

An abstract painting with a textured, painterly style. At the top, a hand in shades of red and brown holds a dark brown pen, positioned as if about to write on a book. The book is depicted with a white cover and a purple spine, lying flat. To the right of the book, there are several concentric, wavy lines in shades of yellow and green, resembling a stylized sun or a decorative element. The background is a mix of light green, yellow, and red tones, with soft, blended edges. The overall composition is centered and balanced.

# Rumi

## *Swallowing the Sun*

TRANSLATED BY Franklin D. Lewis

*Rumi: Swallowing the Sun*

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O N E W O R L D  
O X F O R D

## RUMI: SWALLOWING THE SUN

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Franklin Lewis, Chicago





# INTRODUCTION

## ON TRANSLATING PERSIAN POETRY

The extraordinary success and influence of certain translations and adaptations of Persian poetry into western languages – those by Sir William Jones, Wolfgang von Goethe, Friedrich Rückert, August von Platen, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Edward FitzGerald, Basil Bunting, Robert Bly, Coleman Barks and Dick Davis – makes the burden of the translation past and present especially weighty. A meta-translation question must therefore be resolved in the mind of any would-be Persian translator before they begin: who is the intended audience of this translation, and what use do they have for it? One may of course translate for the love of translating, but even then the endeavor may run aground on unforeseen shoals. As Ḥafeẓ (d. 1391) famously observed in the first line of the first poem of his Collected Poems, or *Divân*, a line whose first hemistich is in Arabic and second in Persian:

*alâ yâ ayyohâ as-sâqi ader ka'san va nâvel-hâ*  
*ke 'eshq âsân nemud avval vali oftâd moshkel-hâ*

Come, Saqi, pour out a cup and pass it around;  
Love – which first seemed easy – comes fraught with complications

That word “Saqi” (*sâqi*) was introduced to many an English-speaking reader in 1868, in the phrase “the Eternal Sâkî,” which appeared in the second edition of Edward FitzGerald’s translation of the *Rubâiyât of Omar Khayyâm*. FitzGerald published four different editions of his Khayyâm translation; in the first edition of 1859, the word “Sâkî” had not appeared – though Goethe and others had previously introduced it to western languages in their translations and adaptations of “Eastern”

poetry. But with the passage of time FitzGerald seemed to increasingly feel the English use of the word “Sákí” appropriate: he introduced it in 1868 (quatrain # 47, which became # 46 in subsequent editions) and then added a second occurrence of the word for the third and fourth editions (1872 and 1879, respectively) of his *Rubáiyát* in a rather prominent place in the poem: an apostrophe to the Sákí in the first line of the final quatrain. FitzGerald’s *Rubáiyát* was one of the most, indeed perhaps the most, successful of verse translations ever made into English, so our “Sákí” (or *Sáqi*, according to a more contemporary transliteration) was often seen in English in the last decades of the nineteenth through the middle of the twentieth century, especially after Omar Khayyam societies became active in most of the English-speaking capitals. The Scottish short-story writer H.H. Munro (1870–1916) even chose Saki as his pen name, so we might assume that it is well attested in English lexicons. And yet, the *Oxford English Dictionary* gives no entry for “saki” in this meaning, only for the homonym that describes a particular genus of South American monkey (to which definition the *Merriam-Webster* dictionaries merely add that “saki” can also be a variant spelling of the Japanese potato, sake).

As for those readers familiar with the meaning of “saki/saqi” derived from translations of Persian poetry, they may be uncomfortable with the overtones this adapted English term has subsequently acquired. “Saki/saqi” may now inadvertently evoke an orientalized presentation of Omar Khayyam and the “East” which was once prevalent in popular Western culture, but is now about as believable and fashionable as the harems depicted in Hollywood films of the silent era through the 1940s. That is to say, “saki” may strongly remind us that the Romantic and post-Romantic translators of Persian held some assumptions we can no longer readily share, and may evoke a colonialist western attitude that modern translators would like to avoid. A change in orthography from *sákí* to *sáqi* may be seen as cosmetic, not enough to distance our stance from that of the nineteenth century.

In an effort to avoid retrograde associations, we may be moved to substitute our own preferred term for the person or profession intended by *sáqi*, namely the one who tends to and serves the wine at a drinking party (a *majles-e sharáb*, or Persian wine symposium). As a literary ideal, this saqi is rather androgynous: attractive, young and supple, bright-complexioned

and smooth-skinned in body and face (if facial hair is present at the temples, along the jawline or above the lip, it should be soft and downy). The imbiber may hope will also be generous and liberal. Some Persian poems will explicitly signal the saqi to be a girl, or a boy, and sometimes as a Christian, or a Zoroastrian. But a modern translator of a ghazal may try to conjure up the ideal saqi with a different term. Depending on the type of establishment one frequents, the kind of poetry and party one favors, the musical genres one prefers, or the gender one desires, one might consider Ganymede, Libationer, Sommelier, Wine-steward, Skinker, Pot-boy, Waitress, Server, Bartender, Barista... Of course, none of these terms comes free of its own cultural baggage. Although this noun "saqi" is an important part of the semiotic universe of Persian poetry, we may despair of finding an equivalent, and therefore avoid naming it altogether by means of some locution, such as a direct address: "Come, fill the Cup!"

## TRANSLATING RUMI

There may not be a Rumi society or club in every English-speaking metropolis, but Rumi has many devotees, and Coleman Barks' renderings have captured the public imagination almost as much as did FitzGerald's rendering of Khayyám. Rumi is generally considered the most outstanding representative of mystical poetry in the Persian tradition, and he has indeed been called more than once the world's greatest mystic poet (an oddly competitive and hierarchical notion, which, despite this irony, does signal the stature and reputation of the poet).

Rumi was born in 1207 of the Common Era (604 A.H. by the calendar he would have used), most probably in the town of Vaxsh. He lived in Transoxiana, including Samarqand, before his father emigrated for political and professional reasons, probably around 1216, taking the family to Syria and Anatolia. Eventually they settled in Konya, the capital of the western Seljuq dynasty, where Persian literature was patronized, and where Rumi lived from 1229 until his death in 1273, with the exception of several years spent studying Islamic law and theology in the colleges (*madrasas*) of Aleppo and Damascus in the 1230s, after his father's death.

“Rumi” is in fact only a toponymic, meaning a man who lived in “Rum,” or Rome, referring to Christendom generally, but more especially Byzantium, as a political domain. Geographically speaking, at least from the perspective of northwest Persian and the Levant, this meant Asia Minor, or Anatolia, which was in Rumi’s day the center of the Seljuq empire, but nevertheless still a region on the periphery of Islamdom. As one might imagine, many medieval Muslim figures living in Anatolia were also called Rumi (“the Greek” or “the Anatolian”), and indeed, until more recently, Rumi was not familiarly known this way in the West. Instead, he was known as Jalál al-Dín Balkhí (Jalál al-Din Balkhi), a man who had reputedly emigrated from Balkh, before arriving in Rum. Rumi’s disciples, however, used the Arabo-Persian title “My Master” (Mowlavi), or “Our Master” (Mowlânâ) to address him. This latter form, Mowlânâ, is how the Persians typically speak of him today, though it has become somewhat more familiar to westerners in its Turkish pronunciation, as Mevlana.

In America it has been repeatedly stated in the press, in library journals and even in academic articles that Rumi is the best-selling poet in America. Insofar as high school and college classes continue to teach the traditional canon of Shakespeare’s sonnets, or Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson and T.S. Eliot, this seems rather incredible. I have not seen comparative publishers’ documentation for the sales figures of the various poets, but UNESCO’s Index Translationum, which inventories some 1.6 million translations made since the 1970s in scores of the world’s languages, lists Shakespeare as the only major poet among the top 50 translated authors of any language in the world.<sup>1</sup> While far more translations are made from English than from any other source language, English ranks only fourth as a target language for translations – more works are translated into German, Spanish and French than into English, and translations into

<sup>1</sup> These statistics were taken at the end of 2006 from the Index Translationum website: <http://databases.unesco.org/xtrans/stat/xTransStat.a?VL1=A&top=50&lg=0>. The database, which is as yet incomplete and contains significant lacunae, is nevertheless a useful starting place. Disney Productions as composite author, Agatha Christie, Jules Verne, Vladimir Lenin and the children’s author Enid Blyton come, in that order, ahead of Shakespeare.

English are only slightly more numerous than translations into Japanese, Dutch and Portuguese. Indeed, citing a consultant for Bowker, which tracks the publishing business, a *New York Times* article announced in 2006 that

American publishers have one of the lowest translation rates in the Western world ... Only 3 percent of books published in the United States are translations (4,114 in 2005) ... compared with, for example, 27 percent in Italy. As a result, linguists contend, much of the English-speaking world knows little of other countries and cultures.<sup>2</sup>

By way of comparison, Persian ranks twenty-fifth as a target language, with translations into Persian just notches above the number of titles translated into Turkish and Arabic.<sup>3</sup> But to comparatively evaluate the extent to which Rumi is being translated, one would need to consider the number of works for which Persian is the source language of the translation. According to these statistics, the number of works translated from Persian is comparatively meager, ranking in thirty-fourth place, behind translations from Latin (in eighth place) and from pre-modern Greek (up to the conquest of Constantinople in 1453) in eleventh, and behind translations from Arabic (16th), Hebrew (20th), Sanskrit (26th) and Serbian (33rd).<sup>4</sup> UNESCO's data clearly stand in need of continued compilation and collation, but nevertheless provide a useful index, indicating that in terms of the total number of titles translated from Persian into all other languages, Omar Khayyam (199) still stands ahead of Rumi (170), even though Rumi has more titles published in English (44) than does Khayyam (30).<sup>5</sup> Of course, none of this actually settles the

<sup>2</sup> Dinita Smith, "Found in Translation: Endangered Languages," *New York Times*, 21 April 2006, Late Edition – Final, Section E, 31, 4.

<sup>3</sup> See <http://databases.unesco.org/xtrans/stat/xTransStat.a?VL1=L&top=50&lg=0>, though one suspects that the statistics fail to notice many translations into Persian, since Iran has experienced an incredible explosion of translated titles published in the last two decades.

<sup>4</sup> <http://databases.unesco.org/xtrans/stat/xTransStat.a?VL1=SL&top=50&lg=0>

<sup>5</sup> Rounding out the top five most translated Persian authors, in descending order, we find Nezâmi, Baha'u'llah and Hâfêz, according to UNESCO's data. <http://databases.unesco.org/xtrans/stat/xTransStat.a?VL1=A&top=10&cs1=PES&lg=0>

question of which poet (Khayyam, Rumi, Whitman, Eliot, Ginsberg, Bly, Angelou?) sells the most books in America.

Nevertheless, English poems with the name of Rumi as author have certainly sold in amazing numbers, in both print and audio formats. More than a dozen translators and para-translators (versioners, adapters and impersonators) have published English renderings of Rumi, and many of them remain in print and on bookstore shelves. Versions by established poets like Coleman Barks, Robert Bly and W. S. Merwin; others by Nevit Ergin, Kabir Helminski and Jonathan Star; some directly from Persian by Nader Khalili, John Moyne and Shahram Shiva; and many others beside, have created and fed an unprecedented interest in the poems of Mowlânâ Jalâl al-Din Rumi. Robert Bly and Coleman Barks obviously demonstrated a remarkable vision and foresight in bringing this particular poet to wider attention. Of course, a fair number of Persianists had already produced translations, and continue to do so, directly from the original language of Rumi – among them, A.J. Arberry, J.C. Bürgel, William Chittick, Abdulkâki Gölpınarlı, Talat Halman, Jawid Mojaddedi, Reynold Nicholson and Annemarie Schimmel. Some of their efforts are very literary in their own right. And even those that are not intended to be read as poetry in English have not only helped us understand the meaning of difficult or ambiguous passages, and the significance of various images and allusions, but have also provided cribs for the popularizing poets who do not themselves know Persian, from which to chisel out poems in contemporary American idiom. As a result of all these efforts, at the very least it does seem quite safe to say that Rumi is currently the world's best-selling thirteenth-century poet (especially if we allow that Dante did not compose his *Divine Comedy* until the fourteenth century).

## PERSIAN LITERARY ADAPTATION TO ENGLISH

For a Persianist, all this translating, versioning and adapting must be good news, right? But our growing awareness in recent decades, due to the theorizing of the orientalist and post-colonial gaze, has taught us to suspect subconscious epistemological biases and motivations in our encounters – both intellectual and political – with the non-western world,

most especially with the Islamicate world. Robert Irwin's *Dangerous Knowledge: Orientalism and Its Discontents* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 2006) makes a vigorous attempt to rehabilitate the reputation of that "motley crew of intellectuals and eccentrics who brought an understanding of the Islamic world to the west," most of whom had been tarred by the brush of Edward Said's seminal work *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978). Said himself later argued that it is literature – representations of lived experience, rather than the explanations of political or religious abstractions – that can dispel the "ideological fogs" in which the western gaze has obscured the Middle East, especially in the post-9/11 atmosphere, now the mass media and the internet have given us a heightened sense of being informed about the Middle East.<sup>6</sup>

One might then harbor a positive view in general of the translators, very few of whom had consciously nefarious intentions, and yet still worry about the meta-meaning of translation. As Julie Meisami puts it in her review of the history of translations of Hafez, who died a little more than a century after Rumi:

There are many reasons for translating a work or works from one literary tradition into the language of another. Only rarely is the impulse purely aesthetic; more often, the aesthetic motive (if there is one) is overshadowed by other, ideological motives which, spoken or unspoken, determine to a great extent the practical approach taken. Translation is never a simple act of transference, but involves complex questions of authority: the authority of the text and of its author, of patrons and publishers, of the translator (whose expertise is assumed), of the receiving culture, and, perhaps most important, the authority of [quoting Andre Lefevere:] "the image a translation creates of its original author, its author, its literature, its culture."<sup>7</sup>

Generally, it would seem that translations of Rumi in the era famously described as a "clash of civilizations" are being put to ecumenical uses with which peaceful and tolerant people ought readily to agree: to demonstrate

<sup>6</sup> Edward Said, "Impossible Histories: Why the Many Islams Cannot Be Simplified," *Harper's Magazine*, July 2002, 69–74, at 74.

<sup>7</sup> Julie Meisami, "Hafiz in English: Translation and Authority," *Edebiyat*, 6, 1995, 55–79, p. 55.



the depth and vitality of Islamic traditions of spirituality, to inspire the vast unchurched population in the West with inspiration for a new age of spirituality, and even for constructive political purposes. As an example of the latter, we might recall the 15 March 2000 issue of the *New York Times*, where a group of Iranians published a full-page advertisement with a line of Persian poetry in calligraphic Persian script, ascribed to Rumi, along with an English rendering by Coleman Barks. The text of that advertisement verse read: “Out beyond ideas of right doing and wrong doing, there is a field, I’ll meet you there.” If the wording seems clumsy and uncommunicative, the purpose was made clear by the small text below it:

70% of the current population of Iran was nine years old or younger when the Americans were taken hostage in 1979. On February 18th, in a democratic election, the citizens of Iran voted for reform. Shall we meet them in the field?

Of course, this kind of message poetry comes with an expiration date, and with the defeat of the Iranian reformists in subsequent elections, it may now seem rather stale. But in any case, it is certainly startling to see the use of medieval poetry to urge negotiation, when modern quotation from medieval texts has sometimes had the opposite effect of condemning another religion or political tradition.

The realization that this process of viewing or translating the other is subject to distortions and ideologies invisible to the onlooker is, of course, not so entirely new: in the 1930s Samuel Chew was already observing, albeit in a less abstract way, that in the Elizabethan era English visitors to the “Orient” carried with themselves “a quantity of superstitions, fabulous lore, and old wives’ tales” as part of their baggage, and after arriving there they were generally “more desirous to have it confirmed than to put it to the test” of actual observation.<sup>8</sup> Some of these pre-impressions had already been formed by the depiction of Persian manners and costumes on the English stage, as well as John Mandeville’s mendacious travel account,

<sup>8</sup> Samuel Clagget Chew, *The Crescent and the Rose: Islam and England during the Renaissance* (New York: Oxford, 1937), 542. See also Hasan Javadi, *Persian Literary Influence on English Literature* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2005), 18. Javadi’s study has greatly informed the present essay.

though the effects of that were somewhat mitigated by two or three reports of later Elizabethan travelers who actually did visit Persia in person.

An early mention of Persian poetry, and the presentation of what may be a kind of second- or third-hand English translation, appears in Puttenham's (whether George, or his brother Richard, has been disputed) work *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), where four pattern poems in "translation" were said to have been "bestowed" on Puttenham in Italy by a longtime sojourner "at the courts of the great Princes of China and Tartarie."<sup>9</sup> It is difficult to tell if these are actual translations, or imitations, and indeed the eighteenth century's vogue for the Oriental Tale would lead to the publication of several works questionably introduced as translations, and attributed to authors otherwise obscure to us, whose authority nevertheless stemmed from their putative oriental origins. Antoine Galland's *Les mille et une nuits* (Paris: Barbin, 1704–17) (*The Thousand and One Nights*) was translated to English more often than Rumi, most often not from Arabic, but from Galland's French. The first anonymous translation, the so-called "Grub Street edition," appeared as *The Arabian Nights Entertainment* (London: Bell), beginning in 1706. Hot on its heels came François Pétis de la Croix' *Thousand and One Days, or the Persian Tales*, rapidly translated to English in 1714 two years after its original French publication as *Les milles et un jours, contes persans*. Pétis de la Croix purportedly translated this from a book authored or compiled by a certain "Dervis Moclès," chief of the Sufis in Isfahan, with whom de la Croix had studied Rumi's *Masnavi* (a book de la Croix had found theological and difficult), but no original Persian manuscript has ever been found. The tales of *A Thousand and One Days* seem to be taken from different sources, perhaps including the imagination of de la Croix himself, who, at the very least, must have re-shaped the tales into their present form, even though he really did meet and receive help in compiling Turkish and Persian stories from this "Sincere Dervish"

<sup>9</sup> George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesie*, ed. Gladys D. Willcock and Alica Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936), 91–5. Cited in Javadi, *Persian Literary Influence*, 25.

(Darvish Mokhleṣ) in 1675.<sup>10</sup> Other famous Persian characters, authors or tales in European literature are, however, acknowledged to be partially or wholly fictive, including Montesquieu's Persian letter-writers, Usbeck and Rica, and Sir James Morier's Hajji Baba of Isfahan.

By 1742, it was already possible for William Collins to publish a *Persian Eclogue*, which he pretended to be written by a poet from Tauris – i.e. Tabriz – who had died of distemper but wrote, probably, in “the beginning of Sha Sultan Hosseyn's Reign” (sic). In this work Collins found a way out of the neo-classical Arcadia into a warmer style, the “rich and figurative” style of the Arabians and Persians, which he characterized as follows:

There is an elegance and wildness of thought which recommends all their compositions; and our genius's are as much too cold for the entertainment of such sentiments, as our climate is for their fruits and spices. If any of these beauties are to be found in the following ECLOGUES, I hope my reader will consider them as an argument of their being original. I received them at the hands of a merchant, who had made it his business to enrich himself with the learning, as well as the silks and carpets of the PERSIANS. The little information I could gather concerning their author, was, that his name was ABDALLAH, and that he was a native of Tauris.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> *Les Mille et un jours. Contes Persans, traduits en Français par Pétis de La Croix*, 5 vols. (Paris, 1710–12). Much later, a new edition was published in a single volume (Paris: August Desrez, 1840). For a study of this text, see Franz Hahn, *François Pétis de La Croix et ses Mille et Un Jours* (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2002), and also the memoir of Pétis de la Croix in *Relations de Dourry Effendi ambassadeur de la porte othomane auprès du roi de Perse. Traduite du turk et suivie de l'Extrait des Voyages de Pétis de la Croix rédigé par lui même* (Paris: Ferra, 1810). De la Croix says he acquired a manuscript called “Hezaryek-Rouz” from Dervis Moclès in Isfahan in 1675; no such volume survives, and if such a text actually served as the basis for his *Thousand and One Days*, it would appear to have consisted of a redaction in Turkish of a Persian retelling of the Arabic text *Faraj ba'd al-shidda* (Hahn, pp. 45–53). An Ottoman Turkish translation of de la Croix' French *Thousand and One Days* was published in 1290 A.H./1873 as *Alf ün-nebar ve nebar*, the stories identified as having originally been Indian in origin; the relation between this work and the earlier Turkish redaction of *Faraj ba'd al-shidda*, namely the *Mubayyelât-i ledün-ü ilâbi* of 'Ali 'Aziz Effendi of Crete (written c. 1211 A.H./1796–7 and published in 1268 A.H./1852–3), is discussed in Andreas Tietze, “Aziz Efendis Muhayyelât,” *Oriens*, 31 December 1948, 248–329, esp. pp. 252–4.

<sup>11</sup> *Oriental Eclogues, Written Originally for the Entertainment of the Ladies of Tauris, and Now Translated* (London: J. Payne, 1757), vi–vii.

Collins goes on to say that “the works of Orientals contain many peculiarities, and that, through defect of language, few European translators can do them justice.”<sup>12</sup>

But Oliver Goldsmith, in his *The Beauties of English Poetry* (1767), thought Collins’ effort “very pretty,” even if “the images, it must be owned, are not very local.” Goldsmith presciently suggested that, “the description of Asiatic magnificence and manners is a subject as yet unattempted among us, and I believe capable of furnishing a great variety of poetical imagery.”<sup>13</sup> In his own *Oriental Eclogues* of 1782, John Scott is aware of Collins’ prior effort, but perhaps more inspired by the “ingenious” Sir William Jones’ “elegant translations and imitations of Eastern Poetry,” especially his translations of Hafez. Scott’s address to Jones is testament to the truth of Goldsmith’s prediction:

The Asian Muse, a Stranger fair!  
Becomes at length Britannia’s care;  
And HAFIZ’ lays, and SADI’s strains  
Resound along our Thames’s plains.<sup>14</sup>

At least a score of book-length collections of Hafez in translation were published in English in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and in Germany, poets and composers were also caught up in the vogue. Even so, it is generally accepted that Hafez has yet to find an entirely satisfactory English translator, though many would-be poets have climbed into print on the back of his reputation. Elizabeth Daryush, daughter of Robert Bridges, published her first book of poems as *Sonnets from Hafez and Other Verses* (London/New York: H. Milford/Oxford University Press, 1921), containing four translations of Hafez and fifty poems of her own. More recently, Daniel Ladinsky, also innocent of a knowledge of Persian, has done two or three books with the name “Hafiz” on the cover,<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Collins, *Oriental Eclogues*, viii.

<sup>13</sup> Oliver Goldsmith, ed. *The Beauties of English Poesy*, 2 vols. (London: William Griffin, 1767), 1:239.

<sup>14</sup> John Scott, *The Poetical Works of John Scott Esq.* (London: J. Buckland, 1782), 332.

<sup>15</sup> *I Heard God Laughing: Poems of Hope and Joy: Renderings of Hafiz* (New York: Sufism Reoriented, 1996 and New York: Penguin Books, 2006); *The Subject Tonight Is Love: 60 Wild and Sweet Poems of Hafiz* (North Myrtle Beach, SC: Pumpkin House Press, 1996; and

some of which present poems of his own, inspired by Hafez (or more accurately, inspired by the iconic notion of Hafez as a mystic poet), and others of which rely on the nineteenth-century translations of H. Wilberforce Clarke, who did know Persian. The same has been true for Rumi – poems have appeared “in praise of Rumi” (1989) by an anonymous author (apparently Lee Lozowick, edited by Regina Sara Ryan), or as *The Love Poems of Rumi* (1998), consisting of four re-printed Rumi poems by Coleman Barks, among many other poems said to be, not “direct” translations, but “moods captured” from Rumi.

By the time of John Scott’s observation, the efforts of that “ingenious” Sir William Jones, member of Dr. Johnson’s famous circle, had already started a vogue for learning Persian and specifically for translating Hafez. “Oriental” Jones’ translation of “A Persian Song of Hafiz,” based on a famous ghazal of the poet (*agar ân tork-e shirâzi be dast ârad del-e mâ râ*), had indelibly characterized the form of the Persian ghazal as “orient pearls at random strung,” a phrase that – minus the qualifier “orient” – aptly describes how most Persian rhetoricians had indeed conceived the structure of the ghazal, when they bothered to talk about it:

Go boldly forth, my simple lay,  
Whose accents flow with artless ease,  
Like orient pearls at random strung :  
Thy notes are sweet, the damsels say ;  
But O! far sweeter, if they please  
The nymph for whom these notes are sung.<sup>16</sup>

This aesthetic assumption about the Persian ghazal has tended to inform the critical understanding, not to mention the practice, of translators in English, and to some extent in other languages of the West. Indeed, though this theory of “disunity” in the ghazal was vigorously challenged from the 1940s, it still has its contemporary proponents among both

New York: Penguin Compass, 2003); *The Gift: Poems by the Great Sufi Master* (New York, Arkana, 1999).

<sup>16</sup> Sir William Jones, *Poems, Consisting Chiefly of Translations from the Asiatick Languages, to which Are Added Two Essays*, 2nd ed. (London: W. Bowyer and J. Nichols, 1777), 63.

critics and translators, especially for the Urdu ghazal. The astounding thing about all this was that the phrase “orient pearls at random strung” appears nowhere in the Persian text of Hafez’ poem, but was a deliberate interpretive interpolation of Jones, who was merely doing what he and many other eighteenth-century translators assumed one should do to nativize a foreign work in English. The poem first appeared in his *Grammar of the Persian Language* (London: W. & J. Richardson, 1771), a book that so delighted its readers that modern language pedagogues would do well to investigate its methodological secrets; Edward FitzGerald reports spending many delightful hours with it and longing to return to it on those occasions when he was compelled to tear himself away. Of course, in those days, a serious gentleman or lady would often attempt to learn a foreign language so as to better appreciate its poetry (to say nothing of attempting to translate it). Jones’ project, as made explicit in his 1772 collection *Poems Consisting Chiefly of Translations*, was to reinvigorate English poetry by recommending “to the new world a species of literature which abounds with so many new expressions, new Images and new inventions.” His “Essay on the Poetry of the Eastern Nations” elaborated:

If the principal writings of the Asiaticks, which are repositd in our publick libraries, were printed with the usual advantage of notes and illustrations, and if the language of the Eastern nations were studied in our places of education, where every other branch of useful knowledge is taught to perfection, a new and ample field would be open for speculation; we should have a more extensive insight into the history of the human mind, we should be furnished with a new set of images and similitudes, and a number of excellent compositions would be brought to light, which future scholars might explain, and future poets might imitate.<sup>17</sup>

It is not inconceivable that some of Jones’ reasoning here, if not his precise wording, could still have been advanced two centuries later as one of the rationales for the creation of the Area Studies Centers funded by the

<sup>17</sup> Jones, *Poems, Consisting Chiefly of Translations*, 189–90.

U.S. Department of Education – at least until Martin Kramer’s *Ivory Towers on Sand: The Failure of Middle Eastern Studies in America* (Washington: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2001) attacked the Middle East Centers for not producing useful knowledge, such as a prior prediction of the attacks of 9/11.

With respect to translation, as Meisami has pointed out, Jones here exemplifies the first of Susan Bassnett’s “two conflicting tendencies” in nineteenth-century translation: that which “exalts translation as a category of thought, with the translator seen as a creative genius in his own right, in touch with the genius of his original and enriching the literature and the language into which he is translating.” The tendency opposed to this, as Bassnett describes it, “sees translation in terms of the more mechanical function of ‘making known’ a text or author.”<sup>18</sup> It would seem that with the popular explosion of interest in Rumi in the past twenty-five years neither category exactly applies; translation as a category of thought is far removed from consideration, insofar as most of the commercially successful “translators” do not work from the languages in which Rumi wrote (principally Persian, with some Arabic), but from cribs found in old scholarly translations, or with native-speaker aficionados who do know the language of Rumi, or some other language (such as Turkish) to which Rumi has been previously translated.

