

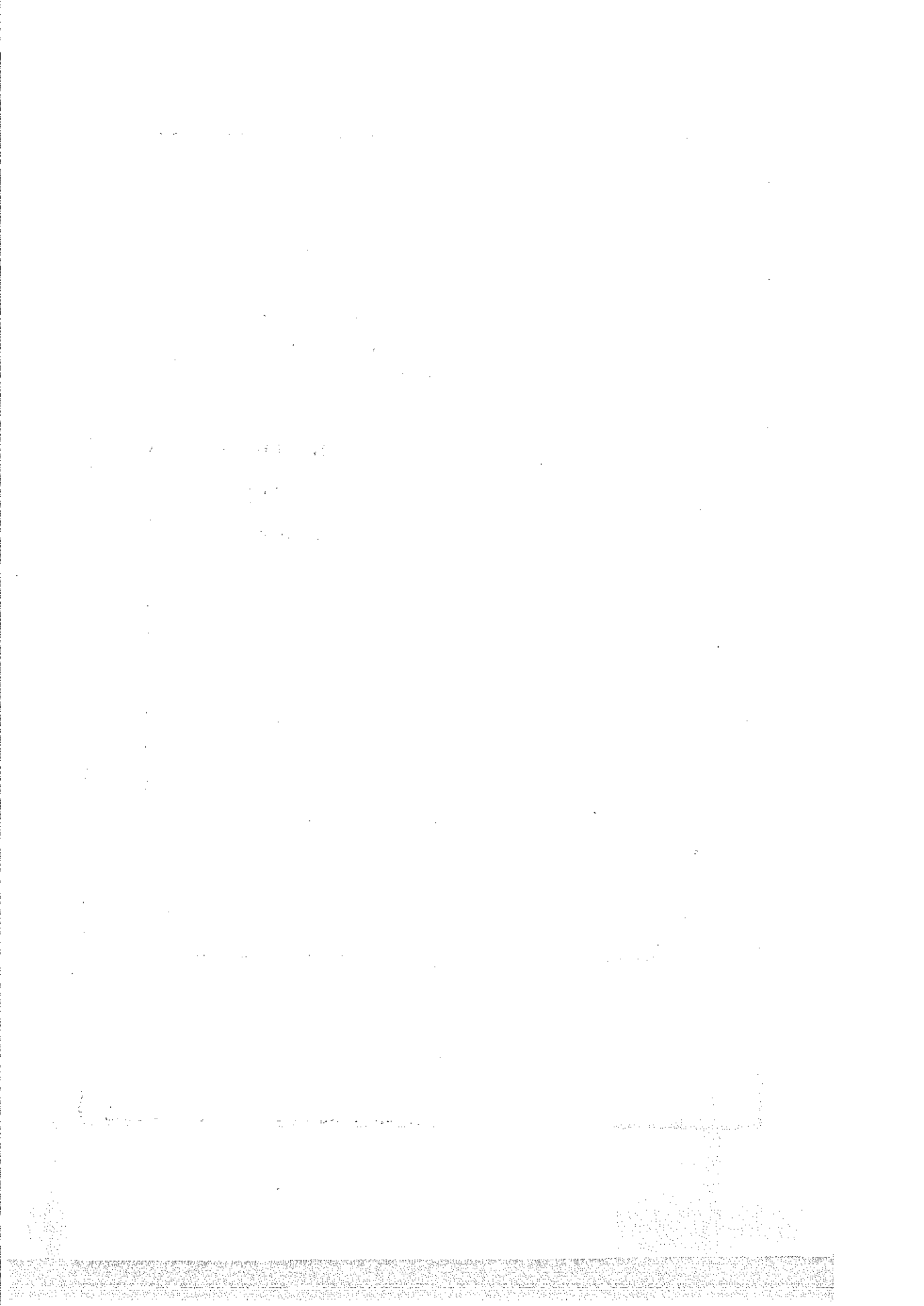
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LANGUAGE AND CULTURE DISTORTION  
IN TRANSLATED AND ADAPTED  
CHILDREN'S BOOKS IN EGYPT.

BY

**Dr / Somaya Mazloun**



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Now, after more than a century, translation still constitutes the best part of Egyptian children's literature. But a look at our current books for the young raises a number of questions such as :

What kind of books are translated and upon what criteria are they selected ?

Do we have any kind of evaluation of these translations ?

Translating books for children in Egypt is done through two channels. One is National press establishments such as Dar El Hilal or Dar El Maarif. The two published a large number of the World's classics among them. *The Princer and The Pauper, Robin Hood, The Little Prince* and many others. The other channel is private publishers such as El Sherook and Nahdat Misr. It is either the translator or the publisher who chooses the book to be translated. But there are no specialized magazines or periodicals to review translated books or stories written for the young in general. This absence of evaluation leads to several and often serious problems:.

