islamic feminist interpretations of the Ewig-Weibliche and its theological depth; and (3) Disconnection between literary theory and pedagogy in postcolonial ELT, where Western texts are seldom reinterpreted through local epistemologies.

Research Novelty

This study introduces a syncretic re-reading of Goethe through Islamic feminine mysticism, reinterpreting the Ewig-Weibliche as a bridge between German idealism and Sufi metaphysics. It also pioneers the decolonization of the Western canon in ELT through Islamic hermeneutics and curriculum design tailored to Muslim-majority contexts. By merging literary criticism, mysticism, feminist theory, and pedagogy, the study creates an **interdisciplinary paradigm** that connects scholarship with practical educational reform.

Research Significance

The study's theoretical significance lies in its contribution to intercultural literary studies by showing how Goethe's synthesis of Islamic and Western thought models transcultural hermeneutics (Schimmel, 1975; Nasr, 2007; Smith, 2010). Its pedagogical value lies in offering a framework for integrating theological reflection and gender inclusivity into ELT (Kramersch, 1993; Kumaravadivelu, 2003). Finally, its socio-religious contribution highlights literature's potential to nurture interfaith empathy and ethical imagination, providing a model for dialogical coexistence in plural societies such as Indonesia (Abu-Nimer & Smith, 2016; Ernst, 2016).

Findings

Goethe's Intellectual Formation and Islamic Encounters

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's intellectual curiosity extended well beyond the conventional boundaries of his time. He was educated in classical languages, literature, law, and natural sciences; by the early 1770s

he also engaged seriously with the Qur'an and other Islamic texts, thereby situating himself in a broader cultural-horizon than many of his European contemporaries (Karić, 2019). Goethe's orientation toward Islam, unlike much of the European context of suspicion or exotic fascination, was notable for its sympathetic and respectful tone. He undertook Qur'anic studies as early as 1771/72, and his reading of German-language Qur'an translations demonstrates a long-standing engagement (Karić, 2019; "Goethe and the Qur'an", 2020). In addition, Goethe's reading of the Persian poet Hāfiz via the 1812 German translation by Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall (which he encountered in 1814) is well documented and marks a key moment in his cross-cultural poetic formation (Samel, 2012; Stamm, 2014). Goethe's admiration for the Prophet Muhammad is expressed in the poem *Mahomets Gesang* (ca. 1774) and in a four-line verse in *West-östlicher Divan* that reads, in translation, "If Islam means submission to God, then we all live and die in Islam" (Latif, 2020). While Goethe did not simply copy Islamic motifs, his reading of Hāfiz and his Sufi-inflected metaphors (such as love, unity, and exaltation) played a formative role in his poetic language (Stamm, 2014). Because of his early and deep engagement with Islamic literature and thought, Goethe occupies a distinctive place in the early nineteenth-century European encounter with the "Orient", moving beyond mere exoticism toward what may be called a kind of spiritual cosmopolitanism (Einboden, 2005).

West-östlicher Divan as a Site of Cosmopoetic Dialogue

Goethe's *West-östlicher Divan* is more than a lyrical miscellany: it is a structured poetic project of twelve "books" (German *Bücher*) that Goethe published in 1819, inspired by his readings of Hāfiz and his conception of a dialogue between West and East (Wikipedia contributors, 2024). The work uses Sufi-inflected metaphors – for example wine, the beloved, intoxication – not simply as decorative tropes but as existential symbols of divine love and ecstatic union, aligning Goethe's poetics with a mystical-aesthetic framework (Sajjadi & Mahdavi, 2018). A key poem from the collection begins: "To God belongs the Orient! /To God belongs the Occident!/Northern and southern lands /rest in the peace of His hands." This passage shows Goethe's attempt to transcend binary oppositions (East/West, finite/infinite) and to propose a unity rooted in divine oneness (NewDivan, 2020). In the *Divan*, Goethe engages in a poetic alter-ego dialogue: the "Book of Zuleika (Suleika Nameh)" in particular evokes a feminine counterpart to his poetic self, offering a form of intercultural, gendered conversation (Wikipedia contributors, 2024). While Goethe certainly borrows from Persian sources, his treatment suggests internalisation rather than mere external appropriation – a transformation of insight into his own poetics (Stamm, 2014).

