

Alireza Roshan

The Book of Absence

Translated from Persian by Erfan Moji & Gary Gach

Proposal for a Trade / Gift Book

Love Poetry
Sufism
Iran
etc

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CONTENT

Concept

The Book of Absence is a sequence of 135 brief poems by Alireza Roshan, Iranian author of 10 books of fiction and poetry – currently in exile in Hamburg.

His debut title is a remarkable Modernist reworking of classic Persian poetic traditions ... blending popular mysticism and the universal appeal of love poetry with the brevity of haiku and tanka ... as a splendid, gripping, sustained, interior journey that coheres as one, single book-length poem. (Minimalism becomes maximal.)

This English edition is the fruit of a five-year collaboration of two award-winning author / translators – an Iranian native speaker and an American poet.

Outline

The book unfolds as three books within the book –

- ***The Book of Me*** [me, without you]
- ***The Book of You*** [you, for whom I yearn]
- ***The Book of Nothing*** [in the absence of labels]

In this unflinchingly sincere record of vulnerable feelings of separation and longing ... the human object of yearning, and the divine Beloved, mirror, magnify, and catalyze each other ... with an third layer (also traditional in Persian poetry) of love for the soul of the world, the better world we know is possible..

Manuscript

The manuscript is available bilingually or English-only. It's being offered to you on a non-exclusive basis. Translators' afterwords are included.

AUTHOR / TRANSLATORS

Alireza Roshan, author

Alireza Roshan was born in Tehran in 1977. He worked as a journalist, heading the Books desk at Iran's most popular reformist daily newspaper (*Shargh*, شرق).

He gained fame as 'a poet without a book,' publishing poems daily on the Internet, for three years, attracting a following of thousands of readers; (a precursor of Instapoetry). A book of these were published in Iran (کتاب نیست), arranged according

to the author's three-part design. In 2011, a bilingual, looseleaf selection was published in France as *jusqu'à toi combien de poèmes*.

He was honored with the André Verdet Award in 2013. Following a year in solitary confinement for his participation in Iran's largest Sufi order, he migrated to Izmir, then Hamburg. His other books in Persian include: *Busy*, *Cage Poetry*, *Fade*, *Layli's Shadow* (a novel), *A Little Book of Love Poetry*, *Moonstone*, *The Point & 19 Other Stories*, *Suwayda*, and *We*.

Erfan Mojib, translator

Erfan Mojib was born in 1988, in the desert town of Yazd, Iran. He holds an MFA, Creative Writing, UNB, Canada; and an MA, English Literature, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur. His publications include works translated to / from English including *Flaubert's Parrot* by Julian Barnes; *Love Begins in Winter* by Simon Van Booy; *The Spell Chanted by Lambs*, and *The Illusion of Separateness*, by Reza Ghasemi; *García Márquez: The Man and His Work* by Gene Bell-Villada; and *The Passion* by Jeanette Winterson. His children's books, in collaboration with the Russian artist Oksana Baturina, have been translated into Persian, Russian, and Chinese. He is the recipient of a Tehran School of Art Short Story Award and the David Walker Prize for creative writing. His adaptations of Hafez, rendered with Gary Gach, will be published Spring 2024 by Hampton Roads — and which will cross-fertilize this title. For more : ErfanMojib.com

Gary Gach, translator

Gary Gach was born in 1947 in Los Angeles. BA in English from UCLA-SFSU, and currently teaches Zen at University of San Francisco, a private, Jesuit institution. He is author of *Preparing the Ground, Poems 1960–1970*; *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Buddhism* (Alpha/Penguin Random; +100,000 copies sold); *Pause ... Breathe ... Smile* (Sounds True; audio editon from Tantor Media, narrated by the author, earned *AudioFile's* Earphones Award). With Brother Anthony of Taizé and Youngmoo Kim, he's translated three books of poetry from Korean by Ko Un: *Flowers of a Moment*, BOA / Lannan Translation Series (Northern California Book Award for Translation); *Ten Thousand Lives* (introduction, Robert Hass), and *Songs for Tomorrow*, both from Green Integer. His anthology *What Book!? – Buddha Poems from Beat to Hiphop*, (Parallax Press/Random; +6,000 copies sold) received an American Book Award from Before Columbus Foundation. His translations have been published in +150 magazines and a dozen anthologies, including *Al-Mutanabbi Street Starts Here*, *Book of Luminous Things* (Czeslaw Milosz, editor), *Brick*, *City Lights Review*, *Code of Signals* (Michael Palmer, editor), *Drunken Boat*, *Evergreen Review*, *Exiled in the Word*, *Language for a New Century*, *The Nation*, *The New Yorker*, *Poems for the Millennium* (1&5), *Technicians of the Sacred*, *Two Lines*, *Words Without Borders*, *World Literature Today*, and *Zyzyyva*. For more : Gary-Gach.com

