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FLARR PAGES #33

The Journal of the Foreign Language Association
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File Under:
-Poetry
-Translation
-Goethe
-GoetheDer Gott
und die Bajadere

THE GOD AND THE BAILADEIRA (An Indian Legend)

Translation of Goethe's "Der Gott und die Bajadere"
by
Edith Borchardt, UMM

Mahadöh, the Lord of Earth,
For the sixth time chooses birth,
To become like us again,
Feeling our joy and pain.
He consents to live among us,
To endure what may arise.
Judging sternly or with kindness,
He must see with human eyes.

And after the wand'rer has looked at the city,
Spied on the mighty, regarded the people,
He leaves them at dusk to go on his way.

As he leaves the town behind him,
Where the last few houses stand,
There he sees a white-cheeked maiden,
An abandoned, lovely child.
"Greetings, Virgin!" – "Thank you, Sir!
Wait, I'll come and join you there." –
"And who are you?" "Bailadeira,
And this is the House of Love."

She sways and she strikes her cymbals in dance,
Encircling herself as if in a trance. So lovely,
She bows and offers him flowers.

She beguiles him past the threshold,
Courting him with liveliness.
"Handsome stranger, lamps will brightly
Light at once this hut of mine,
If you're tired, I will lave you,
Offer comfort, bathe your feet.
What you wish, I will provide it,
Rest, or pleasure or playful retreat.

She tends to his many pretended pains
The God can't help smiling while playing his part,
Perceiving with joy a human heart.

And he asks for her enslavement;
She obliges with great cheer,
And the maiden's artful power
Slowly is transformed in her.
Thus the bud of passion's flower
Opens and in time bears fruit:
With obedience in her spirit,
Love is not so far removed.

But sharply to test if her love will remain
The Master of the Heights and Depths
Seeks lust and horror and furious pain.

And he kisses her white cheekbones
'til she feels the pain of love.
Thus his captive, tears escape her,
Though she never cried before;
At his feet she sinks suppliant,
Not for pleasure, nor for gain,
Oh, and her compliant limbs
Now she tries to move in vain.

And so for the chamber's festive enjoyment
The night provides a dark comforting veil
Of gossamer yarn a beautiful trail.

Sleep comes late amid their banter,
She wakes early with brief rest,
Finding at her heart, not sleeping,
Dead her much beloved guest.
Wailing, she falls down upon him,
But she cannot waken him.
And they carry his stiff body
To the funerary rim.

She hears the priests chanting the songs for the dead,
And raving and racing, she cuts through the crowd.
"Who are you?" they ask her, "Why rush to this pit?"

At his bier she then collapses,
Her despair rings through the air;
"If you don't give back my consort,
I will seek him in his grave.
Shall his limbs to ashes crumble,
His divine form fall to flames?
He was mine, was mine above all,
Oh, it was but for one night!"

The priests go on chanting: "We carry the aged
Who have grown weary and late have grown cold.
We carry the youthful before they've grown old.

Listen to our priestly teachings:
This man never was your mate.
Since you live as Bailadeira,
Your love does not obligate.
With the body follow shadows
Into the still realm of death;
Only wives die with their husbands
For their honor and restraint.

Now sound the drums in mournful complaint!
Accept, o ye Gods, the flower of his days:
Embrace this young man in the pyre of flames."

Thus the chorus without pity,
Adding to her heart's distress:
And with arms stretched wide before her,
She jumps to her fiery death.
But the God within the flames
Rises from the funeral pyre
And in his divine embrace
Lifts his love above the fire.

The Gods rejoice in the penitent sinners.
Immortals carry their prodigal children
With fiery arms to heaven above.