Listen to the reed’s narration
Complaining of separations

Moulana Rumi,
The opening lines of *The Mathnavi*
Songs of Exile
Songs of Exile

Bënnoo Zan

Guernica Editions Inc. acknowledges the support of the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario Arts Council. The Ontario Arts Council is an agency of the Government of Ontario.

We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada.

Nous reconnaissons l’appui financier du gouvernement du Canada.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oedipus</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom Fighter</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutability</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earth</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adat</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moment</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Narrative</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exile Train</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baba</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toronto 2012</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azân on a Toronto Streetcar</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disarmament</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combat Pilot</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your Smile</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Orgy</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma'soumeh</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payâm-dâr</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This poem is selfish—</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No!</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Activist and the Passivist</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let me paint you with my colour</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shahâdah</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nowruz</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tata</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Am I About?</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Namâz</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allah-u Jamil va Yoheb-o Jamal</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Journey</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the Poet’s Harem</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battle of Books</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I die for you, I live for me</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encounter</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who?</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Story</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Execution</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ebadat</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mirror Soliloquy</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter to God</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farewell</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mansooreh</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About The Author</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
for my sister
Zahra Ghanbaralizadeh
Listen to the reed’s narration
Complaining of separations
— MOULANA RUMI,
The opening lines of The Mathnavi
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?
Yaldā

Yaldā comes
and you come —

Mitra
from the height of darkness

Prometheus
from Olympus

Beauty
from the heart of pain —

Yaldā 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 body

Oh, Love —
my flag

---

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

---

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 (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

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

1 William Shakespeare, Macbeth, V, v.
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

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
Rape

Like the inquisition of God
by religion

like tresses of the sun
on the throne of love

like my hands
on shoulders of loneliness

every heartbeat
intoxicates the torturer

every question
inspires the philosopher

Flying to the deserts
like death on the scaffold of life

our embrace —
unvoiced arguments —

my lips
forming into yours

your phallus
turning into my womb

in the dissolution
of boundaries of bitterness

Your agony
is evidence
that I have raped
your ego
Words (IV)

The words were crawling
on my palm

The fortune teller looked up:

Your hand is nature
turning against itself

Let me kill the worms
of hope

Pray
reward me
with your fortune —

the alchemy of life

Masks

The blue in your eyes
is no wing,
My brown
no root.

Your sex
is no love,
my perplexity
no mystic dance.

Could we exchange
masks for a minute?

To understand
the impossibility
of understanding.
At war with the world
at peace with the self —
have I won or lost?

in the bloodless bloodshed
of either-or —

a pahlavan\(^2\)
of epic silence

Which breast do I dispose of?
being left-hearted

Versifier,
I would’ve challenged you
had I not been the verse

My mirror-smeared
curls of courage
untold for romantic
cover

In bed with the battlefield —
a hero fighting me with love

Taking arms
against the arms of war
I envy the object of my love

---

\(^1\) Literally “of heroic mettle,” one of the heroines in the Shāhnāmeh, "The Book of Kings" or "The Epic of Kings," by Firdawsī. She was a champion who fought against Sohrab, the son of epic hero Rostam. On his quest to find his heroic father whom he has never met, Sohrab encounters a knight in full armour. In the middle of the fight, the unknown knight’s helmet falls off and a woman, Gord-Äfarīd, is revealed. Sohrab stops the battle, falls in love and asks her to marry him. He is rejected on the grounds that "the Turks do not seek consorts from among Iranians."

\(^2\) Persian, an ethical hero.
The Last Temptation

The last temptation
was the temptation to kindness

undoing oneself
to act the other

the kind cruelty of silence
and the cruel kindness of lies

to embody the flesh
and behead the head

The last temptation
was the spiritual sex
and the sexual spirit —

the last invitation
of instincts

and the last seduction
of intellect

The last temptation
is the last temptation

Post-Colonial

The sky in your eyes
is the tempestuous peace
of militant empathy.

The sky in your eyes
is the earth I would soar in
with intellect spread-eagled above life,
above all there is to meaning.

My branches aspiring to blue,
my roots to brown,
my years to spring.

Your eyes to water.

Your eyes
the story of all elements,
un-elemental.

My thirst desiring
the blue wine of your eyes
to quench all queries of wisdom.

The sky in your eyes
is an invitation
to all is left of me
in you.

I am the cloud in your eyes,
the thunder
and the rainbow.
I am the sunshine —
absently present
in the affectionate logical embrace,
enlightening the narcissistic gloom
of unconsumed thoughts —
the undisguised secret of dialogues
we will never have.

None know love
but those not in love
with self or you:
the reason for the unreason —
the irrationality of the mind
and the logic of the heart.

The sky in your eyes —
the ocean of affection,
the river of intellect,
the spring of joy.

The sky in your eyes,
the mother tongue of the father,
the alphabet of effacement
the pure poetry of power —
so subdued
it passes for surrender.

