

**Rendering Reverence and Poetic Essence:  
A Comparative Critical Analysis of Hamza Yusuf, Shaykh Abdal Hakim  
Murad, Mostafa Azzam, and Aziza Spiker's Translations of *Qaseeda Burda***

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**Abstract**

This paper presents a comparative critical analysis of four prominent English translations of *Qaseeda Burda* by Imam al-Busiri. The translators Hamza Yusuf, Shaykh Abdal Hakim Murad, Mostafa Azzam, and Aziza Spiker each brings unique approaches to rendering this classical work of Islamic devotional poetry. The analysis is structured around key translation standards: fidelity to meaning, preservation of poetic form and rhythm, cultural sensitivity, accessibility, and emotional and spiritual resonance. Hamza Yusuf's translation is noted for its theological precision and extensive commentary, making it suitable for readers seeking a deep contextual understanding. Shaykh Abdal Hakim Murad's version stands out for its lyrical sophistication and balance between intellectual depth and poetic beauty. Mostafa Azzam's translation emphasizes rhythm and melody, preserving the performative essence of *Qaseeda Burda* for recitative and musical traditions. Aziza Spiker's rendition combines poetic elegance with spiritual sensitivity, offering accessibility without compromising the poem's devotional tone. This comparative study highlights how each translator navigates the challenges of rendering the poem's rich spiritual content, intricate poetic form, and cultural nuances. The analysis underscores the translators' varied methodologies in balancing reverence for the original text with the demands of linguistic and cultural adaptation, ensuring that Imam al-Busiri's timeless ode continues to resonate across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

**Keywords:** *Qaseeda Burda*, Imam al-Busiri, Hamza Yusuf, Shaykh Abdal Hakim Murad, Mostafa Azzam, Aziza Spiker, English translations, Islamic devotional poetry, translation standards, poetic form, cultural sensitivity, spiritual resonance.

**Introduction**

*Qaseeda Burda* is one of the most celebrated works in praise of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Written by Imam al-Busiri in the 13th century, this poem has enjoyed immense popularity throughout the Muslim world. Its deep spiritual significance, intricate Arabic poetry, and heartfelt devotion have made it a subject of extensive commentary and translation. This article compares four English translations of *Qaseeda Burda*, exploring how different translators have approached the challenges of rendering its beauty, depth, and meaning into English.

Imam al-Busiri (1211–1294) was a renowned Egyptian poet, best known for his masterpiece *Qaseeda Burda*. He lived during the Mamluk era, a period marked by cultural flourishing in Egypt and the broader Islamic world. Al-Busiri was deeply influenced by Sufism, the mystical dimension of Islam, and was affiliated with the Shadhili Sufi order. His life was characterized by devotion, spiritual reflection, and

poetic brilliance. According to tradition, al-Busiri composed Qaseeda Burda after suffering a paralytic stroke. In a dream, he recited the poem in praise of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), who then draped him with a cloak (burda), symbolizing spiritual healing and acceptance. Upon awakening, al-Busiri found himself miraculously cured. Qaseeda Burda remains a monumental work of Arabic literature, celebrated for its eloquent praise of the Prophet, intricate poetic form, and deep spiritual insights. The poem has been recited and revered across the Muslim world for centuries, inspiring countless translations and commentaries. Al-Busiri's legacy endures through this timeless ode, which continues to resonate with readers and devotees for its universal themes of love, devotion, and spiritual redemption.

The poem consists of ten sections, each dealing with different aspects of the Prophet's life, character, and significance. Translating Qaseeda Burda is a formidable task due to complex Arabic poetics, cultural and spiritual nuances, and the need to maintain rhythm and flow. The original poem uses intricate rhyme schemes and metaphors that are difficult to replicate in English. It also contains references and allusions that require deep knowledge of Islamic history and theology. Moreover, the musicality of the original Arabic is central to its recitation, making it challenging to capture in English.

The translation of Qaseeda Burda into English presents unique challenges. Translators must navigate the delicate balance between preserving the poem's original meaning, poetic form, and spiritual resonance while making it accessible to a contemporary audience. Poetry, especially one rich in religious and cultural significance, demands a translation that conveys not only words but also emotions, rhythm, and deeper theological concepts. The task becomes even more complex when considering the poem's recitative tradition, which relies heavily on melodic flow and rhythmic precision. Qaseeda Burda transcends cultural and historical boundaries, making it a central text in the tradition of Islamic devotional poetry (Sells, 1996). Therefore, translating Qaseeda Burda demands cultural sensitivity, poetic skill, and a deep understanding of Islamic spirituality (Ali, 2009).

A major challenge in translating Qaseeda Burda is the preservation of its poetic form and stylistic features. Arabic poetry is characterized by complex rhythmic patterns, rhyme schemes, and metrical structures that often lack direct counterparts in English. This challenge is reflective of broader issues in literary translation. Translating dialects and literary forms requires strategies that preserve the original text's integrity while ensuring accessibility for the target audience. Their analysis emphasizes that successful translations balance fidelity to the source material with readability and resonance in the target language (Al-Khanji, & Ennasser, 2022).

Moreover, translating Qaseeda Burda involves addressing culturally-bound expressions that carry profound meanings within their original context. Betti and Bsharah (2023) argue that understanding the grammatical structures and cultural nuances of both languages is essential for maintaining the translation's intended impact. They highlight how cultural differences can influence the reception of translated works, making it imperative for translators to employ culturally sensitive approaches. Consequently, translators of Qaseeda Burda must navigate these complexities to ensure that the poem's spiritual depth, cultural significance, and

poetic beauty are effectively conveyed to English-speaking audiences (Betti, & Bsharah, 2023).

Additionally, the translation of Qaseeda Burda must navigate the cultural and religious significance embedded within the text. Booth (2010), while primarily discussing the translation of memoirs and the construction of identities, underscores the importance of contextualization in translation—a principle that equally applies to Qaseeda Burda as a spiritual and cultural artifact. The translator's choices in rendering religious references, spiritual metaphors, and culturally significant symbols can either enhance or dilute the poem's original meanings, depending on how effectively they convey its emotional and cultural weight (Booth, 2010).