## PROSODY AND FORM

In the present work two basic forms of poetry are translated, one narrative and one lyric. The narrative poetry occurs mostly in the Persian couplet form, from Rumi’s magnum opus, the *Masnavi-ye ma’navi* (“The Spiritual Couplets” or “Couplets of True Meaning”). This work presents problems for the translator, to be sure, but they are, I think, somewhat more tractable than the problems presented by Rumi’s lyrical poems. This is in no small part because of the incredibly extensive commentary tradition on the *Masnavi*, which has for centuries been glossed and explicated,

<sup>18</sup> Meisami, “Hafiz in English,” 56–7, citing Susan Bassnet-McGuire, *Translation Studies* (London: Methuen, 1980), 65–6.

with whole volumes being dedicated to just the eighteen opening lines of the 25,500-plus-line *Masnavi*. Reynold Nicholson has also provided us with a full, explanatory translation of *The Mathnawí of Jalálu'ddín Rúmi* (London: Luzac, 1925–40), and more recently, Jawid Mojaddedi has undertaken a rhymed verse translation, of which the first of the six books of the *Masnavi* has appeared.<sup>19</sup>

Numerous other collections of excerpts from the *Masnavi* exist in translation, both by poets and by scholars, such as A.J. Arberry's *Tales from the Masnavi* and *More Tales from the Masnavi* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1961 and 1963), but these tend to extract the tales from the larger context of the morals that are drawn from them. This is not the proper way to read the poem, though it is a habit born of the great length of this work, and perhaps also reinforced by the three-hundred-year-old habit of reading the tales of the Thousand and One Nights cycle in bits and pieces. The collection you presently hold in hand is not an effort to translate the entire *Masnavi*; instead, it contains passages from the *Masnavi* which are necessarily excerpted from their larger context, torn from the soil in which they thrive, like the reed torn from its bed in the opening of the poem. A few of the translations included here provide the entire narrative portion of a tale, but many others are short excerpts that do not tell a story. The only excuse I can offer for this procedure is the desire to illustrate and highlight certain voices, categories and ideas in Rumi's poetry; but the poem best rewards a through-reading from start to end.

It is worth noting that all passages of Rumi's *Masnavi* follow the same meter, namely *Ramal mahzûf*, which is based upon sextameter lines,

<sup>19</sup> *The Masnavi, Book One*, tr. Jawid Mojaddedi (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) – this work won the Lois Roth Prize for Literary Translation from Persian. There were also previous efforts besides Nicholson's (which appeared in eight volumes from 1925 to 1940 along with his critical edition and notes to the Persian text) to translate the *Masnavi*. Sometimes this took abridged form, as in the case of E.H. Whinfield's effort (London: Trubner, 1887), which is still in print; sometimes it took the form of single books of the six-book *Masnavi*, as in the efforts of Sir James Redhouse for Book 1 (London: Trubner, 1881) and Charles Edward Wilson for Book 2 (London: Probsthain, 1910); and sometimes as single stories, or excerpted passages and selections.



consisting of two equal half-lines, and composed of a repeating quantitative foot [long – short – long – long ], which is, however, curtailed by one syllable just before the caesura and again at the end of the line [long – short – long ], as follows: ~~~~ ~~~~ ~~~| ~~~~ ~~~~ ~~~||. In the couplet form, the rhyme occurs just before the caesura (|), and at the end of each line, which is more often than not end-stopped, though enjambment is permissible. The rhyme changes from one line to the next: a | a || b | b || c | c|| and so on, but the English translations of the *Masnavi* passages in the present collection do not rhyme. Rather, they are presented variously in free verse, blank verse or other syllable-count forms.

The lyrical poems, in contrast, come from Rumi's *Divân-e kabir* (Great Divân), also known as *Ghazaliyât-e Shams*, "the Ghazals of Shams," in whose voice many of the poems are spoken, or to whom many are addressed. Rumi's Divan contains some 3,200 ghazals plus other lyrical forms (quatrains, strophic ghazals and odes). In contrast to the *Masnavi*, comparatively little has been written about the ghazals as poems, and there is no comprehensive commentary or critical analysis.<sup>20</sup> This is a particular problem, it seems to me, because the ghazal cannot be translated well without an operative notion of how this form functions structurally, what it seeks to do and what its horizon of expectations is.

<sup>20</sup> In English, the books of William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983); Ali Dashti, *A Voyage through Divan-e Shams*, tr. Sayeh Dashti (Tehran: Ketâbsarâ, 2003); Fatemeh Keshavarz, *Reading Mystical Lyric: The Case of Jalal Al-din Rumi*, 2nd ed. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005) and Annemarie Schimmel *The Triumphal Sun*, 2nd ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993) are all quite useful. To these may be added the articles by Amin Banani, "Rumi the Poet," and J. Cristoph Bürgel, "Speech Is a Ship and Meaning the Sea: Some Formal Aspects of the Ghazal Poetry of Rumi," both in *Poetry and Mysticism In Islam. Levi Della Vida Symposia*, ed. A. Banani, R. Hovannisian and G. Sabagh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), as well as the articles by Wojciech Skalmowski in *Studies in Iranian Linguistics and Philology* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2004) and J.C. Bürgel's "Ecstasy and Order: Two Structural Principles in the Ghazal Poetry of Jalâl al-Dîn Rumi," in *The Legacy of Medieval Persian Sufism*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (London/New York: Khaniqahi Nimatullahi, 1992): 61–74. Although there are a few works in Persian that treat the poetics of the ghazals, surprisingly little has been done in this regard, given the towering stature of Rumi and the popularity of his poems. A scholarly commentary of Rumi's *Divân* would be an especially useful project.

And yet, the ghazal may no longer be in need of introduction, as it has established itself not only in the English lexicon (along with other borrowed poetic terms, like “terza rima”), but has also increasingly become a living part of our poetic repertoire. There are now entire anthologies of English-language ghazals, and several well-known American poets have practiced the form. Indeed, for the centenary of the passing of the Urdu and Persian poet Ghalib (Ghâleb) in 1969, Aijaz Ahmad assembled a notable workshop of contemporary American poets (W.S. Merwin, Adrienne Rich, William Stafford and Mark Strand, inter alia) to work, courtesy of the Asia Society, on free verse translations of Ghalib’s Urdu ghazals.<sup>21</sup>

The contemporary nativized English ghazal is, then, refracted through a modernist lens – with a particularly South Asian model in mind, wherein the Urdu ghazal is the dominant inspirational model. Though the Urdu ghazal ultimately derives its inspiration from the versification, ethos and motifs of the classical Persian form of the ghazal, it nevertheless took shape, like the Ottoman gazel, late in the history of the Persian form, and reflects stylistic assumptions arising well after the period of Rumi. In addition, the ghazal as practiced by recent English poets is naturally suffused with a post-modern ethos, and a different attitude toward verse structures. Thus, with some exceptions, the sense of the ghazal conveyed by modern poets in English is somewhat attenuated from the model that Rumi practiced.<sup>22</sup>

The Persian ghazal, and not the European sonnet, as has been claimed, may be one of the world’s “oldest poetic form[s] still in wide popular use.”<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Aijaz Ahmad, ed. *Ghazals of Ghalib: Versions from the Urdu* (New York: Columbia University, 1971, reprinted New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>22</sup> A quite authentic Persian-style ghazal in English verse has been published by John Hollander as “Ghazals” in *The Nation*, 10 July 1989, p. 10.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Oppenheimer, *The Birth of the Modern Mind: Self, Consciousness, and the Invention of the Sonnet* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 3. There are older poetic forms, of course, in China, and the Arabic *qasîda* is older than the Persian ghazal; however, the Persian ghazal remains robustly alive and well, many poets having continued to practice the traditional form over the past half century (Rahi Mo’ayyeri, Akhavan-e Sâles, Feridun Moshiri, M.R. Shafî’i-Kadkani, Hushang Ebtehâj), and some even making it their form of choice (Shahriyâr, Simin Behbehâni).

It may also be one of the more conventional, at least for the period we are considering. The oft-repeated comparison of the sonnet and ghazal can be useful in that both are the premier fixed forms of lyric poetry in their respective traditions, but this juxtaposition also creates certain expectations and anxieties, and has had a tendency to draw us into the trap of Eurocentric assumptions.<sup>24</sup> In particular, the question of the architectonics of the ghazal, the how and why of the sequence of its motifs and ideas, can become convoluted by too much cross-comparison with the sonnet. Pursuit of the principles of organic unity in the ghazal has vexed western critics as much as it has informed their understanding, and in recent years some have disavowed any organizing principle in the ghazal other than prosodic conventions. Indeed, an anthology of English ghazals has been titled *Ravishing Disunities*, based upon the ghazal's critical reception as a form that is only unified at the level of the metrical line, with scant relation between the lines. The individual lines are held together in this view mostly by the glue of prosody: rhyme and meter, as well as refrain. Since the anglicized ghazal typically lacks the structure of rhyming verse, its cohesion is artificially achieved through secondary sound patterning and graphical organization of the lines on the page. *Ravishing Disunities* clues us to the fact that in the English ghazal form we do not, and should not, expect any evident linear progression or structural unity – indeed, perhaps the absence of a developed argument, in contrast to the sonnet, for example, is the anti-aesthetic that animates the English-language concept of the ghazal.<sup>25</sup>

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe found the Persian ghazal in 1814 through the Austrian Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall's (1744–1856) translation of the *Divân* of Hafez – or, more aptly, von Hammer-Purgstall's translation of Sudi's Turkish commentary on Hafez. Goethe thought the ghazal more comfortable than the sonnet, and made it a part of the program of what he would later call *Weltliteratur*. Goethe and

<sup>24</sup> Already in the eighteenth century Sir William Jones made the comparison between the ghazals of Hâfez and the sonnets of Petrarch, a comparison frequently repeated until recently, as for example in Reuben Levy, *An Introduction to Persian Literature* (New York/London: Columbia University Press, 1969), 33.

<sup>25</sup> Agha Shahid Ali, *Ravishing Disunities: Real Ghazals in English* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press of New England, 2000).

von Hammer-Purgstall inspired others, like Friedrich Rückert (1788–1866) and August von Platen (1796–1835) to write adaptations of Persian ghazals and original German “ghasels.” From Germany the ghazal form – and the Persian poets who practiced it – came to the attention of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, as well as Walt Whitman, not to mention a whole host of composers (Brahms, Schubert, etc.), who set innumerable translated ghazals as the text of lieder. Rückert, the first to provide a close parallel to the form in German, compared “Die Form des Ghasels” to ottava rima when he introduced the Persian ghazal, via his adaptations of the poems of Rumi:

*Die neue Form, die ich zuerst in deinen Garten pflanze,  
O Deutschland, wird nicht übel stehn in deinem reichen Kranze.  
Nach meinem Vorgang mag sich nun mit Glück versuchen Mancher  
Sogut im persischen Ghasel, wie sonst in welscher Stanze.*

The new seed which I in your garden sow,  
O Germany, for your rich harvest wreath will grow;  
And thou who once ottava rime made  
Thy gifts now in ghazals of Persia show!<sup>26</sup>

Going back to its Arabic origins, *ghazal* (or *taghazzul*) signified discourse about love, or talk with women (this from a male-centric point of view, of course). The Arabic genre of ghazal developed as a lyrical poem of indeterminate length on the topic of love. The Persian ghazal started out this way, but added several features to make it a fixed form. Persian and Arabic verse both follow a quantitative poetic metrics, and a given poem must observe the same meter throughout, as well as a mono-rhyme. Each line is divided metrically and graphically in two, usually with a syntactic break at the midpoint. The rhyme appears at the end of each line of the poem, but in the opening line of the ghazal the rhyme occurs twice, once at the end of the first hemistich and again at the end of the second hemistich,

<sup>26</sup> Hendrik Birus, “Goethe’s Approximation of the Ghazal and its Consequences,” in *Ghazal as World Literature 1: Transformations of a Literary Genre*, ed. Thomas Bauer and Angelika Neuwirth (Beirut: Ergon Verlag, 2005), 427. See also Hubert Tschersig, *Das Ghasel in der deutschen Dichtung und das Ghasel bei Platen* (Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1907).

where the line comes to an end. Oftentimes, in addition to the rhyme, a Persian ghazal will also feature a refrain (*radif*) right after the rhyme, anything as short as a single-syllable word up to a multi-syllabic phrase. This of course adds a formal predictability at the end of each line, which may seem quite repetitious at first. However, the anticipatory contemplation of exactly how the poet will traverse this horizon of expectation, typically in a poem of between seven and fourteen lines in length, creates a certain suspense, and the potential to unfold an aesthetic surprise.

Finally, in the last line, or perhaps the penultimate line of the ghazal, the poet should call upon his authorial persona, or pen name, thus incorporating himself in an address as he exits from the poetic stage. The ghazal thus looks something like this, reading from left to right:

```
***** a | ***** a ||
***** b | ***** a ||
***** c | ***** a ||
***** d | ***** a ||
***** e | ***** a ||
***** f | ***** a ||
      *Hafez!* g |
          ***** a ||
```

By the twelfth century, the Persian ghazal had developed from a topical genre into a fixed form observing the formal requirements outlined above, and as the ghazal became increasingly determined by form, it was liberated thematically from the concerns of romantic love. It became a vehicle for a variety of additional themes: didactic, mystical, political and artistic. The conventions of the genre assume an “I–Thou” dialogue in which the poet’s persona – cast in the role of a (usually unrequited, or rarely required) lover – addresses an absent, or a present, beloved, who is usually uncaring or even deliberately cruel. Alternately, the speaking persona might be a homiletic man of religion exhorting the backsliding faithful; or a mystical guide enlightening the initiates; or a subject praising the ruler; or a servant praising God.

The topoi and imagery of the ghazal are delimited and conventional. Poets were not expected to speak autobiographically, except in vague

terms, though generation after generation of poets did manage to reveal uniquely individual styles within these conventions. The poet's pen name, representing a persona, interrupts the reverie that has been created in the body of the poem, allowing him to achieve an ironic distance from its pathos. Sometimes he will praise his own prowess as a wordsmith; at others he may pithily, often self-deprecatingly, encapsulate the mood of the poem in a phrase. In this line the poet may partially answer the dilemma that has been posed, or resign himself to suffering over the ineluctable workings of the universe, fate or love. He may call for wine, or for silence, in recognition that his dilemma is insoluble. In any case, with this apostrophe to his persona, the poet effectively signs his pen name (*takhalloṣ*) to the tableau vivant he has created.

In the case of Rumi, the ghazals typically end with an invocation to or evocation of Shams-e Tabriz, his spiritual mentor, whose voice he internalized. Alternatively, Rumi may call for silence toward the end of the poem, as a realization of the ineffability of the experience he has been attempting to describe. Rumi speaks with many voices in his ghazals: the desperate voice of the lover destroyed by separation from the beloved, the importunate pleading of the disciple with his master, the praise of the lover of the beloved, the didactic tone of the master to his disciple, the awe of the worshipper before the *mysterium tremendum*, the wise sage who knows a way out of suffering or perplexity, the human being astounded by nature and the workings of the world, the celebrant of festivals and rites, the energetic singer who cannot repress the impromptu urge to versify the mundane things going on around him. He also manages to break down conventions of thought and poetry and language.

## TRANSLATOR'S APOLOGY

Since the publication of *Rumi: Past and Present, East and West* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000), several friends have suggested that the translations contained in that book be presented in a more accessible, stand-alone format, for use in the classroom, or for readers uninterested in the biography or reception history of the poet. While this idea appealed to me, given all the translations of Rumi that were already on the shelves of bookstores – and

which continue to appear – it seemed an almost superfluous gesture. Rumi has become an icon of popular spirituality, if not quite of popular culture. Versions of his poems are recited to brides and grooms at weddings in North America, and UNESCO has declared 2007 as the year of Rumi, in commemoration of the eight-hundredth anniversary of the birth of the poet. Although British scholarship laid the groundwork for the current vogue for Rumi with translations of his poetry done directly from the Persian, his wider popular appeal began largely as a counter-culture phenomenon, tied up with developments in American poetry and spirituality. But the academy has taken notice, as well, and doctoral dissertations in theology and religion, or comparative literature, are now being written to compare Rumi with Meister Eckhart, St. Francis or Walt Whitman, among others. Unfortunately, Persian – the primary literary language of Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan, and the language in which Rumi composed the vast corpus of his poetry – does not today enjoy the central role it once did in foreign language study in the English-speaking world. There are relatively few Persian language programs in the universities of North America, so despite Persian's relatively uncomplicated grammatical structure, many of the poets, writers and scholars newly interested in Rumi cannot read him in the original.

Several collections of Rumi's poems done by "translators" who do not read the original language have generated phenomenal response and reached a wide audience of English-language readers. But reliance upon second-hand versions, adaptations and impressions of the poems cannot suffice for serious academic study and comparison, or for those who genuinely look to Rumi as a spiritual guide. Versions of his poems crafted so as to make Rumi speak like a modern mystic for a modern audience, as if he were born in the United States in the twentieth century, may tend to give a solipsistic picture of his mental and religious universe, and reinforce our already iconic image of Rumi. We are comfortable with this iconic Rumi, a great saint and teacher whom we think we may have met before, since we carry around with us some vague preconceptions about how saints, Sufis, gurus and other wise teachers from the "East" behave, and the way they speak and how we should bow before them.

My aim in these translations, done from the original Persian and

Arabic, was not to nativize Rumi's poetry, or to omit what seemed foreign or unpolished. These translations seek to present Rumi in literary English, but in an idiom that does not elide his beliefs, erode his worldview, evert his style or excise lines that do not quite seem to achieve the desired effect. Of course, I hope to have presented Rumi in idiomatic (American) English, employing a theological and spiritual vocabulary that does not seem alien or awkward to modern readers who are not products of Rumi's tradition and training. However, rather than bringing Rumi's world to modern America, the emphasis has been to bring modern English to the world of Rumi. The premise has been that, if Rumi were to come somehow to our modern shores, he would speak, like many other immigrants who arrive as adults, with an "accent." These translations do not attempt to erase this accent, even when his images may occasionally feel strange, his locales disorienting, his ideas pre-modern or pre-secular, his allusions in need of explanation.

Rumi himself was an émigré from Central Asia who left his homeland as a child and eventually settled in Anatolia. It has been remarked that "the past is a foreign country," and in this respect, Rumi is more estranged from us than a modern immigrant. He lived in a cosmopolitan, multi-cultural environment, but one in which each person was identified, even by how they dressed and comported themselves, with a particular religious tradition. His own affiliation was unabashedly Islamic. Although he displays a largeness of heart and a remarkable empathy of understanding, his beliefs stem from his education in Islamic scripture and tradition, and his worldview stems from his mystical training and praxis. To Rumi, the universe is theo-semantic. Perhaps this is one of the qualities that make him so appealing to modern readers – his mysticism is infused with a kind of natural theology that resonates with personal, experiential spirituality, and is not hidebound by dogmatic creeds and untested doctrines. His empathy for human frailties, his understanding of the sinner and the backslider, his tolerance for those of different faiths (including Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians), none of this should obscure the fact that his beliefs were not entirely harmonious with "new age" spirituality. Rumi did believe in the superiority of Islam and looked to various saints of the Islamic Sufi tradition as necessary guides to true spiritual progress.



Although Rumi's *Masnavi* has been repeatedly glossed and extensively studied and commented upon, the poetics of the *Masnavi* have not received extended attention and the poetics of his lyrical poems – his ghazals as literary artifacts and poetic constructs, rather than as expressions of his mystical teachings – remain relatively understudied. A handful of books and articles come to mind,<sup>27</sup> but much remains to be uncovered and understood. When the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament or the works of Dante, Chaucer or Shakespeare are translated into other languages, there is often a significant scholarly literature that helps translators explain particular cruxes or more creatively conceive the poems as structures and literary devices. Such studies will no doubt buttress the work of future translators of Rumi, but the existing translations and versions also provide a guide to thinking about the poems – what they mean, how they hold together and how they do or do not work in another language. Because the act of translation is itself often an instructive way to grapple with and gloss a poem, I hope that these renderings may contribute in some way to that process.

Free verse has been the most often preferred form to engage with Rumi's ghazals in English. The contrivances demanded by meter and rhyme inevitably result in the loss of precision (in comparison with Persian, English is rhyme-impooverished). In any case, relatively few contemporary readers seem to clamor for or expect traditional verse forms. As I began to work on translations of ghazals, my own models of emulation were Ezra Pound's *Personae*, and the imperative to "Make it New!" Though I have tried some experiments in meter and syllable count, in general I thought that the poetry would sound more sincere in free verse. I still generally believe this, despite what has been pointed out by Alistair Eliot in his essay "Translating Poetic Forms":

Much has been said of the difficulty, unnaturalness, and even insincerity of "obeying" poetic conventions. Well, it is difficult and I suppose unnatural to ride a bicycle – at first. Maybe it would be more sincere to fall off.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> See the works listed in note 20.

<sup>28</sup> *Translation and Literature*, v. 2 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), 68.

One might observe that the Persian ghazal being a highly conventional form, the effort to translate it into something that appears unconstrained and sincere is misguided, or simply misleading. But contrary to the impression created in the most often read English versions of Rumi, the aesthetic conventions that inform Rumi's ghazals include thick sonorities, dizzying cadences, repeated internal rhymes, and paronomasia. To capture some of this in English, free verse affords the best possibilities. Furthermore, despite a relatively simple grammatical surface, there is a complex theological depth and erudition behind much of the vocabulary of the poetry. Rumi's language often imparts to the ideal reader a significance that would take a short paragraph of notes to explain for the reader not versed in Sufi poetry or Islamic theology. In order to engage and highlight these aspects of the poetry and, one hopes, give them spirit in English, free verse seemed desirable. I have used the graphical arrangement of words on the page to try to bring out structural connections, as well as to illustrate phrasing.

Finally, this collection also affords me an opportunity to rethink some of the wordings, or to correct a few mistakes, in translations of Rumi I have published previously, and to add other poems which I have translated since then. They are here organized thematically in thirteen chapters, juxtaposed to highlight certain recurring ideas, motifs, genres and voices in Rumi's poems. Notes are provided where it was thought necessary to understand the poem. Transliteration has been kept as non-intrusive as possible, and should be self-explanatory for those who know the original languages. Because the Koran (*Qur'ān*) is not far from the surface in many of Rumi's poems, an effort has been made to signal quotations on the surface of the poem, by setting them in italics, and by giving verse numbers so that readers unfamiliar with the allusions may easily look them up.



I

ORISONS TO THE SUN:

Poems of

PRAISE AND INVOCATION

*You are the light which told Moses  
"I am God I am God I am God I am."*

– from Ghazal 1526

*Shams-e Tabriz, through your sun  
we shine just like the moon.*

– from Ghazal 1579

*Sun of Truth and Faith, pride of Tabriz! Speak!  
– but it is your voice that mouths all my words.*

– from Ghazal 2056

*My thoughts and reflections inspired by you –  
As though I were your phrases and expression.*

– from Ghazal 1683

SUDDEN RESURRECTION! Endless mercy!\*  
Blazing fire in the thickets of thought!  
    Today you came laughing  
        unlocking dungeons  
        came to the meek  
        like God's grace and bounty

You are antechamber to the sun  
You are hope's prerequisite  
You are sought  
    seeker  
    terminus  
    principia  
You pulse in every chest  
    adorn every idea  
    excite desires  
then permit their realization  
Spirit-spiring, irreplaceable  
delight of action and cognition.

All the rest is pretext, fraud –  
the former, illness; the latter, cure  
We're jaundiced by that fraud  
heart-set to slay an innocent  
Drunk, now on *angel eyes*  
now on plain bread and soup  
Taste this intoxication,  
drop your ratiocination  
savor these delectables  
drop the debatables  
a little bread and greens  
should not entail so much trouble

[K44:54]

\* Ghazal 1

You implement a multichrome design  
cast it like a net  
white over Byzantium  
black in Abyssinia  
throwing them into war  
concocting “a wonder never seen before”!

Box my spirit's ear in secret  
dodge all others with excuses  
Spirit shouts out “Lord release me!”  
By God, my monarch, what a jest!

Silence!  
I am so frenetic  
I rushed from fray  
toward refuge by the battle standard

Put down the paper  
Snap the pen  
The Saqi enters  
Cheers!

O MOUTHPIECE of God\*

Eye of truth

Salvation of creatures from this seething ocean of fire!

How pre-eternal your mastery

How peerless your royalty!

deliverer of the soul

from attachment's travails

You swoop upon souls

walking the ways of sacrifice

all of them dying to know

whose soul is worthy to be game

For what creature can claim your love

when the Creator's glorious light

is in love with your beauty?

What remedy can you recommend

for me who am hunted down by love?

I'm racked in love's convulsions,

my physician with power to heal!

Your grace says approach

your wrath says withdraw

let me know which of the two to obey

O Sun of souls

O Day-star of truth from Tabriz

from each beam you radiate

a spirit emanates,

subtle

eloquent

\* Ghazal 1310

LOOK AT that face\*  
those manners  
that frame  
those cheeks  
those arms and legs  
That complexion  
that strength  
that shining orb  
filling out that shirt

Shall I compare to cypress? meadows?  
to tulips? jessamine?  
to the candle or the candelabra?  
or to the rose dancing in the breeze?

O Love lit like an agiary, assuming form and hue  
Robbing the caravan of hearts along the highway  
Good sir! Give us some respite.

In flames and enflared I pass the night to dawn  
How blessed my victory at *The Sun in the zenith*  
I spin around his bright orb  
greet him without lips  
throw myself down to earth  
before he calls out "Come get it!"

[K93:1]

Rose garden and paradise on earth you are  
the eye and the light of the world you are  
and also searing pain of the world  
when your steps turn to cruelty  
I come to pledge my life

\* Ghazal 5



*Rumi: Swallowing the Sun*

You say

Don't bother me, go!

I bow and obey and withdraw

you say

Come here, you fool!

His image joins company with fiery lovers

May your face

never for a moment

leave our sight!

Heart, patience!

Why so distracted from your focus

Do you ever steal an hour of sleep,

of a morning? in the evening?

The heart replies

His beauteous face

those two bewitching narcissi

his brow of hyacinth

rubies sweet to taste

Love,

everywhere blessed by fair name and good repute

last night I christened you anew:

Pain Incurable

You,

the splendor of my being

the mover of my spheres

send flour, my dear, as grist

to stop the mill grinding to a halt and spinning loose

No more will I speak,

say this line and that's enough:

My being melts in this desire

Befriend us, Our God!





## II

### Poems of

# FAITH AND OBSERVANCE

## **Flee to God's Koran**

*If you feel melancholy, longing for  
a mi'rāj high above the wheel of life –  
The Arabian steed will take you there  
It waits for you, in the field of fasting*

*A beast will never shine with learning's light –  
Your body's beastly; don't let it stop fasting!*

– from Ghazal 1602

*My son, don't read Koran for outward sense!  
A demon looks on man and just sees clay  
The outward Koran is like man's body:  
its features visible, its soul concealed  
A man's own kith and kin may never know  
his soul a hair's breadth in a hundred years*

– *Masnavi* Book 3: 4247–9

*Don't be more than others. So I urge my heart  
Go be a salve of kindness – make no one sting  
If you would have no other do you harm  
Bite no back – do no bad deed – keep no bad thought*  
– Quatrain 993

*Every prophet, every saint has his path  
but as they return to God, all are one*  
– *Masnavi* Book 1: 3086

*Love's folk live beyond religious borders  
The community and creed of lovers: God*  
– *Masnavi* Book 2: 1770

*Mind of the universe! Point of view  
makes all the difference we see between  
the believer, the Zoroast, the Jew*  
– *Masnavi* Book 3: 1258

*The conflicts among men stem from names  
Trace back the meaning and achieve accord*  
– *Masnavi* Book 2: 3680

FLEE TO God's Koran, take refuge in it;\*  
Merge there with the spirits of the prophets.  
The book contains the acts of the prophets  
those fish of the pure sea of Majesty.  
If you read the Book without acceptance,  
what profit in meeting saints and prophets?  
When you accept the stories as you read,  
the bird of your soul will feel encaged.  
A bird imprisoned in the cage must seek  
release, or failing that, is ignorant.  
The only souls to have escaped the cage  
are the prophets, mankind's befitting guides.  
We hear them from beyond sing melodies  
of faith: "Here is your path, this way release."  
This is how we escape the confining cage  
no recourse from this cage but by this path.

\* From *Masnawi* Book 1: 1537-44

SWEEP ALL AWAY with the broom of “No”! Every king or prince has a\* herald for every ceremony. The herald which sweeps aside both worlds from before the face of the Courtiers and Kings of Holiness is the phrase:

THERE IS NO GOD BUT GOD

Everything keeps you distant from your quest  
whether words of blasphemy or of belief  
everything holds you back from the Friend  
whether images of beauty or of beast  
You'll clean no thorn and thistle from this path  
unless the creedal NO serves as your herald  
When NO casts you from fame into confusion  
Then follow Godhead's light through BUT to GOD

\* From Rumi's *Seven Sermons*

THE MOTHER of fasting\*  
comes to her children  
bearing gifts  
Don't let slip your hold  
my child, from the hem  
of the mother-veil of fasting  
Look into her gentle face  
drink her succulent milk  
Make your homeland here  
Sit down right here  
at the door of fasting  
See how the contented hand  
becomes verdant before God!  
See the Eden of the soul  
drenched with the daffodils of fasting!

