



# The Nightingales are Drunk

*Hafez, Dick Davis (translator)*

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'Drunk or sober, king or soldier, none will be excluded'

Sensual, profound, delighted, wise, Hafez's poems have enchanted their readers for more than 600 years. One of the greatest figures of world literature, he remains today the most popular poet in modern Iran.

Introducing Little Black Classics: 80 books for Penguin's 80th birthday. Little Black Classics celebrate the huge range and diversity of Penguin Classics, with books from around the world and across many centuries. They take us from a balloon ride over Victorian London to a garden of blossom in Japan, from Tierra del Fuego to 16th century California and the Russian steppe. Here are stories lyrical and savage; poems epic and intimate; essays satirical and inspirational; and ideas that have shaped the lives of millions.

Rumi (1207-73).

Rumi's Selected Poems is available in Penguin Classics.

## The Nightingales are Drunk Details

Date : Published February 26th 2015 by Penguin Classics

ISBN : 9780141980263

Author : Hafez , Dick Davis (translator)

Format : Paperback 64 pages

Genre : Poetry, Classics

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# From Reader Review *The Nightingales are Drunk* for online ebook

## Jibran says

*Come, tell me what it is that  
I have gained  
From loving you,*

The doubtful quality of translation and the thematic similarity of the selection makes it an unsuitable book to approach Hafiz's poetry for the uninitiated. Not that it's impossible to not like him, but I hold this LBC responsible for the many one-star comments trashing Hafiz the poet that you see in community reviews. But I can't help but rate it five stars because Hafiz is a five-star poet and one of the greatest practitioners of the classical Persian love lyric - the ghazal.

The natural flow of Hafiz's poetry is lost in the rendition and rearrangement of couplets. Ghazals move erratically, break abruptly, and it feels as though a mediocre dabbler has penned them. Davies' handling of the refrain (*radeef*) has also been problematic (see poem on pg 29-30, which I'm not quoting here). It is also important to stick to a form when translating the ghazal. Sure, not every poem translates well into a prefigured form, but it helps to stick to one for the most part and deviate only when the occasion demands it. Arbitrarily changing form as though the originals were a bunch of dissimilar poems obscures the meticulous care the poet has put into crafting each and every ghazal of his Divan.

This selection is culled (by whom it doesn't say) from a Penguin volume *Faces of Love: Hafez and the Poets of Shiraz*, which means it's a selection of a selection. The final product is constricted and doesn't feel like a representative selection of the diversity and richness of his poetic cosmos. He comes off as a fatalist winebibber incapable of talking about anything else. You could never have guessed Hafiz was primarily a Sufi poet who used wine-drinking as a metaphor for divine love, keeping the literal meaning on a mundane level yet elevating it to a higher degree with a reminder that all life is ephemeral and the pinnacle of existence is to merge as one with the Beloved - beloved with the capital B.

By way of apology for pulling a Professor Horrendo on the book, below I quote some fine examples to round off the review:

*Where's a musician, so that I can give  
The profit I once found  
In self-control and knowledge for a flute's songs,  
And a lute's sweet sound?*

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*I've lived my life without a life -  
Don't be surprised at this;  
Who counts an absence as a life  
When life is what you miss?*

*But those whose lives are centered on  
Your lovely mouth confess  
No other thoughts than this, and think*

*Nothing of Nothingness.*

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*My body's dust is as a veil  
Spread out to hide  
My soul - happy that moment when  
It's drawn aside!*

-----

*Until my lips are played on like a flute  
By his lips' beauty,  
My ears can only hear as wind the world's  
Advice on duty -*

And now one of the dozens of wine-laden couplets:

*Sit yourself down upon the wine-shop's bench  
And take a glass of wine - this is your share  
Of all the wealth and glory of the world,  
And what you're given there....is all you need.*

June '16

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## **Sean Barrs the Bookdragon says**

**This is a crap poem.**

It suggests that through alcohol we can find happiness, which is just absurd. Alcohol makes you drunk not happy. There's a massive difference between the two. A temporary fix does not constitute for lasting contentment.

*"The Nightingales are drunk, wine-red roses appear,  
And, Sufis, all around us happiness is near."*

I just don't like the attitude of the poem. It is too fatalistic in its approach to life. There's nothing wrong with drinking alcohol, but the way this poem suggests it should be drunk results in such negative effects. The poem basically says that we're all going to die; therefore, because of this we should have no ambitious or attempt to better ourselves. We should get drunk instead. I mean.....**what!?**

It reeks of idleness and of someone who has, quite simply, given up on life. He suggests that men of both a high and low station die, so there is no point trying to reach the former because we will all fall one day. It is

just such a negative attitude. I find it incredibly disagreeable to me. It is the attitude of someone who is almost looking for an excuse or a justification to drink. To my mind, it is a weak argument and one that suggests that humans should have no ambitions or a will to succeed. We should all get drunk instead. We may as well lie down and die because alcoholism will not result in any lasting happiness.

