

Yaratıcılık ve Çeviri: Celâlettin Rûmî'nin Arapça ve İngilizce Şiirleri*

Rawad ALHASHMI¹

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Etik Bildirim:
lotusjournal@selcuk.edu.tr

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Öz

13. yüzyıl Fars İslam şairlerinden biri olan Celâlettin Rumi (1207-1273), insanlık tarihinin en büyük mutasavvıf şairlerinden biri olarak kabul edilir. Mirası yüzyıllarca hayatta kalmış ve eserleri çeviri kapısından geçerek dillerin eşliğini aşmış ve diğer kültürlerin istifadesine sunulmuştur. Mevlâna, (Gönül hocasının ismini koyduğu) büyük divanını Divan-ı Şemsi Tebrizi'deki şiirlerini ağırlıklı olarak Farsça, bazı şiirlerini Arapça, bazılarını Türkçe ve birkaçını da Yunanca olarak yazmıştır. Farsça eserlerinin birçoğu son birkaç yüzyılda İngilizceye ve diğer Avrupa dillerine çevrilmiş ve bu çeviriler, Mevlâna ve tasavvufun Batı dünyasına tanıtılmasında çok önemli bir rol oynamıştır. Bilindiği üzere Mevlâna Arapçayı çok sevmektedir ve onun kalbinde Sami dillerinden olan bu dilin için özel bir yeri vardır.

Ancak Mevlâna'nın yazılarındaki Arapçanın önemine rağmen Arapça şiirleri, kapsamlı bir şekilde tercüme edilen Farsça şiirlerin aksine, nadiren tercüme ve analiz edilmiştir. Bu yüzden, Mevlâna'nın Arapça şiirlerinin İngilizce 'ye çevrilmesindeki yetersizlik ve bunların şerhi oldukça merak uyandırıcıdır. Sadece birkaç bilim adamı, en önemlilerinden biri Franklin Lewis, Arapça şiirleri tercüme ve şerh etmeye çalışmıştır. Bu çalışma Mevlâna'nın yazılarında Arapçanın önemine ışık tutmakta, ardından Nesreen Akhtarkhavari'nin ve Anthony Lee'nin Kurtarıcı Aşk: Rumi'nin Arapça Şiirleri (2016) adlı eserinden yaptıkları çeviriyi incelemektedir. Aynı zamanda Rumi'nin Arapçadaki şiirsel ifadesinin estetik gücünün İngilizce 'ye çevrilirken kaybolmaması için çeviride yaratıcılığın ne kadar önemli olduğu da ele alınmaya çalışılmıştır.²

Anahtar Kelimeler: Celâlettin Rumi, Arapça, Tercüme, Yaratıcılık.

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¹ Trablus Üniversitesi ve Ghary Üniversitesi, Çeviri Departmanı, Trablus, Libya, E posta, rawadfreelancer@gmail.com
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-4592-2717

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Creativity And Translation: Jalāl Al-Dīn Rūmī's Poems Between Arabic And English*

Rawad ALHASHMI³

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Abstract

Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207–1273), a 13th-century Persian Islamic poet, is considered one of the greatest Sufi mystic poets in the history of humanity. His legacy has survived many centuries and crossed the threshold of languages through the door of translation, enabling his oeuvre to access other cultures. Rumi composed his poems predominantly in Persian (Farsi), some poems in Arabic, a few poems in Turkish, and fewer in Greek, as in his magnum opus, *Divan-e Shams-e Tabrizi*, (which was named after his spiritual teacher). Many of his Persian works have been translated into English and other European languages over the past few centuries, and these translations have played a paramount role in introducing Rumi and Sufism to Western audiences. Not surprisingly, Rumi loves Arabic, and he has a special place in his heart for this Semitic tongue. However, despite the importance of Arabic in Rumi's writing, his Arabic poems are seldom translated or analyzed, unlike Persian poems, which are extensively translated and examined. Hence, the paucity of translating Arabic poems of Rumi into English and their analysis is quite curious. Only a few scholars have tried their hands at translating and examining the Arabic poems of Rumi most notably Franklin Lewis. This essay sheds light on the significance of Arabic in Rumi's writings, and it then examines Nesreen Akhtarkhavari's and Anthony Lee's translation of *Love Is My Savior: The Arabic Poems of Rumi* (2016). It also seeks to address how the power of creativity in translation is crucial in rendering or reconciling the aesthetic characteristics of Rumi's Arabic poetic expression into English.

