

## A Rhyme-Driven Approach to Poetry Translation: Arabic Renderings of Shakespeare's Sonnet 146

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### Abstract

Poetry translation demonstrates a significant obstacle, which lies in seeking a balance between aesthetic elements such as rhyme and rhythm and thematic and linguistic fidelity. This study examines the impact of a rhyme-driven translation approach on achieving textual fluency, taking Arabic translations of Shakespearean poetry as a case study. The research combines qualitative textual analysis with quantitative empirical data in order to examine how rhyme preservation influences translation choices, employing a mixed-method approach. Findings reveal that prioritising rhyme while integrating domestication, literalism, adaptation, covert and overt translation, and foreignisation results in a natural and fluent target text, depending on the translator's literary and linguistic capabilities. Empirical results further confirm this fluency, as 68.41% of participants expressed that they perceived the translation as an original Arabic poem. These insights contribute to the literature on poetry translation strategies, demonstrating that a hybrid translation approach can effectively preserve both the aesthetic and structural integrity of the original.

**Keywords:** translation studies, poetry translation, rhyme-driven approach in poetry translation, Shakespearean poetry in Arabic, aesthetic translation of poetry to Arabic, translation of Shakespearean sonnets

### 1. Introduction

Translating poetry is a popular practice that features numerous impediments. Translators tend to use elucidations and prose translations to convey the meaning behind each poetic stanza. This hinders the connection between readers who are eager to know the meaning behind foreign poems in their own native languages. Poetry translation is not only intriguing to those who do not speak the poem's original language but also to those who speak it as well, as one would be interested to read the same content in different languages and see how the same thing may be expressed in varied manners. Considering the linguistic parameters that change from one language

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to another, people would reckon that poetry cannot be translated, at least while keeping the poetic aesthetic features.

Verily, poetry can be translated while keeping certain aesthetic features. Yet, it is controversial whether this maintains the same content as the original poem or modifies its content and makes it an independent work only similar to the original one. Other perspectives are sparked, tackling the relatedness between the source language and the target language and how it impacts the process of translation. It is also paramount to identify salient elements of a poem and which of them are central to conveying the same effect to the target readers.

This study tackles a case study of Shakespeare's Sonnet for various considerations. Arabic is a broad language that is supposed to be able to express different shades of meaning in literary forms. The sonnet is a poem rich with feelings, figures of speech, and aesthetic devices, which is expected to enrich the current literature and treat various literary and poetic possibilities through a limited corpus.

The study investigates whether it is possible to translate poetry in such a way that literalism, foreignisation, and domestication can all be combined in a harmonious concoction. Initially, the research follows the same rhyme scheme of the original poem while translating it, undergoing the necessary modifications to produce an aesthetic poem-like target text. Alongside this, literal fidelity is questioned in terms of its occurrence, given the translator's aim to maintain the poetic aesthetics. The research problem can be formulated in the following question: Can a rhyme-driven, literal yet aesthetically nuanced translation approach produce both a text that is faithful to the source and naturally fluent for the target audience?

This paper hypothesises that poetry can be translated in a way that preserves both the rhyme and the literal meaning of the original poem without distorting the author's intended ideas or excessively foreignising the poem. Accordingly, the research is pillared on the following objectives:

- To assess whether maintaining the original poem's rhyme pattern can be integrated effectively with literal translation without compromising the author's intent.
- To explore how the use of domestication and foreignisation can be harmoniously fused in the translation process.
- To gather and analyse empirical data (e.g., reader perceptions) to determine if a rhyme-driven approach results in a fluent target text that is perceived as original.
- To understand how aesthetic elements such as rhyme influence thematic modification and overall translation quality, while still maintaining literal accuracy.

Correspondingly, the research aims to answer the following questions:



- To what extent can the original rhyme scheme of a poem be preserved through a literal translation approach without altering the author's core ideas?
- How does the translation balance domestication with foreignisation, particularly under a rhyme-driven strategy?
- How do readers perceive the fluency and originality of the translated poem, especially in light of its aesthetic modifications?
- What role do aesthetic elements (e.g., rhyme, rhythm) play in modifying the theme and structure of the poem during translation?

## 2. Literature Review

The wide array of poetry's parameters made it subject to an everlasting discussion, particularly in terms of how it should be translated and whether or not it can be. To approach the studies and theories tackling the translation of poems, it is indispensable to consider literary translation as the founding cornerstone. The theorisation for the principal types of translation may be traced to the elucidations of Dryden (1680), who coined three types of translation: metaphrase (word-for-word), paraphrase (meaning-based), and imitation (producing a new work in the target language).

