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Rumi in Russia: A story of translation

Natalia Chalisova | Russia

I

IT is generally agreed that the translation of a great work of literature not only lays down the basis for profound research on this work, but – and it is equally important – shapes the image of the original in the receiving culture. “Translation involves trust”,¹ because the audience trusts the image. Regardless of how well-versed he/she is in the art of translation, the reader still involuntarily takes a beautifully edited book with the name of a genius on the jacket to be a creation of the genius’ own pen. That is why translation also involves responsibility. A story of translation is always instructive; it brings to light some truths hidden not only in the original, but in the receiving culture as well.

The name of Jalal ad-Din Rumi is known to the Russian reader, but the translations of his poems, compared with those of Hafiz, Khayyam or Nizami, have so far been surprisingly few. As we know only too well, the ideological reasons for translating or not translating even one of the greatest works from a certain literary tradition are at times stronger than the aesthetic ones. In Soviet Russia Mavlavi’s teachings constituted highly unsuitable and improper reading material from the Marxist-Leninist point of view,² and Rumi the poet was inseparable from his teachings. Thus of all the classical Persian poets Mavlana has received the least scholarly attention, and that, in its turn, was part of the reason for the modest amount of translations.

¹ Lefevere A., “Translation: Its Genealogy in the West”, in *Translation, History and Culture*, ed. by S. Bassnett and A. Lefevere (pp. 14–28), p. 14.

² See Lewis F. D., *Rumi. Past and Present, East and West*. Oxford, 2000, p. 614.

During the 19th century a keen interest in the religion and culture of its Southern neighbour, Iran, was constantly increasing in Russian society. So the first mentions of the Mavlavi order appeared in the periodicals as early as in the first half of the century.³ Popular descriptions of Persian poetry mention Jalal ad-Din Rumi among the other great names, but do not give any sample poems. For example, P. Lerkh in his article "The seven stars on the sky of Persian poetry"⁴ simply mentions Rumi as the greatest mystic not only of Persia, but of the whole East.

The story of Rumi translations started only in the 20th century, prior to the October revolution, and it was a promising beginning indeed. Mavlana was introduced to the Russian-speaking readers around 1906, when Agaphangel Krimskiy published the third volume of his *History of Persia, its Literature and Dervish Theosophy*.⁵

Professor Krimskiy played a significant part in shaping the development of Russian Iranology. A Ukrainian and Russian Orientalist, he was also a writer, a poet and a translator and possessed a literary gift, a quality critical for any scholar when he/she turns to translation.⁶

Krimskiy's *History of Persia* incorporates history chapters on each period and portrait sections (on Rudaki, Sana'i, Anwari, Haqani, Nizami, Rumi, Sa'di) which include an abundant bibliographical survey of the European works relevant to the case along with examples of poetry, mostly in the author's own translation. In the case of

³ «Пляска дервишей» (The dance of the dervishes) in *Бабочка*, 1830. № 103, p. 412; «Дервиши-плясуны и дервишн-крикуны» (Dervishes the dancers and dervishes the shouters). С франц. О.С. in *Северная пчела*, 1832, №№ 219, 220, 221; «Дервиши-вертуны и дервиши-завыватели» (The turning dervishes and the wailing dervishes). Этнографический эскиз. Берчъ in *Каледоскоп*, 1861, № 24.

⁴ П. Лерхъ, «Семизвездье на небе персидской поэзии» in *Библиотека для чтения*, 1851, Vol. 105, part 3, p. 259.

⁵ «История Персии, ее литературы и дервишеской теософии», Moscow 1903-1906; revised with ample supplements Moscow 1914-1917.

⁶ Krimskiy was born in 1871, Vladimir-Volinskiy, Ukraine. From 1898 through 1919 he worked as a lecturer at the Lazarevskiy Institute in Moscow, Department of Arabic Philology and History of the Moslem East. In 1915 Krimskiy took upon himself the main part of the Iranian literature course and became the leading authority of the time on the Persian Classics. His lecture courses included Arabic language and literature, folklore, history of Islam, Persian and Turkish literature. He was the mentor of most prominent Russian scholars like A. Semenov and V. Minorskiy in Iranian Studies, V. Gordlevskiy in Turkic Studies. When the fierce campaign of Stalin's repressions began, Krimskiy was discharged from all his posts and spent 8 years in disfavour. He was arrested on July 20, 1941, proclaimed an ideologist of Ukrainian nationalism and deported to prison in Kustanay, where he died in the prison hospital.