Keywords: Jalal al-Din Rumi, Arabic Language, Translation, Creativity.

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It is declared that scientific and ethical principles have been followed while carrying out and writing this study and that all the sources used have been properly cited.

³ University of Tripoli and University of Gharyan, rawadfreelancer@gmail.com ORCID ID: 0000-0002-4592-2717

Introduction

Rumi is one of the greatest mystic poets of all time. His legacy continues to inspire and influence many people across the globe. Interestingly, Rumi wrote his poetry in all languages that he knew: Persian, Arabic, Turkish, and Greek. His *Divan-e Shams-e Tabrizi* or the *Dīwān-e Kabīr* appeared in these languages, albeit predominantly written in Persian. The translation of Rumi's poems into Western languages like French and German started in the late 1700s by Western orientalists. English translations, however, only appeared in the late 1800s, with one of the earliest English translators being Reynold Alleyne Nicholson (1868–1945). The interest in translating Rumi continued to grow in the 20th century, and these translations have played a significant role in introducing Rumi and Sufism to Western audiences. However, most of these translations have faced criticism for distorting Rumi's original works, particularly by removing cultural context and Islamic references. Perhaps one of the most notorious translations of Rumi's work is the American poet and writer Coleman Barks. Although he does not know Persian or Arabic, Barks relies on Reynold Nicholson's and Arthur Arberry's previous translations to produce what he calls versions rather than translations (Azadibougar and Patton 2015, p. 173). Surprisingly, his versions, which he started to produce in the 1980s have popularized Rumi, especially in the United States making him more appealing to the American culture. Here, it is important to point out that Barks's translation has secularized Rumi and divorced him from Islam. Despite that, Barks' versions of Rumi have had a strong impact on American culture, and "UNESCO made 2007 the 'Year of Rumi'" (2015, p. 174). Such a high profile of Rumi in the United States and the West is dissimilar from Arabic culture.

Generally, for Arab readers, Rumi is a man of faith through his devotion to God and his love for Islam as profoundly expressed in his poems. However, reading Rumi in most English translations doesn't reflect the same image as the original. As a result, Rumi's works are often perceived in English as those of a mystical, spiritual poet, and teacher of love, or all at the same time. Thus, the reading experiences between the original Arabic and the English translation of Rumi's poetry diverge, creating different representations in each language. Nevertheless, the most recent translation of Rumi's poems, which will be analyzed below, offers a fresh and creative translation to English readers. It is important to point out that the art of translating poetry from Arabic to English requires creative solutions to address translation challenges related to language, culture, religion, and aesthetics. In this context, creativity holds immense power in the realm of poetry translation. When wielded judiciously,

it allows for the seamless transmission of meaning, preserving the spirit of the original work, and imparting its aesthetic impact to the reader. On the other hand, excessive or misguided creativity can lead to unintended consequences and alter the original work in the process of translation. Akhtarkhavari and Lee are aware of the complexity of the task of translating Rumi's poems from Arabic to English, so they rely on their creativity to render the poetic legacies of Rumi from the Middle Ages to the contemporary Anglophone world, albeit in a modern tone. In what follows, this paper sheds light on the significance of Arabic in Rumi's writing and is subsequently followed by an examination of Akhtarkhavari's and Lee's translation of some poems from *Love Is My Savior: The Arabic Poems of Rumi* (2016).

The Impact of Arabic on Rumi's Expression: Inspirational Poetics

Jalal al-Din is a compound Arabic name, which literally means "Majesty of religion." His given full name is Jalal al-Din Mohammad Balkh, but he is known in the West as Rumi, which denotes "Roman" in Arabic. The designation of the name is a reminder of the Byzantine Empire, also known as the Eastern Roman Empire, which lasted from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages. Escaping from the threat of Mongols, Rumi and his family moved to Anatolia—present-day Konya, located in the Southern region of Turkey. Rumi retains this name because of his settling in Anatolia, which "was part of the former Roman Empire" and accordingly assumed the toponym Rumi (Burns 2004, p. 111). Apart from his name, Arabic language played an important role in inspiring Rumi's poetry. Needless to say, he orchestrates numerous Arabic lines in his epic *Mathnawi*, and he explicitly states in this diwan that: "Speak Persian, though Arabic is sweeter: Love indeed hath a hundred other tongues" (qtd. in Akhtarkhavari and Lee 2016, p. xxiv). This genuine statement unravels Rumi's fondness for Arabic, while suggesting that love is universal and can be expressed in countless languages. It also implies that he gives preference to Arabic over his native tongue, Persian. This is perhaps due to the divine spark of Arabic language enabling Rumi to exercise his faith, recite the Quran, and connect with God.

