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HAFEZ

TRANSLATIONS
AND
INTERPRETATIONS
OF
THE
GHAZALS

Love is a boundless ocean
nothing for it but to drown

each time you give up your heart to love
is a moment of true joy
such good deeds have no need of divination

follow the path of unreason look for the signs
for like the road to the treasure
it is not obvious to everyone

bring wine and do not try to scare us
with reason's prohibitions
for such authorities hold no sway
in this jurisdiction

the clear eye beholds you
like the new moon in the sky
but not every eye perceives that crescent beauty

O you who are my very soul
ask of your own eyes who is slaying me

it is not in my horoscope
it is not the fault of the planets

Hafez' cries have no purchase
leave no mark on you

I am astonished at this heart of granite

Let me remember you who in parting
did not remember me
who did not soothe my sore heart with your valediction

you who are in the prime of youth
and had the power to set me free
who did not grant this old slave his liberty

I shall wear a petitioner's shirt stained with my blood
before the indifferent heavens
who would not show me the way
to plant myself beneath the banner of justice

my cries outdo even those of Farhād
here on this mountain-side
in the hope that their distant echo might reach your door

and since you withdrew your shadow from the meadow
the dawn-bird no longer nests in the boxwood tree

creation's artist will not delineate
the lineaments of desire
of he who does not confess your God-given beauty

if the wind has brought some message quickly from you
it must have learned something of your agility

O change the tune play a Hejāzi mode
for without taking leave my beloved took that road

Farhād: the doomed lover of Shirin in the story of the king Khosrow and his beautiful queen Shirin

Hejāz: the part of Arabia where Mecca is situated but also one of a number of Persian musical modes

Flaunting their charms they dance to the sound
of Hafez' poetry

the dark-eyed Kashmiris the Turks of Samarkand

Since in Persian the word for he and she is the same, we cannot usually say if Hafez' beloved was masculine or feminine. Sometimes context helps: for example there are references to "soft down" on the face, or to being veiled. It was considered indecent in court circles to write about women or girls, so that suggests an alternative to the more obvious explanation of the male references. On a few occasions Hafez does use the feminine *mashooqē*, rather than the masculine *mashooq*, but this may simply have been for the meter.

Please God let me not spurn wine
in the season of the rose
I boast of my good sense
how could I do such a thing

summon the minstrels
so that I may donate
the sum of my learning and virtue
to the sound of the *nei* and the lute

my heart has grown sick and tired
of debates in the *madrasē*
I shall devote myself once again
to the service of love and wine

where is the messenger of morning
so to that glad countenance
I may voice my complaints
about the night spent alone

when could we ever rely
on the vagaries of time
fill my drinking bowl to the brim
so that I may tell sad tales
of Jamshīd Kavūs and Kai

madrasē: a secondary or higher religious college

Kavūs, Kai (short for Kaiqubād): ancient historical (Sassanian) kings whose exploits were recounted in Ferdowsi's 10th century national epic, the *shāhnāmē*

Last night half asleep I went to the tavern door
with my gown soiled and my prayer-rug stained with wine
the Master's assistant came up to me
scolding and saying
wake up you dozy old tramp

clean yourself up before you enter
the sacred precincts of these Magian ruins
so that they are not sullied by the likes of you

in your lust for the lips of young boys
how long will you go on
staining the pure jewel of the spirit
with liquid ruby

be chaste and pure at this time of life
and do not blemish the honored garment of age
by paying court to youth

those who are initiates of the true path of love
can immerse themselves in that ocean
without wetting one hair on their heads

purify yourself
climb out of nature's deep well
for foul water will not make you clean

I replied O you who mean the world to me
surely it is no sin if in spring-time
the rose-petal is tinted with wine

he said

Hafez your acquaintances have had enough
of these sophistries

O how his gentleness was mixed with such reproof

Paradoxes, contradictions, inversions: the characteristic discourse of mysticism. Up-ending the conventional wisdom, reversing the usual logic. To be poor is to be rich. To serve is to be free. To abandon is to find. To have nothing is everything.

O come back serving-boy
for it is I who want to serve you
eager to be your slave I pray for you

and with your bright cup that overflows with joy
lead me out of the shadows of confusion

although I have been immersed a hundred ways
in the ocean of sin
since I have discovered love I have become
one of the forgiven

O learned colleagues do not chastise me
for my licentiousness my notoriety
since this was set down long ago
in the book of fate

drink up for being a lover
is not something one chooses
a matter of free will
but the gift of nature each of us receives

I who have not left my homeland
in my entire life
for love of you am prepared to go into exile

exhausted and weak my journeying
takes me over mountain and sea

O Khezz my sure-footed guide
assist me in my spiritual quest

a long way though I may seem
from the gateway of your auspicious palace
I am in my heart of hearts
one of those who never leave your presence

Hafez would lay down his life before your eyes
such is his dream if only he was spared

Khezz: literally "the green one," a mysterious spiritual guide who in ancient myth prevented Alexander from drinking the Water of Life and who also appears in the Koran as a guide to Moses

If he put me to the sword I would not stop him
if he pierced me with a dart I would be obliged

tell him whose eyebrow is shaped like a bow
to loose his arrow at me
so that I may perish by his hand his arm

the travails of this world cause me to stumble
what can I hold onto but the cup

rise O sun of the dawn of expectation
for I am imprisoned in separation's night

answer my cries
O Master of the house of ill-repute
make me young again with a drink for I am old

last night I vowed by the ringlets of your hair
I would not raise my bowed head from your hem

Hafez burn these pious robes of yours
for if you catch fire it will not be from them