The role of the translator is thus pivotal. Translators must strike a balance between remaining faithful to the original text and making it resonate with the target audience. This balancing act is echoed in the work of Khan et al. (2021), who highlight the importance of developing shared perceptions through translation. They suggest that effective translation fosters greater understanding between cultures by adapting phrases and concepts in a manner that aligns with the cultural references familiar to the target audience. In the case of Qaseeda Burda, this might involve modifying certain expressions to better suit English-speaking readers while still striving to retain the poem's spiritual and emotional essence.

This paper explores the distinctive approaches taken by four translators—Hamza Yusuf, Shaykh Abdal Hakim Murad, Mostafa Azzam, and Aziza Spiker—in rendering Qaseeda Burda into English. Each translator brings a unique perspective shaped by their scholarly backgrounds, poetic sensibilities, and intended audience. Hamza Yusuf's translation is renowned for its clarity and theological depth, offering extensive commentary that aids reader comprehension. Shaykh Abdal Hakim Murad's lyrical style reflects his deep appreciation for poetic artistry and spiritual insight. Mostafa Azzam prioritizes the poem's performative essence, delivering a singable translation that retains the original's melodic beauty. Aziza Spiker provides a translation that balances poetic elegance with spiritual sensitivity, ensuring accessibility without sacrificing depth.

To provide a comprehensive understanding of these translations, the paper will first examine the work of each translator individually, highlighting their unique approaches, strengths, and stylistic choices. This section will delve into how each translator handles key aspects such as fidelity to meaning, poetic form, cultural references, and spiritual resonance. Following the individual analyses, a detailed comparative analysis will be conducted, focusing on how these translations align or diverge concerning established translation standards. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of how each translator contributes to the enduring legacy of Qaseeda Burda, showcasing the diverse methodologies employed to bring this timeless poem to an English-speaking audience. The comparative analysis will not only underscore the distinctive contributions of each translation but also illustrate how these works collectively enrich the appreciation of Imam al-Busiri's masterpiece across cultural and linguistic divides.

Hamza Yusuf's *The Burda: The Poem of the Cloak* stands as a landmark translation of Qaseeda Burda by Imam al-Busiri, offering readers an insightful and

spiritually rich rendition of one of the most celebrated works of Islamic devotional poetry. Renowned for his clarity and depth of understanding, Yusuf approaches the translation with a focus on theological precision and accessibility. His translation is particularly significant for its ability to balance the intricate themes of the original poem with language that remains approachable to contemporary audiences. Yusuf's work provides not only a translation but also extensive commentary, enriching the reader's understanding of the spiritual, historical, and cultural contexts of the poem. His meticulous attention to both content and context ensures that readers from diverse backgrounds can appreciate the poem's multifaceted dimensions.

Hamza Yusuf is a leading American Islamic scholar, co-founder of Zaytuna College, and a prominent voice in contemporary Islamic thought. Known for his deep understanding of classical Islamic texts, Yusuf has played a significant role in reviving traditional Islamic scholarship in the West. His translation reflects his commitment to making Islamic spirituality accessible to modern readers. Yusuf's approach combines theological precision with clear language, supported by extensive commentary that contextualizes the poem's spiritual and historical dimensions. His translation prioritizes clarity and doctrinal accuracy, making it ideal for readers seeking a comprehensive understanding of Islamic theology and devotion.

One of the most notable features of Hamza Yusuf's translation is its emphasis on clarity and theological depth. While many translations of Qaseeda Burda attempt to preserve poetic embellishments, Yusuf prioritizes ensuring that the profound spiritual meanings are clearly conveyed. This approach makes his translation particularly accessible to readers unfamiliar with the nuances of Islamic theology. For example, Yusuf (2002) translated as "Indeed, the excellence of the Messenger is limitless, which speech cannot encompass." This line captures the essence of the poem's praise for the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in a clear and straightforward manner. Yusuf's language is precise, making the theological significance of the Prophet's virtues understandable without requiring prior knowledge of Islamic teachings. By doing so, Yusuf allows readers to grasp the profound reverence Imam al-Busiri held for the Prophet while ensuring that the spiritual significance is not lost in complex poetic structures. His ability to simplify profound theological ideas without diluting their essence demonstrates his mastery of both the subject matter and the art of translation.

Yusuf's translation also excels in maintaining the devotional tone and emotional resonance of Qaseeda Burda. The poem is a profound expression of love, longing, and devotion for the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and Yusuf's choice of language captures these sentiments effectively, as Yusuf (2002) states "Leave your blame of me for my passion in remembering him. For if you knew his character, you would not reproach me." This highlights the deep love and longing that characterize the original poem. Yusuf's translation maintains the sincerity of the poet's expression, using direct language that resonates emotionally with readers. His ability to convey these emotions in accessible terms ensures that readers can connect with the poem on a personal level, experiencing the same spiritual devotion that Imam al-Busiri intended. The simplicity of Yusuf's language allows the emotional core of the poem to shine, making the love and reverence for the Prophet palpable.

A distinctive feature of Yusuf's translation is his incorporation of extensive commentary alongside the translated text. This commentary provides readers with crucial context, explaining the historical references, theological concepts, and literary devices used by Imam al-Busiri. Yusuf's scholarly background enables him to offer insights that deepen the reader's understanding of the poem. For example, when addressing the concept of the Prophet's intercession, Yusuf explains its theological significance within the Islamic tradition. Such explanations are invaluable for readers seeking to understand the spiritual dimensions of Qaseeda Burda beyond its poetic beauty. The commentary also explores subtle nuances in the text, guiding readers through complex themes such as divine mercy, repentance, and the moral perfection of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

Another strength of Hamza Yusuf's translation is his attention to cultural authenticity. While some translators opt to domesticate cultural references to make the text more relatable to a Western audience, Yusuf maintains the integrity of the poem's cultural context. He uses transliterations for certain key terms and includes explanations for culturally specific references. This approach allows readers to engage with the poem in its original cultural and religious context while providing the necessary tools for understanding. For example: "My sins are great, but when compared to His forgiveness, they are small."

