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Complaining of separations

Moulana Rumi,
The opening lines of *The Mathnavi*

Songs of Exile



Songs of Exile



B ä n o o Z a n



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for my sister
Zahra Ghanbaralizadeh

بشنو از نی چون حکایت می کند
واز جدایی ها شکایت می کند

مولانا رومی

Listen to the reed's narration

Complaining of separations

— **MOULANA RUMI,**

The opening lines of *The Mathnavi*

Introduction



The One I Didn't Write for Songs of Exile

Identity is a pen
Borders are books
You are the writer

Your feet
turn the road
into you

Poetry is the language
of accents

converts
silence to songs

I am
iambic
barbed wire

Give me
your destiny
and I will read you
better than Persian

Books exile
writers
like children
parents

The lines echo:
We are the clouds
life took off
only to land on

In the quiet of the page
the words
hijack the voice

You can't give up
your peace
looking beyond

Identity is skin
Conflicts are bones
Exile is the soul

Phoenix (I)



Cold-fire phoenix —
feathers fighting fire
beak blossoming beauty —
death coming to life

Cold-weather phoenix —
feathers flying fire
brain blooming intellect
heart the same it was
the same tomorrow

Cold-feather phoenix —
eyes following vision
talons facing tempests —
the truth

Cold-country phoenix —
flaying the skin of self
assuming the disguise of other
wearing wounds as in-
vulnerable wings

Ice-fire phoenix —
immortal
as the birds of hell

Phoenix (II)



Fire-feather phoenix —
the torch of fate —

denied death
the chaos of harmony —

Fire melted the dross
and metal was the more metallic

Fire roasted the flesh
and the foul was the fairer

Fire brightened the brain
and Prometheus was the more titanic

Prometheus-phoenix
with lips chained to the rock
of *Rubaiyat*

Unbind her
Love,

unbind me
from the rock of immortal injustice

Phoenix (III)



Frozen
not far away

Flames are together
fire is alone

Feathers are together
phoenix is alone

Phoenix loves death
Fire loves life

Phoenix is fair
beauty is foul

Phoenix fears immortality
Fire fears death

How brave to fear oneself
How timid to fear others

The immortals are asleep

Phoenix —
your back to
the mirror —

you are the most
immortal death

The Mirage



Oh, Freedom,
Happy exile!

you pinned blood's back
to earth
and spilled earth's blood

liberated memory —
an empty glass —

Wine is sweet thirst

The saints
sprinkle blood
with no remorse

My hand is devoid
of me

There is a war
in your name

I have martyred you
sold you
to freedom

oh, Freedom

Journey



On the way to nowhere
the question crossed my path:
“Will you be happy?”

I looked back:
what a luxury
I could not afford

I had left my treasures to poverty
my story to those who prevail
I had left my self behind

This letter
will never reach destiny

It cannot be unwritten

Will there be another Everywhere?

This loneliness —
is a gift so priceless
I will decline

God,
Will you
take it back?

Yaldä¹



Yaldä comes
and you come —

Mitra²
from the height of darkness

Prometheus
from Olympus

Beauty
from the heart of pain —

Yaldä comes
and you do not

leaving me to
self-birth

There are seasons
between heart and reason

whiteness
between the greenest blood
and the reddest body³

Oh, Love —
my flag

¹ The Persian Winter Solstice Celebration, celebrated on the Northern Hemisphere's longest night of the year, that is, on the eve of the Winter Solstice.

² Mitra, the Sun God, symbolizing light, goodness and strength on Earth.

³ The Iranian flag is a tricolour comprising equal horizontal bands of green, white and red; with green on top, white in the middle and red at the bottom.

Words (I)



I undressed the words
touched their lips

We did not make love
as it was made
before we were made

Lovers are codes
and words are lovers' silence

You are the language
so universal
you are forgotten

Be my linguist

Turn me
into your words

Words (II)



The words you give me
are not words

Not fallen so low
I am still the idea —

the freedom of “is”
through “-isms”

There is no shared past
in this future

Transform your words
into yourself

that I may
begin to believe
in me

Words (III)



Oh, Word,
I am banished to you
from the land of
non-verbal blood

All I knew —
non-words
“signifying nothing”¹

We talk to the difference of voices

and I am forever in doubt
about what I mean

Language
is the music
my body is playing

I was not made
for this melody
nor the one before

I am forever silent

And when I am journeying
to the other

the language does not accompany me

I am in love
with misunderstanding

I look words
in the eyes
and invoke them

There is no response —
they do not recognize themselves
in my accent

Language is a silent philosopher
and I am an articulate silence

My consonants
vowel
poetry

¹ William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, V, v.

The Train



There is a train
taking me to the unknown

There are no stops

My destination is my journey —
Directions end where the centre is
and the centre ends
where directions meet

We speak
the same tongue —
our togetherness
intimate acts of separation

I look out the window
glimpsing the world
that claims to be the train

And I look away from the window
eyeing the journey
that claims to be
nothing else

Oh, train,
get out of yourself
out of my journey
Reach the world

Let us meet
in the land of land
at the time of time

Let us be the other —
our self

Get out of my poem
you stranger —
the train most me

I wish to get at me
without us

The train invades me
leaving no train behind
leaving no me behind

I am a
utopia

and the train in me
has turned so human
I can no longer
believe in

Threshold



The hand of the land was extended
and I stood
at the threshold of philosophy

Your veins were open
liberating my blood
from the circle of exile

Nature —
a witness
to my stasis
and your growth

My eyes caressing you
in my absence

Love,
My homeland,

I had always thought
you
were as far as I could go

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- “Rape,” in *From the Root Zine*.
- “Words (IV)” and “Home Land,” in *Ropedancer: The Ontario Poetry Society 2012 Member Anthology*.
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- “Earth,” in *Verse Afire: A Tri-annual Publication of the Ontario Poetry Society*.
- “Ädat,” in *From the Root Zine*.
- “Exile Train,” in *Harvest: A Collection of New Canadian Poetry*.
- “Baba,” in *Derafsh-e Mehr*, <http://derafshemehr.files.wordpress.com/2013/10/derafsh-e-mehr-issue-2-summer-2013.pdf>.
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- “Disarmament,” in *High Coupe: Taking Contemporary Haiku for a Spin*, <http://highcoupe.blogspot.ca/2013/01/haiku-by-banoo-zan.html>.
- “Sister,” in *Verse Afire: A Tri-annual Publication of the Ontario Poetry Society*.
- “Combat Pilot,” in *Wordspells*.
- “Your Smile,” in *The Loyalty of Breath: A Canadian Anthology of Poetry*.
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- “Birth” and “Battle of Books,” in *Episteme*, http://www.episteme.net.in/index.php?option=com_phoca_download&view=category&id=89:poems&Itemid=595.
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About the Author



Bänoo Zan is a poet, librettist, translator, teacher, editor and poetry curator, with more than 180 published poems and poetry-related pieces as well as three books. *Song of Phoenix: Life and Works of Sylvia Plath*, was reprinted in Iran in 2010. *Songs of Exile*, her first poetry collection, was released in 2016 in Canada by Guernica Editions. It was shortlisted for the Gerald Lampert Memorial Award by the League of Canadian Poets in 2017. *Letters to My Father*, her second poetry book, was published in 2017 by Piquant Press in Canada. She is the founder of Shab-e She'r (Poetry Night), Toronto's most diverse poetry reading and open mic series (inception: 2012). It is a brave space that bridges the gap between communities of poets from different ethnicities, nationalities, religions (or lack thereof), ages, genders, sexual orientations, disabilities, poetic styles, voices and visions.

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