In his book *The Task of the Translator*, Benjamin (1923) sought a more unified approach, identifying what he called "the spirit of the text" — the core reason for which the writer wrote his own text. Nida (1964) engaged in a more scientific framework, highlighting the equivalent and the equivalent effect, and proceeding with different types of equivalents. Such was the map of Holmes (1972), which was generalised for literary works as well through a scientific scheme. These studies were mostly the ones on which later views and analyses on poetic translation were based.

### 2.1. *The (Im)Possibility of Translating Poetry*

Poetry is often superficially envisioned as an untranslatable element for a wide range of linguists. Jacobson (1959) states that "Poetry by definition is untranslatable. Only creative transposition is possible." He envisioned the correlation between metres in poems and the meaning of poems as impossible. Benjamin (1923) similarly noted that poetry translation is a flawed process, as the interplay between its elements seems to produce a mismatch in the final product.

Nonetheless, the aforesaid may be a mere restricted view. Nida (1964) impugns the advocates of the impossibility of translating poetry, pointing out that the translator in every type of translation should seek the equivalent effect. Lefevere (1975) stipulates seven strategies for translating poetry: phonemic translation, word-for-word translation, metrical translation, prose translation, blank/free verse translation, imitation, and rhymed translation. The present study follows the last of these — rhymed translation — which is dedicated to producing rhymes imitating the poem in the source language.



Among the studies that confirmed the feasibility of Lefevere's (1975) strategies is the one led by Chongyue et al. (2010), integrating his strategies with Chinese translation methods of metrical English poetry. Masoudzade and Rad (2023) used Lefevere's (1975) seven strategies as a theoretical framework to assess English translations of poems written by the Persian poet Sohrab Sepeheri.

## **2.2. *The Visibility of the Translator***

The footprint of the translator throughout the target text is a paramount point of discussion. Berman (1985), in *The Ethics of Translation*, envisions the visibility of the translator as a salient feature in any translation, relating this to the act of foreignising the text — leaving intentional marks that usher the reader to the source culture in what he calls "l'épreuve de l'étranger" (the trial of the foreign). Venuti (1995) points out that Anglophone cultures practise a kind of hegemony, directing translators to domesticate the texts translated into English, and argues that a translator's liberty is to be marked through a proper process of foreignisation.

Nonetheless, the defenders of Skopos Theory tend to back domestication. The translator's role will always show up, provided the efforts put into establishing a connection between the source culture and the target culture (Nord, 1997). Pym (2012) criticises Venuti's stand for foreignisation, highlighting the fact that the translator in domestication is more conspicuous through her/his choices and decisiveness.

## **2.3. *Translating the Sonnets***

Shakespeare's sonnets were not only of great importance to literary scholars but also to translators and translation studies scholars. Eanani (2016) emphasised the barriers that border the translation of the sonnets to Arabic and assessed their previous Arabic translations. Abdulwahhab Ismail (2023) conducted a corpus study comparing the translation of the sonnets into French and Arabic, realising that foreignisation was followed throughout the French translation while domestication was the dominant approach with the Arabic translations. Cottegnies (2023) elaborated on the social ground of the Sonnets' translation in France and its literary tradition.

However, there is still a gap in providing and assessing Arabic translations for the sonnets that could be a cornerstone for translating other poems. Rhymed translation is a prominent strategy that has not received its due in the Arab context. Such translation can encourage Arabic speakers to read foreign poetry by giving a sense as if they are reading an Arabic literary extract.

## **3. Methodology**

The researcher opted for a mixed-method approach to match the requirements of the study. The research merges qualitative and quantitative approaches to test the textual level and its relation to reality through concrete numbers representing a population's perception of the corpus under



study. Baker (1993) emphasises the importance of using a mixed method in dealing with corpus-based studies, as this opens the gate for unveiling cultural and social patterns. This leads to crystallising the functional perspectives of translation, given that the function of a particular corpus is only known through the social framework to which it is directed (House, 2015).

### **3.1. Sampling**

This study incorporates samples from both a corpus and a population. The corpus study includes Shakespeare's Sonnet 146, "My Sinful Earth," which was translated by the researcher into Arabic. The sonnet was chosen because of the rich vocabulary and the connotative and denotative prospects it holds, as well as its diversity in terms of semantic structure, which makes its analysis easier to generalise to other corpora.