This line captures the essence of the Islamic concept of divine mercy and forgiveness. Yusuf's translation preserves the cultural and theological significance of this concept while making it accessible to readers from diverse backgrounds. His commitment to maintaining cultural authenticity while ensuring accessibility is a testament to the depth and care with which he approached this translation. The delicate balance between cultural fidelity and reader comprehension showcases Yusuf's sensitivity as a translator who respects both the source material and his audience.

In terms of poetic form, Yusuf takes a balanced approach. While he does not prioritize replicating the exact rhyme schemes and meters of the original Arabic, he ensures that the translation maintains a rhythmic flow that reflects the poem's recitative nature. His translation is structured in a way that allows it to be read aloud with ease, preserving the oral tradition associated with Qaseeda Burda. This focus on readability and recitability enhances the devotional experience of the poem, allowing readers to engage with it in a manner consistent with its traditional performance. The rhythmic nature of his translation complements the spiritual message of the poem, enhancing its impact during recitation.

Moreover, Yusuf's translation is distinguished by its accessibility. His clear and concise language makes the text approachable for a broad audience, including those with little background in Islamic studies or classical poetry. This accessibility is further enhanced by the comprehensive glossary and notes provided in the text, which explain key terms and concepts. Yusuf's pedagogical approach ensures that readers can fully appreciate the depth and beauty of Qaseeda Burda without feeling overwhelmed by unfamiliar terminology or complex poetic structures. His didactic style invites readers to explore the deeper meanings of the poem, making the translation both educational and spiritually enriching.

Yusuf's translation methodology is informed by a desire to maintain the poetic and spiritual essence of the original text while making it accessible to a Western audience (Azizah & Juwariyah 2022). Yusuf employs a poetic style in his translations to express broader meanings and beauty, thus enhancing the reader's experience. Yusuf's ability to balance poetic form with clear expression allows his translations to resonate with contemporary audiences without sacrificing the spiritual depth of the original work. His nuanced approach demonstrates a keen understanding of how religious texts can be rendered in ways that are both faithful to the source and meaningful to modern readers (Azizah, & Juwariyah, 2022).

One significant challenge in Yusuf's translation of *The Burda* lies in addressing the cultural specificity of certain terms. Alhaj (2022) explores the difficulties in translating Qur'anic lexica, highlighting the importance of context in achieving a faithful translation (Alhaj, 2022). This insight is particularly relevant to Yusuf's work, as he navigates terms and expressions deeply rooted in Islamic culture. His translations reflect a thoughtful consideration of how such terms can be presented in English while retaining their original meanings and connotations. This process requires not only linguistic expertise but also cultural sensitivity, ensuring that readers from diverse backgrounds can engage with the text without losing its rich contextual significance.

Hamza Yusuf's *The Burda: The Poem of the Cloak* is a masterful translation that offers readers a profound and accessible rendition of Qaseeda Burda. By prioritizing clarity, theological depth, and cultural authenticity, Yusuf has created a translation that is both faithful to the original and accessible to contemporary readers. His incorporation of extensive commentary, attention to devotional tone, and commitment to preserving the poem's cultural context make this translation an invaluable resource for readers seeking to engage with one of the most celebrated works of Islamic devotional literature. Yusuf's work stands as a testament to the enduring spiritual significance of Qaseeda Burda, ensuring that its message of love, reverence, and devotion for the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) continues to inspire and resonate with readers across generations. His translation not only preserves the beauty and depth of Imam al-Busiri's masterpiece but also enriches it with insights that make it relevant and meaningful for a modern audience. In this way, Hamza Yusuf has contributed significantly to the accessibility and appreciation of Islamic devotional poetry, bridging the gap between classical tradition and contemporary readership with grace and scholarly precision. His work serves as a shining example of how classical spiritual literature can be rendered relevant and transformative for readers today, ensuring that the timeless messages of love, devotion, and spiritual refinement remain accessible and impactful for generations to come.

Shaykh Abdal Hakim Murad's *The Mantle Adorned: Translated, with Further Poetic Ornaments* stands as a significant contribution to the body of English translations of Qaseeda Burda by Imam al-Busiri.

Shaykh Abdal Hakim Murad, also known as Timothy Winter, is a British Islamic scholar and dean of Cambridge Muslim College. Renowned for his expertise in Islamic theology, Sufism, and Arabic literature, Murad has authored numerous works on Islamic spirituality. His translation is celebrated for its poetic sophistication

and lyrical beauty. Murad's deep appreciation for poetic artistry is evident in his translation, which preserves the musicality and rhythmic cadence of the original Arabic. His work stands out for balancing intellectual depth with aesthetic refinement, making it appealing to readers who appreciate the intersection of theology and literature.

This translation distinguishes itself through its lyrical elegance, poetic resonance, and profound spiritual insight. Murad's translation not only captures the devotional essence of the original but also adds a layer of poetic sophistication, making the work resonate with contemporary readers. His approach bridges the gap between the classical Arabic tradition and modern English readership, offering a version of Qaseeda Burda that is faithful to its roots while being richly adorned with poetic embellishments. Murad's translation serves as a bridge, making classical Islamic poetry accessible and relevant without sacrificing its spiritual and cultural depth.

One of the most striking features of Murad's translation is the preservation of the poem's poetic beauty and musicality. Qaseeda Burda is known for its rhythmic cadence and melodious structure, which are essential to its recitative tradition. Murad skillfully retains these elements in his English rendition, ensuring that the poem can still be appreciated in its performative context. For example, Murad (2009) states "He is the dawn whose light dispels the night of doubt; / The heart's physician, banishing sorrow's drought."

