

## Re-visiting the Arab Cultural Renaissance: Al-Nahda and the Reception of European Literature

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### Abstract:

*Al-Nahda* – the Renaissance corresponds to the advent of “modern civilization” (AL-TAMADDUN AL-%ADÎO) in Egypt and the East through contacts with the West. The Renaissance is opposed to the Middle Ages (AL-QURÛN AL-WUSMÂ), times of darkness. It is intended, more than a renewal of old models, a revolution of knowledge and thought. It is born of more or less violent contacts with the outside. Just as the Renaissance of the East is fertilized by the Western contributions so the European Renaissance which preceded it is largely attributed to the philosophical and scientific mediation of the Arabs of Andalusia. My research is a re-consideration of al-Nahda, highlighting the development of contemporary Arabic literature as a result of the late-19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> cultural rebirth of the Arab world, with a special stress on the French-Egyptian cultural transfer and the importance of translation.

**Keywords:** *al-Nahda, adaptation, Arabic literature, cultural transfer, reception, translation*

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#### الملخص

النهضة - يقابل النهضة ظهور "الحضارة الحديثة" في مصر والشرق من خلال التواصل مع الغرب. يعارض عصر النهضة العصور الوسطى (القرون الوسطى) ، وأوقات الظلام. المقصود منها أكثر من تجديد النماذج القديمة ، ثورة المعرفة والفكر. لقد ولد من تواصل أكثر أو أقل عنقاً مع الخارج. مثلما تم إضافة عصر النهضة في الشرق بالمساهمات الغربية ، وإن النهضة الأوروبية التي سبقته تُعزى إلى حد كبير إلى الوساطة الفلسفية والعلمية لعرب الأندلس. البحث الحالي هو إعادة النظر في كتاب النهضة ، حيث يسلط الضوء على تطور الأدب العربي المعاصر نتيجة النهضة الثقافية في أواخر القرن التاسع عشر - أوائل العشرين للعالم العربي ، مع التركيز بشكل خاص على النقل الثقافي الفرنسي المصري ، و أهمية الترجمة. الكلمات المفتاحية: النهضة ، تكييف ، أدب عربي ، نقل ثقافي ، استقبال ، ترجمة

## 1. Introduction

Any approach to contemporary Arabic literature is rather complex because, in our opinion, if for the period before the very vast production seems to have a unitary fund both from the aesthetic point of view and from that of the social environment from which it is produced, as regards the modern-contemporary literature this unity is lacking and it would, therefore, be preferable to treat the literature of the individual Arab countries separately. This does not mean, of course, that we cannot recognize common themes and traits from an aesthetic point of view, but the tendency to maintain a diction and a unified treatment reveals, in our opinion, more from the will of the individual scholars than from the feedback in the production literary. As noted by Roger Allen (1982), moreover, the interest that has always aroused Egypt in Western scholars, means that countries like those of the Maghreb or the Gulf are practically hidden in the treatises of contemporary Arab literature with serious prejudice for the literature of these countries. The consequence of this state of affairs is that these kinds of literature deal with the departments of Anglophone, Francophone, or comparative literature and through the medium of translation in these languages. It is also true that inevitably any “history” or manual on contemporary Arabic literature will have deficiencies due to the impossibility for the scholar to know in depth all the literary fields of Arabic literature given its vastness and its, indeed, contemporaneity.

Having said this, we would like to submit another problem to the attention of those who read us. It is generally believed that contemporary Arabic literature was launched following Napoleon’s expedition to Egypt (1798), which, although lasting only three years, would have placed the Arab world in the face of advanced Western civilization and triggered the dynamics of *al-Nahda*, the “rebirth”.

## 2. The essence of a cultural movement

The word “nahḍ a” is coined from the verb “nahaḍ a” which one of the major Arabic dictionaries, *Lisān al-'Arab* – composed in the second half of the 13th century of the Christian era – gives as a synonym for “qāma”, that is, “get up” or “stand up”. “Al-nāhiḍ ” (word-for-word, “one who does the action of getting up”), is the fledgling about

to take flight. As for the noun “al-*nahḍa*”, its first meaning, always according to the *Lisān al-'Arab*, is “the power” (*al-ṭāqa*) and “the force” (*al-quwwa*). “Al-*nahḍa*” is both the energy that makes movement possible and the dynamics created.