As for the sampled population, master's and PhD students and professors at King Fahd School of Translation were selected, totalling 41 participants all specialised in a linguistic combination involving English and Arabic. They were selected to test the visibility of the translator and the extent to which the poem, with all the applied approaches of translation, seems natural.

### **3.2. Data Collection and Instruments**

The study constructs a harmonious mixture between corpus and population data collection. The researcher collected data from the corpus (Shakespeare's Sonnet 146) in a scheme aligned with the theoretical framework. For the population, questionnaires were read orally to participants after the poem had been read to them. The questionnaire contained one primary question — whether the Arabic poem is a translation or an original text. Should the participant answer that it is an original text, no further questions were asked. If identified as a translation, they were asked how they deduced that, and to guess the source poem. Some questionnaires were also distributed online via Google Forms.

### **3.3. Data Analysis and Theoretical Framework**

The qualitative data analysis is based on the theoretical framework of Lefevere's (1975) seven strategies for translating poetry. This theoretical approach leads to the analysis of the poem's translation, with all extractions based on deducing the cases where his strategies were most prominent. The researcher's translation was mainly based on Lefevere's (1975) strategy of Rhymed Translation.

Another analysis model addresses cultural considerations through foreignisation and domestication by Venuti (1995). Adapting the poem to the cultural and aesthetic Arabic norms, the researcher shifted from the English cultural stance to the Arabic one, for the sake of clarity and the invisibility of the translation process. The data resulting from the main survey question measures the extent to which the application of Lefevere's (1975) strategies could enhance the poem's sense of originality, fluency, and clarity.



## 4. Findings and Results

In this section, data is accumulated and analysed for the sake of verifying whether Lefevere's (1975) strategies, namely "rhymed translation," may transfer the poetic essence. Textual analysis serves as the introductory step to dig deep into the textual and aesthetic features in the source text (ST) and the target text (TT). To enhance objectivity, there follows a quantitative analysis with a practical test.

### 4.1. Textual Analysis

The analysis is divided in accordance with the common rhyme — that is, verses with a mutual rhyme in the ST are sectioned and fronted by their equivalents in the TT. Rhymes in both the TT and the ST are highlighted. Features that are compared across different verses are presented following their essential perspective.

#### Lines 1–4

ST (English)	TT (Arabic)
1 <i>Poor soul, the centre of my sinful <u>earth</u></i>	مسكينة أنت يا روح، يا من تَكْتَنِيهِينَ أَرْضِي الْأَثْمَةَ
2 <i>these rebel powers that thee array</i>	تلك القوة العصية التي تَكْتَنِيهِينَ
3 <i>Why dost thou pine within and suffer <u>dearth</u></i>	فمالك كنت فيها تُسْتَصْعِرِينَ، متألّمة
4 <i>Painting thy outward walls so costly <u>gay</u>?</i>	ومالك تبذلين وتبذلين لقاء جدران زائلة تحبكين؟

These lines encapsulate different features conforming to the strategies of Lefevere (1975). The rhymes are rendered in the TT, following the same order as in the ST. In the latter, lines 1 and 3 had /3:θ/ as a rhyme, rendered as /مه/ in the TT. For lines 2 and 4, the rhyme was /ei/, rendered as /ين/ in Arabic. The rhyme choice of the original author was thus preserved.

The rhyme had effects on rendering the meaning in the TT, yet literalism was still relied on. A comparison of line 1 in English to its counterpart in Arabic reveals a high degree of literalism, except for the translation of "centre" to "تكتنهيين," which entailed a transposition from a noun to a verb. Semantic compensation is also pivotal: "تحبكين" encompasses the denotation of both "painting" and "gay," as the Arabic term means to do, make, build, or sew something in a beautiful, showy way.

#### Lines 5–8



ST (English)	TT (Arabic)
5 <i>Why so large cost, having so short a lease,</i>	مقام لك فيها قصير بحمل ألف من البعير،
6 <i>Dost thou upon thy fading mansion spend?</i>	ألقاء ذاك المنزل المهترئ تنفقين؟
7 <i>Shall worms, inheritors of this excess,</i>	فللديدان إذن حاصل هذا المسير؛
8 <i>Eat up thy charge? is this thy body's end?</i>	أهبي إذن لوديعتك من الأكلين؟ أهذه عاقبة الجسد الذي تملكين؟

No different from the previous lines, the ones above followed the same pattern as the ST in terms of rhymes. One may be captivated by the slant rhyme (/i:s/ and /es/) rendered in Arabic as a complete rhyme /ير/ and /ير/. The sixth and eighth lines present a perfect rhyme /end/, rendered through the pronoun /ين/. There was also an internal rhyme, /t/ in "cost" and "short," compensated for through /ير/ in /قصير/. In the fifth line, "costly" was rendered into "يحمل ألف من البعير" which denotes in an Arabic literary register something extremely costly — an instance of domestication adopted both to produce a rhyme and to compensate for collocative aesthetics.

