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Dionysian Dithyrambs

Friedrich Nietzsche

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Dionysus-Dithyrambs

Friedrich Nietzsche

Historical English translation

English translation by Paul V. Cohn and Francis Bickley.

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DIONYSUS-DITHYRAMBS

(1888)

These are the songs of Zarathustra which he sang to himself so as to endure his last solitude.

OF THE POVERTY OF THE RICHEST

Ten years passed by--
Not a drop reached me,
No rain-fraught wind, no dew of love
--A rainless land....
Now entreat I my wisdom
Not to become stingy in this drought;
Overflow thyself, trickle thy dew,
Be thyself the rain of the parched wilderness!

I once bade the clouds
Depart from my mountains;
Once I said to them,
"More light, ye dark ones!"
To-day I entice them to come:
Make me dark with your udders:
--I would milk you,
Ye cows of the heights!
Milk-warm wisdom, sweet dew of love
I pour over the land.

Away, away, ye truths
That look so gloomy!
I will not have on my mountains
Bitter, impatient truths.

May truth approach me to-day
Gilded by smiles,
Sweetened by the sun, browned by love,--
A ripe truth I would fain break off from the tree.

To-day I stretch my hands
Toward the tresses of chance,
Wise enough to lead,
To outwit chance like a child.
To-day I will be hospitable
'Gainst the unwelcome,
'Gainst destiny itself I will not be prickly....
--Zarathustra is no hedgehog.

My soul,
Insatiable with its tongue,
Has already tasted of all things good and evil,
And has dived into all depths.
But ever, like the cork,
It swims to the surface again,
And floats like oil upon brown seas:
Because of this soul men call me fortunate.

Who are my father and mother?
Is not my father Prince Plenty?
And my mother Silent Laughter?
Did not the union of these two
Beget me, the enigmatic beast--
Me, the monster of light--
Me, Zarathustra, the squanderer of all wisdom?

Sick to-day from tenderness,
A dewy wind,
Zarathustra sits waiting, waiting on his mountains--

Sweet and stewing
In his own juice,
Beneath his own summit,
Beneath his ice,
Weary and happy,
A Creator on his seventh day.

--Silence!
A truth passes over me
Like a cloud,--
With invisible lightnings it strikes me,
On broad, slow stairs,
Its happiness climbs to me:
Come, come, beloved truth!

--Silence!
'Tis *my* truth!
From timid eyes,
From velvet shudders,
Her glance meets mine,
Sweet and wicked, a maiden's glance.
She has guessed the reason of my happiness,
She has guessed me--ha! what is she thinking?
A purple dragon
Lurks in the abyss of her maiden's glance.

--Silence! My truth is speaking!--

"Woe to thee, Zarathustra!
Thou lookest like one
That hath swallowed gold:
They will slit up thy belly yet!

Thou art too rich,
Thou corrupter of many!
Thou makest too many jealous,
Too many poor....
Even on me thy light casts a shadow--
I feel chill: go away, thou rich one
Go away, Zarathustra, from the path of thy sun

BETWEEN BIRDS OF PREY

Who would here descend,
How soon
Is he swallowed up by the depths!
But thou, Zarathustra,
Still lovest the abysses,
Lovest them as doth the fir tree!

The fir flings its roots
Where the rock itself gazes
Shuddering at the depths,--
The fir pauses before the abysses
Where all around
Would fain descend:
Amid the impatience
Of wild, rolling, leaping torrents
It waits so patient, stern and silent,
Lonely....

Lonely!
Who would venture
Here to be guest--
To be thy guest?

A bird of prey, perchance
Joyous at others' misfortune,
Will cling persistent
To the hair of the steadfast watcher,
With frenzied laughter,
A vulture's laughter....

Wherefore so steadfast?
--Mocks he so cruel:
He must have wings, who loves the abyss,
He must not stay on the cliff,
As thou who hangest there!--

O Zarathustra,
Cruellest Nimrod!
Of late still a hunter of God,
A spider's web to capture virtue,
An arrow of evil!
Now
Hunted by thyself,
Thine own prey
Caught in the grip of thine own soul.

Now
Lonely to me and thee,
Twofold in thine own knowledge,
Mid a hundred mirrors
False to thyself,
Mid a hundred memories
Uncertain,
Weary at every wound,
Shivering at every frost,
Throttled in thine own noose,

Self-knower!
Self-hangman!