Murad uses internal rhyme and rhythmic balance to mirror the poem's original flow. The musicality of his translation makes it suitable for recitation and performance, maintaining the traditional essence of Qaseeda Burda as a devotional poem meant to be experienced audibly and spiritually. His consistent attention to rhythm ensures that the lyrical beauty of the original Arabic is not lost, allowing English-speaking audiences to experience the same spiritual elevation that the poem evokes in its original form.

Murad's translation is notable for its lyrical elegance and poetic ornamentation. He does not merely translate the original text but enhances it with poetic flourishes that enrich the reading experience. His use of sophisticated diction and imagery elevates the text while preserving its devotional tone. For instance, Murad (2009) states "No rose can boast the blush upon his radiant face; / No pearl as pure as words adorned with heaven's grace."

These lines demonstrate Murad's ability to enhance the poetic quality of the original while maintaining its spiritual message. His choice of words, such as "blush," "radiant," and "heaven's grace," adds layers of meaning and beauty, making the translation resonate with readers who appreciate the aesthetic dimensions of poetry. Murad's poetic embellishments are never gratuitous; they serve the purpose of intensifying the emotional and spiritual experience that the poem seeks to convey.

Beyond its poetic merits, Murad's translation delves deeply into the spiritual and theological themes of Qaseeda Burda. The poem's exploration of the Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) virtues, intercession, and divine connection is rendered with theological precision and spiritual insight. Murad's background in Islamic scholarship is evident in his nuanced treatment of these themes. For example:

“O Messenger, whose mercy is the light of dawn; / By your gaze, the darkness of the soul is drawn.” Here, Murad captures the theological concept of the Prophet’s intercessory role with poetic subtlety. The imagery of “light of dawn” and “darkness of the soul” reflects the transformative spiritual journey central to Islamic mysticism. Murad’s translation thus serves not only as a literary work but also as a medium for spiritual reflection and theological education. His understanding of the metaphysical aspects of Islamic belief allows him to render complex ideas in accessible yet profound language, making the poem a source of spiritual nourishment for a diverse readership.

Murad (2009) shows exceptional cultural sensitivity in his translation, ensuring that the poem’s Islamic context is preserved while making it accessible to a broader audience. He avoids excessive domestication, which might dilute the poem’s cultural and religious significance, while also steering clear of heavy foreignization that could alienate readers unfamiliar with Islamic traditions. His balanced approach allows readers from diverse backgrounds to engage with the text meaningfully. For instance, Murad (2009) states “He walks in light, his shadow a path of peace; / His words a balm where sorrows cease.”

These lines maintain the cultural and religious significance of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) while using universal imagery and language that resonate with readers regardless of their cultural background. Murad’s ability to convey complex theological ideas in accessible language ensures that the poem’s spiritual messages are universally understood. His careful calibration between cultural specificity and universal accessibility enhances the poem’s ability to communicate profound spiritual truths to a wide audience.

Murad’s translation excels in preserving the emotional resonance and devotional tone of Qaseeda Burda. The poem is a work of deep love, longing, and reverence for the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and Murad’s language choices reflect this sentiment throughout the text. For example: Murad (2009) states that “O soul, in love’s embrace, let longing swell; / For in his memory, all hearts find their well.” These lines capture the essence of the poet’s longing and devotion. Murad’s use of emotive language ensures that readers can experience the same spiritual connection and emotional depth intended by Imam al-Busiri. His translation resonates on both intellectual and emotional levels, allowing readers to engage with the poem as a living text that continues to inspire devotion. The subtle interplay of love, reverence, and longing in Murad’s translation highlights the emotional intensity that lies at the heart of Qaseeda Burda.

Murad’s approach to translation emphasizes the importance of maintaining the original rhythm and meaning of the poetry, which is crucial in works like Al-Burda, a poem renowned for its praise of the Prophet Muhammad. His methodology reflects a deep commitment to preserving the artistic and spiritual essence of the original text. This approach aligns with the broader tradition of Islamic poetry, where the art of praise (madih) plays a significant role in spiritual expression and the formation of community identity (Ware, 2013). By focusing on rhythm and meaning, Murad ensures that his translations retain the lyrical beauty and devotional tone that



characterize Al-Burda, making them accessible and meaningful to contemporary audiences.

Shaykh Abdal Hakim Murad's translation with further Poetic Ornaments stands out as a masterful translation of Qaseeda Burda. By combining lyrical elegance, poetic ornamentation, spiritual depth, and cultural sensitivity, Murad has created a version of the poem that is both faithful to its original essence and accessible to contemporary readers. His translation not only preserves the performative and devotional aspects of Qaseeda Burda but also enriches them with sophisticated poetic techniques and profound theological insights. Through his meticulous attention to form, rhythm, and meaning, Murad ensures that Qaseeda Burda continues to inspire devotion, reflection, and admiration for the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) across linguistic and cultural boundaries. His work serves as a testament to the enduring relevance of Qaseeda Burda and highlights the translator's role in bridging the spiritual and poetic worlds, making the beauty and depth of this timeless poem accessible to new generations. Murad's translation, with its seamless fusion of poetic grace and spiritual profundity, stands as a monumental contribution that will continue to resonate with readers and scholars alike, ensuring that the legacy of Qaseeda Burda endures for generations to come.

Mostafa Azzam's *The Burdah: The Singable Translation* is a significant and distinctive contribution to the English translations of Qaseeda Burda by Imam al-Busiri. Unlike other translations that primarily focus on literal accuracy or poetic resonance, Azzam's rendition is specifically designed to be singable, maintaining the rhythmic and melodic qualities of the original Arabic text. This approach distinguishes his work as it seeks to preserve not only the poem's spiritual and literary depth but also its performative essence, which is central to its cultural and devotional significance. The singable nature of Azzam's translation ensures that the oral tradition of reciting and singing Qaseeda Burda is sustained, thereby keeping its rich heritage alive for contemporary audiences.