The sky of your eyes —
the earth in my philosophy,
the wings of my deconstruction,
the spelling of my word.
My life is my Plato
writing my life after me —
a footnote to my life
the antidote to amnesia
on the banks of Styx
I am more than my life
more than life betrayed to death —
the life gods have decreed
and people have obeyed
I am not Homer
blinded by heroism
I am the dreamer
in undemocratic democracy
My life refuses
to stop thinking about life
It is in my hands —
the hemlock presented to me
in my honour
the toast I am offering
to the health of my life
My life is the never-setting sun —
the life I will begin
when I die

My life is my Aegean —
the happily-ever-after
tragedy

the far-sighted sky
the wings of Icarus
and the wisdom of Tiresias

the vision of future
in light of the past

My life is my dialogue
the sober intoxication
of centrifugal irony

the most personal
political action in my life

It needs no tribunal
It needs to be tried

I live it to the end
transcend it with
grace and good reason

Fortunate I am
leading a life worth me
to be worth leading
such life
Assimilation

Losses
are my gains

See how well-off I am:
off you, off me

from blue to brown

I have been on your shores
not in your waters

afraid to dive into you
to drown in you

not knowing
of tsunamis

Poems are writing themselves
without us

Beware!
I want you
to be away

Beware of the deep
where blue turns to black
and you turn
to me

Beware of us
fusing into one
as Hephaestian forge
yields inflexible armours

Beware of eyes
granting us freedom
against our will

Beware of me
turning into you
as the sky into sea
and the sea into deserts

Beware of reading my lips
to write your tongue

Oh, beware of separations
as trees will grow so tall
as to reach the skies

Beware!
my love,

I see no way
out of me
for you
Illicit Philosophy

My wings flutter
I settle on your feathers
consummate
my desire for oneness
I take off
pass the clouds
enter your blind spot—
desert your water
offer you
my hemlock
brave the irony
of dialogue
Touch my thoughts
and you will drink
the sun
Let me betray Loneliness
just this once
with you
knowing ou¹ will claim me back

Prometheus

Your blue silence
lashes at my rock
Your composure quakes
my bed
You mirror heavens
in your sea
target my laughter
shine through thunder
and unity is diversity
Your Olympus is
other than you and me
I am condemned
to stealing your heart
with vultures
of memory
Wield the outrage
rend the distance
descend on this open wound
Claim the memory of Hades
Release omniscience
to hear my prophecy

¹ In Persian, the non-gender specific third person pronoun, standing for both "she" and "he."
Do not postpone the unknown
Zeus,

I am your Titan.

Words (V)

I am a word
in your lexicon

I know no others

and unless
I know them all
you will not tell
my story

My hands
drive me
to you

my feet
ignore my commands

whirling
in the dervish dance
of silence

my song of liberation

is my exile
from the confinement
of your words
Athena

You are copyrighted by me

You grew in the womb of my brain

my skull expanding with your growth

the parturition painful and life-giving as Hera's

Every man is a woman at the moment of liberation of art from the artist

You wield my weapon — you are me better than I

Assuming the birth-role I betray my masculinity

Every author is a woman and every woman is her text

I cannot metamorphose myself back to Zeus:

I am copyrighted by you

Anā l-Ḥagh

God, You are lonely

I am not acting you I am you

a soliloquy addressed to universe on the stage of life

1 Anā l-Ḥaqq, "I am The Truth," interpreted as "I am God," (al-Ḥaqq "the Truth" is one of the titles of Allah), a statement by Mansūr al-Hallāj (c. 858-March 26, 922), Persian mystic, writer and teacher of Sufism, who was gruesomely tortured, dismembered and executed for his claim.
Acknowledgements

As a poet, I am not committed to narrative structure, nor do I wish to make my biographers’ job easier for them. I’m making an exception for three people, though:

Much love to Michael Mirolla for establishing a dialogue among diverse voices on the Canadian page, and to Kate Marshall Flaherty for reading an earlier version of the manuscript and giving detailed feedback. Boundless love to Cy Strom for proofreading the manuscript.

Below is a list of print and online publications where some of the poems in this volume have previously appeared:

- “Yaldâ” and “Journey,” in *Lemon Tradewinds: A Canadian Anthology* by the Ontario Poetry Society.
- “Rape,” in *From the Root Zine*.
- “Words (IV)” and “Home Land,” in *Ropedancer: The Ontario Poetry Society 2012 Member Anthology*.
• “Tree of Heaven” and “Mutability,” in *Voices 2012: An Anthology of Toronto Writers’ Co-operative.*
• “Encounter” and “Gord-Äfarid,” in *Prachya Review.*
• “Mother,” in *Derafš-e Mehr: A Literary Journal by the Students of English Literature at the University of Mazandaran,* http://derafshemehr.files.wordpress.com/2013/12/derafsh-e-mehr-issue-3-fall-2013.pdf.
• “Ädat,” in *From the Root Zine.*
• “Exile Train,” in *Harvest: A Collection of New Canadian Poetry.*
• “Combat Pilot,” in *Wordspells.*
• “Your Smile,” in *The Loyalty of Breath: A Canadian Anthology of Poetry.*
• “The Orgy,” in *Generally about Books,* http://networkedblogs.com/NIeJV.

• “Shahâdah,” in *Dove Tales: An International Journal on the Arts.*
• “What Am I about?” in *Entre Nous: Newsletter of The Ulyssean Society.*
• “I die for you, I live for me,” in *Voices 2015.*
Poet, translator, teacher, editor and poetry organizer Bānoo Zan landed in Canada in 2010. She has published more than 120 poems, translations, biographies and articles in print and online publications around the globe. Her book, *The Song of Phoenix: Life and Works of Sylvia Plath*, was reprinted in Iran in 2010. She is the founder, an organizer and host of Shab-e She’r (Poetry Night), the most diverse poetry reading series in Toronto. Since November 2012, the series has been bridging the gap between diverse poetry communities, bringing together artists from different ethnicities, nationalities, religions (or lack thereof), ages, genders, sexual orientations, disabilities, poetic styles, voices and visions.