Rumi, the scholar chose to divide the description into two parts. The essential information on his teachings, based on Western scholarly tradition of the time, is presented in the special chapter on Sufism in the second volume. In the third volume the selection from the Masnavi, ghazals and quatrains follows the survey of Mavlavi's life and works. Krimskiy used two editions of the Masnavi – the Bombay one (1851) and the Lakhnau one (1865) and had at hand the English abridged rendering of the Masnavi made by Edward Whinfield.⁷ Whinfield, whose primary interest was the development of mystical thought, paid most of his attention to Rumi's "experimental" (to use the translator's term) mysticism; he translated the theoretical and ethical passages and gave many stories and parables in short paraphrase. Krimskiy, in his own words (p. 21-22), decided to act vice versa: to concentrate upon the belles-lettres parts, in other words, the stories and parables, and to omit the theosophy parts; he used to render only the most typical lines now and then. However, Krimskiy followed Whinfield in form; his translation is also made in lineated prose, corresponding to the lines of the original poem. The text basis for translation was, of course, poor at that time, but within those limitations the Russian rendering is clear and readable. It is also beautiful in wording and full of that specific "prerevolutionary" charm, which is nowadays lost for good. The stories from the Masnavi in Krimskiy's translation keep the numeration, given by Whinfield; they include "The song of the flute" (abridged) and 47 stories from the first, second and third daftar (some of them are given in prose paraphrase).⁸ They are followed by a selection from Divan-i Shams (from Tabriz lithographic ed. 1863 by Riza Quli Khan), that is, 28 most-famous ghazals like

مرد خدا مست بود بی شراب
من شاهباز صانع ام بر دست سلطانی بوده ام

طواف کعبه دل کن اگر دل داری
دیدم نگار خود را می گشت گرد خانه

and so on. Some of the verses are provided with interesting philological and historical commentary and others with references to the English and German translations (particularly in those cases where the understanding is dubious).

⁷ The Masnavi-i Ma'navi. By Maulana Jalalu-'d-din Muhammad Rumi. Abridged and Translated by E.H. Whinfield. [1898], 1st ed. 1887 [based on Lakhnau ed. 1865].

⁸ See A. Krimskiy, *History...*, Vol. 3, part 2 (1914), pp. 288-352.

Krimskiy stressed the fact that he had based his translations on the original, but the ghazals selected by the scholar from the huge *Divan-i Shams* were mostly the same that had already been known to the European reader in German translations by Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall and Vincenz von Rosenzweig-Schwannau⁹ and English translations by R. A. Nicholson.¹⁰ From twenty-eight poems with which his *History* presented the Russian public we can find six in Hammer, fifteen in Rosenzweig and nine in Nicholson's edition.

Unlike his predecessors Krimskiy, divided his selections by subject. He was eager to give the general idea of Rumi's outstanding spirituality and the marvel of his flight above Time and Space to the Russian reader. The headings reflect, of course, Krimskiy's own understanding of the main themes and leading motifs of the *Divan-i Shams*. They are the following: "The man of God" («Человек»); "Being before being" («Предсуществование»); "Do you not know what the Temple of God is like?" («Не весте ли, яко храм Божин»); "The heart is the Ka'ba" («Сердце - Ка'ба»); "The soul of man is the only source for cognizing God" («Душа самого человека - единый источник боговедения»); "The program of tariqat" («Программа тариката»); "The approach of ecstasy" («Приближение восторга»); "The ecstasy" («Наитие-экстаз»); "The Pantheistic feeling" («Пантеистическое сознание»); "Impassivity and insensibility of the 'cognizant'" («Безстрастие, безразличие и безволие познавшего»); "The hearing" («Радение»); "Deathbed testament" («Предсмертное завещание»); "From the soulless mineral to God" («От бездушного минерала к Богу»)).¹¹

The translations of the quatrains or ruba'iyat presented in the end of the chapter (*Istoriya*, pp. 373-385) belong to Krimski's older colleague and teacher, Fedor Korsh, a Professor of Iranian studies in Lazarevskiy Institute and a man of letters who used to spend his leisure time translating Russian Golden Age poets

⁹ J. von Hammer-Purgstall, *Geschichte der schönen Redekünste Persiens*, Vienna 1818; the book includes 70 passages from *Masnavi* and *Divan-i Shams*; V. von Rosenzweig-Schwannau, *Auswahl aus den Divanen des grössten mystischen Dichters Persiens, Mewlana Dschelaleddin Rumi*, Vienna, 1838; the edition includes the Persian texts of seventy-five poems, German rhymed translations and notes; see descriptions in F. Lewis' *Rumi* (2000), pp. 566-67.

