

Coleman Barks' Praise of Gamard & Farhadi's "The Quatrains of Rumi"

"Rumi: Soul Fury: Rumi and Shams Tabriz on Friendship," Translations by Coleman Barks, New York: HarperCollins, 2014. Total number of quatrains: 217

Copyright page: "These Rumi versions are reworked from the translations and scholarship of Ibrahim Gamard and Rawan Farhadi in 'The Quatrains of Rumi'."

"Author's Note on Translation", p. 215: "These short free verse poems are versions of Rumi's rubai, done from Gamard and Farhadi's translations. Making versions is a way, I feel, of entering, and praising, and bringing Rumi's insights into my own life. I can do that, it seems, by putting scholarly translations into my own short poem tradition, which is a constantly moving composite of many lineages.... Ibrahim Gamard, Rawan Farhadi, William Chittick, and Franklin Lewis disapprove of making versions. I understand the objection. What I do is a homemade, amateurish, loose, many-stranded thing, without much attention to historical context, nor much literal faithfulness to the original. I did not hear Rumi's name until I was thirty-nine. I claim only to be a poet in American English..."

"Notes on the Rumi Quatrains", p. 219: "The second number... refers to its place in the complete translation of Rumi's quatrains, 'The Quatrains of Rumi,' by Ibrahim W. Gamard and A. G. Rawan Farhadi (San Rafael, CA: Sufi Dari Books, 2008). Their numbering goes from 1 to 1959. Their scholarship is magnificent, comprehensive, and deeply intuitive. We are greatly indebted to them. Anyone who loves Rumi and Shams should own a copy."

Here is one of Barks' versions, together with his comments, followed by Gamard and Farhadi's translation and footnotes:

"A riddle: What is it that gives form such great joy,
and without which all appearances grow dull, drained of pleasure?
In one moment that *something* slips away.
In the next, out of nowhere, it comes back and knocks form to pieces.
Answer: *Your face.*" (p. 57)

"There is a subtle wordplay here in Persian that cannot be duplicated in English. Gamard and Farhadi tell us that the word for 'form' and 'appearance' can also mean 'face,' so that hidden in every line of the poem is the irresistible answer. I put the answer in a last line, but if I understand the scholars correctly, the answer does not appear in the poem in Farsi. It is just always there, concealed as nuance, in the language. Nor does the word 'riddle' appear in the original. It is implied." (p. 226)

What is it from which there is enjoyment in (its) appearance?

And what is it, without which appearance [seems] dulled?
In one moment, that something becomes hidden from form,
And (in) another moment, out of No-Place, it smashes against form.

1. lines one and two: This quatrain takes the form of a riddle, the answer of which is the sublime and irresistible beauty of the beloved's face. The word 'şūrat' occurs in all four lines with the meaning of 'form' and 'appearance', but it also means 'face'. When the beloved's face is seen, everything visible is delightful.

2. lines three and four: refer to the recollected image of the beloved—especially the face, that appears and disappears in the mind of the lover. When it appears, all other forms are 'knocked away'.

—Rumi's quatrain F-127, translated from Persian by Ibrahim Gamard and Rawan Farhadi, "The Quatrains of Rumi," 2008, p. 137

Examples of harmonious versions:

p. 24b:

Love, what sort of thing are you? You carry so much along.
You gather many together, and then scatter them.
You love to stay home and let everything else keep watch at your door.
Love, you are the mother, every human being is your child.

O Love, what thing are you? For all are your possessions.
You are joined together, and (many) gatherings are scattered by you.
You are a home-dweller, and all (else) are your doorkeepers.
You are the mother, and these peoples are your children.

—Rumi's quatrain F-728, translated from Persian by Ibrahim Gamard and Rawan Farhadi, "The Quatrains of Rumi," 2008, p. 453

p. 36a:

Someone who knows your face, do they care about a rose garden?
Someone familiar with your love, do they worry about candles and lamps?
Some say the mind's vigor grows strong with sleep.
Does a lover care about his mind?

Does anyone (familiar) with your face care about the rose garden?
Does (anyone familiar) with your love care about candles and lamps?
It is said that, 'The brain's vigor is from sleep.'
(But) is he a lover who cares about the brain?

—Rumi’s quatrain F-619, translated from Persian by Ibrahim Gamard and Rawan Farhadi, “The Quatrains of Rumi,” 2008, p

38a:

There is a lot of discussion about union and separation.
But how can something that was never apart come back together?

They speak words about union and separation, yet
How can something that was never separated be joined?
—from Rumi’s quatrain F-486, translated from Persian by Ibrahim Gamard and Rawan Farhadi, “The Quatrains of Rumi,” 2008, p

Made-up verses:

Sometimes, he (seemingly) can’t resist adding some “Barksian mush”:

62a: “You give new trembling to those we thought were dead,
best friend and teacher ever, you inside the growing.”

