Section III: Spaces of Encounter
Kamaal Haque

From the Desert to the City and Back: Nomads and the Spaces of Goethe’s *West-östlicher Divan*  
*West-Eastern Divan, 1819/1827*

*Goethe’s West-östlicher Divan* [West-Eastern Divan, 1819/1827] is a paradigmatic text for studies of spatiality in German literature. Goethe’s collection of Persian-inspired poetry straddles the border between East and West. Space in the Divan is unstable, oscillating between East and West, city and desert. The instability of space typical in the *West-östlicher Divan* results in a polyvocal East, one that is neither purely the Persia of Hafiz nor the Arabian Peninsula of Muhammad and the Bedouin. Indeed, within the East of the *West-östlicher Divan*, there exists a further division between the Arabian West and the Persian East, a dichotomy best exemplified by the different roles desert and city play in the poems. Just as the West of Europe and the East of the Middle East are spaces intruding upon and transforming into each other, so too do the spaces of the city and the desert interact. The figures in the *West-östlicher Divan* capable of transcending these divides are the nomads. Using Deleuze and Guattari’s theories on nomads and smooth and striated space in *A Thousand Plateaus*, I investigate the spaces of the *West-östlicher Divan*, including the city, the desert, and the journeys traversing them. The poet’s travels in the *West-östlicher Divan* help to create an open, incomplete, and labile space that is neither East nor West.

In 1814, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe received a gift from his publisher that was to have a significant influence on the former’s work. The publisher, Johann Friedrich Cotta, gave Goethe a German translation of the poems of the fourteenth-century Persian poet Hafiz. Goethe was so taken by these poems that he composed his own *Divan*, the term used in Persian and Arabic for a collection, especially a collection of poems. In his *Divan*, published in 1819 and then in a revised edition in 1827, Goethe details an imaginary journey to the East by a poet, whose alter ego in the text, Hatem, exchanges many love poems with his beloved Suleika. And yet, this book of poems is not simply a journey to the East. Goethe titled his work the *West-östlicher Divan* [West-Eastern Divan], and this mixing of East and West is a crucial aspect of the work. In the *West-östlicher Divan*, the poet continually constructs what appear to be exemplary Eastern spaces, only to undermine the stability of those spaces shortly thereafter. East, or, more precisely, Middle East, becomes West, but West also quickly turns into East in this work. This spatial instability applies not only to spaces of East and West, but also to other spaces as well. Thus, one finds in the *West-östlicher Divan* many examples of urban spaces that transmogrify into desert spaces, while the spaces of the desert often turn out to be the spaces of the town. In this essay, I investigate