

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

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قد يُنْقَصُ الحسَنُ قَدْرًا مَن تَيَقَّنَه  
ولا كحسَنٍ بظَهْرِ الغَيْبِ مَظَنون  
وأَعْرِفُ الحسَنَ لَكن لا أَعْرِفُه  
يبدو لعيني ولا يبدو لتعيني  
روحي بقايا سماءٍ أُسَكِنْتُ جَسَدًا  
ولم تزل للسماء الروح تدعوني  
إن لم أطر حسبتني لم أطر كسلًا  
واستتجدت بعباد الله تشكوني  
فإن أحسَّتْ بأخرى مثلها خفقت  
طَرَقُ المساجين أبواب الزنازين  
هي الأسيْرُ رأى في البُعدِ أُسْرته  
فصاح لا ترجعوا للدار من دوني  
والروحُ تسعى وراء الروح تَؤنْسها  
من غربة الدار بين الماء والطين

صبية (تميم البرغوثي)  
قل للصبية تُحييني وتُردينني  
لم يبق مني سوى ما ليس بيقيني  
يا ظبيةً في قديم الشعر ما برحت  
تُبكي الكريم بمنهلٍ ومكنون  
رأيتها وأنا في الحق لم أرها  
لكنه طربٌ للشعر يعرفوني  
تُحيل كل فتى مرّت بخاطره  
وكل بنتٍ إلى ليلي ومجنون  
تُميل من قدها ما قد تُميل به  
أئمة الناس من دينٍ إلى دين  
ولو رأى وجهها القديسُ قال لنا  
لا بأس بالذنب بين الحين والحين  
ويدخل النارَ فيها أمةٌ 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 poetry<sup>1</sup>  
 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 Majnun<sup>2</sup> 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 heaven<sup>3</sup> 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.

This poem posits some challenges when translating it to English. On the cultural level, the comparison of the beloved with a doe is one of the major topoi of classical Arabic love poetry. Historically, poets associated their beloveds with does as they share beautiful features such as stunning eyes and pleasing contours of the body. Because there is no equivalent metaphorical image in the Anglophone literature, I decided to preserve the original image of the doe and added a footnote to explain the reference. This is what I prefer to call "cultural translation." The second example in this poem is the literary reference to the story of Laila and Majnun. Majnun, which means "possessed by spirits" or "crazy," was the name given to the seventh-century Arab poet Qays ibn Mulawwah when he pronounced his obsessive passion for Layla in elegiac lyrics. The late 12th-century poet Nizami wrote the best-known version of this tragic story after he collected many of the widely dispersed traditional versions (of the story) and wove them into his great narrative poem. The third example that is worth mentioning are the concepts of "أنمة الناس" and "قديس". Coming from the semantic domain of religion, these terms already refer to various faith traditions where sometimes, in one faith per se, there are multiple denominations and differences in beliefs and practices, as well as nomenclatures. While I opted for a more general term (أنمة الناس: clergymen) as it refers to the official leaders of the religious activities of a particular group of believers (it can be Islam, Christianity, or Judaism), I kept "قديس" as "saint" because this concept is familiar across the various Christian denominations. According to encyclopedia Britannica, a saint<sup>4</sup> is a "holy person, believed to have a special relationship to the sacred as well as moral perfection or exceptional teaching abilities." The meaning of the verse in the poem requires that emphasis on the moral holiness that can be easily and willingly subverted.

On the stylistic level, I decided to break up some verses into two because they were long and for the sake of fluidity. Moreover, this poem is rife with verses that are marked by fronting and pre-posing. These rhetorical tools enable a speaker or writer to front whatever he/she wishes for purposes of meaning, or order of importance, or chronological order.

Overall, though Al-Barghouti eschews punctuation in this poem, his poetry usually employs a lean economy of images, allegories, and sentiments that flow smoothly from line to line. In an [interview](#) with Amira Howeidi from the newspaper "Ahram Weekly," Tamim Al-Barghouti attests

<sup>1</sup> The doe is admired for its intelligence, beauty, and elegant movement.

<sup>2</sup> This is a poem composed by the Persian poet Nizami Ganjavi based on a semi-historical Arab story about the 7th century Nejd

Bedouin poet, Qays ibn al-Mullawah, and his ladylove, Layla bint Mahdi (or Layla al-Aamiriya).

<sup>3</sup> A Houris is one of the beautiful virgins provided in paradise for all faithful Muslims.

<sup>4</sup> <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

Housseem 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 of 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*).