O you (who are) the one who gave life to a thousand corpses,
I am your student, since you are a very (excellent) master.

—from Rumi’s quatrain F-1696, translated from Persian by Ibrahim Gamard and Rawan Farhadi, “The Quatrains of Rumi,” 2008, p

37a:

Now I have become whatever that one wants: a child, a stern judge, a wandering beggar,
singing.

In short, his heart transformed my heart,
(And) made me (appear in) any form that he wished.

—from Rumi’s quatrain F-21, translated from Persian by Ibrahim Gamard and Rawan Farhadi, “The Quatrains of Rumi,” 2008, p

101b:

And so do we. Our days of snow and mud become solid, so we can slowly learn traction,
balance.

111b: Qur’an 57:4. The good news comes: He is with you wherever you are.

The news arrives from Him that ‘He is with you (wherever you may be)’.

—from Rumi’s quatrain F-823, translated from Persian by Ibrahim Gamard and Rawan Farhadi, “The Quatrains of Rumi,” 2008, p

120a: Now! The time for discipline has come. Observe Ramadan

p. 124a: . . . the circle of BE! Kun fa-yakun. Be and it is. Qur'an 2:117
F-1507 (hadith story about Muhammad added in poem)

CHECK Barks #104 73b "I am not this body" from footnote for F-1667
p. 29b the great shaman (F-162)

p. 53b: There is a life where you have your longed-for companion day and night, night and day

(There is) a life (in) which God [Khodâ] is the companion night and day,
—from Rumi's quatrain F-1307, translated from Persian by Ibrahim Gamard and Rawan Farhadi, "The Quatrains of Rumi," 2008, p

p. 54a: There is a kind of wildness that makes a man, or woman, conspicuous

The crazy man [dîvâna] is conspicuous among the people,
—from Rumi's quatrain F-571, translated from Persian by Ibrahim Gamard and Rawan Farhadi, "The Quatrains of Rumi," 2008, p

p. 55b: Your mind may be bound tight, but your feet are free. Move them apart, walk along, run. Now, dance!

Your thinking is bound, (but) aren't your feet unbound?
—from Rumi's quatrain F-235, translated from Persian by Ibrahim Gamard and Rawan Farhadi, "The Quatrains of Rumi," 2008, p

p. 84b: My words can do nothing but bring you back to life.
F-462

p. 112a: So I have given up what he told me to, all but the kindness and the wild soul fury of your presence.

Notes, p. 229: "Shams calls this horse 'soul fury.' Rumi refers to it in #65 as the 'horse of great longing.'" (p. 90)

Notes, p. 233: "I put the 'soul fury' and 'kindness' in there. Gamard and Farhadi's phrase is 'the wine and sugar from your lips.'" (p. 90)

Maq.234: Chitt, p. 282: "My purpose in this harshness is to see where his soul [[nafs-é ô--his ego]] comes forth. Yes, there is a time when you put up with a child's nonsense, not for the sake of teaching him courtesy [[adab]], but for the sake of the soul's fury [[= for the

sake of (seeing) the ego's coarseness--ghalîZ-é nafs]]. Right there I would intercede:
'Enough! teach courtesy to your own soul [[nafs-é khwod -- your own ego]], don't kill the child!'"

Barks, p. 177: "The reason for such strictness is this: If a child grows up being indulged, he will become self-absorbed and incapable of real soul-growth.... Of course, there are times when you put up with a child's nonsense. Let his soul fury have its freedom. Don't teach children manners for the sake of manners. When I see an adult doing that, I step in.

'Enough! Teach this courtesy to yourself! Let the child grow in his own way.'"

--Q.3:159, "harsh-hearted" [ghalîZa'l-qalb]; 11:58, "a severe punishment [adhâb-in ghalîZ]

--Q.4:153, "a firm covenant" [mîthâq-an ghalîZ-an]

--Persian: thick, dense; coarse, rough, rugged; rude; avaricious; harsh, cruel

Masnavi (Nicholson) 9X: thick, gross, coarse

I am abstaining from everything the doctor forbade,

Except the 'wine' and 'sugar' that are from his lips.

—from Rumi's quatrain F-318, translated from Persian by Ibrahim Gamard and Rawan Farhadi, "The Quatrains of Rumi," 2008, p

p. 34a: Are you in rose fragrance? No.

Do the sun and stars see you? No.

You say, It is night; Look there in the window.

But it can only be night if you leave. Otherwise, no.

Has the perfumed rose caught a scent of you? No, never.

Or has the sun or the stars (ever) seen you? No, never.

You say, 'It is night. Look at the window.'

It is night (only) if you depart. Otherwise, no, never!

—from Rumi's quatrain F-1914, translated from Persian by Ibrahim Gamard and Rawan Farhadi, "The Quatrains of Rumi," 2008, p

p. 36a: Someone who knows your face, do they care about a rose garden?

Someone familiar with your love, do they worry about candles and lamps?