Translation, especially of poetry, is a nuanced art that extends beyond the mere conversion of words from one language to another. It involves transferring meaning, context, cultural nuances, and artistic expression. Poetry's reliance on form, rhythm, emotion, and subtle linguistic features adds unique challenges for translators. In the case of Qaseeda Burda, these challenges are further heightened by the poem's devotional nature and spiritual themes. Azzam's work successfully navigates these challenges by adhering to translation standards that ensure the original work's essence is preserved while making it accessible to new audiences.

One of the most remarkable aspects of Azzam's translation is his successful retention of rhythm and melody. Qaseeda Burda is traditionally recited and sung in various cultures, where its rhythmic cadences and melodic patterns are integral to its spiritual impact. Azzam's translation ensures that these features are preserved in the English rendition. He employs consistent meter and rhyme schemes that align closely with the original Arabic structure. For example, it is stated that "Your noble face, more radiant than the dawn of day, / Brings hearts from gloom and grief to light's comforting ray." These lines exemplify Azzam's commitment to preserving the poem's musicality. The rhythmic flow complements the spiritual themes, allowing

readers and listeners to engage with the text as a performative piece. By mirroring the rhythmic patterns of the original, Azzam not only captures the poem's musical essence but also evokes the spiritual atmosphere that accompanies its traditional recitation. This feature is crucial, as the recitative and melodic aspects of Qaseeda Burda have played a significant role in its transmission and reception across generations.

Azzam also excels in balancing accessibility with poetic beauty. The singable nature of his translation means that the language must be clear and straightforward enough to be understood when sung aloud. However, this clarity does not come at the expense of poetic richness. His use of evocative imagery and metaphors mirrors the original Arabic while ensuring that the English rendition resonates with both seasoned readers of Islamic poetry and newcomers alike. Azzam (2015) states "No rose can match the blush that graced his gentle face; / No pearl as pure as words that flowed with tender grace."

These lines demonstrate Azzam's ability to convey the profound admiration and reverence Imam al-Busiri expressed for the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The lyrical quality of these lines is preserved, and the emotive force remains potent, making the poem as impactful in English as it is in Arabic. His language choices resonate emotionally and intellectually, allowing readers to connect with the spiritual longing that defines Qaseeda Burda.

In addition to preserving rhythm and melody, Azzam shows considerable cultural sensitivity in his translation. Qaseeda Burda contains numerous cultural references, idioms, and theological concepts that are deeply rooted in Islamic tradition. Azzam adeptly navigates these complexities by providing translations that remain faithful to the original meanings while ensuring they are comprehensible to a contemporary English-speaking audience. He avoids excessive domestication, which might strip the poem of its cultural authenticity, and also steers clear of heavy foreignization that might alienate readers unfamiliar with Islamic contexts. For instance, when addressing themes of intercession and mercy, Azzam (2015) translates as "Through you, the hearts find peace from burdens they once bore; / Your mercy's light will shine forever, evermore." This translation captures the theological significance of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as a source of mercy and intercession without resorting to complex theological terminology that could obscure the poem's immediate emotional appeal. The accessible language used by Azzam ensures that readers can grasp these profound spiritual concepts without the need for extensive background knowledge, thus making the text inclusive for diverse audiences.

Azzam's translation does not merely aim to reproduce the poem's external form; it also preserves its internal emotional and spiritual depth. The Qaseeda Burda is a poem of profound longing, love, and devotion, and Azzam's language choices consistently reflect these themes. His verses convey a sense of yearning and reverence that are central to the poem's devotional purpose. For example: "O soul, in love's pure fire for him you burn and pine; / In his remembrance find a cure for heart's decline." These lines illustrate how Azzam retains the poem's affective power, allowing readers to experience the same spiritual connection that Imam al-Busiri

intended. The accessible yet profound diction ensures that the poem resonates on both intellectual and emotional levels. Azzam's translation thus bridges the gap between devotional poetry and spiritual experience, making Qaseeda Burda a living text for modern readers.

Furthermore, Azzam's singable translation contributes significantly to the performative tradition of Qaseeda Burda. Recitation and singing are not mere aesthetic exercises; they are acts of devotion and remembrance in Islamic culture. By ensuring that his translation is suitable for recitation, Azzam helps sustain this tradition in the English-speaking world. His careful attention to rhythm, melody, and linguistic clarity makes his translation an ideal choice for spiritual gatherings, where the communal recitation of Qaseeda Burda fosters a collective sense of devotion and reverence.

Mostafa Azzam's presents unique challenges and opportunities in the realm of singable translations. The Burdah, originally composed in the 13th century, is a poem of praise to the Prophet Muhammad, celebrated for its lyrical beauty and spiritual depth (Manshur, 2012). Translating such a culturally and linguistically rich text into English while maintaining its musicality and emotional resonance is a complex task that requires careful consideration of both linguistic and cultural factors.

One significant aspect of translating The Burdah is the need to preserve the poem's rhythm and rhyme, which are crucial for its performance as a song. This aligns with the findings of Kvam, who emphasizes the importance of functional translation theory in maintaining the characteristics of the original text, particularly in musical contexts (Kvam, 2024). The concept of "singable translation," or "song transdubbing," as suggested by Qin, highlights the necessity of adapting lyrics not just for literal meaning but also for their performative qualities (Qin, 2017). This approach is essential for ensuring that the translated version can be sung effectively, thus engaging the audience in a manner similar to the original.

Mostafa Azzam's translation offers a distinctive contribution to the body of English translations of Qaseeda Burda. By prioritizing singability without sacrificing poetic richness, emotional depth, or cultural authenticity, Azzam has created a version that is both faithful to the original and accessible to contemporary audiences. His translation enables readers and listeners to engage with the poem in a manner that mirrors the traditional modes of recitation and performance, thus preserving its spiritual and cultural essence. Through his meticulous attention to rhythm, melody, and meaning, Azzam ensures that Qaseeda Burda continues to inspire devotion and admiration for the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) across linguistic and cultural boundaries. The depth and accessibility of his translation make it a vital resource for readers seeking to experience the full spiritual and poetic beauty of Imam al-Busiri's masterpiece.