Then there is the whole separate issue of the forced structure of the poem. It is predominantly in forced rhyming couplets that are as weak and awkward as the message itself. I don't like this poet, and I most certainly don't like this poem. After reading this initial poem it made me look on all his poems in a negative light. I couldn't get over the narcissistic attitude it bears towards life. The tone is supposed to be jolly, but in reality it is one of resignation and submission.

Penguin Little Black Classic- 27

The Little Black Classic Collection by penguin looks like it contains lots of hidden gems. I couldn't help it; they looked so good that I went and bought them all. I shall post a short review after reading each one. No doubt it will take me several months to get through all of them! Hopefully I will find some classic authors, from across the ages, that I may not have come across had I not bought this collection.

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## **rahul says**

The -1 star is only for the translation issues.

I don't know what could have been done better but definitely there was a sense of poems being contrived which I could not shake off.

But Hafez is Hafez. What are five stars for him when he has pitcher full of galaxies at his disposal!

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## **Darwin8u says**

*"Let go, and make life easy for yourself,  
Don't strain and struggle, always wanting more;  
A glass of wine, a lover lovely as  
The moon -- you may be sure... they're all you need."*  
- Hafez from the poem 'My heart, good fortune is the only friend'

**Vol 27** of my Penguin Little Black Classics Box Set is a selection of 26 Hafez poems from Penguin's collection: Faces of Love: Hafez and the Poets of Shiraz.

I loved it. I'm not sure about the translation quality. These poems were translated by Dick Davis in 2013. From various sources it sounds like the quality is great. All I can tell you is I loved them. I'm sure like any great poet (Dante, Shakespeare, Horace, etc) SOMETHING will be lost in translation, but still the power of

these poems floats easily off the pages.

Hafez poems are lyrical and focus on good love, good wine, good women and friends, the moon, hypocritical men of religion, and a transcendent view of life/death/love. I love Persian art. I love that Hafez was a contemporary of Tamerlane. I love his antinomian attitude toward religion and life. There are artists who transcend time, religion, and geography. Hafez is one of the greats. His poetry transcends it all.

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### **Kathleen says**

I may be a little biased because he wrote one of my all time favorite poems. I really don't care, I'm still sticking with 4 stars.

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### **Michelle Curie says**

These poems **didn't do anything for me**. I partly blame the translation and the selection - for they sounded clumsy and boring, yet the repetitions made me suspect that in their original language they *must* have had more of a flow to them.

Hafez was a Persian poet whose works are considered the pinnacle of Persian literature and who has had a big cultural impact, with his words becoming sayings and phrases people know by heart. This selection focusses on his poems on **love and alcohol**, with mainly the latter irritating me, as he speaks about his love for wine *a. lot*. Good for you, man, but I don't find the mere suggestion of you stop drinking as outrageous or upsetting (or poem-worthy) as you did.

*"Drink before fasting, drink -  
Don't put your glass down yet -  
Since Ramadan draws near  
And pleasure's sun must set."*

Having that said, there is the occasional appealing phrase in here, but there are scarce and often overshadowed by another glass of wine. This just wasn't for me.

*"To say that paradise, its houris, and its shade are more  
To me than is the dusty street before my lover's door?  
No, I won't do it."*

In 2015 Penguin introduced the Little Black Classics series to celebrate Penguin's 80th birthday. Including little stories from "around the world and across many centuries" as the publisher describes, I have been intrigued to read those for a long time, before finally having started. I hope to sooner or later read and review all of them!

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## Peter says

Hafez is a CRAP POET. There said it, now lets get through his poems...

Wine, wine, wine... Hafez, my name is Hafez. I shall mention Hafez in every poem, in fact Hafez while reading this Hafez the mention of my name Hafez did I mention it? Hafez that's it Hafez the drunken muslim, after leggin' it from the mosque I like to go on the piss, the razzle oh, AND get rat arsed. In one poem I even mention getting out quick so I can neck the wine bottle.

I writes Hafez at the end of every poem because I am so drunk I cannot remember it otherwise.

A poor, inconsistant (probably incontinent too from the wine) poet who should not be given any recognition.