How long shall our hearts grieve
at the passage of time

imagine how it would be
if there were no heart and no such thing as time

God grant that my friend return safely
and deliver me from the bonds of castigation

O wind bring me the dust of the road
that my dear friend has traveled
that I may fill my eyes with it and give it lodging

bring me help
for my way is blocked in every direction
by that hair that face that mole that cheek and down

today when I am in your hands show me some mercy
for tomorrow when I am dust what use will remorse be

to those who discourse on love
I have nothing to say
except peace be upon you go

O my poor dervish you that have nothing
do not expect to be spared this sword
for love's tribe exacts tribute even from the dead

throw your ascetic's gown onto the flames
for the arch of the wine-boy's eyebrows
has replaced the *mehrab* of the *imam*

God forbid that I should lament your injustice
for the cruelty of the lovely is kindness itself

but Hafez will not cut short his account of your hair
for its chains shall bind him till the resurrection

imam: religious leader, here of a mosque

I all helplessness and despairing need
the other all haughtiness
and drunk overweening pride

the secret I have not shared
and will share with no one
I shall confide in that friend who will keep it
and he alone

to describe properly your hair
fold upon fold
cannot be done briefly
for that is a long story

recalling Majnūn's heavy heart
and the flowing tresses of Leili
the face of Mahmud of Ghazni
and the soles of Ayāz's feet

I have sealed up my eyes
like a young falcon
so that when they open
they may see only your face

whoever comes to the Ka'ba of your street
to the *qibla* of your eyebrows
finds himself in the very eye of prayer

Ayāz: a young slave boy who served King Mahmud so well that one only ever saw the soles of his feet as he abased himself before him, so much so that the king fell in love with him

Qibla: the direction of prayer towards Mecca.

friends

if you want to understand
how Hafez' heart burns
inquire now of the candle
before it melts down

The ignorant are bewildered
by the looks we give one another
winks glances
the games we play

let them think what they want
I am what I seem to be

reason would suggest
that we are the pivot of the compass
but love knows we are spinning round

God has indentured us
to those with sweet lips
we are their slaves and they our noble lords

we are poverty-stricken
but yearn for wine and song
a pity we cannot pawn our pashmina gowns

to boast about love
and then complain about the behavior of the beloved
is the sign of a charlatan
love's dilettantes deserve to be spurned

my eyes are not the only place
where your face appears
sun and moon act as its mirror also

bats being blind cannot describe the sun
for even visionaries are dazzled by that reflection

if the pious do not understand Hafez the *rend*
who cares .

the devil flees from those who know the Koran

It is only through endeavor
that the novice becomes a master
if you do not follow the path yourself
how can you become a guide

under love's tuition in the school of Truth
be diligent my son so that you in your turn
may become a father

wash your hands of the base metal of existence
so that like the people of the Way
you may practise love's alchemy
and transmute it into gold

eating and sleeping merely distance you
from your proper station
only when you do without them
will you find your true self

if the light of God's love
illuminates your heart and soul
you will outblazon the sun
and if you immerse yourself even for a moment
in the great sea of God
believe me the seven oceans
will not wet one hair on your head

from head to foot you will become
the light of God
and on the path of glory lose all sense of either
and if God's face becomes your only vision
you will see everything

when the foundations of your being
have been overturned
know in your heart
things will never be the same again

Hafez if yearning for oneness fills your mind
you must become like dust
at the door of those who truly understand

Hafez your only duty is to pray

do not be concerned

whether He has heard you or not

Hafez refers mainly to the face and head; there is relatively little reference to the rest of the body, apart from stature and poise. And even with the head it is selective: the hair above all; the eyes, eyebrows and eyelashes; the mouth; the cheek; the dimple on the chin. The reason is that each of these means something: the hair connotes confusion, the eyelashes are like darts, the dimple is a well; and so on. It is a poetry not of description or observation but signification.

Joseph abandoned returns in the end to Canaan
do not despair

Jacob quits his hut of sorrow for a garden of joy
do not despair

your broken heart will one day surely be mended
your unresting mind will find a place to rest

and if for a while the heavens seem set against us
remember fate does not always take the same turn

if the springtime of life comes back to the beds of flowers
the songbird will be shaded by the parasol of the rose

if the tide of nothingness sweeps away the ground of your being
since Noah is your Master do not despair at this

and if you do not know what lies behind the curtain
remember there are things of which we are not aware

if your yearning for the Ka'ba takes you through a desert
strewn with sharp thorns do not complain

if the halt is dangerous but the road even more so
no journey is endless do not do not despair

if you are loveless and blocked at every turn
God knows all alters all offer up your prayer

alone and destitute in the profundity of the darkness
Hafez pray read your Koran do not despair

Two paths two ways

on the one hand self-discipline
on the other self-destruction

on the one the hermit's vigil
on the other drunken ruin

on the one the droning sermon
on the other the sound of the viol

on the one hand piety
on the other the free spirit

on the one hand sobriety
on the other the limpid wine

on the one hand the dead lamp
on the other the torch of the sun

Last night I dreamed that the angels
were beating at the tavern gate
kneading Adam's clay
they made measures out of it

the hidden seraphims
the purest of the pure
sat down and drank with me
who beg from door to door

the angels could not bear
the weight of heaven's trust
so the lot fell to man
and this one who is insane

there is some excuse for
the unending wars of religion
for unable to see reality
people cling to illusion

God be thanked that now
there is peace between Him and me
when the maidens of heaven heard
they danced draining their cups

fire is not that which we see
in each laugh of the candle's flame
fire is that which burns up
the harvest of the moth's being

since poets first used their pens
to comb the tresses of speech
no one like Hafez has unveiled
the complexion of our minds