#### Lines 9–12

ST (English)	TT (Arabic)
9 <i>Then soul, live thou upon thy servant's loss</i>	فلك إذن أن على أشلاء خادمك تقتاتين، يا روح،
10 <i>And let that pine to aggravate thy store;</i>	منونته لك مغنم، فكوني من الغانمين
11 <i>Buy terms divine in selling hours of dross;</i>	واشري سويجات أهو لقاء خلد لا يروح
12 <i>Within be fed, without be rich no more:</i>	قوت لك في جوفه، وفاقه إن أنت له تهجرين

Unchangeably, the rhyme in the TT imitates the one in the ST. The first rhyme was /ɒs/ in the ninth and eleventh lines, produced as /روحو/ in the TT. The rhyme /ɔ:(r)/ in lines 10 and 12 appeared in Arabic as /ين/. The rhyme entailed numerous alterations to the TT. In line 9, "loss" was rendered as "أشلاء," a directed interpretation that changed the semantic charge while preserving what the researcher deemed most paramount. Stanza 10 presents a special case of translation based on complete interpretation: "aggravate" in Middle English meant to make greater, encapsulated in



"مغتم," while "let" was rendered as "فكوني," introducing lexical parallelism between "مغتم" and "غانمين." Accordingly, domestication was purely employed throughout this stanza.

*Lines 13–14*

ST (English)	TT (Arabic)
13 <i>So shalt thou feed on Death, that feeds on <u>men</u></i>	فالمنية لك قوت وقوتها بنو بشر
14 <i>And Death once dead, there's no more dying <u>then</u></i>	وإذا المنية زهقت، فلا مزهوق بعد لنواري

In these two lines, Shakespeare used the same rhyme consecutively, and so was the pattern in the TT. The rhyme was /en/ in the ST, rendered as /ري/ in the TT. To make the text short enough for the rhyme to be related to the one under it, "shall" was not reproduced explicitly, causing a transposition from a verbal form in the ST to a nominal form in the TT. The second line starts with a literal translation in the first clause, in contrast to the second clause, which was based on a cultural equivalent.

#### 4.2. Coherence throughout the TT

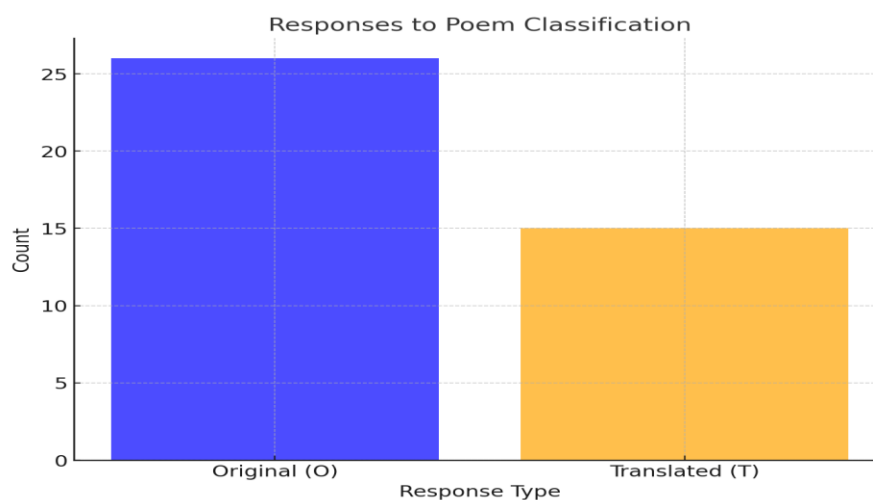
The text consisted of a different cohesive structure, yet in the end, this did not produce a different structure in terms of coherence. Cohesive devices throughout the lines were mainly organised following the pattern of rhymes throughout the poem. Fronting was used even when unemployed in the TT, and was at times not rendered in the TT, though it was in the ST. This can be labelled a poetry translation rhyme-driven approach. As for literalism, it was frequently used so that there could be no deviation from the coherence-based pattern throughout the TT.