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## Zanna says

*Go, mind your own business, preacher!*

*what's all*

*This hullabaloo?*

I thought I knew what Hafez was all about, but it turns out I didn't. When I recently read *The Left Hand of Darkness* I thought that Handdara was based on Buddhist ideas, but now I am almost sure Le Guin was drawing rather on Sufiism or on Hafez, who calls himself ignorant, names his freedom, finds kinship in monasteries and enough of everything on earth (in the dust at God's door).

*This inn has two doors, and through one we have to go -*

*What does it matter if the doorway's high or low?*

I am a big fan of Dick Davis who translated this. I will see what else he's done and seek it out!

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## Hannah says

Truly some of the most beautiful poetry I've ever read. Some of the earlier poems weren't my favorite, but the later ones really showed Hafez's ability as both a poet and a critic. I'll definitely be reading more from him soon.

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## Nafiza says

I come away with some things:

1. Hafez was probably an alcoholic. Hah. All the poems in here talk about the pleasures of drinking wine.
2. I know that saying your name in the poem you are writing was/is old tradition but God it got annoying fast.

3. I liked some of the poems but the majority was meh. Not my style, not my feel. Sorry Hafez of the wine-bar.

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## leynes says

{ Can you tell that I am desperately hunting down every single LBC-poetry collection there is because I've recently learned that the entire collection is going out of print... \*panics and runs to the book store\* }

*The Nightingales Are Drunk* is by far my favorite poetry collection in the Little Black Classics series. Almost every poem packed an emotional punch and I highlighted and annotated the shit out of my edition. 10/10 would totally recommend!

**And even though the drunkenness of love  
Has ruined me,  
My being's built upon those ruins for  
Eternity.**

The 26 collected poems were written in the 14th century by Hafez – the most popular of Persian poets. He lived in Shiraz, Iran, and has still a major literary influence up until this day. Many of his lines have become proverbial sayings, and his poems are still learned by heart in Persian homes.

Hafez wrote about the typical things poets write about like love, loss, rejection and grief, but he managed to encapsulate these emotions with a beauty and grace that I rarely ever witnessed in lyricism. Within a few stanzas he managed to convey that love heals but destroys at the same time, that we are 'just a tiny mote in love's great kingdom', and that we shouldn't be afraid to sin because of that.

Especially the last theme surprised me. If Hafez lived today, he'd probably have a tumblr blog with the title 'Welcome to my twisted mind' or something along those lines. ;) He's pretty 'emo' to say the least. I thought his IDGAF-attitude was very refreshing to read about. Freedom from restraint and the vanity of our wordly concerns were central in all of his verses. He constantly stressed that we're all gonna die eventually so we might as well enjoy the ride (like hell yes!):

**The endless arguments within schools –  
Whatever they might prove –  
Sickened my heart; I'll give a little time  
To wine now, and to love.**

**But when did time keep faith with anyone?  
Bring wine, and I'll recall  
The tales of kings, Jamishid and Kavus,  
And how time took them all.**

Of course there was a downside to this as well, because at times Hafez grew a little too pessimistic even for my taste: he mused about the fact that we shouldn't be ambitious, that we shouldn't 'soar into the skies' because 'an arrow falls to earth; however far it flies' (I mean, I am still shooketh about the beauty of that verse but I don't agree with its sentiment). Personally, I act on the belief that even though in the grand scheme of things human life might be meaningless, one should still find meaning and happiness just for one's own sake.



Nonetheless, I was still amazed by the wisdom of Hafez' words and the life lessons you can learn from reading his poetry. He mused about being humble and not forgetting where one came from. He reflected on longing and rejection, and that one shouldn't count solely on other people but should find strength within one's self. He knew that humans will never be able to explain everything, especially not with reason and logic, and therefore we shouldn't overthink everything and trust our intuition:

**And when our hearts discoursed  
with Wisdom's ancient words,  
Love's commentary solved each crux  
within our lexicon.**

Hafez' ghazals consist of generally self-contained lines, bound together by a single meter, a single rhyme, and sometimes a radif, that is, a word or phrase repeated at the end of each line. I got along really well with this style. It gave the poems a clever structure and added emphasis in the right places.

Lastly, I wanna give a huge shoutout to the translator Dick Davis. I cannot imagine how difficult it must have been to preserve not only the beauty of Hafez' verse but also its meaning. What a phenomenal job!  
#BLESSETH

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### **Jacob Overmark says**

A whisper from behind a veil  
Does tell my turn is due  
Circling trice around his tomb, your wishes will come true

A ruby wine on rosy lips  
The color match divine  
So tell me, give the poet hope  
When will your heart be mine

Someday, perhaps, the whisper from behind the veil oppose  
But first, my poet, swear to me, my secret don't disclose.