Why so carefree and smiling, Rosebud  
when you're drenched in blood?  
Could you be the Isaac of God's Abraham,  
delighted by the dagger of fasting?

Why so in love with bread?  
see the world baked afresh  
Take the wheat of spirit  
Watch out for the harvest of fasting

\* Ghazal 2375



CLOSE YOUR mouth to bread – here comes the sugar of the fast\*  
You've seen the arts of eating, now look to the art of the fast  
That king of two hundred climes will crown your head –  
Hurry up and buckle on the belt of the fast

From this world like a dungeon fly up to the heights  
Acquire a God's-eye view with the eyes of the fast  
You majestic silver, all this while in a vat  
The fire will serve you, in the sparks of the fast  
Fasting is the moisture in the Zamzam well  
It entered Jesus of Mary, and he reached the peak  
of the fourth heaven in the journey of the fast  
Think of the wings of birds and the wings of angels:  
the wings of birds are strengthened eating seeds  
the wings of the angels fly with fasting

If the fast is hard,  
yet it has a hundred charms  
It has a certain sweetness  
the low blood sugar of the fast

The true fast is a mistress, veiled in her *chador*  
don't look at the black cloth, but find the fast beneath it

It makes your neck narrow

It makes you safe from death

The results of eating: gallstones – the results of fasting: drunken buzz  
Thirty days you flail  
upside down and downside up  
within this sea  
until you reach, my master  
the pearl of the fast

\* Ghazal 2307

With all his schemes and tricks and guile  
Satan's every arrow breaks  
upon the shield of the fast  
Fasting tells of its own charge and feint better  
so close the doors of speech  
and open them to the door of the fast

You are, Shams al-Haqq of Tabriz,  
both patience and abstinence  
you pour out sugar on days of festival  
as well as the grappling of fasting

*Moses, peace be upon him, and his rejection of the shepherd's prayer\**

MOSES SAW a shepherd on the road  
who kept crying out: O God, O Lord  
Where do I find you, that I might serve ?  
sew your moccasins, and comb your hair  
wash your clothes for you, and kill your lice  
bring milk for you, O Lord Majestic!  
Kiss your little hands and rub your feet  
and at bed time sweep your place to sleep!  
May my goats all be your sacrifice,  
in whose name I call my hoes and hies...  
“Who’s that you’re talking with?” asked Moses,  
hearing shepherd voice such silly hopes.  
“With the one who’s fashioned us,” he said.  
“And made earth and heavens come to light.”  
“What wretched state you’re in!” said Moses.  
“What Islam or blasphemy is that?  
Total nonsense, what delusions, false!  
Stuff and stop your mouth with cotton coarse!  
You fill the world with stench of blaspheme  
and tear faith’s silken garb to tatters.  
Fit for you are boots and moccasins,  
but seemly for the Sun? Are such things?!  
If you do not bite your lip and tongue,  
flames will touch all creatures, singe the world.  
If no flames fell, what’s this ashen soot?  
Spirit blackened and soul rejected.  
If you know for sure that God is Judge,  
how can you buy impudence and mud?

\**Masnavi* Book 2: 1720–60 (following the Este‘lâmi edition, lines 1724–64)

Witless friends work just like enemies –  
God on high such service does not need!  
You speak like this with aunt and uncle –  
God's grandeur needs no ease and comfort!  
Only sucklings, growing boys, drink milk  
Only bare feet are for slippers fit.  
And this, God's saying, means His servants:  
    My servant is Me and I am him  
    I fell ill, you did not visit me.  
    It offended Me and not just him.  
To talk like this, even of servants,  
is wrong, if they "Hear and see through Me."

This talk's even nonsense in respect  
of servants who "Hear and see through me."  
Don't speak rudely with these men of God;  
it dulls your heart, turns your pages black.  
If you call some man by "Fatima"  
though men and women are one specie  
though this man's a calm one and serene  
he'll try to slit your throat  
To a woman "Fatima" is praise  
to a man this cuts him like a knife  
Hand and foot in our respect may fit  
It's – respecting God's transcendence – spit!  
He's *He neither gives birth nor was born*  
He creates both mother and her son  
We speak of birth for forms corporal  
birth flows through our world material  
formed of composition and decay  
contingent on a Primal Mover.

[K112:3]

The shepherd said, "Moses, you sewed shut  
my mouth and scorched my soul with regret."  
He rent his cloak, unleashed a hot sigh,  
bowed head into the desert, and went.

Revelation came from God to Moses:

You've torn My servant from My presence

Were you sent in order to unite

or to distinguish and divide?

Avoid if you can separation

"More hateful still to Me, estrangement"

I to all their qualities assign

and give a form to their expression

What to some is praise, to you is blame

What's honey to his taste, your poison

Above pure/impure I'm sanctified

far above all suave-and boorish-ness

I command My servants worship Me

not for My profit, but to bless them:

Hindus praise Me in the Hindu tongue

Sindis praise Me in the Sindi tongue

I'm not made pure by their remembrance

but pure, full of pearls, do they become

We've no regard for words or language

We look for spirit and behavior

We see the heart and if that's humble

ignore the words used, brash or mumbled.

*Story of a lord and his prayer-loving slave, whose communion with God in prayer and supplication was most mighty.\**

A LORD, at dawn, saw need to take a bath  
and shouted out, "Sonqor! wake up, let's go!  
Go fetch the soap from Altun, bowl and towel;  
We're heading to the baths now, no excuse!"  
So Sonqor brought the nicest bowl and towel,  
and off he set, together with his lord.  
There was a mosque along the public way  
whose call to prayer went straight in Sonqor's ears.  
Sonqor was firm and fervid in his prayers,  
so said, "My lord, who're always kind to slaves –  
Wait here awhile beside this little shop  
while I perform the rite and say the verse."

When all the people, their Imam came out,  
all finished with their prayers and litanies,  
Sonqor remained inside until mid-day,  
his lord with eyes expectant all this while.  
He called, "Sonqor! Why haven't you come out?!"  
    "That Artful One won't let me come," he said;  
    "Just wait, my light and lord, a little longer;  
    I've not forgot – am well aware you wait!"  
He waited more and called out seven times,  
until exhausted by this Sonqor's trick.  
    "He won't allow me leave," was his response,  
    "to come outside just yet, your eminence."  
"But no one's left inside the mosque!" he said.  
"So who detains you, keeps you sitting there?"

\* *Masnawi* Book 3: 3055–76

“The same who keeps you bound outside the door,  
has likewise bound me here inside the mosque.  
The one who will not let you enter in  
will not give leave for me to come outside.  
He who’ll not let you step beyond this line  
has bound this servant’s foot fast on this side.”

\* \* \*

Will sea permit the fish to walk outside?  
Or may earth’s beasts plunge deep within the sea?  
Water’s source for fish, and land for beasts –  
All your scheming, planning, can’t undo this!  
The lock is firm, unlocked by God alone –  
    so reach for this: submission and content.  
Were every atom turned into a key,  
no opening would come except through God.  
Once you forget about your planning,  
you’ll find your old guide brings you fortune fresh.  
    Once you’re forgotten to yourself, they’ll mention you.  
    Once you’ve become a slave, they’ll set you free.

AN APE can mimic man in all he does\*  
Supposing there's no difference in the deeds  
Malicious men can never comprehend:  
Some men are moved by His command to act,  
some (may dust pile on their heads!) by malice  
Hypocrites may pray beside the pious  
prompted not by abject need, but malice.  
In prayer and fasting, pilgrimage and alms  
both hypocrite and faithful win and lose:  
To the faithful in the end goes victory  
to the hypocrite, the ultimate defeat  
Though both are players in a single game  
They're continents apart in character.  
Each proceeds his own station to assume,  
moves on his designation to acquire.  
Call him believer, his soul rejoices  
Call him hypocrite, he's filled with fire.

\* From *Masnavi* Book 1: 282–90



*The Story of the Hoopoe and Solomon in explanation of “When destiny intervenes the seeing eye is closed”*

WHEN SOLOMON’S royal pavilion was pitched\* [K27:15ff, 27:20]  
all fowl came before him out of respect  
They found he spoke their tongue and understood.  
One by one with zeal each hastened to his feet.  
Each bird departed from him all atwitter –  
simpatico, a confidant and brother.

A language shared brings kinship and a bond  
But talk with folk of unlike mind’s a chain:  
Often Turk and Hindu can communicate  
Whereas two Turks may meet and feel estranged  
The lingo the like-minded share is best!  
Better a common heart than common tongue!  
Beyond all speech, past semaphores and scrolls,  
the heart knows many modes to transfer meanings.

Each bird told its secret arts and knowledge  
boasting for Solomon of its powers ...  
The turn came for the hoopoe to explain  
its talents, crafts and industries and thoughts  
It said, “Shall I reveal a minor art  
my king – keeping ‘brevity is best’ in mind?”  
The king said, “Tell me what that art would be.”  
“When I soar over all, I downward gaze  
from on those heights with sharp eyes, sure of sight;  
On the ground I see water in the wells –  
where it is, how deep and of what color,  
why it springs up, whether from soil or stone.  
O Solomon, keep this always in mind  
as your armies march and camp in fields afar.”

*Masnawi* Book 1: 1202–33 (following the Este’lâmi edition, lines 1210–42)

Then Solomon replied, “My good true friend,  
in wastelands where deep water’s wanting  
perhaps you’ll locate water for the army,  
and quench your fellows’ thirst along the way.”

The raven heard, came forward, full of envy  
and said to Solomon, “His words deceive.  
Talk before the king’s a breach of etiquette,  
especially false and foundless boasting.  
Had he the constant power of sight he claims  
How did he overlook the buried trap?  
How did this trap, then, take him captive?  
Why does he sit here, unfulfilled, engaged?”

Then Solomon demanded of the hoopoe,  
“At my first taste of wine poured from your hands  
is it befitting dregs should fill my mouth?  
Why do you feign from milk inebriation –  
in our presence, lie about your powers?”

He said, “O King, I’m but a naked beggar,  
I beg, for God’s sake, please don’t heed my foe!  
If the claims I make may seem invalid  
I submit my neck to you, behead me.  
The crow denies divine decree, so he’s  
a heretic, though his intellect’s immense.  
I do see traps from in the air, unless  
divine decree my sight and reason cloaks.  
In the face of God’s decree, knowledge fades;  
shadows blacken the moon, eclipse the sun.

Thus does divine decree become deployed:  
It’s God’s decree the crow deny decree.

*The tale of the grocer and his parrot and the spilling of the oil*

ONCE THERE was this grocer with his parrot\*  
This parrot, green and sweet-of-speech, could talk  
It stayed at the shop, kept watch at the door,  
trading with customers witty banter.  
In human converse he was eloquent,  
and in parrot twitter he was expert.  
One day, startled, he fluttered cross the shop,  
the bottles of rose oil overturning.  
From home, his master came to open shop  
and sat down as an owner will, at leisure.  
Finding the shop oiled and his garments soiled,  
he smote the parrot's head, spilling feathers.

For several days the bird withheld from speech –  
The grocer heaved a sigh from deep regret;  
He plucked his beard hairs, calling out “Alas!  
I've lost my lucky sun behind the fog.  
Better that the hand I raised had broken  
than have it smite that sweet-tongued parrot's head!”  
He gave alms awhile to every dervish  
in hopes his bird might rediscover speech.

After three days and nights of misery  
sitting at the shop perplexed, forlorn,  
showing the bird all kinds of baubles,  
perchance to coax him back again to words,  
there passed a mendicant, in sack-cloth dressed,  
feet unshod, head shaven shiny of its hair.  
The parrot opened up its mouth again  
and called out like a heckler to this dervish:  
“So what made you, Baldy, join the hairless?”

*Masnawi* Book 1: 247–65 (following the Este'lâmi edition, lines 248–66)

Been busy overturning bottled oil?"  
At this assumption all burst out in laughter –  
the bird supposed the pious monk like him!

Don't suppose the pure your mirror image,  
Though it's true "ewe" and "you" may sound the same;  
The whole world's gone astray for just this reason:  
So few can recognize the saints of God.  
Folks compare their own selves to the prophets,  
and take God's saints for mortals, just like them.

PILGRIMS ON THE WAY! where are you?\*

Here is the beloved, here!

Your beloved lives next door

wall to wall

why do you wander

round and round the desert?

If you look into the face of Love

and not just at its superficial form

You yourselves become the house of God

and are its lords

Ten times

you trod the trek unto that house

For once

come into this house

climb onto this roof

That sweet house of sanctity –

you have described its features in detail

but now give me some indication

of the features of its Lord

If you have seen that garden,

where is your bouquet of souvenirs?

If you are from God's sea,

where is your mother pearl of soul?

And yet, may all your troubles

bring you treasure!

Too bad that you yourselves are veiling

the treasures hid within

\* Ghazal 648

AS I ENTER the solitude of prayer\*  
I put these matters to Him, for He knows  
    That's my prayer-time habit, to turn and talk  
    That's why it's said: "My heart delights in prayer"  
Through pureness a window opens in my soul  
God's message comes immediate to me  
Through my window the Book, the rain and light  
all pour into my room from gleaming source  
    Hell's the room in which there is no window  
To open windows, that's religion's goal

\* From *Masnawi* Book 3: 2400–4



### III

#### Poems on

## POETRY AND MUSIC

*Since your love kindled its fire in my heart  
all that I owned but love for you is burnt  
My studied reason and my books he shelved;  
I now compose études of poetry*

– Quatrain 616

*The wise men tell us that we take these tunes  
from the turning of celestial spheres  
These sounds are revolutions of the skies  
which man composes with his lyre and throat*

\*

*We all were parts of Adam at one time  
In paradise we all have heard these tunes  
Though clay and water fill us up with doubts  
We still remember something of those songs*

\*

*And so, like food, samâ‘ sustains God’s lovers  
within its harmonies the mind’s composed  
imagination draws its inspiration  
takes its shape within this hue and cry*

– Masnavi Book 4: 733–43



*Rumi: Swallowing the Sun*

*My lover, my healer, fills the cup  
Leave off then, iamb and anapest, trochee and dactyl*  
– from Ghazal 1367

*Today, like every day, we're shot, just shot  
But do not think too hard, get the rebec (rabâb)!  
He whose prayer niche is the Beauty of the Friend  
knows a hundred ways to pray, prostrate and bow*  
– Quatrain 81

BY GOD, who was from pre-eternity\*  
living, knowing, powerful, self-subsisting;  
whose light set ablaze the candles of love  
revealing a myriad mysteries;  
who filled up the world by just one command  
with lovers and love, with ruler and ruled!  
In the talismans of Shams-e Tabriz  
the treasury of His wonders were concealed,  
such that since the moment you departed  
we've been stripped of sweetness and turned to wax –  
consumed like candles, all night long we are  
wedded to his flame, from his honey estranged;  
In separation from his beauty, my  
flesh is in ruins, my soul hoots like an owl  
Give those reins a shake in this direction  
lead joy's wild elephant here by its long trunk!  
Without you present, *samâ's* unlawful  
like Satan, joy's pelted by piles of stones  
Not a ghazal was composed in your absence  
till your message arrived, ennobling me  
The bliss of hearing your letter's music  
parsed some five or six poems into verse  
May you end our darkness with your dawning,  
pride of Syria, Armence and Byzance!

\* Ghazal 1760

LOOK AT me –\*  
these two cheeks  
saffron-stained,  
the worldly  
multi-hued  
signs of me,  
and my soul,  
ancient, wise,  
set within  
this, my frame –  
    may my youth  
    be as dust  
    at its feet –  
Look sharp now,  
through my eyes –  
    Do not let  
my seeming  
heartsoneness  
steal away  
with your heart.  
These, my lips,  
and once kissed  
by their fate,  
crunched out words  
so sweet that  
sugar blanched.  
Ears will hear  
the surface  
of my words,  
unpierced by  
my soulful  
thundering ...

What fires rage  
in this world  
from my breath,  
forevers  
bubble up  
immortal  
from my words,  
evanesced?  
Gazing on  
Shams, the sun  
    and the pride  
    of Tabriz,  
what was it  
I saw that  
set all these –  
    my meanings –  
in motion?

\* Ghazal 2077

MY SUN and moon has come, my ears and eyes have come\*  
That smooth and argent skin, that mine of gold has come!  
A dizzy warmth whelmed my head, light lit up my eyes –  
What else that you could ever ask, that too has come!  
That bandit, breaker of repenting vows has come!  
That jasmine-bodied Joseph, sudden at my side!  
Today beats yesterday, my friend of auld lang syne,  
and I was drunk last night, since news of him had come.  
The one I sought for yesterday, a lamp in hand –  
Today, like wildflowers, just swept into my hands!  
He cinched me hard in his embrace with both his arms;  
what a precious belt that gorgeous monarch gave me!  
See his garden: fresh spring! His vintner: drunken eyes!  
See his tasty, sweet-melt rose-petal marmalade  
I'm not fearing death, since that fount of life has come –  
Why fear barbs and jabs, since he has become my shield?  
I'm Solomon today, since you gave me this ring  
and a royal crown has come to rest upon my head  
When pain became unbearable in love, I left.  
O Lord, what blessed bliss has come to me by travel!

Time's come to drink the wine and lighting-bolt my mind  
Time's come to soar aloft, since wings have come to me  
Time's come for me to shine like sun upon this world  
Time's come for me to roar aloud, a virile lion!  
Two lines remain unsung, but love, I'm borne away  
to where the world appears to me as summary

\* Ghazal 633

“*Song of the Reed*”

LISTEN TO this reed\*  
play out its plaint  
unfold its tale  
of separations:

Ever since they cut me  
from my reedy bed,  
my cry  
makes men and women  
weep

I like to keep my breast  
fretted with loss  
to convey  
the pain of longing

All those severed from their roots  
thirst to return to the source

I raise my plaint in any kind of crowd,  
in front of both the blessed and the bad.  
They hear in me just what they want to hear –  
None tries to find my secrets couched within  
My secret’s soon divulged in my lament  
but eyes and ears lack light, cannot discern it  
Not flesh from soul, nor soul from flesh are veiled,  
but none is granted leave to see the soul.

Fire, not breath, makes music through that reed –  
Let all who lack that fire be blown away!  
What races through the reed is love’s own fire  
What bubbles in the wine is love’s ferment  
The reed, soother to all Sundered lovers –  
its piercing modes reveal our hidden pain:

*Masnavi* Book 1: 1–34

(What's like the reed, poison and antidote,  
soothing as it pines and yearns away?)  
The reed tells the tale of a blood-stained quest  
singing legends of love's mad obsessions  
Only the swooning know such awareness  
only the ear can comprehend the tongue

\* \* \*

In our sadness time slides by listlessly  
the days searing inside us as they pass.  
But so what if the days may slip away?  
So long as you, Uniquely Pure, abide.  
Within this sea drown all who drink but fish  
If lived by bread alone, the day seems long  
No raw soul ever kens the cooked one's state  
So let the talk of it be brief; go, peace!

Break off your chains  
My son, be free!  
How long enslaved  
by silver, gold?  
Pour the ocean  
in a pitcher,  
can it hold more  
than one day's store?  
The pitchers of  
the greedy-eyed  
never seem full.  
Only once closed  
in contentment  
does the oyster  
produce a pearl.

He whom love runs ragged and haggard  
gets purged of all his faults and greed

Welcome, Love! Sweet salutary suffering,  
physician-healer of our maladies!  
Cure of our pride  
of our conceits,  
Our Plato  
Our Galen!  
By Love  
our earthly flesh  
ascends to heaven  
Our mountains  
are made supple,  
moved to dance.

Love moved Mount Sinai, my love,  
and *it made Moses swoon*.

[K7:143]

\* \* \*

Let me just touch those harmonious lips  
and I, reed-like, will tell what may be told  
A man may know a myriad of songs  
but cut from those who know his tongue, he's dumb.  
Once the rose wilts and the garden fades  
the nightingale will no more sing his tune.

The Beloved is all; the lover, veil.  
The Beloved's alive; the lover, carcass.  
Unsuccored by Love, the poor lover is  
a bird all plucked, grounded and unfeathered.  
Without the Beloved's surrounding light  
how perceive what's ahead and what's gone by?

Love desires these words to be revealed;  
if no mirror reflects them, who's at fault?  
Do you know why your mirror won't reflect?  
Because unburnished, dross obscures the face.

DO YOU get what the rebec is saying\*  
about flowing tears  
about insides seared by love?

I'm a skin, peeled off its muscle

Torn off and tormented, why shouldn't I wail?

Its neck also says:

A verdant branch, I was

tall in my saddle until

uprooted, splintered by that knight

We are exiles torn from our roots!

Hear this from me, ye kings:

*To God is the return*

[K3:12]

We first sprouted in this world from Truth

and to it we return as the cycle revolves

Our cry (just like a thunderbolt in gathered rainclouds  
just like a caravan's departure bell):

Seeker!

Do not get heartset on any station on the way  
or you'll be hurt when it comes time to pull away  
for you have come traversing many stages  
from conception to the fullness of youth

Take it easy, so you may escape with ease,  
give freely and receive a just reward

Hold firmly to Him, as He holds firmly to you

In the beginning: Him

In the end: Him

Find: Him

\* Ghazal 304



His bow sets Lovers' hearts  
aquiver  
and so he draws  
the spiked fiddle's strings  
in slow vibrato

Whether the lover be Arab, Greek or Turk  
this call speaks to him, rings true  
The winds lament, calling to you:  
Come, follow me to the stream  
I was water, I turned to wind, I came  
to free the thirsty from this mirage

That is the logos of wind that once was water  
and will return to water when the veils fall off  
This cry was heard beyond all dimensions of time and space:  
Flee dimensionality, but never turn your face from me!  
Lover, you're not less than a moth  
And a moth never flees the flame

The king's within the citadel  
because of my owlish spectre  
How can I leave the city for a roost in ruins?  
When an ass goes mad  
crack its head with an ox whip until its smarts return  
If I humor him, it will only make more thistles for him  
Of the infidels, He has said they deserve:  
*smiting upon the neck*

[K47:4]

THE SEA OF HONEY sent word to me this morning:\*

See this wave on wave of honey?

To people's eyes they are ghazals

While fasting, one drinks in only the sound of water

And yet, eventually, that sound does its work

*Samâ'* is the gurgle of water as the thirsty dance

You'll come to life with this call of babbling water

Water says: you've grown from me, you'll come to me

You'll return at last to where you first were

I swear by your precious head!

If any of this water spills on the head

even one that's bald

a musk-black tangle of tufts will sprout

The imbiber did not mix the wine with this water

He'll be hungover on and on. Just wait, you'll see.

\* Ghazal 1357

THEY DANCE, parade about the battlefield\*  
they dance in their own blood, all true men do.  
When they free themselves from their own clutches  
when they can leap right out of their own flaws:  
they clap their hands and then they do a dance  
Within their breasts a beat like minstrels' drums  
and all the oceans foam with their ferment  
You cannot see it with your outward eyes  
but even leaves on trees sprout hands for them  
the leaves keep clapping to their beat – but listen  
for this with your inner (not your body's) ear.

\* From *Masnavi* Book 3: 96–100

IV  
Poems of  
SILENCE

*I met last night in stealth with Wisdom's elder  
begged him to divulge in full life's secrets  
This he softly, softly whispered in my ear:  
It must be seen, it can't be told, so hush!*

– Quatrain 1035

*The way of the middle is wisdom's path  
But what is that middle? It's relative ...  
Ten prostrations of prayer may wear you out,  
while five hundred may work just fine for me.  
One man walks barefoot clear to the Kaaba,  
one knocks himself out to the corner mosque.  
One man gives his life without second thoughts,  
and one it kills to give a loaf of bread!  
A mean is derived only from finites,  
since we can measure beginning to end –  
the beginning and end are requisites  
for mind to encompass average and mean.  
But In the Beginning and In the End  
remain unexplained by anyone.  
“Were the sea ink for my Lord,” says the Book ...*

*Yes, even were all Seven Seas turned ink  
still hopeless, infinitely incomplete!  
Cut down all gardens, groves, for pens; still we'd  
not come one word closer to definition –  
that mass of pen and ink would pass away  
the tale, unfathomed, would go on and on*

– *Masnavi* Book 2: 3531–6

I SERVE THAT ORB in heaven, say no word but Orb\*  
Speak to me of nothing but sweetness and light  
Not of bother, but of treasure  
And if you cannot find the words,  
don't bother.

Yesterday a craze came over me  
Love saw, came up to me:  
Here I am,  
don't shout,  
don't rip your shirt,  
hush, shh!  
I spoke: Love, I'm scared of that other thing.  
There is no other thing, say nothing!  
I will whisper secrets in your ear  
you just nod in asseveration  
speak in semaphore

A nova, a celestial love,  
burst bright above the heartway  
So exquisite the quest of heart,  
it cannot be expressed  
I asked: Heart, what orb is this?  
Heart intimated:  
Beyond fathom –  
be quiet, forget!  
Is this the face of man or angel?  
Beyond men and angels  
hush!  
What is it!? Tell me, I'm in a whirl  
Whirl on, keep quiet!  
You sit within this room

\* Ghazal 2219

*Rumi: Swallowing the Sun*

whose walls reflect  
mere forms and suppositions  
Get up, go out, move on,  
keep quiet!

I said: Heart, befather me!

Does this not match with God's description?

Yes, my son, it does,  
but do not tell.

MUSICIAN, FACE moonrise bright –\*

Tell us, what was it that you heard?

Here you are among friends; you can

Tell us everything you saw.

Our king and crown

our realm of joy!

Within the sanctum

of the one who animates us

Tell us, what did you come across?

The languid drunken eyes

of one whose company God keeps?

Last night in his bed of roses,

Tell us, what was it that you picked?

You slipped through my clutches

I lost hold of my tipsy heart

You who have seen it all,

which one did you choose?

Tell us!

The seasons come and go

but your festival

goes on and on forever

How in the world

did you escape unaided

from heaven's inexorable turning wheel?

Tell us!

I sank, sugar,

into the soul's fields of cane

Tell us if you tasted of its sweets

Wine pulls me left

heart pulls me right

What a pleasant pushing-pulling!

Tell us what repelled or pulled you?

\* Ghazal 2245



You brim the goblet up with wine  
disturb the peace, inciting riot  
Tell us, how did you get the key to tavern doors?  
Ferment of our tavern  
radiance of our prayers  
you who strip naked our desires,  
Tell us!

The moon in the sky  
darkens, debased by clouds  
You, orb untouched, beyond the clouds  
Tell us!  
May your shade forever shelter us,  
may your moon always beam bright,  
may the wheel of heaven heed your wishes;  
Tell us what has made you bolt and shy away?

Love asked  
how did you fall for me in love last night?  
I said  
Don't beat around the question how,  
what tapestry is this you've woven?  
Tell us.

I was cautious  
ascetic, a man at war with sin  
Why did you fly away to safety  
like a bird?  
Tell us ...

THIS HOUSE where the lute strings constantly strum –\*  
ask of its lord, what house is this?  
If this is the house of the Kaaba  
how can it be so full of icons?  
If this house is a Magian fane  
how can the light of God be shining here?  
There's a treasure in this house  
too great for galaxies to hold  
“House” and “lord”  
are just a play, divertimento  
Don't touch the House –  
this house is talisman  
Don't speak to the lord –  
he's drunk all night

Musk and fragrance, the dust and thistles of this house  
Verse and melody, the cries arising from this house  
To sum up  
he who gains entry to this house is  
Sultan of the earth  
Solomon of the age  
My lord, kindly look down here  
from your perch upon the parapet  
for those soft cheeks  
are touched by  
constant fortune's kiss  
By your life!  
all else but the vision of your face –  
even ownership of earth –  
to me is so much hocus pocus

The rose bower, baffled  
wonders: what petals, what blossoms, these?

\* Ghazal 332

The birds, bewitched  
twitter: what bait, what trap is this?

