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Dionysian Dithyrambs

Friedrich Nietzsche

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Dionysus-Dithyrambs

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Plain modern English

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Wild Songs for Dionysus

(1888)

These are the songs of Zarathustra, which he sang to

himself so that he could get through his last loneliness.

How the Richest Are Poor

Ten years went by.
Not a single drop reached me.
No wind full of rain, no gentle drops of love.
It was a land with no rain at all.
Now I beg my wisdom
Not to turn stingy in this dry time.
Overflow, my wisdom, let your drops trickle down,
Be the rain yourself for the dried-up wild land!

Once I told the clouds
To leave my mountains.
Once I said to them,
"More light, you dark ones!"
Today I try to tempt them to come back.
Make me dark with your heavy, full bellies, like udders:
I want to milk you,
You cows of the high places!
Wisdom as warm as fresh milk, sweet gentle drops of love,
I pour out over the land.

Go away, go away, you truths
That look so gloomy!
I won't have on my mountains
Truths that are bitter and impatient.

Today, let truth come to me
Covered in gold by smiles,
Made sweet by the sun, tanned brown by love.
A ripe truth is what I'd gladly pick from the tree.

Today I reach out my hands
Towards the hair of luck,
Wise enough to lead it along,
To trick luck the way you'd trick a child.
Today I will be welcoming,
Even to what is unwelcome.
Even towards fate itself I won't be prickly.
Zarathustra is no hedgehog.

My soul,
With a tongue that is never satisfied,
Has already tasted everything, good and bad,
And has dived down into all of the deep.
But always, like a cork,
It bobs back up to the surface
And floats like oil on brown seas.
Because of this soul, people call me lucky.

Who are my father and mother?
Isn't my father Prince Plenty?
And my mother Quiet Laughter?
Wasn't it these two together
Who gave birth to me, the strange beast that is a puzzle,
Me, the creature of light,
Me, Zarathustra, the one who gives away all wisdom?

Today, sick with too much tenderness,
Like a soft, damp wind,
Zarathustra sits waiting, waiting on his mountains.

Sweet, and slowly cooking
In his own juices,
Below his own mountain top,
Below his ice,
Tired and happy,
Like God resting after creation.

Quiet!
A truth passes over me
Like a cloud.
It strikes me with lightning I cannot see.
Up wide, slow stairs
Its happiness climbs towards me.
Come, come, beloved truth!

Quiet!
This is MY truth!
From shy eyes,
With soft, velvet shivers,
Her look meets mine,
Sweet and naughty, the look of a young girl.
She has guessed why I am happy,
She has seen right through me. Ha! What is she thinking?
A purple dragon
Is hiding in the deep drop of her young girl's look.

Quiet! My truth is speaking!

"How bad for you, Zarathustra!
You look like someone
Who has swallowed gold.
Someday they will cut your belly open to get it!

You are too rich,
You who spoil so many!
You make too many people jealous,
Too many people poor.
Even on me your light throws a shadow.
I feel cold. Go away, you rich man!
Go away, Zarathustra, out of the path of your sun!"

Among Hunting Birds

Whoever tries to climb down here,
How quickly
He is swallowed up by the deep!
But you, Zarathustra,
Still love the deep drops,
You love them the way the fir tree does!

The fir tree throws its roots out
Right where the rock itself stares down
And shudders at the deep.
The fir tree stops at the edge of the deep drops,
Where everything around it
Would gladly fall down.
In the middle of the impatience
Of wild streams that roll and leap,
It waits, so patient, strict and silent,
All alone.

Alone!
Who would dare
To come here as a guest,
To be your guest?

A hunting bird, maybe,
One that enjoys other people's bad luck,
Will hang on stubbornly
To the hair of the one who stands firm and keeps watch,
With crazy laughter,
The laughter of a vulture.

"Why stand so firm?"
The bird mocks him so cruelly.
"Whoever loves the deep drop must have wings.
He must not stay stuck on the cliff
Like you, hanging there!"

Oh Zarathustra,
You cruelest mighty hunter!
Not long ago you were still one who hunted God,
A spider's web set to catch goodness,
An arrow of evil!
Now
You are hunted by yourself,
You are your own prey,
Caught in the grip of your own soul.

Now
You are alone with me and with yourself,
Split in two by what you know about yourself,
Among a hundred mirrors
That show you falsely,
Among a hundred memories
You can't be sure of,
Tired out by every wound,
Shivering at every frost,
Strangled in your own rope loop.

You, one who studies himself!
You, one who hangs himself!

