Translation and Creativity

Approaches to translation go far back to ancient times, with Cicero and Horace “(first century BCE) and St Jerome (fourth century CE).”(1) But in modern times there has been a greater rise of theories and schools or models which have so much developed the art of translation. Philological, linguistic, socio-linguistic, functional, semiotic, and communicative or manipulative methodologies have failed to meet at a united stand. It has been mentioned that “At one end of the debate, we have the idea that nothing is communicable or translatable; at the other extreme, we have the thought that everything is translatable into any language,” if we accept the fact that humanity shares certain characteristics.(2) Standing half way between these two extreme ends of the debate, Susan Bassnett, a prominent professor of comparative literature and cultural studies, comes to suggest that “Exact translation is impossible,” implying the translatability of untranslatable things but at certain degrees of approximation or sameness.(3) Such controversies have surely created dichotomy between theory and practice to which many renowned scholars have showed an alertness. In her essay “The field of translation studies: An introduction,” Kitty van Leuven-Zwart “describes translation teachers’ fear that theory would take over from practical training, and literary translators’ view that translation was an art that could not be theorized.”(4)

If the translation process sounds unable to free itself from the shackles of theorization, so does the translator. When s/he happens to follow one of the theories, the other comes to fasten many clasps around his/her neck. There is no better evidence to cite here than the Brazilian translation-studies community’s description of the translator, particularly in post-colonial countries, as “cannibal,” with all significations of the word, and Derrida’s perception of the translation process as “the breaking of the hymen, the penetration or violation of the source text, which is thereby feminized in a distasteful sexist way…” (a faint echo, perhaps, of Steiner.(5) Wole Soyinka has also seen cross-cultural translators as ‘racists’ claiming that they civilize (or change the ideology of) alien
source texts in ways acceptable to their native cultures.(6) And even those theorists and analysts who have shunned such offensive metaphors of the translator have fettered him/her by difficult responsibilities. E. Gentzler realises that the translator is required to painstakingly reveal “competence as literary citric, historical scholar, linguistic technician, and creative artist.”(7)

The bewildering question is: if the translator is most often regarded as an artist, which is the title of any good author, why is he denied the right of creativity? As a well versed Egyptian writer and translation practitioner, Enani, depending on other scholarly notions, contends that the translator, unlike the writer, “is deprived of the freedom of creativity or thought, because he is confined to a text whose author has happened to enjoy such right; he is committed to literally recording the original’s ideology from a language, which has got its own assets of culture and tradition as well as social norms, into another different language.”(8) This vision seems to limit ‘creativity’ to the ability of creating new ideas or, in other words, to the content rather than the form of a text. If authors are thus looked upon as creative artists as being the inventors of genuine ideas, how about those ones who derive their ideas from other sources? Would they still be creative? If not, as implied by Enani, this is going to shake a well-established and wide-ranging creativity of innumerable authors in the world. On top of all comes W. Shakespeare, whose creativity, as a playwright or poet, is almost always based on reshaping historical, social or cultural sources in new ways. This kind of creativity is valid in the light of the term’s definition in medieval Europe as “the reliance upon various artistic devices of language (rhetoric, prosody and style) in transferring a familiar, but rather old theme to a new literary source in an appealing way…”(9) A modern vision of the term may not go far from its orthodox context. According to psychologists, creativity is an intellectual capacity for invention.

It is this paper’s main target to prove that translation is not an ordinary activity of everyday life, as has been claimed by many scholars, but rather a real field of creativity. Neglecting the narrow pedagogical function as well as the bad type of translation, ideally
creative translation is defined as a rewriting process which meets three independent requirements: accuracy, naturalness and communication. The first is bound up with transmitting the overall meaning of the ST accurately, the second with applying suitable natural forms of TL to the ST, while the third with carrying the meaning and emotional force of the ST to the target reader, as much effectively as they are communicated to the ST readers. In this way, translation reproduces “the total dynamic character of the communication.”(10) Though this process gives room for the manifestation of great creativity, through adapting formal and linguistic parameters of the ST to different form and language dimensions and conventions, it should be governed by certain criteria. Dagmar Knittlova points out: “The text reads well but elegant creativity should not make the text sound better, more vivid than its original version, even if the translator is stylistically talented, gifted and inventive.”(11)