This term – applied for the first time in this area by Hamilton Gibb, who first used it in an article that appeared in the Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies in 1928 – is supported in the Arab world by others according to the country – *islāh, tanwīr, yaqza*; and in some cases yes it also denies that we should speak of “rebirth”, if for example, Sabri Hafez states that, if there was a vacuum in Egypt, no *nahda* would have been possible (Hafez, 1993). Admitting a “rebirth”, in fact, would mean taking for granted that the previous period should be referred to as “forfeiture”. In fact, even in this period, which can be placed between the 13th and 19th centuries, he saw the emergence of prominent intellectuals such as, by way of example, Ibn Haldūn. The study by Hafez, which has the merit of finally placing the birth of the novel and the Arab intellectual in a context, demonstrates, in our opinion beyond any doubt, how contact with the West was only one of the elements that contributed to the flourishing of modern Arab literary prose, and how a change was already underway in economic and social terms (Hafez 1993: 37-62) – which led to the formation of a new social class and, consequently, of a new readership that no longer recognized itself in traditional literature, an expression of socio-cultural discrimination, and that somehow asked intellectuals a production more suited to their needs (this does not remove, however, that the period called *'ahd al-ḡahl wa az-zalām*, “epoch of ignorance and backwardness”, should be reconsidered from the point of view of literary production). On a social level, in fact, we see the loss, by the *ulamās of al-Azhar*, of cultural power and the disintegration of the Arab Muslim identity following the Ottoman rule with a shift towards an Arab identity that unites Muslims and Christians. The reply of the writers was, as Heidi Toelle notes, twofold: on the one hand we turned to the *ihyā'*, on the other to the *iqtibās* (Zakaria-Toelle 2003: 200). In the first case, what Lucien Goldmann calls the “tragedy of rejection” (Goldmann, 1956) was represented.

As mentioned, the al-Azhar establishment no longer played the role of mediator between the people and culture – above all due to the strong centralization desired by Muhammad 'Ali - and therefore turned to the past as an authenticating source with

important implications also on the language and not only in the literary field. From this point of view, it was natural to refer to the *maqāma*: The most significant modern representatives of this literary genre, which had its greatest flowering in the classical period and which some scholars consider to be an indigenous model for the modern novel in Arabic are, for example, A. Mubārak, author of '*Alam ad-dīn*' ("The banner of religion"), didactic work in four volumes published in Cairo in 1979, A.F. Aš-Šidyāq, with *As-sāq' alà as-sāq fī mā huwa al-faryāq* ("Life and adventures of Faryāq") published in Beirut in 1855, and M.I. al-Muwaylihī, author of a series of modern *maqāmas* known as *Hadīt 'sà ibn Hišām* ("The stories of 'Isà ibn Hišām", Cairo 1898).

As the most recent research on the genus states this literary expression must be considered as such, that is a work of fiction "aware" of the author. This perspective makes it possible to re-evaluate gender development in a new light and to see the birth of the Arab novel as no longer a mere Western import. On the other hand, the *iqtibās*, or the refusal of one's own tradition to address the West, gave rise to a series of translations and arrangements of Western works that contributed to the formation of an original narrative, the Egyptian one. A leading exponent of this movement was R. At-Tahtawī (1801-1873), director of the Egyptian Office for Translations, established for the translation of Western scientific works in Arabic. The process, of course, was slow, and we can consider that it ended earlier in the story is to be considered the favourite literary form in periods of social transition. With Hafez, the author who gives form to the narrative speech is Lāšīn and in fact, reading his stories, we find cohesion and a maturity of style that still makes it a pleasant read.

Despite these brief signs, it is clear, in our opinion, how different elements contribute to the formation of literary production. It is one of the elements that make it possible to read reality. From this point of view, the writer does not live outside of reality, but is part of it and, consciously most of the time, expresses its ideological tendencies. This statement is even truer when it comes to Arabic literature, a literature where the concept of *iltizām* is, in modern times, declared. And yet, very few critical studies present this approach.