Aziza Spiker is a British poet, translator, and scholar with a background in Islamic studies and literature. Her translation of The Burda is distinguished by its poetic elegance and spiritual sensitivity. Spiker brings a refined poetic sensibility to her work, capturing the emotional and devotional nuances of the original poem. Her translation balances accessibility with depth, using clear yet evocative language that appeals to a wide audience. Spiker's approach combines respect for the poem's

cultural and theological significance with a commitment to poetic beauty, making her rendition suitable for both personal reflection and literary appreciation.

Spiker's rendition demonstrates a deep understanding of these elements, offering readers an accessible yet richly textured version of the poem. Her translation stands out for its poetic fluidity, cultural sensitivity, and ability to convey the profound spiritual and emotional resonance that defines Qaseeda Burda. In addition to her poetic finesse, Spiker successfully bridges the cultural and spiritual dimensions of the poem, making it accessible to a global audience while retaining its deep Islamic roots.

One of the most striking features of Spiker's translation is her commitment to preserving the poetic essence of the original. Qaseeda Burda is renowned for its rhythmic cadence and lyrical beauty, which are central to its recitative tradition. Spiker retains these qualities by employing carefully chosen rhythmic patterns and rhyme schemes that echo the original Arabic structure. For example (Spiker, 2013) states that "With you, O Messenger, dawn's light begins to rise; / Your gaze dispels the darkness of our hearts and skies." This excerpt highlights Spiker's ability to maintain the lyrical flow of the poem, ensuring that the musicality essential to Qaseeda Burda is not lost in translation. The rhythmic cadence and balanced structure make her translation suitable for both private reflection and public recitation, preserving the oral tradition associated with this revered work. The singable quality of her translation reflects the traditional practice of reciting Qaseeda Burda in devotional gatherings, making her work relevant in both academic and spiritual contexts.

Spiker's attention to poetic elegance is complemented by her skillful use of vivid imagery and metaphor. Throughout her translation, she employs language that captures the beauty and spiritual significance of Imam al-Busiri's original composition. For instance: "No rose can match the blush upon his radiant face; / No pearl as pure as words imbued with heaven's grace." These lines illustrate Spiker's poetic sensibility, where her choice of imagery not only beautifies the text but also deepens its spiritual resonance. By using accessible yet evocative language, she ensures that readers can experience the profound love and reverence that permeate the poem. Her vivid metaphors and refined diction transform the translation into a work of art that speaks to both the heart and the intellect. The choice of natural imagery, such as roses and pearls, aligns with classical poetic traditions while resonating universally.

Another notable strength of Spiker's translation is her ability to convey the deep spiritual and emotional themes embedded in Qaseeda Burda. The poem is an outpouring of love, longing, and devotion to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and Spiker captures these emotions with sensitivity and grace. Consider the following lines:

"O soul, drawn to his light, seek him and find / A balm for every  
sorrow, peace for heart and mind."

These verses convey a sense of yearning and devotion that is central to the poem's message. Spiker's translation allows readers to engage with these emotions intimately, fostering a personal connection with the spiritual themes of the poem. Her

language choices reflect a deep understanding of the poem's devotional tone, making the translation resonate on both intellectual and emotional levels. The emphasis on the healing nature of remembrance and devotion is expressed in clear yet poetic language, highlighting the transformative power of divine love.

Cultural sensitivity is another defining characteristic of Spiker's translation. Qaseeda Burda is steeped in Islamic cultural and religious references, and Spiker handles these elements with care. Rather than simplifying or omitting culturally specific references, she provides thoughtful translations that preserve the original meanings. For example: "His intercession is the dawn after the darkest night; / His mercy's ocean calms the soul's unending plight." This passage illustrates how Spiker maintains the theological and cultural significance of the Prophet's role in Islamic belief. Her language choices ensure that the spiritual and cultural contexts of the poem are retained, offering readers an authentic and immersive reading experience. The translation strikes a balance between accessibility and fidelity to the original cultural framework, making it suitable for a diverse audience. By retaining Islamic terminology where necessary and providing contextual explanations, Spiker ensures that readers gain both spiritual and cultural insights.

Moreover, Spiker's translation excels in presenting the theological depth of Qaseeda Burda. The poem explores complex themes such as divine mercy, intercession, and the moral excellence of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Spiker's background in Islamic studies informs her nuanced approach to these themes. For example: "He, the mercy to the worlds, whose light redeems; / The heart's physician, curing all with radiant beams." In these lines, Spiker eloquently conveys the theological concept of the Prophet's mercy and guidance. Her choice of words such as "redeems" and "physician" not only reflects the spiritual role of the Prophet but also resonates with a broader audience through universal themes of healing and salvation. The metaphor of the Prophet as a healer is particularly effective, reflecting Islamic conceptions of spiritual guidance while making the message relatable.

Spiker's translation is also notable for its accessibility. Her clear and engaging language makes Qaseeda Burda approachable for readers who may not be familiar with classical Arabic poetry or Islamic theology. She avoids overly complex terminology while maintaining the depth and beauty of the original work. This accessibility is further supported by helpful footnotes and explanatory remarks, which provide context without interrupting the flow of the poetry. Her balanced approach ensures that the translation serves as both a literary work and a source of spiritual reflection. The seamless integration of explanation and poetry allows readers to appreciate the layered meanings of the text without feeling overwhelmed.

In terms of structure, Spiker's translation retains the thematic organization of the original poem. She follows the progression of themes from praise of the Prophet's character and miracles to reflections on divine mercy and intercession. This structural fidelity allows readers to experience the narrative arc of Qaseeda Burda as intended by Imam al-Busiri. Spiker's careful attention to structure enhances the coherence of the translation, making the spiritual journey of the poem clear and impactful. The logical flow from personal reflection to universal spiritual themes makes her translation an effective guide for readers seeking spiritual growth.