To show how creativity works in the translation process one may need to examine certain common theories of the subject on which practicing translators depend. The equivalence theory is followed by an endless list of translators, but not without problems. The conclusion that there are no two fully corresponding languages is inevitable, and that those words or signs (verbal or non-verbal) from different languages taken in translation as similar in meaning or even synonymous cannot solve the problem either: words and lexical structures have various associations and most likely no analogous images. As a very simple example, ‘yes’ in English is generally understood as an expression of agreement, meaning ‘right’ or ‘all right,’ whereas the Arabic equivalent نعم (Na’am) is interpreted differently, in relation to the situation. The creative translation is one adapted skillfully to any of such situations as: ‘Here I am’ (the reply to somebody’s asking a group for someone whom he had not met or known before); What do you want? (the response to someone’s demand that has not been properly heard); ‘Come again?’ (if somebody’s feeling is hurt by another one’s offensive words). It is noteworthy that the interpretation of the double use of this Arabic item (Na’am … Na’am) depends upon tone, which, for example,
may be an ironic response to someone’s telling of something (a religious notion or wise saying) as if were unfamiliar.

The question of equivalence gets much more complicated when specific words or structures of a language find no equivalent or even approximate meanings in another language. Catford, Popovic, Darbelnet and Vinay concur that “untranslatability,” of such kind falls into two categories: cultural and linguistic. As an example, the common English expression: ‘Mother Nature is angry’ sounds obscure or senseless to an Arab Moslem listener who may know English well but is ignorant of the cultural and religious images behind it. However, the good translator tests his own background of Western culture and religions against the expression to adapt its meaning in a suitable cultural and linguistic context of the target audience. Being aware of the cultural and religious differences between the West and the East, the translator knows that ‘Mother Nature’ is used in many English-speaking countries to refer to ‘god’ or ‘goddess,’ images which have no existence in the Arab Moslem’s mind. The latter believes in One and Only One God, whose image is never likened to any male figure or referred to as female. No Moslem would be expected, normally, to say: ‘Nature is angry,’ but may say: ‘God is angry at me (or us), when s/he feels that none of his/her prayers is answered, but not to describe a day’s bad weather, as Western non-Moslems do. On the contrary, Moslem Arabs always equate rainfall (but not a deluge) with the English expression, that is to say, as a clear sign of God’s satisfaction with them, because rains are needed for the cultivation of their desert lands on which they mainly depend. Thus the creative translator may render the English expression into: “Rabuna ghadib (Aleina)” which means in English: ‘God (or Allah)’ must be furious (with us)’.

Susan Bassnett is aware of such case of untranslatability, implying that only a creative mind can provide an appropriate translation. She presents many examples. The word ‘bathroom’ is explored by her as having different cultural contexts in English, Finnish and Japanese. In addition, one can claim that this word also has no existence in the Arabic language dictionaries, and is alien to ancient Arabic culture,
even though it is used much in the modern Arab world. The creative rendering of this English word forges it into any of such Arabic norms as: بيت الراحة، الغانط، بيت الخلاء، المرحاض، محل الأدب which in this way goes up well with the linguistic and cultural contexts of the target audience, and if the translator opts for الحمام he adapts the English word to the modern Arabic culture but at the expense of the lexical structure. A vindication of this exists in Nida’s “dynamic equivalence” and the Prague school’s functional equivalence’ as well Lotman’s semiotic approaches to translation. The latter sees that language and culture are inseparable. The production of dynamic lexical features of a language (by adjusting them in such a way as to conform to other languages) should therefore be associated with culture’s dynamism. (13)

The pragmatic theory of translation also gives room for the emergence of creativity. In all its ramifications (coherence and the implicature principles), the theory defines translation as a process of making sense out of a given text in the target language. This task is not easy, as it requires the translator to be highly perceptive and knowledgeable. Mona Baker recognizes “that a reader’s cultural and intellectual background determine[s] how much sense s/he gets out of a text.” (14) As the overall meaning of any text is formed by many interrelated factors, a good translator should master them all. For instance, the linguistic structures of certain types of texts may not suffice in creating coherent senses of what their authors want to say in the reader’s mind. A creative translator looks therefore for them behind lexical structure levels and through surface as well as implied relations in the ST in order to originate an adequate pragmatic equivalence in the TL. The translator’s creativity becomes greater when s/he makes sense out of a text that contains some exotic words without explanatory references. Examples of this are innumerable. The translation of Greek works into English and other languages is just one.

