Text, In-Text, Pretext:

The Question of Elusiveness and the Problem of Translation

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This paper revolves around the problem of translation and the difficulty to transmit, **faithfully**, the text to be translated. So many translations have been made and remade. Whether in languages that have the same origin, or languages that differ in roots, translation remains an inextricable difficulty. This fact induces me, in this paper, to raise the problem of translation and try to lay bare the real obstacles the translator encounters in dealing with the literary text. To elucidate such problem, I have gathered the major factors that I consider as the crux of the matter of translation. These factors are: **Interpretation** (understanding), **Autobiographical entity**(Self-Involvement of the artist in his art), **Style**(Nature and Mode of Expression), **Figures of Meanings**, and finally, **Figures of Sounds**.

Translating a literary text is, in fact, interpreting it, and interpretation does not necessarily represent what the artist wants to communicate. What the artist **says** is not what the text **is**, and in terms of the literary critic, Milan Kundera, « The sole certainty became 'the wisdom of uncertainty.' »[1] In other words, the truth of the artist is decomposed into myriad of relative truths and is parceled out[2] by readers.

To translate a text is to build up a text different from its author, i.e., you dissociate it from its maker. The spirit of complexity characterizes the literary text ; subsequent- ly, this fact makes the text difficult to handle and grasp. Literature represents life with its

text difficult to handle and grasp. Literature represents life with its multifurious realities, and no reality exists except as a means of perception. The critic Richard Dutton, aware of such problem, notes that :

> In the process of understanding its (literature) 'signs', the reader is made increasingly aware of the arbitrary way in which they operate, of the fact that have no fixed connotation but may take on successive, theoritically infinite meanings, depending on our appreciation of the total structure. Thus, they challenge us to contact our own reality.3

This new reality we get, each time we read a novel, a poem or a play, makes the objectivity of the text an illusion. Thus, multiplicity in meaning is due to the reader's view which makes him see the literary text through affections, fantasies and uncons- cious associations. «Meanings in the persistent and massive flow,»4 says the critic Akan Egudan in his article « Truth and the Method in Gadamer's Hermeneutic Philosophy , « are our present meanings, insofar as they make sense to us. »5

Ambiguity in the work of art makes the text carry out a variety of meanings. In other words, ambiguity is the spirit of complexity of the literary text. This spirit of complexity prevents us to penetrate into the Within of the text in order to reveal its secret. « But if I do not understand myself by understanding the other, » wonders Paul Ricoeur, « can I still talk of meaning ? If a meaning is not a sector of self-understanding, I do not know what it is. »6

Familiarity with the artist and his text is a tool to get inside the work, but still the work resists to the 'intruder'. It remains strange and, subsequently, impenetrable. This strangeness makes interpretation differ_it reproduces so many realities and diverse views. Cynthia Nelson, in her article « An Anthropology's Dilemma : Fieldwork and Interpretation Inquiry, » points out that :

> Strangeness and familiarity are not limited to the social field but are general categories of our interpretation of the world. Interpretation would be impossible if expressions of life were

completely strange. It would be unnecessary if nothing strange were in them. Interpretation lies, therefore, between these two extremes.7

The literary text, mainly poetry, does not only express thoughts but emotions either. It is never what the poems says which matters, but what it means. Poem, 'poiema', in Greek, means making a work of art. Thus, it differs from 'logus' which means logical discourse. It means that the poem is suggestive, and suggestive language is always subject to interpretations. « A work of literature, therefore, not only is, but also says something. »8, writes the critic R.L. Brett. He adds : «What it says will never be precise in the way that logical propositions are precise, but it is therefore without meaning. »9

Diversity in /of opinions on a work of art shows that this work is ever anew, complex and alive. It shows, also, that the work of art holds meanings more than the words they compose it, and more than the normal utterance and speech.

Multiplicity in interpretation has made the work of art a complex matter : there is the authorial intention as well as the reader's responses. This fact shows how difficult to tackle a poem and understand it. The text evades and violates the normal, common canons of language use. This what makes translation of thoughts and ideas of a work of art, from one language to another, become too difficult to handle. Even the author cannot, faithfully, translate his own work to another language.