### 3. The Syrian revival

It is well known that the Nahda, the Arab cultural Renaissance that emerged in Egypt at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, had Syrian artists who emigrated there, fleeing ethnic-religious persecutions, since Egypt was practically considered a State independent of the Empire Ottoman and was more culturally open, closer to the West than the rest of the Middle East countries. The progress and subsequent conversion of this country into a cultural model for the rest of the Arab world are due, in part, to immigrant intellectuals such as playwright and musician Abu Jalil al-Qabbani or the thinker Abdurrahman al-Kawakibi. Syrian literature thus has determining importance in the context of Arabic.

Poetry is, perhaps, the most representative genre of the height of Syrian authors throughout the twentieth century, either in Syria itself or in the Americas, in what is known as Mahyar literature (emigration). Writers such as Badr ad-Din Ahmed (1897-1961), Badawi al-Jabal (1905-1981), Nadim Muhammad (1908-1944), Wasfi Qurunfuli (1910-1972) or Omar Abu Risha stand out in the lyric. The generation of the 50s has a maximum exponent to Nizar Qabbani (1923-1998). It is also worth noting Muhammad al-Magut, Ali al-Yundi (1928-2009) or Adonis, the great Syrian poet, still active. The influence of these figures persists through the years and reaches authors of later generations, such as the innovators Sania Saleh (1935-1985), Mamduh Skaf, Faiz Jaddur or Nazif Abu Afash, open and knowledgeable about world literature, who renewed the genre both at the level of images and metrics, abandoning the rhythms classics and sometimes embracing free poetry. This had begun in Syria with Muhammad al-Magut and Riad Saleh al-Husain (1953-1982), which had great repercussion not only in the country but also in the rest of the Arab world. In the present generations, the taste for free poetry is still maintained, although the themes have changed: simplicity, everyday life and a certain pessimistic tone are the usual, as in the case of Usama Esber, Talib Hammash, Luqman Derki or the poet and also filmmaker Hala Muhammad.

In the field of narrative, the story and short stories dominate from the beginning (over 700 works of this genre have been published in the last ten years). The contemporary short story teachers have been: Alfat al-Idlibi (1912-2007); Hasib Kayali (1921-1993),

father of the Syrian burlesque tale; Fuad al-Shayeb (1911-1970); Said Huraniya (1929-1994), of great resonance despite not having written more than two collections, because he was one of the first to introduce socialist realism in Syrian literature, and Zakaria Tamer, who lit his own style taking advantage of the traditional legacy of the Arab story and putting it at his service, creating environments that sometimes approximate the literature of the absurd.

Among the greatest exponents of the novel are Abdussalam al-Uyaili (1918-2006), whose work is related to the most everyday realism; Hanna Mina, influenced by socialist realism; and Haidar Haidar, who stands out for treating contemporary issues such as the sociopolitical changes of the Arab world, as well as for his poetic phrase, which has made him one of the most renewed and read Arab novelists. Other noteworthy authors are Walid Ijlasi, Nadia Jost or Hani Ar-Rahib, among others. The influence of the great works of world literature, known through translations and in some cases through the original versions, opened new horizons in certain Syrian authors, such as Muhammad Kamel al-Jatib, who has drawn a new line in the story, or Mamduh Azzam, which is often based on the history of the country to create a new magical realism, different from Latin America but based on it.

As for the theatre, whose founder was Abu Jalil alQabbani, he had his most fruitful years in the seventies with the aforementioned Muhammad al-Magut, as well as with Farhan Bulbul or Saad-Allah Wannus (1941-1997), the playwright more renovator and featured and that brought gender to its peak. At present, there are no major figures in the dramatic genre, although this is a movement in permanent development since most cities hold almost annually theatrical festivals in which private and public companies participate, such as the International Theater Festival of Damascus, the Misyaf Festival, the Raqqa Festival, or festivals organized by the different universities.

As far as women are concerned, at this time it surpasses men in literature, at least in the genres of the short story and the novel. According to the critic Nidal Saleh's investigation and official statistics, of the 231 titles published in this field in the last five years there are more than 180 works written by women. Among the most prominent are Manhal al-Saray, Samar Yazbik, Abir Esber, Rosa Yasin Hasan, Lina Huayyan al-

Hasan or Dimah Wannus, all of them very young and already occupying a rather respected place in the Arabic novel.