Strikingly, despite the importance of Arabic in Rumi's writing, his Arabic poems are rarely translated or studied, unlike the Persian poems, which have been translated many times and extensively analyzed in the Anglophone world, attracting much scholarly attention, especially his manga opera, *Diwan-e Shams-e Tabiz* and *Masnawi*, "Spiritual Couplets," which Jawid Mojaddedi describes as "The Koran in Persian." However, only a few scholars have translated and studied the Arabic poems in Rumi's writing, most notably Franklin Lewis, among a few others. As such, it raises an intriguing question about such a scholarly gap in the literature as

well as Rumi's reception in the West. As a matter of fact, Rumi's admiration for Arabic is no *secret*. His incorporation of Quranic verses and *hadith*, the Prophet Mohammad's sayings into his Persian verses are a testimony thereof. Furthermore, his inspiration of classical Arabic poetry, particularly that of Abu Al-Tayyeb al-Mutanabbi (915–965 A.D) is apparent in his works. In this regard, Lewis aptly notes:

He [Rumi] appreciated the poetry of al-Mutanabbî, even though he represented the professional class of panegyrists. Aflâki (Af 623-4) has Rumi reading Mutanabbî at nights for pleasure, a practice which Shams al-Din condemned and tried to wean him of. Rumi quotes from Mutanabbî's poetry in *Fihe mâ fih* and also in the *Masnavi*, so Shams did not succeed in rooting this poet out of Rumi's memory. (2000, p. 315)

This powerful quote illustrates the significance of Arabic in Rumi's life and his appreciation of Arabic poetry. Rumi pursued learning Arabic and went to Syria where he “received a traditional religious studies-education in Aleppo and Damascus, including the study of Hanafi law, Koran, Hadith, and theology” (James 2019, p. 366). The serious endeavors of Rumi in mastering Arabic in Syria led him to read al-Mutanabbi, one of the iconic figures in Arabic literature, whose poetry still resonates today. “Rumi obviously had an excellent command of Arabic, not only as a reading language, but as a language in which he could compose poems, deliver sermons and so on” (Lewis 2000, p. 315). In his journey to learn Arabic, Rumi became acquainted with *Kalila and Dimna*, a collection of Oriental stories of Indian origin, which was translated into Arabic by Ibn al-Muqaffa in the 8th-century. In this light, Annemarie Schimmel observes that “Most of Maulana's Animal stories in the *Mathnawi* are taken from *Kalilah wa Dimna*” (2001, p. 36). The references to these significant literary works in Rumi's writings reflect the colorful spectrums of his *divans* while denoting great admiration of Arabic. Moreover, his mastering of classical Arabic also opened his eyes to *Sufism*, allowing him to read Abu Talib al-Makki's *Qut al-qulub (The Nourishment of Hearts)*, which is highly regarded as the handiest treatise on Sufism (Schimmel 2001, p. 36). Hence, Arabic has a paramount influence on Rumi's life in various ways.

Creativity and Translation: Analysis of Translating *Love Is My Savior*

In Arabic corpus, the first collection of Rumi's poems in Arabic, entitled, *Al-Diwn al-Arabi li-Maulana Jallal al-Din al-Rumi* was introduced by al-Basheer al-Ghwaaji and published in 2011. The scarcity of translating Rumi's Arabic poems into English is inquisitive. *Love Is My Savior* “is the first English translation dedicated to Rumi's Arabic poems” (Akhtarkhavari and Lee 2016, p. xx). As such, the selected Arabic poems in this book become available to

English readers after their fresh translation by Akhtarkhavari and Lee. It is noteworthy that these poems are written in medieval Arabic prose, abundant with rich poetic elements, deep connotations, and an array of literary, spiritual, cultural, and religious references that are unfamiliar to English-speaking audiences. Such characteristics make it challenging to convey the sophisticated qualities of Arabic to contemporary English audiences. Thus, in this section, I examine Akhtarkhavari's and Lee's translation of Rumi's *Love Is My Savior: The Arabic Poems of Rumi* (2016) with attention to the following poems: "Rejoice in Silence," "He Stole My Heart!" and "Peace Is the Path." In doing so, I highlight how Akhtarkhavari and Lee explored their creative endeavors and collaborated to translate Rumi's Arabic poems, attempting to render and reconcile the aesthetic and power of the original Arabic in English translation.

