

Das Buch der hängenden Gärten

(The Book of the Hanging Gardens)

Op. 15 (1908–9)

Fifteen Songs on Texts of Stefan George

I. Under the protection of dense clusters of leaves where delicate flakes snow down from stars, gentle voices proclaim their sorrows, fabulous animals spew streams from their brown maws into the marble basins from which the little brooks hasten away lamentingly: there came tapers to ignite the bushes, white forms to part the waters.

II. Grove in these paradises alternates with flowery meadows, pavilions, brightly painted flagstones. Slender storks' bills ripple ponds that gleam with fish, rows of birds in a dull glow trill on the oblique roof ridges and the golden sedges rustle—but my dream pursues only one thing.

III. As a novice I entered your enclosure; previously there was no amazement in my attitudes, no wish stirring in me before I caught sight of you. Look graciously upon the clasping of my young hands, choose me as one of those who serve you, and with merciful patience spare the one who is still stumbling on such an unfamiliar path.

IV. Since my lips are immobile and burn, I begin to observe where my feet have come to: into the splendid domain of other masters. It was perhaps still possible to break away, but then it seemed as if through high gate rails the glance before which I knelt untiringly was seeking me questioningly or was giving signs.

V. Tell me on which path she will walk by today, so that I can fetch soft silk weaves from the richest chest, can pick roses and violets, so that I can lay down my cheeks as a footstool beneath her soles.

VI. I am henceforth dead to all efforts. To call you near me with my senses, to spin out new conversations with you, service and payment, permission and prohibition, of all things only this is necessary, and to weep because the images that flourished in the beautiful darkness always vanish when the cold, clear morning threatens.

VII. Anxiety and hope oppress me in alternation, my words are prolonged into sighs, I am afflicted with such impetuous longing that I pay no heed to rest and sleep, that tears soak my bed, that I keep every joy away from me, that I desire no friend's comforting.

VIII. If I do not touch your body today, the thread of my soul will tear like a sinew that has been stretched too far. Let mourning crepes be beloved signs for me, who have been suffering since I have belonged to you. Judge whether I deserve such torment; sprinkle cool water on me, I am hot with fever and unsteadily leaning outside.

IX. Fortune is severe and obstinate with us; what could a brief kiss do? The fall of a raindrop on a parched, bleached desert, which swallows it without pleasure, which must do without new refreshment and which cracks open from new heat waves.

X. I contemplate the beautiful flowerbed as I tarry; it is enclosed by purple-black thorn in which flower cups with speckled spurs tower, and velvet-feathered inclining ferns and fluffy-tufted flowers watery-green and round, and in the center bellflowers white and gentle—their moist mouth is of a fragrance like that of the sweet fruit from the fields of heaven.

XI. When behind the flowered gate, we finally felt only our own breathing, did we obtain the blisses we had imagined? I recall that we both began to tremble like weak reeds whenever we merely touched each other lightly, and that our eyes teared—you remained at my side a long time that way.

XII. Whenever, resting blissfully in deep meadows, we join our hands around our temples, veneration mitigates the burning of our limbs: and so, do not think about the misshapen shadows that rock up and down on the wall, (do) not (think) about the watchers who may separate us swiftly, and (do) not (reflect) that the white sand outside the city is ready to sip our warm blood.

XIII. You lean against a white willow by the bank; with the stiff points of your fan you protect your head as if with lightning bolts, and you roll your jewelry as if you were playing. I am in the boat which arches of foliage are guarding and which I invited you in vain to step into . . . I see the willows, which are bending lower, and flowers that are floating scattered on the water.

XIV. Do not always speak about the leaves, prey of the wind, about the shattering of ripe quinces, about the steps of the annihilators late in the year. About the trembling of the dragonflies in storms and (the trembling) of lights whose gleam is changeable.

XV. We peopled the evening-gloomy arbors, bright temples, path and flowerbed joyfully—she with smiling, I with whispering—Now it is true that she is going forever. Tall flowers pale or break, the glass of the pools grows pale and breaks, and I stumble in the decaying grass; palms jab with their pointy fingers. Unseen hands jerkily drive the hissing throng of withered leaves outside around the dun walls of the Eden. The night is cloudy and sultry.