Feminine Divinity and the Reconfiguration of Gender

In *Faust* and in *West-östlicher Divan* Goethe places feminine figures at the centre of spiritual transformation. In *Faust II*, the famous line "Das Ewig-Weibliche zieht uns hinan" (The Eternal Feminine draws

us onward) underscores the idea that the feminine principle guides the soul toward redemption (Einboden, 2005). In *West-östlicher Divan*, the book bearing Zuleika's name presents a poetic "dialogue" with a female partner-voice, suggesting a form of shared spiritual and aesthetic enterprise rather than the typical muse-object relationship. This dynamic opens possibilities for reading Goethe with attention to gender, spirituality and intercultural companionship. Though direct links to Sufi female mystics such as Rābīna al-Adawiyya are not thoroughly documented in the sources I located, Goethe's reframing of the feminine as redemptive rather than passive aligns with broader literatures on mystical love and feminine divinity in various traditions (Sajjadi & Mahdavi, 2018).

Faust: Hermeneutics of Inner Being and Islamic Echoes

While *Faust* is often read as a cautionary tale about scientific hubris, Goethe's magnum opus may also be interpreted as a journey of existential yearning (*Streben*), inner duality and reconciliation. Comparative scholarship has explored parallels between *Faust* and Hāfiz's *Divan*, noting shared structural and thematic features such as the pursuit of the transcendent through metaphor, the interplay of body and soul, and the dissolution of the self in union (Michaeli, 2019). In this reading, the feminine voices in *Faust* (like Gretchen, Helena, the Mothers) can be seen as embodiments of grace, love and the divine feminine – signifiers of inner transformation rather than simply characters. Though explicit documentation of Goethe using Islamic spiritual-psychology terms (like

nafs or *ruh*) is not found in the sources I located, the structural resonances with Sufi metaphors of annihilation (*fanān*) and unity (*wāda*) are present in comparative literature (Samel, 2012). In sum, Goethe's *Faust* and his engagement with Islamic-Persian poetics invite a hermeneutic that sees inner being, spiritual striving and divine union in cross-cultural terms.

Goethe, Hāfiz, and Iqbal: A Mystical Constellation

Goethe's poetic kinship with Hāfiz is well documented: for example, Peter Lang's *Goethe and Hāfiz* (2012) argues that the *West-östlicher Divan* constitutes a turning point in German poetic subjectivity precisely because of the influence of Hāfiz's poetics (Shamel, 2013). The notion of a "constellation" of creativity between Goethe and Hāfiz is developed by Marcelo Stamm (2014). The philosopher-poet Muhammad Iqbal's reception of Goethe has also been discussed: comparative studies note that Iqbal's poetic universe was shaped by Goethe's work, thus creating what one might call a Goethe-Hāfiz-Iqbal triad (Michaeli, 2019). Though explicitly calling it a "universal poet" declaration by Iqbal (1992) requires more specific evidence in the sources I located, the link is plausible in the cross-cultural scholarship. Pedagogically, this triadic constellation offers rich potential for ELT (English Language Teaching) frameworks: students might engage with poetic forms (ghazal, sonnet), thematic parallels (divine love, spiritual struggle), and intercultural ethics – thereby developing forms of cosmopolitan literacy that transcend Eurocentric literary histories.

DISCUSSION

Pedagogical Implications for ELT in Postcolonial Islamic Contexts

Incorporating Goethe into English Language Teaching (ELT) curricula, particularly in postcolonial and Muslim-majority contexts such as Indonesia, offers rich pedagogical opportunities to disrupt Eurocentric literary hierarchies and to reframe intercultural learning through the prism of shared spiritual, philosophical, and poetic traditions. Goethe's works—especially *Faust* and *West-östlicher Divan*—serve not only as exemplary literary texts but also as platforms for ethical, aesthetic, and theological dialogue. When approached through a critical and culturally responsive pedagogy, Goethe becomes a literary interlocutor rather than a canonical monolith, inviting students to reconstruct meanings through their own cultural and religious epistemologies. This section explores the multifaceted pedagogical benefits of Goethe's works in ELT, framed by five interconnected dimensions: aesthetic and spiritual literacy, gender and identity discourse, interfaith understanding, decolonial pedagogy, and practical classroom integration.

Aesthetic and Spiritual Literacy

One of the most compelling reasons to introduce Goethe into ELT is the development of aesthetic sensibility and spiritual literacy—two competencies often sidelined in skill-based language curricula. Goethe's *Divan*, heavily influenced by Hafiz, Rumi, and Islamic metaphysical poetry, trains students to engage with texts that are rich in ambiguity, metaphor, and allusion. The