MARKET

This is a great time for poetry. A recent survey found 28M Americans are reading poetry – the highest percentage in two decades. Nielsen BookScan reports two-thirds of poetry buyers are younger than 34 and 41% are aged 13–22, with teenage girls and young women identified as the biggest consumers. ¹

***The Book of Absence* shares key elements with poetry titles selling +100,000 and +1,000,000 copies.** Following breakdowns of the book’s niches, we quote one publisher’s overview of different demographics achieving dynamic synergy to make a general Trade title. Our multiple entry points are:

1. love poetry
2. inspirational / spiritual / devotional poetry
3. Sufi poetry
4. literary translation
5. brief poetry
6. Instapoetry
7. Iranian culture
8. gift

One Love Poetry

Lovers give a book of poetry to express their heart. Consider Edward Fitzgerald’s *The Rubáiyát* of Omar Kháyyám as a reference point. A classic edition of love poetry, it was the most widely known book of poetry in the 19th century. *The Book of Absence* is similarly a suite of short philosophical Persian love poems, likewise arranged in a progression of interlocking images and themes.

Other love poetry favorites include Neruda’s **20 Love Poems & a Song of Despair** (+2M copies in print), ***The Song of Songs*** (blending divine and mortal love) **Mirabai, Rumi, Shakespeare’s sonnets, John Donne, HD, Walter Benton, Rod McKuen** (+60M), **Leonard Cohen, Alexandra Vasiliu, Rupi Kaur**, etc. Some readers compared *The Book of Absence* to the lovers in ***Layli and Majnun*** by 12th-century Persian poet Nazami Ganjavi, (retranslated in 2021 by Dick Davis for Penguin Classics).

Personal and contemporary, yet universal, our title fuses clarity of thought, depth of heart, and unflinching sincerity, with delicacy of expression – rendered with concise intensity, the brief poem format well-suited for today’s abbreviated literacy.

Two Inspirational / Spiritual / Devotional Poetry

When sensing the ineffable, we often part company with common speech, relying on poetry – as by Lao Tzu, Basho, St. John of the Cross, William Blake, Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, Ranier Maria Rilke, Rumi, Mary Oliver, David Whyte, Jane Hirshfield, and John O'Donohue.

The Book of Absence's universal compassion and unique wisdom is, *sui generis*, just such a spiritual title.

Three Sufism

Many religious traditions have a mystic undercurrent: Gnosticism in Christianity, Hassidism in Judaism, Zen in Buddhism, and Sufism in Islam. **Our evolving awareness in the West of Sufism often comes through its manifestations as poetry** – a synthesis of Love Poetry and Spiritual Poetry, with a “non status quo” social undertones. Not unlike *The Song of Songs* and the **Bride of Christ** – Persian Sufi poetry intertwines mundane and sacred love – the beloved and the Beloved.

Edward Fitzgerald's rendering of **Omar Khayyám's *Rubáiyát*** has seen several hundred editions. Its fame was then eclipsed by Kahlil Gibran – who acknowledged his debt to Sufism in *The Tempest*; ***The Prophet*** sold 9M copies in the US alone, and was translated into +50 languages.

Cultural issues notwithstanding, Coleman Bark's drafts of poetry by 13th-century Sufi **Rumi** have sold +2M copies. Daniel Ladinsky's **Hafiz *The Gift*** has sold a million copies (Penguin Compass). Retranslated by Sholeh Wolpe, Norton released At-tar's classic ***Conference of the Birds*** in hardback and paper; Dick Davis published a rendition in 2014 (Penguin Classics).

Alireza Roshan was active in Iran's largest Sufi order. Along with his similarities to traditional Sufi poets, his is a very *contemporary* voice, familiar with world poetry from Shakespeare to Neruda and Brecht – refreshingly spiritual-yet-secular.

Four Translation

We experience much of life itself as a translation. Books of Love Poetry and Sufi Poetry are often **translations**. After the dwindling of translation in American publishing since 1989³, literary translation is now experiencing a renaissance, and building a community of its own.

Recent attention has been paid to Coleman Barks' lack of knowledge of Persian, and Daniel Ladinsky's publishing his own poetry under the name of Hafiz. Our translation is faithful to the original, and Persian scholar Iraj Anvar and noted translator Elizabeth T Gray, Jr. vetted the bilingual edition.