#### **4. Egyptian-French encounters**

The questions raised by the translation of Western literary works into Arabic are closely related to those posed by translation for the general public, for while the first great movement of translation of Greek works in this language, from the 8th to the 15th centuries, concerned scholars and the ruling class, the second movement, which began in the nineteenth century and whose effects are still visible today, concerns the large number.

The meeting of the French with the Egyptians during the Egyptian campaign of 1798 was the starting point of the craze of the Arabs for Western works. If the arrival of the French forces at that time on the Egyptian horizon forced the Arab thinkers to question the relationship which bound them to the West and which began under the sign of military invasion, the reception of the works western to the mid-nineteenth century in Arab-Muslim countries has given another dimension to this report abroad, which was no longer imposed by arms, but by technology, science and culture. This period of openness to the West which marked the beginning of the modern Arab Renaissance, the Nahda, literally “the rebirth”, was at once political, cultural and religious, and extended from the end of the eighteenth century until the middle of the 20th century. The Arab world had access to Western culture initially, largely through the translation and adaptation of European works. If there are texts that have received a massive and enthusiastic reception in a society that seemed in every way different, it is these French books, for the most part, which served at the same time as a model for Arab literature who was now turning to modernity and who needed at this time of his evolution of a foreign element to ensure its renewal. The new costume that the Western text had to clothe in order to find a place in the East was that of the Arabic language and very often also that of certain Eastern cultural criteria. It also very often happened that he had to lose some of his own characteristics in order to allow, first of all, Arabic-speaking readers and writers to get used to the new forms of the novel, the short story and the theatre, genres imported from The West and which were adopted alongside those of classical Arabic literature.



Classical Arabic literature, or '*adab*' (literally meaning courtesy), includes the traditional genres of poetry that are *madih* (panegyric), *rithâ'* (elegy), *ghazal* (love poetry), and so on. and ancient prose like the *maqama* (session), the *rihla* (the travel story), the *risala* (the epistle), the compilations .... As for the narrative genre, the former *adab* already possessed *qissa* (history, be it biographical history or fictional narrative), *hikaya* (narrative, fable or fictional narrative), the *khabar* (literally 'new', stories or anecdotes narrated as truthful), the *hadith* (speech, conversation) etc.

At the time of the *Nahda*, therefore, translation often went hand in hand with the modification of the original text, which was subject to changes in substance and form in order to be closer to the criteria of Arabic literature or to please the general public. which ended up transforming translations into adaptations. Does this particular approach mean that literary otherness is denied in Arab-Muslim countries? Thought, tastes and morals Western countries were they so difficult to accept as such in these countries? One can then wonder how a book continues to exist when it has evacuated all that goes against the tastes and customs of the countries where it was received and that it was kept only those parts that do not offend the local culture. To answer these questions and many others, we must look at the first French works that were chosen to be translated into Arabic and presented to the general public. We will first highlight the contradictions that characterize these translations that welcome a foreign text while rejecting the specificity, then analyze and explain these phenomena by addressing the issue of Arab cultural resilience in the face of Western otherness. This will allow us to better understand the complexity of the treatment that Arabic translators and adapters have given to the French text and what these translations have brought to modern Arabic literature which Abdelfattah Kilito rightly says has been "regenerated through the "test" of the foreigner [and who] is now inseparable from European literature" (Kilito 2009: 12).

## **5. The translation at the time of the Nahda**

Aimé Césaire wrote in *Discourse on Colonialism*:

“...whatever its own particular genius maybe, a civilization that withdraws into itself atrophies; that for civilizations, an exchange is oxygen; that the great good fortune of Europe is to have been a

crossroads, and that because it was the locus of all ideas, the receptacle of all philosophies, the meeting place of all sentiments, it was the best centre for the redistribution of energy. But then I ask the following question: has colonization really placed civilizations in contact? Or, if you prefer, of all the ways of establishing contact, was it the best? I answer no.” (Césaire 2000: 33)

In the case of Egypt, the brief passage that the French made there from 1798 to 1801, although it certainly did not allow a real meeting or a real exchange between the Egyptians and the French, by sounding the knell of the Ottoman power, which kept Egypt in almost universal cultural self-sufficiency, indirectly allowed the country to open up to the world, to make contact and exchange, after the event, with other cultures and other civilizations. The real exchange between Orientals and Occidentals could be done from the time of the Egyptian missions in Europe. Admittedly, Egypt owed Bonaparte its first factories and its first printing works: Bonaparte founded the Egyptian Scientific Institute, and the scholars who accompanied him made a vast study of Egypt, recorded in nine volumes titled: *The Description of Egypt*. Bonaparte also established a printing press, a bookstore and factories.