This is the lord of the sphere:  
an orb like the Moon or Venus  
and this is the house of love:  
boundless, uncontained

Like a mirror to the soul  
your visage fills the heart  
the heart, like the comb  
tangles in your tress  
In the presence of Joseph –  
there where the ladies cut their hands  
meet me, love  
for my soul's somewhere in that space  
All the house is drunk:  
none knows what gives  
nor minds who comes, who goes

Well, don't sit there on the doorstep –  
it's an omen that invites an ill  
come, quickly, in the house  
He who stands at thresholds  
darkens doorsteps

God's drunkards, though a multitude  
are no more than one  
while the passion-drunk  
are dualist, trinitarian

Charge into the lion's thicket  
unafraid of mauling  
for fearful thoughts  
are a sissy's plague

Love and mercy –  
and not mauling  
await you there  
But standing outside the door  
your suppositions  
bar you like a bolt  
Don't set fire to this thicket  
be silent, heart!  
hold your tongue  
for your tongue  
is a lick of flame.

I CALL UPON you\*

who practice ceaseless sorcery  
who make a lion a gazelle  
whose magic conjures double vision  
who makes our hands to rub our eyes  
who makes the sour citron  
change its colors  
to ripen into sweeter plums

Your magic makes the lamb a wolf  
makes a wheatspike barley corn  
Your magic makes imagination's scroll unfold  
into proclamations of immortality  
Touched by your sorcery  
even the wayward pagan's beard  
billows in the breeze of wisdom

Your sorcery's made a sophist of me  
You who with your marshaled truculence  
Moslemize humanity, Turkify all Hinduality  
In the heat of battle you transform  
the mammoth tusky elephant into a gnat  
Then let them join in even combat –  
destiny against divine decree  
till one emerges true

Enough of sophistry:  
Hold my peace!  
Unleash the tongue of meaning

\* Ghazal 116

WHEN THE SUN came out\*  
from the pit  
of a black well,  
hear this call  
in each and every beam:  
    There is no God but God!  
        No, not beams ...  
he came out as sun-soul  
stealing the bright garb  
and halo from the sun  
When the heart's orb  
came out Adam-like  
from clay and water –  
    A hundred suns like Joseph  
    sink into the well

Lift a head from the dust,  
you're not less than an ant  
Give tidings to the ants  
of fields and crops  
Ignorant of our luscious hyacinth  
the ant contents itself with rotted grain  
Tell the ant:  
it's spring, you have hands and feet –  
Won't you wend your way from graves to meadows?

Why speak of tiny ants?  
Even Solomon himself  
rent his garb in longing!  
    (O God! do not lay hold of me  
    for these metaphors that mar and jar!

\* Ghazal 2408

*Rumi: Swallowing the Sun*

But the tailor cuts the cloth  
to fit the customer  
my garment's long  
but then the customer is short.  
Bring me one of standing  
and we'll cut a cloth so long  
that the thread that holds the moon will snap)

I'll keep silence from now on  
for in my silence  
Truth and error separate  
just like wheat from chaff

THE HEART like grain\*

us like a mill

how can the mill

know why it turns?

Flesh, like the stone

water, our thoughts

Stone says: It knows

the course, Water.

and Water says:

Ask the miller;

he sends water

cascading down.

Miller tells you:

Chewer of bread

if not for this

how bake, how eat?

And on and on

the cycle goes

Silence! Ask God

for He'll tell you.

\* Ghazal 181





# V

## Poems of

# LOSS AND CONFUSION

*Tell for a while  
the tale of Tabriz.  
Tell for a while  
the bloodthirsty tale  
of an eye-fluttering flirt  
How bitter to be  
severed from such sugary lips –  
spoon out the candy  
of those godly sugars*

– from Ghazal 807

*We've left our job and craft and store in flames  
We've learned ghazals and lyrics, lines of verse  
In love, he's heart and soul, our very eyes  
We've left all three – heart, soul and eyes – in flames*

– Quatrain 1293

GO LAY YOUR HEAD on your pillow, let me be alone\*  
leave me laid waste to wander the night, afflicted  
Me and the waves of grief, alone, dusk to dawn  
Come be kind, if you will; go and be cruel, if you want.  
Leave me, run, fast, or you'll fall likewise in affliction  
Choose the more wholesome path and leave harm's way  
Me and the puddle of my eyes, huddled in sorrow's corner  
turning mill after mill after mill with my tears

Impudent, brazen, he murders me, stony his heart  
none dares demand money to atone my blood  
The monarch of handsome faces is under no duty to be true  
Sallow-faced lover, be patient, be true  
It is a pain cured only by dying  
I cannot tell you how to treat this pain

Last night I dreamt I saw an old man in the street of love  
he beckoned me with his hand, "Come this way, to me"  
If a dragon blocks the path, love works like an emerald  
The glittering of the emerald will repulse the dragon

Enough! I am senseless,  
If your skills can match the task  
Tell the dates of Bu Ali  
and box the ears of Bu Alâ

\* Ghazal 2039

IT'S STRANGE! Where'd that gorgeous heartbreaker go?\*

Odd – where'd our tall and supple cypress go?  
He bathed us like a candle in his light,  
in thin air vanished, left us! Where'd he go?  
My heart, leaf-like, trembles all day long at this:  
At midnight, all alone, where'd that heart-throb go?

Run up to the road and ask the travelers –  
That soul-quickenning companion, where'd he go?  
Walk to the garden, ask the gardeners –  
That luscious bough of rosebuds, where'd he go?  
Clamber on the roof and ask the watchmen –  
Our one and only monarch, where'd he go?

A man possessed, I wander in the plain  
crying, “Where in the world d’our gazelle go?  
My tearful eyes outflow the mighty Oxus –  
That pearl sank in this sea, where did it go?  
All night through I beg the Moon and Venus –  
Where did, in heaven’s name, that bright orb go?

Since he’s ours, how is it he’s with others?  
Since he’s not here, from here to where’d he go?  
And if he’s left the world of clay and breath,  
his placeless soul to join with God did go.  
So tell me clear:  
Shams al-Din of Tabriz  
who quotes “The Sun dieth not” –  
Where’d he go?

\* Ghazal 677

I'M MAD about, just crazy\*  
for Damascus!  
My heart feels melancholic and  
I left my spirit in Damascus!  
Blissful morn comes up in that direction  
Dawn and dusk, intoxicated  
by Damascene bewitchments:  
Love bereft, we stand by Barid Gate  
Beyond the Lovers' Mosque  
in the green field of Damascus  
Have you never sipped the Spring of Bu Nuwas?  
We love the quenching water  
of Damascus!  
Let me swear an oath on Uthman's Codex:  
That heart-stealing pearl makes  
us sparkle in Damascus  
Far from the Gate of Release  
and the Gate of Paradises  
you can't imagine what visions we see  
in Damascus  
Let's climb Ribwa, and on Christ's Cradle  
we'll be like monks, drunk on the dark red wines  
of Damascus  
In regal Nayrab we saw a tree;  
sitting in its shade, we're dizzied  
by Damascus  
We roll through her Verdant Field, struck  
like polo balls by mallet curls of hair,  
on the quadrangle of Damascus  
We could never lack for Mizza, for we gain savor and delight  
at the Eastern Gate of Damascus  
On Righteous Mountain is a mine of gems  
through which we swim in the jewels of Damascus

\* Ghazal 1493

Since Damascus is paradise of the world,  
    we long for a vision of the fair angels of Damascus  
For a third time let's speed to Syria from Byzance  
For tresses dark as Syrian nights  
    drench us in the fragrance of Damascus

If that is where to practice servitude  
    to Shams al-Haqq of Tabriz  
then my heart's mastered by Damascus,  
and mister, I'm Master of Damascus!

NIGHT AND day\*  
buffeted by fantasies of you  
head planted at your pedestal  
night and day  
Day and night  
I'll keep this up  
until I drive  
the night and day  
to love distraction

They demanded from the lovers  
earnest heart and soul  
I make pledges day and night  
with heart and soul  
Until I discover  
what is in my brain  
I'll not scratch my head for a time  
day and night

Your love plays me  
like a tune  
day and night  
Sometimes harpstring, sometimes lyre  
you work me over  
with your plectrum  
day and night  
My high quivering notes  
scale the skies  
you poured out forty-fold libations  
for all mankind  
from that ferment  
I'm sotted night and day

\* Ghazal 302

You drive a train of choke-reined lovers  
I walk in those chains  
smashed, pulling your weight  
I stagger like a burdened camel  
day and night

Unless I break fast with your sugar  
I'll keep hungry day and night  
until the judgment  
My fortune will celebrate a festival  
when I break fast at bounty's table  
day and night  
but the festival befalls us  
only once in every year  
I'm feted  
with your full face  
each new moon  
night and day

Life of the night  
pulse of the day –  
you animator  
me anticipation –  
night and day  
All anticipation  
counting hours  
day and night  
until the tryst day  
and the night you promised

He sowed such warmth  
in my thirsty soul  
I rain down tears  
from my cloudy eyes  
night and day



I MANAGE FINE with no others around;\*  
I cannot manage without you  
My heart bears your brand,  
it won't wander away from you  
Reason's eye blurs with your wine  
heaven's wheel spins under your thumb  
Pleasure's nose follows your lead  
I cannot manage without you  
Psyche ferments at your mention  
The heart drinks nectar from your hand  
and reason lets out with the roar:  
I cannot manage without you  
My potion and intoxication,  
my flowering time, my garden bloom,  
my sleep, my peace  
I cannot manage without you  
My pomp, my presence, dominion, wealth!  
You are my crystal water and  
I cannot manage without you  
You alternate between  
being true and being cruel  
You're mine – where are you off to?  
I cannot manage without you  
They offer heart, you snatch it  
they vow, repent, you break it  
All this and more you do  
I cannot manage without you  
If only the world were inverted  
We could live without you –  
there where Eden's garden is Gehenna

\* Ghazal 553

I cannot manage without you  
If you're head, I stand pat, your foot  
If you're palm, I'm in hand, your flag  
If you go, I'm undone, a no-thing

I cannot manage without you  
You've charmed me from my sleep  
you've washed me clear away  
You've cut me off from all

I cannot manage without you  
If you will not be my partner  
my affairs are all ashambles!  
My counselor, my consoler –

I cannot manage without you  
Living lacks joy without you  
dying lacks joy without you  
How can I clear my mind of care for you?

I cannot manage without you  
Whatever I say, my source,  
reveals my strengths and faults  
So please, be gracious!  
and repeat with me:

I cannot manage without you.



## VI

Poems from

# DISCIPLE TO MASTER

*I once was an ascete – you made me sing  
made me riot of the party – drunk with wine  
You found me on a prayer rug, dignified –  
made me toy for children, taunted on my block*

– Quatrain 1716

I HAVE THIS friend\*

I have this cave

[K9:40]

I am gutted by love

you are that friend

you are that cave

my lord, don't cast me off

you are Noah you are numen

you are conqueror you are conquest

you are the breast laid open

[K94:1]

I stand at the door of mysteries

you are light

you are festival

you are fortune, God-confirmed

you're the bird of Mount Sinai

I the wounded captive in your beak

a drop you are

the sea you are

grace you are

wrath you are

sugar, poison you are you are

do not afflict me any longer!

You are the solar sign

the house of Venus

the paradise of hope

let me in, my Friend

You are daylight

you are fasting

you are the wages of our begging

You are water you are jug

let this lover drink!

\* Ghazal 37

*Poems from Disciple to Master*

You are bait  
you are the trap  
You are wine  
you are the cup  
you are cooked  
you are raw

    Please do not leave me raw!

If this flesh would stop its spinning  
    my heart would not be robbed so dizzy  
you left town  
    so I would not prattle on incessantly

O JOSEPH (sweet the name!)\*  
is that you walking sweetly overhead  
along the roof?

Shatterer of my chalice  
Destroyer of my traps  
my light, my festival  
my victorious fortune!  
Stir up my ferment  
that my grapes may wine.

Thief of my heart and  
my highest aspiration  
where I turn to worship  
object of my adoration  
You've lit up my incense  
watch the smoke rise from me  
My friend, my defrauder  
seducer of my drunken heart!  
Don't kick the legs out from under me  
Take my turban as my earnest

My heart got stuck in mud  
up to its ankles  
But I'd trade my life,  
not just my heart.  
What fires burn the lovesick heart?  
So much for it,  
so much for me!

\* Ghazal 4

ICON, I CAN NEVER get my fill of you\*  
and yet breath by breath I'm fed up with separation  
I see how content you are with our discomfiture  
How can I, heartlorn lover, get my discomfited fill?  
My dropsied heart drinks gulps of blood  
my eyes are ever wet and filled with tears

If you're fed up with this world, come –  
none ever gets his fill from that world of mine

When I saw all your lovers in agreeable accord  
I felt full of nullus, negative and no;  
yet with your breath, love's Israfil, a resurrecting trumpet blows –  
I cannot get my fill of spirit-blast, its clarion rise and fall.  
When the scent of Soul's goblet met my brain  
O soul of Soul, I found Jamshid's grail so unfulfilling  
Since this madness waxes hour by hour  
only the miser remains unfilled by more-and-less  
When I saw his cup and glass, I felt  
I'd had my full of the inverted multi-layered globe  
The image of Shams of Tabriz appears –  
I cry uncle for his beauty  
I swear I've had my fill of kith and kin.

\* Ghazal 1046



I PAINT ICONS\*

All the time  
I am forging an idol  
and then  
in front of your eyes  
I melt down all the idols  
I conjure myriad forms  
infuse them with spirit  
When I see your form  
I cast them all in flames  
Are you  
    wine-pouring vintner?  
    foe to consciousness?  
    or sworn to destroy each home that I build?  
Spirit is poured over you, mingled with you  
Since your scent oozes spirit  
well then, let me caress it  
All blood that flows from me  
calls out to your dust:  
    I share the same tint as your affection  
    I'm playmate to your love

In this home of water and clay  
my heart is in shambles without you  
Enter this home, beloved  
or I will abandon the house.

\* Ghazal 1462

I SLEEP AND WAKE in love's afflictions\*  
my heart turns on the spit of passion's fire  
If you abandoned me to best refine me,  
You're wisdom, without you I'm unrefined  
Why the harshness in your cruel heart? How long  
must I cry and suffer what has happened?  
Because I love to say "I'll die for you"  
I live in you and call myself "your kill"  
You counseled patience as my consolation?  
    (Don't suppose they always loved with patience!)  
The moment you left, absence would kill me  
if each day I did not expect to meet you.  
I repent prayerfully, beseechingly  
to my lord for my sins and shortcomings  
    Tabriz radiates with my lord, Faith's Sun;  
    I weep blood, choke on it, for what I've done.

\* Ghazal 319

MY LIFE BLOOD, my world,\*  
where were you last night?  
No, what am I saying –  
You were within our hearts.  
Last night there was cruelty in your separation  
You had been a paragon of faithfulness  
What a state I was in last night!  
Whose company were you in last night?  
I'm envious. I wish I were a tunic –  
the arms of a tunic held you in tight embrace.  
I haven't got the gall to ask you  
"Why were you absent from gloomy me?"  
Swift-souled lover, when you slipped away  
you flew off like the breeze at dawn  
Trouble and toil bound my hands without you  
Stay, because you have been a slave to trouble.  
Your cheeks' high color gives you away, you know  
You were in the sanctuary of God's grace  
You have your own color,  
unsullied by earthly colors  
You're one color with immortality  
You are mirror  
your color is Someone's reflection  
You were untinted by all color

\* Ghazal 3165

LOVER, COME here. Today you are ours\*

Where are you where are you where are you?

I swear by your victorious insignia,  
and the royal shade of your divine wings

We are like the sun! You are  
Bird of Royal Omen, Royal Bird, Royal Bird!

The mortal world is no more; within it you're  
immortal, immortal, immortal

The world strums you as harmonious harp  
you tune it, in tune, in tune

When the lover loses his shirt, for him  
you're tunic you're tunic you're tunic

I fall silent, but for God's sake  
be like God be like God, like God

\* Ghazal 2716



## VII

### Poems from

## MASTER TO DISCIPLE

*Come here, I have no designs on you, you understand?  
It's no good to stay over there, why be all alone?  
All life comes from the Chelebi of the path;  
find God, what are you following?  
The Chelebi wants his charges;  
what do you make of the Chelebi?*

– from Ghazal 1982

*Essence: Poverty – all else: attribute  
Good health: Poverty – all else: disease  
All the world's delusion and deception  
From this world Poverty's our goal and treasure*

– Quatrain 1042

DO YOU, novice, wish to turn dung to musk?\*

Then graze the garden many years. You must!

Don't chomp on hay and barley like an ass;

    Like musk deer, graze the redbud in Khotan

    Graze jasmine or on clove, or rose alone

    Go to the fields of Khotan with that flock

    Get your gut accustomed: Sweet basil, rose.

    You'll taste sagacity, prophetic might

    So wean your stomach-juice off barley, straw

    Your regimen is rose, sweet basil – Start!

The body's stomach calls us to the trough,

    the belly of the heart to basil sweet.

Hay and barley-eaters go for slaughter

    imbibe the light of Truth, become Koran

    Half of you is musk

and half dung, watch out!

    Amass that Chinese musk

don't fill with dung!

\* From *Masnawi* Book 5: 2472–9

TAKE LOVE'S chalice and on you go\*  
just choose this as your love and go  
Be limpid wine, pure as spirit  
unblurred by vinestalk scum, and flow  
    One glance at him's worth scores of lives  
    strike a bargain, sell your soul and go  
    Such a body: argent, fluid, fine!  
    pay the silver, close your purse, and go  
Let the whole world weep for you! So what?  
Look up at his smiling globe and go.  
If they call you hypocrite, poseur,  
Say "So I am, and ten times worse," and go  
Thumb your nose at people, rub it in  
suck the sugar of his lips and go –  
    "The moon is mine, the rest is yours  
    I need neither hearth nor home," you go  
    Who is that moon?  
    Lord of Tabriz, it's Shams, the Sun!  
    Step into his regal shade  
    Let's go!

\* Ghazal 2179



DIDN'T I TELL you:\*

Don't go over there, for I am the one who knows you;  
In this mirage of annihilation,  
I am your source of life;  
and if in anger for a million years  
you run from me, in the end you will return to me  
for I am your destination?

Didn't I tell you:

Don't be content with the outer scheme  
and semblance of the world,  
for I am the architect  
of your pavilion of contentment?

Didn't I tell you:

I am the sea and you are just a fish in me;  
don't go on the dry and sandy beach  
for I am your liquid purity?

Didn't I tell you:

Don't step into a trap just like a bird.  
Come to me, for I am your wings and feathers  
and your power of flight?

Didn't I tell you:

They will rob you and leave you cold,  
for I am your hearth and fire?

Didn't I tell you:

They will fill you with ugly attributes  
so that you will lose your way to me,  
your wellspring of virtues, attributes?

Didn't I tell you:

Don't say how or from which quarter  
your affairs will be arranged;  
I create you out of nowhere and of nothing?

\* Ghazal 1725

If you are the lamp of hearts,  
know which way leads homeward.  
And if you have the qualities of a lord,  
know that  
I  
am  
your  
Overlord.

AND WHO                    He asked                    is at the door?\*

I said                        The humblest of your servants  
State your business! he demanded

My lord                     I said                        to greet you.

How long                    He asked                    will you keep knocking?

I said                        Until you answer

He asked                    How long will you ferment?

I said                        Until the Resurrection

I boasted of bravery and dominion  
and how I let them go for love

He warned                    The Judge will call for you to prove your claims

I said                        My tears come freely forth, eye-witnesses  
I submit the pallor of my face as evidence

He said                     Your evidence is inadmissible  
your witnesses both blurred and tainted

I said                        By your majestic justice! They testify  
both fair and true

He said                     Who came here with you?

I replied                    O King, just the image I carry of you.

He asked                    Who summoned you here?

I answered                    The fragrance in your chalice

He demanded                State your purpose

Friendship                    I responded                    and fidelity

He asked                    What is it that you want from me?

I said                        Your universal grace

He countered                There is a place more pleasant. Name it!

I replied                    The Royal Palace

And what                    He queried                    did you see there?

I said                        A million blessings

And why                    He asked                    is it now desolate?

I said                        For fear of robbers.

And who                    He asked                    is a robber?

\* Ghazal 436

*Poems from Master to Disciple*

I said                   The robber is reproach  
He said                   And where can one take refuge?  
In continence            I replied                   and piety  
He asked                And what is continence  
I said                    The way to safety and salvation  
He asked                And which way lies calamity?  
                              In the pathway of my love to you  
                              And how will you manage there?  
                              By being steadfast ...  
Silence!                 For if I tell you of his attributes  
                              you will lose yourself  
                              and find yourself  
                              homeless  
                              completely without prospects

HERE A FEW, there a few\*  
the drunkards all show up  
the worshipers of wine  
one by one turn up  
along the way, heartmelters  
all along they flow and flirt  
smooth and pink-cheeked boys  
arriving from the rose bowers  
Little by little  
in the world's egress-regress  
beings come and nothings go  
pockets all loaded up  
like mines with gold  
they come to visit those of empty-hand

You gaunt and battle-wearied of love's pastures!  
Here come the hale and fattened up reserves  
The pure of soul, like beams of sun,  
shine down from up above on earthly ones  
Blessed the garden as it bears  
fresh fruits in winter  
for all the Marys  
    Kindness their origin  
    and to kindness they return  
    coming from rose bower  
    to a bower of rose

\* Ghazal 819

CARAVANEER! See the camels all on down the line, a whole train, drunk:\*  
the lead drunk, the lord drunk, the friend drunk, the rest drunk  
Gardner! Thunder makes our music, the clouds pour out our wine.  
They make:  
gardens drunk and hill-slopes drunk, the buds drunk, the thorns drunk  
Spinning heavens! Stop a while and see the turning of the elements:  
water, drunk – the wind, drunk – the earth, drunk – and fire, drunk.

What brings about a scene like this, and what true meaning lies beneath?  
Don't ask!  
the spirit's drunk – reason, drunk – fancy, drunk – mystery, drunk!  
Now cut it out, all this compulsion! Be humbler than the dust and you'll  
behold through the compelling God: each speck of dust, drunk  
So don't be thinking, "the gardens lack drunkenness in winter's dead" –  
for a spell they'll hide from scheming eyes, drunk.  
The roots of all those trees are sipping up a covert wine;  
just wait a day or two, and they'll awaken, drunk!

When jostled by these passing drunkards, do not get upset:  
with thundering music and drenching wine, how could they keep in line?  
Saqi! Pour us a singular, united wine – why all this bickering?  
friends drunk on affirmation and foes on denial, drunk  
Stir up the wind's incantations over us to untwine this knot:  
until wine fills these heads, they'll never pawn their turbans, drunk  
Is our Saqi stingy, then, or are these evaporating wines?!  
Neither holds steady as the mounts list onward, drunk.  
Look on these sallow faces and pour out rosy wine  
for there is no rose in the cheeks and faces of the drunk  
You have a divine wine most subtle and smooth to swallow  
If he wants, each day a cellar-full he'll drink, the drunk  
Shams of Tabriz, not a single soul around you's sober –  
the infidel, the believer: smashed; the ascete, the vintner: drunk!

\* Ghazal 390

WHOEVER LEAVES our circle for another place\*  
might as well relinquish sense of sight and sound  
A lover licks his liver's blood, lion-like;  
what lion-heart would shrink from love and guts?  
Hearts suck up cruelty from heart-throbs like cubes of sugar;  
did you ever see a parrot turn from sugar?  
It's a small gnat that turns at every headwind  
Only stealthy thieves scatter in moonlight.

Any head that the Lord strikes dumb or scrambles  
drops its place in heaven and heads for hellfire.  
And he who fathoms death leaps to welcome death  
rushes for the robe, crown and realm eternal.  
Fate decrees that so-and-so will die abroad  
and fear of the reaper spurs him from his home  
Enough of stalking such unbecoming prey!  
for the night and its phantoms flee from the dawn.

\* Ghazal 794

YOU WHO SUPPOSED steam\*  
to be spirit  
mistook gold druck  
for mine lode  
You who  
sink in the earth like Korah  
believing earth is sky  
You who looked on puppet plays of demons  
and mistook them for humans  
From you love recoils  
for loathsomeness  
though you suppose  
yourself involved  
You  
eyes teared  
with pagan soot  
imagining soot  
shining light  
You  
like a worm  
squirming  
in lust's filth  
supposing  
lovers act the same.  
Lust drunkenness, the curse's mark –  
You who  
confuse the Traceless  
with a common mark  
You  
rotted amid words and sounds  
You who suppose God tongueless, dumb

\* Ghazal 2382



*Rumi: Swallowing the Sun*

The moon beams down  
on your blind lunacy  
You who  
imagine the moon eclipsed

All I have said  
I address to myself,  
You who  
have assumed  
this an attack on others ...

VIII

Poems of

MASTER TO MASTER

*I am declawed by love of Shams-e Din  
or else would I restore sight to the blind  
So you, Truth's Light, Hosam al-Din, cure him  
and may it blind the evil envious eye!*

– Masnavi Book 2: 1122–3

*Pillar and haven of the morn, it's dawn  
Pardon me to my master, Hosam al-Din!*

– Masnavi Book 1: 1807

*A hundred thousand hidden monarchs  
raise up their heads so proud in realms beyond  
Their names concealed – He is a jealous God!  
Not every beggar should pronounce their names!*

– Masnavi Book 2: 931–2

I WAS DEAD, came back to life\*

I wept, began to laugh

Love's force came over me

Fortune smiled on me forever

My eye has seen its fill

my spirit feels no fear

I have a lion's gall

I'm luminous as Venus!

    You are not mad, he said

    You are not fit for this home

I went mad, was bound by chains

    You are not drunk, he said

    You don't belong among us, go

I went and got drunk, stuffed with joy

    You are not slain, he said

    You are not buried in joy

Before his vivifying face I fell down, dead

    You are too clever by half, he said

    drunk with doubt and fantasy

I got deceived, stunned, cut off from all

    You glow like a candle, he said

    the focus of our common adoration

I'm not together

I'm no candle

I'm dispersed like wisps of smoke

    You're a shaykh and guide, he said

    Go ahead and lead the way

\* Ghazal 1393

I'm no shaykh  
am not ahead  
I am slave to your command

You have wings and feathers, he said  
I need not give you means of flight  
In yearning for his wings and feathers  
I am clipped and plucked

New-found fortune told me:  
Do not go away, do not take offense  
for I am coming towards you  
out of grace and kindness

Old love said to me:  
Do not leave my side  
Alright, I won't, I said  
I've become grounded, abiding

You are the source of the rays of the sun  
I am the shade beneath the willow tree  
Since your rays hit my head, I've drooped, melted.  
The radiant spirit touched and cleft my heart,  
opened it, my heart. It spun a fresh silk,  
my heart, made me enemy to these rags  
In bliss the soul's form boasted on at dawn:

I was slave and bondsmen  
I've become king and lord!

Paper I touch to write you cries sweet thanks  
for it feels your endless sugar in me.  
Base earth gives thanks for heaven's bowl inverted  
that light rains through its turning apertures  
Heaven's wheel thanks angels, king, dominion –  
through His gifts and grace I'm brightness, bounty!  
God's gnostic gives his thanks for eminence:  
“a star above the seven spheres, I shine”

*Rumi: Swallowing the Sun*

I was Venus, I am the moon  
I become celestial wheel  
with countless levels  
I was Joseph, and now I engender Josephs

You've made me, brightest moon!  
Gaze into me and in yourself  
for the traces of your smile  
have turned me to a field of laughing blossoms

Like a chess game  
Be in motion  
silent but expressive  
For in castling with the world King  
how regal and auspicious  
I have become!

YOU THERE, checkmated by the king of love\*  
Don't be moved to wrath or retribution  
Enter the garden of effacement – Look!  
inside your own immortal soul: Eden  
Move just a little bit ahead of Self  
to see what's beyond, above the heavens –  
    the monarch of fine meanings, mystic truths  
    royal banners, parasols of ancient light  
When that scene comes in sight, do not seek out  
distinction; the distinctive miracles  
of saints are just the signposts pointing here  
To the sea's edge the flood is visible,  
but once those waters merge, the flood will drown  
    We are mated by you, Shams of Tabriz  
    To you our endless pledge and greetings, mate!

