

Humanized Microhistory of Translation: The Case of Modern Arabic Literature in English Translation

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Abstract

Throughout history, translators have played a vital role as cultural agents in shaping the histories of different nations and cultures. Nevertheless, the translators' role has been largely ignored in translation history research studies, which have often focused on the texts translated. Therefore, many scholars in translation history research (Adamo 2006; Munday 2014; Pym 2009) have argued for the importance of studying translators themselves. The present study draws on the method of microhistory and applies it to the Arabic translation tradition by analyzing the life, personal relationships, and statements of one of the leading translators of Modern Arabic Literature (MAL) into English, Denys Johnson-Davies (J-D). The paper explores and analyses J-D's autobiography, interviews, and paratextual materials accompanying his translations in order to better understand how J-D's experience as a translator and cultural agent can shed light on the bigger picture of MAL translation history. The data analysis reveals insights into the status of translation during the different periods of MAL translation history. This includes the publication of Arabic-translated literary works into English, the reception of MAL by the English readership, and the reception of translators and their work by Arab authors and governments during the different periods of the translation history of MAL. This study also confirms the argument that the study of translators is a valid, useful method for researching translation history.

Keywords: Modern Arabic Literature, Translation Microhistory, Arabic Translation history, Denys Johnson-Davies, Humanizing translation history, Translator Studies

Introduction

Translators have played a vital role in shaping the histories of different nations and cultures. They have helped develop systems of writing and impacted the evolution of national languages. They have also been the means by which science, knowledge, religion, and cultural values are transferred from one culture to another (Delisle and Woodsworth 1995). Besides, translators have played a key role in decolonizing societies and cultural representation. Yet, despite translators' role as key players in the history of different

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translation traditions, the study of “translators’ role as creative and inventive mediators or as cultural agents has been largely ignored” in translation history research, which has often focused on the translated texts (Adamo 2006, 86).

Several translation scholars and historians (Pym 2009; Adamo 2006; Munday 2014; Paloposki 2017) have called for the study of translators as a way to do research in translation history. Pym (2009), for example, calls for humanizing translation history by studying translators rather than texts. In his translator-focused approach, Pym argues that “looking critically at the language in prefaces, correspondence and the subject’s texts other than translations” is a valid method to reveal some facts about translators who played a role in shaping translation history (15). In the same manner, Adamo (2006) argues for a microhistory of translation, which involves reducing the scale of historical research, pointing out that such an approach can be more rewarding than microhistory (85). Adamo points out that the object of study in microhistory involves different kinds of documents: “not only textual and paratextual elements in the translation, but also translators’ own statements contained in prefaces and dedications, in their letters and memoirs, or in publishing data” (Adamo 2006, 89). In the same vein, Linghui (2020) sees paratexts, produced by the translator, as a valuable source for historical research. He argues prefaces to translations, for instance, contribute to the historical research in its macro and micro approach (Linghui 2020, 18). Such a source of data provides valuable information about the translator as well as the source text’s origin, version, and reception in the source language (Linghui 2020, 19). Linghui (2019) argues that prefaces also provide a record of why and how certain works were translated in a specific period of time. He also argues that when analyzing prefaces and paratexts to chart the history of translation, they should be studied as interconnected with other prefaces instead of in isolation.

Munday (2014) also argues for the value of studying translators or what he calls ‘microhistory’ of translators “to better understand how the detailed analysis of the everyday experience of individuals can shed light on the bigger picture of the history of translation in specific socio-historical and cultural contexts” (65). Such approaches go beyond the long-standing approach of source-target relation. Instead, it focuses on extra-linguistic factors such as translators’ relations with other agents, such as authors, translators, and publishers, in the socio-cultural and political environments of the source and target cultures. Translation microhistorians define several historical resources in their pursuit of documenting histories of translation and translators. For instance, Munday (2014) discusses several resources including unpublished written and typed manuscripts, drafts of translation, correspondence between translator, author and editor, personal papers. He discusses several cases where such data sources revealed historical facts either about a translator’s working conditions and daily routine; their social and economic status; or the power relations between author and translator in specific periods (Munday 2014, 76).

Other researchers explore further unordinary resources. For instance, Gomez (2017) examines the validity of obituaries as potential extra-textual data for studying the social and cultural history of translators and translation (67). She collects obituaries published in the state of Ohio between 2000–2015. Gomez (2017) reports that obituaries provide valuable historical information about Ohio translators including personal details, type of service and career field, source of income, languages spoken and

translated, subject-field, and membership in translation associations. She also reports patterns in the analyzed data such as translators' immigration trends, prevalent gender, and most frequent languages translated.