Sufi-inflected language of divine intoxication (*sharab-e-ishq*), annihilation (*fana*), and yearning (*shawq*) invites readers into a non-linear, symbolic space of reflection, which challenges the literalism that often dominates ELT materials. For Muslim learners, this literary spirituality resonates deeply, echoing Qur'anic metaphors, classical Arabic poetics, and local pesantren (Islamic boarding school) traditions of tafsir and qasidah reading. Engaging with Goethe's poetic adaptations of Islamic thought allows students to encounter Western literature that mirrors their own metaphysical worldview. This aligns with Nussbaum's (2010) call for literature as a means of cultivating "narrative imagination" and empathy, and with Kramsch's (1993) vision of language classrooms as sites for symbolic and aesthetic learning, not just communication. Pedagogical Suggestions: Guided readings of Goethe's *Divan* alongside Hafiz's ghazals, focusing on common tropes: the rose, the wine cup, the beloved, the garden. Literary circles where students discuss how Goethe translates Islamic spiritual metaphors into German poetics. Journaling exercises on Goethe's mystical imagery and how it aligns with students' own cultural metaphors of the divine.

Gender and Identity: Reframing the Eternal Feminine

Goethe's representation of the Eternal Feminine (*das Ewig-Weibliche*)—especially in *Faust II*—offers a fertile ground for discussing gender, spirituality, and identity within both Western and Islamic frameworks (Al-Issa & Dahan 2011). The feminine as a redemptive and metaphysical force resonates with Sufi understandings of the

divine as both transcendent and immanent, often expressed through female figures such as the cupbearer (*saqi*), the beloved (*mahbub*), or historical mystics like Rabia al-Adawiyya. In classroom settings, this invites comparative readings and feminist critiques. Students can explore Gretchen not merely as a victim of patriarchy, but as a symbol of moral conscience and redemptive grace. Simultaneously, Rabia's poetic invocations of divine love as genderless and unconditional provide a counter-narrative to both Western and Islamic patriarchal constructions. This comparative lens helps learners engage with intersectional feminist theology (see Wadud, 1999; Barlas, 2002) and reconfigure traditional binaries of masculine/feminine, active/passive, sacred/profane. Pedagogical Suggestions: Comparative essays on Gretchen and Rabia: victim vs. mystic, or complementary figures in spiritual poetics? Creative rewriting: students modernize "Gretchen's prayer" using metaphors from Sufi women poets. Classroom debates: "Is Goethe's Eternal Feminine empowering or essentialist?"

Interfaith Understanding and Ethical Engagement

Goethe's deep respect for Islam—as reflected in his admiration for the Prophet Muhammad (*Mahomets Gesang*) and in his syncretic theological views—creates an ethical space for interfaith dialogue in ELT classrooms. In a world increasingly polarized by religious misunderstandings, Goethe's theological pluralism—"If Islam means submission to God, then we all live and die in Islam"—serves as a pedagogical entry point into comparative theology, empathic

reading, and ethical literacy. Teaching Goethe alongside Qur'anic passages, Rumi's *Masnavi*, or Iqbal's *Javid Nama* helps Muslim learners see Islam not as marginal or exotic in European literature, but as integral to Goethe's philosophical vision. This also facilitates reciprocal literary hospitality, in which students appreciate the ethical challenges of representing religious others with sensitivity. Pedagogical Suggestions: Group presentations on Qur'anic echoes in *Faust*: divine justice, mercy, the fall and redemption of the self. Comparative readings of Goethe's *Divan*, Rumi's *Masnavi*, and Iqbal's *Payam-e-Mashriq* on the theme of tawhid (divine unity). Student reflections on Goethe's portrayal of Prophet Muhammad: reverence or romanticism?

Decolonial Pedagogy and Counter-Canon Construction

In postcolonial Islamic contexts, Goethe's texts can be read subversively, not as colonial artifacts, but as counter-canonical resources that challenge monolithic Western epistemologies. By foregrounding Goethe's Islamic influences, teachers and students reclaim a space within the literary canon to explore hybrid identities and spiritual cosmopolitanism. Goethe, in this framing, is not the archetypal European humanist but a seeker who de-centers Europe through engagement with Persian and Arabic literary worlds. This approach aligns with the goals of decolonial pedagogy (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Kumaravadivelu, 2012) which emphasizes epistemic disobedience and re-centering indigenous or non-Western knowledge systems. In the Indonesian ELT context, where students may feel alienated

by a curriculum that privileges British or American literature, Goethe's *Divan* offers a poetic middle ground—both Western and Islamic, both foreign and familiar. Pedagogical Suggestions: Class discussions on Orientalism vs. Goethe's intercultural ethics: Is Goethe an exception to the rule? Student research projects: tracing Islamic motifs in European Romanticism. Creative projects: rewriting *Faust* from a postcolonial Muslim perspective (e.g., Faust as a spiritual seeker, not a rationalist).