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*Somaya Mazloun*

When in the last century, educationalists felt the need for providing children with stories, written particularly for the young, they had English and French books translated into Arabic. In this way, writing for children in Egypt began with translation and adaptation. We have, for example the poems of Mohammed Othman Galal and Ahmed Shawqui, adapted from the *Fables* of La Fontaine. Kamel El Kelanie also drew heavily upon foreign and ancient sources. He translated some of Shakespeare's plays, *Gulliver's Travels*, *Robinson Crusoe*, Indian stories such as *The Cruel Princess* and from the world myths such as King Midas. Bamberger, in his paper, *The influence of Translation on the Development of the National Children's Literature*, points to the importance of translation for the young.

First of all, in children's literature translations may be considered to be an integral part of national literature; for the realm of children's books knows no frontiers. Children do not care where books come from, they do not read them because they are foreign books, as adults often do, but regard them as stories of adventures,

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fantasies and so on, just as if the books were written in their own language (Klingberg p.19).

Thus it is through translation that our children could enjoy the stories of Alice, Pinocchio, Snow-white, Little Red Riding-Hood, Peter Pan, and others. It is also through translation that Antoine Galland, in the first decades of the eighteenth century, transferred to France and thence to the rest of Europe, *The Thousand and One Nights*, which greatly influenced Western writings, whether for children or adults.

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First : Some writers translate or adapt stories from other countries without making it clear to the young reader that these stories are not Egyptian and that they are taken from other cultures such as : *Al Warda*, by El Sharouni (*The Nightingale and the Rose* by Wilde, *The Story of Enchanted Pot* by Abdul Baqui (*Le Roman de Renart*)).

Secondly : Some stories should not have been chosen for translation because their content clashes with our culture, such as *My Friend in The Tree* (Zeppelin) and *Shahrastani and the Enchanted Palace* ! (The original is not found).

Thirdly : Good books are not usually faithfully translated and generally, translators are free to change, mutilate and abridge as much as they like and the result is a distortion of the original text and in the translation of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

The aim of the present paper is to discuss the above mentioned problems which lead to the distortion of the language and culture of the target text. Five stories are selected as they are written by leading Egyptian Children's writers and published by leading National Press Establishments.

*Hikayat El Kidra El Mashoura (The Story of the Enchanted Pot)* and *Shahrstani Walkaser El Mashour*.

*Alice Fi Bilad El Agaayeb*

*Al Warda*

*My friend in the tree* Four of the source texts of the chosen stories are discussed, because they are available, only one source text, which, is that of *Sharastani Walkas El Mashour* is not available.

By "culture" I mean the body of values or norms governing behaviour which each society has and to which an individual is enculturated from his birth. In spite of the increasing cultural interchanges, cultural differences still exist among different countries. Language of any country is an essential part of its culture "Culture is reflected in language.. culture determines language and then language determines our view of reality ( James.83-84 )

The translator's business is not merely to find equivalents but to see that the product is acceptable in the target culture :

Unlike the translators of adult literature, translators of children's books are usually allowed and even expected .. to manipulate the source text in various ways in order to make it compatible with the requirements set by the recipient literary system. In other words, .. conformity to the conventions of the target children's literature takes precedence over "faithfulness" to the original.( Snell - Honby P . 84 )

We Have an example of the good manipulation of the source text in what Galal and Shawqui made of the fables of La Fontaine Each selected from the fables and utilized the moral in them in the way he saw suitable, rendering the new poems in eloquent, rhymed verses. For instance, one of La Fontaine's fables : *Le Paon Se Plaignant A Junon* is about a peacock that complains to Juno, the Roman goddess, about its ugly voice, while the nightingale, has a voice that charms everyone. Juno reprimands the



peacock because it envies the nightingale and forgets its unparalleled beauty. The goddess explains how the gods divided the gifts and abilities among the different animals. The moral is that no one can have everything, man should be content with what he has :

Tout animal n'a pas toutes propriétés  
Nous vous avons donné diverses qualités :  
Les uns ont la grandeur et la force en partage; ...  
Tous sont contents de leur ramage.  
Cesse donc de te plaindre, ou bien pour te punir,  
Je t'ôterai ton plumage. (88-9)

Although La Fontaine dedicated the first six books of his fables to the young Dauphin, in order to teach him, with delight, what he ought to know, that is to say, he wrote these poems for children, yet Galal and Shawki, were aware that the French work belonged to a different culture and different time. It was natural for the Dauphin, in his Greek and Latin studies, to know about gods and goddesses, but for the Arab, Egyptian child, Juno and the Greek Gods were unfamiliar words. Galal and Shawki each made changes in the poems to make them suitable to our culture.