#### 4.3. Empirical Analysis

This analysis is a complementary study to the previous corpus-based one, cementing its practical implications. It analyses the responses of a research population completely specialised in different degrees of translation between Arabic and English, based principally on the coherence shown to be found in the TT by the corpus study.

*The Visibility of the Translator*

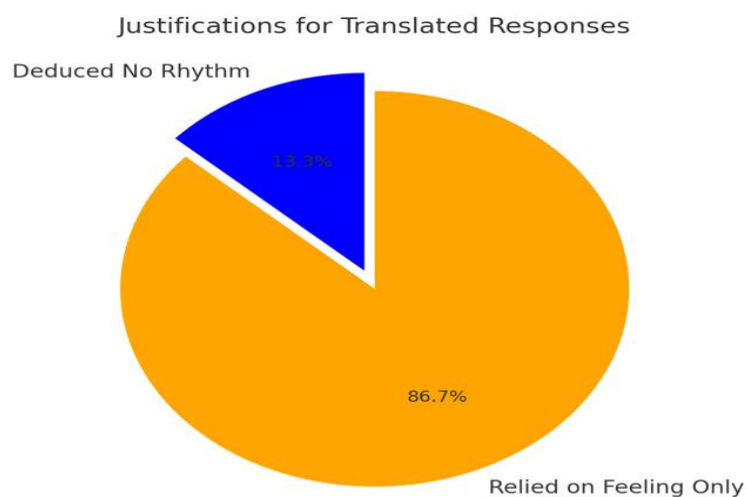


**Figure 1**

*Responses to whether the Text Seems Original or a Translation*

The data in Figure 1 indicate, on the one hand, that the majority answered that the text was an original poem written in Arabic. On the other hand, almost half the population expressed that the text was a translation. Mainly, 26 people out of 41 said they felt the text was linguistically natural and responded that the text is original, while 15 said that the text was translated for different reasons. In terms of the visibility of the translator, the data depict that most participants saw no mark of the translator.

*Indications of Translation in the TT*

**Figure 2**

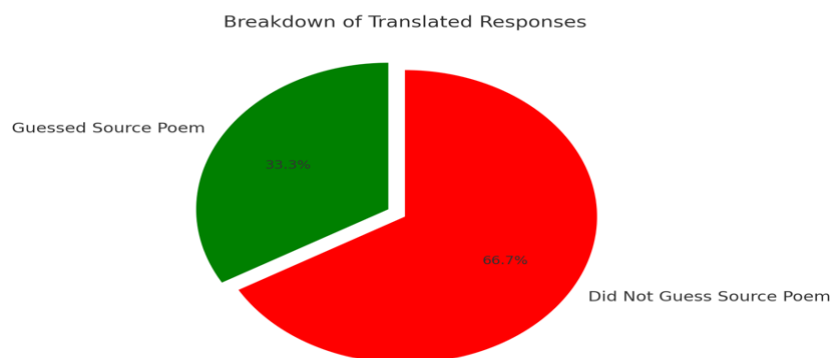
*Justifications for Responding that the Text Was a Translation*



The interviewees who answered that the text was a translation were asked for the reason. The majority answered that they only had a feeling and could not elucidate further. A very small population (13.3%) answered that they deduced no classic Arabic rhythm throughout the TT. The other 86% could not provide any further comments, even after rereading the TT. Their answers orbited around having just a sense — based on no textual particularity — that the text was a translation, meaning the text had no clear indications of the translator's footprint.

#### *Relatedness between the ST and the TT*

**Figure 3**



#### *Percentage of Participants who Guessed the ST*

The data in Figure 3 shows that a part of those who said the text was a translation could relate it to a poem they had already read. Most of the participants who said the text was a translation could not guess the source text, representing 66.7% of the population, while those who guessed the ST were only 33.3%. Significantly, everyone who had previously read the ST could guess it.

#### **4.4. Synthesis**

The findings indicate various facts. The translation strategy that can be sorted out of the herein TT is a rhyme-driven translation approach. It modified the theme and the rhyme throughout most of the poem's parts to keep the rhyme pattern. Additionally, the rhyme behaved the translator to use aesthetic elements, resulting in the use of domestication, while this did not lead to abandoning literal translation and foreignisation. The translator maintained the foreign structures whenever appropriate, and they were also fused with the target culture's structure, producing a fluent, natural combination.