However, it was only under the government of the viceroy of Egypt Mohammed Ali (or Mehemet Ali) that real action was taken to bring the country out of his decadence. Originally, Mohammed Ali (1769-1849) was an Albanian soldier engaged in the Turkish military expedition of 1801 to defeat the French. He later realized his dream of governing Egypt and providing the state with a military force to defend himself against potential aggressors.

It was during his reign that the first cultural missions abroad were held to train teachers in various scientific fields. Since the language of the Western sciences, which was essential for the development of his political projects, was foreign, Muhammad Ali gave translation a very important place, it is thanks to the translators that Egypt could maintain effective links with Europe. He privileged the military, industrial, administrative and teaching fields and it was also under his government that the official Egyptian printing press of Boulaq was founded in 1820. The cultural domain was thus gradually able to benefit from direct contacts with the West. and allow the existence of a new generation of cultured and modernist men. The first cultural mission in the West

took place in 1826 in France during which a personality like Rifa'a Rafi 'al-Tahtâwî (1801-1837), the young Cheick Al-Azhar (the Cairo Islamic University), distinguished himself. He stayed in Paris from 1826-1831, where he went as an imam accompanying the first Egyptian students in France. He recounted his stay in Paris in his famous work *Takhlis al-ibrîz fî talkhîs barîz* ("Fine gold or Paris in a nutshell") (Al-Tahtâwî, 1989), published in Cairo in 1834. On his return to Cairo, he founded the School of Languages (1835) and headed the Translation Bureau (1841). He succeeded in expressing within the Egyptian society his desires for institutional reform, particularly in the field of education, as well as his enthusiasm for Enlightenment thought and the technical progress in Europe. Despite the gap that existed between the European cultural universe and that of Egypt that was just emerging from its decadence, Arab travellers such as this man served as an intermediary between Europe and the Arab-Muslim world.

At the time of the Nahda, Egypt experienced a great movement of translation and adaptation of Western writings into Arabic. First of all, scientific, political and administrative works for the state were translated, and later literary translation, which reached its peak in the first half of the twentieth century. The important translation effort that has taken place, in addition to the progress of the booming press at the time, has allowed the Arabic language itself to become richer and simpler in order to express the changes that Egyptian society knew. Many neologisms were born, most of the time, inspired by French or English, in the scientific, technological and literary domains. Many foreign concepts could now be translated into Arabic, and objects hitherto unknown and which were beginning to appear in Arab society at that time could be named. The old stylistic habits of the classical Arabic language were also gradually abandoned, such as redundancies, rhymed and rhythmic phrases and other artifices of style, even if some writers used them to give their translations or adaptations a classical literary character. The press also helped to give their first readers news, plays and novels translated into Arabic. The reception of these genres was done in part by the major newspapers which published them in the form of serials. The Western world occupied a prominent place in this new mode of expression through the influence of its political, economic and cultural models. This image of the West was served in particular by the "elite" press and the "European" press. According to Abd Al-Malek,

“The private press is divided into the national press and the press of the elite turned towards Europe [...] deeply politicized, but giving the widest place to Letters, sciences, economy, arts, the contribution of the civilization of the industrial age of Europe [...] finally a European press, occupied above all to support the effort of economic and political penetration of the powers in Egypt” (Abd Al-Malek, 1969, pp. 182-183).