The present study draws on the method of microhistory and applies it to the Arabic translation tradition to analyze the life, translations, and personal relationships of one of the leading translators of MAL into English, Denys Johnson-Davies (J-D). The paper analyses J-D's autobiography, interviews, and paratextual materials accompanying his translations to better understand how J-D's experience as a translator and cultural agent can illuminate wider themes in MAL's translation history. In order to evaluate the validity of humanizing translation history and microhistory as methods to document the translation history of MAL, the paper explores J-D's statements about the translation history of MAL and links them to the macro-history of the MLA as documented by some translation historians. Before delving into J-D and the microhistory of MAL, an overview of Arabic translation history research is needed.

Arabic Translation History Research

Translation history research in the Arab world has focused, for the most part, on periodization and the subsequent documentation of the macro-history of Arabic translation in specific periods. For instance, Mehawesh (2014) traces Arabic translation through six main periods of Islamic history: Islamic Empire, Umayyad Period, Abbasid Period, school of Toledo, Ottoman period, and the twentieth century. His translation history focuses on the translation projects conducted as well as the development of translator schools and training during each defined period of Islamic history. Mehawesh's historical research relies on secondary resources including previous literature on Islamic history in general and Arabic translation history in particular. Similarly, Rababah (2015) traces the translation movement from the pre-Islamic period through the end of the Umayyad era in order to highlight Arab translators' contribution to the global translation movement and civilization. Rababah's work also documents how the translation movement from and into Arabic was managed, sponsored, and organized in the Arab world during the eras in his study. His approach to documenting Arabic translation history is similar to Mehawesh's (2014). They both rely on a comprehensive overview of the related literature to propose periodization for the Arabic translation history.

Other researchers discuss the notion of translation historiography and evaluate the way translation history is documented by different historians. For instance, Al-Batineh (2019) utilizes corpus methods to investigate the impact of Eurocentrism and ideology on translation historiography. To this end, he analyzes a corpus including two books documenting the Arabic translation history during the Islamic Golden Age (8th-14th century) written by De Lacy Evans O'Leary (1947, 1949), an English historian and orientalist. Al-Batineh traces the number of occurrences and context of two clusters: * *into Arabic* and * *from Arabic* in the corpus. The researcher assumes that "the context of the phrase * *into Arabic* documents the translation movement of Greek works into Arabic, while the context of the second phrase * *from Arabic* is an indication of a sentence discussing the second translation movement" (107). He also traces the frequency and context of *translate(s)*, *translation(s)*, *translator(s)*, *translating*, *translated*. The

study endeavors to reveal the historical facts expressed in each concordance. The qualitative and quantitative analyses show that O'Leary's ideology plays a role in documenting Arabic translation history during the golden age. The researcher concludes that O'Leary's discourse presented a Eurocentric view reflected in the focus of his writing on the history of the first translation movement, which included the translation of Greek science into Arabic. O'Leary simultaneously ignored the role played by the Arabs through the second translation movement, which preserved Greek knowledge and transmitted it via translation to the West (Al-Batineh 2019, 111).

Sayaheen and Al-Ramadan (2020) take Al-Batineh's (2019) investigation a step further and conduct a comparative study examining how O'Leary and Jim Al-Khalili, an Iraqi-British scholar, documented the translation history during the Islamic Golden Age (2020). To this end, the researchers critically analyze *How Greek Science Passed to the Arabs*, by O'Leary's (1949) *Arabic Thought and Its Place in History* and Al-Khalili's (2011) *The House of Wisdom: How Arabic Science Saved Ancient Knowledge and Gave Us the Renaissance*. The results of the analysis revealed both convergences and divergences in the way that both authors presented translation history facts. Both historians agree on general historical facts such as the existence of a large-scale translation movement and extensive governmental support from the Calipha to translators (Sayaheen & Al-Ramadan 2020, 162). On the other hand, the researchers argue that both O'Leary and Al-Khalili disagree about the role of scholars who also worked as translators in The House of Wisdom. The researchers note that O'Leary documented the Arabic translation movement as only involved with transferring Greek and Latin knowledge into Arabic and translator-scholars as mere scribes, while Al-Khalili highlights that the translation movement comprised not only a linguistic transfer of knowledge but also a serious translation movement that improved and expanded the imported and translated knowledge (Sayaheen and Al-Ramadan 2020, 161).