Five Brief / Long Poetry

Our experiences of life are often brief. A brief poem stands us at a cliff, gives us a nudge – and we discover we can fly. ⁴ Alireza Roshan admits his admiration for **haiku**. Haiku's wide audience includes those who confess they don't "get" poetry. Robert Hass' *The Essential Haiku* (Ecco, 329pps) has sold +50,000 copies.

At the same time, *The Book of Absence* is a **book-length poem** – hearkening back to *The Rubaiyat*. Famous classics include Attar, Homer, and Ovid. Contemporary authors of popular book-length poems include John Ashbery, Anne Carson, T S Eliot, H D, Juan Felipe Herrera, Maxine Hong Kingston, Fred Moten, Alice Notley, Claudia Rankin, Ron Silliman, Layli Long Soldier, Jack Spicer, and Anne Waldman,

Six Instapoetry

Worth mentioning if only as a data point. Instapoetry is combines Brief Poetry and Love Poetry. Alireza Roshan became known as "poet without a book." Is his poetry related to "Instapoetry," in sharing its emotional, confessional, heart-based content, and initial publication via social media? What *Book Riot* says of Rupi Kaur's poetry is true of his, as well: '... insanely quotable, managing to bring forth powerful emotion in simple language.' But the subsequent "Instapoets" add large, *interactive* online followings. Rupi Kaur's first book, *Milk and Honey*, (Andrews McMeel, 208pps, 4 sections, one poem per page) sold over 3.5M copies, in 40 languages.

Bottom line: Instapoetry adds wind in the sails of poetry as a commercially viable genre. *The Book of Absence* could benefit from the Instapoetry craze, which carved out a popular basis for his own work, and through point-of-purchase *sales by association* ("You liked *that*? You'll love this!").

Seven Iranian culture

Last but not least, **over the past 25 years, a cultural renaissance has been occurring in Iran.** Yet the West has been relatively cut off from it, due to the revolution of 1978 and US sanctions. (In 2005, Arcade Publishing challenged the US Treasury Department's prohibition of publication in the US of works from countries subject to trade sanctions.) Along with Iranian cinema and electronica, we've witnessed such literary triumphs as breakout memoirs by Firoozeh Dumas (*Funny in Farsi*), Marjane Satrapi (*Persepolis*), and Azar Nafisi (*Reading Lolita in Tehran*), and such novels as Iraj Pejeshkzad's *My Uncle Napoleon*, and Simin Daneshvar's *Savushun* (+5,000,000 copies sold).

Poetry is the acme of Iranian culture. What philosophy is to ancient Greece, poetry is to Iran, then and now. Contemporary poetry anthologies include *Strange Times*, *My Dear: The PEN Anthology of Contemporary Iranian Poetry* (Arcade, 2005); *Belonging: New Poetry by Iranians Around the World* (North Atlantic, 2008), and *Es-*

sential Voices: Poetry of Iran and Its Diaspora (Green Linden, 2021 – in a 2nd printing five months after initial release. Despite multiple books in English of poetry by Forough Farrokhzad (1934–1967) and Ahmad Shamlou (1925–2000), editions by contemporary Iranian poets, such as *The Book of Absence*, are rare. The translators can also furnish books by contemporary Iranian poets Fariba Arabnia, Gholamreza Borousan, Sahara Mohammadi Ardahali, Ali Asadollahi, Leila Kordbache, Faryad Nasser, Rasoul Yunan, and Garous Abdolmalekian (*Lean Against This Late Hour*, Penguin 2020).

With the tragic death of Mahsa Amini, September 17, 2022, Iran has given birth to one of the largest women-led social movements in history, Woman Life Freedom, with intersectional relevance to global society. As of this writing, mainstream media has been influenced by JCPOA negotiations. While media quotes clerics, generals, and politician – literature shows us human beings. If Iran drops off today's front page, poetry never sleeps.

Eight Gift

Love Poetry and Spirituality are evergreen for Gift books. *Rumi's Little Book of Life: The Garden of the Soul, the Heart, and the Spirit*, in the new series from Hampton Roads, has sold 70,000 copies thus far. Andrews McMeel's list has poetry and spirituality titles, some selling millions of copies (specifics, available by request). GG is researching sales figures for New Directions' gift editions of Thomas Merton, and Kenneth Rexroth's Love Poems; and Parallax Press' Essential Mindfulness series, which he helped conceive. Please see *Bookstores & Other Sales Outlets*, in Promotional Opportunities (p 9).

