SELECTED GHAZALIYÄT (LOVE POEMS)
TRANSLATED FROM THE CLASSICAL PERSIAN OF
KHÄQÄNĪ, SA‘DĪ, AND RÜMĪ

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Translations of the *ghazaliyät* (love poems) of these three masters of classical Persian verse are here offered together for the first time for two reasons: (1) to suggest by way of comparison, the development of the *ghazal* (love poem) in the early middle period of classical Persian Poetry, and (2) to show the level of mastery achieved in the *ghazal* form by poets whose poetic reputation is in another genre.

The lives of these three poets were affected by new racial incursions from Central Asia into the northeast of Iran. By 1100 A.D., most of Iran was already under Turkish political domination in the family of the Seljuq Turks. Within the next two hundred years, the northeastern area of Iran, Khoräsän (including Gozgan with its city of Balkh, called “the Mother of Cities,” and Transoxiana with its cities of Samarqand and Bokhara) and Khwârazm that together formed the center of the Islamic-Persian Renaissance of the 4th century and were the most prosperous areas of Iran since the Arab Conquest (ca. 640–740 A.D.), was devastated and depopulated, changing from a mercantile and agricultural economy to a nomadic herding economy. What was once an Iranian area in race, language and culture, came to be an area of Turkish dominance in population, language, and to some extent, culture. Even later (ca. 1250 A.D.), that part of Central Asia that was once Iranian became largely Mongol, pushing the Turks even farther west.

KHÄQÄNĪ

Hasan al-‘Ajam Afdal al-Din Bedil bin ‘Ali Najjär Khäqänî Shervâni (500–582 A.H. 1102–1184 A.D.) was raised on the northwestern borders of the Iranian cultural area, in what is now Azarbaijan S.S.R.¹ His mother was Christian and his father, Muslim. The area of Ṭabaristân (modern Gilân and Mazânderân) just to the south and east had long been a holdout—for three
centuries after the collapse of the Sasanian Empire under Arab Muslim attack of the old Iranian culture of the Sasanian. Pahlavi was still written and read, and Zoroastrianism practiced, in the 5th/11th century. First known as Haqâ’iqi (“of the truths”), he received his second takhallus or pen name of Khâqânî (princely, royal) by serving as court poet to the Khâqân (king) of Shervân, Aktisân bin Minûchehr. Khâqânî has the reputation of being one of the most difficult and learned of all Persian poets. He was also certainly not humble; rather, his complete awareness of his poetic capability and accomplishments tended to make him haughty. In any case, he felt he was not sufficiently appreciated in Shervân in the northwest of Iran and hoped to fare better under the royal patronage of Sanjar, last of the great Seljuq sultans, in Khorásân, the home of the Persian Renaissance. Several times he attempted to relocate there and was foiled by various mishaps. Once, when he was already halfway there, he was forced to turn back at Rayy (near modern Tehran) for some unknown reason. His hopes were dashed when the Oghuzz Turks in 548/1154, quarrelling with Sanjar over taxes and pasture rights, swarmed out of their cramped pastures in what is now northern Afghanistan (Guzgan), and captured Sanjâr. They destroyed political authority in all of Khorâsân, and pillaged as far west as Nishapur (Nayshâbûr), which they sacked, massacring many of its inhabitants.

To turn to Khâqânî’s poetry, he is most famous for his qâşa’id (singular, qasîda: ode) in which he eulogized ruling princes and great scholars using all of his learning—literary, religious, and scientific—to construct complex metaphors and “poetic machines” of interrelated and integrated metaphors. Yet he wrote very fine and comparatively simple love poems (ghazaliyât). These tend to be short, piercing, poems. Already in the hands of Khâqânî, the ghazal had attained a mature form. In Khorâsân in the fourth and fifth centuries of the Hegira (eleventh and twelfth centuries A.D.), Persian poets had been adapting the Arabic ghazal, which had appeared first in its developed form in the urbane poetry of ‘Umar b. Abî Rabî‘a (d. 719 A.D.) of the early Umayyad Hijâzî school of poetry. This ghazal poetry was distinguished by topic and style. Its topic was illicit “love” affairs—whence its name, ibâhi, “unpermitted”—wherein the male lover/poet seduced the woman and then abandoned her. It was truly more about sexual play than about true love. Its style was coy and employed implicit suggestion. ‘Umar b. ‘Abî Rabî‘a’s innovation was to introduce dramatic tension in the ghazal by using a dialogue between the man and the woman. Soon after the appearance of the ibâhi ghazal (poem of illicit love), another school of love poetry developed most probably in the Umayyad courts of Syria and the ‘Iraqi camp cities of Basra and Kufa. This ghazal was called ‘Udhrî after the Arab tribe of the Banî ‘Udhrâ, a Yemeni
tribe legendary for its unselfish lovers who suffered unrequited love, usually
dying of heartache. Famous among the noble poet-lovers of this tribe were
Jamil and ‘Urwā. Others not associated with the Bānī ‘Udhrā, but ‘Udhrī
poets in their own right, were the legendary Qais and Majnūn (who went mad
from love of Layla, majnūn meaning “jinn-possessed” or mad). These ‘Udhrī
poets may never have existed separately from the urban poets who in a nos-
talgic vein idealized the unrequited love of these desert nomads. In any case,
the theme of death and madness as ultimate results of love (by which term
unrequited love is almost always intended) is fully taken over by Khāqānī from
these ‘Udhrī poets.