Why did you tie yourself up
With the rope loop of your own wisdom?
Why did you tempt yourself
Into the snake's garden of Eden?
Why did you sneak
Inside yourself, into yourself?

Now you are a sick man,
Sick from the snake's poison.
Now you are a prisoner
Who has been given the hardest fate of all.
In your own mine shaft
You work bent over,
In your own cave
You dig into yourself.
Completely helpless,
Stiff,
A cold dead body,
Crushed under a hundred loads,
Weighed down by yourself.
A knower!
One who studies himself!
The wise Zarathustra!

You went looking for the heaviest load,
And so you found yourself,
And now you can't shake yourself off.

Watching,
Chewing,
One who no longer stands up straight!

You'll grow twisted out of shape even in your grave,
You twisted spirit!

And not long ago you were still so proud,
Standing tall on all the stilts of your pride!
Not long ago you were still the loner without God,
The loner with only one friend: the devil,
The scarlet prince of every kind of mischief!

Now
You are curled up
Between two nothings,
A question mark,
A tired puzzle,
A puzzle for vultures.
They will "solve" you.
They are already hungry for your "solution."
They are already fluttering around their "puzzle,"
Around you, the doomed one!
Oh Zarathustra,
You, one who studies himself!
You, one who hangs himself!

The Sun Goes Down

1

You won't be thirsty much longer,
Oh heart that has been burnt dry!
There is a promise in the air.
I feel breath coming from mouths I do not know.
The great coolness is coming.
My sun stood hot above me at midday.
I greet you who are coming,

You sudden winds,
You cool spirits of the afternoon!

The air is strange and clean.
Look how the night
Gives me sly sideways looks,
Like someone trying to tempt me!
Be strong, my brave heart,
And don't ask "Why?"

2

Day of my life!
The sun goes down,
And the calm water
Is already turning gold.
The rock gives off warm breath.
Did happiness, at midday,
Have a good nap on it?
In green light,
Happiness still glimmers up out of the brown deep drop.

Day of my life!
Evening is near.
Your eye already
Glows, half closed and failing.
Your dew already
Pours out its teardrops.
Already, across the white seas,
The purple of your love is walking,
Your last, hesitant holiness.

3

Come, golden joy!
You, the sweetest first taste,
The first taste of death!
Did I go on my way too fast?
Now that my feet are getting tired,
Your eye still catches me,
Your happiness still catches me.

All around, there are only waves and play.
Whatever was hard
Has sunk into blue forgetting.
My boat now sits still.
Storm and movement: how it has forgotten them!
Wishing and hoping have drowned.
The sea and my soul are both calm and still.

Seventh and last loneliness!
Never before have I felt
Sweet certainty so close,
Or the sun's ray so warm.
Isn't the ice on my mountain top glowing now?
Silvery and light, like a fish,
My boat now swims out to sea.

The Last Wish[1]

This is how I would like to die,
The way I once saw him die:
The friend who, like a god,
Threw the light and fire of lightning
Into my dark, gloomy youth.
He was light-hearted and yet deep.

Yes, even in the struggle of battle
He had the heart of a happy dancer.

Among the fighters,
his heart was the lightest.
Among the winners,
his face was dark with deep thinking.
He was a fate balanced on top of his own fate:
he never bent, and he threw his thoughts back into the past
and forward into the future. That is what he was like.

He was afraid under the heavy weight of winning,
and yet he was singing, as winning and death
came to him together, hand in hand.

He was still giving orders even as he lay dying,
and his order was that people should destroy.

That is how I would want to die,
the way I saw him die back then:
winning, and destroying.

The Signal Fire

Here, where the island rose up out of the seas,
like a tall rock where offerings are made to the gods,
here, under a darkening sky,
Zarathustra lights his fires on the mountain:
a signal fire for ships that have lost their way,
a signal fire for those who have an answer!...

These flames, with their grey-white bellies,
flicker their longing out into the cold far distances.
The fire stretches its neck toward high places that are purer and purer,
like a snake rearing up because it cannot wait.

I have set up this signal there in front of me.
This flame is my own soul.
It can never get enough of new distances,
and it sends its silent heat rushing upward, upward.

Why did Zarathustra run away from animals and people?
Why did he run so fast from every land?
He already knows six kinds of loneliness.
But even the sea was not lonely enough for him.
On the island he could climb; on the mountain he
turned into flame.
And now, reaching for the seventh and last loneliness,
he casts a fishing rod far over his head.