Arabic translation history in the modern age has rarely been discussed or documented. This era witnessed an awakening in the Arabic translation movement and remarkable evolution in the translation of Modern Arabic Literature. Several Arab authors and thinkers argue that translation in this modern era should serve the Arab culture by promoting the modern Arab renaissance (Jabra 1992; Shureteh 2014). Jabra (1992) believes that restoration or reconstruction can "bring the Arab nation back to its original notable position within the broad context of civilizations" (Jabra 1992, 57 cited in Shureteh 2014). Nevertheless, this translation movement has received little attention from historians and translation scholars. Most works on MAL have focused on the development of Arabic literature and the authors who played a significant role in pushing the Arabic literary tradition forward (cf. Allen 2006; Badawi 2006; Brugman 1984; Hafez 2006; Jayyusi 2006; Tresilian 2008). The few attempts to document the translation history of MAL have focused on general aspects of modern Arabic translation history such as the current status of the Arabic translation movement in terms of the number of books translated, current translation projects that have enhanced the current status of Arabic translation, or on translation awards and initiatives that have played a role in moving the translation movement forward (Shureteh 2014). Other scholars have documented the modern Arabic translation movement in specific Arabic countries such as

Palestine (Al-Khatib 1995), Jordan (Shunnaq 2016; Al-Hamad 2014) and Egypt (Esam Alddin 1986). The following section provides an overview of the translation history of MAL.

MAL in Translation: A Brief Historical Overview

Arabic literature historians have failed to agree on when to date the beginning of the Modern Arabic Literature era. For instance, Badawi states that modern Arabic literature began with the French campaign in Egypt in 1798 (1993). He bases his claim on the fact that 1798 marks the opening of the Arab world to the West and to Western literature, which has had a noticeable influence on MAL (1-3). On the other hand, Starkey (1998) and Somekh (1991) argue that MAL began during the *Al-Nahdah* era (Cultural Awakening) in the late 19th and early 20th centuries when some Western literary genres entered the Arabic literary tradition through translation. Al Ka'bi (2005) finds Somekh (1991) and Starkey's (1998) argument more valid for three reasons. First, during the *Al-Nahdah* era, Arabic literature developed more modern themes as it used the classical language to address freedom, women's rights, and equality. Second, the first Arabic novel, as a borrowed literary genre, was written during the *Al-Nahdah* era. Third, another significant change in Arabic literature during this era was the creation of literary schools and journals (Ka'bi 2005, 445). These three reasons distinguish MAL from other eras in the history of Arabic literature.

Translations of MAL started in 1947 when Johnson-Davies translated Taymur's *Tales from Egyptian Life* into English. Altoma (2005) divides the translation history of MAL into English into three main periods (2005). During the first period (1947-67), only sixteen works were translated. He argues that before and during the first period, Western readers showed little interest in Arabic literature. The second period (1968-88) was marked by translations of more literary works by writers from different Arab countries, such as Gassan Kanafani (Palestine), Tayyib Salih (Sudan), Muhammad Shukri (Morocco), Abed Al-Rahman Munif (Jordan/ Saudi Arabia), and many others. The second period marked an academic interest in the translation of Arabic literature as social documents, not as literary achievements (Altoma 2005, 54-58). Similarly, Büchler and Guthrie (2011) note that Arabic literary works from the Middle East and North Africa, with some exceptions, are "often approached primarily as a source of socio-political commentary or documentary, rather than as literary works *per se*" (6).

The third period, the post-Nobel era (1989-present), was marked by Naguib Mahfouz, an Egyptian novelist, winning the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1988, and "since then, Western publishers and readers have shown a steady interest in contemporary Arabic fiction" (Altoma 2005, 54). During the third period, many political turning points impacted the translation movement of MAL into English. Büchler and Guthrie (2011) report that the number of Arabic works translated doubled in 2000-2010 as compared to 1990-2000. This is attributed to major political turning points in the Arab world such as the 11/9 attacks on the United States (2001) and the war on Iraq (2003). More recently, the socio-political events in the Arab world such as Arab Spring have also ignited more interest in Arabic literature. In this regard, Shamma (2016) points out that "political landmarks seem to be more significant than literary ones in the

history of Arabic literature in translation” (7). Such observations have rarely been backed up by a thorough investigation of the status of translation during and after political turning points.

The translation history of MAL, as documented and presented by translation historians and scholars, will be investigated in this paper through the lens of microhistory. Previously, historiographical attempts focused on the periodization of the translation history of MAL or the number of translated books translated into and from Arabic. However, the documentation of other translation-related historical facts such as the publication of Arabic translated works into English, the reception of MAL by the English readership, and the reception of translators and their work by Arab authors and governments during the different periods of the translation history of MAL has rarely been investigated. To fill this gap, the present study analyzes the life, translations, and relationships of Johnson-Davies in order to trace and document the translation history of MAL. The following section provides an overview of Johnson-Davies’s life and his encounter with MAL.

Johnson-Davies’ life and encounter with Arabic

Denys Johnson-Davies, the most influential Arabic-English literary translator of our era (Said 1995, 377), was born in 1922 in Canada and died in Cairo in 2017. During his childhood, J-D’s parents traveled and lived in different places within the Arab World, including Egypt and Sudan (Johnson-Davies 2006a, 1). At the age of twelve, J-D returned to England; however, according to his autobiography, he was never comfortable in England, preferring to return to the Arab World throughout the rest of his life. At the age of fourteen, J-D passed the entrance examination at Cambridge. Unfortunately, he was unable to attend due to a rule at that time stating admitted students must be fifteen years old (Johnson-Davies 2006a, 2). Despite this setback, he now had the chance to spend a year at the School of Oriental Studies in London before going to Cambridge.

