



PROGRAMME ABSTRACTS

THE TRANSLATION OF MODERN ARABIC LITERATURE INTO EUROPEAN LANGUAGES

***AN INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM
30 NOVEMBER – 03 DECEMBER 2010***

THE SYMPOSIUM IS ORGANISED BY THE SOAS CENTRE FOR CULTURAL, LITERARY AND POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES, CCLPS, SCHOOL OF ORIENTAL AND AFRICAN STUDIES, AND ALECSO, THE ARAB LEAGUE EDUCATIONAL, CULTURAL AND SCIENTIFIC ORGANIZATION

IT WILL TAKE PLACE AT SOAS: THE OPENING SESSION ON TUESDAY 30TH NOVEMBER 2010 IN BRUNEI GALLERY LECTURE THEATRE AND WILL BE FOLLOWED BY A RECEPTION IN BRUNEI GALLERY SUITE. THE REST OF THE SYMPOSIUM WILL TAKE PLACE IN ROOMS 101 AND 102, 21/22 RUSSELL SQUARE.

EACH PARTICIPANT HAS 30 MINUTES FOR PRESENTING THE PAPER AND 30 MINUTES FOR DISCUSSION

DIRECT ALL FURTHER ENQUIRIES AND REGISTRATIONS TO:

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ABSTRACTS

THE CHOICE OF THE TRANSLATOR- AMBIGUITY, COMPROMISES AND COURAGE

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Translation is a highly complicated activity, implying a certain amount of courage, in order to face ambiguity, confront with the quest for compromise and above all cope with choices.

My paper will focus on the matter of choices, under a threefold approach. The first issue at stake is the choice of the translator intended as the combination of a particular matching for a certain author. Secondly, the choice may refer to the work to be translated, taking different factors as guidelines. But what really implies a strong decision-making process is the third choice, i.e. the choice of the translator in the moment he must select one word or another, work out interpretation problems, and opt for an idiomatic expression. The paper will mainly concentrate on this kind of choice, considering that translation is not just saying something from a language into another, it is not a literal transposition of a single term, but the expression of a concept from one culture to another.

As Umberto Eco wrote, translation is “saying almost the same thing”, stressing the fact that the main activity is interpretation, a general transposition of the overall meaning, not of the single word.

Translation from Arabic may raise particular problems, considering that sometimes there are difficulties in rendering in Italian the same nuances as in the original text, and that in certain cases the best solution is either to give up translating and make recourse to the Arab word, or to use periphrasis which may explain the general meaning. This is an example of choice. In other cases, betrayal of the original meaning could be more effective for the Italian reader than a faithful translation which does not correspond completely to the intention of the author. Examples will be provided in this sense. In any case, the translator should also decide whether insert explanatory notes or not. This assumption of responsibility is another example of choice, requiring the necessary courage to face the possible risk of ambiguity, or opt for the compromise of burdening the reading with technical explanations.

TRANSLATION AS INTERROGATION: ON THE POST 9/11 FORENSIC INTEREST IN ARABIC LITERATURE

SINAN ANTOUN

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While the fortunes of modern Arabic literature in the U.S were far from ideal before 9/11, it is not exorbitant to count Arabic literature (and culture) as a site that suffered extensive discursive damage in terms of its reception and dissemination in translation. The manichaeian discourse deployed by the Bush administration to exploit the attack for political purposes drew on an already resilient Orientalist archive to overdetermine how the event and its aftermath were to be understood and which responses were appropriate and needed. Any and all knowledge about this civilizational and cultural other was, and still is, in high demand. While no reading or translation is immune from politics and ideology, my paper argues that, with very few exceptions, Arabic literature came to be read, even more so, as ethnography and/or fragments of the monolithic exhibit pointing to a guilty culture.

THE TRANSLATOR AS AUTHOR ... OR THE AUTHOR AS TRANSLATOR?

MARILYN BOOTH

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The emergence of Translation Studies as an academic discipline—with a concomitant focus on the variable status of the literary translator—has led to a welcome accenting of the translator’s creativity and autonomy as a producer of aesthetic culture. Indeed, this has yielded an intensified interest in the creative process of the translator’s craft and an emphasis on the translator’s responsible selectivity: not just in terms of choosing texts to translate, which remains an abiding concern for those engaged in the production of translated Arabic literature, but also within the text.