Sailors thrown about by storms! Broken pieces of ancient stars!
You seas of the future! You skies no one has ever mapped!
I now cast my fishing rod toward everyone who is lonely.
Answer the flame, which cannot wait any longer.
Let me, the fisherman on the mountains,
catch my seventh and last loneliness!----

Fame and Forever[2]

1

Speak, tell me: how long will you sit and brood
over this bad fate of yours?
Be careful, or out of your gloomy mood
a face so dark will grow
that when people see you, they will sense
a hatred more bitter than salt water.

Speak: why does Zarathustra wander
up on the tall mountain high places?

Why has he, suspicious, bitter, and grim,
kept his home hidden from human eyes for so long?

Look! Suddenly a flash of lightning blazes out.
The deep pit fights back against the sky
with a challenge of thunder,
while the great mountain cracks and crashes with noise!
Rocked like a baby in the high places,
born as the child of hatred and lightning's love,
the anger of Zarathustra lives up above
and hangs there threatening, like a storm cloud.

You who have roofs over your heads, go quickly, crawl away and hide!
Go to bed, you soft little ones! Because loud thunder
is riding in triumph on the blasts of the storm,
and walls and defenses are swaying and rocking.

The lightning burns across the dark face of the night,
and strange, creepy truths, flashing like lights from the underworld of the dead,
mock everything people are used to. That is how, in a storm,
the flaming curse of Zarathustra's anger bursts out.

2

This fame, which the whole wide world loves,
I only touch with gloves on,
and I look down on it
and stamp it under my feet.

Who is hungry for what fame pays?
Who throws himself in its path?
These people who sell themselves for gold,

these shopkeeper types. They close
their greasy hands around fame, which jingles like coins,
and that ringing clink wins praise from the whole world.

Do you want to buy something? It takes no skill.
They can all be bought. Just make sure your purse is deep,
and let their greedy paws crawl into it
without stopping them. Let them take as much as they want.
Because if you don't offer them enough,
they will show off their "goodness" to hide that they are sulking.

They are all good people, yes, every single one.
Goodness and fame have always gone together,
for as long as time has been running.

The tongues that chatter about goodness as something that gets rewarded
are the ones that earn fame. Because goodness is fame's clever go-between, the one who sells her.

Among these good people, I would rather be
someone guilty of every ugly and horrible sin!
And when I see fame pushing herself on people,
advertising how shamelessly she sells herself,
my ambition turns bitter. Among people like that,
the only place I would want to win is the lowest one.

This fame, which the whole wide world loves,
I only touch with gloves on,
and I look down on it
and stamp it under my feet.

3

Quiet! I see something huge! And about huge things,
should a person keep silent, unless he can hold them
safe inside his words? Then take the power that brings
the heart up onto your tongue, my wisdom, you who are under a
spell!

I look up, and there the sea of stars is rolling.
O night, silent stillness, voiceless cry of the stars!
And look! A sign! The sky opens its edge,
and a shining group of stars falls down toward me.

4

O highest crown of all that exists, crowded with stars!
O carved stone tablets of forever!
Are you really coming my way?
Your beauty, which is hidden from everyone,
what? Are you not afraid to show yourself to my eyes?

O shield of fate!
O carved stone tablets of forever!
Yes, truly, you know what all people hate
and what I alone love: nothing can harm you,
not the blows of change or time. You are the fate of all fates!
Only you, O terrible what must be,
can light a love in me that lasts forever!

O highest crown of life! O shield of fate!
No wish can reach high enough to call you down.
You have never been dirtied or stained by a No.
You are the everlasting Yes of life, and I am your Yes forever:
because I love you, forever!

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

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

Pieces of Wild Songs for Dionysus

(1882-88)

Speeches, Stories, and Comparisons

3

My home is in the high country,
so I don't long for the high country.
I don't lift my eyes upward:
I am someone who looks down,
someone who has to give blessings. All
who bless look down.

11

This is how I started:
I forgot how to feel sorry for myself!

13

Your courage was not in smashing false gods.
It was in smashing the part of you
that worships false gods.

14

Look, there they stand,
those heavy cats made of granite stone,
those old, old values.
Poor me! How can I knock them over?

Scratching cats,
with their paws chained up,
there they sit,
and the way they look at you is poison.

17

A flash of lightning became my wisdom:
with a sword harder than diamond, it split open every
darkness in me!

19

A thought that still
flows hot, like lava.
But every stream of lava
builds a fortress around itself as it cools,
and in the end every thought
weighs itself down with rules.