In the summer before joining the School of Oriental Studies, J-D moved to Cairo to learn Arabic, where he had his first learning experience with the Arabic language and culture. During his stay in Egypt, J-D immersed himself in the Arabic Egyptian culture by frequenting traditional cafés in Cairo and speaking with locals. J-D’s interest in the Egyptian culture, daily life, and dialect greatly affected his translation and text selection later on. After his time in Egypt and at the School of Oriental Studies, J-D went to Cambridge. There, he studied Arabic literary works in addition to extracts from the Qur’an. This experience increased his knowledge of the Arabic language as well as its literary style and tradition, which further fostered his interest in Arabic.

After graduation, J-D worked as an Arabic translation reviewer at BBC Radio, which signaled his first time working with translation (Johnson-Davies 2006a, 9). While at the BBC, J-D contacted famous Arab short story writers, such as Mahmud Taymour and Twfiq al-Hakim, and took his first step in literary translation by translating two of Taymour’s short stories into English.

In 1946 J-D was the only translator who was interested in translating Arabic literature, which was almost neglected by Arabists, into English (Ghazoul 1983, 81). In one of his interviews, J-D indicates that while in Egypt, he found a literature that “nobody [in the Anglophone world] knew about” (Ghazoul

1983, 81). In other interviews (AUC 2011), J-D states that Arabs did nothing to translate their literature into foreign languages. For this reason, J-D mentions that he wanted to do “something” for Egyptian literature—i.e., translating it and making it known to the world. Being the first translator of MAL and the “dictator”, as he puts it, of such translations, J-D had the power to select authors and texts to translate. J-D selected and translated several works written by famous Arab writers such as Naguib Mahfouz, Tawfiq Al-hakim, and Mahmud Taymour. In some cases, J-D was the person who determined the book cover and packaging for translated work (Johnson-Davies 2006a, 104).

During his sixty years as the pioneer of Arabic literary translation into English, J-D translated more than twenty-eight literary works, including novels, poems, short stories, essays, and articles. J-D was even the first to recognize and translate the works of the Nobel laureate Naguib Mahfouz. The list of authors he worked with and translated include Tewfiq al-Hakim, Yahya Taher Abdullah, Mohamed El-Bisatie, Taha Hussein, Yusuf Idris, Mohammed Berrada, Salwa Bakr, and Zakariya Tamer. In addition to Arabic, J-D was also interested in Islamic Studies. He left his mark on this subject as well by being a co-translator of three Prophetic Hadith books (Clark 2006).

Beyond his translations of literature, J-D has produced valuable paratextual material like introductions, prefaces, and forewords to his translation. As previously mentioned, he has been interviewed on several occasions and extensively talked about MAL translation throughout different periods. His autobiography serves as a comprehensive narrative of his journey as a translator and his views on such practice. The present paper makes use of these resources to trace the translation history of MAL. The following section presents the data collection and analysis of this study.

Methodology

The data of the present study consist of J-D’s autobiography, interviews, introductions, and forwards to his translations (See Table 1). Autobiographies and interviews are essential resources for historical research (Munday 2014; Redlich 1975). In this regard, Munday (2014) argues that “crucial testimony about both the process of translation and the conditions under which it takes place is provided in post-hoc accounts by the individuals concerned, in the form of memoirs or autobiographies or interviews in which they consciously reflect on the event” (86). Similarly, Pym (2009), Crisafulli (2002), and Adamo (2006) highlight the importance of paratexts accompanying translations, such as translator’s introduction and forwards, as valuable resources for translation historians and historical research in translation studies.

The data of this study include four interviews, seven introductions, one autobiography, and two forewords. Table 1 lists the data of the study.

Table 1: Data of the Present Study

Title	Resource type
On Translating Arabic Literature: An Interview with Denys Johnson-Davies	Interview (Ghazoul 1983)
J-D's Introduction to The Mountain of Green Teas and Other Stories	Introduction (Johnson-Davies 1984)
J-D's Foreword to Tigers on the Tenth Day and Other Stories	Foreword (Johnson-Davies 1985)
J-D's Foreword to Distant View of a Minaret: And Other Stories	Foreword (Johnson-Davies 1987)
J-D's Introduction to The Hill of Gypsies and other stories	Introduction (Johnson-Davies 1998)
J-D's Introduction to The Slave's Dream & Other Stories	Introduction (Johnson-Davies 1991)
J-D's Introduction to Final Night: Short Stories	Introduction (Johnson-Davies 2002)
Memories in Translation: A Life Between the Lines of Arabic Literature	Autobiography (Johnson-Davies 2006)
J-D's Introduction to The Anchor Book of Modern Arabic Fiction	Introduction (Johnson-Davies 2006b)
J-D's Introduction to The Lamp of Umm Hashim and other stories	Introduction (Johnson-Davies 2006c)
On the Politics of Translation in the Arab World	Interview (Wilson-Glodie 2007)
Denys Johnson-Davies on Translation (No, He Doesn't Like It)	Interview (AUC 2011)
J-D's Introduction to The Essential Naguib Mahfouz	Introduction (Johnson-Davies 2011)