Roman Jakobson’s model of translation, which he categorizes into three types (intralingual, interlingual, and intersemiotic), may allow the good translator to get his creativity into practice. The ‘intralingual’ translation means “the interpretation of verbal signs by
means of other signs in the same language.” (15) Since this category depends on the synonym principle, the translation may look no more than an interpretation, for the translator seems to do nothing other than rewording the text. But creativity is still there, as long as we accept the fact that the linguistic units a translator uses to explain certain signs in a text cannot stand as perfect equivalents, because words of each unit have got their different associations. We are not so far here from Bassnett’s statement: “Equivalence in translation … should not be approached as a search for sameness, since sameness cannot ever exist between two TL versions of the same text.” (16) The interpretative translation of several verbal signs in the Quran is a good example. The verse 17 in Al–a’raaf surah, speaking of the devil’s persistent attempts to entice righteous people away from God’s path: (17) ﯽﭙﻦ ﺑﺎﻨﮭﻢ ﻣ ﻷﺗﯿ ﻣ ﮔ ﺑ ﻧ ﺷ ﯽ ﻧ ﻣ ﺗ ﻦ ﻷﻣ ﻳ ﻳ ﻳ ﻩ ﻢ ﻣ ﺣ ﻞ ﻮ ﺲ ﻋ ﻑ ﻪ ﻣ ﻳ ﻳ ﻳ ﻩ ﻢ ﻷ ﻞ ﻫ ﻣ ﻫ ﻣ ﻓ ﻣ ﻣ ﻓ ﻣ ﻗ ﻣ ﻓ ﻬ ﻬ ﻬ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ ﻢ 

A greater degree of creativity may show up in following Jakobson’s two other categories of translation. The ‘interlingual’ translation means the use of another language to explain the ST verbal signs, whereas the ‘intersemiotic’ translation (or transmutation) is the use of nonverbal signs for the interpretation of verbal signs in the ST.” (19) Facing the problem of untranslatability of certain verbal signs in a ST, usually brought about by the close relation of their
significances to unfamiliar cultural values, a translator seeking accuracy cannot omit or ignore them, but rather should, Levy insists, have “a clear moral responsibility to the TL readers” and should also take the “responsibility of finding a solution to the most daunting of problems.” (20) Nida’s wide-ranging categorization of the semantic relation-ships for the simple word ‘spirit’ into eleven forms (e.g. demon, fairy, God, ghost, liveliness, ethics of group, part of personality etc) (21) is a very good illustrative example of creativity at work, where the translator makes a semiotic transformation for reaching a readable translation of the context involving such word. On a different level, the intuitive translator considers these factors: the particular significance of each verbal sign used in a text so as to adapt them to nonverbal signs from a different language, the relationship between the signs and the overall linguistic structure of the text, and the cultural context out of which these signs came into existence. It becomes so complicated an issue for the translator when a ST is steeped in cultural conventions which cannot be replaced by equivalents from the culture of the TL. The creative translator, however, finds in the TL culture those near conventions which may carry their general purport. The kind of translation produced in such creative way applies the principle of the functional rendering that takes into account the sense and the style as well as the form of texts.