Why didst bind thyself
With the noose of thy wisdom?
Why luredst thyself
Into the old serpent's paradise?
Why stolest into
Thyself, thyself?...

A sick man now,
Sick of serpent's poison,
A captive now
Who hast drawn the hardest lot:
In thine own shaft
Bowed as thou workest,
In thine own cavern
Digging at thyself,
Helpless quite,
Stiff,
A cold corse
Overwhelmed with a hundred burdens,
Overburdened by thyself,
A knower!
A self-knower!
The wise Zarathustra!...

Thou soughtest the heaviest burden,
So foundest thou thyself,
And canst not shake thyself off....

Watching,
Chewing,
One that stands upright no more!

Thou wilt grow deformed even in thy grave,
Deformed spirit!

And of late still so proud
On all the stilts of thy pride!
Of late still the godless hermit,
The hermit with one comrade--the devil,
The scarlet prince of every devilment!...

Now--
Between two nothings
Huddled up,
A question-mark,
A weary riddle,
A riddle for vultures....
They will "solve" thee,
They hunger already for thy "solution,"
They flutter already about their "riddle,"
About thee, the doomed one!
O Zarathustra,
Self-knower!
Self-hangman!

THE SUN SINKS

I

Not much longer thirstest thou,
O burnt-up heart!
Promise is in the air,
From unknown mouths I feel a breath,
--The great coolness comes....
My sun stood hot above me at noonday:
A greeting to you that are coming,

Ye sudden winds,
Ye cool spirits of afternoon!

The air is strange and pure.
See how the night
Leers at me with eyes askance,
Like a seducer!...
Be strong, my brave heart,
And ask not "Why?"

2

The day of my life!
The sun sinks,
And the calm flood
Already is gilded.
Warm breathes the rock:
Did happiness at noonday
Take its siesta well upon it?
In green light
Happiness still glimmers up from the brown abyss

Day of my life!
Eventide's nigh,
Thy eye already
Glows half-broken,
Thy dew already
Pours out its tear-drops,
Already over the white seas
Walks the purple of thy love,
Thy last hesitating holiness....

3

Golden gaiety, come!
Thou, the sweetest foretaste--
Foretaste of death!
--Went I my way too swiftly?
Now that the foot grows weary,
Thine eye still catches me,
Thy happiness still catches me.

Around but waves and play.
Whatever was hard
--Sank into blue oblivion.
My boat now stands idle.
Storm and motion--how did it forget them!
Desire and Hope are drowned,
Sea and soul are becalmed.

Seventh Solitude!
Never felt!
Sweet certainty nearer,
Or warmer the sun's ray.
--Glows not the ice of my summit yet?
Silvery, light, a fish
Now my vessel swims out....

THE LAST DESIRE[1]

So would I die
As then I saw him die,
The friend, who like a god
Into my darkling youth
Threw lightning's light and fire:
Buoyant yet deep was he,

Yea, in the battle's strife
With the gay dancer's heart.

Amid the warriors
His was the lightest heart,
Amid the conquerors
His brow was dark with thought--
He was a fate poised on his destiny:
Unbending, casting thought into the past
And future, such was he.

Fearful beneath the weight of victory,
Yet chanting, as both victory and death
Came hand and hand to him.

Commanding even as he lay in death,
And his command that man annihilate.

So would I die
As then I saw him die,
Victorious and destroying.

THE BEACON

Here, where the island grew amid the seas,
A sacrificial rock high-towering,
Here under darkling heavens,
Zarathustra lights his mountain-fires,
A beacon for ships that have strayed,
A beacon for them that have an answer!...

These flames with grey-white belly,
In cold distances sparkle their desire,
Stretches its neck towards ever purer heights--
A snake upreared in impatience:

This signal I set up there before me.
This flame is mine own soul,
Insatiable for new distances,
Speeding upward, upward its silent heat.

Why flew Zarathustra from beasts and men?
Why fled he swift from all continents?
Six solitudes he knows already--
But even the sea was not lonely enough for him,
On the island he could climb, on the mount he
became flame,
At the seventh solitude
He casts a fishing-rod far o'er his head.

Storm-tossed seamen! Wreckage of ancient stars
Ye seas of the future! Uncompassed heavens!
At all lonely ones I now throw my fishing-rod.
Give answer to the flame's impatience,
Let me, the fisher on high mountains,
Catch my seventh, last solitude!----

FAME AND ETERNITY[2]

I

Speak, tell me, how long wilt thou brood
Upon this adverse fate of thine?
Beware, lest from thy doleful mood
A countenance *90* dark is brewed
That men in seeing thee divine
A hate more bitter than the brine.

