Unit 6

Mehr wissen: über Goethe

Find out why he is considered the greatest writer in German.

Rather than a biography, we thought that one of his poems would give you a better idea of why Goethe is regarded as the greatest writer in the German language.

The first two verses describe the poet‘s journey to a night-time meeting with his beloved, the third the time he spends with her, and the fourth their parting the next morning. The poem was published in 1787 and draws on the young Goethe’s first serious relationship, with Friederike Brion, a pastor’s daughter from Sessenheim in Alsace.

The English translation is simply to give an idea of the meaning, it makes no claims beyond that!

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| **Willkommen und Abschied** | **Welcome and Parting** |
|  | *The urgent rhythm of the first two verses expresses the poet’s passionate impatience through his horse ride.* |
| Es schlug mein Herz, geschwind zu Pferde!  Es war getan fast eh’ gedacht.  Der Abend wiegte schon die Erde  Und an den Bergen hing die Nacht;  Schon stand im Nebelkleid die Eiche  Ein aufgetürmter Riese da,  Wo Finsternis aus dem Gesträuche  Mit hundert schwarzen Augen sah. | … quickly to horse!  Almost before thinking, it was done.  *It takes place as darkness is falling.*  The oak was already clothed in mist,  A towering giant*.*  *The darkness seemed to be watching*  with a hundred dark eyes. |
| Der Mond von einem Wolkenhügel  Sah kläglich aus dem Duft hervor,  Die Winde schwangen leise Flügel,  Umsausten schauerlich mein Ohr;  Die Nacht schuf tausend Ungeheuer,  Doch frisch und fröhlich war mein Mut:  In meinen Adern welches Feuer!  In meinem Herzen welche Glut! | *The moon was largely hidden behind clouds,*  *the wind …*  Roared frighteningly in my ears,  The night created a thousand monsters;  But my mood was fresh and joyful:  In my blood such fire!  In my heart such a blaze! |

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| Dich sah ich, und die milde Freude  Floß von dem süßen Blick auf mich;  Ganz war mein Herz an deiner Seite  Und jeder Atemzug für dich.  Ein rosenfarb’nes Frühlingswetter  Umgab das liebliche Gesicht,  Und Zärtlichkeit für mich – ihr Götter!  Ich hofft’ es, ich verdient’ es nicht! | *As soon as he sees his beloved, he is totally caught up in the emotion of their love for one another:*  I saw you, and a gentle joy  flowed from your sweet gaze onto me …  And tenderness towards me, you gods!  I hoped for it, I did not deserve it! |
| Doch ach, schon mit der Morgensonne  Verengt der Abschied mir das Herz:  In deinen Küssen welche Wonne!  In deinem Auge welcher Schmerz!  Ich ging, du standst und sahst zur Erden,  Und sahst mir nach mit nassem Blick:  Und doch, welch Glück, geliebt zu werden!  Und lieben, Götter, welch ein Glück! | *The final verse describes their parting the next morning.*  In your kisses, such joy,  in your eye such pain!  As he rides away, she is weeping, but he concludes:  And, how lucky to be loved!  And to love, gods, such good fortune! |