The Ghuzz or Oghuzz Turk outbreak of 1154 A.D. was the first of four
devastating blows that befell eastern Islam, especially Khorāsān (northeastern
Iran). The second came in a Mongol exploratory and punitive “raid” which
penetrated as far west as Nishapur in 1220–21. The third blow came in the
main Mongol conquest of Iran in 1256, culminating in the sack of Baghdad,
the central metropolis of Islam, and the end of the Abbassid Caliphate (1258
A.D. The fourth blow from Central Asia came in Tamerlane’s conquest of the
Middle East at the end of the fourteenth century A.D.). The two remaining
poets whose ghazalīyyāt are represented in this selection of translations were
all deeply affected by the Mongol invasions of 1220 and 1256 A.D. Sa’dī
(1184–1291 A.D.), a native of Shirz, spent most of his life wandering outside
of Iran due to the desolation of Iran wrought by the Mongols. Rūmī spent
most of his life in Anatolian Turkey. His father, Bahā’ al-Dīn Walad, a famous
Sufi writer, fled from his homeland, Balkh, with his family because of political
and religious differences with the local authorities, only to discover shortly
afterwards that the Mongols had razed Balkh (1220 A.D.).

SA’DĪ

Mtisharrif al-Dīn b. Muṣliḥ al-Dīn ‘Abdullāh Sa’dī of Shīrāz (1184?–1291?
A.D.), perhaps still the most popular and widely read of the classical Persian
poets, is the only one of the three poets who is as famous for his ghazalīyyāt
(love poems) as for his poetry in other genres, e.g., the Golestān (Rose-gar-
den), short stories in prose and verse with pithy, practical morals, and the
Būstān (Orchard), practical moralizing in verse. Nonetheless, his ghazalīyyāt
are generally ranked by Persians second only to those of his fellow Shīrāzī,
Ḥāfiz. In Sa’dī’s Dīvān (collection of ghazals and quasidas where the poems
are arranged in alphabetical order of rhymes), the single theme ghazal reached
its peak, whereas in the Dīvān of Ḥāfiz, the peak of the multi-themed ghazal
is said to have been attained. Significantly, however, Sa’dī was well acquainted
with the Divân-e Shams-e Tabrizi of Rûmi, his contemporary. It is reported that when requested to choose the best ghazal written in Persian, Sa’dî chose one of Rûmi’s, saying, “Never have more beautiful words been uttered, nor ever will be. Would that I could go to Rûm (Asia Minor), and rub my face in the dust at his feet.” 2 E. G. Browne most lucidly compares the tone of the works of Sa’dî with those of Rûmi:

He (Sa’dî) is a poet of quite a different type from . . . [Rûmi] . . . and represents on the whole the astute, half-pious, half-worldly side of the Persian character, as the other two represent the passionately devout and mystical. Mysticism was at this time so much in the air, and its phraseology was—as it still is—so much a part of ordinary speech, that the traces of it in Sa’dî’s writings are neither few nor uncertain; but in the main it may be said without hesitation that worldly wisdom rather than mysticism is his chief characteristic, and that the Gulistân in particular is one of the most Machiavellian works in the Persian language. Pious sentiments and aspirations, indeed, abound; but they are, as a rule, eminently practical, and almost devoid of that visionary quality which is so characteristic of the essentially mystical writers. 3

This fierce worldliness and hardened cynicism are easily explained by the circumstances of Sa’dî’s early life. When he was still a child, Sa’dî lost his father and had to struggle through an Arabic education in Baghdad, slavery, and years of near-constant travel, before he won recognition and was able to lead a settled life. He was probably over fifty when he returned to Shíráz in 1256 A.D. to commit much of his poetry to paper. It is amazing that his hardships did not stifle the flow of his lyrical inspiration.

Despite Sa’dî’s hard life and tough worldliness, his love poems display the same dominant strains of yearning for an absent lover as the ghazaliyát of Khâqânî and Rûmi. In addition, we often see Sa’dî as a faithful lover who is dropped by a faithless or merely bored beloved. Ghazaliyát nos. two and three, included here, are of this type. Curiously, the misrâ’ (half-bayt or hemistich) with which ghazal no. two opens, closes ghazal no. three and vice versa. This indicates the consummate craft with which Sa’dî composed and polished his love poems. Indeed, Sa’dî is famous for his sahl-e montani‘, his “inimitable facility” as a poet. His verses flow like water, lacking the raging outbursts and fitful “stop and go” quality of Rûmi’s poery. Sa’dî’s verses are more regular in metre than those of the other two poets whose work is represented here. Indeed, a great part of the beauty of Sa’dî’s love poems is the
tension between the absolute lyrical control and the pent-up passion and anguish so well caught and frozen in the structure of the words.