20

This is what I want:
and because it is what I want,
everything goes the way I wish.
That was my final wisdom:
I wanted what I had to do,
and that way I beat every "have to."
Since then, there has been no "have to" for me.

23

Tricking people
is the whole skill of war.
The fox's skin
is my secret suit of armor.

25

We, the people of the new underworld,
dig for new treasures.
To the people of ancient times it seemed wicked, against the gods,
to disturb the insides of the earth looking for treasures.
And now this wickedness is coming back to life.
Can't you hear the insides of the earth thundering?

28

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

29

Do I love you?
Yes, the way a rider loves his horse,
the horse that carries him to where he wants to go.

30

His pity is cruel.
His loving handshake leaves bruises.
Don't give your hand to a giant!

31

You are afraid of me?
You are afraid of the bow pulled tight?
You are afraid someone might put his arrow to the bow?

33

I am nothing but a maker of words.
What do words matter?
What do I matter?

34

Oh, my friends,
Where has everything gone that people call "good"?
Where have all the good people gone?
Where has the innocence of all these lies gone?
I call everything good:
leaves and grass, happiness, blessing, and rain.

35

It was not because of his sins and his greatest foolish acts.
It was because of his perfection that I suffered,
just as I suffered most from people.[1]

36

"People are bad."
That is what the wisest said,
to comfort me.

37

And only when I am a burden to myself
do you all weigh heavily on me!

38

Too soon, already,
I am laughing again:
it is easy for an enemy
to make things up to me.

39

I am gentle toward people and toward luck.
I am gentle with everyone, and even with the grass.
I am like a spot of sunshine on winter curtains,
damp with tenderness,

a warm, melting wind for souls trapped in snow.

But I am too proud to care about small
gains. Where I see the greedy trader's long finger,
it is always my pleasure
to let myself be cheated.
That is what my picky, refined taste tells me to do.

40

A strange breath blows on me and spits at me.
Am I a mirror, that fogs up right away?

41

Small people,
Trusting and open-hearted,
But their doorways are built low,
So only short people can get in.

How can I get through the city gate,
I who had forgotten how to live among small people?

42

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

43

You saw darker and more evil things than any prophet
ever saw:

No wise man had ever traveled through the wild parties
of Hell.

44

Get back! You are following too close on my heels!
Get back, or my wisdom might step on you and crush
you!

45

"Whoever goes your way goes to hell!"
Fine, so be it! To my hell
I'll pave the road myself, with well-made sayings.

46

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

48

They chew gravel,
They lie flat on their bellies
In front of little round things,
They worship everything that doesn't fall down—
These last servants of God,
Believers (in what is real)!

50

They made their God out of nothing,
So is it any wonder that now he has become nothing?

51

You higher people! There were once times
That were more thoughtful, more given to deep thinking,
Than our today and our tomorrow.

52
Our time is like a sick woman—
Just let her scream, rave, and yell,
And smash the tables and dishes!

54

You are climbing?
Is it true that you are climbing,
You higher people?

Tell me, aren't you
Like a ball
Shot up to the high places
By the lowest part of you?
Aren't you running away from yourselves, you climbers?

55

All the things you thought
You had to look down on,
When really you had only given them up!

56

Everyone repeats the same chorus!
No, no, and three times No!
What is all this yapping about heaven?
We don't want to enter the kingdom of heaven—
The kingdom of earth shall be ours?

57

The will sets us free.
Whoever has nothing to do
Finds something to worry about even in a Nothing.

58

You can't bear it anymore,
Your cruel, bossy fate?
Love it—you have no other choice!

59

Only these two free us from our troubles
(Now choose!):
Sudden death,
Or long, drawn-out love.

60

We are sure to die,
So why not be happy?

61

The worst excuse of all
I have kept hidden from you—that life got boring!
Throw it away, so that you find you like it again!

62

Lonely days,
You must walk on brave feet!

63

Loneliness
Doesn't plant anything; it only makes things ripen....
And even then you need the sun as your
friend.

64

You must dive into the crowd once more—in
the crowd you grow hard and smooth.
Loneliness dries you up
And in the end destroys you.—

65

When the great fear comes over the loner;
When he runs and runs
And doesn't know where to;
When the storms roar behind him
And the lightning speaks against him like a witness,
And his cave gives birth to ghosts
And fills him with terror.

67

Throw your pain into the deep,
Man, forget! Man, forget!
The skill of forgetting is godlike!
Do you want to fly?
Do you want to feel at home in the high places?
Throw your heaviest load into the sea!
Here is the sea—throw yourself into the sea!
The skill of forgetting is godlike!