The analysis of the data relies on the close reading of the collected paratexts in order to trace J-D's statements about the publication of Arabic translated works into English; the reception of MAL by the English readership; and the reception of translators and their work by Arab authors and governments during the different periods of MAL translation history. The following sections feature the findings of the data analysis.

Findings and Discussion

The analysis of the collected data has revealed valuable information about the translation history of MAL. The analysis illustrates several points of convergence between the statements of J-D about the history of MAL and the historical facts documented by translation historians. The following sections arrange the findings into three sections. The first section presents a historical account of the publication of Arabic-translated works into English while the second section discusses the reception of MAL by the English readership in light of J-D's statements. The third section provides a discussion about a topic that has rarely been investigated—the reception of translators and their work by Arab authors and governments during the different periods of the translation history of MAL.

Publishing MAL in Translation

In his autobiography and interviews (Johnson-Davies 2006a, 2006b, AUC 2011), J-D explains the difficulties he and other translators faced in convincing publishers to print English translations of Arabic literature. On several occasions, J-D highlighted that in the 1940s, it was almost impossible to find a publisher willing to publish translations of Arabic books. At that time, only a few literary magazines sometimes published translations of short stories from Arabic (Johnson-Davies 2006a, 2011; Ghazoul 1983). J-D elaborates in this autobiography that translators' main concern was to find a publisher who could be relied upon "to look favorably on translations from Arabic" (Johnson-Davies 2006a, 58). In his remarkable interview with The American University in Cairo (AUC) Press, he also points out that due to the lack of interested publishers, translators would publish their translation at their own expense, which happened to J-D when he published a translated collection of stories by Mahmud Taymour (AUC 2011). Unfortunately, J-D noted that twenty years separated the publication of his first translated work (1947) and that of his second (1967); this illustrates the difficulty of finding a publisher interested in printing Arabic literature in translation (Ghazoul 1983, 84). The second volume of Arabic short stories translated by J-D, *Modern Arabic Short Stories* (1967), was published by Oxford. However, the work was "accepted as a work of scholarship rather than for the literary merit of the stories" (Johnson-Davies 2006b, xviii). The small number of Arabic works printed from 1947-67, "came out from small, specialized publishers, often under a university imprint, and were aimed at students of Arabic" (Johnson-Davies 2006b, xviii).

J-D also indicated that during the first period of MAL translation history (1947-67), governments and institutions did not play any role in promoting or encouraging the translation movement (Johnson-Davies 2006a, 47). The lack of publisher's interest and the absence of governmental support limited the number of translated Arabic literary works produced during the first period (cf. Altoma 2005).

J-D noted in his autobiography that the second period of the translation history of MAL (1968-88) marked an increased interest in Arabic literature as social documents and not as literary achievements. More Arabists and national and international publishers, such as Oxford University Press, the AUC Press Cambridge, Doubleday, Dar el Shorouk, and Holy Koran Publishing, invested in publishing Arabic literature in translation (Johnson-Davies 2006a, 93). Even though the second period witnessed an increased publisher interest, it was still difficult to publish Arabic literature in translation. J-D explains, in his autobiography, that as a translator "one translates much more than one publishes: sometimes one works on something and halfway through one suddenly has doubts and abandons it, or for one reason or another one cannot find a publisher for some piece of writing about which one was sufficiently enthusiastic at the time" (Johnson-Davies 2006a, 108). In the early 1980s, The AUC Press signed a contract with Naguib Mahfouz to obtain the rights to translate his works into English and other languages (Johnson-Davies 2006a, 40). J-D and other translators joined the AUC team and translated much of Mahfouz's works into English (Johnson-Davies 2006a, 40). The end of the second period and the beginning of a new era in MAL was marked when Mahfouz was awarded the Noble Prize in Literature in 1988.

Also, during this second period, governments began supporting the Arabic translation movement, which occurred when the United Arab Emirates government helped fund the translation of some literary works (Johnson-Davies 2006a, 93). Publishers' newfound interest in MAL in translation, as well as the governmental support of the Arabic translation movement, helped to increase the number of translations produced, which in turn improved the visibility and appreciation of Arabic literature.