One of the main devices he uses to sustain the tension of anguish and yearning throughout a particular ghazal is to allude to a former time when he was blissfully by his beloved’s side. Thus, in ghazal no. five, he begins the poem with his beloved entering a room in which he is present, resulting in his heavenly transport at the vision of her/him. (I have uniformly translated “u”, the aspecific as to gender third person pronoun, as “her” in these poems, but neither passionate homosexuality nor “platonic homosexuality” may ever be ruled out in classical Persian poetry.) Yet immediately afterwards, the theme of separation is introduced which more or less dominates the rest of the poem. In the second ghazal, the poet mentions union in the middle of the poem only after it has passed and has been replaced by deep separation. The poem closes with Sa’di’s inability to accept the end of the affair. The poet is left stubbornly hoping for her return. In ghazal no. three, the theme of union is also briefly sounded in the middle of the poem only to be engulfed by the anguish of separation which precedes and follows this brief spot of brightness. The reader who is well acquainted with Sa’di’s more practical and Machiavellian works is especially struck by his honesty in displaying his helplessness amidst the throes of love. Curiously, these love poems which are ranked so highly by Persians have only infrequently been printed. (None of the poems by Sa’di here presented. to my knowledge, have been translated before.) Perhaps it is that very “inimitable facility” (sahl-e momtenā’) which has so frustrated and deterred translators.

RūMĪ

Mowlānā (Our Lord) or Mowlevi (My Lord) Jalāl al-Dīn RūMī (604–672 A.H./1207–1273 A.D.), was born in Balkh in 604/1207. He founded the Mevlevi Order of Sufis, the famous Whirling Dervishes, and was descended from the royal house of Khwārazm on his mother’s side. At the age of three he fled with his father Bahā’ al-Dīn Walad Balkhī and family from adverse political circumstances. In the very next year (608/1211) Jingiz Khān razed Balkh. RūMī and his family travelled widely, stopping in various places such as Nishapur, Baghdad, Mecca, Damascus, Malatiya, Arzanjān (in Armenia), and Laranda. At Laranda, when he was nineteen, he married Jawhar Khātūn, daughter of the Lālā Sharaf al-Dīn of Samarqand (623 A.H.). Not long after his marriage, RūMī moved with his father and extended family to Qonya in central Anatolia (Turkey), then the capital of the Seljuq Empire. His name RūMī indicates this connection with the land of the Romans, Rüm, i.e., Greece,
Byzantine Anatolia being recently conquered by the Seljuq Turks. Bahāʿ al-Dīn lectured in Muslim law and sciences under the patronage of the Seljūq prince, ‘Alā al-Dīn Kaqībād. Rūmī studied first under his father, then under his father’s Sufi disciple, Burhān al-Dīn Muḥaqiq Tirmidhī. When his father died in 628/1230, Rūmī succeeded to his father’s professorial chair. Although he had a large number of pupils, when the malāmatī Sufi (a Sufi of the “path of blame,” malāma) Shamsī Tabrizī arrived in Qonya (642/1244), Rūmī abandoned teaching to be tutored in Sufism by Shams.

Shams was an illiterate, traveling Sufi of the antinomian variety. It is said that his grandfather was Kiyā Bozorgomīd, successor of Hasan-b. Šābbāh, the “Old Man of the Mountain” ( Alamūt) of the Assassins, an eastern branch of the Ismaʿīlī Shiʿīs. Although Shams’ father, Khāwand ‘Alā al-Dīn renounced Ismāʿīlī Shiʿism, burned his books, and gave his son a Sunni education, it was perhaps this very ancestral Shiʿism that encouraged him to believe that he was a prophet. In any case, his spiritual aura was so strong that in the Dīvān, Rūmī identifies Shams (the sun) with the Solar Source of Divine Effulgence; all who surrender to this solar onslaught are melted into this sun and become that sun. Shams fled from Qonya once in 643 or 644 A.D. to Damascus, but Rūmī heard of his whereabouts and fetched him back again. Shortly afterwards, in 645/1246, Shams was presumably killed by Rūmī’s jealous disciples. It was probably during Shams’ absence in Damascus that Rūmī began composing the Dīvān-e Shams. Remarkably, he was almost forty when he first became a poet. The fact that the Dīvān carries Shams’ name is a measure of Rūmī’s loving spiritual surrender to the Divine that he perceived in Shams. (It is, of course, this very spiritual surrender that gives “Islam”—“submission (to God)”—its name.) Most of the Dīvān was probably composed in memoriam for Shams.5

Rūmī’s poetry ranks with that of Shakespeare, Dante, and Homer and should need no introduction. Yet, due to the lack of interest in mysticism in the West, Rūmī is as little known here as the great Chinese poets Po Chu’î, Lî Po, and Han Shan, and the Indian Kālidāsa. Rūmī is unpredictably brilliant and will use any means at his disposal to collapse the barriers between Divine Being (or consciousness) and temporal, normative being (or normative consciousness). More than the work of any other Persian poet, except perhaps for that of another Sufi, Rūmī’s younger contemporary, Fakhr al-Dīn ‘Irāqī, Rūmī’s poetry sings. He sings the pulse of the Divine Heart beating in the corporeal body of a fool, the deathless (bāqī, from baqā’: mystical survival) in the lifeless (fānī, from faṇā’: mystical annihilation).