Yet, has this new valuation of the translator as cultural actor—as, indeed, author—effaced recognition of the other forces that go into production of the published text? It seems too obvious to mention that editors as well as publicity apparatuses that frame the published text have a hand in producing the text. Yet so does the author of the original, acting within the text’s Benjaminian “afterlife”: as a perhaps indispensable source of background information and linguistic puzzles for the translator, and yet also sometimes with a far stronger hand. Inspired by three different experiences of authorial intervention, the author of this paper considers the shifting (and of course highly varied) roles of Arabophone authors in producing translated texts out of their Arabic originals. Has the recent “star quality” of a few Arabic works (and their translations) affected the relationship between first and second author of the work more generally, in the field of Arabic literature in translation? What dynamics are at work in this often intimate, sometimes tense relationship? What role do publishers and editors play in this relationship, and how do translation contracts affect it? The author of the paper draws not only on her own experience but also on that of other translators.

THE TASK OF THE DRAGOMAN: COMMUNICATION, EMPATHY, AND THE CONDUCT OF WAR

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Translation is often assumed to follow a path towards communication, and thus to comprehension. Hence it is seen as a crucial means for creating human empathy and deeper cultural understanding. But it is not difficult to find examples from our colonial history and our imperial present that suggest that the normal goals of translation are not to create agreement, but something else. Translation is not just how we might understand each other, it’s also a key part of how we conduct armed conflict. Indeed, translation is a routine protocol of modern empires, without which they would perish. This paper explores the military aspects of translation—in the modern Arab world, with particular attention to the ways in which translation has intensified conflict and been wielded as a weapon.

MAPPING TRANSLATION IN THE EURO-MEDITERRANEAN AREA: A PRISM FOR INTERCULTURAL PROCESSES

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Director and Founder, Transeuropéennes

Issues related to translation are at the heart of linguistic and cultural development, and they need to be given a central role in intercultural exchanges across the Mediterranean region. For those who do not master a foreign language, who do not have the opportunity to study abroad, translation gives access to knowledge and to other horizons.

Translation enriches languages, providing it with new vocabularies, with new concepts in the field of human and social sciences. It renews imaginaries and modes of representation. As it contributes to a restoration of languages to their proper place, in all their richness and complexity, their diversity and depth of field, translation is a strategic dimension for the implementation of the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. But besides this, translation can put into perspective entrenched differences and "untranslatables" that must not be glossed over. It means developing a relation to the others which will be based on experience, rather than on stereotypes and fear.

Starting from these fundamental requirements of Transeuropéennes' project "Translating in the Mediterranean Area", Transeuropéennes and the Anna Lindh Foundation have decided to join their efforts to launch in 2010 a mapping of translations in the Euro-mediterranean region, together with twenty partner organisations. Beyond the quantitative dimension of such a mapping, the main objective is to know better what is translated, what is not, in the field of literature (including youth literature and theatre) and human and social sciences and to understand better the quality and nature of the cultural exchanges in the region. The mapping addresses numerous questions, including the quality of translations, the status of translators, the conditions of reception of the translated works. This contribution will present its very first mapping results, insisting on translation of Modern Arabic Literature, and relate them to intercultural processes and practices.

TRANSLATIONS OF NAGUIB MAHFOUZ INTO ENGLISH

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Nearly all Naguib Mahfouz's novels have now been translated into English. Of his 33 novels (counting the Cairo Trilogy as one work) 29 are now available in English translation. The ones as yet unavailable in English are: *Al-Hubb Tahta al-Matar* (1973); *Qalb al-Layl* (1975); *'Asr al-Hubb* (1980); and his very last novel, *Qushtumr* (1988); all of which are under contract for translation and publication by the end of 2011. Of the works translated, only one *Awlad Haratina* was translated twice, first as *Children of Gebelawi* (1981) by Philip Stewart, and then as *Children of the Alley* (1999) by Paul Theroux. How good are the translations of Mahfouz? Do they vary in quality and why? Are the translations as good as the originals? Do they give Mahfouz his due? Do the translations convey his ideas and the aesthetics of his style faithfully? And how much of the original is lost in translation? What problems did translators meet and how did they deal with them? What are the specific issues of translating dialogue as opposed to narrative? What happens to jokes, puns and playfulness, specifically associated with the Arabic language and culture, and more specifically with spoken Egyptian? How do translators overcome (or fall victim to) their lack of intimate knowledge of the popular culture of Egyptian Arabic? And what happens to character

names which Mahfouz often impregnates with suggestive meanings related to character temperament and the themes of the novel? What happens to the spoken language laden with religiously based expressions when transferred to such a language as English, now secularised for centuries? Are there problems dictated by the fact that translators are predominantly English-speaking Arabists, to whom some intimate domains of the language and culture are inevitably little accessible and irresolvable by reference to dictionaries?

