

Portrait of an Orientalist

by David Solway (May 2016)

I perfume my beard with civet and rosewater,
the room is fragrant with aloes-wood burning in a censer,
I drink *khamr*, made of dates and spiced with quinces and Syrian apples,
at least four rotls at a time,
those tiny slices in my silver dish are fish tongues
(at a cost of one thousand *dirhams!*),
I wear a lounging-robe edged with Chinese silk
and my person is fumigated with frankincense,
Aristotle's *Categories* and Porphyry's *Isagoge* repose beside me
on a table inlaid with ebony and tortoise-shell
as I sprawl on my *diwan* amidst gold-brocaded cushions,
my pearl-tipped writing implements perched on a teakwood lectern
like falcons awaiting my command,
the maidens who dance for me are like the bamboo among plants in stature,
their cheeks white with fard
with a mole like a drop of ambergris upon a plate of alabaster,
bestowing glimpses of the Fertile Crescent to tease my sense of geography,
and breasts like ripe pomegranates, nipples dyed with henna,
I chew my food slowly, laugh but little, do not lick my fingers,

and avoid garlic and onions as unbefitting a polished speaker,

I am attended by a retinue of Jews and Christians

and by young men slender and muscled to serve a sudden whim—

these are my perquisites

for I am a member of the learned sodality, a gentleman of intellect,

but with no strict standards of veracity

(which would be contrary to my profession),

whether in the court of al-Rashid or al-Mamun

in Abbasid splendour of high accomplishment,

or today, in Cairo and Riyadh

or any center of seminarian repute.

David Solway is a Canadian poet and essayist. His most recent volume of poetry, *Installations*, appeared in fall 2015 from Signal Editions. A partly autobiographical prose manifesto, *Reflections on Music, Poetry & Politics*, was released by Shomron Press in spring 2016. A CD of his original songs, *Blood Guitar and Other Tales*, appeared last summer. Solway's current projects include work on a second CD with his pianist wife Janice and writing for the major American political sites such as *PJ Media*, *FrontPage Magazine*, *American Thinker* and *WorldNetDaily*.

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