Certain aspects of Rūmī’s style stand out, such as the division of a miṣrā’ (half-baṭī or hemistich) into two or more opposing semantic units. This allows
for telling use of interior rhyme, indeed, perhaps for the most effective use of it in all Persian Literature save in the modern poetry of Ahmad Shālū. Rūmī is not very subtle stylistically and rhythmically. He marshalls his poetic forces in full view, building up a sustained rhythmic hammering of meaning and passion at best. This hammering is deliberate and highly successful. It is intended to break down all of the lower anfās (selves: singular, nafs) simultaneously in a rising call. Its mesmerising rhythm, as in the first line of ghazal no. 1, lulls the lower selves:

\[
yār mārā ghār mārā 'eshq-e jēgār khwār mārā
yār tō'ī ghār tō'ī khwājē negahdār mārā\]

Both the acute appositeness of particular semantic segments and the opposite technique of the complete abandonment of the poem by the poet to face the Divine totally break the higher nafs (self). The poet ceases to be an integral part of the poem and addresses the Divine rather than the reader. This allows for the Divine Ocean to flood through (esteghrāq: absorption by drowning) in love. His ghazalīyāt (love poems) have the capacity to trigger fanā’ (mystical annihilation into the Godhead), to trigger what The Tibetan Book of the Dead terms, “the Great Straight-upward Path,” wherein total reality is apprehended instantaneously, and simultaneously with that apprehension, and as a result of it, identification of the soul as that total reality is made. This, to be sure, is a very hit-or-miss method on the part of the poet, which often fails, but when a poem works for a particular reader, that reader may be catapulted by sudden awareness through mystical annihilation into the Godhead. Sufi poets play for higher stakes than most artists in their art. This is because they play for higher stakes in their own lives. ‘Irāqī so well illustrates this in one of his love poems addressed to the Divine (translated by Arberry):

Lo, we have cast, and made our stake;  
Our life and heart hang on a spin;  
What better throw could gambler make  
If, giving all, thy love he win? 

. . .  
Along thy path to death I move  
And I am glad; I will not turn.  

Jan Rypka and R. A. Nicholson have criticized the poetry of the Dīvān-e Shams as monotonous. Presumably, what they find monotonous is the expression of love for the Divine.\(^8\) In a sense, they are right. If one reads many of these love poems in succession, one’s capacity to pay attention is dulled. Nevertheless, the criticism of monotony is not to the point. Mystical poetry
is not intended to entertain or divert. It is intended to make consciousness focus on the Divine Presence, a total facing (and interfacing) of All Reality immediately. It either works or it doesn’t. If it works, the reader is plunged into an exploration of the very infinity and formlessness that was intentionally invoked in one particular ghazal. This makes the Divān-e Shams one of the most successful books ever at the highest breaking pitch of intended meaning. Meaning explodes into unity at that level. If the reader thinks that the translator has belabored this point, it is because Western audiences through unfamiliarity with the dynamics of mystical literature have so thoroughly misunderstood mystical poetry, being in turn baffled, then bored by it. The mystical poem does not stand by itself. Although its beginning is on the page or in the reciter’s voice, the last line is always burned into the devotee’s heart. No mystical poem is complete without the surrender of the reader’s heart to the Divine.

In conclusion, a few short comments on the poems themselves will be of use. Rūmī often ends his poems invoking silence, as silence is the abode of the Divine, e.g., ghazalīyāt nos. 1 and 2. In ghazal no. 1, Rūmī is addressing the Divine through the physical manifestation of his pīr or guide, Shams. The closing refers to Shams’ murder. The lovers of ghazal no. 2 are Sufis, lovers of the Divine. Ghazal no. 3 is very curious and daring, since the persona, the “1,” is Shams or the Divine. Indeed, it is both Shams and the Divine, the phenomenal and the noumenal aspects of the Divine. It is said that Rūmī composed ghazal no. 4 on his deathbed. The persona here is the poet himself, “we” signifying “1.” Rūmī ruthlessly drives the poem into the ground, squeezing it dry, until he has no inspiration left. The end is not pretty, nor is it meant to be.

FROM THE GHAZALĪYĀT (LOVE POEMS) OF KHĀQĀNĪ SHERVĀNĪ

1

lovers seek none other
than a risk-all lover.
good hearts only want
an all-or-nothing lover."


while love reigns, reason is under ban
for folk won’t tolerate rival claims in love’s domain.
there are those like mé with nothing left them
but clipped wings and
wide eyes fixed on flame.
stoke-hearts fired to fly flame, we
are but moths driven to love’s flame.
yet you’ll not catch me flying
outside my love’s sacrosanct seraglio.
they don’t call that soul-searing spike
oppression. they seek not shrieks
from that world-burning tulip.
should I be slain by the flirt,
of her eyes twain lovely, take care—
lest lovers want my blood’s spurt
for her twin twinkling eyes.
this is the moral law in the lovers’ church:
none shall seek to gain
blood-price for those in love slain.
speak not a word to Kháqání
’less its main line be love,
lovers won’t hear a song sung
from the nightingale’s tongue
’less roses be in bloom and spring be sprung.