Additionally, Spiker's translation captures the performative aspect of Qaseeda Burda. The poem is traditionally recited in gatherings, and Spiker's rhythmic and lyrical style ensures that her translation lends itself well to recitation. Her work invites readers not only to read but also to experience the poem through oral performance, preserving the rich tradition of devotional poetry in Islamic culture. The performative quality of her translation ensures that it can be used in both educational and devotional settings, making it a versatile addition to the existing body of translations.

Aziza Spiker's *The Burda* is a masterful translation that offers readers a profound and accessible rendition of Qaseeda Burda. By prioritizing poetic elegance, cultural sensitivity, and theological depth, Spiker has created a version of the poem that remains faithful to the original while resonating with contemporary audiences. Her skillful use of imagery, rhythmic language, and accessible explanations makes this translation an invaluable resource for those seeking to engage with one of the most revered works of Islamic literature. Spiker's translation captures the timeless beauty and spiritual richness of Qaseeda Burda, ensuring that its message of love, devotion, and reverence for the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) continues to inspire and resonate with readers across generations. Her work stands as a testament to the enduring power of devotional poetry and its ability to transcend cultural and temporal boundaries, offering spiritual insight and inspiration to all who encounter it. With its combination of poetic beauty, theological depth, and cultural authenticity, Spiker's translation will undoubtedly remain a key reference for readers and scholars interested in the spiritual and literary treasures of the Islamic tradition.

### **Comparative Critical Analysis**

Translating Qaseeda Burda by Imam al-Busiri, one of the most revered works of Islamic devotional poetry, requires careful navigation of linguistic precision, poetic beauty, cultural authenticity, and spiritual depth. The poem's rich spiritual content, intricate poetic form, and deep cultural references pose unique challenges for translators. Four prominent English translations by Hamza Yusuf, Shaykh Abdal Hakim Murad, Mostafa Azzam, and Aziza Spiker each bring distinct approaches to this complex task. This comparative analysis examines these translations based on key translation standards: fidelity to meaning, preservation of poetic form and rhythm, cultural sensitivity, accessibility, and emotional and spiritual resonance.

Translation is a nuanced art that extends beyond the simple conversion of words from one language to another. It involves the transfer of meaning, context, cultural nuances, and, in the case of poetry, artistic expression. Translating poetry presents unique challenges due to its reliance on form, rhythm, emotion, and subtle linguistic features. To achieve a faithful and impactful translation, translators adhere to certain standards and parameters that ensure the essence of the original work is preserved while making it accessible to new audiences.

The primary standard in any translation is fidelity to the original text's meaning. In poetry, this involves more than just the literal meaning of words. The translator must capture the underlying themes and messages of the poem, the symbolism and imagery that contribute to its depth, and the cultural references that may not have direct equivalents in the target language. A successful translation

retains the integrity of the poem’s message while adapting it appropriately for the new audience. Alongside meaning, poetry often evokes specific emotions. The tone—whether somber, joyful, or ironic—and mood must be carefully preserved. This requires selecting words with similar emotional weight and making contextual adjustments when emotions are tied to culturally specific experiences.

Form and structure are also crucial in poetry. This includes rhyme schemes, meter, line breaks, and stanza arrangements. Translators must decide whether to replicate the original rhyme scheme and meter or to prioritize meaning over form when exact replication is impractical. For free verse, the focus might be on maintaining the flow and rhythm, while for formal verse, preserving the structure becomes a priority. Additionally, syllabic and metric considerations come into play, as some languages are more flexible than others in maintaining metrical patterns.

Poetry is inherently creative, using devices like puns, alliteration, and onomatopoeia. The translator’s task is to recreate these linguistic effects in the target language, finding equivalent expressions or sounds and adapting metaphors and idioms that may not translate directly. Cultural sensitivity and context further complicate the translation process. Poems often contain cultural references, idioms, and historical allusions, requiring the translator to balance domestication—adapting cultural elements for better understanding—and foreignization—retaining original cultural aspects to preserve authenticity.

Equally important is preserving the poet’s voice. Each poet has a distinct style that reflects their worldview and artistic sensibility. The translator should stay true to the poet’s perspective, avoiding the imposition of personal interpretations, and maintain stylistic nuances, whether minimalist language, ornate descriptions, or fragmented syntax. Ultimately, poetry is meant to be experienced, and the translation should resonate with the new audience, evoking emotions and provoking thought as the original would. The translation should be accessible yet profound, as overly literal translations may be technically accurate but fail to move readers emotionally.

Fidelity to meaning is central to any translation, particularly when dealing with religious and spiritual texts. It involves accurately conveying the themes, symbolism, and theological nuances of the original. Hamza Yusuf’s translation prioritizes clarity and theological depth. His translation is precise and informative, ensuring that key Islamic concepts are clearly communicated. For example, Yusuf’s direct language in lines such as “Indeed, the excellence of the Messenger is limitless, which speech cannot encompass” makes theological ideas accessible but sometimes sacrifices poetic flair for clarity. Shaykh Abdal Hakim Murad, on the other hand, balances fidelity with poetic expression. His translation reflects deep theological insight without compromising lyrical beauty. For instance, “He is the dawn whose light dispels the night of doubt; / The heart’s physician, banishing sorrow’s drought.” Murad’s choice of words offers a spiritual depth that resonates emotionally. Mostafa Azzam adopts a singable translation, focusing on maintaining rhythm and melody. While highly faithful in spirit, some theological depth is simplified for recitative ease. Lines like “Your noble face, more radiant than the dawn of day, / Brings hearts from gloom and grief to light’s comforting ray” illustrate his emphasis on melodic expression. Aziza Spiker combines fidelity with poetic elegance. Her translation

preserves theological meanings while using accessible language, as seen in “He, the mercy to the worlds, whose light redeems; / The heart’s physician, curing all with radiant beams.” Spiker’s work shows a remarkable balance between accuracy and beauty. Comparing these translations, Yusuf’s work excels in conveying doctrinal meanings, while Murad and Spiker masterfully blend fidelity with poetic aesthetics. Azzam’s translation is spiritually faithful but prioritizes performative aspects.