Accordingly, this textual fluency, as a result of a rhyme-driven approach, was confirmed by empirical findings. Most of the interviewees identified no signs of translation throughout the TT, as 68.41% said the text was an original poem written in Arabic. Furthermore, this proves that literalism, if used properly, does not lead to any lack of textual fluency. The textual fluency was



further established by the fact that even those who said the text was translated could not assign that to any lack of textual fluency.

## 5. Discussion

The findings indicated that the rhyme-driven translation approach was paramount in forming the TT. This strategy's crux was altering both theme and rheme in different locations to maintain the rhyme pattern, producing a text governed by aesthetic and domesticated elements. However, literal translation and foreignisation were not abandoned; instead, they were strategically employed, allowing the translator to retain foreign structures when appropriate. Empirical data cemented this textual fluency, as 68.41% of participants perceived the TT as an original Arabic poem with no signs of translation, indicating that the rhyme-driven approach could take off traces of translation while preserving the poem's aesthetic, semantic, and structural integrity.

## 6. Conclusion

Translating poetry is an extremely creative process filled with numerous challenges. Poetry is a unique text, given its intricate parallelism between form (rhyme, rhythm) and content (theme, meaning). This study focused on this issue and was conducted to explore the most feasible strategies to translate poetry and convey its meaning between two different cultures, combining corpus-based data and empirical data.

By analysing the translation of Sonnet 146 through a rhyme-driven approach, the research deduced the effect that the rhyme had on the TT. Thereafter, literalism was observed to occur frequently, indicating that the used approach does not employ full foreignisation but rather relies on a consistent fusion between domestication and foreignisation, as theorised by Venuti (1995), enhancing fidelity to the text and adherence to the target language rules. This was further proved by the empirical data that featured fluency in the TT through the majority of participants who thought the TT was a poem written originally in the target language.

The research's findings impugned various studies in the literature and espoused others. The study showed that approaches claiming poems cannot be translated are inadequate. The research further cemented the practice of translating poetry while considering its parameters that are either to be foreignised or domesticated in accordance with the general perspective of the poem or its particular one related to each verse. The two strategies of rhymed translation and literal translation mentioned by Lefevere (1975) were found to be relevant, and lines were drawn between those two strategies and foreignisation and domestication of Venuti (1995), creating a harmonious concoction between the two tendencies.

The totality of this paper's findings suggests that its approach can be widely applied in translating poetry. Poetry translators should not hesitate to consider replicating the same rhyme



pattern of the source poem in the TT, training themselves to excel in using proper words and expressions whose meaning is very close to those in the ST, constituting a literal translation that does not seem foreign to the readers. Future research should increase the quantity of the corpus under analysis and the empirical population, incorporating diversified categories of participants, to ensure the permanency of the approach suggested by this paper.

## Appendix: The Questionnaire

The following questionnaire was administered to participants both in person and via Google Forms:

### 1. Please read the following poem.

مسكينة أنت يا روح، يا من تكتهين أرضي الأثمة،  
تلك القوة العصية التي تكتفين،  
فمالك كنت فيها شئصغرين، متألمة  
ومالك تبذلين وتبذلين لقاء جدران زائلة تحبكين؟  
مقام لك فيها قصير بحمل ألف من البعير،  
ألقاء ذاك النزل المهترئ تنفقين؟  
فللديان إذن حاصل هذا المسير؛  
أهي إذن لوديعتك من الأكلين؟ أهذه عاقبة الجسد الذي تملكين؟  
فلك إذن أن على أشلاء خادمك تفتاتين، يا روح،  
منونه لك مغتم، فكوني من الغانمين،  
واشري سويغات لهو لقاء خلد لا يروح،  
قوت لك في جوفه، وفاقة إن أنت له تهجرين:  
فالمنية لك قوت وقوتها بنو بشر،  
وإذا المنية زهقت، فلا مزهوق بعد لنواري.

### 2. Is the poem originally written in Arabic, or is it a translation?

Options: Original (أصلية) / Translated (مترجمة)

### 3. Should you have answered that the poem is a translation, then why?

### 4. Should you have answered that the poem is a translation, could you guess the original poem?



## Declarations

**Conflict of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Ethical Approval:** The study involved human participants (questionnaire respondents). Participation was voluntary and anonymous. No personally identifiable information was collected.

**Data Availability:** The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

**Author Contributions:** The author confirms sole responsibility for the conception and design of the study, data collection and analysis, translation of the corpus, and preparation of the manuscript.

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