Some say the mind's vigor grows strong with sleep.

Does a lover care about his mind?

Does anyone (familiar) with your face care about the rose garden?

Does (anyone familiar) with your love care about candles and lamps?

It is said that, 'The brain's vigor is from sleep.'

(But) is he a lover who cares about the brain?

—from Rumi’s quatrain F-619, translated from Persian by Ibrahim Gamard and Rawan Farhadi, “The Quatrains of Rumi,” 2008, p

Islamic references in his renderings:

82b: Barks actually adds an Islamic devotional interpretation of what he thinks may be Rumi’s meaning:

“Still, in the way of things, I am a bow. Bending to pray, a bow is one who sends away. Why should I be surprised when, suddenly, you are not here?”

Still, you are an arrow and I am like a bow--

(And) since you are an arrow, what (is) surprising if you flee from a bow?

—from Rumi’s quatrain F-1805, translated from Persian by Ibrahim Gamard and Rawan Farhadi, “The Quatrains of Rumi,” 2008, p

29b: “...closer to each of us than the big vein on our necks.” [= Q.50:16]

30a: “annihilation-in-God”

35a: Joseph and Jacob, and Job [Q.12; 21:83-84; 38:41-47]

49b: “Splash nightwater on your face. Put your hands down in the dew. Now put them wet on your face, your arms, your feet. Cleanse yourself as you do before and after prayer. Wake for the blessing coming then before sunlight returns.” [= Q.5:7]

55a: “as pilgrims wind the Kaaba on the plain of Arafat” [Q.22:26; 2:198]

60b: “Say to yourself, Lord.” [Q.20:114]

64a: “...our prayer rug, our discipline with fasting, the feast on the evening we honor Abraham, the exalted feel of a Night of Power.” [Q.97:1-5]

68b: “Ya-Sin. No one knows what those letter combinations mean at the beginning of certain chapters of the Qur’an.” [= Q.36:1]

70b: “As we began in the first creation, we will do it again...” [= Q.21:24]

71a: “the tavern called ‘Am I Not (Yes!) your Lord? A-lastu bi-rabbi-kum?’”

73b: “Or while saying, ‘Allah, Allah.’”

95b: “..the tip of a black thread in the dark.” [= Q.2:187]

111a: “Qur’an 57:4. The good news comes: ‘He is with you wherever you are.’”

112b: “...like those young men and their dog, the cave companions, who slept joyfully for centuries.” [= Q.18:9-26]

120a: Now. The time for discipline has come. Observe Ramadan. For a few days hold back even from mentioning the bowl for eating hot lentil soup, the jar for keeping springwater cool.” [= Q.2:185]

124a: “‘Kun fa-yakun. Be and it is.’ Qur’an 2:117.... As it was with Muhammad as a child, when there was one speck of pain left in his heart that two angels came and washed away.”

126b: “...on the white tablet where everything has already happened...” [Q.85:22]

Islamic references in his endnotes:

p. 221: “This poem may be read as a gloss on Qur’an 50:16: ‘We [Allah] created man. We

know the promptings of his soul, and are closer to him than his jugular vein' (Dawood translation). Many of Rumi's poems are glosses on, or unfoldings of, Qur'anic passages."

p. 224: "I said 'Salaam aleichem' to a wonderfully garrulous group of Muslim men just out of Friday night prayers, gathered in an Athens, Georgia, coffeehouse. Mostly they were from Amman, Jordan, but from all over the Near East too--Beirut, Cairo, Tunis, Damascus. They turned and smiled. 'Aleichem salaam, my brother.' All of us were der-fish, let out of school." [Q.7:46]

p. 225: "Rumi sometimes calls it the 'Am I Not (Yes!)' tavern because of the covenant of Alast (mentioned in Qur'an 7:172--not the tavern but the covenant). There was a moment (!) in pre-eternity when Allah asked us formless ones, 'Am I not your Lord?' We all answered 'YES!' so quickly that the answer was simultaneous with the question.... in Dawood, the more serene answer, 'We bear witness that you are.'"

p. 228 (F-1955): "This a gloss on Qur'an 84:19, 'You will travel from stage to stage,' combined with Qur'an 5:115-17, where Jesus prays for a table spread with food."

p. 228: "Smelling Joseph's shirt restores Jacob's sight. Joseph's shirt, torn from behind, proves his innocence with Zuleikha. Then there is Joseph's amazing technicolor dream coat." [Q.12:96; 28; Genesis 37:3, based on Septuagint translation]

p. 229: "As the Qur'an says, 'Whichever way you turn, there is the Face of God' (Qur'an 2:115)."

p. 229: "An intense jet black is mentioned in Qur'an 35:27."

p. 234: "The second stanza refers to the saying of God (hadith) reported by Muhammad, 'I am not contained in heaven or earth, but rather in the hearts of those who love me. Look for me there.'"