Speak, why does Zarathustra roam
Upon the towering mountain-height?

Distrustful, cankered, dour, his home
Is shut so long from human sight?

See, suddenly flames forth a lightning-flash,
The pit profound with thunderous challenge fights
Against the heavens, midst clamorous crack and crash
Of the great mountain! Cradled in the heights,
Born as the fruit of hate and lightning's love,
The wrath of Zarathustra dwells above
And looms with menace of a thundercloud.

Ye, who have roofs, go quickly, creep and hide!
To bed, ye tenderlings! For thunders loud
Upon the blasts of storm triumphant ride,
And bastions and ramparts sway and rock,

The lightning sears the dusky face of night,
And eerie truths like gleams of Hades mock
The sense familiar. So in storm breaks forth
The flaming curse of Zarathustra's wrath.

2

This fame, which all the wide world loves,
I touch with gloves,
And scorning beat
Beneath my feet.

Who hanker after the pay of it?
Who cast themselves in the way of it?
These prostitutes to gold,
These merchant folk. They fold
Their unctuous palms over the jingling fame,

Whose ringing chink wins all the world's acclaim.

Hast thou the lust to buy? It needs no skill.
They are all venal. Let thy purse be deep,
And let their greedy paws unhindered creep
Into its depths. So let them take their fill,
For if thou dost not offer them enough,
Their "virtue" they'll parade, to hide their huff.

They are all virtuous, yea every one.
Virtue and fame are ever in accord
So long as time doth run,

The tongues that prate of virtue as reward
Earn fame. For virtue is fame's clever bawd.

Amongst these virtuous, I prefer to be
One guilty of all vile and horrid sin!
And when I see fame's importunity
So advertise her shameless harlotry,
Ambition turns to gall. Amidst such kin
One place alone, the lowest, would I win.

This fame, which all the wide world loves,
I touch with gloves,
And scorning beat
Beneath my feet.

3

Hush! I see vastness!--and of vasty things
Shall man be dumb, unless he can enshrine
Them with his words? Then take the might which brings

The heart upon thy tongue, charmed wisdom mine!

I look above, there rolls the star-strown sea.
O night, mute silence, voiceless cry of stars!
And lo! A sign! The heaven its verge unbars--
A shining constellation falls towards me.

4

O loftiest, star-clustered crown of Being!
O carved tablets of Eternity!
And dost thou truly bend thy way to me?
Thy loveliness, to all--obscurity,
What? Fear'st not to unveil before *my* seeing?

O shield of Destiny!
O carven tablets of Eternity!
Yea, verily, thou knowest--what mankind doth hate,
What I alone do love: thou art inviolate
To strokes of change and time, of fates the fate!
'Tis only thou, O dire Necessity,
Canst kindle everlasting love in me!

O loftiest crown of Life! O shield of Fate!
That no desire can reach to invocate,
That ne'er defiled or sullied is by Nay,
Eternal Yea of life, for e'er am I thy Yea:
For I love thee, Eternity!

[Footnote 1: Translated by Dr. G. T. Wrench.]

[Footnote 2: Translated by Dr. G. T. Wrench.]

FRAGMENTS OF DIONYSUS-DITHYRAMBS

(1882-88)

SPEECHES, PARABLES, AND SIMILES

3

My home's in the highlands,
For the highlands I yearn not,
I raise not mine eyes aloft:
I am one that looks downward,
One that must bless,--All
blessers look downward.

11

Thus I began,
I unlearned all self-pity!

13

Not in shattering idols,
But in shattering the idol-worshipper in thee,
Consisted thy valour.

14

See, there stand
Those heavy cats of granite,
Those old, old Values.
Woe is me! How overthrow them?

Scratching cats,
With paws that are fettered,
There they sit
And their glance is poison.

17

A lightning-flash became my wisdom:
With sword of adamant it clove me every
darkness!

19

A thought that still
Flows hot, like lava:
But all streams of lava
Build a fortress around them,
And every thought finally
Oppresses itself with laws.

20

Such is my will:
And since 'tis my will,
All goes as I wish--
That was my final wisdom:
I willed what I must,
And thus I forced every "must,"--
Since then has been for me no "must."