2

my day gave up its reign to night;
my life came up to my lip,
made a desperate last-ditch pilgrimage
of the lip;
my soul rose all the way up to my throat
(and threatened to go). 10
hearing me over and over
going, “O my God! O my God!”
made the sky start miming my moan,
my irksome tune of “O my God!” sing.
love came and goblet gave way to goblet.
cups raising a hue and cry
draining away that wine, it
maintaining an anti-faith stance.
each time I drew a draught
but higher I got, this time
I raised the double-sized chalice
and on my side, met your lips.
it was no struggle at all for us.
we had no need to spur on our steeds.
I went as far as her door, met
and talked with her guardian who said,11
“what brought on this passion so mad?”
her neighbor overheard my sigh and said,
“don’t you think Khāqānī is a bit
fever-touched?”

there’s not a head not thrust up
by you against the knife’s blade.
until head from neck is severed,
from love of you not a head may rest.12
each breath with your winning arrow-glances
you shéd
our blood, bled us of our tears.
all the while my tear-shot eye
blinks and blinks, but your eye stays dry.
sovereign of the elegant
ladies you are,
yet you
lord it o’er me oppressively.
pound me down to wine, pound me!—
for no one gets the upper hand
over your authority.
when will you be straight with me?—
no one plays fair these days, especially you.
no one will ever get a square deal out of you.
nightfall came over me. I was grief-pierced,
lingering long in my love for you.
there’s no way out for this smoke—
my heart’s on fire—except through hope’s narrow hole.
each day, a thousand and thousand times out loud
I’d read and reread the “Book of Patience.”
since you have my ear,
no wonder it never sounds right.
I cried out, “God, my God!” a thousand times
but you were not moved. O God!—
why can’t I have a loving mate
to ease my grief?
Khāqānī! what’s the use of moaning
so impotently, “O God!”—?
—since the moan’s pitch
won’t shatter your heart’s ice-cold freeze.¹³

FROM THE GHAZALĪYĀT (LOVE POEMS)
OF SĀ’DDĪ SHĪRĀZĪ

not so fast, caravan master!¹⁴
go gently, go gently and slow,
for you take my peace of mind
with you as you go.
that heart that used to be mine,
now goes with my love in your caravan.
I remain
behind, wounded, separated from her,
anguished, made wretched by her
as if her poison fangs penetrate
and infect my bones from a distance.
I told myself with charms and spells:
“I’ll hide my pride inside”—but no go.
all hot, my blood flood flushed to the surface
spoiling the whole show
of reserve.
caravan master, hold O
hold that camel-litter wherein sits
my love! don't be so hasty
to pull away with
your caravan!
from love of that lady of stately grace,
my mind has lost its place.
she moves away and as she turns
proudly away, she takes my heart in tow
with her skirt that she trails behind her.
don't ask anymore about me
for there's no sign left of my heart.
my dear but rebellious love returned
and when she came,
my miserable subsistence faded into life.
I'm a chafing dish aflame—
now smoke billows out my mouth.15
with all this her injustice, and this
her baseless truth which me broke,
in my heart her memory dear I hold,
if betimes I
sing it not
on my tongue.
come back and sit upon my eye,
you who play so heavily on my heart,
you who seduce me so completely!
you know my gut eruption and cry
from this earth up-thrust-pierces sky.
all the night long I sleep not
nor heed I any advisal rot.
no herald proceeds me on this road
to intercede with you—the reins
have slipped me, you see, I have no control.
(headlong youwards rush I.)
I said to myself, "I'll cry, tears wring
until the camels get stuck in mud
just like donkeys." but that
too, I couldn't do:
for my tear-spring heart already had
departed with the caravan.
patience in waiting to meet my heart’s mate
    and returning from gaming with my heart’s bait—
    these issue from me; I act—but they
    are beyond my control,
    acts slipping out my grasp!
they spout all kinds of talk how
    the soul out the body goes; but I
    with my own eyes saw
    my soul leave.
Sa’di, it’s not fitting
    that moans roam your throat—you ingrate!
    yet endure your tyranny, my love,
    I can no longer. crying now
    is all that’s left me."  16

2

you broke troth with me
    but I still hang from my oath.  17
thankful for all your favors,
    I was nourished by your kindness.
what can the slave do
    who can’t stand tyranny?
    a load strung around my neck,
    I toed the line.
’twas not your love
    which blistered my feet,
for I was laid back deep
    in the garden’s green leisure.
only at the bleak
    dawn of separation’s day
    did I know the spell of union’s night.
how strange it would be
    had there not been power
    that night without me knowing.
if. hereafter, they ask my gain
    from this world’s harvest,
I’ll say. “that day, that day
    I spent speaking with my love.”
who could approve you
  breaking your troth of old?
I swear by our union
  I didn’t deserve your breaking
off with me.

happy the day
  when you at last come back!
then Sa‘di will say:
  “O you came! O I’ve been so
scatter-brained, wanting you so
  O, wanting you so!”