Galal in his poem *The Peacock* translated some lines from the above-quoted poem by La Fontaine. His translation can be characterized as communicative where the focus is on the target language, and the second reader, "who does not anticipate difficulties or obscurities, and would expect a generous transfer of foreign elements into his own culture". (Newmark, p.39). Instead of the

peacock and Juno, we have the peacock complaining about its ugly voice to its master or owner. We have an analogy between the peacock in its sumptuousness and the rich people who envy any merit in the poor. Man is always looking to what others have. In the following extract, translated from the Arabic poem, we have the moral :

And thus among the rich in money and ornamented dress  
If they see any merit or a feather in the poor  
Wish to have, in spite of all they have and clash.

These eyes, their eyelids are bags only dust fills, <sup>(1)</sup> \* (54-55)

The poem is a delightful new creation that emulates the original, because of the writer's rich poetic gift, his use of humour and rhyme. He also uses Egyptian colloquial language which gives the poem its simplicity and familiarity, at the same time, it has dignity through the writer's use of words that echo phrases from the Koran.

In Shawqui's poem *Solomon and The Peacock*, we have Solomon, known to the Arab reader as the prophet who had the ability to understand and talk the language of animals and birds. The poem is not a translation. Shawqui just utilises the idea of the dissatisfied peacock, but he uses different imagery and expressions that become sometimes difficult and remote from the experience of children such

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\* All the translations from Arabic into English in this paper are mine.

as the words that denote incbriation, and infatuation. Shawqui uses La Fontaine's fable to show that the arrogance of the peacock is the cause of its ugly voice :

Solomon said to it, this is the way it is

The Creator's wisdom, Glorious is the work of God

You, belittled, you arrogant, the gifts of God ungratefully

Kingdom of birds, you did not value in pride and tyranny

If you had the voice, you would not talk to man ! 2\*(54-5)

This is what has been presented to children at the turn of the century and the first half of the twentieth century: a good selection of the source text ,and an excellent rendering of the translation in eloquent Arabic. Egypt was occupied and had a keen interest in preserving its identity, and its Arabic and Egyptian character. As for the second half of the century, it is noticeable that most of what is written for children in Egypt is translated. The market is flooded by detective stories, science-fiction and stories about crime. The Western culture is the dominant one. We almost have no modern Arab heroic characters in fiction except probably for Sindbad and Alaa El Din from *The Thousand and One Nights*.

In discussing the first cause of language and culture distortion, we find that there are books adapted from foreign sources without any reference to the original works. Although this issue receives considerable

attention in the case of adult writers, no body seems to care whether ideas in a child's book are original or taken from foreign sources.

Dr Tabana warns against the danger of stealing the works of foreign writers on our indigenous culture, he says :

The harm of plagiarism is not limited to the moral evils that threaten morality and the standards of behaviour, but its consequences are deeper and more dangerous on the nation's mentality... the nation's standards in morals and arts were confused... it no longer had its distinguishing cultural values and gradually it lost its independent character built through the centuries. (Tabana p.129).

Writers in this case make what Klingberg calls "context adaptation", that is "the adaptation of the culture context of the source language to the cultural context of the target language". (Klingberg p.86). That is to say, the Egyptian writers take a foreign story, change the setting, the names or whatever changes they see necessary. For example, in Wilde's famous fairy tale *the Nightingale and the Rose*, the nightingale sacrifices herself to make the red rose needed by the student to give to his sweetheart. But the sacrifice is wasted, because the professor's daughter finds a better lover to dance with, and the precious rose is thrown into the street! The nightingale symbolizes the artist who fails to change people's values. The Egyptian version of the story, a short play of two scenes entitled *Al Warda* by Y. El Sharouni, is about a nightingale that comforts a princess in her illness with its sweet songs and sacrifices itself to give her the rod

rose required to cure her disease. So while in Wilde's tale the sacrifice is for true love to survive, here the sacrifice is for the sake of a friend's life. The nightingale says to the old bird: "Sacrificing one's life for the sake of a friend is not madness" (14). While blood sacrifice is inherent in Christian tradition, the connotation of the bird's giving its blood so that others may live is lost in the case of the Egyptian child. Furthermore, the young princess in the play is not identified. She is not named. The name of the country is not mentioned as well, only the visiting doctor is described as Chinese. This shows that there is some difficulty in locating the story, as the writer is unable to fit the English fairy tale in an Egyptian setting. One feels that the story is misplaced, as Lefevere says:

Language is not the problem. Ideology and poetics are, as are cultural elements that are not immediately clear, or seen completely "misplaced" in what would be the target culture version of the text to be translated. (Bassnett p.27)

In contrast to the Egyptian dealing with Wilde's tale, we find Villasante in translating the same story into Spanish did not want to change anything in the tale, he was conscious of how its language is symbolic, it reflects the characteristics of Art for Art's sake and Wilde's avant-garde ideas. Villasante wonders:

Should one help the child to absorb the language of Wilde or should one make reading the text easier by bringing it up to date? In my opinion the child should take the trouble to

understand Wilde's language. In this way it will have a better understanding of other cultures and times. (Klingberge p.49).