Enani’s contention that any translation product is the inevitable result of intuitions, which he defines as “the positive power to reach into mysterious areas of experience and, in a flash, reveal an expected thing - an image, a thought, a truth” is good evidence of the translator’s creativity in action. (22) With a peculiar mental power, a talented translator can have a deep positive insight into the allegorical content and structure of great poetry and, Enani maintains, a “deep-level sense of organization governing conflict in drama and narration in the novel.” (23) This is far from suggesting that the intuitive translator can easily grasp a great poet’s full intuition; no one, not even psychoanalyst, can. Otherwise, Shakespeare’s poetic and dramatic works, as an example, would not have been differently interpreted throughout four long centuries. This surely means that there are still certain invisible things (images, ideas or tonalities) kept far under the
surface of linguistic and technical features. It is no wonder that Shakespeare’s works will be interpretable (or translatable) as long as they are the concern of peoples of different cultures and languages.

There are countless prime examples of the creative intuition in the translation of verse. It is worth mentioning that if the poet’s intuition is difficult to measure or formalize, so is the translator’s. Like all intuitive writers, translators have their own ways of moulding an intuited sense from the ST into words of the TL. It is hardly surprising therefore to discover various versions of translation for one single source poem. The following three Arabic versions of an excerpt from T.S. Eliot’s The Waste Land is just an example:

The Chair she sat on, like a burnished throne,
Glowed on the marble, where the glass
Held up by standards wrought with fruited vines
From which a golden Cupidon peeped out
( Another hid his eyes behind his wings )
Doubled the flames of sevenbranched candelabra
Reflecting light upon the table as
The glitter of her jewels rose to meet it,
From satin cases poured in rich profusion
In vials of ivory and coloured glass
Unstoppered, lurked her strange synthetic perfumes, Unguent,
powdered, or liquid – troubled, confused
And drowned the sense in odours; stirred by the air
That freshened from the window these ascended
In fattening the prolonged candle-flames,
Flung their smoke into the laquearia,
Stirring the pattern on the coffered ceiling.
Huge sea-wood fed with copper
Burned green and orange, framed by the coloured stone;
In which sad light a carved dolphin swam.


Arabic versions of Eliot’s cited lines by Lewis Awad from
(في الأدب الإنجليزي الحديث)

1- على الرخام لمع المقعد الذي عليه جلست
كأنه العرش الوضاء، حيث ارتفعت المرأة
على أعلام موشاة بالكرم ذي الأعشاب،
ومنها أطل كوبية ذهبية
( وأخيري آخر عنيته خلف جناحه )
فضاعفت المرأة شعلات الشمادان
ذي الشعلات السبع.
وانعكس منها الضوء على المائدة
لحظة أن ابتدى بريق جواهرها للقيام
صاعدا من احتفظ مطينة بالدمق، متدفقة في فيض عظيم.
وفي قوارير من العاج والزجاج الملون بلا سدة،
كمنت عطورها العطرة المركبة
بين زيت ومسحوق وسائل،
فأزجت الحواس ويلبّتها وأغرتها في الروائح.
ولما حرك هواء النافذة الرطيب الروائح
صعدت، في لهب الشموع المستعرض المستطي بالسقف الخشبي،
وقذفت بدخانها على مربعات السقف الخشبي،
فهتز المشق المنقوش
على السقف المحوّف كأنه الصندوق.
وفي السقف اشتعلت أشجار البحر الجسيمة
المطعة بالشمس الأحمر
بالمهاب الأخضر وبلون البرتقالي
ومن حولها إطار الحجر الملون
وفي هذا الضوء الديني سحير دقيق منقوش

By Nabeel Raaghib ( from أرض الضياع: )
٢ - المقعد الذي استوت عليه مثل عرش متألق،
توهج على الرخام، حيث المرأة
المثيرة على قوائم قدست من عناقيد كروم
من خلالها اختلس كوبك ذهبي نظارات

Ahmed Hussein Khalil

( وأخر أخفي عينيه خلف جناحه)
عناست لهيب الشمعدان بفروعه السبعة
والضياء على المنضادة
في حين ضع وبعض جواهرها للفان،
متفقفاً على عجل الحرير الأطلسي في ثراء باذخ،
ومن قوارير العاج والزواج الملون
وقد فتحت أفواهها، تضوع أرجع طورها الغربية،
مرهمية، مسحوبة أو سائدة - مشوشة، حائرة
فأغرقت الحواس في عينها المشتراء بين طيات الهواء
المجندة من النافذة والمساعدة
لا طعام لهيب الشموع ذات العمر المنتد،
فتكافد دخانها بين أرجاء السقف المنحوت,
لتدب الحياة في صورة المنجدة
صوب أعشاب بحرية كثيفة مطعمة بنكاس أحمر
متوهجة بالخصبة ولون البرتقال، في إطر من الحجر الملون,