3

O you came! O I’ve been so
  scatter-brained, wanting you so.\(^\text{18}\)
ever since you left my side,
  I’ve been a lifeless shell.
it wasn’t because I forgot you
  that I fell silent in calling you,
but ’twas because I was so amazed
  in gazing on you—there’s so
much to praise in you!
I didn’t sleep a wink without you
  in the lap of the rose-garden’s
bloom;
  for wasn’t I wandering lost
amidst desert thorns without you?
my hope of seeing you kept me alive,
  strung out moment by moment,
hanging on hope.
  had I no hope
I would have died by now,
slain by the distance between us.
in helping you out, even though
  it was a trial by fire,
  I was in a meadow
amidst basil and tulips.
on the off chance that the fresh breath of dawn
  will waft your presence-scent my way,
I stay up all night
    waiting for the nightingale
    to herald the daybreak.
under the devastation of being
    without you,

Sa'di used to say, day under day:
    "you broke troth with me
    but I still hang from my oath."

a thousand times I swore:
    "yours truly
    won't go pokin' 'round love no more!"
— but at every breath I took,
    the spectre of your face
    kept pace with me. 19
I didn't intend to tell my tale of love
    but what difference did it make?
my tear-blooded eyes, my face,
    pale-drained, told it anyway.
I arrived at the rosebush,
    apprised of having no time to waste; but
I haven't even picked one rose— 20
    just a thousand thorns
    pricked my gut. 21
Fate, you might say, and time
    rolled up my life like a throw-rug;
    but never have I told the tale right:
    ever the vision of my love.
all those who advised me patience were but
    cold wind blowing on closed ears in vain. 22
by your eyes I swear:
    not even once did I look on any woman
with love's eye, desire's drive—
    not until your eyes left mine.
not a day waiting
    for your beauty to come my way
    did I count as a day,
because the days spent away from you
I didn't consider as being
part of my life.
given your temper, what venom
haven't you expended on love?—
while not a word of complaint
to any friend have I made.
when first I saw your lasso, I shied
as any animal a-wild might do.
now that I'm tamed and intimate,
I won't be driven away—
even at sword-point.
who told you Sa'di isn't worth
and isn't man enough
for your love?
were I to break troth,
then would it be shown in truth
that I'm not a man—(ah, but I am:
these my red eyes attest.)

5

you came in the door
and I went out my mind.
you could say
I left this world behind
and landed in seventh heave.
I keep my eyes peeled
to see if any have news of her.
someone spoke of her
and I broke down.
I was but dew before you
and you were sun shining.
love touched me to the quick
and I flew to the Pleiades.
I thought to myself: "go
see her. maybe the pain
of yearning, maybe the pain can
be eased." I saw her and
yearned for her then all the more.
I had not the strength
to pick myself up and visit my love:
yet I went: sometimes in head
and sometimes on foot,
stumbling headlong.
just to see her walk,
just to see her talk—
I was all eyes and ears.
how can I not look at her?
ever since the first time I saw her,
I haven't been able to take my eyes off her.
she herself wasn't interested in catching me;
it was I, all by myself,
who got myself caught, all
 tangled up in the trap of her glance.
they ask me now, "how, Sa'di,
did you get so pale a hue?—
you who were so young and fresh!—
blood on your cheeks, health in your tint!"—
the elixir of love splashed
on my coppery skin
and I flashed into gold.

FROM THE GHAZALĪYĀT (LOVE POEMS)
OF MOWLĀNA (RUMĪ)²³

I
You are friend and cave to me, grief-torn love for me.²⁴
my Lord Guardian You are.
Noah You are; Spirit You are; conqueror and conquered You are.
an open breast You are, full of pearl-secrets
You are for me.
light You are; feast You are;
Manṣūr's dominion and fortune You are.²⁵
Mount Sinai's bird You are, You with beak wounding me.²⁶
sea-drop and sea You are; malice and grace You are.
sugar and poison You are; O leave off tormenting me!
sun-room You are and house of singing Venus You are.
garden of hope You are; open up, Friend! O let in me!
day and fast You are; harvest of door-begging You are.
water and jug You are; give water this time—give me!27
seed You are, trap You are; wine and cup You are:
with You, Yourself, You bait and trap me.
both cooked and raw, both experienced and green You are.
don’t bungle it and astray lead me!

if my body short You weave,
You make but slight inroads into my heart.
to the vanishing point You streaked.28
let this be the end and all of my speech!