So, here are two approaches to translation. One is to manipulate the source text as much as it is necessary to be acceptable in the target language. The other, that of Villasante, is to be faithful to the source text and make the readers stretch up to it, to have the chance to know of other cultures and other times. But we can say that the two approaches are both valid. The first one is more suitable to younger children, when they are not able to judge for themselves and cannot absorb discrepancies in the different ways of living. The second one is more appropriate to older children when they have the understanding enough to know about things that are different from what they are used to.

Another example of the distortion of culture is *The Story of the Enchanted pot !! Hikayat El Kidra El Mashoura* by Abdul Baqui. It is adapted from *Le Roman de Renart*. The medieval French romance originally written in verse between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. It has the central characters: Renart the fox, that plays tricks upon Isengrin the wolf, his rival and enemy and Noble the lion, the King and Renart's dupe. The romance is allegorical and contains cruel satire of the feudal system. In a later Dutch version, translated into English by William Caxton, Renart is taken as Noble's counsellor. This is what we have in the Egyptian version, *The Enchanted Pot*. The animals here have Arabic names, and the story opens with the father fox who is proud of his successful tricks

and teaches them to his favourite son. We are shown in the first chapter how the hen, cock and rabbit are eaten one by one by fox and the wolf. The adaptation is not acceptable, because we do not make the hero in a children's story an evil character. He is likely to be imitated by the child, and in this case, the reader will learn "the indispensability of renardie"(deceit) for worldly success" (Blackham p.46), and will try to do as the fox does.

In his paper, *The Social and Aesthetic Criteria Applied in Choosing Children's Books for Translation*, Motyashov says that the book is to:

Introduce the child reader to the world of common human spiritual and ethical values and to repulse a narrowly pragmatic, consumer attitude to Nature and society".  
(Klingberg 1978 p.100).

The harmful effect of the story would probably have been less, had the writer indicated that the story belongs to another culture and another time. The story also contains many expressions of violent nature such as:

- \* The carcass of Taalibo (the name of the fox) is found, slain.(84)
- \* She (the old Rabbit) went to the kitchen ... her eyes fell on the big kitchen knife, shining in the corner.. She found herself pushed by mysterious, magic power towards the knife.. as soon as she held it she felt a great comfort and superpower.(91)
- \* The Rabbit slept in her bed, embracing her big, dear knife with love and trust.(92)

Finally, the enchanted pot itself which gives its name to the title of the story, is a pot that refills with food as soon as it is emptied. I think the writer means the cornucopia. In Greek mythology it is the horn of plenty, everlastingly full of fragrant food and drink. So this is an example of appropriating world myth and turning it into our own.

As for the second problem some translated children's stories are not morally suitable for children. J. Stephen in his book *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction* says that children's books attempt either to perpetuate desired values or resist the undesired ones :

Writing for children is usually purposeful, its intention being to foster in the child reader a positive appreciation of some socio-cultural values which, it is assumed, are shared by author and audience. These values include contemporary morality and ethics, a sense of what is valuable in the culture past..., and aspiration about the present and future(Stephen p.3).

Among our Egyptian children's writers Ahmed Naguib stresses the same point in *The Content in Children's Books*, saying . The book should make the child realize the moral values, to admire good quantities and shun undesirable ones" (Naguib p.45). But this principle is not followed in some of our children's stories. For instance, the Egyptian Arabic Story *Shahrstani Wa Al Kasr El Mashour, Shahrstani and the Enchanted Palace!!* by Abdul Baqui,



is a story from China, about a Chinese king called "Radwan" and his loyal minister "Muazen" But the two Moslem names become inconsistent with the events narrated by the king, when he was chasing a beautiful deer. The deer turns out to be the daughter of the king of Jinn, who fell in love with the human king! Radwan shuts his ears to the entreaties of his minister not to leave his country to his rival who will ravage the country with corruption and oppression. But the king does leave his country. One wonders what kind of values the writer is emphasizing in the story. It is also inappropriate that a children's story should have as its subject the fervent and unearthly love of two adults. The story is likewise full of words of passionate love such as, "We drank the cups of pleasure to the full (81), I silenced her with a kiss while telling her .. I will be at your disposal. I will not object to anything nor ask you about anything .. whatever happens"(80). Later on, he says ... " I am no longer fit for anything but weeping and regret"(95). The hero, here, is not a good example, because he gives up his duty. He sacrifices his country for the sake of his love, added to the fact that he falls in love with the daughter of Jinni King. How can the child understand that? This is an example of culture distortion, because although our Islamic tradition acknowledges the existence of Jinn, a Moslem man cannot marry a jinni woman as she is an unseen spirit and has a different nature. The confusion arises when the writer replaces the Chinese name of the king by a Moslem name in the Egyptian story. The result is disfigured characters who are neither Egyptian nor Chinese.

Furthermore, there is historical confusion in the incidents of the story. The princess, daughter of Radwan and the Jinni, turns out to be Balkis, queen of Sheeba who becomes the wife of king Solomon. But Solomon is known to have lived in the tenth century B.C. At the same time, China in the story is invaded by the Mongols, an event which actually happened much later in the thirteenth century A.D.