Niches Crossing Over to General Trade

These eight themes braid into strong knots. In personal correspondence, Publisher Greg Brandenburgh (Hampton Roads) speaks of a relevant example of **multiple niches crossing over into a wide market**, for *Rumi's Little Book of Life* (+70,000 copies sold). He writes:

“ [It] appeal[s] to people interested in

- Sufism
- Esoteric/ancient wisdom
- General spirituality (those without any affiliation as well as liberal Protestants and Catholics)
- New Age spirituality
- Poetry
- Self-Help
- Gift product

Nearly 30% of the sales have gone through Amazon. 20% of the sales have been in the UK. Probably 10% of the sales have been through independent

bookstores. The rest of the sales are a mix of New Age, gift, and library account.... I love ... that [it] **crosses over from the niches into the general market** [emphasis added]. "

PROMOTIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Here's a checklist of areas where GG plans to promote this literary property. Please excuse redundant mention of what you already know far better than he. GG would be honored to work with and learn from you and the Team.

Bookstores & Other Sales Outlets

This title is perfect for reps adept at the **Gift** books market: serving hybrid stores that carry pens, cards, calendars, and journals, as well as books; and stores featuring other products, such as Anthropologie and Urban Outfitters, as well as airport bookstores. Instapoetry has been strong here. Gach's work has been carried at Compass Books, SF Int'l Airport and at Paradies Lagardère outlets; his most recent book was also carried by Pharmaca, Marshalls, and Whole Foods.

If useful for reps, GG can furnish names of 30 trade **bookshops** where he's done events, in Los Angeles, the San Francisco Bay Area, Seattle, Sonoma, Portland, and Vancouver, including Barnes & Noble, Book Passage, City Lights, Copperfields, Moe's, Stanford Bookshop, and Vroman's. GG has done events at five book shops specializing in spirituality (East West, both Seattle and Palo Alto; New Renaissance, Portland; Open Secret, San Rafael). He hasn't yet appeared at Beyond Words (Northampton), Controversial (San Diego), Dragon (Westhampton), Present Moment (Minneapolis), Silver Sage (Reno), Twenty-First Century (Fairfield, Iowa) and Woodstock's Bookmart, Mirabai nor Readers Quarry. Specialty **poetry bookstores** such as City Lights (San Francisco, Grolier Poetry Book Shop (Cambridge) and Open Book: A Poem Emporium (Seattle) are natural fits. Erfan has a list of US and European bookshops for the large **Iranian diaspora**. *The Book of Absence* could also be shelved at liberal **Catholic** bookshops, plus **Islamic** shops such as Kazi (Chicago) and Saqi (London). **Asian art museum** bookshops are also possible sales outlets (Kansas City, San Francisco, Washington DC, etc.) And Gach's books have sold well at **college** bookstores (Stanford, SFSU, UBC, and UCLA).

He presented his most recent title, *Pause ... Breathe ... Smile*, to 300 regional bookshop buyers at the Discovery Show of Northern California Independent Bookstore (NCIBA – now **California Independent Bookstores Alliance**). GG will enlist his friends and his writers' group to post 5-star reviews on **Amazon** as soon as the book drops.

Calendar

The book has three media “hooks”: February, **Valentine’s** ... April, **Poetry Month** ... May, **World in Translation** ... September 17, the beginning of **Woman Life Freedom**.

Endorsements

Thus far — Michel Manasse, in *European Journal* (Brussels), noted the poetry reminds him of **Omar Khayyam** and Sa’adi. New Directions author/translator Elizabeth T. Gray, Jr. writes of the poetry (in personal correspondence) “... both modern and koan-like while remaining so distinctly Persian ! ... absolutely stunning, and important!” – and wishes to review the book when published. Reza Aslan calls the work “remarkable.” Naoi Shihab Nye (in personal correspondence) calls the work Exquisite, intimate, wondrous and wise.”

Magazines & Anthologies

GG’s own work has been **excerpted** in *Spirituality & Practice*, *Tricycle*, *Utne*, etc., and **reviewed** in *Boston Book Review*, *January* (Canada), *Library Journal*, *San Jose Mercury News*, etc. He’s already placed excerpts in *Asymptote*; *Berkeley Times*; *Essential Voices: Poetry of Iran and Its Diaspora*; *Jacket 2*; Academy of American Poets (Poets.org) Poem-a-Day; San Francisco Public Library Poem-of-the-Day; *World Literature Today*; and *Y’alla – A Texan Journal of Middle Eastern Literature*.