The post-Nobel era (1989-present), or the third period of the translation history of MAL, witnessed a Western interest in Arabic literary works as literary achievements and not as social documents. Awarding Mahfouz the Noble Prize was a significant turning point in the translation history of MAL. In this regard, J-D points out that "it required Naguib Mahfouz to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature before an Arab writer could get into a mainstream publisher's list" (Johnson-Davies 2006a, 84). During the third period, governments increased their support for the translation of MAL; however, their ideological interest controlled and censored the works that were being published and translated (Johnson-Davies 2006a, 34, 43).

Furthermore, this era has witnessed retranslation as a new practice in MAL. Some novels have been translated by different translators into English, and others have been translated into multiple languages (Johnson-Davies 2006a, 85). Retranslation has helped spread MAL not only to the English-speaking world but also to the readers of other languages. The launch of many literary and translation prizes by private and public institutions has helped the proliferation of MAL in translation. One of the first translation prizes in the Arab world was the *Naguib Mahfouz Medal* for Literature. This particular prize was suggested by J-D and offered by AUC for the best novel published in the Arab world (Johnson-Davies 2006a, 63). Other prizes that appeared during the post-Nobel era to celebrate Arabic literature include the King Faisal Prize, Egypt's State Prize for Literature, and the Sheikh Zayed Book Award, which J-D won in 2007.

Translators of MAL

J-D, on several occasions, discusses the status of translators and their relations to authors, publishers, and governments during the different periods of MAL translation history (AUC 2011). In his autobiography and interviews, J-D discusses two important concepts related to translators of MAL: "translators as spies" and "translators as dictators".

J-D points out that translators were accused of being spies during the first period of the translation history of MAL. During that time, J-D had to hide his identity as a translator who knows Arabic, especially when stopped by the police. As J-D puts it, "foreigners can be an object of suspicion if one happens to know the language [Arabic]" (Johnson-Davies 2006a, 78). Some Egyptian politicians and authors believed J-D was an English spy (61). The Egyptian government also censored some of his translations that discussed the life of Egyptians living in the poor countryside. In his 2011 interview, J-D recalls when he translated some texts describing Egyptian peasants who were starving and walking without shoes (AUC 2011). The news of the translation reached King Faisal, who became so upset with what J-D produced that the Egyptian government suggested J-D "be removed from the country" (AUC

2011). In the same interview, J-D comments that “this was the price one paid for trying to get into a foreign field” (AUC 2011). This incident shows how politics played a role in the translation movement in the early stages of MAL translation.

Translation has always been seen by J-D as a creative art that requires more than knowing two languages (Johnson-Davies 2006a, AUC 2011). However, this type of art “is not appreciated” and as a translator, “if you get your name on the book anywhere at all you’ll be very lucky” (AUC 2011). J-D states that the translation of MAL was not financially rewarding and the money he received from translations was not enough to make a living. In the same vein, selling translation rights was not financially rewarding to authors. In his regard, J-D tells a story about when Tewfik al-Hakim showed J-D the check from Heinemann, the publisher of the Arab Authors series, for six months of royalties: a total of £3.60. Al-Hakim looked at J-D and ironically said “It would be a real shame to cash this. I think I’ll get it framed so I can hang it up” (Johnson-Davies 2006a, 36).

Authors, on the other hand, appreciated the work of translators. Arab authors regarded being translated as a “stamp of excellence” (Ghazoul 1983, 83). In his introduction to *The Essential Naguib Mahfouz*, J-D points out that the authors of MAL believed that translation was the vehicle by which their works could reach readers beyond the Arabic-speaking world. In his autobiography, J-D mentions that when he asked Mahfouz why he had given all the translation rights to his books to the AUC Press, without receiving an advance on royalties, Mahfouz replied, “At least this way my work will get translated and read in English and for me [Mahfouz] that is more important than money” (Johnson-Davies 2011).

However, some authors considered translation a derivative act that was secondary to creative writing. As recounted in J-D’s autobiography, Yahya Taher Abdullah, a well-known short story writer, asked J-D how much he would make as an author after his work had been published in English. To this, J-D replied that it would depend on how well the book sold and “that the publisher’s contract would stipulate that the author and the translator would split the royalties fifty/fifty”; Yahyah immediately replied, “But you’re only the translator!” (Johnson-Davies 2006a, 104). This shows how some authors perceived the work of the translator as a derivative task that was not creative or labor-intensive.