2

O lovers, lovers! it’s time to break

camp

and migrate on from this world.

my soul’s ear hears the drums of departure

announcing from on high: present exit!29

look! the head camel-driver is up

and has already ordered the camel file.

he who would have us release him from the guilt

of any evil he might have done us, asked us,

“why were you sleeping, O caravan folk?”

this noise both ahead and behind us

is the commotion of setting out

with camel bells aswing already.

each moment souls thrust themselves into Nowhere

and breaths snuff themselves out

there Nowhere.

from these upset candles

and from these sky-blue veils,

weird creatures sprout out.

making the invisible visible.
you came from this waterwheel-spinning sky,
but a deep sleep stole o’er you.
   alas for this slight life!
   beware this cumbrous slumber!
O heart, make a bee-line for your Love!
   O mate, make tracks for your Mate! don’t wait!
   O watchman, wake and watch!—
the nightwatch has no business sleeping.

there are cries and snarled lives on every side;
   every quarter shows candle and torch
because tonight the pregnant world brings forth
   the world eternal.
you were mud but became heart and blood;
   you were ignorant and became wise.
He who drew you so far this way
   will draw you out that way.
His annoy amidst His struggles is joy.
   His fires are cool water; don’t frown His way.
His work is to sit in Spirit;
   His work is breaking repentance vows.
from His many deceits and tricks,
   these pearls of trembling tears drop.
O mocking arrow-notch jumper! you escape the bowstring, saying,
   “you can’t catch me, fit me to the string;
   you can’t do that to me!—I’m the town mayor!”
how long will you jump around? bend your neck!—
   and if you don’t, He’ll draw you like a bow.
you sowed deceit’s seeds;
   you reaped regret’s tears and sweat beads.
you thought God to be not;
   now take a good look, you cuckold!
you ass! you’re better than straw!
   you’re better than a blackened pot!
even in the pit’s abyss you’re better—
   you’re a disgrace to princedom and dynasty.

there’s someone else in me
   whom these eyes miss and fail to see.
know this for truth!—let this be your proof:
when water ignites from fire,
that someone inside you’ll see.
I’m not armed with stone in palm;
I’ve no quarrel to pick with anyone;
no, I’m not out to get anyone—
how could I when my joy is orchard-lush?
thus does my eye gaze down from on high,
looking down from the other world:
on this side is a world; on that side is a world—
I straddle the threshold between the both.
he is at that threshold whose logic is mute.
stay poet!—enough of spreading these secrets—
just hold your tongue! be dumb!

3

didn’t I tell you not to go where I know you?
here at the original black hole of annihilation
I am the fountainhead of life:
(point source spraying dimension-rays,
splaying out life waves.)

and if in anger you stray a thousand years from Me,
you finally return free-fall
to Me who am your end-all:
(I, your ultra-gravity, call.)
didn’t I tell you not to be at ease with the face of things?
I forewarned you with inside knowledge,
for I am the constructor of the house
that encloses you in comfort
and I painted the easing images
on the walls that surround you.
didn’t I tell you I’m the sea and you’re a fish?
don’t dry out!—because I’m the real sea
with wet consequences.
didn’t I tell you not to fly towards the trap bird-like?
come rather because I am your foot,
your wing, your power of flight.
didn’t I tell you that they would cut you
off at freedom’s pass and put you in deep freeze?
I told you—I who am your blast fire,  
your sheet shine, and your atmosphere’s heat.  
didn’t I tell you that they would bring out all your bad points?—  
and that you would get lost in magnetic haywire?  
I am the source of your pure polar north.  
didn’t I tell you not to discourse on the why  
and wherefore of slave’s labor? shape up!  
I am Creator without grounds. I am the Prime Urge.  
if you are a heart lamp,  
know where the road home lies!  
and if you have the crackling air of a divine,  
know so: that I am your Divinity!

let lay your head back on a pillow!  
go forget about me! just leave  
me be! leave me to my nightwatchman’s addiction:  
to love’s drunken affliction,  
leave me!

we’re nothing but an undulation of black passion,  
alone all night,  
swamping and swamped in the surging,  
yours is the choice: if you want to, come!  
love me! grace me! save me!  
or if not, burn and spurn me!

run! just get away from me as fast as you can!—  
unless you too want to fall in harm’s way!  
take the safe way out: leave fangland be!  
we’re nothing but eye-water cried out, crept here—  
quivering, shivering—to lie low in a dog-sad corner:  
from spots where our tear-drops splash,  
construct and harness the hydrodynamics  
of a hundred watermills!

the beautiful people don’t have to  
be true to the powers that be;
but now as for you, you pale-faced lover—
wait a bit, keep faith, string yourself out
a little further: be true to the True!
there is a pain having no cure but death—
how then can I ask you to cure this pain?\(^{32}\)
I dreamed last night I saw an old man
lounging around love’s part of town;
he was making signs with his hand
to me to follow him down.

if there’s a dragon on the road of love,
be sure it’s from man.
by love’s lightning flash repel that man-dragon!

enough! enough of these black-dotted words.
I’m beyond myself now. if you’re art-hot—I’m not—
speak to me of Bu ‘Ali! rouse! tingle!—
draw on the sense of the Most High!\(^{33}\)

David Martin grew up in Japan, Burma, India, and the U.S. He graduated in psychology from the University of Chicago. For some years he was director and lead writer for Shiva poetry Theater (formerly of Chicago and San Francisco, now defunct), which won first prize in the 1972 Chicago poetry Festival. From 1975 to 1977 he was a Fellow in Persian Literature at the Iranian Cultural Research Institute in Tehran—the first and last Westerner to be associated with the Institute. He has translated works from classical Arabic and classical and contemporary Persian. His own poetry and translations have appeared in *Poetry, Hawaii Review, Ab Intra, Greenfield Review, Jazz/Linguïs*, etc. Presently he is writing his dissertation on Sufism at UCLA.