¹⁰ *Selected Poems from the Divani Shamsi Tabriz*, ed. and trans. by R.A. Nicholson, Cambridge 1898, see description in F. Lewis' *Rumi* (2000), pp. 531-32.

¹¹ See A. Krimskiy, *History...*, Vol. 3, part 2 (1914), pp. 353-73.

into Latin. Korsh worked with the Constantinople edition (1895) and prepared a small collection of rhymed quatrains (70 all in all in the 2nd ed. of Krimskiy's *History*) full of elegance and poetic witticism.¹² Those translations age well and are still popular, cf. the latest reprint in the *Anthology of the Oriental Poetry*.¹³

Both Krimskiy and Korsh were professional iranologists with a profound knowledge of the Persian language and literature and of the Western scholarly works as well. Both were also gifted poets. Their renderings seemingly differ in style but share a pioneering spirit and a sense of responsibility to the original. The work of those scholars marked the first and productive stage in Rumi translations in Russia. Unfortunately, historical events put a long stop to Rumi studies and to the translation activity.

The second or Soviet stage of Rumi's translation started in 1935, when several articles of Soviet iranologists were collectively published under the heading *The Orient*.¹⁴ The book was published among the editions of the 3rd Congress of the Iranian Art and Archeology and meant to have an international response. Thus a small chapter on Rumi had been included, with a short introduction by Aleksey Starikov¹⁵ and some new translations, made by Starikov himself (from the *Masnavi*) and Evgeniy Dunayevskiy¹⁶ (from the *Divan-i Shams*).

¹² Reprint in: *Persian Lyric Poets X – XV*, trans. by Acad. F. Korsh, ed. posthumously by Prof. A. Krimskiy, Moscow, 1916 (Персидские лирики X–XV вв. / С персид. яз. пер. акад. ф. Корш, после его смерти проред. и встп. ст. снабдил проф. А. Крымский. М.: М. и С. Сабашниковы, 1916)

¹³ *Anthology "Poetry of the East"*, Vol. 2, Moscow, 2002, Rumi in F. Korsh's translation – pp. 203–24 (Антология «Восточная Поэзия, Том 2, М., 2002, Руми: стихи, пер. акад. Ф.Е. Корша, стр. 203–224).

¹⁴ *The Literature of Iran in X – XV*, Moscow, 1935 (Восток. Сборник второй. Литература Ирана X–XV вв.).

¹⁵ Starikov Aleksey Arkadyevich (1892–1962) graduated in 1915 from the Lazarevskiy Institute of Oriental Languages in Moscow. Proff. A. Krimskiy and F. Korsh taught him Persian literature. Later he became a lecturer of the Moscow Oriental Institute (1938–1956), Moscow state University (philological department 1943–1956 and Oriental languages department 1956–1962). He was the mentor of a whole generation of the Russian iranologists, for example, Prof. Osmanov and Prof. Prigarina. Starikov is mostly known for his thoroughly enlightening commentary to the Banu Lahuti translation of the *Shah-name*; his instructive article "Firdowsi and his poem *Shah-name*", included in the first volume of the edition (Moscow 1957), was later translated into Persian and published in Tehran as a monograph.

¹⁶ Evgeniy Dunayevskiy (1st half of the 20th cent., dates unknown), a gifted linguist and a polyglot, translated poems from different languages (Latin, Persian, Sanscrit). He was arrested during the time of Stalin's repressions some time before World War II and spent many years in prison.

Starikov was definitely an “old school professor” and he fully understood that Rumi was one of the greatest mystics and poets who ever lived, but in 1935 he had to justify his choice for translation and to place the appropriate label on the chosen text. In the Introduction he wrote that “mystical insights of the Iranian Sufi poets are alien to the Soviet reader. But the works of Rumi occupy such an important place in Persian and all Middle Eastern literature and his poetic achievements are so great that one cannot exclude him from classic Persian literature”.¹⁷ For his translation, Starikov selected a fragment from the very beginning of the *Masnavi* (pp. 3-17 of the first volume of Nicholson’s edition 1925); along with Nicholson’s text the scholar used a certain manuscript which he had in personal possession. His translation is versified and observes the double rhyme scheme. It combines the reliability and careful approach to imagery with stylistic elegance and refinement. Unfortunately, the translated fragment is extremely short.