According to our data analysis, the first generation of Arabic-English translators who worked on MAL had great power over which texts and authors were to be translated into English. Governmental authorities, publishers, or other parties had no say in the process of selecting authors and translators. In this regard, Johnson-Davies (2006a) comments:

Arabic translators thus, in many ways, have both greater power and more responsibility than their French counterparts [for example], for they take upon themselves not only the role of translator but also that of the person deciding what should be translated. (59)

This role gave J-D power as a cultural agent, critic, and translator. J-D describes his task as a “dictator” who dominated the translation of MAL in the first period (1946-1967). In his interview with AUC, J-D pointed out that he “was a sort of dictator of the field, which [he] enjoyed” (AUC 2011). J-D as

the first translator interested in translating MAL into English had so much power that he decided which texts and authors to be translated. In another interview conducted in 1983, Johnson-Davies states:

The fact that I am one of a very small group of people interested in translating modern Arabic literature and that it is I who choose what I shall translate and am not commissioned by a publisher to translate a particular work, gives me perhaps an excessive, and certainly unsought, power. (Ghazoul 1983, 86).

His powerful role ignited the anger of some young Arab authors. In his autobiography, J-D recalls that one writer came directly to J-D and demanded, “Who are you to choose what writers you translate?” (Johnson-Davies 2006a, 58). This author then said that J-D should not be the one choosing texts but instead “[J-D] should go to the Ministry of Culture and get a list of the books that should be translated” (Johnson-Davies 2006a, 58). This role of translators as powerful agents of selection started to vanish in the second half of the second period of the translation history of MAL. This role has shifted to publishers who began choosing authors to be translated—AUC press is a case in point.

Reception of MAL in Translation

Preconceived notions of Arabs and their literature were among the factors that played a key role in limiting the spread of MAL in the English-speaking world and negatively impacted the reception of MAL in translation. In an interview, J-D indicates that the “[British] couldn’t bring themselves to believe that an Arab who is probably sitting in the desert somewhere could be sophisticated” (AUC 2011). This was one of the main reasons behind the lack of Western interest in publishing MAL in translation. During the first period of the translation history of MAL, Arabic literature in translation was used and perceived as social documents that would provide information about the socio-cultural aspects of the Arab society. In this regard, J-D agrees with Sir Hamilton Gibb, who points out that “[a]ll of these productions, however, short stories, novels, and plays, remain bounded by the horizons and conventions of the Arab World; when translated into other languages they are often more interesting as social documents than as literary achievements” (Sir Hamilton Gibb (1963) quoted in Johnson-Davies 2006a, 21).

In one of his interviews with Gulf News, J-D explains that Western publishers did not view Arab writing as a work of literature worth consideration. When the interviewer asked J-D about the publishers’ reception of MAL in English translation, he replied “Arab writing? There ain’t such a thing! For them [publishers], it was the Arabian Nights and that was it” (Gulf News cited in Grimes 2017). Publishers interested in MAL also approached Arabic literary works in translation as works of scholarship, not as literary achievements (Johnson-Davies, 2006b, xviii). In this regard, J-D discusses the story behind one of his early translations published by Oxford University Press. The work was accepted “as a work of scholarship rather than for the literary merit of the stories” (xviii), and it was approved under one condition: the book must be introduced by the leading Arabist, Arthur Arberry, who was not an expert in MAL (xviii).

In an interview with Egypt Today, J-D points out the reception of Arabic literature did not receive a warm welcome from publishers and readers because “readers, on the whole, are not all that interested in

literature with a capital L" (Hassan 2017, para 22). They are interested in common narratives, which might not be a characteristic of MAL in translation. In the same interview, J-D narrates when he entered Hatchard bookstore in London to ask about Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*—its English translation having been published in 1969. When J-D inquired about the title of Salih's novel, he was greeted "with a blank stare", and when he mentioned the author's name, it "also didn't elicit a response." After J-D explained that Tayeb was an Arab writer, the salesclerk replied: "Oh yes, sir, well you'll find him down in the basement" (Johnson-Davies 2006a, 85). J-D reflects on this incident and how "[i]t has taken something like four decades for Tayeb's novel to make its way up from the basement in Hatchard's to being added to the Penguin Modern Classics" (Johnson-Davies 2006a, 85).

According to J-D, the differences between Arabic and English also contributed to the lack of interest in the translated Arabic literature. In this regard, J-D notes that Western readers encounter several hurdles when encountering Arabic literature for the first time as they must accustom themselves to the Arabic names of characters and places (Johnson-Davies, 2006b, xix). He adds that the social and cultural differences between Arab and Western culture played a role in the disinterest in MAL. For instance, themes such as sex, love, religion, and marriage are handled differently in Arabic fiction as compared to Western fiction (Johnson-Davies 2006b, xx). During the late 1970s and early 1980s, the status of MAL shifted after Mahfouz was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. English readers and publishers became more interested in Arabic literature, which in turn motivated the translation movement of MAL into English. In this regard, J-D comments "it has taken a long time for the West to begin to acknowledge the new Arabic literature" (Johnson-Davies 2006b, xviii).