The task of translating Rumi's Arabic poetry into English is a formidable one, given the intricate and sophisticated nature of the Arabic prose, abundant with rich poetic elements, deep connotations, and an array of literary, spiritual, cultural, and religious references. Akhtarkhavari and Lee are aware of these complexities and attempt to bring the essence of Rumi's poems to English readers. According to them, "The power of Rumi's verse has survived the test of centuries. The problem that confronts the translator is how to bring these verses into English in language that will retain that power" (Akhtarkhavari and Lee 2016, p. xx). Against this background, a literal translation is not a suitable approach when it comes to translating Rumi's poetry. Such a method is inherently limited and provides a single-dimensional representation of the source text, particularly when the languages in question, like Arabic and English, are not from the same language family. Arabic belongs to an Afro-Asiatic language family called Semitic languages like Hebrew, Amharic, etc., whereas English is an Aryan language extended from the Indo-European languages family like French, Greek, Persian, Hindi, etc. As such, it poses a challenge, which is compounded by the intricate nature of the task, where a literal approach is not feasible in most cases, insofar as it leaves no space for creativity. Don Paterson argues, "literal translation can be useful in providing us with a black-and-white snapshot of the original" (1999, pp. 357–358). Hence, it leaves no space for creativity, and it is impossible to overcome untranslatability. On the contrary, free translation presents a multitude of options – a vibrant array of possibilities – for the skilled translator to turn to in instances of difficulty or even untranslatability. Here, creativity assumes significance in invoking poetic translations, insofar as it plays a vital role in solving such dilemmas, offering creative solutions to any obstacles that may arise. Under

the realm of creativity, translators are no longer limited to finding a solution, but rather, they can craft their own. In this sense, creativity in translation is *the art of the impossible*.⁴ However, it must be used with caution, as excessive creativity may result in a loss of the original spirit and distort the intended meaning of the source text.

English Translation	Original Arabic	Literal Translation
<p>Rejoice in Silence</p> <p>People, rejoice! His gate is open wide.</p> <p>We are not alone—we're saved at his side.</p> <p>People, rejoice! This is the day of grace!</p> <p>Your lover holds the Holy Book in place.</p> <p>Don't fret about the things that you have lost. (Akhtarkhavari and Lee</p>	<p>أبشروا بصمت أبشروا يا قوم هذا فتح باب قد نجوتم من شتات الاجتراب افرحوا قد جاء ميقات الرضا من حبيب عنده أم الكتاب قال "لا تأسوا على ما فاتكم"</p>	<p>Rejoice in Silence</p> <p>People, rejoice! This is an open door.</p> <p>You have been saved from the diaspora of expatriation.</p> <p>People, rejoice! The time of satisfaction has arrived.</p> <p>From a lover who holds the holy book.</p> <p>Don't fret about the things that you have lost.</p>

⁴ It is noteworthy that this phrase is the same as the second part of Peter Robinson's textbook, *Poetry & Translation: The Art of the Impossible* (2010). Here, I would like to emphasize that my phrase is more specific about the indispensable connection between creativity and translation, and how they go hand and hand in translating poetry from Arabic to English. Whereas Robinson's title is more comprehensive in that it deals with "the interactive processes of reading and writing poetry composed in mother tongues and in translation" as well as "the paradox of good translators of poetry are adepts at doing the impossible" (2010, p. x).

2016, p. 5 [boldface mine]).		
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In his review, Muhammad Isa Waley observes that the title of one of the poems: ‘Love Is My Savior,’ which is also the title of the collection, is not available in the original nor is attributed to Rumi. Instead, the original title of the Arabic phrase means “Love Is My Neighbour,” which has a strong resonance in the original, but because of the translators’ choice, this significance is left behind and replaced by “Savior,” reflecting Christian flavor to their audiences (Waley 2017, pp. 187–188). Nevertheless, Waley concludes that the translation is good news for English readers. Akhtarkhavari and Lee have harnessed their creativity to the fullest, collaborating as an Arabic translator, and English poet to translate Rumi’s poems. Through this fruitful collaboration, they have largely succeeded in bringing Rumi’s poetry from the medieval era to the contemporary English world, while making some necessary alterations and compromises.