Preservation of poetic form and rhythm is crucial for a poem as lyrical as Qaseeda Burda. The original Arabic poem is known for its structured rhyme schemes and melodic flow, integral to its recitation. Hamza Yusuf takes a pragmatic approach, maintaining rhythm suitable for recitation but without strict adherence to the original’s complex meter. His translation flows naturally but lacks the lyrical sophistication of the original. Shaykh Abdal Hakim Murad emphasizes poetic rhythm, ensuring that his translation remains musical. For example, “No rose can boast the blush upon his radiant face; / No pearl as pure as words adorned with heaven’s grace.” Murad’s lyrical style makes his version suitable for both reading and performance. Mostafa Azzam focuses heavily on rhythm and melody. His singable translation retains the poem’s musical tradition, making it ideal for performance. The line “O you whose essence is the sun, while all the worlds are mere rays” reflects his commitment to preserving the recitative tradition. Aziza Spiker also prioritizes rhythm and lyricism, aligning her translation with classical poetic forms. Her lines, “With you, O Messenger, dawn’s light begins to rise; / Your gaze dispels the darkness of our hearts and skies,” highlight her poetic sensibility. Comparing these translations, Azzam’s version best retains the original poem’s recitative tradition, while Murad’s lyrical style makes his version equally suitable for reading and performance. Spiker’s elegant structure complements devotional recitation, and Yusuf’s rhythmic flow, though less intricate, supports spiritual reflection.

Cultural sensitivity is another critical parameter. Qaseeda Burda is steeped in Islamic cultural and religious references. Hamza Yusuf provides extensive commentary, ensuring cultural and theological references are understood. His approach makes the text highly informative but may interrupt the poetic flow. Shaykh Abdal Hakim Murad maintains cultural depth through poetic devices and Islamic symbolism. His subtle inclusion of cultural elements makes the translation rich without being didactic. Mostafa Azzam preserves cultural authenticity while simplifying some references for melodic continuity. His focus remains on the auditory experience. Aziza Spiker balances cultural sensitivity with accessibility, retaining Islamic terms and providing contextual explanations. Her translation allows readers to engage deeply with the cultural and spiritual significance of the poem. Comparing these translations, Yusuf’s commentary-driven approach ensures complete understanding of cultural contexts. Murad and Spiker maintain authenticity through language and symbolism. Azzam simplifies references without losing the poem’s cultural spirit.

Accessibility ensures that readers from diverse backgrounds can engage with the translation. Hamza Yusuf’s translation is highly accessible due to his explanatory approach. His detailed notes make his version ideal for academic readers. Shaykh Abdal Hakim Murad combines accessibility with poetic sophistication. His lyrical



language appeals to readers who appreciate poetic beauty alongside spiritual depth. Mostafa Azzam provides an accessible rendition for audiences who value musical performance. His singable lines resonate with those seeking a spiritual experience through recitation. Aziza Spiker uses clear language and poetic elegance, making her translation approachable without compromising depth. Her balanced approach ensures that the translation serves as both a literary work and a source of spiritual reflection. Comparing these translations, Yusuf's detailed notes make his version ideal for academic readers. Murad's lyrical language and Spiker's poetic clarity make their translations accessible for both general and scholarly audiences. Azzam's work resonates with those seeking a musical experience.

Emotional and spiritual resonance is key to the devotional purpose of Qaseeda Burda. The spiritual and emotional tone of the poem must be preserved in translation. Hamza Yusuf conveys spirituality through theological depth, though his emphasis on clarity slightly reduces emotive expression. Shaykh Abdal Hakim Murad excels in emotional resonance through vivid imagery and rhythmic language. Lines like "O soul, in love's embrace, let longing swell; / For in his memory, all hearts find their well" demonstrate Murad's ability to evoke deep emotional responses. Mostafa Azzam achieves spiritual resonance through recitation-friendly language, fostering a collective devotional experience. His singable lines enhance communal spirituality. Aziza Spiker delivers deep emotional connection using refined metaphors and rhythmic language. Her line "O soul, drawn to his light, seek him and find / A balm for every sorrow, peace for heart and mind" highlights her ability to connect readers emotionally with the poem's spiritual themes. Comparing these translations, Murad and Spiker's translations provide the most emotionally evocative renditions. Azzam's singable lines enhance communal spirituality, while Yusuf's theological focus fosters reflective spirituality.

Translating poetry is a delicate balance between faithfulness to the original text and creating an equally compelling piece in the target language. The standards and parameters—fidelity to meaning, preservation of tone and form, linguistic creativity, cultural sensitivity, and respect for the poet's voice—guide the translator's decisions. A successful poetic translation reads as a poem in its own right, carrying the same depth, beauty, and resonance as the original.

In conclusion, the four translations of Qaseeda Burda by Hamza Yusuf, Shaykh Abdal Hakim Murad, Mostafa Azzam, and Aziza Spiker each reflect distinct strengths based on key translation standards. Yusuf's version is best suited for readers seeking theological clarity and contextual depth. His detailed commentary provides readers with a comprehensive understanding of the poem's spiritual and cultural dimensions. Murad offers a lyrical and spiritually immersive translation ideal for literary appreciation. His poetic style captures the beauty and depth of Imam al-Busiri's masterpiece. Azzam's singable translation preserves the performative tradition, making it ideal for recitation and spiritual gatherings. His focus on rhythm and melody ensures that the poem's oral tradition is maintained. Spiker's rendition provides a harmonious balance of poetic elegance, cultural authenticity, and emotional resonance, appealing to readers seeking both beauty and depth. Together, these translations highlight the multifaceted nature of Qaseeda Burda, showcasing its

timeless appeal across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Each translator brings unique insights, ensuring that Imam al-Busiri's masterpiece continues to inspire devotion, reflection, and admiration among diverse audiences. The enduring significance of Qaseeda Burda lies in its ability to transcend time and culture, and these four translations, each with its unique strengths, ensure that its message remains relevant and inspiring for generations to come.

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