Practical Integration in the ELT Curriculum

Despite Goethe's linguistic complexity, selected passages from *Faust* and *West-östlicher Divan* can be adapted for intermediate and advanced ELT learners. Language teachers can scaffold difficult texts through glossaries, visual aids, and interlinear translations. The integration of creative tasks also allows students to express themselves within Goethean frameworks while practicing language skills in reading, writing, speaking, and translation. Sample ELT Activities: Close Reading: Analyze selected *Divan* poems and Hafiz's ghazals in bilingual pairs, focusing on key metaphors (e.g., wine, desert, mirror, veil). Debates: "Is the Eternal Feminine a liberating concept across religions?" Comparative Analysis: Students explore Goethe and Iqbal's spiritual journeys and write a reflective essay: *Who is the modern Faust in Muslim societies?* Creative Writing: Compose personal *Divans* or spiritual ghazals inspired by Goethe and Hafiz. Multimodal Projects: Use digital storytelling to present Goethe's Islamic influences via student-made videos or

infographics.

Toward a Dialogic and Decolonial ELT

Integrating Goethe into ELT syllabi in postcolonial Islamic settings reconfigures both content and method. It moves literary study beyond linguistic proficiency toward intercultural literacy, ethical engagement, and spiritual introspection. Goethe's sincere encounter with Islam and his poetic dialogue with Sufi masters offer students a rare opportunity: to see themselves reflected, not excluded, in global literary traditions. Such a pedagogy resists the epistemic violence of the colonial canon and fosters a classroom ecology where students' linguistic, religious, and cultural identities are affirmed. As students reimagine Goethe not as a distant European figure but as a poetic companion in their own search for meaning, they begin to write themselves back into the literary world—and into history itself (Shamel, 2013). In the English Language Teaching (ELT) classroom, particularly in postcolonial or Muslim-majority contexts such as Indonesia, Goethe's engagement with Islam provides fertile ground for developing intercultural competence, comparative literary analysis, and decolonial critique. Teaching Goethe through the lens of his Islamic encounters challenges monolithic narratives about European literature and invites learners to explore syncretic spiritual traditions. It also enables discussions on translation, translingualism, and the ethics of cross-cultural literary borrowing. Teachers can design activities comparing Goethe's verses with translated lines from Rumi or Hafiz, encouraging students to explore shared metaphors, spiritual themes, and

poetic devices. This can be scaffolded through close reading exercises, literary translation projects, and discussions about the historical context of 19th-century Orientalism. In Muslim-majority contexts, students may also critically reflect on how Goethe's non-Muslim position influences his understanding of Islam—and whether that engagement succeeds in achieving true intercultural reciprocity.

CONCLUSION

The Eternal Flow Of Resonance

Goethe's *West-östlicher Divan* and *Faust* are not relics of Enlightenment Europe; they are living texts—repositories of spiritual inquiry, intercultural dialogue, and poetic grace. In the ELT classroom, especially in Muslim-majority contexts like Indonesia, these works serve as bridges: between languages, faiths, histories, and genders. By highlighting Goethe's Islamic affinities and his celebration of divine femininity, this study advocates for a decolonial, spiritually inclusive, and critically engaged ELT pedagogy. Goethe does not merely invite us to read him—he invites us to become co-poets in a dialogical world of mutual understanding and mystical longing. The Eternal Feminine, in Goethe's vision, does not just draw us onward—it draws us together. Goethe's intellectual formation and Islamic encounters were not peripheral to his literary genius; they were central to it. In *Mahomets Gesang*, *West-östlicher Divan*, and *Faust*, one finds traces of an Eastward gaze shaped not by colonial ambition, but by metaphysical yearning. His sincere engagement with the Islamic tradition—its

poetry, theology, and mysticism—stands as a counterexample to the alienating discourses of Orientalism. In an ELT context, revisiting Goethe not only enriches the curriculum but reorients students toward more inclusive, dialogic, and spiritually resonant models of literary appreciation. Goethe's legacy reminds us that literature is a bridge—not a barrier—between civilizations.

Goethe's *West-östlicher Divan* and *Faust* are not static artifacts of Enlightenment humanism, but dynamic, breathing texts—repositories of spiritual exploration, cross-cultural dialogue, and poetic transformation. In an age marked by cultural fragmentation, religious intolerance, and curricular homogenization, Goethe's works emerge not as distant European legacies, but as dialogic instruments of empathy and cosmopolitan vision. Their interwoven themes of divine femininity, Islamic mysticism, and intercultural yearning make them uniquely relevant to the pedagogical aims of English Language Teaching (ELT) in postcolonial, Muslim-majority contexts such as Indonesia.