If a translation of a work of art is made; why do we put in doubt its objectivity and faithfulness to the originial ? Why do we try to revise and remake it again? In his preface 'Le Texte et la Traduction', in F. V. Hugo's translation of Shakespeare's Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth into French, Yves Florence puts the following notes :

La traduction du théatre de Shakespeare n'a pas encore été tenté par un Traducteur moderne. Toutefois, F.-V. Hugo ne disposait pas des textes originaux et authentiques__du moins dans la mesure

du possible que la critique moderne a établis. Aujourd-hui, aucune

traduction ne peut se faire qu'à partir du 'New Shakespeare de Cambridge'. C'est donc en la confrontant à ce texte que nous avons

réviseés la traduction de F.- V. Hugo, qui a été purgéé, en outre, des

contresens, approximations douteuses, formules embarrasseés et autres erreurs. 1()

It means that this translation is not faithful, and fails, thus, to transmit what Shakespeare wants to say. This is very clear in Florence's remarks : 'traduction revisée', 'purgée de contresens', 'approximations douteuses'. 'formules embarrassées', et 'd'autres erreurs'. F.-V. Florence goes further in his quest and reproduces for us some sentences__but not verses_ of Hugo's translation of Hamlet , and proposes how they should be rewritten faithfully. He has, eventually, dropped some words and added some others. For the matter of illustration, I'll give you the original passage of Shakespeare's Hamlet and how it is translated by F.-V. Hugo, and finally, how it is revised and corrected by Yves Florence :

Original in English :
Pol. : Marry, I'll teach you : think yourself a baby ;
That you have ta'ken these tenders for true pay.
Which are not sterling. Tender yourself me dearly ;
Or, not to crack the wind of the poor phrase,
Running it thus, you'll tender me a fool.11

Translation of F.-V.Hugo :
Polonius : -Eh bien ! moi, je vais vous l'apprendre.
Pensez que vous êtes une enfant d'avoir pris
pour argent comptant des offres qui ne sont pas
de bon aloi. Estimez-vous plus chère ; ou bien
pour ne pas prendre le souffle de ma pauvre parole
vous me mentrerez une nigaude12

According to Yves Florence, F.-V. Hugo has misinterpreted Polonius's utterance. Polonius's intention is, in fact, to make a baby for Ophelia, and the word marriage explains this intention. This confusion in/of meaning renders the translation of this passage difficult. Yves Florence seems to understand such 'jeu de mots' and dares correct F.-V. Hugo, when he adds to the translation the word 'enfant' for 'nigaud' : Vous viendrez me mentrer un nigaud de petit enfant.13 But is it an adequate and faithful translation to be trusted ?

Will it not be in turn revised by some other critics and translators ?

Another factor that makes translation a difficult matter is the artist himself. We should not deny that the literary text translates thoughts and emotions of its maker into words, expressions and images. The artist manipulates his ordinary experience through literary dimensions and, thus, remains hidden in his work. He is everywhere disguised and never disappears. His presence is felt, but it evades anyone who tries to grasp it ; « In understanding fiction, » says Francis R. Hart, « one seeks an imaginative grasp of author's meaning; in understanding personal history one seeks an imaginative comprehension of author's history. 'Meaning' and 'Identity' are not the same kind of reality and do not make the same demands. »14

The artist uses all the tools of fiction writing in order to carry out his project of presentation. He recycles his experiences and transposes them through images. This self-representation in the literary work is, as philippe Lejeune points out, « the retrospection, into prose, that a real person makes on his own existence, when he stresses on his individual life, and in particular, on the history of his own personality. »15 What Lajeune calls history of personality, the critic Avron Fleishman calls 'historical identity'. According to him, identity is related to the awakening of the self, i.e., the conscious existence in the piece of art. « Historical identity,» he says, « is the wake the self.makes in enacting its meaning, and following that wake in autobiography is precisely to grasp a meaning. »16

Nothing can start from nothing-from the absolute. Anything that springs from the individual is his own extension, because, in terms of

Albert Camus, « the artist reconstructs the world to his plan. »17 Or, in Malcolm Bradbury's words, « the change of the word without was matched by a sense of a changed world within. »18

The artist reveals his art and effaces himself into it . He is, thus, everywhere: in the words he chooses and the images he describes. This what the shortstory writer, Katherine Mansfield, points out :

> When I write about ducks I swear that I am a white
> duck with a round eye, floating on pond finged
> with yellow_blobs and taking an occasional dart at
> the round eye, which floats upside down beneath me19

Any presentation, thus, is a representation; And any representation holds some imprints of its maker. The artist is bound to his work. To translate his work, then, you should know him and locate his presence; this is, however, a difficult matter. The unity between the work of art and the artist makes objectivity in understanding an illusion. This what T. S. Eliot notes:

> Someone else may call my view of the world 'subjective',
> a merely personal appendage of 'me'. I, however, cannot
> call it subjective, because to call it subjective would be to
> separate me from it ; and my experience is inseparable from
> the conviction that the three things my interlocutor would
> separate_I, the objective world, and my feelings about it_
> are an indissoluble whole. It is only in social behaviour
> ... that feelings and things are torn apart.20

This 'personal appendage' of 'me' into the work of art is what Virginia Woolf draws our attention to in her « A Sketch of the Past » » ; She writes :

> At any rate it is a constant idea of mine; that behind
> the cotton wool is hidden a pattern ; that we_ I mean
> all human beings_ are connected with this ; that the whole

world is a work of art ; that we are parts of the work of art….

We are the words: we are the music; we are the things it self[21]

So, translation is made difficult, because of the false confidences the artist gives.

Another complex problem in translation is style. When the artist obstinates to use 'I', and by which he means 'me', he complicates the matter for the translator. The artist uses, and chooses, words to mean something that he cannot say. If the translator chooses words he thinks they express what the artist wants to communicate, he is leading himself astray. In fact, he is choosing words and reproducing a text proper to him, and thus, different from the original. More than this, if he translates what he assumes the text is, what about the rest? « Words differently arranged. » notes Pascal, « have different meanings. »[22]In other words, to know the meaning of words, is to know the gulf between the words the artist uses and the reality of the mind, i.e., what he means by through it; « Every choice of words, every choice of forms, » notes the critic Richard Dutton, « implies the possibility of alternative choices of words and forms which would have created alternative realities. »[23]

Choice of words are subjective and personal. The artist collects and selects words, and even more, he frees them from the boundage of the commonly known dictionary meanings. He attributes to them meanings proper to him: « The dictionary, » say Christian Baylon and Paul Fabre in their book La Sémantique , « does not reflect the reality of language, but refers to the image society has made to itself.»[24] What Baylon and fabre want to say is that the meaning of a word is very difficult to be limited, because the author creates a special type of language which is strictly personal. The language of the artist is a transposed language. The aim of the artist is to introduce a kind of rupture between what he writes and what he lives in ; between what is common and what is uncommon. In La philosophie du Langage, the philosopher J. Paul Resweber writes the following: « In everyone of us dwell, in fact, two persons : the one

that lives and requires, and the one that speaks and opposes. »25 Every word, thus, is linked to its context from which it takes its meaning. « Words, » says the critic Pierre Guiraud, « are human creation and, at the same time, like most of creations of man, they have their private life: we create them, and they create themselves. »26

The style is said to be the man, said Duffon. No one could imitate others'style in the same language; «For it is difficult to finish a letter in somebody's else's style, »27says Virginia Woolf in The Waves. If it is difficult to imitate someone else's style, what about the translated work, mainly to a language that has no root with the original?

Another obstacle that affects translation is the figures of meaning, mainly metaphor, imagery and symbolism.

Metaphor consists in giving a name of something to something else. This means that words lose their definite meaning and get new meanings. Consequently, this fact opens the way to interpretations and multiplicity in meaning. «Meaning something,» says Derek Bickerton, in his article « Prologomena to a linguistic Theory of Metaphor, » « exists in language, like water in well, and is either there to be extracted from it, or something, mysteriously, not. »28

All literary language is, somehow, a metaphor, because it does not say what it means. Meaning exists, but in connection with extra-linguistic world. The meaning of a sentence is more than the word, which compose it. « Literal sphere of reference, » points out the critic and linguist Micheal J.Reddy, « can be delineated for various types of words. »29

If for the linguist metaphor is a language deviation, for the literary critic, it is more than this. It is something that represents something else. It is a tranfer of something real to something ambiguous, of something known to something unknown.« There are words, » says J. P. Resweber, «that tell more than others. »30 Then, how can a translation be faithful, if the meaning remains probable and vague?

Writing is thinking through images. The image is the representation of sensibility into art.i.e.. the image holds a wide range of meanings of/about the image-maker. « A man's house, »note René Welleck and Austin Warren, « is the extention of himself. Describe it and you have described him. »31

Like images, symbols hold the within of its maker. They dig into the self of the artist and represent the ideal of him into images and archetypes. «The word symbol, » writes R.L.Brett, «suggests a holding together, and literary language very often holds together several meanings in one symbol or set of symbols. »32

Symbolism, thus, divorces literature from logus. Meaning in literature varies without any relationship to the logical discourse of the empirical science. Symbolism is arbitrary and holds a private significance of its maker. It represents something else and holds some meanings of the unexplored depths of the artist's mind.