23

Deceit
Is war's whole art
The fox's skin
Is my secret shirt of mail

25

We of the new underworld
Grub for new treasures.
Godless it seemed to the ancients

To disturb the earth's bowels for treasures
And once more this godlessness revives,
Hear ye not earth's bowels thunder?

28

Looking for love and finding masks,
Finding accursed masks and having to break them!

29

Do I love you?
Yes, as the rider loves his steed,
That carryeth him to his goal.

30

His pity is cruel,
His loving hand-clasp bruises,
Give not a giant your hand!

31

Ye fear me?
Ye fear the taut-strung bow?
Ye fear a man might set his arrow to the bow?

33

I am naught but a word-maker.
What matter words?
What matter I?

34

Ah, my friends,
Whither has flown all that is called "good"?
Whither all good people?
Whither the innocence of all these falsehoods?

I call all good,
Leaves and grass, happiness, blessing, and rain.

35

Not through his sins and greatest follies.
Through his perfection I suffered,
As I suffered most from men.[1]

36

"Man is evil."
So spake the wisest
For my consolement.

37

And only when I to myself am a burden
Do ye fall heavy upon me!

38

Too soon, already
I laugh again:
For a foe 'tis easy
To make me amends.

39

Gentle am I towards man and chance;
Gentle with all men, and even with grasses:
A spot of sunshine on winter curtains,
Moist with tenderness,
A thawing wind to snow-bound souls:

Proud-minded towards trifling
Gains, where I see the huckster's long finger,

'Tis aye my pleasure
To be bamboozled:
Such is the bidding of my fastidious taste.

40

A strange breath breathes and spits at me,
Am I a mirror, that straightway is clouded?

41

Little people,
Confiding, open-hearted,
But low-built portals,
Where only the low of stature can enter.

How can I get through the city-gate
Who had forgotten to live among dwarfs?

42

My wisdom was like to the sun,
I longed to give them light,
But I only deceived them.
The sun of my wisdom
Blinded the eyes
Of these poor bats....

43

Blacker and eviller things didst thou see than ever
a seer did:
Through the revels of Hell no sage had ever
journeyed.

44

Back! on my heels too closely ye follow!
Back! lest my wisdom should tread on you, crush you!

45

"He goes to hell who goes thy ways!"
So be it I to my hell
I'll pave the way myself with well-made maxims.

46

Your God, you tell me,
Is a God of love?
The sting of conscience
A sting from God?
A sting of love?

48

They chew gravel,
They lie on their bellies
Before little round things,
They adore all that falleth not down--
These last servants of God
Believers (in reality)!

50

They made their God out of nothing,
What wonder if now he is naught?

51

Ye loftier men! There have once been
More thoughtful times, more reflective,
Than is our to-day and to-morrow.

52
Our time is like a sick woman--
Let her but shriek, rave, scold,
And break the tables and dishes!

54

Ye mount?
Is it true that ye mount,
Ye loftier men?

Are ye not, pray,
Like to a ball
Sped to the heights
By the lowest that's in you?
Do ye not flee from yourselves, O ye climbers?

55

All that you thought
You had to despise,
Where you only renounced!

56

All men repeat the refrain!
No, no, and thrice say No!
What's all this yap-yap talk of heaven?
We would not enter the kingdom of heaven,
The kingdom of earth shall be ours?

57

The will redeemeth,
He that has nothing to do
In a Nothing finds food for trouble.

58

You cannot endure it more,
Your tyrannous destiny,
Love it--you're given no choice!

59

These alone free us from woes
(Choose now I)
Sudden death
Or long-drawn-out love.

60

Of death we are sure,
So why not be merry?

61

The worst of pleas
I have hidden from you--that life grew tedious!
Throw it away, that ye find it again to your taste!

62

Lonely days,
Ye must walk on valorous feet!

63

Loneliness
Plants naught, it ripens....
And even then you must have the sun for your
friend.

64

Once more must ye plunge in the throng--In
the throng ye grow hard and smooth.
Solitude withers
And lastly destroys.--

65

When on the hermit comes the great fear;
When he runs and runs
And knows not whither;
When the storms roar behind
And the lightning bears witness against him,
And his cavern breeds spectres
And fills him with dread.

67

Throw thy pain in the depths,
Man, forget! Man, forget!
Divine is the art of forgetting!
Wouldst fly?
Wouldst feel at home in the heights?
Throw thy heaviest load in the sea!
Here is the sea, hurl thyself in the sea!
Divine is the art of forgetting!