حيث سباح درفيل منحوت في ضوئه الشجن

By M.S. Farid

٣ - كان الكرسي الذي اقتحمه يحكي عرشا مصفولا
ويلمع على الرخام، وقد قامت المرأة
علي قوائم تطعمها العراش المزدهرة
وأطل منها كوبك ذهبي صغير
( وواري آخر عينيه خلف جناحه)
فضوعت شعارات الشمعدان ذات السبعة أفرع
وراحت تعكس الضوء على المائدة إذ
ارتفاع بريق حليها للفان،
من غلب الأطلسي الذي سالت في فيض غني.
A careful consideration of the translations may come up with the fact that there is a wide-ranging divergence between one version and another. The first, unlike the other two, is different in terms of form from the original, as the English 20 lines are met with 24 Arabic lines. But this is not a problem because omissions and accretions are allowed in the process of rendering linguistically different texts. Enani suggests that “a single line may be divided, deliberately, for the sake of rhythm or rhyme [or both] into two or three in the target language.” (25) The problem is indeed related to the needles change of the structure of certain lines in the ST, and to the use of Arabic equivalents associated with alien cultural or religious images. The first version begins with which is the end of the second line’s first part (on the marble), and moves back to the beginning of this same line to take the verb ‘Glowed’ and then up to the first line to complete with (The chair she sat on); the second Arabic line starts with the simile which is the last part of the first line. Unlike the second and third versions, this one also divides the sixth line into two Arabic lines:

What sounds strange is that such recombination of the original lines does not seem to serve the structure of the Arabic lines, nor does it make them look musical, which is a primary feature of verse; it rather breaks the grammar of Arabic language. Contrary to Arabic norms of structuring a sentence, the first version begins with the preposition علي
and the second with the noun الممقعد (as literally as the original does). But the third version follows the Arabic rules by starting with the past verb كان even though it does not have an equivalent in the original’s first line but is implied by the verbs “sat” and “Glowed” (which are in the past tense). This is an indication of the translator’s awareness of Arabic norms, which he creatively adapts to the English structure. Actually, the first version departs from standard Arabic by tending much to begin most of the lines with a preposition (e.g. على أعلام، ومنها أطل، وفي قوارير، بين زيت، على السقف، وفي السقف، باللهب الأخضر، ومن حولها، وفي هذا). It is perhaps this reconstruction of the English lines into Arabic which has unconsciously made him overuse the conjunction “و” (in English ‘and’) in an attempt to make his lines look harmonious. But even this device further distances the Arabic text from the general poetic structure of the original.

More dangerous is these versions’ choice of irrelevant Arabic alternatives which impose different images and meanings on the original. For example, the use of الممقعد for “chair” refers to any seat, whereas the English word implies such a special chair that looks like the throne, which interestingly meets the religious implication of the Arabic rendering الكرسي (mentioned repeatedly in both the Bible and the Quran as a scene of luxury in paradise) in the third version. But this is not the only problem. The first version’s choice of الوضاء for the English adjective ‘burnished,’ rendered by the second version into متألق, is burdened with the Arabic connotations: ضوء / ضياء (light) and وضاء (ablution). The last is a common image in Islamic religion which is indeed alien to the cultural background of the original text. Similarly, the Arabic alternative توهج used in the second version for ‘Glowed’ brings in problematic Arabic associations, such as التهيب (flamed), استعر (burned) or استعر (blazed). All these Arabic images dim the initial English image confined to the shining chair like the finely polished throne,’ to which the third translation كان الكرسي الذي اقتعدته يحكى عرشا متصقولا ‘corresponds interestingly. Much more important, this translation also creates richer and closer Arabic synecdoche by the use of اقتعدته instead of the common verb جلست (sat) and يحكى (like)as well as متصقولا وساء (burnished), all of which make the original
image appear clearer, with the same effect, and supply the Arabic language with fresh images.