\* Ghazal 378

YOU, LEADER of the prayers to Love\*  
Let out with your "God is Great!"  
for you are drunk  
Shake your hands in dance  
Turn your back on existence  
You were promised to be on time  
so you were making haste  
Now that the call to prayer has come  
Get moving! Don't just sit there!  
Hoping for the altar of truth  
you carve a hundred altars  
Hoping for the love of that idol  
you adore a hundred idols  
Fly up a little higher,  
my love, my obedient love,  
for the moon's up high  
and the shadow's down low  
Don't bang on every door  
like a door-to-door beggar  
Grab the knocker of heaven's door  
Since your arms are long, it's within your grasp  
Since heaven's flagon's made you like this,  
be stranger to the world, having freed yourself from self  
I ask you how you are.  
How can Howlessness be asked how are you?  
Tonight you're drunk and ruined,  
when tomorrow comes you'll see  
How many casks you've opened  
    how many glasses smashed  
For every glass I've broken  
My reliance was on you:  
    You have mended countless kinds of breakings

\* Ghazal 2933

You secret artist,  
who contain within a thousand forms  
beyond the moon,  
beyond the bright beloved orb  
You've left one rival in the dust, but filled a thousand throats with words  
You've pierced one breast, but spared a hundred lives and hearts  
I've gone crazy, whatever I say it's madness talking,  
so hurry up, if you were privy to God's "*Am I not ...*" [7:172]  
and say *yes, yes*



THAT REDCLOAK\*

who rose over us last year  
like the new moon  
has appeared this year  
in a rust-colored dervish coat  
The Turk you saw that year  
busy with plunder  
is the same who came this year  
like an Arab  
It's the very same love,  
though in different garb:  
He changed clothes and appeared again  
It's the same wine, though the glass has changed  
See how happy he comes in his tipsiness!  
The night's gone –  
Where are my morning partners in drunken revel  
now that the torch lights up the window of mysteries?  
When the Abyssinian age began, the fair Greek disappeared  
Today it emerges with great hosts of battle  
Proclaim:  
the Sun of Truth of Tabriz has arrived!  
for this moon of many lights  
has climbed the wheeling skies of purity!

\* Ghazal 650

IN THE END time\*  
there is no helper  
but Salah al-Din  
Salah al-Din, that's it!  
If you know the secret of his secret  
Don't breathe a word  
so no one else finds out

A lover's breast is sweetest water  
souls float on his surface  
like thorn and thistle  
When you see his face  
do not speak  
for breath obscures the mirror:  
    The sun rises  
        from the hearts of lovers  
        the whole world shines  
        fore and aft

\* Ghazal 1210

BEREFT OF you both earth and sky shed tears!\*  
Heart adrift in blood, mind and soul in tears  
because none in the world can take your place.  
For you space and meta-space mourn and weep:  
Gabriel, the angels, feathers blued,  
the prophets and saints, eyes all ablur,  
by lamentation choked, I cannot speak  
to make you metaphors of how I cry.

As you left this house, fortune's roof collapsed  
Now Fortune grieves for those sore-bereaved.  
You proved not one man but a hundred worlds  
Last night I dreamt the next world weeps for this.  
All eyes fixed on you fading from our view;  
Shorn of living light, these eyes wept bloody tears.  
If not so proud for you, I too would burst  
as my bloodied heart drips secret tears:  
Cut off from you, each breath coughs blood.  
Not tears, but sacks of fresh-cut musk are shed

Alas and alas and alas, alas  
that doubtful hearts should weep for an eye so clear  
    Salah al-Din the king, fleet phoenix, flown,  
    an arrow upward sped, the bowstrings cried,  
        Not just anyone can mourn Salah al-Din,  
        but one who truly knows to mourn true men.

\* Ghazal 2364

O LIGHT OF Truth, Hosam al-Din! Let's add\*  
a sheet or two, description of the *pir*.  
I know your subtle body has no strength,  
and yet without your sun we have no light ...  
You hold our thread of thought within your hand  
Your blessings string our heart with meaning's pearls.  
Write down the circumstances of the *pir*  
who knows the way. Choose this *pir* and let him guide!

\* From *Masnawi* Book 1: 2934–8

SO, IN EVERY AGE, a saint arises –\*  
testing continues till the Resurrection  
All those of goodly character are saved  
All those who have a heart like glass will break  
The “living established Imam” is that saint  
Whether descended from ‘Umar or ‘Ali.  
He, O seeker, is the Mahdi and the Guide  
Whether hid or seated right before you.  
He is like light and wisdom is his Gabriel  
The lesser saints but lamps lit up by him.  
The one who’s less than these lamps is our flame.  
Light emanates in grades as per a scheme,  
for seven hundred veils obscure Truth’s light  
and all these veils of light stack up in tiers  
Behind each veil there stands a certain folk –  
these veils – rank after rank, till the Imam!  
Those at the bottom tier, in the weakness  
of their eyes, cannot bear the light above  
and the next tier through the weakness of their sight  
cannot stand the light of the tier above.

\* From *Masnawi* Book 2: 815–24

## IX

### Poems of

## DREAMS AND VISIONS

*"I am Truth" shone from Mansur's lips like light  
"I am Lord" fell from Pharoah's lips by force.*

– *Masnavi* Book 2: 305

*I saw all atoms with their mouths agape  
Tell all they devour, and the tale won't end!*

– *Masnavi* Book 3: 26

*When you possess the attributes of Glory  
pass like Abraham through fires of fleshly ills  
and the flames will feel cool and safe to you*

– *Masnavi* Book 3: 9–10

HOW COULD I know this melancholy\*  
    would make me so crazy,  
make of my heart a hell  
    of my two eyes raging rivers?  
How could I know a torrent would  
    snatch me out of nowhere away,  
Toss me like a ship upon a sea of blood,  
that waves would crack that ship's ribs board by board,  
    tear with endless pitch and yaw each plank  
that a leviathan would rear its head,  
    gulp down that ocean's water,  
    that such an endless ocean could dry up like a desert,  
that the sea-quenching serpent could then split that desert  
could jerk me of a sudden, like Korah, with the hand of wrath  
    deep into a pit?

When these transmutations came about  
no trace remained of that desert or the sea  
How should I know how it all happened  
since how drowned within Howlessness?

What a multiplicity of how could I know!  
But I *don't* know –  
for to counter that sea  
rushing in my mouth  
I swallowed a froth of opium

\* Ghazal 1855

TODAY I SAW him\*  
the friend  
the glow in every deed  
He was gliding on the heavens like  
the soul of Mustafa  
The sun before his face: ashamed  
The celestial globe: latticed by stars, like my tattered heart  
From his radiating splendor, water and clay beam brighter than fire

Show me a ladder, I said  
so I can clamber onto the heavens

Your head is the ladder, he said  
Plant your head under your heels  
As you set foot on your own head  
you step above the stars  
Once you've staved in your lust  
let your feet lift you up in the air. Come!  
Up in the heavens, in the air  
a hundred roads unfold before you  
You'll fly over the sky  
every morning  
like a prayer

\* Ghazal 19



O FRIEND, within whom I have disappeared!\*

I dreamt I saw you in a wondrous form

Like the ladies of Egypt in their love for Joseph

I cut citrons, lost control and cut my hand

Where has that moon gone?

Where those eyes of last night?

Where those ears with which I heard it all?

Nowhere to be found:

not you

not me

not that moment

not those teeth that nipped my lips

I am a silo brimming with melancholia

for I reaped melancholy

after melancholy

from that tillage

You calm the hearts of the melancholic

You are my Dhu al-Nun, my Junayd, my Bayazid!

\* Ghazal 1507

HERE'S JOSEPH'S coat\*  
and the scent of him!

He himself  
can't be far behind these two  
The must of ruby wine gives joyful tidings:  
After me, the goblet and the serving gourd!  
Your I-am-God soul ascends Hallāj-like  
its divine light shining ray upon ray  
Stones can never harm the water  
though stones can shatter jugs  
Aqua Vitae  
cannot be contained  
within your mind;  
dig a trough  
for the water flows  
and needs a channel  
Douse with water  
this jealous fire  
whose winds blow  
across this earth

The Love and Wisdom  
of the house are  
locked in strife  
their screeching and screaming  
echoes in the street outside  
The wealth or clothes  
that Love forgoes  
come in the end  
back to it again

\* Ghazal 997

*Rumi: Swallowing the Sun*

Though the groom pays  
great price to his bride  
her trousseau and herself  
both come to him  
in the end

You asked for a table from heaven  
Rise up from your self and wash your hands,  
it descends!  
Glad tidings, love!  
a new sign has come  
from Shams-e Din in Tabriz

WE ARE LOVE'S FLAME that has reached the wax\*  
Candle-like, we've overcome the poor moth  
We've made a manly, drunken charge  
to forgo knowledge, and arrived at the Known

In the first stage, two leagues away from Being  
We joined the caravan of a deceased community  
A moon neither high nor low shined down on us  
and we reached the spot where none is praised, none blamed

Let the stone-hearted and mean-spirited turn green with envy!  
We attained to the presence of that ruby unbounded by time and space  
Through the Throne verse we soared up to His Seat  
We even saw the *Living One* and came to the *Self-subsisting* [K2:255]

Today, how verdant and melodic that garden has made us!  
So do not suppose, Sir, that we came away deprived  
Like falcons, we leave the ruins to the owls  
We are not owls, though we roost in this realm  
We've cut the pagan cincture from the Caesar of Anatolia  
Take the news to Tabriz, that we have arrived in Rome

\* Ghazal 1481

I'M OUT OF my senses and you are smashed –\*  
who will see us home? I've told you so many times:  
    don't drink so much  
    just two glasses  
    maybe three  
I don't see a single sober soul in town  
each more demented and fermented than the next

Soul of life!  
    come to the ruins  
    and taste the spice of life  
    what savor can the spirit know  
    without the converse of the soul's delight?  
How can the heart rejoice  
parted from the one who pumps it?

In every corner lies a drunk  
hand on the handle of a goblet  
and here's the Server who affirms our existence  
with her royal chalice.  
Your sustenance: in the tavern  
your income and expenses: wine  
Never trust a sober soul  
with a single drop of sustenance

Go on, play your lute  
you drunken gypsy!  
Who's more sotted, you or I?  
I know my magic holds no spell  
cast before a drunkard such as you!

\* Ghazal 2309

I left my house, a drunk came up to me  
his every look was pregnant  
with a hundred roses, garden bowers  
Like a ship without an anchor  
he wobbled left and bobbed right  
every wise and careful scholar  
nearly died on seeing him  
I asked him: Where are you from?  
    He mocked me, saying: My dear  
    I'm half from Turkestan  
    I'm half from Central Asia  
    I'm half clay and water  
    I'm half heart and spirit  
    half seashore, half precious pearl  
I said: Then, be my companion  
for we are kith and kin!  
    He replied: I do not know my kin from strangers

I am heartlorn and unturbaned  
hungover in the tavern  
My breast swells heavy with a weight of words –  
shall I get them off my chest, or no?

    When you walk with cripples  
    you have to learn to limp  
    I gave you this advice before  
    from the sagest source  
    have you ignored it?  
    What a good little sot you are –  
    Are you denser than a stick of wood?  
    For in the end the Moaning Pillar cried:  
Sun of Truth from Tabriz!  
Now that you have stirred  
such ravishing revolt in motion  
why do you avoid us?

I HAVE SEEN a vision, worthy of attention and praise!\*

Come, Mantic of the Age, see what form my dream assumed:

In a dream I have seen the moon

What does it mean in a dream, the moon? For in dreams things  
are resolved, what has come and what will come.

That moon who lights the heart when heart feels mystery's  
presence

Such heart-bright sensibility spills out, illuminates the face

*On that day some faces will be dawn-bright, laughing* [K80:39]

This was it!

*Blessed, glad for their efforts* [K88:9]

So it was!

Drive off these wild beasts before they slay the mind's brain  
We stuff our ears with cotton against this and that delirious rant  
Just a couple breaths of life are left –  
will covetous phantasma dog me to the end?!  
No one is at home; do not build your house on earth

The night has passed, the dawn has come.

Get up, don't be asleep and heedless!

– as if the rays of the sun of faith would leave you heedless!

A horde of Tatars and armed warriors, the horizons are  
pregnant with enmity

Say: tear the belly of the heavens – it may give this fetus birth

Enter the fray of brightness – how long Tatars and Armenians?

Strap on blade, wrap on shroud, onward!

How long worldly robe and garb?

\* Ghazal 1839

On the eve of a Saturday, the fifth day of the month of Qa'da  
It is six hundred and fifty, plus four more years  
There is commotion in the city. What has happened?  
It's a tremor  
It's the city of Medina! Now is the report amiss or true?

Pass by Medina, go beyond and see the quaking of the earth  
Regard the movement of the heavens,  
their most strange manner  
Look at the sea, see the leviathan, see the blue-bruised sea  
See the wave – within it, the fiery whale!  
See the outline of that whale, asleep –  
see Jonah of the spirit, captive.  
Jonah of the spirit, who ere this  
*was of those who praise God*

[K37:143]

I'll turn the sea like wine, beyond the three dimensions  
Before all this the suspended sea was limpid, free of forms  
That purity did not grow turbid, our eyes are dazed  
by the drops of water and mud, the stirring of the shapes of clay

The head of him whose hand  
is a hand delighting in defilement  
turning our wine turbid  
let's lop it off – now, strike the blow!  
Why should we not recall him?  
It's only just – just what he deserves.  
Since enmity involves focus on a thing, heedlessness wards off enmity:

A lover once asked a fortune-teller for a written charm,  
who said, take this amulet and bury it beneath the earth,  
but while you bury it, do not think of monkeys,  
for the thought of monkeys will distance you from your mate.  
Every which way he went to plant that buried charm  
a monkey's form appeared in ambush of his heart.



*Rumi: Swallowing the Sun*

If only you wouldn't mention the monkey, he sighed  
None who seek your help would make monkeys of their heart.  
Do not needle me, he said  
Do not pour salt in the wound  
Put yourself to enchanting sleep

Do not go to sleep Hosam-e Din

THIS WORLD would be engulfed in flames,  
If the lover's soul would speak\*  
and this rootless world would smash together like so many atoms  
The world would turn to sea, the sea – in awe – into Negation  
Not man, not humanity remain, though entreating Adam's kinship  
Smoke arises from the spheres, neither creatures nor angels remain  
and from that smoke flames soon stretch up to the majestic vault  
It's then the heavens crack, neither Being nor Space remain  
Chaos churns through the universe and all celebration turns lamentation  
Here the water burns in fire, there the water drinks the flames  
The sun falls and fails, no brighter than the spark of human soul  
Don't seek answers from the uninitiates,  
For even intimates can barely tell.  
While waves of void surge over fiery comets and the dark  
Mars drops its manliness, Jupiter's celestial books burn up  
The moon wanes in grandeur, its joy turns to grief  
Mercury sinks into mire, and Saturn goes up in flames  
Venus grows pale, untuned its happy music  
No bow and no rain, no wine and no chalice remain  
No pleasure, no bliss, no balm salving any wound  
No water to streak the plains, no winds to ripple earth  
No garden to refresh and delight, no spring clouds to sprinkle, bedew  
Neither pain remains nor physic, no contesting litigant, no witness  
Neither flute remains nor air, not harp and not arpeggio  
All causes fold away into eternity, the Saqi serves herself  
Spirit chimes "My Lord on High"  
Heart will go "My Lord the all-knowing"  
Rise up, for the limner of eternity has set to work a second time  
imprinting on the embroidered Tapestry immutable patterns  
Truth has stoked its fires, so that all untruth is burned away  
Fire burns the false, and the new world's heart is purely forged

\* Ghazal 527

*Rumi: Swallowing the Sun*

The sun of True heart stands east of it,  
An east whereof constant lightning flashes  
streak through the scion of the unseen  
to alight upon Jesus of Mary

## X

### Poems about the Religion of Love

# WAYS OF REASON, MODES OF LOVE

*Limited Reason's like a lightning flash –  
We can't go in a flash from here to Vaxsh.  
The flash of lightning's not to guide your way;  
But comes, instead, commanding clouds to cry*

– *Masnavi* Book 4: 3319–20

*If Reason clearly saw its way along,  
Fakhr-e Razi would zero in on truth.  
But "he who has not tasted does not know,"  
and so his fancy reason just confused him.*

– *Masnavi* Book 5: 4144–5

*Whether I go east or west  
or climb the sky,  
there is no sign of life  
until I see sign of you*

*I was the ascete of a country  
I held the pulpit  
Fate made my heart  
fall in love and  
follow after you*

– from Ghazal 2152

*Love is but blessing and fortune  
Nothing but guidance and a dilated heart  
Bu Hanifa never studied love  
Shafi'i never related anything about it  
The law of permissible and impermissible  
Pertains from now until the day of death  
The knowledge of lovers is eternal*

– from Ghazal 499

LOVE RESIDES not in learning\*  
not in knowledge  
not in pages and pamphlets  
Wherever the debates of men may lead  
that is not the lovers' path

Love's branches arch over pre-eternity  
and yes, its roots delve down forever  
A tree resting not on soil  
nor trunk  
nor even Heaven's throne

We deposed reason,  
punished passion with the lash –  
this reason and these morals  
were degrading to such glory

It's like this:  
So long as you long  
you idolize longing.  
Become the beloved  
and put an end to longing  
The incessant hopes and fears  
of the sea-faring man  
float upon planks;  
but obliterate  
both planks and seaman  
and only submersion remains

\* Ghazal 395

Shams of Tabriz! the sea is you  
the pearl, too  
because your being  
head to toe  
is nothing  
but the mystery  
of the Maker

THE SEEKER of the Court of God's like this:\*

When God appears, the seeker fades away

Yes, this encounter brings eternal life,

but effacement comes before undying life

Could shadows, say, be seekers of the light?

When the light shines, the shadows disappear.

How could reason live when sacrificed to Him?

*All but His face shall perish from the earth*

[K28:88]

Being and nothing fade before His face;

What a miracle, to be in nothingness!

In these precincts wisdom and logic fail

and at this point, the pen is split in two

\* From *Masnavi* Book 3: 4658–63



YOU ATTAIN to knowledge by argument\*  
You attain a craft or skill by practice  
If what you want is righteous poverty  
that's won by *sobbat*, not by hand or tongue  
The knowledge of it passes soul to soul  
not by way of talk or reams of notes  
Although its signs are in the seeker's heart  
the seeker does not learn to read those signs  
until his heart becomes exposed to light  
    Then God reveals: *Did We not expose*  
    for We exposed the chambers of your breast  
    and placed that exposition in your heart

[K94:1]

\* From *Masnawi* Book 5: 1062–7

THE EYE wants something new to see\*  
and follows after that  
The soul wants joy and pleasure  
and follows after that  
The head wants giddiness for some new idol  
and follows after that  
The legs want wearing out at the bidding of a lover  
and follow after that  
Love wants to soar up to the heavens  
and follows after that  
The intellect wants learning, cultivation  
and follows after that

Beyond reason's explanation there are wonders, mysteries –  
the eye is veiled that only looks to causes and effect

The lover subjected in this world  
to infamy's hundred accusations  
will enjoy, when it comes time for union,  
one hundred honors and distinctions  
We stomach the wasteland trek, its pebbles,  
the camel's milk, marauding bedouin plunder  
for the goal of pilgrimage  
Knowing the lips pleasures from a lover's luscious rubies  
the pilgrim places soulful kisses  
on the Black Stone at the Kaaba

Upon the mint of speech cast no more silver coins!  
He who follows after them will find a motherlode of gold

\* Ghazal 617

THE THINKER is always at pains to make his mark\*  
The lover always comes undone, gets all worked up  
Thinkers are cautious, avoid the water's edge  
Lovers make deep-sea drowning their profession  
Thinkers find ease in making things easy  
Lovers find leisure's bindings disgraceful  
    In a gathered crowd a lover's alone  
just as oil and water poured together remain apart  
Do you love to reform lovers with wholesome advice?  
You'll only reap passionate humiliation  
    Love smells of musk  
    that's how it gets a bad reputation:  
    Musk always has a whiff of notoriety about it.  
Love is like a tree, and lovers the shade of that tree:  
    The shadows are rooted, no matter how tall they grow  
To acquire reason, a child must grow old  
In acquiring love, an old man grows young.  
    Shams of Tabriz!  
    In loving you  
    the one who embraces lowliness  
    will – just like your love –  
    be raised and lifted up

\* Ghazal 1957

LET GO ALL your scheming, lover\*  
let yourself go mad  
    go mad  
just step into the heart of fire  
make yourself a moth  
    a moth  
Turn yourself into a stranger  
raze your house down to the ground  
then come stand here under one roof  
    beneath the same roof  
and live among the lovers.  
Scrape your breast, like a plate,  
clean of envy, with cascades of water  
then fill up like a chalice,  
    like a chalice  
with the wine of love  
Metamorphose purely into soul  
make yourself worthy of the Soulmate  
If you're going to see the drunkards  
    walk tipsy  
    with inebriation  
Like a model  
your earring pendant dangles  
brushing intimate against your cheek  
incline that cheek and ear  
    to the Mother Pearl  
    that Precious Pearl  
As your spirit rises in the air  
from the sweetness of our tale  
efface yourself and like the lovers  
    be a legend  
    legendary

\* Ghazal 2131

The Night of the Grave is what you are  
The Night of Power is what you must become  
For the power dwelling in all spirits  
    be a nest  
    make a home

Your thoughts go traipsing off  
and drag you in their wake  
With decision cut off all speculation  
    be a leader  
    stand in front

Desire clings, and lust locks upon the heart  
become a key and turn like a tumbler  
    like a tumbler

With light the Chosen One caressed  
that moaning pillar  
are you less than that piece of wood?  
    Cry out  
    be empathetic

Though Solomon has told you:  
    Listen to the language of the birds  
like a trap the birds fly from you  
    nestle them  
    and be their nest

If that gorgeous idol shows her face  
fill up with her like a mirror  
if she lets her silky hair down  
    become her comb  
    and brush her

How long two-headed like a rook?  
how long a peon like a pawn?  
how long go crooked like a queen?

be a master of the game  
and mate  
Thankfully you've given to love  
many gifts and wealth  
put away your money, give yourself  
be gratitude  
be grateful

For a while you were matter  
for a while you were animal  
for a while you were soul  
become the soulmate  
meet your soul  
How long pace on the roof and vineyard?  
Fly, my ratiocinating soul, into the house  
Abandon all this rationalizing talk  
Don't wag the jaw  
don't jabber on

AMONG LOVERS don't be a wise guy\*  
especially with such a sweetly met love  
Let the wise ones keep far away from lovers  
(the morning breeze should avoid the stench of the bathhouse sewer!)  
If a wise one walks in, tell him: there's no entrée!  
But if a lover enters, tell him welcome, always always welcome  
By the time reason makes its plans and calculations  
Love will have flown up to the seventh heaven  
By the time reason finds a camel for the Hajj  
Love will have climbed Mount Safa  
Love came and stole over this mouth of mine  
Saying:  
    Ascend beyond poetry  
    Climb onto the realm of Pleiades

\* Ghazal 182

A MAN IN love, no matter what he says\*  
the smell of love wafts love-ward from his mouth  
He speaks of jurisprudence, what emerges?  
From mystic poverty, a sweet effulgence.  
He blasphemes, the scent of faith arises.  
He offers doubts, no doubt we grow more sure

\* From *Masnawi* Book 1: 2880–2



THE GNOSTIC arcs constant toward the King's throne\*  
The ascete travels each month one day's road ...  
Love has a thousand feathers and each one  
soars over the throne beyond the Pleiades  
The fearful ascetic charges on foot  
Lovers fly lighter than lightning and air

\* From *Masnawi* Book 5: 2180, 2191–2

IF WORDS made you certain that fire exists\*  
don't rest at the stage of certainty – Taste fire!  
The cooked, alone, know Certitude itself  
You want that Certitude? Step in the fire!

\* From *Masnawi* Book 2: 860–1



# XI

## Poems

### CELEBRATING UNION

*He said with a smile: Go and give thanks*

*I'll offer you up  
to celebrate the festival*

*I asked for whom am I the sacrifice?  
and the friend said: you're mine, you're mine, all mine*

– from Ghazal 2114

*You've filled my life with joy like sacks of sugar  
preserved me like a petaled rose, in sugar  
And now today I'm seized by peals of laughter –  
what joyous sounds you sprinkled in my mouth!*

– Quatrain 1652

*I speak of plural souls in name alone –  
One soul becomes one hundred in their frames;  
Just as God's single sun in heaven  
shines on earth and lights a hundred walls  
But all these beams of light return to one  
if you remove the walls that block the sun  
The walls of houses do not stand forever  
and believers, then, will be as but one soul*

– *Masnavi* Book 4: 415–18

MAY THE blessings which flow in all weddings\*  
be gathered, God, together in our wedding!  
The blessings of the Night of Power,  
the month of fasting  
the festival to break the fast  
the blessings of the meeting of Adam and Eve  
the blessings of the meeting of Joseph and Jacob  
the blessings of gazing on the paradise of all abodes  
and yet another blessing which cannot be put in words:  
the fruitful scattering of joy  
of the children of the Shaykh  
and our eldest!

In companionship and happiness  
may you be like milk and honey  
In union and fidelity  
just like halva and sugar.  
May the blessings of those who toast  
and the one who pours the wine  
anoint the ones who said Amen and  
the one who said the prayer.

\* Ghazal 236

YOU'RE A SPRIG of rose!\*

From you, the garden's green and joy  
Your partner in this dance, the breeze  
The wind like Gabriel, you a Mary  
Born to this pair: Jesus of silkrose cheeks  
The dance of you two, key to the ever-life  
    Endless mercy on this dance!

The throne room of your generation: the brain  
The throne is the place of Kay Qobâd  
The fruit of each branch finds its way  
to the pit of the stomach  
for they grew in a world of creation and decay  
Our daily blessings, since they stem from the Creator  
Do not mix with eating and somnolence  
Each folk's daily bread from a different garden  
    Your banquet table is most large, bountiful one!  
It's apportioned by fortune. Go and seek your fortune –  
    Fortune's better than furnishings, to make the story short!  
Enough! A gentle breath blows through the heart-matrix  
from that helping light which brings forth birth.

\* Ghazal 1003

ONCE MORE we come like dust adance in air\*  
From beyond the skies of love, aturn  
On the field of love like polo balls we roll  
skittering to the side, coming to the fore

Love reduces one to need – if that's your lot  
it suits you. Not us, who come from the beyond  
This gathering's in your honor and the guests  
have all arrived. But not for bread alone  
we come here; pour out the firewater!  
As you course through our veins, made wretched by  
our wounds for you, thank God we come quick to life!  
Shams of Truth this love of yours thirsts for my blood  
I head straight to it, blade and shroud in hand!  
Tabriz aboil, your salt alone can simmer!  
We – pride of all the earth in caring for you –  
have come to help you stir up the age.

\* Ghazal 1720

DO NOT sleep\*  
my hospitable friend, tonight  
for you are spiritous spirit  
and we are ailing ill tonight

Banish sleep from inner seeing eyes  
let mysteries appear tonight  
You are the giant planet, yes  
yet revolve around this moon  
circling through the turning firmament tonight  
Through the constellations you soar  
like the soul of winged Ja'far  
stalking the Eagle, Altair, as prey  
To burnish separation's rust  
from the deep dark blue  
God has given you polish tonight

Praise God, all creatures have gone to sleep  
leaving me involved with my creator tonight  
What wakeful fortune, bright glory!  
I am conscious of the wakeful God tonight!  
If my eyes close shut to rest until the dawn  
I'll despise, denounce my eyes tonight

Though the market place is empty now  
Look! What commerce in the milky ways tonight  
Our terrestrial night is daytime in the world of stars  
and so celestial shining fills up our view tonight  
Leo pounces on Taurus  
Mercury decks its crown with diadem  
Saturn plants surreptitious seeds of tumult  
Jupiter showers golden coins

\* Ghazal 296



*Rumi: Swallowing the Sun*

I sit silent, lips shut  
                    and yet  
I speak volumes  
    without words  
                    tonight

TOP OF THE MORNING, you're already smashed!\*

Yes you are, you tied your turban crooked.  
I swear to God, all night last night till dawn  
you were drinking – pure wine, undiluted;  
It's plain in your eyes, your cheeks, your color  
the sort you are – wouldn't put it past you.  
Give the tipplers some of what you tasted  
O Guardian of all created blessings

Today the lion prowls around for prey  
the vale and mountain tremble at the thought  
From him you'll not escape by running!  
Submit, like head-bowed lover and you're saved.  
You will live on in blissful safety  
once you are joined to his eternal realm

Run away from all this talk, run sixty leagues,  
You're at sixes and sevens in talk's trap

\* Ghazal 3153

TOP OF THE MORNING, you're already smashed!\*

Oh, yes you are! You tied your turban crooked.