69

Look forward, never look back!
We sink to the depths
If we peer ever into the depths.

70

Beware, beware
Of warning the reckless!

Thy warning will drive them
To leap into every abyss!

71

Why hurled he himself from the heights?
What led him astray?
His pity for all that is lowly led him astray,
And now he lies there, broken, useless, and cold.

72

Whither went he? Who knows?
We only know that he sank.
A star went out in the desolate void,
And lone was the void.

73

What we have not
But need,
We must take.
And so a good conscience I took.

74

Who is there that could bestow right upon thee?
So take thy right!

75

O ye waves,
Wondrous waves, are ye wroth with me?
Do ye raise me your crests in wrath?
With my rudder I smite
Your folly full square.

This bark ye yourselves
To immortal life will carry along.

77

When no new voice was heard,
Ye made from old words
A law:
When life grows stark, there shoots up the law.

78

What none can refute
Ye say must be true?
Oh, ye innocents!

79

Art thou strong?
Strong as an ass? Strong as God?
Art thou proud?
So proud as to flaunt
Unashamed thy conceit?

80

Beware,
And ne'er beat the drum
Of thy destiny I
Go out of the way
From all pom-pom of fame!

Be not known too soon!
Be one that has hoarded renown!

81

Wilt thou grasp at the thorns?
Thy fingers must pay.
Grasp at a poniard.

85

Be a tablet of gold,
They will grave upon thee
In golden script.

86

Upright he stands
With more sense of "justice"
In his outermost toe
Than I have in all my head.
A virtue-monster
Mantled in white.

87

Already he mimics himself,
Already weary he grows,
Already he seeks the paths he has trod--
Who of late still loved all tracks untrodden!

Secretly burnt--
Not for his faith,
Rather because he had lost the heart
To find new faith.

88

Too long he sat in the cage,
That runaway!
Too long he dreaded
A gaoler!

Timorous now he goeth his ways,
All things make him to stumble--
The shadow e'en of a stick makes him to stumble.

89

Ye chambers smoky and musty,
Ye cages and narrow hearts,
How could your spirit be free?

90

Narrow souls!
Huckster-souls!
When money leaps into the box
The soul leaps into it too![2]

92

Are ye women,
That ye wish to suffer
From that which ye love?

99

They are cold, these men of learning!
Would that a lightning-flash might strike their food,
And their mouths could learn to eat fire!

101

Your false love
For the past,
A love for the graves of the dead,
Is a theft from life
That steals all the future.

An antiquary
Is a craftsman of dead things,
Who lives among coffins and skeletons.

103

Only the poet who can lie
Wilfully, skilfully,
Can tell the truth.

104

Our chase after truth,
Is't a chase after happiness?

105

Truth
Is a woman, no better,
Cunning in her shame:
Of what she likes best
She will know naught,
And covers her face....
To what doth she yield
But to violence?
Violence she needs.
Be hard, ye sages!
Ye must compel her,
That shamefaced Truth....
For her happiness
She needs constraint--She
is a woman, no better.

106

We thought evil of each other?
We were too distant,
But now in this tiny hut,
Pinned to one destiny,
How could we still be foes?
We must needs love those
Whom we cannot escape.

107

Love thy foe,
Let the robber rob thee:
The woman hears and--does it.

110

A proud eye
With silken curtains,
Seldom clear,
Honours him that may see it unveiled.

111

Sluggard eyes
That seldom love--
But when they love, the levin flashes
As from shafts of gold
Where a dagger keeps guard at the treasure of love.

117

They are crabs, for whom I have no fellow-feeling.
Grasp them, they pinch you;
Leave them alone, and they walk backward.

119

Crooked go great rivers and men,
Crooked, but turned to their goal;
That is their highest courage,
They dreaded not crooked paths.

121

Wouldst catch them?
Then speak to them
As to stray sheep:
"Your path, your path
You have lost!"
They follow all
That flatter them so:
"What? had we a path?"
Each whispers the other:
"It really seems that we have a path."

[The numbering given corresponds to that of the original,

several fragments having been omitted.--TR.]

[Footnote 1: Nietzsche here alludes to Christian perfection, which he

considers equivalent to harmlessness.--TR.]

[Footnote 2: Alluding to the saying of the Dominican monk Tetzel,

who sold indulgences in the time of Luther: "When money

leaps into the box, the soul leaps from hell to heaven!"--TR.]

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