The selected verses for the analysis below are presented in tables, divided into three columns to show the readers a clear picture of translation by comparing Akhtarkhavari’s and Lee’s translation with the original Arabic and its translation with a literal approach side by side.

These lines are redolent with profound philosophical truths, expressed by powerful language to signify lavish praise for the holy, thus suggesting a notion of promised *utopia*. The speaker enthusiastically addresses his people, urging them to rejoice as God saved them from the diaspora. This is also reflected in the translation, albeit with some modifications. The first line can be translated literally as “People, rejoice! This is an open door,” but such a literal rendering is naïve, invoking a black-and-white snapshot and thereby failing to convey the profound significance of the source text. To that end, the translators interpreted this verse freely to “People, rejoice! His gate is open wide” by shifting the singular possessive pronoun “his” to refer to God while conveying the essence of meaning that God opens his Gate to save people. The second line, which reads verbatim as “you have been saved from the diaspora of expatriation,” is obviously ponderous in a literal approach. So, the translators employed

creative interpretation to maintain the original's aesthetic effect and capture the power of the original language while conveying the meaning correspondingly, which can be deemed justifiable. The translation reads: "We are not alone—we're saved at his side." As such, it is an illuminating use of creativity. However, shifting the second pronoun "you" to the first-person pronoun "we," is the only issue here in that the speaker is also included, unlike the original Arabic. The translators missed the point in that the speaker serves a crucial function as a messenger between God and people, but changing the pronoun from second to first person pronoun cuts this link. The third verse, rather than sticking to a straight literal translation of "People, rejoice! The time of satisfaction has arrived," is given a more artistic treatment by rendering it as "People, rejoice! This is the day of grace!" They also include two exclamation marks in "rejoice and grace" to emphasize the sense of excitement. In the fourth line, the translation shifts from "From a lover who holds the holy book" to "Your lover holds the Holy Book in place," adding "place" to maintain the rhyme as in the previous verse and adding "your" to establish a direct association with God. Here, the translators have employed a rhyming scheme in the first two lines with "wide and side," as well as in the third and fourth lines with "grace and place" to attain a pleasing effect artistically, thereby mimicking the original's aesthetic appeal. Whereas they used a literal approach in translating the Qur'anic verse: "Don't fret about the things that you have lost" besides using a footnote to indicate that this verse is cited from the Quran. In doing so, they identified the Quranic verse and made it clear to their readers. Aesthetically speaking, the translators have ingeniously employed a rhyming scheme in the first two lines with "wide and side," as well as in the third and fourth lines with "grace and place," to attain a pleasing aesthetic. Ultimately, these lines showcase the translators' imaginative use of language to reconcile the aesthetic effect and the beauty of the original verses. To their credit, they also preserve a religious Islamic tone in translating the Qur'anic verse and remain true to its literal meaning.

English Translation	Original Arabic	Literal Translation
The silence of fidelity. No words. Be silent! Know the secret of silence. Be patient! God guards his truth in silence (Akhtarkhavari and Lee 2016, p. 5).	إن في صمت الولا لطف الخطاب قد سكتنا فافهموا سر السكوت يا كرام الله أعلم بالصواب	The silence of loyalty is the politeness of speech. We remain silent, so understand the secret of silence. O honorable people, Allah knows the truth.

The first line is roughly translated in a literal sense into “the silence of loyalty is the politeness of speech,” which, while carrying wisdom, lacks poetic resonance in English. Hence, the translators chose a free interpretation method to effectively render a strong echo of the original in a parallel manner: “The silence of fidelity. No words.” Nevertheless, in the second and third lines, they have inserted a commanding tone in English with “Be silent! and be patient!” which is not present in the source text. This is problematic because “be patient,” for example, commands people to show signs of calm denoting that they are not patient. Another option would be “have patience,” which is more formal and less commanding while implying that people are already patient, but they still need to exercise more patience without a position of authority or control. The original passage read literally like this:

“We are silent, so understand the secret of silence.

O honorable people, Allah knows the truth.”