In the same book we are met with another mishandling of a different kind. We have a Greek myth : Persephone .. the Spring Virgin. The mishandling is in the description of the gods by the writer. For in dealing with Greek, Roman and also the Pharaonic mythologies, we have to acknowledge that the child does not reach the adult's mature understanding of God. If we talk to him about the Greek people's way of regarding their gods, we have to be very careful so that we may not arouse his fears or confuse him. Thus Zeus, called "the god of gods" is described as falling in love with Demeter, the earth-mother goddess, and Persephone came as "sweet fruit of this love" (11). Later on the writer says :

But her (the earth-mother goddess's ) cries did not reach the great god of gods .. for he was much absorbed in his pleasures .. having no time to listen to the cries of Demeter, who was once loved by him (24)..

The Greeks gave human qualities to their gods. They are described as falling in love, jealous or envious. Thus the writer describes the love of Pluto, god of the infernal regions and of death, for

Persephone. Before this love the god did not know except the screams of the tortured :

- \* God of hell and the seven layers of torture ... neither could the screams of the tormented move one hair in his body, nor the tears of the inhabitants of his dwelling stir any emotions in his heart (13).
- \* Pluto has no other care but to invent new means of torture to add to his fearful ones .. or to make new terroristic tools to those who disobey his family, the Olympian gods, and those who rebel against their ruthless fates (15).

Will not the impressions of this fearful description of the Olympian gods and the ruthless fates have harmful effects on children ? Here one must point to the skill of El Kelanie the pioneer writer for children in the Arab World and his keenness to avoid whatever may confuse the child's mind. In this story King Midas, the Roman god Bacchus gave Midas the gift of the golden touch, that anything he touches turns into gold. But Al Kelanie succeeded in avoiding touching religion. He rather explained to the reader that in ancient times, there were matters that probably we find today strange or unusual, exactly as we have in our age new things that we got used to and if seen by people of those remote periods, they would not have believed. El Kelanie did not mention the god as in the original story, he replaced him by what he called "the strange visitor" who came to his palace and granted him the gift. Another well-known

children's writer, Ibrahim Azzouz, avoided mentioning the gods in his story *The Golden Apple*, by referring to Zeus as the head of Wise Men and the other gods as noble men and noble ladies.

A final example is the story of *My Friend in The Tree* (1994) translated by A. Yossef from *Zeppelin* (1976) by the Norwegian Writer Tormod Haugen, the Anderson's Award winner. In spite of the fact that the story is interesting and reveals the writer's awareness of the psychological needs of children and their relationships with their parents, yet the story contains a lot of elements that clash with our mores. It tells the story of Martin, Eva and Nina their ten-year old daughter who go to their summerhouse and discover that someone has been using the house in their absence. Nina finds the usurper, a runaway boy of twelve. They start their friendship and she brings him his shoes and food from the refrigerator. Her parents are puzzled because they do not know who takes these things. The police and neighbours are also puzzled. Nina never answers their questions, although she knows who does all these things and knows his place. The boy takes other things from the neighbours as well and calls this borrowing. He says that the frequent fighting of his parents drove him to run away. He is not punished at the end and as children sympathize with the hero, there is the danger that they may imitate him. So the first problem with this book is the selection of the story itself. The story takes our children away from what they are inculcated, never to enter

anybody's house before asking permission of its inhabitants. There are also some passages in the story that should have been excluded in the translation :

So odd

His hands were leaf-green between the branches.

Her fingers were white.

She laid her index finger on his hand.

Yes, it was white and green.

His hand over her hair.

A finger glided along the ridge of her nose.

A finger glided over her lips.

She opened her mouth for the tip of her tongue.

His finger tasted of maple and silver moon (*Zeppelin* 91)

The passage is sensuous and probably sensual, and Egyptian children are not given such kind of writing in their young age. Reading such a passage will be like opening their eyes to something they are not at all encouraged to think about or experience..

The second problem is the language of *Zeppelin*. First the translator made some justifiable alterations in the source text, for instance :

If there are angels, they look like Nina, said Uncle Ole.

Nina thought about glossy postcards covered with glitter.

Glossy angels covered with glitter were the worst thing

she knew. (7)

This is translated as :

Uncle Ole says : I think that fairies look much like Nina. Nina remembers postcards with pictures of fairies, imagined by artists. She did not like their fairies with those false wings. (10)

The sentence "If there are angels" suggests doubts about the unseen and about heaven. This is a taboo subject and is justly replaced. Also the word "stealing" is replaced by the phrase : "take without permission," the translator euphemizes in order to avoid linking the heroine with such an act.

There was a Nina who stole money and bought chocolate (7)

is translated as :

There is Nina who takes money and buys chocolate.

