

When 'Umar Became a Reflector of Mysteries (Comparative Translations)

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December 2013

When Fárúq ('Umar) became a reflector of mysteries, the old man's heart was awakened from within.

He became without weeping or laughter, like the soul: his (animal) soul departed and the other soul came to life.

In that hour such a bewilderment arose within him that he went forth from earth and heaven

A seeking and searching beyond (all) seeking and search I know not (how to describe it); (if) you know, tell!

Feelings and words beyond (all) feelings and words--he had become drowned in the beauty of the Lord of majesty,

Drowned, not in such wise that there should be for him any deliverance, or that any one should know him except the (Divine) Ocean.

Partial reason would not be telling of (the mysteries of) the Universal (Reason), if there were not demand after demand (perpetual Divine impulses necessitating the manifestation of these mysteries).

Since demand after demand is arriving, the waves of that Sea (Universal Reason) reach this place (the world of partial reason).

Now that the story of the old man's (spiritual) experiences has come to this point, the old man and his experiences have withdrawn behind the veil.

The old man has shaken his skirt free from talk and speech: half of the tale has remained in our mouth (has not been told).

--Masnavi, Book I: 2208-2217, translated by Nicholson, 1926

COMMENTS:

This is a very accurate literal translation and reflects the Persian text (see below) very well. However, Nicholson's addition of explanations within parentheses sometimes awkwardly interrupts the flow of the verses. For example: "When Fárúq ('Umar)", "the waves of that sea (Universal Reason) reach this place (the world of partial reason)."

Omar, discerning mirror of God's light,

Woke up the man's soul from its dark night:

He stopped his laughing and his weeping too,

His old soul died, but he was born anew;

Then he was filled with such bewilderment

He rose beyond the earth and firmament:
A search beyond all searches thus began,
Not that I understand--perhaps you can?
Such states and words beyond what's known to us,
Drowned in the beauty of the Glorious,
A drowning, neither meaning his deliverance,
Nor that the Sea and he still show a difference:
Your intellect cannot know the Whole unless
You keep on pleading and show neediness--
When such demands are made repeatedly
At last a wave will come from that Pure Sea.
Now that we've reached the ending of this tale,
The old man and his states have drawn the veil;
He's shaken words off just like crumbs of bread
Though half of this long tale is left unsaid.

--translated by Jawid Mojaddedi, "Rumi: The Masnavi, Book One," 2004, pp. 136-37

COMMENTS:

There is some loss of the literal meanings, per the compromises resulting from the requirement to rhyme. For example: "the old man's heart was awakened from within" is rendered, "Woke up the man's soul from its dark night"--adding an image from Christian mysticism of the "dark night of the soul." "The old man has shaken his skirt free from talk and speech" has been rendered, "He's shaken words off just like crumbs of bread." However, the other verses retain their meanings rather well, in spite of the need to rhyme. The rhyme is often pleasant, as is the iambic pentameter meter (oXoXoXoXoX, oXoXoXoXoX).

As Omar was the mirror of the mysteries,
the soul of the old man awoke within
Now free of tears and laughter like the soul,
this soul was gone. Another came to life.
Just then amazement seized his inner state
so much he took his leave of earth and heaven.
The search and quest beyond search and quest,
I do not understand -- do you? Tell me!
Such words and states beyond all states and words,
he drowned within the beauty of His splendour.
One drowned beyond all hope of being found,
and none would know him now except the ocean.
The partial mind could not tell of the whole
if waves of impetus did not appear.

Since impetus on impetus is coming,
 that ocean's waves are coming to this place.
With this much telling of the old man's state,
 he and his state withdrew behind a veil.
The old man freed himself from words and speech --
 and half the tale has stayed within my mouth.
--translated by Alan Williams, "Rumi: Spiritual Verses," 2006, p. 207

COMMENTS:

This is an accurate translation in pleasant iambic pentameters. The only compromise was translating "Omar" (instead of "Fârûq"), perhaps to make it easier for the reader to understand (without needing to add a footnote), as well as to improve the meter.

As Faruq mirrored the mysteries divine
The old man's spirit awoke from deep within
Like spirit, he neither laughed nor did he cry
His spirit left and another came alive
He was filled with such amazement deep inside
That he went beyond the earth, beyond the sky
A searching and seeking beyond search and quest
I do not know, you tell me, if you know best
Speech and state beyond all other state and speech
Plunged in the beauty of divine majesty
Drowned not so there would be salvation for him
Nor that any but the ocean should know him
Partial intellect would not tell of the whole
If not for prompting after prompting for more
Because prompting after prompting does arrive
The surging of that ocean does here arrive
Since the story of that old man's state led here
The old man and his state slipped beyond the veil
The old man shook his skirt free of talk and words
Half the tale has been left in our mouth unheard
--translated by Victoria Holbrook, "Listen: Commentary on the Spiritual Couplets of Mevlana
Rumi [by] Kenan Rifai," 2010, p. 282

COMMENTS:

This is a fairly accurate translation, with only a few compromises resulting from the requirements to have imperfect rhyme (of consonants or vowels) and to produce each semi-verse with exactly eleven syllables (as in the original Persian text). For example: "(if) you know, tell" is rendered, "you tell me if you know best." And "Since demand after demand is arriving, the

waves of that sea reach this place” is rendered a bit awkwardly, “Because prompting after prompting does arrive [[therefore,] the surging of that ocean does here arrive”.

The old man’s heart woke. . . without weeping or laughter.

In the true bewilderment of the soul
he went beyond any seeking beyond words
and telling, drowned in the beauty,
drowned beyond deliverance.

Waves cover the old man.

Nothing more can be said of him.

He has shaken out his robe,
and there’s nothing in it anymore.

--Version (based on Nicholson’s translation) by Coleman Barks, “The Essential Rumi,” 1995, p. 120

COMMENTS:

This is not a translation from Persian, but a reinterpretation of Nicholson’s translation. Barks has directly taken a couple of Nicholson’s phrases: “the old man’s heart,” “without weeping or laughter”. The verse, “he had become drowned in the beauty of the Lord of majesty” [dhû ‘l-jalâl, from Qur’ân 55:27] has been rendered, “drowned in the beauty”--an example of how Barks often purges Mawlana Rumi’s references to God in his poetry. “The old man has shaken his skirt free from talk and speech” is rendered vaguely (or perhaps with a Zen flavor), “He has shaken out his robe, and there’s nothing in it anymore.”

چونک فاروق آینه اسرار شد
جان پیر از اندرون بیدار شد
همچو جان بی‌گریه و بی‌خنده شد
جانش رفت و جان دیگر زنده شد
حیرتی آمد درونش آن زمان
که برون شد از زمین و آسمان
جُست و جویی از ورای جُست و جو
من نمی‌دانم تو می‌دانی بگو
حال و قالی از ورای حال و قال
غرقه گشته در جمال ذوالجلال
غرقه‌ای نه که خلاصی باشدش

یا بجز دریا کسی بشناسدش
عقل جزو از کُل گویا نیستی
گر تقاضا بر تقاضا نیستی
چون تقاضا بر تقاضا می‌رسد
موج آن دریا بدینجا می‌رسد
چونک قصهٔ حال پیر اینجا رسید
پیر و حالش روی در پرده کشید
پیر دامن را ز گفت و گو فشاند
نیم گفته در دهان ما بماند

مثنوی ، دفتر اول ۲۲۰۷