A Young Woman: A Translation of Tamim Al Bargouthi's (تميم البرغوثي) (تميم البرغوثي)

صبية

Houssem Ben Lazreg¹

¹ Department of Modern Languages and Cultural Studies, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada

E-mail: benlazre@ualberta.ca

قد يُنقصُ الحسن قدراً مَن تَيَقنه
ولا كحسن بظاهِر الغيب مطنون
وأعرفُ الحسن لكن لا أُعرِفُه
أوطى لعيني ولا يبدو لتعييني
روحي بقايى سماء ظسكنت جسداً
ولم تزل للسماء الروح تدعوني
إي لم أطر حسبتي لم أطر كسلاً
وأستجيت بعباد الله تشكوني
فإن أحسنت بأخرى مثلها خفقت
طرقي المساجين بابات الزنازين
هي الأسير رأى في البُعد أسرته
فصاح لا ترجعوا للدار من دوني
والروح تسعى وراء الروح تؤنسها
من غربة الدار بين الماء والطين

قل للصبية تَحبيني وترديني
لم يبق مني سوى ما ليس بيقيني
يا طيبة في قديم الشعر ما برحت
تَثكي الكريم بمنهله ومكتون
رأيتها وأنا في الحق لم أرها
لكنه طرب للشعر يعرونني
تُحل كل فتى مرت ببشوته
وكل بنت إلى ليلي ومجنون
ثنى من قدها ما قد تميل به
أنمها الناس من دين إلى دين
ولو رأى وجهها القديم قال لنا
لا بأس بالذنب بين الحين والحين
ويدخل الناز فيها أمة طمعوا
من حسنها في جنان الحور والعين
A Young Woman

Say to the young girl to resurrect and then kill me
All that is left of me will not suffice to keep me alive
O doe from classical poetry¹
Who has never ceased to make the noble man weep
In secrecy and in public
I have seen her, when I actually have not
Yet the elatedness of poetry deluges me
Every young man and every young girl she passes by
Laila and Majnun² they become
With her graceful body, she sways
clergymen from faith to faith
If a saint sees her face, he will bless our sins
‘It is totally fine to sin from time to time’
As her beauty drags a whole community to hell
For the virgins of heaven³ they crave
It will be in vain to fancy her beauty
For charm, as the unknown, is inconceivable
I recognize beauty, but I cannot define it
It is visible to my eyes, invisible to my mind
My soul is the remnants of a sky
inhabited by my body
Still my soul urges me to join the heavens
If I fail to fly, she will complain about my indolence
The servants of God she will call out protesting me
And if she senses the presence of another like her, she will beat joyfully
Like prisoners’ banging at the cell doors
She is the prisoner who, afar off, sees her family
And shouts ‘Do not leave me here’
The soul seeks the company of another
To alleviate the alienation of the body

Commentary (Notes on translation)

This amatory poem (aka as Ghazal) underscores one’s longing for the beloved’s beauty in all its glory through various metaphorical images and figures of speech. Interestingly, numerous scholars and poets have attempted to translate “Ghazal” from their original language to English. However, the task is daunting, as keeping the literal meaning of each poem while respecting the rhyme, refrain, and length of lines is difficult, if not impossible.

¹ The doe is admired for its intelligence, beauty, and elegant movement.
² This is a poem composed by the Persian poet Nizami Ganjavi based on a semi-historical Arab story about the 7th century Nejdi Bedouin poet, Qays ibn al-Mullawah, and his ladylove, Layla bint Mahdi (or Layla al-Aamiriya).
³ A Houri is one of the beautiful virgins provided in paradise for all faithful Muslims.
⁴ https://www.britannica.com/topic/saint
that translating his poems into English tends to strip them of meaning. Despite this inevitable loss, I think that creativity is still key when translating to retain as much of the ambience of the original text as possible.

Translator’s Bio

Houssem Ben Lazreg is currently a blogger, a freelance translator/interpreter, Ph.D. candidate, a teaching assistant for French/Arabic at the Department of Modern Languages and Cultural Studies at the University of Alberta, and a French language instructor with the Canadian School of Public Service. His research interests include politics and translation, Middle Eastern graphic novels, and Islamist militant movements. His translations have appeared in journals such as *Transcultural, Transference*, and *Multilingual Discourses*, while his commentaries on international politics are published with *The Conversation* and *Sasapost*.

Poet’s Bio

Tamim Al-Barghouti is a famous Palestinian poet, columnist, and political scientist. He is one the most widely read poets in the Arab World. He was a visiting professor of politics at Georgetown University in Washington DC from 2008 till 2011 and is currently a Consultant to the United Nations Economic and Social Committee for West Asia. He has published six poetry collections in both colloquial and classical Arabic, *Al-Manzar (The Scene, 2000)*, *Maqam Iraq (The Iraqi Ode 2005)*, *Fil Quds (In Jerusalem, 2008)*, and *Ya Masr Hanet (Oh Egypt, It’s Close 2012)*, and two academic books on Arab politics and history (*Benign Nationalism: Nation State Building Under Occupation, the Case of Egypt; and The Umma and the Dawla: The Nation State and the Arab Middle East)*.