The reception of MAL in translation in the post-Nobel era has radically changed as more regional and international publishers produced MAL in translation. In this regard, J-D comments: "achievements of modern Arabic literature were properly recognized only as recently as 1988 when Naguib Mahfouz became the first Arab writer to be awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature" (Johnson-Davies, 2006b, xix). This confirms Casanova's argument that "the translation of dominated authors [can be seen] as an act of consecration that gives them access to literary visibility and existence" (2004, 135).

This interest also extends beyond the translation of only literary works into English. Producers and agents began translating Arabic works into plays and movies, including Saleh's *Season of Migration to the North* (Johnson-Davies 2006a, 86). In the post-Nobel era, female writers, such as Nawal El Saadawi and the Lebanese Hanan al-Shaykh, became more visible and moved to the forefront (Johnson-Davies, 2006b, xx). Several works by Arab female authors were translated, giving voice to women's literature in the Arab World. Through this, Western literary studies have been introduced to the waves of feminist writers in the Arab world, which are viewed as valuable works of art for Western readers and sources for literary and comparative studies. Currently, the reception of MAL in translation has shifted to being appreciated as literature by several regional and renowned international publishers.

Conclusion

This study of Johnson-Davies has revealed valuable historical information about the translation history of MAL. The analysis of J-D's paratexts, interviews, and autobiography has helped chart the microhistory of the publication of MAL in English translation, the reception of MAL in translation, and the status of translators during the three periods of the translation history of MAL. J-D's statements included in the data showed that publishers' interest in MAL in translation has evolved from non-existent to flourishing during the post-Nobel era. Moreover, according to the data, early published works were treated either as social documents or works of scholarship, not as literary achievements. This status changed when Naguib Mahfouz won the Nobel Prize for Literature. Since then, MAL literature has finally been placed on the shelves of international literature.

The study has also documented the history of MAL's reception by English readers. In light of J-D's comments, it was revealed that during the first period of MAL, Western readers did not recognize Arabic literature as works of creativity due to stereotypical beliefs about Arabs as people. Fortunately, this has changed in the post-Nobel era. The paper has also traced the status and reception of translators during the three periods of MAL translation history. During the first and second periods of the translation history of MAL, translators had power, as cultural agents, over who and what was to be translated. However, translators were perceived as spies by the government during these two periods. More recently, translators have acquired more prestige in the Arab world as national and regional translation completions and prizes have been launched celebrating the achievement of translators.

This study supports the argument that the study of translators is a valid, useful method to research translation history. The paratexts and autobiography produced by J-D served as a valuable resource to discover historical information about the translation history of MAL. The findings support Adamo's (2006) argument that paratextual material and translators' own statements in introductions, prefaces, dedications and their letters and memoirs serve as crucial resources in translation microhistory research. Besides, the analysis of J-D's interviews also contributed to the documentation of MAL history, as narrated by J-D. In this regard, Munday (2014) maintains that interviews with translators are indeed relevant to translation history research and offer insights into "the process of translation and the conditions under which it takes place" (66). Ultimately, humanizing the translation history (Pym 2009) of MAL has helped build a more comprehensive historical overview of MAL, which contributed to filling gaps in this history in terms of translation's status during the different periods of MAL. This includes the publication of Arabic works translated into English, the reception of MAL by the English readership, and the reception of translators and their work by Arab authors and governments during the different periods of MAL translation history.

تأريخ حركة ترجمة الأدب العربي المعاصر إلى اللغة الإنجليزية من منظور التاريخ الجزئي

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الملخص

يناقش هذا البحث موضوع تاريخ الترجمة، ويركز على دراسة تاريخ ترجمة الأدب العربي المعاصر إلى اللغة الإنجليزية. ويستند الإطار النظري للبحث على نظريات التاريخ الجزئي حيث يحلل البحث بيانات مأخوذة من إنتاج المترجم الراحل دينس جونسون ديفز تحتوي على معلومات حول حركة الترجمة من اللغة العربية إلى اللغة الإنجليزية. وتشتمل البيانات على أعماله الأدبية، ومقالاته حول الترجمة ومقابلاته الشخصية زيادة على سيرته الذاتية. كشف تحليل البيانات أن اتباع منهج التاريخ الجزئي في دراسة تاريخ الترجمة أمر مفيد للغاية حيث تمكن الباحث من تدوين الكثير من المعلومات التاريخية التي تطرق إليها ديفز في مقالاته ومقابلاته وسيرته الذاتية مثل نظرة القراء الغربيين للأدب العربي خلال الفترات المختلفة لتاريخ ترجمة الأدب العربي المعاصر والدعم الحكومي لمشاريع الترجمة علاوة على وضع المترجم الاجتماعي والثقافي في تلك الفترة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تاريخ الترجمة، ترجمة الأدب العربي، الترجمة العربية، دراسات الترجمة.

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