Today your eyes look shot, all glazed over

I think you drank a hundred proof last night

Light of our lives and light of our hearts!

Salutations to you! How are you feeling?

You imbibed and traveled to the heavens

got yourself sotted and broke all bonds

The face of reason always freezes hearts,

The face of love turns all heads giddy

You got sotted, started wrestling lions

wine-suckled, rode bareback on a lion's neck

Like an old shaykh the aged wine guided you

Go now, freed from the ancient spinning wheel.

Saqi, you hold truth and justice on your side

refusing worship to all things but wine

You've borne away our reason,

but this time carry us away

like we'll never go again

\* Ghazal 3154

A LITTLE apple\*  
half red, half yellow  
recalls a tale  
of rose and saffron:

Sunder lover from beloved –  
cuteness goes with the latter  
pain falls to the former  
Love reveals  
two contrary colors  
in one severance  
on the cheeks of each:  
yellow clashes with kissable cheeks  
red and hale feel cold to lovers' cheeks  
(When the one you love plays hard to get  
don't fight it, lover, just play along).

I'm like the thorn, my lord like the rose  
Though the two are in reality one  
He is the sun and I, then, the shade  
From him eternity's heat, from me the cold  
When Goliath came to battle Saul:  
"David, *measure the chainmail well!*"

[K2:247-51]

[K34:11]

The body bears the heart  
but the heart rules the body  
just as woman gives birth to man  
but within the heart  
another heart is hidden  
like a rider in a cloud of dust  
(the knight kicks up the dust  
it's him that makes it dance)

\* Ghazal 968

*Rumi: Swallowing the Sun*

It's not like chess  
    where you ponder your next move  
Be reliant, like in backgammon:  
    pray and cast your dice

The heart of the sun  
is Shams of Tabriz  
    all fruits of the heart  
    bask in his warmth and grow

EXQUISITE LOVE, what exquisite love we have*	O God!
How fine, how good, how beautiful,	O God!
How warm, how warm this sun-like love keeps us –	
How hidden, hidden, yet how manifest,	O God!
The moon, the exquisite moon, and exquisite wine – both here with us	
adorning the spirit and the material world,	O God!
What ferment, what exquisite ferment the world stirs up	
What exquisite works, what exquisite fruits they have there	O God!
The king of king of knights has had a great fall, had a great fall	
kicking up an exquisite dust, what exquisite dust	O God!
We've fallen, how we have fallen – never to get up again	
We don't know, don't know what all this commotion is,	O God?
From every lane, each and every lane: a smoke of different colors	
Once more and again once more, what mad passion is this	O God?
Neither trap nor fetter, so why are we in this bind?	
What bonds, what fetters chain our feet	O God?!
What plans, and O what plans in the sizzling of these hearts?	
It's strange, it's so strange, coming from above	O God!
Silent, you are silent, that it may not be revealed	
for unknown persons hem us in left and right,	O God

\* Ghazal 95

IN THIS COLD and rain\*

it's better to have a lover

    A beauty at your side, love in mind

    A beauty at your side, like a picture –

    delicate and nice, supple and fresh, limpid

In this cold we rush to his neighborhood

    (none like him is born to any mother)

In this snow I'll kiss those lips of his

    (snow and sugar make the heart beat faster)

I can't stand it, I can't hold on any longer

    (they carried me off and brought me back)

When his image suddenly lights up the heart

The heart just runs from its place, God is great!

\* Ghazal 1047

BLISS –\*

the instant  
spent seated  
on the terrace,  
me next to you  
two forms and  
two faces  
with just one soul,  
me and you

The chatter of birds  
the garden's murmur  
flowing like a fountain of youth  
as we stroll through roses,  
me and you

The stars of the firmament, bent low to look over us  
Let's eclipse them, shine like the moon,  
me and you

Me and you join,  
beyond Me  
beyond You  
in joy  
happy, released from delire and delusion  
Me and you, laughing like this,  
reach dimensions where celestial birds suck sugary cubes  
Magical! Me and you, here,  
in our corner of earth,  
but wafting on airs of Iraq and Khorasan,  
me and you

\* Ghazal 2214



*Rumi: Swallowing the Sun*

In one form here on earth  
in other forms in paradise,  
eternal, sunk in fields of sugar,  
me and you

## XII

### Poems of

## DEATH AND BEYOND

*Shams-e Tabriz is gone and who  
will weep for the best among men?  
The world of meaning's gained in him a bride,  
but shorn of him the world of forms just weeps*

– from Ghazal 2893

*You who fly from this narrow cage  
veering off beyond the heavens  
You'll see a new life after this  
how long will you bear this life's drear? ...  
This body wore a butler's garb  
now sports more fashionable form  
Death means life and this life is death  
though heathen eyes see negative  
All souls departed from this body  
live on, but hidden now, like angels ...  
When body's bricks crumble, don't wail  
Sir, you've been only in a jail  
When you emerge from jail or pit,  
you stand regal, tall, like Joseph*

– from Ghazal 3172

*On the day I die  
as they bear along my bier  
do not suppose  
I'm chagrined at losing this world.  
Don't cry for me and do not lament*

– from Ghazal 911

*The human frame: a talisman made quick  
an essence pure now kneaded in the clay  
When heaven breaks that talisman apart  
to clay returns the clay, to Pure the pure.*

– Quatrain 1067

WHERE HAVE you gone\*

you godly martyrs?  
you seekers of calamity  
on the hot plain of Karbala?

Where have you gone  
soaring souls, lovers lofted up  
above the birds of heaven?

Where have you gone  
monarchs of the skies  
discoverers of a portal  
to pass through the firmament

Where have you gone  
all disencumbered  
of person and place?

One demands that reason answer:

Where are you?

Where are you  
who smashed in the jailer's door  
who freed the debtors from the prison

Where are you  
who opened the treasury

Where are you  
melody without sound?

You dove into that Sea  
of which this earth is only foam  
We can still make you out, for a moment more  
Sea-foam : the forms of the world  
pass beyond foam  
if your essence is clarity, pure

\* Ghazal 2707

*Rumi: Swallowing the Sun*

My heart froths up  
with the image of these words  
Give up the image  
delve into the heart, if you belong to us

Rise up  
Sun of Tabriz  
from the East  
for you are  
the essence of the essence of the essence of light

YOU FLEW OFF in the end –\*  
verged into the hidden  
But how? How – by what road  
did you depart the world?  
Oh, your feathers fluttered  
your wings beat – broke the cage  
and you took to the air  
soaring toward the soul world

A royal falcon you were  
caught in the Old Hag's jess  
The falcon-drum called you back  
to the Placeless perch  
Intoxicated, you –  
a nightingale among  
the inauspicious owls  
When it came over you –  
the rose bower's fragrance –  
you flew toward the hand of  
the one who plucks the rose

This sour yeast's sore yield:  
A throbbing hangover  
But in the end you found  
Eternity's tavern  
Straight as an arrow speeds  
you marked fortune's target  
You whizzed toward that target  
Fleeing this tautly bowed arch

The crooked world, ghoulish-like  
misled you here to there

\* Ghazal 3051

You passed beyond those signs  
heading toward the Traceless  
What to do with that crown  
now that you are a sun  
or with this regal belt?  
What good these, to a head  
disappeared from our midst?

I've heard that with both dead eyes  
we'll stare up at the soul  
Why do you gaze soul-ward  
who've joined with the soul of Soul.  
O heart, what a rare bird!  
in hunting your reward  
You flew forward toward spears  
held up both wings for shields  
Roses shrink from autumn  
But you're a bold-bud rose  
braving fall blasts, you went –  
not all in one fell swoop –  
but skittering slowly

From heaven to the earth  
You poured down on the roof  
and like the raindrops ran  
every which-way, to learn  
the drainpipe spits you out

Silence! Enough talk – sleep!  
You've sheltered with the Friend

AND NOW IT'S time\*

for love's union  
for God's vision  
for resurrection, everlasting life

Time for grace, for blessing  
for surging pure oceans of purity  
the sea foams white, casts its treasures:  
Fortunate dawn, morn of the light of God!  
Whose face? What image? King or prince?  
What ancient sage is this?

All these are only veils  
fervid ardor burns these veils away  
You have the mind's eye to taste him  
You writhe for it in your head  
but you are all of two minds  
    an earthly head of clay  
    and one celestial, pure

All these celestial heads  
lay scattered in the dust  
to show you that another mind's afoot  
At root, essential mind is hidden  
and only branches dangle to our eyes  
Know that beyond this universe  
another endless world awaits  
    Seal up the skin, my host,  
    no vintage can convey us there  
    The jug of apprehension's bottlenecked in those straits

The Sun of Truth shone from Tabriz  
and I told him:  
Your light touches all  
and yet remains apart

\* Ghazal 464



I DIED TO mineral, joined the realm of plants\*

I died to vegetable, joined animal

I died from animal to human realm

So why fear? When has dying made me less?

In turn again I'll die from human form

only to sprout an angel's head and wings

and then from angel-form I will ebb away

For *All things perish but the face of God*

[K28:88]

And once I'm sacrificed from angel form

I'm what imagination can't contain.

So let me be naught! Naughtness, like an organ,

sings to me: *We verily return to Him*

[K2:151]

Know that death – the community's agreed –

is like the fount of life in darkness hid

\*From *Masnavi* Book 3: 3901–7

## XIII

### Poems about BIRTHING THE SOUL

*The lady of my thoughts gives constant birth  
She's pregnant but with the light of your glory*

– from Ghazal 2234

*Shams al-Haqq of Tabriz, my heart's pregnant with you  
when will I see a child born by your fortune*

– from Ghazal 2331

*You are my sky, I am the earth, dumbfounded:  
what things you sprout from my heart each moment!  
I'm parched earth, rain down on me drops of grace,  
for your water makes the earth grow rosy  
What does the earth know what you sow in it?  
you made it pregnant, you know what it bears  
every atom pregnant with your mysteries –  
you make it writhe a while in pangs of birth  
What marvels writhe to birth through the world-womb:  
An "I am God," the call "Glory to me"*

– from Ghazal 3048

*Before I wanted an audience to buy what I said  
Now I only want you to ransom me from my words  
I carved many an idol to deceive the folk  
Now I am drunk on the Abrahamic friend  
and am sick of the carver of idols  
A colorless imperceptible idol  
distracted my handiwork:  
"Go find another master  
for the gallery of idols"  
I've sold the studio  
put aside suppositions  
learned the value of madness  
purified myself of speculations  
When some form comes before my eyes  
I yell at my heart: Get out, deceiver!  
and if it hesitates at all,  
I raze its foundations ...*

– from Ghazal 2449

HEART,\*

sit at the foot of one who knows his hearts  
rest beneath the tree whose boughs bud fresh  
Don't wander all around the market of perfumes  
sit in the stall of him who has a stash of sugar  
You'll be fleeced by every seller –  
Without a scale to take their measure  
you'll mistake the gilded slug for golden tender  
They'll make you sit inside the shop  
sweetly promising "Just one moment, please"  
Don't sit there waiting,  
there's another door goes out the back  
Don't wait with bowl in hand for every pot to boil  
what stews in every pot is not the same.  
Not every cane-cut pen drips with sugar  
not every under has above  
not every eye's possessed of vision  
not every sea conceals a pearl

Sing your little heart out, nightingale  
for your famed intoxicated lamentation  
echoes and transmutes the stony hills and granite boulders  
If your head cannot contain you – lose it  
you can't pass through the needle's eye a knotty thread  
The awakened heart's a lamp  
cloak it from contrary airs beneath your mantle  
for the windy air will do it harm.  
Pass beyond the winds and reach the spring  
become a secret confidant, welling with emotion  
and then like a green tree you will swell with sap  
and come to fruition as it courses through your heart

\* Ghazal 563

HERE I COME again\*  
again I come from the Friend  
Look at me, look at me  
I've come to look after you  
I come in joy, rejoiced  
I come freed from all

Several thousand years went by  
before I found the words:  
I ascend, ascend  
I dwelt up there, am heading there  
Let me go again, again  
I am at a loss here:  
I was a divine bird  
see now how worldly mired I am  
I didn't see the trap  
and suddenly  
came up caught in it

I am pure light, my son  
not just a fistful of clay  
The shell is not me  
I came as the royal pearl within

Look at me  
not with outward eye  
but with inward heart;  
Follow me there and see  
how unencumbered we become

\* Ghazal 1390

I am  
    above the four mothers  
and I am  
    above the seven fathers  
I am  
    the lodestar jewel  
    come from the ore  
    to be revealed

My beloved struts through the bazaar  
    discerning, quick  
to buy me out  
or else what business  
could I have at all  
to be on the market  
    – I come in search of him.

Shams-e Tabriz  
    Won't you search me out,  
    comb the earth, end to end?  
    for I have criss-crossed  
heart-sore  
    and soul-sick  
through the sands  
    of effacement



Shall I call him candle,  
picture of love,  
heart-stealer,  
life-sustainer,  
pure spirit,  
tall-statured,  
infidel,  
soul's beloved?

An old man stomping before his dais like a drunk –  
but a sea of knowledge, a philosopher and sage  
holding to the hem of knowledge with his teeth  
but the smith's tongs of love  
having left him not a single tooth ...

There I am, transfixed by this sage's light,  
the old man completely absorbed in the beloved  
He like a mirror's face, pure reflection

I, two-headed, like a comb  
I grew old in that subtle old man's beauteous glory  
I like a moth in him, he having in me a moth

I finally called out:

Master of all beings in knowledge  
and of all the climes in art,  
grant us from your grace a small abode

He said:

You are farsighted, but closed of eye –  
I'll tell you. Heed this, the sure and  
august counsel of my heart:  
My knowledge and knowing,  
sagesse and wisdom and culture  
see how all of it is drowned



in the beauty  
of one rosy-cheeked  
and priceless pearl

When I looked, what did I see –  
the ruin of the heart and soul  
O Muslims, have mercy! O Lord, some aid and succor!

You cloak these words in mystery; say it plain!  
Do not fear the jealous, tell true and bravely – who was it?  
That Tabrizi Sun of Truth and Faith, that Lord  
who turned this laggard by his love into a leader!

OH, HOW colorless\*

and formless

I am!

When will I ever see the am that I am?

You said:

The secrets that you know, bring forth, put out, talk up!

Where is up

or forth

within this middle

that I am?

When will my soul be still?

It moves when motionless,

the anima I am.

My sea has drowned within itself;

what a strange and shoreless sea

I am!

Not in this world

not in the next should you seek me out;

both this and that have vanished

in the world I am.

Like non-existence

nothing profits me

and nothing harms –

What a wondrous useless-harmless thing

I am!

I said

Friend, you are just like me!

\* Ghazal 1759

He said

How can you speak of likeness to  
the obviousness I am?

I said

That's it, that's what you are!

He said

Silence! No tongue has ever uttered  
what I am.

I said

Since no tongue has given voice to you,  
Here I am! your unutterable exposition.  
In annihilation  
I became  
inconstant  
like the moon

Now here I am! your sure-footed, footless runner.

A call arose:

Why do you run?  
Look to see how manifestly hidden  
that I am

When I saw Shams-e Tabriz

I became.

Now what a wondrous treasure-mine  
and sea of pearls I am!

IT'S WAVES OF LOVE that make the heavens turn\*  
Without that love the universe would freeze:  
no mineral absorbed by vegetable  
no growing thing consumed by animal  
no sacrifice of anima for Him  
who inspired Mary with His pregnant breath  
Like ice, all of them unmoved, frozen stiff  
No vibrant molecules in swarms of motion  
Lovers of perfection, every atom  
turns sapling-like to face the sun and grow  
Their haste to shed their fleshly form for soul  
sings out an orison of praise to God

\* From *Masnawi* Book 5: 3854–9

WITH EACH NEW BREATH the sound of love\*  
surrounds us all from right and left  
Now up we go, head heavenward  
who wants to come and see the sights?  
We've been before in heaven's realm  
The angels there our constant friends  
We'll go again  
for we were born  
all in that town.

We are ourselves above the skies  
a greater host than angels there;  
why should we not exceed their rank  
since our abode is Majesty?  
The purest pearl  
does not belong  
in earthly dust.

What brought you down? What place is this? Pack up!

By fortune blessed to give our lives,  
the caravan will guide our steps:

Our pride in life, the Chosen One  
By His bright orb the moon was split  
(it would not turn its gaze away)  
And so luck smiled upon the moon  
the lowly moon that begs its light!  
The wind's sweet scent drips from his locks  
His image shines with brilliant rays  
from his bright face, reflecting from  
*And the sun in its zenith*

[K 93:1]

See how my heart with every beat  
reveals the moon cleft clear in two  
why do you turn your sight down from such a sight?

\* Ghazal 463

*Poems about Birthing the Soul*

Like water birds, man's born within  
the sea of soul  
How could he nest within the mire,  
that ocean bird?  
And we are all pearls in that sea,  
afloat on it,  
or else why wave on wave would surge  
all through our hearts?  
Over our boat just like a wave  
broke *Am I not*  
Our ship's ribs staved, the boat will sink  
our time has come for reunion,  
to meet with God.

[K7:172]

INFUSE OUR veins with love's aqua vitae\*  
show us dark nocturne reflections  
of the morning's draught  
Father of fresh joys, course quick through our veins!  
Like the magic grail  
brim up both worlds, reveal the heavens  
You who stalk my wits  
who live by firing arrows  
pinch my heartfeathers taut on to your string  
raise your arms and take my life as target

If reason's watchman blocks your path and plan  
Strategize, devise excuse, escape him  
Is it proverbial "Red of complexion, short of magnanimity"?  
See the magnanimity in ruddy wine, and make it legendary  
The stars have played you like a pawn –  
made you march about, checkmated you  
Choose a knight, storm the castle, charge the king  
Get up, set your cap askance, avoid all traps  
Kiss the cheeks of spirit, comb the locks of joy  
Climb the heavens, get acquainted with the angels  
Reach the *court of righteousness*  
and bow in service to its threshold

[K54:55]

Once his dreamy image makes your heart its haunt  
Dwell phantomlike in heart and mind:  
you'll see two tubs,  
one full of fire and one of gold  
choose the fire and plunge your hand right in  
Be like him who spoke with God:  
Do not covet the golden tub

\* Ghazal 1821

Take the fire into your mouth  
turn the land into a tongue of fire  
Tame the feral lions  
make enemies your intimates  
Call the foe's blood Magian wine

Come, saqi!  
We call on you to ward away dualities  
Put one strong shot in my palm  
and unite all multiplicities in one

It's true, this home, our world,  
extends in six directions  
yet just one point will orient us  
since that focal point of adoration  
has no homeland,  
build your nest in nothingness  
Time's a relicker, wearing all things out  
for immortality don't look to it.  
Everlasting life's above, beyond time's span  
You are what's winnowed: the wheat  
the body's so much straw  
unless you're an ass  
you don't munch on straw  
Pick the meat and kernel

The word is out  
why knock on the door?  
Knock down the door  
by your spirit  
set out for the psyche





## NOTES ON THE POEMS

The notes provided here are offered where some explanation was felt essential to the understanding of the poem for non-specialists; they are not intended as a systematic commentary or as literary analysis. Indeed, some ghazals did not seem particularly in need of notes at all, and most of the *Masnavi* passages explain themselves. Quotations from or allusions to passages from the Koran (*Qur'ān*) are indicated in brackets on the right-hand side of the page.

### I. ORISONS TO THE SUN: POEMS OF PRAISE AND INVOCATION

The poem fragments that begin this section are addressed to Shams-e Tabrizi, or Shams al-Din of Tabriz, the figure who transformed Rumi's spiritual life. Shams means "sun," which name Rumi plays with frequently. Shams al-Din (Sun of the Faith) and Shams al-Haqq (Sun of Truth) are also titles Rumi uses for Shams.

SUDDEN RESURRECTION! Endless Mercy!

Ghazal 1

*Ay rastakhiz-e nâgahân v-ay rahmat-e bi-montabâ*

Rajaz: | - - - - | - - - - | - - - - | - - - - ||

A poet's collected lyrical poems, called by the generic title *Divân* in Persian, were commonly arranged in alphabetical order, by the last letter of the line, from about the time of Rumi onward. Rumi's collection of poetry (known as the *Divân-e kabir* = the Great Divan; or *Divân-e Shams* = the Divan of Shams) is traditionally organized not strictly by alphabetical order, but also by meter. Whether by design or not, Rumi's *Divân* opens with a poem addressed to the spiritual beloved, one may assume Shams, as "Sudden

Resurrection.” The poem of course ends with the Saqi, or spiritual cupbearer, pouring out the mystical experience that cannot be expressed and does not admit rational explanation.

“Angel Eyes” from the Koran describe the beauties in the symbolic paradise that awaits believers (see Koran 52:20, 56:22 and 44:54). The multi-chrome design may refer to Rumi’s notion of the prismatic nature of reality: truth is unichrome, white light, but as it is refracted into the phenomenal world, things that are actually one appear in duality and distinction, so that even Moses may come into conflict with a Moses (see *Masnavi* Book 1: 2467). The speaking persona of the poem asks the guide/beloved for attention, which includes the reprimands of boxing his ears, but as long as exclusive attention is given to the disciple/lover, this is enough, even if the reprimands prove overwhelming and unending. Of course, the discussion is jocular in tone, and everyday events intrude on the poem, such as the bread and greens (it is worth noting that novitiates desiring entrance into the Mevlevi Order of Whirling Dervishes in later centuries had to first serve in the kitchen for 1001 days).

O MOUTHPIECE of God

Ghazal 1310

*Ay nâteq-e elâbi v-ay dide-ye baqâyeq*

Mozâre‘ akhrab al-sadrayn: | --- | --- | --- | --- ||

LOOK AT that face

Ghazal 5

*Ân shekl bin v-ân shive bin v-ân qadd o khadd o dast o pâ*

Rajaz: | --- | --- | --- | --- ||

“Agiary”: a word used in South Asian English for a Zoroastrian fire-temple (Persian: *âtasb-kade*). Zoroastrians revere fire as a symbol of beneficent force in the cosmos, but ill-informed or inimical outsiders have accused them of being “fire-worshippers.” Rumi’s allusion here therefore appears quite sophisticated, understanding the divine beloved as having taken on human form, a form that becomes the focal point of worship. The beauty of this godly youth overpowers the beholder and steals away his heart, as a bandit might swoop down on a caravan and plunder it. The speaking persona in the poem appeals to this godly incarnation for respite.

“Good sir” (*futâ*): a young man, perhaps even a member of the chivalric

order of young men (or *fotovvat*). The word connotes a young warrior, a knight, who has power to plunder but operates according to a code of chivalry.

“The Sun in the Zenith” (*Shams al-ḡuḡā*) uses a description from the opening words of Sura 93 of the Koran to apply to Shams, which of course also means “the sun”.

“Come and get it” (*salā*): the call to begin eating.

Narcissi and hyacinth: the beloved’s eyes are often compared to the narcissus in Persian poetry, and the facial hair of the beloved, here eyebrows, to the fragrant, bushy hyacinth.

WHAT A BANNER, what a standard

Ghazal 2407

*Zabi levā va ‘alam lā elāha ella llāh*

Mojtass: | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ ||

The refrain of this poem, “there is no God but God,” is of course a liturgical phrase from the obligatory prayers, repeated five times daily. It often occurs in Sufi chanting (*dhikr*) and meditation, as well.

## II. POEMS OF FAITH AND OBSERVANCE

In the lines with which this chapter opens, the *mi’rāj* refers to the Prophet’s miraculous ascension to heaven and entrance into the luminous presence of the divine. The story is provided in suggestive outline in the Koran (53:5–18), but it was much elaborated in the Hadith, and the genre known as “stories of the prophets.” The Prophet was borne aloft by a winged equine-like creature, named Burāq. Various Sufis have suggested that the fully self-realized spiritual person can repeat this journey for himself.

“Zoroast” is a poetic license, a metrical shortening of “Zoroastrian.” The Persian word used here (*gabr* – sometimes rendered into English in British India as “guebre”) was in quite common usage among medieval Persian Muslims as an unflattering term to denote Zoroastrians. The word used here for “Jew” (*jahud*) is also now considered derogatory, though the extent to which Rumi uses it in a necessarily derogatory sense is open to interpretation. The Koran generally uses *al-yahūd* to designate the Jews, or *Banī Isrā’īl* for “the children of Israel.” Rumi uses both *yahud* and *jahud*, which are of course etymologically related. Both *gabr* and *jahud* are now considered derogatory,

though one may quibble about the emotional overtones they would have carried in the Persian verse of Rumi's time. Note, however, that in the shorthand used by Rumi and other Muslims of his day, a true "believer" (*mo'men*) is, of necessity, a Muslim. The Jews and Zoroastrians and Christians (who were also referred to with a colloquial term, *tarsâ*, less flattering in its connotations than the words appearing in the Koran) were not conceived as infidels or unbelievers in a theological sense, but rather as "People of the Book;" nevertheless, they were commonly assumed by Muslims to possess a less complete realization of revealed truth, which attitude is often implicit in the vocabulary.

FLEE TO God's Koran, take refuge in it

From *Masnavi* Book 1: 1537–44

SWEEP ALL AWAY with the broom of "No"!

Verses from Rumi's  
*Seven Sermons*

THE MOTHER of fasting

Ghazal 2375

*Suye atfâl bi-âmad be-karam mâdar-e ruze*

Ramal makhbun: | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ ||

The month of Ramadan is, of course, a month of fasting for Muslims. The eastern Iranian traditions of asceticism and mysticism included additional periods of fasting, and one of Rumi's teachers, Borhân al-Din Mohaqeq of Termez, was particularly fond of this practice.

Isaac: the Koran does not mention the name of the son Abraham was called upon to sacrifice, and in many Muslim sources it is Ishmael. Rumi seems ambivalent about which son it was, citing sometimes Isaac, sometimes Ishmael. See John Renard, *All the King's Falcons: Rumi on Prophets and Revelation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 49–50.

CLOSE YOUR mouth to bread – here comes the sugar of the fast

Ghazal 2307

*Bar band dabân az nân k-âmad shekar-e ruze*

Hazaj akhrab: | ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ ||

Zamzam is the well in the sacred precincts of the Kaaba in Mecca, said to have

been dug by Abraham. Pilgrims consider the water blessed and possessed of curative powers.

“Châdor”: literally “tent,” but also the full-length cloth that urban women in Iran use to cover their hair and bodies when in the presence of men to whom they have no blood or marriage ties.

MOSES SAW a shepherd on the road

*Moses, peace be upon him, and his rejection of the shepherd's prayer*

*Masnavi* Book 2: 1720–60 (following the Este'lâmi edition, lines 1724–64)

The story continues after the point where this passage ends with further reproach of Moses. God transforms Moses' heart with mystic knowledge. Moses chases into the desert after the shepherd and tells him not to worry about the rules of religion, but to worship with the heart. “Your blasphemy is true religion. You are saved and have saved the world.” But Moses' reproach of him has also purified the shepherd and given him superior insight.

The story contains Rumi's explanation of the meaning of a Hadith, or tradition from the Prophet: “My servant is Me, and I am him.” On the Day of Resurrection, God will say to his servants, “I was ill and you did not come to visit me.” The servant will reply, “But you have no body, how could I visit you?” God will answer that visiting people who are sick is, in effect, a visitation of God.

Fâtima: the name of the daughter of the Prophet, and a common girl's name in the Muslim world.

THE LORD, at dawn, saw need to take a bath

*\* Story of a lord and his prayer-loving slave, whose communion with God in prayer and supplication was most mighty.*

*Masnavi* Book 3: 3055–76

AN APE can mimic man in all he does

From *Masnavi* Book 1: 282–90

WHEN SOLOMON'S royal pavilion was pitched

*The Story of the Hoopoe and Solomon in explanation of “When destiny intervenes the seeing eye is closed”*

*Masnavi* Book 1: 1202–33 (following the Este'lâmi edition, lines 1210–42)

There is a pun in this story, insofar as the Persian word for raven (*zâgh*) is the

same as the Arabic verb in the Koran for “swerve” or misperceive, which comes in Surat al-Najm (53:17), speaking of Muhammad’s vision of the divine presence at the lote-tree beyond which no one may approach closer to God, which he saw on the *mi’rāj*: “His eye did not swerve.” Thus we have “raven” (*zâgh*) and “it did not swerve” (*mâ zâgh*), which could also be interpreted as “not-raven.”