THE BURDEN OF HISTORY

Hartmut Faehndrich

Two figures may be tentatively used to symbolize the modern western view of the Orient representing two different ways of approaching its literature and still creating a similar image. Perhaps this is a daring assertion, but so be it!

The two are:

Antoine Galland (1646-1715), professor of oriental languages at the Collège de France and celebrated translator of the Arabian Nights.

François Pétis de la Croix (1653-1713), also specialist in oriental tongues and author of a highly praised collection of stories, *Les Mille et un Jours*, written more or less in the vein of the Thousand and One Nights.

Both these gentlemen are profoundly responsible for the creation of a particular image in the West of life and literature in the East, an image that was, with variations, to persist since the lifetime of Galland and Pétis de la Croix.

The first one took stories of different origins and put them together in a collection that was to become THE work of the Arabic literary tradition. The other one outright invented stories that he offered to the reading public as stemming from an oriental manuscript.

Both works deeply influenced the West that, after the failure of the Ottoman army to conquer Vienna in 1683, had set out to reorient its attitude towards the East.

EXCUSE MY FRENCH! THE TRANSLATION OF ARABIC MODERN LITERATURE FROM A FRANCOPHONE PERSPECTIVE.

Yves Gonzalez-Quijano

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At times, good theory may come from experimentation on practical ground. Apologizing for speaking sometimes from my own experience, obviously personal but also related to a general context which made it possible, I shall try to come back to the various stages of the translation of Arabic Modern literature into French with a focus on the 1990's, when the opening of a specialized collection at Actes Sud publishing house started a new era for the translation of Arabic modern literature in French. This will lead me to the second part of this paper, dedicated to some of the questions raised by the convenors of this seminar. They were so numerous and challenging that I shall certainly not pretend to answer all of them, in a definitive way. Rather, I shall only pretend to

tackle, with some frankness, some of the issues which have been suggested regarding the translation of modern Arabic literature into French.

THE PIONEERING EXPERIMENTS
MARGARET OBANK
BANIPAL

TRANSLATING (DENATURING?) MODERN ARABIC LITERATURE INTO SPANISH

Gonzalo Fernandez
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The interest in Modern Arabic literature has been bound in Spain to translation since its inception more than half a century ago, when Taha Husayn's *Al-Ayyam* was translated (*Los días*) by Emilio García Gómez in 1954. Since then, many Arab poets and novelists have been translated into Spanish, first mainly with the support of institutions and more recently under the troublesome forces of the markets.

Translation was born out of a sociological, rather than a literary, interest. Arabic literature was perceived as a means to better understand customs and manners of Arabs and Muslims. The sociological and political capitalization on literature often marked the selection of original texts as well as characterized the translated texts from Arabic. Footnotes, transliterations, Spanish vocabulary of Arabic origin and other textual devices ended up establishing an authentic typology of translated Arabic texts into Spanish that might have hampered the reception of modern Arabic literature and abandoned during the last decade.

FOREIGNISATION, DOMESTICATION AND COMMUNICATION IN THE TRANSLATION OF MODERN ARABIC LITERATURE INTO ENGLISH

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In the last few decades resistant translation strategies have acquired a certain currency among translators and translation theorists. What Venuti calls domestication has come to be regarded by some as reductive and deceptive because it disguises difference and produces an effect of transparency, while foreignising translation strategies, designed to signify the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text and resist target culture values, have gained favour. This paper evaluates foreignisation and domestication as approaches to the translation of modern Arabic literature through an exploration of the English translations of Najib Mahfuz's *Hadith al-Sabah wa'l-Masa'* and Hanan al-Shaykh's *Hikayati Sharh Yatul*. It finds that the domesticating approach can be extremely effective in some cases while foreignisation, even as it achieves its goal of disrupting target culture norms and assumptions, can be self-defeating and obstruct cultural exchange.

PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES OF GRANTS AND SUPPORT PROGRAMS FOR TRANSLATION OF ARABIC LITERATURE FOR THE GERMAN LANGUAGE MARKET

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The paper will analyse a number of assumptions with regard to the place that Arab fiction has on the German language market for fiction (or translated fiction).

The first assumption is that the literary market is functioning in such a way that Arab literature will be translated into German provided that German readers would buy the books. Has this been proven wrong over many decades?