Nine ghazals in E. Dunayevskiy’s rhymed rendering stand for the whole *Divan-i Shams* in this edition (the translation is based on Nicholson’s *Selected Poems* edition). The poems were chosen “on the basis of the most lyrical imagery, omitting many passages of a mystical, abstract and speculative character” (p. 380). E. Dunayevskiy was a passionate lover of Rumi and a connoisseur of Persian Poetry; his small contribution turned out to be the only attempt to translate Mavlana’s ghazals into the Russian verse directly from the original, observing the rhyme scheme and keeping the exotic imagery.

During the second half of the 20th century several other ghazals were introduced to the reader (around 30 in all) within select anthologies of Persian poetry, but the mode of translation had changed. It became the joint venture of an anonymous interpreter who prepared a word-by-word translation and a poet who did not know Persian (like Vladimir Derzhavin, Ilya Selvinskiy, or David Samoylov). Even if the scratch was good, the poet-translators still were ignorant about Persian medieval culture and literature, let alone the peculiar world of Rumi’s poetry; in the process of poeticizing the scratch they made their ghazals in a classical poetic idiom that appealed to the Russian taste. The poets of that period tried to keep the rhyme scheme of the ghazal (that was “oriental” enough for the Russian reader), but they inevitably turned the Beloved into a lady-friend, omitted the incompre-

¹⁷ *The Literature of Iran...* 1935, p. 379.

hensible and strange poetic ideas and substituted them for customary ones. The result was good Russian poetry with a nice and delicate oriental flavour.

The “direct translations” of E. Dunayevskiy and the renderings of the poets made up the collection of ghazals, which was reprinted in many anthologies of Persian poetry and was published in the famous one hundred volume edition of the “World Literature” series¹⁸ – a sign that an official image of the “lyric poet Rumi” had been created in the Russian culture. These translations of the ghazals still stand for the whole *Divan* in Russia and are being constantly reprinted.¹⁹

The situation with the *Masnavi* translation was almost the same. In 1957 (the year of the 750th anniversary of Rumi) several short passages were published²⁰ by Michail Diakonov. A renowned specialist in the history of ancient Iran and Media, he was the second Russian scholar to make a direct translation of the *Masnavi* passages into Russian verse since A. Starikov; no further attempt was ever made in that direction. Vladimir Derzhavin, the prolific poet who used to poetise the anonymous word-by-word translations of many Persian poets, prepared his small selection of Rumi’s parables²¹ in 1957. This poetical rendering was prefaced with a strong and extensive warning for the reader that the poetry of Rumi is not limited by his Sufi teachings.²² This version underwent numerous reprints, both in full (1963, 1969) and in parts.

A new stage in Rumi studies and translation began in the 80s, when the ideological restrictions first started to weaken and then came to a full stop. In 1986 a new popular abridged edition of the *Masnavi* appeared.²³ Naum Greb-

¹⁸ Rumi, “From the *Divan* of Shams from Tebriz” (translated by E. Dunayevskiy, D. Samoylov, B. Zv’aginceva, I. Sel’vinskiy), in *Library of World Literature. Irano-Tajik Poetry* (Библиотека мировой литературы. Иранотаджикская поэзия). Moscow, 1974, pp. 173–83.

¹⁹ Rumi D., *Ghazals; Parables*, Dushanbe, 1988 (Руми. Газели. Притчи); Dj. Rumi. *Lyric, Masnavi* (Дж. Руми, Лирика), Moscow, 2001.

²⁰ “Djalaladdin. From the *Masnavi*. (Fragments)”, trans. by M. Diakonov, in *The Anthology of Tajik Poetry* (Джалаладдин. Из Маснави. (Отрывки). Перевод М. Дьяконова. В: Антология таджикской поэзии), Moscow, 1957, pp. 292–299.

²¹ *Rumi. Parables. Trans. by V. Derzhavin* (Руми. Притчи), Moscow, 1957.