Most major newspapers, such as the famous *al-Ahram* (“The Pyramid”), founded in 1875, began to publish Arabic translations of European fictional works as soon as they were first published. This was also the case of the *al-Hilal* newspaper (“The Crescent”), from its first publication in 1892. The Arab-speaking general public appreciated this kind of light and entertaining literature that the newspapers published in supplement. Journal editors also used translations of Western works to attract readers, often making them appear on the front pages. Here are some examples of translated works that have been successful with the Arabic-speaking general public in Egypt and the Arab world:

- Fenelon’s *Les Aventures de Télémaque* (“The Adventures of Telemachus”, 1699) is one of the first French works translated in the nineteenth century into Arabic and adapted to the Arab public in 1851 by Rifa'a Rafi 'al-Tahtawi under the title of *Mawaqî' al-aflak. waqâ'î 'Tilimâk* (“The position of the stars or the adventures of Telemachus”).
- The novel of Father Prévost, *Manon Lescaut* (1753), is translated in 1936 by Elias Abu Shabaka (1903-1947), writer and Lebanese romantic poet, famous for his poetic work written in the Rimbaudian tradition. The translators were at that time mostly writers themselves. They worked for the promotion and the influence of the French literature, either by their translations or by their tendency to write inspired by Western works that marked them.
- Another work made a great noise in Egypt and the Arab world, until the sixties, is *Paul et Virginie* (“Paul and Virginia”, 1787) of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, a novel translated and adapted in 1872 by Muhammad 'Uthman Jalal (1829-1898) who is also one of the first adapters of Racine and Molière in the Egyptian dialect, as *Tartuffe* adapted under the title of *Cheick Matlûf* in 1873. The novel *Paul and Virginia* was then translated in 1902 by the intellectual secularist Syro-Lebanese Farah Antun (1874-1922).

- *Atala* (1801) by François-René de Chateaubriand is translated under the same title by Gamîl Nahla Mudawwar, in Beirut in 1882. Marûn Abûd translates *Atala* and *René* under the Arab title of *Atala wa Rini*, published in Amchet in Lebanon in 1910. Mustapha Lutfi al-Manfaluti adapted it under the title *Al-Shuhada* (“The Martyrs”) and inserted it in his collection of novels adapted in the form of news and entitled *al-Abarat* (“The Tears”) in 1915. Al-Manfaluti did not only bring back the French works by retranslating them, but he also summarized some of them, his goal is being to produce entertaining and easily accessible literature for the general public with a predilection for sad stories, as evidenced by the titles.
- The works of Alexandre Dumas father and son are part of French writings translated into Arabic and continue to be reissued until today because they represent romantic adventure literature highly appreciated by the Arab public. The characters of these novels resemble by their exploits and their code of honour to the Arab horsemen that poetry and classical prose celebrate. The novel *The Three Musketeers* (1844) was translated by Nagîb al-Haddâd in 1888, under the title *al-Fursân al-thalâta*. The Count of Monte-Cristo (1845) was translated by Bishâra Shadîd in 1871 who gave him the title of *Qissat al-Kunt du muntû Kristû*. The novel by Alexandre Dumas Jr., *La Dame aux camélias* (“The Lady of the Camellias”, 1848) which inspired many Arab authors, has several versions including that of al-Manfalûti who transformed the novel into a novel that he published in 1915 under the title *The Victim* in his collection *al-'Abarât* (“The Tears”). Tanyus 'Abduh, in a more faithful translation, published this work in 1918 under the title *Dât al-Zahra al-baydâ'*.
- Victor Hugo is quite present in the translations, especially for his novel *Les Misérables* (1862), the translations are quite numerous and the most recognized and the most faithful is that of the famous Egyptian poet Hafez Ibrahim (1872-1932) which dates from 1903.

And the list may continue with Zola, Guy de Maupassant, Alphonse Daudet, or Anatole France. During this period of uninterrupted translation, which began at the end of the nineteenth century and reached its peak in the early twentieth century and lasted until its middle, this translation work was carried out with a delay of about twenty years compared to the original works. Egyptian literature owes most of its production to

translation from the end of the nineteenth century to the end of the first quarter of the twentieth century. Over ten thousand works have been recorded during this period (Al-Nassaj 1968: 23). The massive translation of French works, which the generalization of modern printing has facilitated, was provided by Egyptians, but also largely by Syrian and Lebanese Christians who felt close to France who had brought them some during the war against the Druze (Badr 1983: 119). In addition, Lebanese and Syrian intellectuals were very attracted by the political ideas of the French Revolution of 1789. But despite this craze for French literature, Arabic translations were not always very faithful to the original works.