But the figures of meaning are not the only problem for translation. There is another obstacle, which is the figure of sounds. Every language has a specific and peculiar pattern of sounds proper to it. The sound of the word or the sentence contributes to the meaning of the text:

Eg : James Joyce's Finnegan's Wake

Finn	Egan	's	Wake
Fin	Again	Is	Wake
End	Again	Is	Wake

Finnegan's Wake= End Again Is Wake : it means coming back to life(reincarnation)

Words, mainly in poetry, are arranged in a special way so that they give a special pattern of sounds which pleases and informs. The sound gives sense and contributes to the overall meaning of the poem. In other words, the sound-stratum is more than a euphony ; it is a way of saying things. « There is no 'musical' verse without

some general conception of its meaning or at least its emotional tone. »33. write R. Welleck and A. Warren.

A poem is both a pattern of sound and a pattern of meaning. The sound is organized in a given pattern so that it makes a special appeal to the ear. And the meaning is organized, concomitant with the sound so that it reinforces it and, in turn, reinforced by it. R.L.Brett stresses this point and says that:

Sound reinforces the meaning and it is reinforced by the meaning. Even the most onomatopoeic language(i.e. language where the sound seems almost identical with the meaning) is considerably less dependent on sound than might at first think.34

Then, we can guess how extremely difficult to translate a sound which holds a special meaning, from one language to another. Each language has its own basis of rhythm and metre: there is pitch(high/low), duration(shorter/longer), stress(accent), frequency of recurrence(greater/smaller), and some other permitting quantitative distinctions which make the poem difficult to translate. These differences are explicit mainly between languages that do not belong to the same origin, like Arabic and English.

English verse is based essentially upon quantity. It organizes its sound effects into patterns of shorter/longer vowels, and vowels, in turn, divided into feet. The foot, in turn, is composed of two or three vowel sounds. On the basis of this quantity, we get the English metrical pattern:

Trochee	(long		short)
Iambus	(short		long)
Dactyl	(long		short short)
Anapaest	(short short		long)
Spondee	(long		long)
Pyrrhic	(short		short)

And for the foot:

Monometer   Diameter   Trimeter   Tetrameter
Pentameter   Hexameter   heptameter, etc...

In Arabic, we have more than 15 metrical patterns (بحور شعرية). These metres are groups of different sound pattern called(تفعلة) and (تفاعيل). These تفعلة and تفاعيل, in turn, are organized according to their duration (shorter/longer). For example if we have (فعولن), we get short-long-long duration : short :ف , long : عو , long :لن .

Both English and Arabic organize the sound-strata of their metre on quality ; but English metre is much more based on the stress or the accent of the whole foot rather than the word. This means that the metre in English poetry is based, essentially, on the stressed and unstressed sound.

On the other hand, there is a difference in rhyme, if ever the poem is rhymed. In English, we have feminine and masculine rhymes, whereas in Arabic we do not. Eg:

> When we too parted
> In silence and tears
> Half broken-hearted
> To sever for years.

Parted and Hearted are feminine rhymes. They are feminine because each rhyme ends with unstressed syllable after the stressed main vowel.

Also, when translating a rhymed poem, there is a problem to face, whether to keep the meaning of the poem or to keep the rhyme. In other words, if we lay stress on meaning, we lose rhyme and vice versa. The coming example is very illustrative. Abdessalam Es-shoua in his book In Comparative Literature / Practical study Between Two literatures : Arabic and English(و العـــربي :أدبين بين تطبيقية دراسة :المقارن الأدب في

ﻯ——ﺣﻷﺍ) . raises such difficulty when he translated Shelley's passage 'Invitation'. Es-shoua tends to rhyme rather than to meaning.

