

AGHA SHAHID ALI

GHAZALS

for Edward W. Said

In Jerusalem a dead phone's dialed by
exiles.
You learn your strange fate: you were
exiled by exiles.

You open the heart to list unborn
galaxies.
Don't shut that folder when Earth is filed
by exiles.

Before Night passes over the wheat of
Egypt,
let stones be leavened, the bread torn wild
by exiles.

Crucified Mansoor was alone with the
Alone:
God's loneliness—just His—compiled by
exiles.

By the Hudson lies Kashmir, brought
from Palestine—
It shawls the piano, Bach beguiled by
exiles.

Tell me who's tonight the Physician of
Sick Pearls?
Only you as you sit, Desert child, by
exiles.

Match Majnoon (he kneels to pray on a
wine-stained rug)
or prayer will be nothing, distempered
mild by exiles.

“Even things that are true can be proved.”
Even they?
Swear not by Art but, O Oscar Wilde, by
exiles.

Don't weep, we'll drown out the Calls to
Prayer, O Saqi—
I'll raise my glass before wine is defiled by
exiles.

Was—after the last sky—this the fashion
of fire:
Autumn's mist pressed to ashes styled by
exiles?

If my enemy's alone and his arms are
empty,
give him my heart silk-wrapped like a
child by exiles.

Will you, Belovéd Stranger, ever witness
Shahid—
two destinies at last reconciled by exiles?

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The pure pain with which he recognizes
angels
has left him without cures among the
dreamless angels.

The dawn looked over its shoulder to ask
the naked night
for the new fashions in which it could
dress angels.

Is it that I've been searching in the wrong
places for you?
That your address is still Los Angeles,
Angels?

The air is my vinegar, I, its perfect
preserve—
Watch how I'm envied by Heaven's
meticulous angels.

In Inferno the walls mirror brocades and
silks—
Satan's legions—though fallen—are,
nonetheless, angels.

"Let there be Light," He said. "And the
music of the spheres."
To what tune does one set *The Satanic
Verses*, Angels?

I won't lift, off the air, any wingprints, O
God—
Hire raw detectives to track down the
mutinous angels.

All day we call it wisdom but then again
at night
it's only pain as it comes from the
darkness, Angels!

Do they dye their wings after Forever,
tinting their haloes,
aging zero without Time, those
androgynous angels?

You play innocence so well, with such
precision, Shahid:
You could seduce God Himself, and fuck
the sexless angels.

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for Anthony Lacavaro

I say *This, after all, is the trick of it all*
when suddenly you say “Arabic of it all.”

After Algebra there was Geometry—and
then Calculus—
But I’d already failed the arithmetic of it
all.

White men across the U.S. love their
wives’ curries—
I say *O No!* to the turmeric of it all.

“Suicide represents ... a privileged
moment. ...”
Then what keeps you—and me—from
being sick of it all?

The telephones work, but I’m still cut off
from you.
We star in *America*, fast epic of it all.

What shapes galaxies and keeps them
from flying apart?
There’s that missing mass, the black
magic of it all.

I’m smashed, O Enemy, in your isolate
mirror—
Why the diamond display then—in
public—of it all?

Before the palaver ends, hear the
sparrows’ songs,
the quick quick quick, O the quick of it
all.

For the suicidally beautiful, Autumn now
starts.
Their fathers' heroes, boys gallop, kick off
it all.

The sudden storm swept its ice across the
great plains.
How did you find me, then, in the thick
of it all?

For Shahid too the night went "quickly as
it came"—
After that, O Friend!, came the music of
it all.

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Now "God to aggrandize, God to
Glorify" in
the candle that "clear burns"—glare I
can't come by in.

What else for night-travel? The extra pair
of socks?
Besides the tin of tea, pack the anti-fly in.

If you don't succeed at first, do certainly
give up—
I too shut off those who say *Just keep
tryin'!*

Galloping flood, hooves iron by the
river's edge—
Heart, O beating night, how will you rein
the sky in?

Thank you for the parchment and the
voice of the sea.
A drowned god used the shell to send his
reply in.

When the last leaves were birds, stuck
wingless to branches,
the wind glass-stormed the season you'd
left me to cry in.

Flood the market, O Blood, so the liver is
restored,
again emotion's sea, the heart's forsaken
tie-in.

When even God is dead, what is left but
prayer?
And this wilderness, the mirrors I
multiply in?

Doomsday is over, Eden stretched vast
before me—
I see the rooms—all the rooms—I am to
die in.

Ere he never returns, he whose footsteps
are dying,
Shahid, run out weeping, bring that
passer-by in.

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But first the screened mirror, all I knew
of water!
Imagine "the thirstquenching virtue of
water."

Who "kept on building castles" "Upon a
certain rock"
"Glacial warden over 'dreams come true'"
of water?

Of course, I saw Chile in my rearview
mirror,
its disappeared under a curfew of water.

Hagar, in shards, reflects her shattered
Ishmael.
Call her the desert Muslim—or Jew—of
water.

God, Wordless, beheld the pulled rain
but missed the held sun ...
The Rainbow—that Arrow!—Satan's
coup of water.

Don't beckon me, Love, to the island of
your words—
You yourself reached it, erasing my view
of water.

Her star-cold palanquin goes with the
caravan.
Majnoon, now she'll be news—out of the
blue—of water.

When the Beast takes off his mask, Love,
let it be you
sweetening Tomorrow Doom's taboo of
water.

No need to stop the ears to the Sirens'
rhetoric;
just mock their rock-theme, O skeleton
crew of water.

Are your streets, O Abraham, washed of
"the Sons of Stones"?
Sand was all Ishmael once drew of water.

I have signed, O my enemy, your death-
warrant.
I won't know in time I am like you of
water.

For God's sake don't unveil the Black

Stone of Ka'ba.

What if Faith too's let love bead a dew of
water?

I have even become tears to live in your
eyes.

If you weep, Stark Lover, for my
breakthrough of water?

Shahid's junk mail has surfaced in a dead
letter office.

He's deluxed in the leather *Who's Who of
Water.*