#### **6. Traduttore – traditore: Is translation betrayal?**

The translation and adaptation of Western works have facilitated the cultural and linguistic relations between the Arab world and the West, despite all the criticism of this work and perhaps also precisely because of the transformations that had taken place to make the Western book accessible to the Arab reader. While Arab translators have sometimes wanted to be faithful to the world of the Western author, as was the case for a number of them, they have been more tempted to transform foreign writings to make them more conformable to taste of the Arab public.

Many books translated into Arabic do not mention the name of the translator, merely the original author's or, conversely, some translators and adapters did not consider it important to quote the name of the original author without it being their intention to appropriate or plagiarize the work of the latter. The translator contented himself with referring to the foreign origin of the work revealed by the title, as in the case of the following books: *Farah an-nasr aw Ibn Nabuliyun* ("The Joy of Victory or The Son of Napoleon"), by Yusuf al-Bustani published in Cairo in 1924. *Ibnatu al-Markiz* ("The Marquess' Daughter") is a translation of Tanyus Abduh published in Cairo in 1917 without mention of the name of Alexandre Dumas.

*Barizit (Parisette)*, undated) is a novel probably adapted from the film noir of Louis Feuillade (1922) by Tawfiq 'Abd Allah. The omission of the names of the authors may have served to avoid any comparison with the original work which could call into question the freedom granted to them by these translators. Some writers, on the contrary,

have claimed that their works were translations of European works, when in fact they only imitated the Western world. These authors thus thought to ensure the same success as that of translations and adaptations, highly appreciated by the public. Today, even if this phenomenon can subsist, it is less common; on the other hand, it is unfortunately quite rare that the name of the Arabic translator is mentioned.

Many so-called “translated” works have undergone major transformations in their content and form. Western novels were amputated from certain paragraphs, descriptions and sometimes entire parts, as was the case with Ahmad Hasan al-Zayyat’s translation of *Julie* or *La Nouvelle Héloïse* by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, which translated only selected parts of this work. These passages appeared in 1937 in his collection *al-Riwâya* (“The Novel”). Concision seemed to be one of the priorities of the translators, which explains the great success of the short story, especially that of Guy de Maupassant, but here again, most of the translations have altered the original works (Farhat 2005: 51-66). The distracting, exotic or moralistic dimension of these translations, whether original or added, responds to a long Arab literary tradition. The books of the *adab* (classical Arabic literature) were full of anecdotes whose purpose was to maintain the reader's attention. Georges Tannus, one of the translators who had recourse to the Egyptianization of Western texts, admitted and regretted both the betrayal of original works (Badr, 1983: 119). However, he justified his attitude by giving the example of a play by Voltaire he called *al-Sha'b wa al-qaysar* (“Caesar and the people”, 1905), after *The Death of Caesar*. He added a female character and therefore a love story, he thought, to satisfy the taste of his audience, sensitive to love intrigues. Alongside these translators who did not hesitate to betray the original texts to satisfy their readers, there were, on the other hand, other translators whose approach privileged the original work and its universe. This is the case of the poet Hafez Ibrahim (1872-1932), who, although not fluent in French, sought to do a scrupulous job and remain faithful to the text. He translated *Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo at the rate of one page every twenty-five days. His translation, which appeared in 1903, remains the most widely read and widely read.

## **7. Literary adaptation and cultural resilience**

To speak of resilience about the reception, translation and adaptation of Western works for the Arab public is almost to consider this encounter between East and West as a

“trauma” that the Orientals would have suffered and that it has had to go beyond to rebuild a new cultural identity. In fact, it is a clash of cultures that has been overcome by the effort to modernize a traditional culture to which it was necessary to graft foreign elements to ensure renewal. The Arab writers had to resort to adaptation (*al-iqtibas*), arabization (*al-ta'rib*) and Egyptianization (*al-tamsir*), all this in order not to receive, without crazy, works very different from those of classical Arabic literature and offer them as such to the general public Arabic. These foreign writings carried a thought that could shock Eastern minds, or cause them to doubt or think differently than they did before, thus questioning the foundations of Arabo-Muslim society.