²² M. N. Osmanov, Preface to *Rumi* 1957].

²³ Rumi Dj. *The Poem of a Hidden Truth. Selected Parables*. Trans. by Naum Grebnev, word by word translations and commentary by O.F. Akimushkin (Руми Дж. Поэма о скрытом смысле. Избранные притчи. Пер. с пере. Н. Гребнева. Подстрочн. пер. и комм. О. Ф. Акимушкина), Moscow, 1986.

1102 nev, a famous poet and translator, worked with a scratch prepared by the famous scholar Oleg Akimushkin, who also wrote an extensive introduction on the phenomenon of Sufism in Iran and the role of Rumi and prepared a useful and instructive commentary. As translation achievements, Akimushkin and Grebnev's work far surpassed (at least, in many people's opinions) the efforts of the previous translators, but it was still intended for the general public; Naum Grebnev used Akimushkin's reliable word-for-word translation, but he was far more concerned with the beauty of the Russian verse than with the reliability of his creation.

By the end of the 20th century several "secondary" translations from English also appeared; the abridged rendering of Nicholson's *Masnavi*²⁴ and the full Russian version of Coleman Barks' *Essential Rumi*.²⁵ If C. Barks, who translated into free English verse, believed that "Rumi would have wanted his poems to resonate in translation with the culture of the target language",²⁶ Sechiv's interpretation of the "Barks' *Masnavi*" goes one step further. S. Sechiv added Russian rhyme in translation, and the "essence of Rumi" in his rendering sounds beautiful, appealing and quite unrecognizable. Those translations also helped to establish Mavlana's reputation in Russia as a great Persian poet and a Sufi sage, but failed to provide the reader with the authentic works of the poet.

Thus, despite the established image of Rumi as a poetic genius and a fascinating story-teller, his poetry really remained without an adequate Russian translation throughout the entire 20th century. It is a clear case of a Great Poet presented in a target culture without his Poetry. Paradoxically, a rich translation history does not always change the result. In the case of Hafiz whose ghazals have been presented in numerous renderings and interpretations both in English and Russian, we still witness the same unbridgeable gap between the poetic message of the original and the produced versions. The question arises as to whether the situation with all translations of works by great poets is always the same. As Julia Meisami put it, "Do translators, by making the attempt, covertly (or

²⁴ Dj. Rumi. *The Treasure of Memory. Trans. from English by L. and B. Tiraspolskiy* (Дж. Руми, «Сокровища Вспоминания»), Moscow, 1998; reprint 2001.

²⁵ Barks C., Sechiv V., *The Essence of Rumi, translation, versification and commentary by Sergey Sechiv* (Баркс К. Сеуив В. Суть Руми), Moscow, 2006.

²⁶ F. Lewis, *Rumi* 2000, p. 591.

unconsciously) seek to cut” the poet “down to their own size?”²⁷ So what is the next step? What constitutes an adequate translation of Rumi? I cannot formulate the answer any better than J. Meisami did in her article on Hafiz in English. It involves “the extreme density of language, which corresponds to a density and complexity of thought. (Poetic thought, that is.) These have yet to be attacked in any serious manner, let alone solved.”²⁸

If Rumi did not manage to find his translator in 20th century Russia, the first years of the 21st century have brought about a positive shift. The approaching of the 800th anniversary proved to be a helpful factor here, and an extensive project of the *Masnavi* translation was initiated. The project is sponsored by the Centre of the Iranian culture in Moscow, with some of the best specialists on Persian classics among the participants. The first *daftar* has been released just recently: Djalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi. *Masnavi-yi Ma'navi* (The Poem of Hidden Truth). The first *daftar* (bayts 1 – 4003). Trans. from Persian by O. Akimushkin, A. Hismatullin et al., ed. by A. Hismatullin, Petersburg, 2007.²⁹ The work has been done by a team of scholars from Petersburg, with the prominent iranologist Oleg Akimushkin and his younger colleague A. Hismatullin as the leading translators; A. Hismatullin is also the editor of the whole volume. The work is a philological translation (4003 bayts) of the first of the six *daftar*s, based on the Konya manuscript; the prose translation aims at literalness rather than elegance; it is lineated and the limits of each half-verse are observed; the Persian text is also attached. The detailed commentary aims at providing the reader with a wide cultural and intellectual context (quotations from the Koran, *ahadis*, hidden allusions to a *hadis* or a Koranic story, idioms and technical terms, variants of previous interpretations and possibilities of double interpretation). The main concern of the translators is exactly the density of language, corresponding to the density and complexity of Rumi's thought as mentioned by J. Meisami. They see their main goal as “creation of a certain matrix, similar to the English translation by R. Nic-