I'm but a Djinni of the night  
Induced by wine and sorrow  
A vision now, a vivid dream  
When morning comes, I'm out of sight

Alas, then fill my cup again, this night must never end  
The wine flow like a brook in spring, I cannot let you go

She smiles at me behind her veil  
I thought I heard her sing  
The way Djinn does when entering your soul  
The word I heard, of that I'm sure "I'll stay, you wretched thing"

Probably not the best collection, and maybe not the best translation, but nevertheless a fine example of what is on man's mind, and rest assured, the above is not Hafez, but yours truly playing around.

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## **Kirstine says**

*"When love is faithful, and it seems  
Nothing can hurt you,  
Know that the world is faithless still  
And will desert you... remember this."*

The thing is, even if all the other Little Black Classics were terrible and not worth the paper they're printed on, then this, this one book, would have made it all worthwhile.

I read it and I fell in love. Simple as that. Without this series I most likely would never have read a single word of Hafez and I am so infinitely, so deliriously happy that I have, because I have loved every word so far.

I'm having trouble putting into words exactly what it is that moves me so in his writing. There's a lightness to it and at the same time a gravity, an understanding of life and what it means to live, in a world that can be both cruel and kind. There's self-awareness, there's beauty, so much beauty, but the kind you find in simple things, in the smallest of gestures.

It was also a venture into non-European, non-Western poetry for me. Normally I'd be intimidated (and I still am, with everything I read from somewhere else), because I think poetry from my own country can be difficult enough to grasp without a guide, imagine how little I'd understand without any knowledge of the tradition, the country and the culture Hafez comes from.

But I decided to embrace the chance for diversity, the opportunity to read Persian poetry, because when else would I do it? I decided to collect this small, manageable sample, and I fell in love. Yes, there's a hell of a lot I didn't catch, of course, but so much of poetry is universal I'm reminded. So much of it can be grasped, when you find the right poem or poet, in the feeling you get while reading. Not an understanding, necessarily, more like you've shared something with someone, across time, across space, despite the wall of flesh separating minds, something significant.

I admitted my cowardice, tried to do better, and I fell in love. Irrevocably, I fear.

*"Good news! The days of grief and pain  
won't stay like this –  
as others went, these won't remain  
or stay like this."*

(...)

*In words of gold they've written on  
the emerald sky,  
'Only Compassion does not die*

*but stays like this.’’*

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## **Liz Janet says**

The two ends of Hafez's poetry : *“Ah, god forbid that I relinquish wine” to “What does life give me in the end but sorrow?”*

Hafez was a Persian poet, whom, I am quite sure, had two obsessions, women (was he bisexual?) and wine. It is said he also targeted religious hypocrisy, but I did not see much of that in this collection, but I do want to see in the future.

I find this part funny:

*“And if I leave the mosque  
For wine, don’t sneer at me  
Sermons are long, and time  
Moves on incessantly”*

For a Muslim, he sure is interested in leaving prayer for some drink. Could this be the religious hypocrisy he was trying to tell us about? Most likely.

After researching a bit about who this person was, and how revered he is in Iran and the Islamic world, I understood that this is not the best nor worse of his poetry and verse, and that I should read more of him so as to truly comprehend him. There has to be a better translation of his work out there, since the Little Black Classics have disappointed me on that aspect, this will not be the last I read of him.

*“And when did kindness end? What brought  
The sweetness of our town to naught?  
The ball of generosity  
lies on the field for all to see –  
No rider comes to strike it”*

Yes, I can see the potential, I am very pleased.

*“When good or bad come, why give thanks  
and why complain?  
Since what is written won’t remain  
or stay like this.”*

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## **Joey Woolfardis says**

Hafez was a 14th Century Persian poet whose works are amongst the most popular in modern-day Iran. *The nightingales are drunk* is a collection of his poetry taken from *Faces of Love*.

Hafez likes wine. He likes drinking wine a lot. He revels in speaking to himself as if he were another person and his drinking is much a common problem with his religious practices.

"Speak Hafez! On the world's page trace  
Your poems narrative;  
The words your pen writes will have life  
When you no longer live."

No poem owns a title and the prevalent theme is, indeed, wine. Personally, I found him pretentious and

boring, speaking of wine and wine and referring to himself in the third person and speaking of drinking wine and sitting in a wine shop drinking wine. He was repetitive (wine) and his poems just did not roll well off the tongue. I assume this has a little to do with translation, too, but altogether just a pile of tosh.

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