But the use of the present in the translation indicates frequency which is not in the source text and consequently changes the meaning This leads us to the second point concerning language : The alterations made by the translator sometimes obscure the meaning, for instance :

She was six years old and ran away from home ... She was unished (8-9).

This is translated as :

She was six years old when she left home and did not return .. She was punished. (10)

The translator avoids Nina's "running away" as she is the heroine and should be a good example. But the change causes confusion because it is not clear why she is punished.

The third point concerning language is the inaccuracy of the translation in some parts of the story, particularly when it has to do with description of nature, for instance

The rain came in the evening

Light and blowing

A strong scent of flowers drifted through the open window (64)

This is translated as :

Rain fell with the evening ... lightning flashed, thunder pealed..

A breeze blew and carried with it the scent of flowers through the open window. (59)

Light is wrongly translated as lightning. Another example is

Nina saw ... cornflower blue in the shadows

and the moon reflected in the window – panes(.66 )

is translated as

She saw ... corn stalks swaying like blue sprites

(or shadows) ... (61)

Cornflower with its blue flowers is mistaken for corn.

Nina closed her eyes, when she only listened to them,

they sounded like the children at home in the street.

They shrank and were made small by the children's words. (p.78)

This is translated as :

Nina closed her eyes while she was listening to them ... they sounded exactly like street children in their town..They shrink and repeat children, words. (p.72)

Here the way Nina's parents talked to her made her think of the way children talk in the street but this is translated as the way street children talk which is completely different thing. Street children is a social phenomenon probably not found in Norway.

Finally, the language of the translation as a whole can be characterized as poor. The translator seems to impose the linguistic characteristics of English on Arabic, for example, lack of connectors between sentences, the use of word order in Arabic as it is used in English, and not observing the dual form all the time. The result is sometimes disconnected sequence of words. This is sharply contrasted with the way El Kelanie used to translate. He used to have an end in mind. Professor El Hadidi says

El Kelanie was of the opinion that the language used by the writer should be a little above the child so that he may be familiar with it and it becomes a part of his diction. Thus the child improves his language and gets delight and benefit from what he reads (El Hadidi 378)

El Kelanie used classical Arabic that is close to the colloquial speech. He was keen on using a language that is above the child's level so that the child can stretch up to it and not vice versa.. But this interest in language



is not always noticed in children's writers today. There are even children's monthly book series that have English names such as Zoom, Flash, and Smash.

The third and last problem is that good books are loosely translated. Faithfulness to the original text is not always observed as in the translation of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. In the first place, it is very difficult to translate this work for several reasons. Carpenter and Prichard say:

Despite the difficulties of translating the book into other languages... the book has been translated more often and into more languages than almost any other work except the Bible(17)

Alice's world is the world of dream, her journey is to the underground through the rabbit hole, where logic and natural laws do not apply. She grows and shrinks uncontrollably. Everything is turned upside down. Animals, birds plants, even the pack of cards talk and order her about like the grown-ups. *Alice* is also considered as a "nonsense" story, that illogical fantasy for children's entertainment :

"The *Alices* are also often cited as prime models of "nonsense", a genre whose success depends upon *a lack of applicable meaning*"- a liberating and delicious indeterminacy, as immunity from the usual demands upon classics to make good sense about real life (*Rackin 1991, p.14*).

Carroll wants children just to be pleased and amused and satirizes adults for their perpetual moralizing at children :

*meaning* plays a secondary role in these episodic tales ... Instead of straightforward meaning we often get words with interesting sounds, and the sounds are often more important than sense. feelings They engage the

reader's more than his intellect. *Feeling*, then a new phenomenon in children's books, supersedes *meaning* (Cohen 1990).

Thus it is not to be expected to find meaning in the target language if it is not originally there in the source language. But apart from that, the Egyptian translation of *Alice* in El Hilal monthly book series for children, is a very inaccurate one. The translator freely changes the original text, sometimes without any apparent reason. For instance, the rabbit's pink eyes are translated as red, the daisies Alice thinks of picking are translated as roses, the Duchess is turned into a princess, the dormouse into a lizard, the Gryphon into a dog, the knave into a servant and many other similar changes. Probably the translator thinks that the Egyptian child is not familiar with the words duchess, Gryphon and dormouse and she replaces them, but the words pink and daisies should have been translated as they are.

Weaver in his book *Alice in Many Tongues* says that although *Alice* is a very British and verbally complex book, it has been loved by children all over the world. The translations of *Alice*, "have been appreciated primarily for the imaginative interest of the actual episodes of the narrative" (p. 77). Weaver hoped that the translator should preserve, "all the wonder and excitement and childish humour of the child's book". (p. 76). But our translated *Alice* misses much of the wonder and the humour of the original. The translator omits a great deal of the story because of the limited number of pages of the monthly book series for which she is writing. But she also omits parts of the story, whether whole passages, lines, or sentences.