²⁷ Meisami J., “Hafiz in English: translation and authority”, in *Edebiyat*, NS, 6. 1 (1995), p. 77.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Дайты ад-дин Мухаммад Руми. Маснави-ий ма'нави («Поэма о скрытом смысле»). Первый дафтар (Байты 1-4003) / Пер. с персидск. О. Акимушкина, А. Хисматуллина и др., под ред. А. Хисматуллина. СПб.: Петербургское востоковедение, 2007 (448 с).

1104 holson, which would generate the following Russian verse translations, more reliable and preserving the sense intended by Rumi in the original” (p. 15). On the whole, the translation of the first *daftar* has been done in the mode of sacred text interpretation, the poetic dimension of the *Masnavi* left unattended both in translation and in commentary.

As far as I know, translation of further volumes is now in progress; the second and the third *daftar* are taken care of by another team of scholars in Dagestan, with Prof. Nuri Osmanov as the leading author. So, hopefully, it is a matter of several years before the gap between the poet Rumi and his poetry is finally bridged. And, hopefully, the 21st century scholars in Russia will build up the necessary strength to attack the enormous fortune of Rumi’s Ghazaliyat as well.

II

DESPITE the scarce amount of Rumi texts in Russian, there is still one with a tradition of reception. It is the famous beginning of the *Masnavi*, the *Nay-nama*. One can count at least seven renderings of the text, in prose and in verse, full and abridged, translated directly from the original and based on intermediary scratch (A. Krimskiy, A. Starikov, M. Diakonov, V. Derzhavin, N. Grebnev, Banu Lahuti, O. Akimushkin). They cover a period from the beginning of the 20th up to the beginning of the 21st century. These opening 34 or 35 lines tell us about the separation of the lover, personified as the reed (*nay*), from the reed-bed, where he used to belong, that is, from his Fatherland, the land of the Beloved. It has been argued that “this prelude to the *Masnavi* captures the major themes that appear in the ensuing several thousand rhyming couplets.... What the reed stands for in Rumi’s life, as well as in the life of the poem, is an essential question in understanding both the *Nay-namih* and the *Masnavi*.”³⁰ Whether the voice of the reed represents Rumi’s Self purged of his self (Foruzanfar), or whether it is “The most Exalted Pen”, or the soul of the deified Perfect Man, the disciple, Husam ad-Din (according to Nicholson), in any case, the imagery of the reed should be treated with utmost care. As I am writing in English, I have not yet been able to give any examples of the Rus-

³⁰ F. Papan-Matin, “The Crisis of Identity in Rumi’s *Tale of the Reed*” in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 23, 1&2 (2003), p. 246

sian renderings of Rumi. Now I shall try to compensate for that by demonstrating the fate of just one line of the *Nay-nama* (bayt 3) in Russian reception.

سینه خواهم شرحه شرحه از فراق
تا بگویم شرح درد اشتیاق

The third line of the *Nay-nama* caused a lot of controversy among translators and commentators all over the world. It is deceptively easy in Persian and very vulnerable in translation. The line is as follows:

The line demonstrates what the Persian critics call *sahl-i mumtani'* (unachievable simplicity), the quality considered by poets and readers as the greatest merit of Poetry. The bayt combines at least three figures of embellishment in such a way that it still sounds as natural (*matbu'*) and not ornate (*masnu'*). The first figure is an alliteration or *tajnis* between *sharha* and *sharh*; the second is a "beautiful reason" (*husn-i ta'li'l*) found for the specific feature of the reed flute, i. e. the small holes in its body. These holes make it possible for the reed to produce a sound. That kind of description has a long-standing tradition; the Persian poets used to find fantastic reasons for the technical features of the reed pen. For example, there are lots of verses about the tongue (*zabaØn*) of the *qalam*, which has been cut because of its indiscretion. Rumi extended this way of description to the one other instrument made of reed and able to talk, the flute. The reason for the cuts it has got in its breast is the pain of separation.

