

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Translated from the German by
Zsuzsanna Ozsváth & Frederick Turner

Blessed Yearning

Do not tell the mocking nation,
Secrets only for the wise:
Life that longs for consummation
In the flames—that's what I'd praise.

In the night of love still cooling,
Where what made you, you were making,
You are wrought by a strange feeling
In the candlelight's soft shaking.

Now no more the darkness keeps you
Clasped in shadows meditating:
And a new desire now sweeps you
Upward to a higher mating.

Space can't clog your spellbound yearning,
You come flying just the same,
And at last, drawn to the burning,
You're the moth come to the flame.

You would be Earth's sullen guest
In the darkness glooming,
If you'd never felt this quest:
Die into becoming!

1814-15

The Fisherman

The water whispered, swelled, and flowed,
An angler sat embarked;
He gazed and gazed upon his rod,
And peace was in his heart:
But as he sits and listens there,
The rustling flow divides,
And from the river, wet and bare,
A woman upward glides.

She sang, she spoke: Why do you snare
With human tricks and lies
My finny brood into the glare
Of your hot deadly skies?
Ah, would you knew how fit a home
My fishes find their bed,
Then as you are, you'd yield and come
There, where you're healed and fed.

Do not our own dear moon and sun
Bathe themselves in the sea?
—And having breathed the waves, return
With doubled brilliancy?
Does not deep heaven lure you in,
That wet transcending blue—
Your own reflected face within
Its clear eternal dew?

The water whispered, swelled, and flowed,
Drenched his bare foot with bliss;
His heart yearned with its heavy load,
As with a lover's kiss.
She spoke, she sang, so cunningly,
It was the angler's bane:
Half drawn by her, half sinking, he
Was never seen again.

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In a Thousand Forms

Though in a thousand forms you may conceal you,
Yet, All-belovèd, soon I know it's you;
Whatever veils of magic-weaving seal you,
All-presence, still I know it's you.

In the young cypresses, their pure limbs glowing,
All-shapeliest, I know at once it's you;
In the canal's pure life-wave softly flowing,
You All-caressing, well I know it's you.

When the tall fountain climbs in its unfolding,
All-playful, I rejoice that it is you;
When the clouds change, all molding and unmolding,
All-manifold, I find that it is you.

In the embroidered veil of meadow flowers
All-tint-bestarred in beauty, it is you;
And thousand-armed the clinging ivy bowers
All-clasping, tell me always that it's you.

And when the sunrise kindles in the ridges,
I greet the dawn, All-halcyon, as you;
And then pure heaven with its arching bridges
All-heart-enlarging, breathes the breath of you.

What I with outward sense and inward knowing
Perceive, All-teacher, that I do through you;
And naming Allah's hundred names onflowing,
Each one is echoed by a name for you.

1814-15



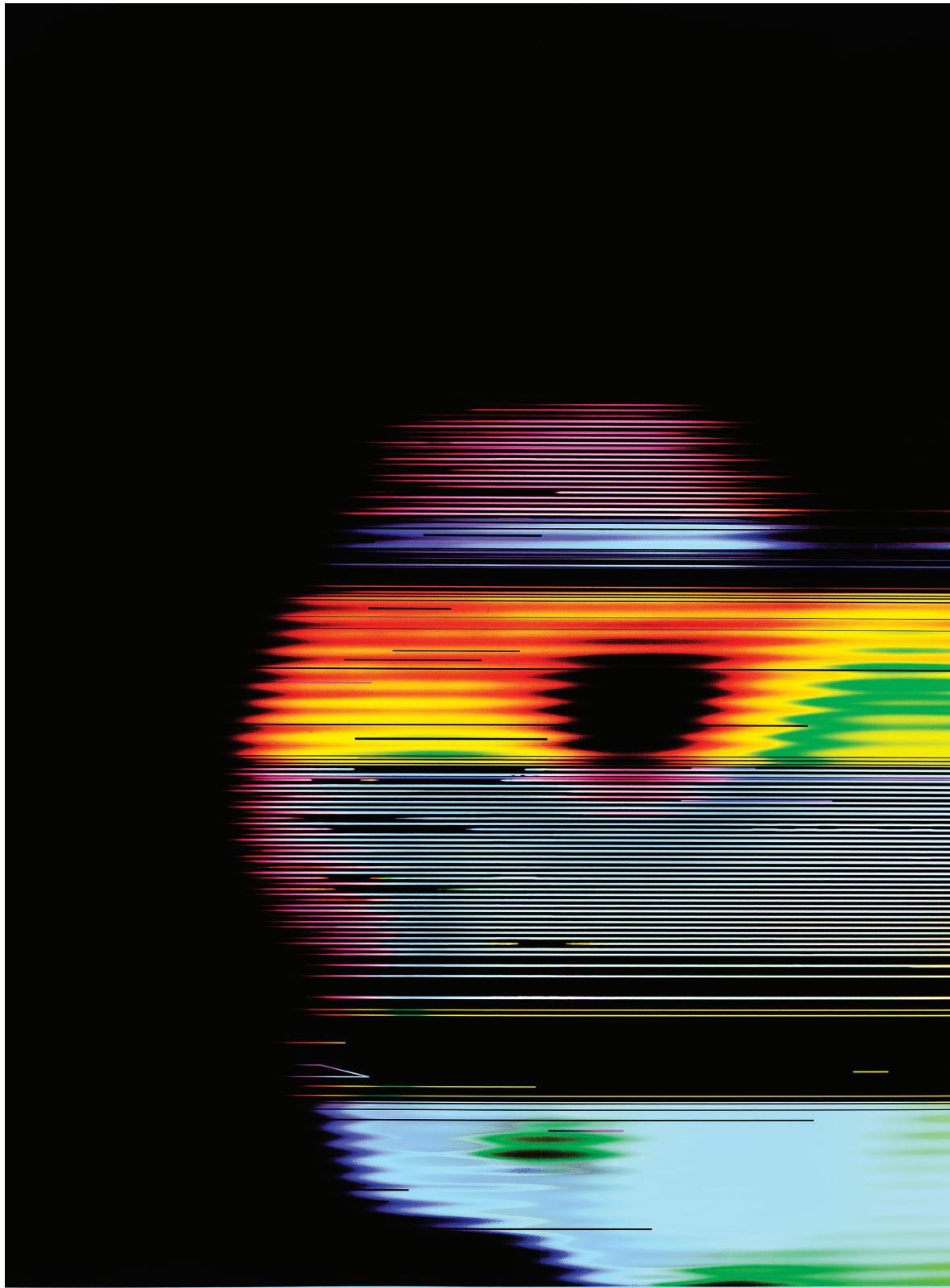
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