Sometimes the sentence itself is not completed whenever a technical difficulty arises or just for space consideration. For example in the first chapter, when Alice eats a small piece of the cake and nothing happens to her, she is surprised :

To be sure, this is what generally happens when one eats cake; but Alice got so much into the way of expecting nothing but out-of-the-way things to happen, that it seemed quite dull and stupid for life to go on in the common way (15).

In the Arabic version this sentence is back-translated as "She felt surprised when she found that she remained as she was, and no strange things happened to her. (16) The sentence is not completed and here the reader of the Arabic text misses much because the rest of the sentence is very important to the story. It expresses Alice's boredom with everyday life from which the whole story is a kind of an outlet or an escape.

Sometimes the change is made to give a didactic turn, thus spoiling the humorous effect of the original. The caterpillar smoking the hookah, is changed into a silkworm eating. Another example is when Alice is described as : "She generally gave herself very good advice (though she seldom followed them)" (22) is back translated as : "She often advises herself and follows the good advice" (7). The story contains parodies of English poems such as

Twinkle, Twinkle, little bat !

How I wonder what you're at ! (73).

or

'Tis the voice of Lobster : I heard him declare

You have baked me too brown, I must sugar my hair. (106)

Weaver suggests that the best way of dealing with parodied verse is to choose a poem that is familiar and known in the target language and write a parody of it, imitating the style of Carroll. Our translator omits the first parodied poem altogether and in the second, she translates the last four lines only. The story also contains references to historical events, that are familiar to the English such as the reference to William the Conqueror and the Normans and to habits that are peculiar to the British people, such as tea-time. It is also full of wordplay that cannot be rendered into Arabic such as: knot and not, beat time and He (Time) won't stand beating, the Mouse's tail and sad tale, axis and axes. The famous riddle asked by the Hatter, why is a raven like a writing-desk, is translated into a completely different one: Why was cabbage, like a bomb ?!

In the essay, Translation Theory : Four Fundamental Aspects, the writer speaks about the pragmatics of translation, that is the different functions of the text in the source language and the target language:

When dealing with translation, it is thus necessary to take into account the impact of the cultural and linguistic environment in which the source text and the target text are produced. Texts are composed at a certain point of time, for a certain purpose and for a certain audience ... when translating, these factors may vary, which makes different kinds of adjustments necessary.

(Dollerup p.54).

But these adjustments must be made carefully so that they may not change the meaning, harm the unity or spoil the effect of the original. In the

translation of *Alice* whenever there is a difference between what the Egyptian child is used to, and what Alice encounters, the translator changes the context. But these changes or adjustments make meaning incomplete, and unclear. For instance, in chapter seven, "A Mad Tea-Party", the Hatter advises Alice to befriend Time, so that He may do what she asks of him :

For instance, suppose it were nine o'clock in the the morning, just time to begin lessons : you'd only have to whisper a hint to time, and round goes the clock in a twinkling ! Half-past one, time for dinner !

Alice : but then -- I shouldn't be hungry for it, you know (73).

This is back translated as :

For instance, if the time is eight o'clock in the morning, time to go to school, you just sign to make the time two in the afternoon, and you leave school.

Alice exclaimed : This will be wonderful indeed, but how shall I feel hungry if time passes quickly ?!

We notice here that nine o'clock is turned to eight, because it is school time in Egypt, but the changes made by the translator spoil the sequence of the passage in the original. It is not made clear in the translation why Alice will or will not feel hungry. The translator should have explained that at half-past one school children take a break for dinner in England. Thus we see that the translator dose not handle satisfactorily what Weaver considers the principal problems in translating *Alice*: the parodied verses, puns, nonsense words, the jokes involving logic and the twists of meaning. The changes she makes get us further from the text rather than nearer to it and the

translation is a mutilated version because of the omissions of many parts from the original.

We have another example of how the translator's alterations in the original text may damage the intended effect of the writer. At the end of Wilde's fairy tale *The Birthday of the Infanta*, the young princess says :

For the future let those who come to play  
with me have no hearts (Wilde 127)

The words are very cruel and show how insensitive, haughty and unfeeling the princess is towards the little dwarf, who dies of a broken heart when he discovers that the others and the princess were laughing at his ugliness. In El Sharouni's translation, the concluding words give a very different effect. The princess says in the back translation :

This is the first time that I hear that hearts are  
broken (Al Sharouni 74).

These words show her innocence, ignorance of the fact that hearts break, but do not give us the unreasonableness and absurdity of the young princess's order. The change, undoubtedly, alters the whole meaning of the tale.

It can therefore be concluded that we should have a sort of evaluation of translated books to see whether they are good or distorted. We should also be very careful in selecting books to translate. This is what Ahmed Sweilam emphasizes at the end of his

book, *Cultural Education of The Arab Child*, in a chapter entitled *What Do Our Children Want of Us ?*

Our children want us to restore them to their Arab and Islamic environment that has Arabic as its first language and to their ancient tradition, the richest in its values ... as it combines tradition and contemporaneity. Our children want us to think much and be meticulous when we translate for them instead of giving them the imported ready-made moulds that greatly contradict our culture and customs.