Readings

Of GG’s dozens of poetry readings, venues include Beyond Baroque (with Amy Uyematsu); Focus Gallery (with Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Jack Hirschman); opener for Gathering of the Tribes for 1st Human Be-In (Los Angeles); Marin Poetry Center; New College of California; Poetry Santa Cruz; San Jose State University (with Sholeh Wolpe); SF Poetry Center; Two Lines (3ce); University of British Columbia. Samples of his reading from *The Book of Absence* are on [the book’s website](#).

Broadcast & Podcast

Gary’s appeared on over a dozen television programs, including Connie Martinson Talks Books (2M viewers; rebroadcast as an audience favorite). As a guest on +30 radio shows, he’s been heard on ABC, PBS, Pacifica, and Westwood One networks, plus numerous independent programs. Of +30 podcast interviews, the most recent is [Classical Ideas](#) [New Books Network].

Social Media

Alireza Roshan, Erfan Mojib, and Gary Gach have, combined, **51,600 social media followers**; fans of Alireza Roshan’s poetry have posted 600 entries on Instagram. Erfan devotes two days a week to his Instagram account. GG is creating a backlog file of word/image “memes” for Instagram accounts he’ll create and activate when the book campaign is ready. He is also joining Post and TikTok. Facebook’s “Poetry”

group hosts 99K members; “Rethinking World Literature,” 13,400; “Literary Translation,” 4,400, and he is becoming a familiar member of those communities.d

Speaking / Audio

Poetry is performative. GG is blessed with an expressive bass and dynamic stage presence. He’s acted on **tv**, **screen**, and legitimate **stage**; been keynote speaker at +20 **events**; spoken on +20 **panels**; organized and participated in several **benefits**, offered writing **workshops**; teaches at a **university**; and has offered over a hundred **poetry readings**, solo and with luminaries such as Robert Creeley, Diane DiPrima, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and Ko Un. The Bob Thurman Podcast gave him a poetry segment for nearly a year. GG recalls a book of Ko Un which he translated sold through the first printing at the Dodge Poetry Festival, and would be excited to promote the book through readings. Since **audio editions** add a revenue stream, the publisher might wish to license both an English and a Persian edition. Alireza Roshan is a gripping reader of his work, and can furnish a haunting electronica backdrop (samples available). GG narrated his most recent book for Tantor Media (Earphones Award, *AudioFile Magazine*). “Listening is the new reading.”

Translation

Literary translation bears its own promotional opportunities, such as ALTA, *Asymptote*, Center for the Art of Translation, *Kenyon Review*, *Reading in Translation* (translations reviewed by translators), *Three Percent Book Review*, *Translation Review*, *Translationista* and *World Literature Today*. Awards include Lois Roth Persian Translation Prize, Harold Morton Landon Award, PEN Award for Poetry in Translation, Three US universities offer degrees in literary translation, where GG might guest lecture. Facebook’s “Literary Translation” group hosts 4.4K members; “Rethinking World Literature,” 13.3K members. GG’s email lists 350 people dedicated to literary translation.

Iranian Culture

GG will seek reviews from *Asymptote*, *Parsagon*, *Persian Book Review*, *World Literature Today*. Other niche outlets include BBC Persian, Farhang Foundation, *Kanoon*, *Khanversations*, *Mela* (Middle Eastern Librarian Association, *Mela.us*), *Muslimah Media Watch* (*Patheos*), *New Books Network* *New Books* (*Middle Eastern*), *Parsi Times*, *Jeevika Verma*, *VOA*, etc. *Since the establishment of Woman Life Freedom, he has been compiling additional lists of outlets.*

RIGHTS

The author approves of the English translation.
World rights, except for French, are available.

Notes [optional]

1

Poetry sales soar as political millennials search for clarity, Donna Ferguson, *The Guardian*, 21:1:19. 'Andre Breedt, for Nielsen, said that sales were booming because in times of political upheaval and uncertainty, people turn to poems to make sense of the world: "Poetry is resonating with people who are looking for understanding. It is a really good way to explore complex, difficult emotions and uncertainty. ... He added that the form's brevity also meant it could be easily consumed on phones and shared on social media.'

2 In poetry, sacred and secular weren't always separate. In the 12th century, for instance, the union is found in Western traditions of minstrels and jongleurs, courtly trouvères and troubadours, and Dante – all of whom influenced by Sufi thought.

3 [Lost \(and Found\) in Translation](#), by GG, *Paste Magazine* (Atlanta), August 2008.

4 In *The Sea & the Honeycomb*, Robert Bly wrote of brief poetry:

A brief poem does without the scaffolding of secondary ideas. Because of this, it moves more swiftly than the longer poem and with more intellectual exhilaration. ... A brief poem stands us at a cliff, gives us a nudge – and we discover we can fly.