ONCE THERE was this grocer with his parrot

*\*The tale of the grocer and his parrot and the spilling of the oil*

*Masnavi* Book 1: 247–65 (following the Este‘lâmi edition, lines 248–66)

PILGRIMS ON THE WAY! where are you

Ghazal 648

*Ay qawm-e be hajj rafte kojâ'id kojâ'id*

Hâzaj akhrab makfuf: | --- | ~--- | ~--- | ~--- ||

The Sufi tradition of poetry often suggests that the ritual of pilgrimage has an interior meaning that can be achieved without actual performance of the outward forms, whereas the ritual might be performed without the meaning be achieved.

In Mecca, the pilgrims circumambulate the Kaaba, a square structure that housed the idols of the Arabian tribes before the advent of Islam, but is now called “the House of God.”

AS I ENTER the solitude of prayer

From *Masnavi* Book 3: 2400–4

### III. POEMS OF POETRY AND MUSIC

Legend holds that Rumi did not compose poetry until the arrival of Shams in 1244, nor did he perform the related activity of *samâ'*, literally “audition.” *Samâ'* involved listening to poetry accompanied by music, which sometimes moved the hearer to meditative or even ecstatic motion, akin to dance. Islamic scholars and Sufis were divided over the propriety of this action, since dance, especially as practiced at the royal courts, was generally accompanied by wine and salacious intent. Most Sufis eventually accepted the practice of *samâ'* for those people who found it aroused only their spiritual inclinations. The particular kind of *samâ'*, or “turning,” performed by the Mevlevi who followed Rumi has given them the nickname of “the Whirling Dervishes.”

For an explanation of the rebec (*rabâb*), see Ghazal 304, below (“Do you get what the rebec is saying”).

BY GOD, who was from pre-eternity

Ghazal 1760

*Be khodâ'î ke dar azal bud-ast*

Khafif mahzuf: | ˘ ˘ ˘ ˘ | ˘ ˘ ˘ ˘ | ˘ ˘ - ||

*Samâ'*: see above, under III. Poems of Poetry and Music. This poem asserts that in the (first) absence of Shams, Rumi did not write ghazals or perform *samâ'*.

One of the rituals of the pilgrimage is stoning the pillars of Satan.

Syria, Armenia and Byzantium were geographical territories or political entities surrounding Muslim Anatolia.

LOOK AT me

Ghazal 2077

*Be man negar be do rokhsâr-e za'farâni-ye man*

Mojtass: | ˘ ˘ ˘ ˘ | ˘ ˘ ˘ ˘ | ˘ ˘ ˘ ˘ | ˘ ˘ - ||

MY SUN and moon has come, my ears and eyes have come

Ghazal 633

*Shams o qamar-am âmad sam' o basar-am âmad*

Hazaj akhrab al-sadrayn: | ˘ ˘ ˘ | ˘ ˘ ˘ (˘) | ˘ ˘ ˘ | ˘ ˘ ˘ ˘ ||

Joseph is the prophet, famous for his beauty. Solomon's ring, or seal, gives him control over the jinn and comprehension of the language of the birds. For Rumi's use of Joseph and Solomon, respectively, see John Renard, *All the King's Falcon's: Rumi on Prophets and Revelation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 59–66 and Taqi Purnâmârdiân, *Dâstân-e payâm-barân dar Kolliyât-e Shams*, v. 1 (Tehran: Mo'assese-ye Motâlê'ât va Tahqiqât-e Farhangi, 1985), 345–404.

LISTEN TO this reed

“*Song of the Reed*” *Masnavi* Book 1: 1–34

“Singing legends of love's mad obsessions”: Specifically, the legends of Majnun, who was touched by his unrequited love for Layla.

DO YOU get what the rebec is saying

Ghazal 304

*Hich mi-dâni che mi-guyad rabâb*

Ramal mahzuf: | ˘ ˘ ˘ ˘ | ˘ ˘ ˘ ˘ | ˘ ˘ - ||

A story is told by the hagiographer Aflâki (*Manâqeb*, 165–8) in *The Feats of*



*the Knowers of God*, tr. John O’Kane (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 115–17, that this poem was composed in response to some Islamic legal scholars who wanted to condemn and forbid the playing of the *rabâb*. Rumi’s reply, including this poem, is said to have shamed them into silence.

“Rebec”: Literally, *rabâb* (or *robâb*), a kind of string instrument known for its plaintive sound. It was played with a bow, had a sound chamber covered by animal skin, and evolved in Europe into the Rebec.

“From conception to the full of youth”: Compare *Masnavi* Book 3: 3901 and 4: 3637, as well as Koran 23:13.

“The spiked fiddle’s strings”: Literally, the *kamânche*.

“If I humor him, it will only make more thistles for him”: The allusion here is somewhat obscure, and unaccounted for by Aflâki’s anecdote. It may be an allusion to the dynamics of the relationship between Rumi and the Seljuq ruler, or Mo’in al-Din Parvâne. An owl is inauspicious, said to reside only in ruins. The Koranic verse that follows apparently refers to a situation of war between the believers (Muslims) and unbelievers (*alladhîna kafarû*), in which the believers are called upon to smite the unbelievers on the neck until they are overcome and taken prisoner. Then, they should either be set free or ransomed by the end of the war. God could have accomplished this punishment, but tries some servants by means of others. Those who are slain in the path of God, He will not let their deeds be in vain.

THE SEA OF HONEY sent word to me this morning Ghazal 1357

*Payâm kard marâ bâmdâd bahr-e ‘asal*

Mojtass: | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ||

*Samâ’*: see under Poems of Poetry and Music, *Be kbodâ’i ke dar azal bud-ast*, Ghazal 1760 (“By God, who was from pre-eternity”).

“Water says: you’ve grown from me, you’ll come to me”: Possibly alluding to Koran 21:30, which indicates that all life comes from water.

THEY DANCE, parade about the battlefield

From *Masnavi* Book 3: 96–100

IV. POEMS OF SILENCE

In the excerpt from the *Masnavi* on the title page of this chapter, two verses from the Koran are referenced.

“Were the sea ink for my Lord” comes from Koran 18:109: *Say: If the sea were ink for the words of my Lord, the sea would surely run dry before the words of my Lord run dry, even if another were linked to it for us.*

“Cut down all the gardens, groves for pens”: This alludes to Koran 31:27: *Were all the trees on earth pens and the ocean, swelled by the seven seas beyond it, yet would the words of God not be exhausted. Verily, God is Mighty, Wise.*

I SERVE THAT orb in heaven, say no word but Orb Ghazal 2219  
*Man gholâm-e qamar-am ghayr-e qamar hich ma-gu*  
Ramal makhbun: | - - - - | ~ - - - | ~ - - - | ~ - - - ||

“Orb”: Literally, the moon (*qamar, mâh*), which is a metaphor for the bright face of the beloved, which totally dominates the night sky, and alongside which all other thoughts and images pale. Unfortunately, “moon face” does not carry the same positive associations in English.

MUSICIAN, FACE moonrise bright Ghazal 2245  
*Motreb-e mahtâb-ru ânche shenidi be-gu*  
Monsareh matvi maksuf: | - - - - | - - - - | - - - - | - - - - ||

THIS HOUSE where the lute strings constantly strum Ghazal 332  
*In khâne ke payvaste dar u bâng o chaghâna-st*  
Hazaj akhrab makfuf: | - - - | ~ - - - | ~ - - - | ~ - - - ||

I CALL UPON you Ghazal 116  
*Ay sakbt gerefte jâdovi râ*  
Hazaj akhrab maqbuz: | - - - | ~ - - - | ~ - - - ||

The raids that conquered India in the name of Muslim rulers were carried out mostly by the Turkish dynasty of the Ghaznavids. Turks earned a reputation as brave fighters, first as slaves, in which capacity they formed the royal guard of the caliph; then as the rulers of eastern Iran, under the

Ghaznavids and Seljuqs. The beloved is not infrequently compared to a young Turkish warrior-prince who slays suitors right and left with his haughty charms. On the other hand, the work of sorcery is generally considered a shamanistic, pagan and non-Islamic activity.

“Tongue of meaning” refers to the true inner meaning, as opposed to superficial understanding. “Meaning” here is *ma’navi*, the same word used in the title of the *Masnavi-ye ma’navi* – “the couplets of true meaning.”

“Divine decree” (*qazâ*) and “destiny” (*taqdir*) are terms from a theological crux in Islam, which the *Masnavi* repeatedly addresses, including in the conversation between Solomon and the Hoopoe, in this collection (Poems of Faith and Observance, *The Story of the Hoopoe and Solomon*).

WHEN THE SUN came out

Ghazal 2408

*Cho âftâb bar âmad ze qa’r-e âb-e siâh*

Mojtass: | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ||

The allusions are to Joseph and Solomon. The story of Joseph, cast in the well by his brothers, only to rise out of it again, reborn, and assume in due course the kingship of Egypt, is related in Sura 12 of the Koran. The story of Solomon and the ants occurs in Koran 27:18–19. As noted previously, Rumi’s prophetology respecting Joseph and Solomon is discussed in, respectively, John Renard, *All the King’s Falcons: Rumi on Prophets and Revelation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 59–66 and Taqi Purnâmârdârîân, *Dâstân-e payâambarân dar Kolliyât-e Shams*, v. 1 (Tehran: Mo’assese-ye Motâlê’ât va Tahqiqât-e Farhangî, 1985), 345–404.

“Tailor cuts the cloth”: Rumi uses this metaphor elsewhere to illustrate the limits of reason. Reason is useful in that it brings you to the tailor when you have need for a new tunic, but once you get there you must turn yourself over to the hands of the tailor and let him do his work. See *Ketâb-e Fih-e mâ fib*, ed. B. Foruzânfar (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1983), 112, as translated by A.J. Arberry in *Discourses of Rumi* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1972), 123 or by Wheeler Thackston in *Signs of the Unseen: The Discourses of Jalalddin Rumi* (Putney, VT: Threshold Books, 1994), 117. Here, Rumi appears to refer to his composition of poetry, and/or his discussion of theosophical points; he needs a customer who will fit the text he’s weaving.

THE HEART like grain

Ghazal 181

*Del cho dâne mâ mesâl-e âsyâ*

Ramal mahzûf: | - - - - | - - - - | - - - - ||

For the supposed circumstances in which this poem was composed, see Aflâki, *Manâqeb al-ârefin*, ed. Tahsin Yazıcı, 2 vols. (Ankara, 1959; reprinted Tehran: Donyâ-ye Ketâb, 1983), 370–1. This work can now be consulted in an excellent full English translation: *The Feats of the Knowers of God*, tr. John O’Kane (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 256–7. Because this work was compiled on the basis of testimony of individuals many decades after the fact with little effort to distinguish between what was plausible and what was not, it is not reliable in all details, including the circumstances of composition of individual poems. That said, the composition and/or performance of this poem in *samâ’* at a mill would seem to make sense, as the metaphor of spinning applies nicely to the practice of Mevlevi turning. The English translation here is based on a four-syllable line.

## V. POEMS OF LOSS AND CONFUSION

GO LAY YOUR HEAD on your pillow, let me be alone

Ghazal 2039

*Row sar beneh be-bâlin tanhâ marâ rahâ kon*

Mozâre’ akhrab al-sadrayn : | - - - | - - - - | - - - | - - - - ||

Aflâki’s explanation of the circumstances of composition of this poem, however improbable, are given in *Manâqeb*, ed. Tahsin Yazıcı (Tehran: Donyâ-ye Ketâb, 1983), 589–90, as translated in *The Feats of the Knowers of God*, tr. John O’Kane (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 402–4. According to Aflâki, it was the last ghazal composed by Rumi, on his death bed, written down by Hosâm al-Din. Sultan Valad, Rumi’s son, was obviously distressed at the imminent demise of his father, and would not leave his side. Rumi wished to assure Sultan Valad that he felt well, and that Sultan Valad could go lie down. The content of the poem fits far more closely with the period of Rumi’s inconsolable grief after the final disappearance of Shams.

In ancient folklore, an emerald was believed to repulse dragons; its sparkling reflection blinded the dragon, or he would see his own reflection in it and be deceived into thinking that another dragon was staking the territory.

“Bu ‘Ali” and “Bu ‘Alâ” may allude to the famous wise philosopher, Avicenna (Abu ‘Ali ibn Sinâ), and the rationalist, materialist poet, Abu ‘Alâ al-Ma‘arri, respectively. Alternatively, we might translate them as “such a one” and “so and so.”

IT’S STRANGE! Where’d that gorgeous heartbreaker go Ghazal 677

*‘Ajab ân delbar-e zibâ kojâ shod*

Hazaj mahzûf: | ~ - - - | ~ - - - | ~ - - ||

Another poem evidently composed after one of the two times when Shams disappeared from Konya.

The beloved is compared to a tall, supple cypress tree, and the Sufi shaykh to the beloved.

I’M MAD about, just crazy Ghazal 1493

*Mâ ‘âsheq o sar gashte vo shaydâ-ye dameshq-im*

Hazaj akhrab makfuf mahzûf: | - - - - | - - - - | - - - - | - - ||

It would appear that some earlier Arabic poems in praise of Damascus inspired Rumi in this ghazal, though he himself had also spent time studying in the city. Aflâki reports (*Manâqeb*, 698–9) in *The Feats of the Knowers of God*, tr. John O’Kane (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 484–5, that this poem was composed on the road to Syria as Rumi went in search of Shams. Many of the locations mentioned, such as the names of the various city gates, are well-known sites in and around the city; a description of them is given in Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present, East and West* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000), 195, to which may be added the following.

“Uthman’s Codex” (*mushaf ‘Osmân*): ‘Uthmân, the third caliph of Islam and head of the community from 644 to 655, standardized the text of the Koran, creating an official version that harmonized the variant readings of the professional Koran reciters. A handful of copies of this codex were promulgated to various important Muslim cities, including Damascus. A copy of the codex purporting to be the one that Uthman sent, was kept in the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, and historians or travelers report having seen the manuscript (Ibn Battûta), though Ibn Kathîr says in his *Faḍâ’il al-Qur’ân* that the manuscript was brought to Damascus from Tiberias in 518 A.H./1124 C.E., indicating that the original copy in Damascus must have been moved or

destroyed. The poem of Rumi confirms that there was such a manuscript in his day known as Uthman’s Codex.

Mizza was a mountain outside Damascus, now a neighborhood incorporated in the modern city.

“Master of Damascus” (*Mowlâ-ye Dameshq*): Apparently an allusion to Rumi’s own title among his disciples, as Master of Rum (*Mowlâ-ye Rum*). Instead, he would rather be master of Damascus, if that is where he can be disciple to Shams.

NIGHT AND day

Ghazal 302

*Dar havâ-yat bi-qarâr-am ruz o shab*

Ramal mahzûf: | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ ||

“To drive the night and day to love distraction”: That is, to make them like Majnun, the “possessed”, who is proverbial for lovesickness in Islamicate cultures. The famous lover of Layli, he pines away for her in the desert, living like a hermit among the animals and singing poems of love night and day.

I MANAGE FINE with no others around

Ghazal 553

*Bi-hamegân be-sar shavad bi to be sar nemi-shavad*

Rajaz: | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ ||

## VI. POEMS FROM DISCIPLE TO MASTER

I HAVE THIS friend

Ghazal 37

*Yâr marâ ghâr marâ ‘eshq-e jegar-kh<sup>w</sup>âr marâ*

Sari‘ matvi: | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ ||

The two friends in the cave is an allusion to an episode mentioned in Koran 9:40, describing Muhammad’s flight from Mecca with Abu Bakr. As the pagan Meccans pursued Muhammad, attempting to kill him, they hid in a cave. A spider is said to have spun a web over the entrance, making it appear as though no one had entered the cave for some time, so the pursuers did not look inside.

“The breast laid open”: from Koran 94:1 refers in the first instance to revelation sent down by God when Muhammad was in trying circumstances, which caused his breast to dilate with joy. The biographical tradition also preserves

a story about an angel opening up the chest of Muhammad to remove his heart, wash it to purify it from sin, and replace it.

From the last line, we may conclude that this poem was intended to accompany a session of turning (*samâ*). It apparently dates to one of the two times Shams disappeared from Konya.

O JOSEPH (sweet the name!)

Ghazal 4

*Ay Yusof-e kb<sup>w</sup>osh nâm-e mâ kb<sup>w</sup>osh mi-ravi bar bâm-e mâ*

Rajaz: | - - - - | - - - - | - - - - | - - - - ||

The “Joseph” in this poem, as everywhere else Rumi invokes this name, is the Koranic Joseph, whose story is told in Sura 12 of the Koran (and also, of course, in the Bible). He is an emblem of beauty and chaste purity (for rejecting the advances of Potiphar’s wife). He is also divinely guided, seeing dreams of his own greatness and interpreting dreams for the Pharaoh. The spiritual guide or mystic beloved is often compared to Joseph. He was cast by his brothers into a well because he had received a colored cloak from his father, Jacob, as an indication that Joseph was his father’s pride and joy. The scent of Joseph’s shirt/coat and Joseph in the well are common motifs in Persian poetry.

ICON, I CAN NEVER get my fill of you

Ghazal 1046

*Na-gashtam az to hargez ay sanam sir*

Hazaj mahzuf: | ~ - - - | ~ - - - | ~ - - - ||

Isrâfil is an archangel mentioned in the Hadith, responsible for blowing the trumpet that announces the Day of Resurrection from a holy spot in Jerusalem. This trumpet blast of Resurrection is mentioned in the Koran (36:49–53 and 69:13–19). Etymologically, the name perhaps derives from Hebrew “seraph,” but Israfil has also been associated with the archangel Raphael in Judeo-Christian tradition.

“Jamshid’s grail” (*jâm-e jam*): The mythical Persian king, Jamshid, possessed a goblet or grail in which he could see all the events of the world (it is now the name of the international television channel of the Islamic Republic of Iran). For the legend of the Persian king Jamshid, see Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings*, trans. Dick Davis (New York: Viking, 2006).

I PAINT ICONS

Ghazal 1462

*Suratgar-e naqqâsh-am har lahze boti mi-sâzam*

Hazaj akhrab al-sadrayn: | --- | ---- | --- | ---- ||

I sleep and wake in love's afflictions

Ghazal 319

*Umsi wa a'bi'u bi-l-jawâ ata'adhdhabu*

Rajaz: | --- | --- | --- ||

(in Arabic)

MY LIFE BLOOD, my world

Ghazal 3165

*Jân o jabân dush kojâ bude'î*

Sari': | --- | --- | --- ||

LOVER, COME here. Today you are ours

Ghazal 2716

*Biâ jânâ ke emruz ân-e mâ'î*

Hazaj mahzuf: | ---- | ---- | --- ||

The ghazal formula requires that the first and second hemistich of the opening line rhyme with one another, and this rhyme must be retained in the second hemistich of every line throughout the poem. In this particular poem, the second hemistich of each line consists of a repeated phrase (“X thou art, X thou art, X”), where each and every two-syllable X throughout the poem rhymes with all the others, constituting a kind of litany of hyper-rhymes. In addition, the first hemistich of lines 3 through 5 also share an ending with each other (“for him/it” = *u râ*), which is not required by the ghazal form, and hence represents an additional rhetorical device in this poem. Line 6 replaces the “him” with “God” (*kbodâ râ*) at the end of the first hemistich, thus creating an intense series of parallelisms and sonorities. The last line, rather than saying “God thou art,” replaces “thou” with the imperative: “Act like God/a Lord.”

“The Bird of Royal Omen/Royal Bird (*Homâ*)”: A mythical bird whose shadow blesses all who are touched by it, and which signifies the divine right of the king.

VII. POEMS FROM MASTER TO DISCIPLE

Chelebi is a Turkish title, akin to “master,” and here signifies Hosâm al-Din Chelebi, the companion to whom Rumi dictated the *Masnavi*, and to whom



he delegated a leading role in the community of disciples. “Chelebi” was also later used as a title for the male descendants of Sultan Valad, Rumi’s son. The position of Grand Chelebi, chosen from Rumi’s lineage, was the title given to the head of the Mevlevi Order. These lines seem to be from an initiation poem.

“Poverty” refers to the voluntary poverty that allows the adept to practice detachment from worldly goods.

DO YOU, novice, wish to turn dung to musk?

From *Masnavi* Book 5: 2472–9

Khotan is a region, or kingdom, in China along the silk route. It is an oasis, noted for mulberries and evidently for its good pastures. It is known for its musk deer, and hence musk is associated in particular with China and Khotan.

TAKE LOVE’S chalice and on you go

Ghazal 2179

*To jām-e ‘eshq rā be-stān o mi-row*

Hazaj: | ~ ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ ||

DIDN’T I TELL you

Ghazal 1725

*Na-goftam-at ma-row ānjā ke āshnā-t man-am*

Mojtass: | ~ ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ ||

The very unlikely report attributed to Hosām al-Din Chelebi by Aflāki in *Manāqeb*, ed. Yazıcı, 147–9, and given in translation by John O’Kane in *The Feats of the Knowers of God* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 103–4, indicates that this poem was composed for the Seljuq Sultan Rokn al-Din, as he was strangled by the “Tatar” Mongols.

AND WHO He asked is at the door?

Ghazal 436

*Goftā ke kist bar dar goftam kamin gholām-at*

Mozârê‘ akhrab al-sadrayn: | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ ~ ||

This poem is as much a conversation of the disciple with the master as it is the inverse, especially insofar as the poem is related in the first person through the persona of the disciple. However, it begins with the question of the master,

and relates a symbolic encounter in which the speaker of the poem must silence himself for fear of revealing too much of the overpowering mystical truth he has experienced.

“The fragrance in your chalice”: Foruzanfar’s edition reads *jân-at* (“your soul”), which slightly violates the rhyme of the poem. A.J. Arberry therefore amended this to read *jâm-at* (“your chalice”) in his translation, as given in *Mystical Poems of Rûmî*, v. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 178. This response poem evokes a petitioner seeking entrance to the court, and since the royal court is the site of wine and banquets and jewel-encrusted goblets, the reading “your chalice” (*jâm-at*) may be correct. On the other hand, “the fragrance of your spirit” is also an attractive reading, and is not improbable, given the poetic license Rumi sometimes takes.

HERE A FEW, there a few

Ghazal 819

*Andak andak jam'-e mastân mi-resand*

Ramal: | - - - - | - - - - | - - - - ||

The poem suggests an initiation ritual of sorts, perhaps fasting or serving in the kitchen (initiates to the Mevlevi order, at least in later years, would serve in the Mevlevi kitchen for one thousand days before being allowed to “whirl” in turning ceremonies). Initiates would be male, typically adolescents, and they are therefore imagined in this poem like the Hellenistic ephebe. In Persian ghazal poetry, the beloved is often a beautiful adolescent boy, and poets would often play with this convention.

CARAVANEER! See the camels all on down the line, a whole train, drunk

Ghazal 390

*Sârebânâ oshtorân bin sar-be-sar qatâr-e mast*

Ramal: | - - - - | - - - - | - - - - | - - - - ||

WHOEVER LEAVES our circle for another place

Ghazal 794

*Har ke az halqe-ye mâ-jâ-ye degar bogrizad*

Ramal makhbun: | - - - - | - - - - | - - - - | - - - - ||

“Fear of the reaper”: The archangel ‘Azrâ’il is the angel of death in Persian tradition. It is related in the traditions of the Prophet (Hadith) that when

God wants to seize a servant's life from a certain place on earth, he makes it necessary for that servant to travel there. There is a story about this in Rumi's *Masnavi*, Book 1: 956–70.

YOU WHO SUPPOSED steam

Ghazal 2382

*Ay bokhâri râ to jân pendâshte*

Ramal: | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ||

The family of Rumi were preachers, and Rumi was well practiced in this art. Some of the sermons he gave for his disciples are recorded in his *Majāles-e sab'e* (an example of one of them is translated in Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present*, 130–33). A preacher might rely upon the expectations of the homiletic genre to lull his audience into a misperception about what was being said, as in this poem.

Korah (Qārūn) appears in the Koran (28:76–82) as a fabulously wealthy man who grew proud, thinking that his treasures were a reward for his knowledge. Though warned by his people to act humbly and charitably, and that worldly possessions would not profit him in the next world, he persisted in his arrogance and in his rebellion against Moses and Aaron, and was eventually swallowed up by the earth.

## VIII. POEMS FROM MASTER TO MASTER

Rumi speaks of Shams al-Din Tabrizi as a great spiritual teacher and master, and even composes many of his poems in the voice of Shams al-Din. But Rumi also spoke of two other men as sources of spiritual inspiration or guides, first Salâh al-Din Zarkub and then Hosâm al-Din Chelebi. The way that Rumi spoke of these latter two individuals has been puzzling to some of his disciples, as well as scholars, insofar as the intellectual and spiritual achievements of Rumi seem to dwarf theirs. At times, Rumi adopts the voice of wisdom and insight, not in a didactic tone as one might address disciples, but rather as if addressing others of similar insight. Indeed, Shams often describes the relationship between himself and Rumi as one of relative equals in his *Maqâlât*. See William Chittick's translation, *Me and Rumi: The Autobiography of Shams-i Tabrizi* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2004), and also Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000), 162–71.

I WAS DEAD, came back to life

Ghazal 1393

*Morde bodam zende shodam gerye bodam khande shodam*

Sari' matvi: | - - - - | - - - - | - - - - | - - - - ||

“Joseph”: See the note under Poems from Disciple to Master, *Ay Yusuf-e kb<sup>w</sup>osh nâm-e mâ kb<sup>w</sup>osh mi-ravi bar bâm-e mâ*, Ghazal 4 [O Joseph (sweet the name!)].

YOU THERE, checkmated by the king of love

Ghazal 378

*Ay gashte ze shâh-e 'eshq shahmât*

Hazaj akhrab maqbuz mahzuf: | - - - - | - - - - | - - - - ||

YOU, LEADER of the prayers to Love

Ghazal 2933

*Ay ânk emâm-e 'eshqi takbir kon ke masti*

Mozâre' akhrab al-sadrayn: | - - - | - - - - | - - - | - - - - ||

The Imam leads the prayer, usually announced by the muezzin from the minaret with the chant, “God is Great” (*Allâhu akbar*). The poem, however, represents a call for the prayer of love, a mystical rather than ritual approach to communion.

“Howlessness” (*bi-chegune*) evokes an epithet for God, who should not be asked to explain his doings – it would be impudent and impertinent for contingent creatures to demand this information, which, in any case, is beyond their comprehension.

THAT REDCLOAK

Ghazal 650

*Ân sorkh qabâ'i ke cho mah pâr bar âmad*

Hazaj akhrab makfuf mahzuf: | - - - - | - - - - | - - - - | - - - - ||

The later Mevlevis wore a particular color of ceremonial cloak for their turning ceremony, but this poem apparently alludes to Salâh al-Din Zarkub, who became the focus of Rumi's devotions after the disappearance of Shams al-Din Tabrizi.

“Abyssinian age” (*dowrân-e habash*) and “fair Greek” (*rumi*): The dark complexion of the Abyssinians (Ethiopians) and the light complexion of the Greeks (the inhabitants of Anatolia) is a metaphor for night and day here. This occurs elsewhere in Rumi's poetry, sometimes with East Africans (*zangi*) or Abyssinians representing dark skin. In addition, the Abyssinians

and Greeks both represent non-Muslim populations. Among other ethnic groups sometimes evoked for various qualities, not only skin color, we also find Arab, Turk, Armenian, Persian, Kurd and Indian. The word *rumi* also sometimes indicates geographic region, Anatolian, rather than an ethnicity, in contrast to Syrian, or in one poem to city toponymics (Marghzi, Râzi).

In the end time

Ghazal 1210

*Nist dar âkhar-zamân faryâd-ras*

Ramal mahzûf: | - - - - | - - - - | - - - - ||

The hagiographer Aflâki gives the circumstances of composition of this poem, explaining that Rumi was whirling in *samâ'*. See *Manâqeb al-'ârefîn*, ed. Tahsin Yazıcı (Tehran: Donyâ-ye Ketâb, 1983), 736 and the English version translated by John O'Kane as *The Feats of the Knowers of God* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 513. The poem would appear to date from some time after the final disappearance of Shams from Konya (i.e. from about 1248), until the death of Salâh al-Din in 1258.

Bereft of you both earth and sky shed tears!

Ghazal 2364

*Ay ze hejrân-at zamin o âsemân be-griste*

Ramal mahzûf: | - - - - | - - - - | - - - - | - - - - ||

This poem was said to have been recited at the funeral of Salâh al-Din; see *The Feats of the Knowers of God*, tr. John O'Kane (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 508–10.