Therefore, it is not surprising that in the collections of translated Western works one finds on the cover the mention “Service of translation and Arabization” (“Maslahat al-tarjama wa al-ta'rib”). This recourse to the Arabization of the content of Western works in order to mitigate the potentially subversive or contrary to Arab-Muslim mores and beliefs has, in fact, become widespread in the practice of translation. Having direct access to Western culture and literature in the Nahda era has made some of them fervent defenders, as was the case with Taha Hussayn (1889-1973), author of the *Book of Days* (1926). This great blind Egyptian writer of modest origin, a graduate of the Islamic University of al-Azhar and who went to study in Paris as a language and French literature had become, on his return to his country, one of the great defenders of Western rationalist thought, particularly by applying the critical method to pre-Islamic poetry, which earned him the wrath of conservatives. The course of this man proves that he who has direct access to a foreign culture and thought even if it seems to differ totally from his own is likely to be influenced by it. But this descent worries more than it rejoices; it is a “multiform invasion”, as orientalist Richard Jacquemond (1993) calls it that Arab translators seek to counteract by resorting to cultural ethnocentrism that is expressed by all the transformations that foreign works undergo. It seems that all the betrayals whose foreign texts have suffered in their Arabic translations have for their first reason the attempt of translators to remove the danger of acculturation while striving to give them a place in Arab literature. Al-Tahtawi was torn between this culture of modernity and rationalism and his religious thought. Because of his status as an imam, he has always forbidden to favour the first to the detriment of the second. It is also his approach that



should be brought closer to the translators who have succeeded him and who have Arabized Western works.

## **8. Conclusion**

Why betray a work by erasing its foreign side? Why give yourself a work, or attribute your work to another, if it is not because we still do not know how to position ourselves in relation to foreign and new literature? All the problems of translation at that time in Egypt seem to have the same original cause: they stemmed from the groping of the pioneers of modern Arabic literature who had to integrate certain data from a foreign culture into theirs. But in the end, they managed to create modern literature made of acquired and borrowed and the translation was an essential step to this evolution by allowing a progressive discovery of foreign literature. These translations are part of everything that the Arab East has been able to discover from the West after having opened its doors, if only half, fearing to be overwhelmed by a foreign cultural wave that might make him lose his eastern identity. Many translators felt a little like the guardians of Arab-Muslim identity and moral and ideological values. And while they have failed to prevent Western influence from pervading all areas of Eastern social and cultural life, they have limited readers' adherence to Western thought through literature and art, often also censored. The Arabic language is that of the Koran, to prevent the conveyance through it of ideas, sociocultural habits and values totally different from Muslim mores were for many translators to be the defenders. From then on, they were forced to bring to the Western book a neutral habit to give it the right of citizenship in modern Arabic literature. The work done on foreign works allowed Arabic translators who were mostly writers to write their own novels, plays and short stories, describing the social and cultural reality of their own country. Thus, the translation, even if it was unfaithful, allowed writers as well as the general public to become acquainted with the different literary genres imported from the West, thus shaping the Arab literature from the inside and allowing it to be renewed and to flourish.

If today, when Arab literature has reached maturity, there are still translation problems similar to those that existed at the time of the Nahda, alongside translations very faithful to the original works, because this temptation to alter the original text, especially literary, has not been, in its beginnings, countered and limited in its effects, has established itself by becoming commonplace. We continue to translate the foreign text or

adapt it, but to "adopt" it is often still deprived of otherness always considered dangerous, difficult to translate, boring, arduous or too licentious. However, we cannot reduce the receptive fate of the Western book in the Arab countries to the distortions that it may suffer, because these translations, even if they are not faithful and even touching the intimacy of the text to introduce a from the East, or to deprive him of his power, have allowed him to "migrate" to the Arabo-Muslim land. Thus, the Western book continues to exist, often reworked, a little hybrid, both Western, but bearing the mark of the East, still contributing to cultural diversity, serving as an intermediary between the Western text and Arabic literature, pushing those who master foreign languages to turn to original works and allowing others to discover a literary universe often a little altered, but still quite original to raise questions and curiosity for foreign literature.

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