- Thus we need, As Sweilam says, to translate stories to children and to have access to other cultures, but we just have to be careful about what we translate and how we translate it .

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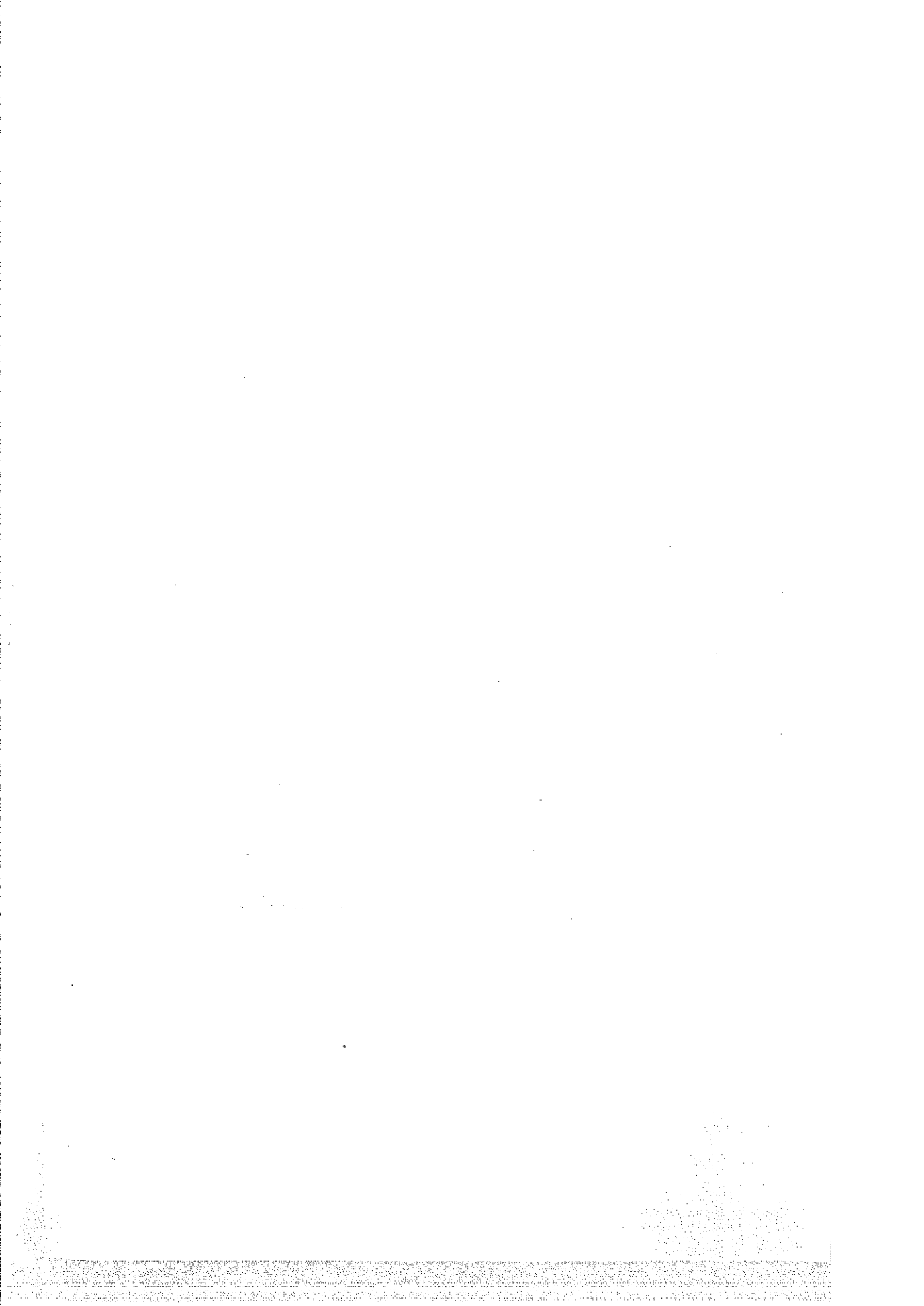
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## Notes

### 1-Galal's verse in Arabic:

- وهكذا في اغنياء الناس المال والزخرف في اللباس
- وان راو مزية الصغير او ريشة في ذنب الفقير
- ودوا امتلاكها على ما ملكوا واختبطوا بغيطهم واشتبكوا
- تلك عيون جفنها جراب وانما يملوها التراب

### 2-Shawqui's verse in Arabic:

- فقال له سليمان لقد كان الذي كان
- تعالت حكمة الباري وجل صنيعه شانا
- لقد صغرت يامغرور نعم الله كفرانا
- وملك الطير لم تحفل به كبرا ووطنيانا
- فلو اصبحت ذا صوت لما كلمت انسانا