In this particular example, Akhtarkhavari’s and Lee’s translation comes across as unwarranted, inasmuch as they alter the original tone and shift the meaning to some degree by shifting the pronoun to impose a commanding tone, which is absent in the original language.

English Translation	Original Arabic	Literal Translation
He Stole my Heart!	سبا قلبي	Stole my Heart
Brother! See the Beauty who stole my heart! Stole it!	أخي! أرايت جمالا سبا القلوب سبا؟	My brother! Did you see Beauty steal hearts stealing?
And don’t you hear the voice that cleaned my soul? Cleaned it!	وهل أتاك حديث جلا العقول جلا؟	Did the talks come to you to exalt your minds exalting?
Aren’t you the one looking for immortality in music?	ألست من يتمنى الخلود في طرب؟	Are you not the one who wishes immortality in glee?
Look up! He comes to you now. He comes! (Akhtarkhavari and Lee 2016, p. 11).	ألا انتبه وتيقظ، فقط أتاك أتى	Pay attention and wake up! He is coming to you now, coming.

In this poem, the translators have dexterously captured the power of Rumi’s language and the dialogic nature of these verses. By utilizing repetition in the first, second, and fourth lines,

punctuated with exclamation marks, they correspondingly convey the meaning of the original in English, creating a similar aesthetic impact for English-speaking readers. In addition, they maintain the conversational tone and dialogic nature of the poem in translation, exhorting the reader to engage with the rich imagery of the poem, which, in turn, is imbued with an urge to educate. The strong emphasis on excitement and emotions follows a similar pattern as the original employing a straightforward grammatical structure, which results in aesthetically pleasant outcomes. The translators successfully establish a comparable aesthetic function in modern English while ending the first and second lines with the neutral pronoun “it,” not present in the Arabic text, and adding “now” in the fourth line to emphasize the present moment.

Peace Is the Path	منهاج الطلب
Peace is the path of search. Patience is enchantment to me.	السلم منهاج الطلب، الحلم معارج الطرب
With fire he tests the gold . . . with light he tests my loyalty.	والنار صراف الذهب، والنور صراف الولا
Love, my lamp in darkness . . . and his absence cremates my heart.	العشق مصباح العشا، والهجر طباخ الحشا
Love's union is my cure, you crushed my very soul in me (Akhtarkhavari and Lee p. 69 [boldface mine]).	والوصل ترياق الغشا، يامن على قلبي مشا

The Arabic verses in this poem express wisdom, peace, love, compassion, loyalty, spirituality, and excitement, and are poetically charged with vivid imagery illuminating didactic values in their manifestations. These universal themes echo in translation, conveying sagacious insights to English readers in their terms. Akhtarkhavari and Lee orchestrate their utmost creativity to deal with challenging issues while bringing the essence of the poem to English readers. For example, the boldface verse is almost impossible to translate without creativity. It reads verbatim as: “A relationship is the antidote for the membrane; you are the one who walks into my heart.” While the first sentence is ponderous, the second part may seem funny and unrealistic. Therefore, they artistically rendered it as: “Love’s union is my cure, you crushed my very soul in me.” Such a translation is very effective in capturing the power of the source text in this example. All in all, it has been established that literal translation does not do justice to Rumi’s language while emphasizing that creativity is a fundamental element in bringing the essence of his poems to English readers.

Conclusion

Although much ink has been spilled on studying Rumi's Persian verses, Arabic poems are less studied and translated. It is hoped to see more translations and critical analysis of Rumi's Arabic poetry to English—given the importance of the Arabic tongue in Rumi's poetic expressions. Furthermore, translating Rumi from Arabic to English requires creative solutions to deal with translation challenges related to language, religion, culture, and aesthetics. Through their collaborative efforts, Akhtarkhavari and Lee demonstrate how creativity and translation can work hand-in-hand in translating Rumi's poems into English. For the most part, they produce a brilliant English translation that captures the aesthetic elements, religious references, and some of the power and excitement of the original. On the other hand, this analysis also reveals how creative translation can result in alterations, such as changes in pronouns and tones when utilized more radically. This highlights the delicate balance of creativity in translating Rumi's poetry, which is a double-edged sword, requiring deft handling. *Overall, Rumi's poetic legacies to the world are worth more critical studies to better understand the creative power of Rumi's language and the nuances between the original and translation.*

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