

The
WEST-EASTERN DIVAN
of
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VON GOETHE

translated from the German by
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MOGANNI NAMEH

Book of the Singer

In the decades that are gone,
I enjoyed a share of pleasures;
Strung in handsome cavalcade,
Like the golden days of Baghdad.

Hegira

North and West and South are fractured,
Thrones exploding, empires quaking;
Fly out East where things are clearer,
Taste an air that's patriarchal:
What with loving, drinking, singing,
Khizer's well shall make you younger.

There in regions pure and righteous
I shall plumb the human species'
Deepest origins, to ages
When they still received from God the
Lore of Heaven in common speech, their
Heads not cracked by such instruction.

High respect they paid their fathers,
Shunning servitude with strangers;
I'll enjoy a younger, bounded
World, with narrow thought but wider
Faith, and words of greater value
For the words are spoken only.

I'll associate with shepherds,
Seek refreshment at oases,
Wander on with caravans while
Trading shawls and musk and coffee;
I'll step out on every pathway
From the deserts to the cities.

Hafez, in the dangers of the
Rocky trail, your songs warm up the
Heart, while fits of rapture seize our
Guide: he's singing from the lofty
Saddle of his mule, to rouse the
Stars and frighten off the bandits.

Then I'll follow your example,
Sainted Hafez, when at watering
Spots and taverns, girlfriends lift their
Veils and shake perfume from loosened
Ringlets – Yes! the poet's whispered
Love could wake desire in houris.

If you envy this or even
Long to spoil a thing for someone,
Know the poet's words are at the
Gates of Paradise forever
Hovering and gently knocking,
Praying there for life eternal.

Pledges

Talismans, when they've been wrought
From cornelian, bring us luck;
Should an onyx be their mounting,
Dedicate to them some kisses!
Driving evil from the door,
Guarding you, your home as well,
If engraved with pure and plain
Words that sound the names of Allah,
They inspire your love and striving.
Women gain a special blessing
From the talisman's protection.

Amulets are much the same, with
Symbols written out on paper;
Here, though, there is less restriction
Than in handling precious stones, and
So devoted souls may choose a
Longer verse, if they prefer it.
Faithful people then enclose them
In a scapular's embrace.

Inscriptions have no hidden extra bits,
They are themselves, and should give all the meaning;
Whatever else you honestly would like to
Append, they cry: 'It's said! It's done!'

BOOK OF THE SINGER

I would seldom choose Abraxas!
Often just a grotesque image
Dreameed up by a solemn fool, and
Claiming great significance – so
If I mouth absurdities, just
Think, he's giving me Abraxas.

A signet ring is hard to fashion:
The deepest wish in narrow space;
But if you know it's truly dedicated,
The word is as engraved, you let it stand.

Free Spirit

Leave me be, I only love the saddle!
You can stay there in your tents and shanties!
I'll be riding briskly to the farthest
Points, with nought but stars above my headgear.

For you He set the stars in their place
To lead you by land and sea,
To give you endless happiness
In gazing at the heights.

Talismans

Eastern lands belong to God!
Western lands belong to God!
All the peoples of the earth do
Know the peace of His embracing.

He, exclusively the Righteous,
Wills to each a just provision.
May of all His hundred names be
This, amen, the highest honoured!

In my erring is confusion;
But Thou knowest to unbind me.
In my deeds and in my sayings,
Grant Thou me a straightened pathway!

My imaginings are worldly,
Yet to richer harvestings do win me;
Not disbanded with the dust, the spirit
Striveth in itself and striveth higher.

Within thy breathings are blessings united:
To take in air, and then to unburden;
That doth constrain, this doth refresh;
In wondrous form thine existence was mixed.
Thank thou the Lord when He doth press,
And thank Him when He doth grant a release.

Four Favours

The Arabs in their wandering
Can cross the world in gladness,
Since Allah gave them for their share
A quartet of His favours.

The turban first, a better trim
Than any kingly headgear;
A tent, to move from spot to spot,
So home is where the tent is.

A sword, a fitter guardian
Than cliff or city walling;
A song, that pleases and has use
In setting traps for women.

The flowers from her shawl fall down
Defenceless to my music;
She knows quite well it's all for her,
And ever is obliging.

With fruit and flowers I can set
A dainty table for you;
And should you want a yarn as well,
I'll spin you one that's novel.

Confession

What is hard of concealment? A fire is!
In the daytime betrayed by smoke,
By night revealed as a flaming demon.
Harder to hide the passion of love:
No matter how encasing the mask,
It signals itself with timid eyes.
A poem's the hardest yet to suppress:
No bushel's known can hide this light.
On tossing off a new production,
The poet's quite infatuated,
Writes out a neat and careful draft, and
Angles for universal homage.
He's pleased as Punch and reads to all
Aloud, to bore, and edify.

Raw Materials

Just what subject matters are there
For a worthwhile song to draw on,
That a layman will enjoy and
Connoisseurs can hear with pleasure?

Love above all other matters
Is the topic fit for singing;
When a song is driven by it,
Words and tune are all the better.

Then the sound of glasses clinking
With a wine that burns like rubies:
It's the lovers and the drinkers
Who can sport the brightest garlands.

Sound of arms is also fitting,
When a trumpet's blaring loudly;
So, when Fortune blazes flames, a
Hero's victory makes him godlike.

Then at last, and quite essential,
That the poet – who loves beauty –
Also knows the way to hate, to
Hate what's ugly and what's shameful.

When the singer knows the handling
Of these four primeval powers,
Then, like Hafez, he can always
Please and animate his listeners.

To Create and Animate

From just a dumpling made of dirt,
The Lord had fashioned Adam;
And since his mother was the Earth,
He lacked sophistication.

Through Adam's nose the Elohim
Then puffed the means of thinking;
What help this was he showed at once
By sharp allergic symptoms.

With member, head, and skeleton,
He still was just a dumpling,
Till Noah found the tankard fit
For alcohol's reception.

The dumpling felt an inward leap,
The day he wet his whistle,
As sure as yeast supplies to dough
The requisite ignition.

So, Hafez, your congenial songs,
And sanctified example,
With clink of glasses lead us up
To Our Creator's dwelling.

Phenomenon

Phoebus and clouds of rain
Couple together,
Making an arcing rim
Shaded with colour.

In mists the god again
Draws out a circle;
Arcs then are painted white –
Still arcs of heaven.

So should you, green if grey,
Not feel afflicted;
White showing through the hair
Won't kill the passion.