69

Look ahead, never look back!
We sink into the deep
If we keep staring down into the deep.

70

Watch out, watch out
About warning the reckless!
Your warning will push them
To jump into every deep drop!

71

Why did he throw himself down from the high places?
What led him the wrong way?
His pity for everything low led him the wrong way,
And now he lies there, broken, useless, and cold.

72

Where did he go? Who knows?
We only know that he sank.
A star went out in the empty, bleak space,
And the space was lonely.

73

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

74

Who is there that could give you your rights?
So take your rights yourself!

75

O you waves,
Amazing waves, are you angry with me?
Are you raising your crests at me in anger?
With my rudder I strike

Your foolishness head-on.
This boat—you yourselves
Will carry it along to life that never dies.

77

When no new voice was heard,
You made out of old words
A law:
When life grows stiff and rigid, the law springs up.

78

Whatever no one can disprove,
You say must be true?
Oh, you innocent babes!

79

Are you strong?
Strong as a donkey? Strong as God?
Are you proud?
So proud that you show off
Your vanity without shame?

80

Be careful,
And never beat the drum
Of your fate!
Stay out of the way
Of all the boom-boom of fame!

Don't become known too soon!
Be someone who has saved up his fame!

81

Do you want to grab the thorns?
Your fingers will pay for it.
Grab a dagger instead.

85

Be a tablet of gold,
And they will carve on you
In golden letters.

86

He stands up straight,
With more feeling for "justice"
In his littlest toe
Than I have in my whole head.
A monster of goodness,
Wrapped in a white cloak.

87

Already he copies himself,
Already he is growing tired,
Already he looks for the paths he has walked before—
He who until recently loved every path no one had walked!

Burned in secret—
Not for his faith,
But because he had lost the courage
To find a new faith.

88

He sat too long in the cage,
That runaway!
For too long he was afraid
Of a jailer!

Now he goes along timidly,
Everything makes him trip—
Even the shadow of a stick makes him trip.

89

You smoky, stale rooms,
You cages and narrow hearts,
How could your spirit be free?

90

Narrow souls!
Greedy trader souls!
When the money jumps into the box,
The soul jumps in with it![2]

92

Are you women,
That you want to suffer
From the thing you love?

99

They are cold, these learned men!
If only a flash of lightning would strike their food,
So 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 the whole future.

A collector of old things
Is a craftsman of dead things,
Who lives among coffins and skeletons.

103

Only the poet who can lie
On purpose and with skill
Can tell the truth.

104

Our hunt for truth—
Is it really a hunt for happiness?

105

Truth
Is a woman, no better,
Sly in her shyness:
About the thing she likes best
She pretends to know nothing,
And hides her face....
What does she give in to,
Except force?
Force is what she needs.
Be hard, you wise men!
You must make her give in,
That shy, bashful Truth....
For her own happiness
She needs to be pushed—She
is a woman, no better.

106

We thought badly of each other?
We were too far apart.
But now, in this tiny hut,
Tied to one fate,
How could we still be enemies?
We have to love those
We cannot get away from.

107

Love your enemy,
Let the robber rob you:
The woman hears this and—actually does it.

110

A proud eye,
Hidden behind silky curtains,
Is seldom clear and open.
It honors the person who is allowed to see it without its veil.

111

Lazy eyes
That seldom love—
But when they do love, lightning flashes out of them,
Like bright light from golden mine shafts,
Where a dagger stands guard over the treasure of love.

117

They are like crabs, and I feel nothing in common with them.
If you grab them, they pinch you;
If you leave them alone, they walk backward.

119

Great rivers and great men take crooked, winding paths,
Crooked, but always turned toward their goal;
That is their highest courage:
They were not afraid of crooked paths.

121

Do you want to catch them?
Then talk to them
As if they were lost sheep:
"Your path, your path—
You have lost it!"
They will follow anyone
Who flatters them like that.
"What? Did we have a path?"
They whisper to each other:
"It really does seem that we have a path."

[The translator's note: The numbers given here match the numbers in the original,

because several fragments have been left out.]

[Footnote 1, from the translator: Here Nietzsche is hinting at the Christian idea of being perfect, which he

thinks is the same thing as being harmless.]

[Footnote 2, from the translator: This points to a saying of Tetzel, a Dominican monk

who sold pardons for sins for money in the time of Luther: "As soon as the money

jumps into the box, the soul jumps out of hell and into heaven!"]

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