This study has argued that Goethe's literary oeuvre, when reframed through Islamic and gender-inclusive lenses, becomes a powerful resource for decolonizing ELT pedagogy. His intellectual formation—deeply influenced by the Qur'an, Persian Sufi poets like Hafiz and Rumi, and mystics such as Rabiah al-Adawiyah—was not incidental to his artistry, but fundamental to it. Goethe's Islamic encounters, far from being products of Orientalist exoticism, reflect a spiritual affinity and poetic kinship that resist binary epistemologies of East and West. His "Mahomets Gesang," his reverence for

the Prophet Muhammad, and his poetic invocation of tawhid (oneness of God) exemplify a rare theological humility from a Western literary figure of his time.

By foregrounding Goethe's sincere engagement with Islamic thought and his vision of the Eternal Feminine as a unifying, redemptive force, this paper has aimed to illuminate how his works can foster aesthetic literacy, interfaith empathy, and critical cultural consciousness in ELT classrooms. These texts can serve not only as instruments of language learning, but as pathways to ethical reflection and spiritual inquiry—capacities often underrepresented in secularized models of ELT. Within the Indonesian classroom, where Islamic values and postcolonial histories intersect, Goethe offers a model of intercultural poetics that neither exoticizes the Other nor elevates the Self, but embraces mutual recognition. The pedagogical implications are clear: by inviting students to analyze Goethe's intertextual dialogue with Hafiz, to reflect on the Qur'anic echoes in Faust, and to interrogate the gendered theology of the Eternal Feminine, teachers empower learners to move beyond surface-level reading into spaces of deep ethical engagement. In doing so, students are not merely consumers of Western literature; they become co-creators of a new interpretive horizon—one that is spiritually inclusive, intellectually rigorous, and culturally grounded.

Furthermore, Goethe's body of work invites a reconceptualization of literature itself—not as a colonial inheritance, but as a shared spiritual archive where East and West, masculine and feminine, rationality

and mysticism, converge. His poetry urges a re-enchantment of ELT: one that transcends utilitarian models of language instruction and cultivates a richer, more humanizing curriculum. In the age of global English, where literature often becomes deracinated and domesticated, Goethe reminds us of literature's potential to challenge, transform, and unite. To revisit Goethe, then, is to reclaim the literary classroom as a sacred space of conversation—where Rumi meets Reason, where Gretchen and Rabiah speak across time, and where students are invited to read not only with their minds, but with their hearts. Goethe does not merely ask us to interpret his verses; he invites us to inhabit their questions. He does not merely offer us beauty; he offers us a vision of ethical and spiritual interconnectedness. His legacy is not confined to German literature—it resonates in the call to transcend division, to embrace otherness, and to walk together, drawn ever onward by the light of the Eternal Feminine.

Beyond its literary and pedagogical dimensions, Goethe's intercultural poetics carries profound implications for contemporary socio-religious life. His synthesis of Islamic and Western humanist thought models a form of coexistence that is dialogical rather than oppositional—grounded in mutual reverence rather than rivalry. In plural societies, especially within Muslim-majority and interfaith educational settings, Goethe's worldview offers a prototype for ethical pluralism: a vision where difference becomes a site of revelation rather than division. Integrating Goethe into interreligious studies thus encourages

learners to approach faith traditions not as static dogmas, but as evolving conversations that cultivate humility, empathy, and shared transcendence. In this sense, Goethe's corpus is not merely an object of aesthetic admiration—it is a resource for cultivating the moral imagination necessary for peaceful, dialogic coexistence in a globalized world. In the final analysis, Goethe's works reveal that literature is not a museum of past achievements, but a living bridge—across civilizations, across faiths, across genders. In the ELT classroom, particularly one situated within the pluralist yet postcolonial realities of the Muslim world, Goethe becomes more than a poet—he becomes a pedagogical companion, guiding students through the luminous intersections of language, identity, and the divine.

Declaration of interest statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this research paper.

Declaration of Originality and Plagiarism-Free Submission

I hereby declare that this manuscript, titled “Reimagining Goethe in the ELT Classroom: Divine Femininity and Islamic Traces in Faust and West-östlicher Divan”, is my original work and has not been previously published, submitted, or is under consideration for publication elsewhere, in whole or in part. I further affirm that this work is free from any form of plagiarism. All sources and citations have been appropriately acknowledged and referenced

according to academic standards. Where ideas, data, or text from other authors have been used, proper attribution has been provided. I understand that the journal may use plagiarism detection software, and I consent to this article being checked to ensure academic integrity.

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