**NOTES**

DAVID MARTIN


9. Gozide-ye Ash’âr-e Khâqânî Shîrvâni (Selected Poems of Khâqânî Shîrvâni), ed. Sayyid Diyâ al-Dîn Sajjadî (Tehran, 1972), ghazal no. 9, p. 420. Metre: tawîl (the long) tetrameter (---/---/---/---) where “-” signifies a short syllable and “--” signifies a long syllable. Persian metre is quantitative as to the number of long and short syllables.

10. Ibid., ghazal no. 10, p. 421. Metre: mutadârik (the continuous) tetrameter: (---/---/---/---).

11. Guardian (raqîb): this is one of the three stock characters of the ancient Arabic ghazal stemming from the time of Umar bin Abî Râbi’a (d. 719 A.D.). The “guardian” is usually a man who watches the lovers and guards the woman on behalf of the tribe to safeguard the tribe’s honor. (The lover is frequently from another tribe.) The two other stock characters are (1) the “secret enemy” (kâshiḥ) who, jealous of the lovers, tries to destroy the love affair by spreading rumors and (2) the “blamer” or “censurer” (ʿâdhîl). The “neighbor” (hamsâyî: of the same shade) of the next bayt (couplet) is Khâqânî’s equivalent of the “blamer.” These stock characters appear more often in the poetry of Khâqânî than in those of the latter ghazal poets, for he was closer to Arabic Poetry both in time and poetic study. Khâqânî, unlike the other ghazal poets here represented, was mainly a qaṣida (eulogy) poet. The qaṣida was, par excellence, the Arabic “poem.”

12. Godide-ye Ash’âr-e Khâqânî, op cit., ghazal no 11, p. 421. The basic metre is a variant of mudâriʾ-e muthamman-e akhrabe makfîf-e maḥdîf: (---/---/---/---).
13. In the first line of this signature bayt, Khāqānī addresses himself but in the third line, he is addressing his love.


15. The poet is indicating that his heart is on fire.

16. The first “your” in the signature bayt refers to Sa‘di, the second, to his love.


20. “I haven’t even picked one rose”: more literally, “I didn’t pick even one rose complete.” Alternate translation: “I didn’t even eat (nakhordam) even one rose complete.”


22. Literally, this line (mišrā’) reads: “were air’s wind blowing on my cold iron.” The intimation is that cold iron cannot be further forged or tempered. Only red-hot iron may be worked and bent. Thus the poet’s bent to the rashness of love may not be further bent to compass patience, endurance and fortitude (these all being sabūrī).


24. Reference to the Cave Companion (of the Prophet), Abu Bakr.


26. Mount Sinai’s bird: Perhaps this is an oblique reference to Prometheus chained to a mountain peak in the Caucasus. A vulture came to eat his liver every day according to the myth. Then again, it may be the Simorgh that nests at the top of the cosmic mountain (Qāf). Mount Sinai could easily serve as symbol of the cosmic mountain as it was on Mount Sinai that Moses received various revelations. If the latter is the case, it would be an ironic reference indeed, for the Simorgh fostered Zāl, born with white hair. Zāl was the father of Rostam, hero of the Shāh Nāmeh (the epic Book of the Kings) of Ferdowsi. The sense here would be that the Simorgh wounded the poet by
giving the poet a glimpse of the Unitary Being of God. (See the climax of Ḍātār’s Conference of the Birds, trans. C. S. Nott (Berkeley, 1971) for the Simorgh in the role of bestower of epiphonic vision; see Sohravardī al-Maqtūl’s visionary récit in ‘Aql-e Sorkh (Tehran, no date), p. 11, where the variant of Isfandiyār’s death at the hand of Rostam is given wherein Isfandiyār sees the reflection of the Simorgh in Rostam’s armor and is blinded by the Divine Effulgence).

27. This line has several other simultaneous meanings due to the many usages of bār: “. . . this load of mine;” “. . . this fruit of mine;” “. . . for this audience (--hear me!);” “. . . this be my plea (petition).”

28. Literally, “you went until you were not” (rāh shodī tā nabūdī).


30. Rūmī, Kulliyāt-e Shams-e Tabrīzī, op. cit., vol. II, ghazal no. 357. Metre: a variant of hazaj that the prosodists do not mention: (-- --/--/--/---/---/---/---). The first five syllables are almost uniformly “--/---” and the ending syllables are uniformly in one of two patterns: “--/---” or “--/---/---.”


32. I take this pain to mean the pain of the human condition of being lost in the cosmos and, concomitantly, the pain of human separation from the Divine, the assumed result of dying being finding and arriving at one’s home, the Divine.

33. Perhaps this is a reference to Bū ‘Alī Sinā (Avicenna, known in Iran for his mystical philosophy in addition to his medical, philologic and other studies) or Bū ‘Alī Tirmidhī (or Abū ‘Alī Tirmidhī, a famous early Sufi).