Contrary to the first two versions, the third is laden with evident examples of creativity which put the original into new but related-in-meaning forms of Arabic words. Most interesting is the rendering of ‘Doubled the flames of sevenbranched candelabra’ into which gives the original image of ‘candelabra’ a new Arabic form (symbolically, with seven arms), a form which easily brings to the Arab reader's mind a clearer picture of the English image, as exactly as received by the English reader. Furthermore, the translator opts for (vials of ivory), (and cloured glass/ Unstoppered) (In which sad light a carved dolphin swam). They all indicate that he has a very good command of both English and Arabic languages, which enables him to ideally produce a kind of translation that carries the general linguistic and cultural parameters of the source text. Therefore, it is not an exaggeration to claim that any attempt to echo this translation must come to grief.

The translator's creative intuition can also be found at work in another province of translating English verse into Arabic. When the translator tries to use a tone in Arabic comparable to that in an English poem, he in this way lets his intuition travel deeper behind the linguistic and technical features of verse. Consider the following lines for Robert Graves and their Arabic translation:

Since now I dare not ask
Any gift from you, or gentle task,
Or lover’s promise - not yet refuse
Whatever I can give and you can dare choose-
Have pity on us both: choose well
On this sharp ridge dividing death from hell.
Though the two texts have got the same number of lines, they cannot be regarded as fully corresponding. The Arabic version is less in number of words and different in rhyme. However, the linguistic and technical features of the Arabic translation are indeed made to come as close to those of the original as can be imagined. The reader does not need to have a look at the source text language in order to appreciate the painfully ironic situation of the poet, where he is portrayed as standing on a sharp ridge between ‘death’ and ‘hell.’ Nor does s/he need to search for the irony underlying the imperative: أحسني اختيار مطلبك (choose well), as it is determined by the last line to be so much terrible as ‘death’ or ‘hell.’ (28) The translator’s creative intuition is here caught in producing more than a functional translation - one which preserves most of the technical features of the original (concerning rhythm or tempo, sequence of ideas, tone, and point of view) in a completely different linguistic and cultural matrix. It is this creativity which gives the Arabic text its genuineness, making it look as if we were originally written in Arabic, despite confinement to the foreign original.

Inasmuch as the intuitive translation contributes to the development of literary works through professed cases of intellectuality, it may distort the original texts. Hutchins et al’s rendering of some of the Egyptian N. Mahfouz’s novels into English, which may have helped the novelist to win the Nobel Prize for literature, is indeed far behind the Egyptian cultural scene brought alive by certain colloquial Arabic words and expressions, which are fully misunderstood by the English translator. English-speaking Egyptian intellectuals, well acquainted
with the Arabic novels, with their linguistic and cultural backgrounds, will feel mostly misled when they come to read the English translation. The following is just a brief example from the translation of قصر الشوق (Qasr al-shoaq)(Palace of Desire):

…Amina replied, “May our Lord be gracious to us.” She sighed and continued: “The whole world is a blazing pyre, especially the oven room. The roof terrace is the only place you can breathe in summer - once the sun has set.”( 29)

As a translation for the Arabic:

قالت امينة:
- ربي لطفنا (ثم وهي تنتندي) الدنيا كلها كوم وحجرة الفرن كوم! السطح هو الوحيد في الصيف بعد غياب الشمس. (30)

The translator’s unfamiliarity with Arabic language and life of Arabs must have made him unable to give a faithful translation. His rendering of الدنیا کلّها کوم وحجرة الفرن کوم! into: “The whole world is a blazing pyre, especially the oven room,” goes far behind the real Arabic meaning (Compared to the whole world, the room with the oven is far more blazing). Also the Arabic word المتنفس done into ‘breathe’ indicates the translator’s missing of a most common scene in the Egyptian life during summer (immediately after sunset, most people leave their own very hot rooms to sit and relax on the roofs of their houses. This is to say the Arabic المتنفس implies relaxation more than breathing.