The second assumption is that programs to promote translations from Arabic to German can remedy the existing imbalances. The problem remains under what conditions they can do this.

The third assumption is that such programs of supporting translations can function on the basis of sufficient funds. Is funding a major problem?

The fourth assumption is that it is most important to decide what should be translated and not how the respective work would be translated (and by whom) and under what conditions the translated work would be marketed.

The fifth assumption is that in view of the existing imbalances of translations of Arabic fiction into German it is more important to translate more than to translate better, whether such translations are geared to the (German) book market or not.

The sixth assumption is that control of quality of translations is a matter which in view of the need to translate more can be neglected.

The seventh assumption is that one should never give up hope, and that funding agencies are interested in learning from their experiences.

The paper will focus on the realities of translation programs in Germany (which has contributed to more than 20 % of Arab fiction available on the German market in the last 20 years, having been supported by the Litprom program with the support of the German government and the Swiss cultural foundation Pro Helvetia) and those supported by Arab countries (foundations and agencies).

'ETHICS' VERSUS POLITICS: TRANSLATION AND ARABIC LITERATURE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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In this paper I would like to revisit Edward Said's 1990 discussion of Arabic literature as an 'embargoed literature' in the United States, with reference to the 'ethics' debate in Translation Studies as formulated by Lawrence Venuti (1998) and others (Bermann & Wood 2005) in the last decade. I will argue that, in the context of Arabic literature, the domestication/foreignization debate is inseparable from the post-9/11 reception environment and hence from new modes of orientalism that alter the terms of the ethics debate as a whole, and that force us, as translators, to move beyond the question of how we translate to confront the politics of why we translate.

The paper will take up the question of what, in the main, gets translated into American English today and how distinct translation choices geared towards specific audiences encourage distinct ways of knowing vis à vis Arabic literature and the Arab world that encode invisible hierarchies of institutional and generic power. I will explore the contemporary spectrum of reception environments – from mass market readerships served by corporate publishing houses, to academia, to activist communities of translators, educators and political organizers working through the

internet and small not-for-profit presses, and conclude first, with a reflection on the limits of humanist notions of translatability and second, with the outlines of an agenda for radical translation practice in the 21st century.

TRANSLATING RELIGION

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The translator of modern Arabic literary prose into English, German or French is confronted with the problem of how much of the Muslim vocabulary has to be explained to the average non-Muslim reader. It is said that in a book on natural sciences aimed at a broader public one mathematical formula will halve the readership. Is there an analogous danger in explaining too many factual details in a literary text? Does the quest for precision and authenticity of detail interfere with the pleasure of reading in the target language? The paper starts with a comparison of Taha Husayn's Al-Ayyam (volume 1) in English, French and German translations. How much of the Muslim vocabulary did each translator decide to explain? And if he did, did he use a glossary, footnotes or textual obiter dicta inserted into the translated text? Finally, an answer will be attempted to the related question of how much religious exoticism the reader expects.

THE CONCEPTION (IMAGE) OF THE WORLD AS A NOTION: ITS SEMANTIC RANGE AND LEXICAL PARALLELS IN ARABIC AND RUSSIAN

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Terminology as a specific part of a lexicon reflects the system of concepts which determine scientific conscience, gradually shaping the linguistic worldview of a scholar who uses the language in special purposes. The term is in essence, "summary" of a scientific thought developed in the process of a scholar's creative activity, his (her) innovative scholarly pursuits. Owing to its incorporation into scientific discourse, the language of science acquires clarity and comprehensibility meeting the requirements of scientific communication.

We suggest considering the term as a means of accumulating, forming and storing knowledge as well as a means of data exchange and information sharing. The principal criteria to apply to the term are accuracy or exactness, clarity, and absence of ambiguity within the scientific hierarchy it belongs to.

The notion of the humanitarian scientific "conception of the world" is based on the main humanitarian concepts of the world development, namely tolerance, cultural diversity, multipolarity, a dialog across cultures and civilizations, and many other things. According to the meanings the term embraces, it is the most far-reaching notion that characterizes the global integration and "diversified, multiform quality" of the world culture.

When handling the notion “the Conception of the World” as a term requiring some language-specific expression (language specific verbalization), scholars find themselves in a difficult situation. The term is a derivative or, more precisely, a compound made up of two notions – “conception” (or image) and “the world”. Both of them have quite a wide and complicated semantic range and, being put together, they produce a new meaning. It is derivatives and compounds that make it possible for a language to describe the most complicated structures of scientific knowledge with an economy of language without falling into verbosity.