Shelley's 'Invitation':

> Away, away, from men and towns
> To the wild wood and the downs_
> To the silent wilderness
> Where the soul need not express
> Its music

Es-shoua translates it as follows :

بعيدا، بعيدا، عن المدن و الرجال

الى غابة العذراء و التلال

الى الصحراء و صمتها

حيث لا تقمع روح صوتها. 35

In another instance, Es-shoua gives us, in his book, two different and differing translations of Keats's passage « The Terror of Death ». The first translation is his own, whereas the second is of the critic and translator Mohamed Mahmoud. What is noticeable in these two translations is that both translators are trying to keep rhyme and meaning. Stranger than this, is that they adopt the same rhyme. But a closer reading to the poem induces me to doubt in their faithfulness to the meaning of Keats's passage : they are constructing rhymes that are linked to their own worlds of meaning.

Keats's « the Terror of Death »

> When I behold upon the night's starr'd face
> Huge cloudy symbols of high romance
> And think that I may never live to trace
> Their shadows, with the magic hand of

chance.

Es-shoua's translation :

و عندما تتراءى أمامي، كالسحب صور من الخيال

مبهمة، في وجه الليل المرصع بالنجوم،

و أشعر أني قد لا أحظو سحرها بيدي، محال

لاقتراب قضائي المختوم36.

Mahoud's translation :

و حينما أرى فوق الليل المرصع بالنجوم صور من سامي الخيال

الخيال

ـ كالسحب ـ لم تضيج بعد و أذكر أني قد لا أعيش

حتى أسجل معانيها بيد من سحر الخيال37.

Es-shoua gives us another translation of Shelley, but this time, he tries to keep the meaning of the passage, but hopelessly, neglects the rhyme.

Shelley's « The Poet"s Drean »

> On a poet's lips I slept
> Dreaming like a love-adept
> In   the   sound   his   dreaming

slept.

Es-shoua's translation :

نمت على شفتي شاعر

أحلم مثل بارع بالحب

بقى صوته الخافت يرن38

It is noticeable that the passage has lost its rhyme and melody   It has become only a sum of verses connected to one another with the

unity of the theme. Besides the problem of rhyme, there is the problem of alliteration, assonance and consonance (sibilant).

In conclusion, I would say that :

1- Any translation is supposed to be bad, because it is not faithful to both the artist and the text.

2- The work of art carries its own meaning, and what we get as translations are only approximations and attempts.

3- We cannot study the language of any work of art through translation ; we can only, but to a certain degree, study the thematic concerns.

4- It is better, mainly for researchers, to read any literary text in the original.

One day, when the Irish writer Samuel Beckett was asked about the ambiguous title of his play Waiting for Godot, he replied :

« Je ne sais pas Messieurs.

If I had known, I would have told you in the play ! »

In turn, if you ask me how can a translation be faithful, I will reply :

« Je ne sais pas Messieurs.

If I had known, I would have told you in my paper ! »

Thank you.

Milan Kundera. The Art of the Novel .Trans. Linda Asher(New York: Grove Press,1986).p.14.

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[10]"Yves Florence, « Préface : Le Texte et la Traduction, » in Skakespeare : 'Hamlet', 'Othello', ' Macbeth', Trans. F.-V. Hugo (Paris : Librairie Générale Française, 1972, repr.1978), XVI.

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[18]:Malcolm Bradbury, The Modern World: Ten Great Writers(London: Martin Secker & Warbury limited, 1988),p.11.

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[21]Virginia Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," in Collected Essays, Vol.I (london : The Hogarth Press, 1968),pp.72-3.

[22]Blaise Pascal, Pensée(1897)Trans. W.F.Trotter(New York : Modern literary press, 1941),p.11.

[23]Richard Dutton, An Introduction to Literary Criticism , Op.Cit., p.77.
[24]Christian Baylon, and Paul Fabre, La Sémantique (Paris : Nethan, 1978),pp.91-2.

[25]Jean-Paul Resweber, La Philosophie du Langage (Paris : Publication Universitaire de France, 1979, repr.1990),p.90. (Trans. Mine).

[26]Pierre Guiraud, La Sémantique (Paris : Publication Universitaire de France, 1955, repr.1979),p.31. (Trans. Mine.)

Virginia Woolf, « The Waves, » in Virginia Woolf : Four Great Novels (Oxford . New York : Oxford University Press, 1994),p.551.

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[33]René Welleck, and Austin Warren, Theory of literature, Op.Cit.,p.158.

[34]R.L.Brett, An Introduction to English Studies, Op.Cit.,p.43.

[35] عبد السلام الشوا ، في الأدب المقارن/ دراسة تطبيقية بين أدبين: العربي و الأنجليزي(الجزائر: المؤسسة الوطنية للكتاب)،ص136