From what has been discussed so far we may conclude that the translator, particularly of literary products, should be more creative than merely reproducing or interpreting. The creative translator uses his/her own intuition or talent to catch the true meaning and intended message, lying at different levels, behind the overall structure of a source text and put them adequately into a different language and form of the target text. To venture an old simile, like the dressmaker, the translator uses certain strategies to put the source text in a new dress by changing certain parameters of its form and/or content – a job which
invites us to admit that he shares creativity with the author. Nonetheless, this kind of creativity, unlike the author’s, is limited. He may feel free to select from the target language all materials (linguistic, cultural or technical) which help him to create a new (target) text, although he may not be free to leave out the essential linguistic and technical features of the source text. Therefore, the kind of translation which exceeds these limits, by adding to or cutting from the essence of the source text, is judged as “unduly free.” (31) However, the estimation of the translator’s creativity, like the author’s, is not based on specific grounds but rather on individualistic criteria, as each has his/her own linguistic and cultural background and mental ability. Such conclusion may attract more attention to the translator’s job, which is discovered to be no less important than the author’s. If there is no text without author, there is no life for any genius outside national borders without the translator.

Notes

Translation: An Anthology of Translation from Dryden to Derrida, Chicago and London: The Univ. of Chicago Press.

(2) From the website: webmaster@completetranslation.com Copyright 2000-2004, Complete Translation Services, Inc., last modified: January 11, 2004.


(5) The Brazilian cannibalist movement in translation is detailed in many books on translation, like Susan Bassnett’s Translation Studies, the preface, and Jeremy Munday’s Introducing Translation Studies, p. 136, where the metaphors used to describe translation and the translator are indicated ‘to stand the experience of colonization and translation: the colonizers and their language are devoured, their life force invigorating the devourers, but in a new purified and energized form that is appropriate to the needs of the native peoples.’ E. Vieira presents a summery of the movement and its debt to Haroldo de Campos brothers in her essay ‘Liberating Calibans: Readings of Antropofagia and Haroldo de Campos’ Poetics of Transcreation,’ in Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi (eds.) (1999) Post-Colonial Translation: Theory and Practice, London and New York: Pinter, pp. 95-113; George Steiner (1975) After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation, London: Oxford Univ. Press.


Basil Hatim and Ian Mason (1997) *The Translator as Communicator*, London and New York, p. 2, where the authors elaborate on the job of the translator as both receiver and producer, a position which they regard as a ‘special category of communicator.’ See also Mona Abousenna (ed.) (1993) *First Series on Creativity in Translation*, seminar papers, CDELT, Ain Shams Univ., where a number of renowned Egyptian scholars echo Hatim and Mason’s view of the translator and the relation between translation and culture.

From the website: Webmaster@completetranslation.com (2000-2004)


Analysis in Translation: Theory, Methodology and Didactic Application of a Model for Translation-oriented Text Analysis, Amsterdam: Rodopi.


(18) Abdulaah Yusuf Ali, Trans., The Holy Quran, Britain: Khalil Al-Rawaf. Arthur J. Arberry, The Koran Interpreted, London: Oxford Univ. Press, renders the same verse of Al-A’Raaf surah into: “And I shall come on them from before them and from behind them, from their right hands, and their left hands,” whereas Mohamed Marmaduke Pickthall’s The meaning of the Glorious Koran, USA: A Mentor Book renders it into: “Then I shall come upon them from before them and from behind them and from their right hands and from their left hands. It seems that Ali’s full understanding of Arabic language, as an Arabic scholar, must have enabled him to give a more faithful English interpretation of the Quran than Pickthall’s and Arberry’s, who are English-speaking Moslems.


(21) Susan Bassnett (20).


(27) From M.S. Farid (1999) ‘The Love Poetry of Robert Graves’ in *Cairo Studies in English*, p. 118. The English Excerpt from this article and its different Arabic translations are used by Enani in his *On Translating Arabic* (pp. 151- 52) for discussing the Arabic interpretation of English rhythm.


(31) See the Website: Webmaster@completetranslation.com (January, 2004).
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Arabic works:-