But the line also suggests an alternative way of understanding. *SiØna* could point both to the breast of the flute and to the breast of the compassionate friend. Hence, the third poetical figure, called *iham* (making one suppose), a kind of amphibology or double entendre. Both meanings are equally important, and it is their intertwining in the discourse that creates the poetical sense of the verse.

Let us see now what has been made of that line in different Russian translations. This comparison may help us to understand the achieved degree of understanding Rumi on this "one line level".

First let us quote the existing English renderings.

E. Whinfield (1887):

I burst my breast, striving to give vent to sighs,

And to express the pangs of my yearning for my home.

Here only the first possibility is taken into account: “my breast” means the breast of the flute.

R. Nicholson (1925)

I want a bosom torn by severance that I may unfold (to such a one) the pain of love-desire.

Here only the second possibility is presented: “a bosom torn by severance” means a compassionate friend.

The Russian versions:

A. Krimskiy (1914)

В страданиях разлуки я готова истерзать всю грудь на ломти, Лишь б
вышлакть-высказать свю боль-тоску по родному Дому!

In the pain of separation I am ready to tear my breast to pieces
To tell the story of my yearning for home.

In this first Russian translation the variant “my breast” is given in the text, but the second understanding is discussed and turned down in the commentary: “I consider my translation of the third bayt as the true one. A. Gaffarov in his dictionary translates: I long for a bosom torn by severance... Rosen in his German translation of the selection from the *Masnavi* put it like this: Ich such' ein sehrend Herz, in dessen Wunde – Ich giesse meines Trennungs-leides Kunde”.³¹

A. Starikov (1935)

Я грудь свю готова разрезать на куски,
Чтоб выплакать всю горечь разлуки и тоски.

I am ready to tear my breast into pieces

³¹ *History...* 1914, pp. 290–91.

To wipe out the bitterness of separation and yearning.

This poetic translation, made directly from the original, chooses the “my breast” variant in the text, but the second variant, also versified, is given in the commentary:

О как бы я хотела найти кого-нибудь,
Кто, как и я, в разлуке свою терзает грудь.

Oh, I am so eager to find somebody,
Who, like me, is tearing his breast to pieces in separation³².
Cecilia Banu Lahuti (1983)

Мне, видно, грудь, пронзило расставанье,
Чтоб мог излить влюбленного страданья.

My breast seems to be stabbed with separation,
For I would be able to pour out the needs of the lover.

Banu Lahuti expresses only the first meaning, but the poetic idea is rendered quite clearly: the reason for cutting the flute’s breast is to produce a sound of pain.³³

V. Derzhavin (1957)

К устам искривленным страданьем, хочу я всегда припадать,
Чтоб вечную жажду свиданья всем скорбным сердцам передать.

I want to always press myself close to the lips twisted in pain,
To tell all the broken hearts about the eternal longing for a meeting.

N. Grebnev (1986)

³² Vostok... 1935, pp. 381-382.

³³ Banu Lahuti, *V sad ya vyshel na zare...* (At dawn I went into the Garden...), translations from Persian Poetry, Dushanbe, 1983, p. 73.

Не потоум ль вы плачете от боли,
Заслышав песню о моей недоде.

Is not your weeping from pain
caused by my song of distress?

Thus, in verse translations made by poets and based on word by word prose renderings, the original imagery is substituted with suitable Russian poetic clichés. In both cases the original meaning is literally lost in translation.

Akimushkin (2006)

Грудь [свою] рассеку я в ключья от разлукн,
дабы высказать боль (страстной) тоски/вожделения

I will cut [my own] breast into pieces because of separation,
To express the pain of the (passionate) yearning /desire/

The latest achievement in the interpretation of the third *bayt* is, again, only a partial solution of the problem, in spite of the fact that in that philological work the words “my own” in “my own breast” have been put into square brackets. The lack of attention to the poetical side of the text played a trick on the translator. The Russian version of the line is not open to double understanding and is not provided with any commentary, thus the “need for a friend” motif, which appears in the *Masnavi* as early as in the third line, is lost again.

In my opinion, what a responsible translator should do is to suggest a translation that is open for both interpretations:

*I need a breast in pieces with separation,
For I can describe the pain of yearning*

and provide it with a proper commentary on its double meaning. Only in this case will the reader be able to hear the message of integrity at the very beginning, which, ultimately, is of utmost importance for understanding the *Masnavi*.