O LIGHT OF Truth, Hosâm al-Din! Let's add

From *Masnâvi* Book 1: 2934–8

Hosâm al-Din was the spiritual companion of Rumi after the disappearance of Shams and the death of Salâh al-Din Zarkub. It was at the request of Hosâm al-Din, whom Rumi titled “Light of the Faith,” that the *Masnâvi* was composed.

“Pir”: an adjective meaning “old” as applied to a person, but also a noun meaning “elder”, and, in the Sufi context, a spiritual guide. It is the equivalent of the Arabic term *shaykh*.

SO, IN EVERY AGE, a saint arises

From *Masnâvi* Book 2: 819–24

Rumi taught that there was a hierarchy of saints, with the spiritual axis, or “pole” (*qotb*), of the age being the pivot around whom the spiritual life of the universe turned. He was often hidden, unknown or unrecognized by people, though the life of the spirit depended upon him. This doctrine of the pole, or perfect man, found some favor among many Sufis, but was not necessarily approved by the orthodoxy.

The terminology used in this poem includes:

Valī = saint (friend of God), guardian.

Imām = for Shiites, a descendant of Muhammad and divinely inspired ruler of the community, the rightful authority rather than the caliph. For Sunnis, it is simply a prayer leader, behind whom the congregation performs the ritual prayers.

‘Umar = the second caliph, or successor to Muhammad as head of the community of Islam. Because the Shiites believed ‘Ali should rightfully have been appointed, ‘Umar is considered a caliph by Sunnis but not by Shiites.

‘Alī = the son-in-law and cousin of the Prophet, as well as the third man elected caliph after the death of the Prophet. He is accepted by both Sunnis and Shiites, but is held by Shiites to have been appointed by Muhammad as his successor, and invested with mystical authority, because he received oral teachings from the Prophet which were not necessarily included in the Koran.

Mahdī = the “rightly guided one,” a figure of both Sunni and Shiite eschatology, who will help usher in justice in the days of the end.

## IX. POEMS OF DREAMS AND VISIONS

Mansur on this title page refers to Hallāj, executed in Baghdad in 922 for the blasphemy of speaking openly about his mystical identification with God. Pharaoh, meanwhile, though he was lord of his kingdom, spoke real blasphemy because of his haughtiness and opposition to Moses.

The unbelievers tried to burn Abraham in the fire, but he found it to be cool, because of God’s protection (Koran 21:67–9). For Rumi’s treatment of Abraham, see John Renard, *All the King’s Falcons: Rumi on Prophets and Revelation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 47–58.

HOW COULD I know this melancholy

Ghazal 1855

*Che dānestam ke in sowdā marā z-in sâṅ konad majnun*

Hazaj: | ~ - - - | ~ - - - | ~ - - - | ~ - - - ||

Korah (Qārūn), in the Koran, is a wealthy man swallowed up by the earth for his pride (see the description above under Poems from Master to Disciple, *Ay bokhâri râ to jân pendâshte* Ghazal 2382). In addition to the Koranic version of the story, it also occurs in briefer form in the Bible (Numbers 26:9–11), where Korah leads a rebellion against Moses and Aaron and is swallowed up by the earth for it. There may also be some echo of the Greek legend of Croesus, king of Lydia, in the name Korah.

The staving in of the ship's plank alludes to the Koranic story of Moses and Khizr (18:65–82), which in turn was used as a metaphor of the relationship of Rumi and Shams (see Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present*, 33–5).

“Howlessness” (*bi-chun*): An epithet for God. See Poems from Master to Master, *Ay ânk emâm-e 'eshqî takbir kon ke masti*, Ghazal 2933.

It has been ventured that opium (*afyun*) was used as an antidote to drowning, or to madness. Perhaps here the vision described is compared to a hallucinogenic experience. In any case, “a froth” (*kaff-i*) can here mean both the foam of the sea and also a handful, or palmful.

TODAY I SAW him

Ghazal 19

*Emruz didam yâr râ ân rownaq-e har kâr râ*

Rajaz: | - - - - | - - - - | - - - - | - - - - ||

Mustafâ, “the chosen one,” is an epithet of the Prophet, Muhammad. The ladder to clamber onto the heavens would enable the speaker of the poem to follow the Prophet on his *mi'râj*, or miraculous journey into the heavens, where he came into the near presence of the divine essence (as described in Koran 53:5–18).

O FRIEND, within whom I have disappeared!

Ghazal 1507

*Ayâ yâri ke dar to nâ-padid-am*

Hazaj mahzûf: | ~ - - - | ~ - - - | ~ - - - ||

The story of Potiphar's wife, as related in the Koran, includes a scene in which the wife, after her husband has determined her at fault in trying to seduce Joseph, invites her ladyfriends for a banquet, so that they can see Joseph's beauty for themselves and stop blaming her for her behavior. They are cutting citrons to eat when Joseph is called in. Astonished at his beauty, they cut

their own hands instead of the citrus fruit they are holding (see Koran 12:30–2). Three famous Sufi masters of the ninth and tenth centuries c.e. are evoked at the end of the poem: the ascetic mystical teacher Dhū al-Nūn of Egypt (d. 861); Junayd (d. 910), the expounder of the “sober” school of Sufism (in contrast to the “drunken” ecstaticism of Hallāj); and Bāyazīd (Abū Yazīd) Bastāmī (d. c. 874), a visionary mystic who is associated with the doctrine of effacement (*fanā*) and with ecstatic sayings, such as “Glory be to me” (*subhāni*).

HERE’S JOSEPH’S coat

Ghazal 997

*Pirhan-e Yusof-o bu mi-resad*

Sarī‘ matvi maksuf: | - - - - | - - - - | - - - - ||

The story of Joseph is given in the Koran, Sura 12, but see the note on Joseph under Poems from Disciple to Master, *Ay Yusof-e kb<sup>w</sup>osh nām-e mā kb<sup>w</sup>osh mi-ravi bar bām-e mā*, Ghazal 4.

Hallāj was a Persian Sufi put to death in Baghdad in 922 c.e. for his ecstatic revelation of mystic insight, which appeared blasphemous to orthodox theology. It included the famous phrase “I am Truth/God” (*anā al-haqq*).

WE ARE LOVE’S FLAME that has reached the wax

Ghazal 1481

*Mā ātash-e ‘eshq-im ke dar mum residim*

Hazaj akhrab makfuf: | - - - - | - - - - | - - - - | - - ||

“The Throne Verse” is a name given to verse 255 of Surat al-Baqara in the Koran (2:255). It emphasizes the sanctification of God above his creatures and the creation, and his all-encompassing knowledge of them and their affairs, which he watches over from his throne, which extends over heaven and earth. The verse is much quoted in devotional contexts, as a reminder that humans only have access to that portion of the divine knowledge which God wills to bestow upon them. “The Living One” (*al-hayy*) and “the Self-Subsisting” (*al-qayyūm*) are epithets of God in this verse.

*Zonnār* is a belt or cord associated with Zoroastrians or Christians and their religious rites, but especially with wine-drinking. It is therefore a symbol of paganism, or of the mystic ministrations of the Sufi Shaykh.

“Qaysar-e Rumi” (“the Anatolian Caesar”) may signify the Emperor of Byzantium, or Christendom, whose symbolic and ritual Christian garb is



stripped off by the poet. It may also allude to the ruler of Seljuq Anatolia, since the Seljuq Sultan 'Alâ al-Din Kay Qobâd had in 1224–6 built a palace called Qobâdiyye in the city of Kayseri (Qaysari).

I'M OUT OF my senses and you are smashed Ghazal 2309  
*Man bi-kb<sup>o</sup>od o to bi-kb<sup>o</sup>od mârà ki barad khâne*  
Hazaj akhrab sâlem: | - - - | ~ - - - | - - - | ~ - - - ||

“The Moaning Pillar” (*oston-e hannâne*): A tradition relates that the Prophet Muhammad would lean on a certain tree trunk in the Prophet’s Mosque in Medina while he preached. When a pulpit was later constructed, this tree trunk was heard to moan in its separation from the touch of the Prophet.

I HAVE SEEN a vision, worthy of attention and praise! Ghazal 1839  
*Vâqe’ei be-dide-am lâyeq-e lotfo âfarin*  
Rajaz matvi makhbun: | - - - - | ~ - - - | - - - - | ~ - - - ||

The term *vâqe’ei* suggests a kind of dream or vision that reveals or predicts a true event. Dream interpretation was often practiced as a profession by individuals thought to have a talent or susceptibility for it (*mo’abber*), here rendered as “mantic.” Based upon the address at the end of the poem, this would appear to refer to Hosâm al-Din Chelebi, to whom the *Masnavi* was dictated by Rumi.

The Koranic verses cited in the poem (80:39 and 88:9) describe the countenances of the faithful believers, on the judgment day and in paradise, respectively.

The date 5 Dhû al-Qa’da 654 A.H. corresponds to 24 November 1256 C.E. In June of that year (Jumâdî al-thâni), basaltic magma erupted from the ground in the Harrat Rahat area between Mecca and Medina, causing increasingly strong and frequent tremors for four days, until finally a large earthquake shook Medina on 5 Jumadi al-thani as people gathered for the Friday prayers. For two months after that, volcanic eruptions spewed lava that came within eight kilometers of Medina itself. It spread as a red-blue river of two meters’ depth, which brightly lit up the night sky for miles around, making it appear as if the sun shone on the Kaaba at nighttime. Just a few months later, in an unrelated event, on 1 Ramadan (22 September), in an

unrelated event, the Prophet's Mosque was destroyed by fire. In the same year the Tigris flooded Baghdad, the city of the Abbasid caliphate, which the Mongols would soon conquer in February 1258. Rebuilding of the Prophet's Mosque in Medina was delayed due to the Mongol invasions.

"Tatars" evidently refers to the Mongol troops; Armenians in Cilicia continued to be hostile to the Seljuq rulers. On Seljuq Anatolia in the time of Rumi, see Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present*, 78–81, 279–82, etc.

THIS WORLD would be engulfed in flames, if the lover's soul would speak  
Ghazal 527

*Gar jân-e 'âsbeq dam zanad âtash dar in 'âlam zanad*

Rajaz: | - - - - | - - - - | - - - - | - - - - ||

This poem is modeled on one by Sanâ'i, whom Rumi often speaks of highly as a poetic precursor and mystical thinker. It is an eschatological vision of the passing away of the world and the creation of a new one at the Resurrection.

"East of it": In the Koran (19:26) Mary withdrew from her people to the east and covered herself with a veil, at which point a spirit of the Lord appeared to the Virgin in human form, with the announcement that she was destined to bear a sanctified son.

"Scion of the unseen": *pure-ye adham* (Scion of Adham = blackness), would appear to be a reference to Ibrahîm ibn Adham (Abraham son of Adham), a ninth-century ascetic Sufi from Balkh, who, according to legend (echoing the legend of the Buddha), was a prince who gave up his dominion to practice spirituality and voluntary poverty. Called "the Scion of Adham" (*pur-e adham*), Ibrahîm ibn Adham appears in the *Masnavi* as "the Sultan of the Sultans of justice" (*Masnavi* Book 2: 932), and also elsewhere in the ghazals as "Son of Adham" (*pesar-e adham*, e.g. Ghazal 640). The phrase *pure-ye adham* occurs one other time in the ghazals of Rumi (Ghazal 1135), but there is also a similar phrase, *pur-e âdam* (Son of Adam) (Ghazal 859), or the metrically identical phrase *pure-ye âdam* (Ghazal 1615). This reading (Son of Adam = Son of Man) may actually make better sense here, if we allow ourselves to assume a copyist's error in the manuscript.

In Islamic eschatology, Jesus is expected to return in the time of the end to do battle with the anti-Christ (Dajjâl), after which, with the Mahdî, a reign of peace will be ushered in. Rumi speaks of each individual soul having an

interior Jesus waiting to be born (*Fih-e mâ fib*, ed. Foruzânfâr, 21 and also *Masnavi* Book 2: 450), but the Messiah carried by Mary also has a role in the Resurrection. This Messiah is not of water and clay, but is beyond space. The entire world is pregnant with the soul of soul carried by Mary, and the world will give birth to another world at the time of the Resurrection (*Masnavi* Book 2: 1183–8). Elsewhere in the *Masnavi* (3: 3771–82), the Holy Spirit tells Mary, who runs from the human shape it has assumed to impregnate her, “Do not flee from my being into the Void [pre-existent nothingness = ‘adam]. In the Void, I am the king and standard-bearer. My home and foundation and home is in nothingness; it’s only a form of mine that stands before your ladyship. Mary! Look on my difficult form: I am the crescent moon as well as an imagination in your heart. When this image enters your heart and inhabits it, it remains with you, no matter what direction you flee. Except for a superficial and vain imagination, which is like unto a false and fleeting dawn. However, I am the true and radiant dawn from the light of the Lord, whom no night can touch with darkness ... You take refuge in God from me, but I am the epitome of refuge in pre-eternity ... you suppose the Friend to be a stranger and joy to be called a sorrow.”

## X. POEMS ON THE RELIGION OF LOVE: WAYS OF REASON, MODES OF LOVE

In the poem excerpts on the title page of this chapter, Vaxsh is mentioned. This is the birthplace of Rumi, on the Vaxshab river, in what is now Tajikistan. He left the area when he was a boy, eventually settling in Anatolia, never to return home. The legend that he was born in Balkh is contradicted by what Bahâ al-Din Valad, Rumi’s father, wrote.

Also mentioned here is Fakhr al-Din Râzi, the theologian, who died in 1209, after writing a penitent will and testament. He had been considered arrogant, in part for over-reliance on his own reason.

Abû Hanifâ and Shâfi’î were founders of two of the canonical Sunni schools of law. Hence they represent the application of reason and systematization to the study of religious knowledge, that produced rules of behavior, creeds and theology. Specifically, Rumi followed the Hanafî school and Shams followed the Shâfi’î school.

LOVE RESIDES not in learning

Ghazal 395

*'Eshq andar fazl o 'elm o daftâr o ovrâq nist*

Ramal mahzûf: | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ||

THE SEEKER of the Court of God's like this

From *Masnavi* Book 3: 4658–63

YOU ATTAIN to knowledge by argument From *Masnavi* Book 5: 1062–7

*Sohbat* is the Sufi concept of companionship with the *pir*, or elder – the spiritual guide. By being with the guide, hearing what he says and watching what he does and how he reacts to things, the disciple gradually may learn the spirituality that the guide has learned.

THE EYE wants something new to see

Ghazal 617

*Cheshm az pay-e ân bâyard tâ chîz-e 'ajab binad*

Hazaj akhrab al-sadrayn: | ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ ||

“The Black Stone” (here *sang-e siab*, though properly *al-bajar al-aswad*) of the Kaaba is a corner stone of that building, to kiss which is the desire of pilgrims circumambulating the Kaaba.

THE THINKER is always at pains to make his mark

Ghazal 1957

*Hast 'âqel har zamâni dar gham-e paydâ shodan*

Ramal mahzûf: | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ||

LET GO ALL your scheming, lover

Ghazal 2131

*Hilat rabâ kon 'âsheqâ divâne show divâne show*

Rajaz: | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ ||

The “Night of the Grave” (*laylat al-qabr*): On the first night of burial, the angels of the grave, Nakir and Munkar, visit the deceased soul in the grave. The soul will not be dispatched to heaven or hell until the final judgement of the Resurrection, but must reply correctly to questions asked about religion and the nature of Muhammad on that first night of the grave, or face torment. This is not a doctrine of the Koran, but was elaborated later.

“The Night of Power” (*Lailat al-qadr*): Traditionally believed to be the

night when revelation came to the Prophet, in the last part of Ramadan. The Koran (see 97:1–5) says that God’s angels and spirit descend to bless every endeavor on this night.

“The Chosen One” (Mustafā) is an epithet of Muhammad, the Prophet.

“The Moaning Pillar”: According to tradition, Muhammad would lean on a tree trunk in the mosque at Medina as he preached. When a pulpit was constructed, this pillar cried out and is therefore known as the Moaning Pillar (*oston-e hannāne*; literally “the compassionate pillar”), because, even though inanimate, it longed to be in the presence of the Prophet.

Solomon, the heir of David, was granted by the God the ability to understand the language of the birds (Koran 27:16ff).

AMONG LOVERS don’t be a wise guy

Ghazal 182

*Dar miān-e ‘āsbeqān ‘āqel ma-bā*

Ramal mahzuf: | - - - - | - - - - | - - - ||

The Hajj is the pilgrimage to Mecca. Mount Safā is a small hill in Mecca visited by the pilgrims during the pilgrimage ritual.

The Pleiades is a constellation associated with poetry, in part because it resembles a necklace of pearls, itself a metaphor for the ghazal – pearls of speech pierced and threaded on a string of meter and rhyme.

A MAN IN love, no matter what he says      From *Masnavi* Book 1: 2880–2

THE Gnostic arcs constant toward the King’s throne

From *Masnavi* Book 5: 2180, 2191–2

The contrast between the gnostic (*‘āref*) and the scholar (*‘ālem*) and the ascetic (*zābed*) is frequently portrayed in Sufi literature. In his discourses, Rumi elaborates further, explaining that the scholar (“the knowing one”) shares an attribute with God, insofar as he knows things, and in this respect is superior to a gnostic. A gnostic is a person who did not know and then came to know, which is not an attribute of God, who always was all-knowing. But the gnostic comes to know things that knowledge based on reason cannot know, and in this respect is superior. As for the ascetic person, his asceticism is based on religious knowledge; his turning away from the world is based on

a knowledge of the world and its nature. Nevertheless, it is said that a scholar is better than a thousand ascetics, and this is also true, if the scholar has attained to the higher knowledge that comes after asceticism. See *Ketâb-e Fihre mâ fih*, ed. B. Foruzânfar (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1983), 47. Two English translations, exist: by A.J. Arberry, *Discourses of Rumi* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1972), 58–9, and by Wheeler Thackston, *Signs of the Unseen: The Discourses of Jalaluddin Rumi* (Putney, VT: Threshold Books, 1994), 49.

IF WORDS made you certain that fire exists From *Masnavi* Book 2: 860–1

### XI. POEMS CELEBRATING UNION

The sacrifice and celebration alluded to in the fragment from Ghazal 2114 suggest the Festival of the Sacrifice (*Īd al-adhâ* or *Īd al-qurbân*), which commemorates Abraham’s binding of his son. During this festival (as also on other festive occasions), an animal would be slain and the meat shared with the poor.

MAY THE blessings which flow in all weddings Ghazal 236

*Mobâraki ke bovad dar hame ‘arusi-hâ*

Mojtass: | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ ||

This poem was said to be recited on the wedding night (*zefâf*) of Fâteme, the daughter of Salâh al-Din, with the son of Rumi, Sultan Valad. See the description in *The Feats of the Knowers of God*, tr. John O’Kane (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 501–2.

YOU’RE A SPRIG of rose! Ghazal 1003

*Shâkh-e goli bâgh ze to sabz o shâd*

Sari’ matvi maksuf: | - - - - | - - - - | - - - - ||

Kay Qobâd is a mythical Iranian king, but also the regnal name of two of the Seljuq Sultans of Rum during the lifetime of Rumi, ‘Alâ al-Din Kay Qobâd I (r. 1219–37) and ‘Alâ al-Din Kay Qobâd II (r. 1249–57). This poem may perhaps be dated to the reign of the latter.

In the *Masnavi* (Book 3: 3770), Rumi describes “a lick of pure light” (*donbâle-ye nur-e pâk*) rising up to the stars from the lips of the Holy Spirit as

he, in human form announces to a frightened Mary that she would give birth. A few lines further on (lines 3773–4), this spirit (identified with Gabriel) says: “Mary! Look on my difficult form: I am the crescent moon as well as an imagination in your heart. When this image enters your heart and inhabits it, it remains with you, no matter what direction you flee.”

ONCE MORE we come like dust adance in air Ghazal 1720

*Bâr-e degar zarre-vâr raqs konân âmadim*

Monsareh matvi maksuf: | ~ ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ ( ~ ) | ~ ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ ||

DO NOT sleep Ghazal 296

*Ma-khosb ay yâr-e mehmândâr emshab*

Hazaj mahzuf: | ~ ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ ||

This poem, in a Polish version done by Tadeusz Miciński, titled *Pieśńo nocy*, was set to music by Karol Szymanowski in his Symphony # 3, Op. 27. Miciński worked from the German version of Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall. For a treatment of the symphonic lyric text (including Persian transliteration, Hammer-Purgstall’s German, a French translation of Miciński’s Polish and a modern French rendering) see Wojciech Skalmowski, “Un *samâ* polonais: le ‘Chant de la nuit’ de Karol Szymanowski” in “*Mais comment peut-on être persan?*” *Eléments iraniens en Orient & Occident. Liber amicorum Annette Donckier de Donceel*, ed. C. van Ruymbek (Louvain: Peeters, 2003), 137–51.

“The winged Ja’far” (*Ja’far-e tayyâr*) is an epithet for Ja’far ibn Abî Tâlib, the brother of the Prophet’s son-in-law, ‘Ali. Ja’far was killed in battle with the Byzantine army in 629, but he continued to hold the battle standard of Islam up against his chest with his upper arms even after both his hands had been cut off. According to tradition, the Prophet Muhammad compared his arms to wings with which he would soar in paradise. His epithet *tayyâr* is similar to the name of the star Altair (*al-tâ’ir*, or “flying”), the brightest star in the constellation Aquila, the Flying Eagle (*al-nasr al-tâ’ir*). The poet therefore recalls Ja’far-e tayyâr as he sees the Flying Eagle).

TOP OF THE MORNING, you’re already smashed! Ghazal 3153

*Z-avval-e bâmdâd sar-masti*

Khafif: | ~ ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ ||

TOP OF THE MORNING, you're already smashed! Ghazal 3154

*Z-avval-e bâmdâd sar-masti*

Khafif: | ˘ ˘ ˘ ˘ | ˘ ˘ ˘ ˘ | ˘ ˘ ˘ ||

These two poems, both starting with the exact same line, and following the same rhyme and meter, illustrate how Persian poets, among them Rumi, might rework their own material in different directions, for different occasions.

Wine is ubiquitously used by Rumi as a metaphor for mystical intoxication. The beginning section of both poems is addressed in the voice of the disciple to the mystic guide. The first poem comes to a close with silence, since the supra-rational experience cannot be adequately expressed. Rumi frequently ends his poems this way, with a call to himself for silence (for more on the poetics of silence in Rumi, see Fatemeh Keshavarz, *Reading Mystical Lyric* [Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998]). In the second version, the speaking persona of the poem calls upon the Sâqi, or cupbearer, to pour out further wine and carry away conscious reason, so that the sense of mystical intuition will alone remain.

A LITTLE apple

Ghazal 968

*Sibaki nim sorkh o nimi zard*

Khafif: | ˘ ˘ ˘ ˘ | ˘ ˘ ˘ ˘ | ˘ ˘ ||

The lover in Persian ghazal poetry is expected to suffer in love, to weep, to waste away as he pines and to have a sallow complexion. The beloved is imperious and cruel, able to do without the lover. Therefore his or her cheeks are red and healthy. Of course, the lover-beloved relationship is a metaphor for the worshipper and God, or, in a more immediate sense, the disciple and the guide.

Three lines in the middle of the poem (“I’m like the thorn . . .” *measure the chainmail well!*”) are in Arabic, though there are no lines in Arabic in the next poem in Rumi’s *Divân*, which happens to begin with the same opening half-line, and maintains the same rhyme.

EXQUISITE LOVE, what exquisite love we have

Ghazal 95

*Zabi 'eshq zabi 'eshq ke mârâ-st khodâ-yâ*

Hazaj makfuf mahzuf: | ˘ ˘ ˘ ˘ | ˘ ˘ ˘ ˘ | ˘ ˘ ˘ ˘ | ˘ ˘ ˘ ||



IN THIS COLD and rain

Ghazal 1047

*Dar in sarmâ vo bârân yâr kh<sup>w</sup>osb-tar*

Hazaj mahzûf: | ~--- | ~--- | ~- ||

BLISS

Ghazal 2214

*Khonak ân dam ke neshinim dar ivân man o to*

Ramal makhbun: | ~--- | ~--- | ~--- | ~- ||

“The airs of Iraq and Khorasan” literally reads: “we are both at this moment/ breath in Iraq and Khorasan, you and I” (*ham dar-in dam be ‘erâq-im o khorâsân man o to*). It may allude to musical modes accompanying the poem to the nay, but they are associated with the respective regions from which Shams (*‘erâq-e ‘ajam*, “Persian Iraq,” or western Iran, could include Tabriz) and Rumi come.

## XII. POEMS ON DEATH AND BEYOND

WHERE HAVE you gone

Ghazal 2707

*Kojâ’id ay shahidân-e khodâ’i*

Hazaj mahzûf: | ~--- | ~--- | ~- ||

Karbala is a town southwest of Baghdad, where Husayn ibn ‘Ali, the grandson of the Prophet, was killed by the Umayyads. He had gone into battle with the assertion of backing from the populace, in order to assert his claim as the sole legitimate caliph, which was held to pass to him from his father ‘Ali. He was slain with a small group of family and followers, denied water to quench his thirst in the hot sun. The shrine built on the spot of his burial is a place of pilgrimage for Shiites, who see him as the rightful successor to Muhammad as head of the Muslim community, after ‘Ali, his father, and Hasan, his older brother. Although Rumi was not a Shiite, this poem (along with other poems and prayers about the occasion) has been used to commemorate the martyrdom of Husayn.

“Tautly bowed arch”: The archery bow is commonly compared to the eyebrows of the beloved, but here to the inverted bowl of the sky.

YOU FLEW OFF in the end

Ghazal 3051

*Be-‘âqebat be-paridi o dar nehân rafti*

Mojtass: | ~--- | ~--- | ~--- | ~- ||

The falcon is a special image in Rumi for the noble soul obedient to its lord, the king, and by extension John Renard, *All the King's Falcons* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 14–15, discusses it as a symbol of Rumi's prophetology, in which connection it is opposed to the owls, which haunt the material world.

AND NOW IT'S time

Ghazal 464

*Nowbat-e vasl o leqâ-st nowbat-e hashr o baqâ-st*

Monsareh matvi maksuf: | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ||

I DIED TO mineral, joined the realm of plants

From *Masnavi* Book 3: 3901–7

### XIII. POEMS ON BIRTHING THE SOUL

HEART

Ghazal 563

*Delâ nazd-e kasi benshin ke u az del khabar dârad*

Hazaj: | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ ||

HERE I COME again

Ghazal 1390

*Bâz âmadam bâz âmadam az pish-e ân yâr âmadam*

Rajaz: | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ ||

The “four mothers” are the four constituent elements of the material universe, according to the philosophy/physics of antiquity: water, earth, fire and air.

The “seven fathers” are the stages or levels into which it was traditionally believed the heavens of the firmament were divided.

BEFORE THE candle

Ghazal 2789

*Pish-e sham'-e nur-e jân del hast chun parvâne'i*

Ramal mahzuf: | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ||

OH, HOW colorless

Ghazal 1759

*Ah che bi-rang o bi-neshân ke man-am*

Khafif mahzuf: | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ||

IT'S WAVES OF LOVE that make the heavens turn

From *Masnavi* Book 5: 3854–9

WITH EACH NEW BREATH the sound of love

Ghazal 463

*Har nafas âvâz-e 'eshq mi-rasad az chap o râst*

Monsareh matvi maksuf: | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ ||

Aflâki reports that this poem was praised by the famous Sa'di of Shiraz to the ruler of Shiraz, Malek Shams al-Din. See Aflâki, *Manâqeb*, ed. Yazıcı, 266, and, for English, *The Feats of the Knowers of God*, tr. John O'Kane (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 184–5.

INFUSE OUR veins with love's aqua vitae

Ghazal 1821

*Âb-e hayât-e 'eshq râ dar rag-e mâ ravâne kon*

Rajaz matvi makhbun: | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ | ~ ~ ~ ||

According to the closing verses of Surat al-Qamar, alluded to here, in paradise the righteous will find themselves amidst gardens and streams, at the court/throne of righteousness in the presence of a potent king.

“Magian wine,” or Zoroastrian wine, is associated with the pagan wisdom of the ancient Iranian religious tradition and the practices of the Sasanian court. It appears as a symbol both of blasphemy to Muslim orthodoxy, and as the mystic experience that releases the poet from rationality and opens new horizons on the truth. The wine is served and measured out by the Sâqi, or cupbearer.

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