

REMEMBERING

FOR

TOMORROW

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REMEMBERING FOR TOMORROW

ARABIC LITERATURE AT THE CUSP OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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INTRODUCTION

For most of the Arabic-speaking world the post-colonial period is now almost half a century old. The rhetoric of nationalism and unity has receded, taking its rightful place in the history of modern Arab thought and writing; along with it, novelistic accounts of the struggles for independence —those of Ghanim al-Dabbagh (Iraq), Halim Barakat (Syria), Najib Mahfuz (Egypt), Muhammad al-Salih al-Jabiri (Tunisia), al-Tahir Wattar (Algeria), and Abdelkarim Ghallab (Morocco) being just a cross-section— have become part of the history of modern fiction in each subregion and, in some cases, throughout the Arabic-speaking world. Consequently, more direct expressions of identity and aspiration have been replaced by a more complex post-colonial condition, one in which the emerging need for a focus on the cultural particularities of each subregion confronts the realities of globalism —with its overwhelming demand for normativeness, a globalism whose parameters are established and imposed from outside the region itself. The nations of the Third World thus find themselves pulled in two opposite directions, resulting in cultural tension between the perceived benefits of membership in the global economy

(with all its apparently compulsory accompanying values) and a preference for more indigenous cultural and social norms. It is in this latter case that the conservative norms represented by Islam—as both a system of belief and as the fosterer of a cultural community—have entered the arena of political and social tension with renewed intensity to become a powerful player in the establishment of political systems and social values throughout the region.

The background to the creation and publication of Arabic literature today is thus not only problematic but ambivalent. Within this scenario the *littérateur*—rarely, if ever, a gainful profession in the Arabic-speaking world—struggles first to make a living (often within the official cultural sector of publishing, newspapers, journals, etc.) and then to identify a reading public and to have his creative works published.

DEVELOPMENT OF GENRES

In 1999 the prominent Egyptian critic, Gaber Asfour, collected the series of articles that he had been devoting to the novel genre in different publications and published them as a book under the title *Zaman al-riwayah (The Time of the Novel)*. In several of the book's chapters he draws attention to the many ways in which the political and social circumstances mentioned briefly above have made the novel such an appropriate medium, indeed the most appropriate medium, for the expression of aspirations and concerns within the various nations and communities of the Arabic-speaking region. However, in the context of literary genres as a whole, Asfour's title is also clearly something of a challenge and also a sign of change, in that it deliberately invokes and transforms another book's title, the Syro-Lebanese poet-critic Adunis's work *Zaman al-Shi'r (The Time of Poetry)*, originally published in 1972. The temporal gap and the change in generic priorities implicit in the two titles are both of major significance in the recent history of literature in the Arabic-speaking world.

When Adunis penned his study, Arab poets considered themselves to have been long liberated from the trammels of tradition, primarily represented by the forms, styles and genres in which they were supposed to compose their works and by the perceived and implicit audience/readership whom they were supposed to be addressing. In the wake of independence from colonial rule, the writer or poet was now not merely an individual, but also a participant—and an important participant—in one of the societies of the larger Arab world and therefore, in most cases, in the development of a group consciousness within the larger “Arab” entity to which politicians were continually referring. The rallying cry for *littérateurs* of the post-independence period was “commitment”, and there was no shortage of material to which poets could turn their attention: on the positive side, there were the undoubted successes against former imperial overlords, the very existence of the Arab League and, from 1958-61, the United Arab Republic; on the negative, the disastrous plight of the Palestinian people in the wake of the 1948 war with the incipient Israeli state (known to Arabs as “the disaster”). These circumstances formed the backdrop for an amazing period of poetic activity in the Arab world during the 1950s and 1960s. Groups of poets,

magazines and conferences all emphasized the central role of poetry in society (and regular patterns of imprisonment for poets who crossed over a certain line also underlined the fact that the ruling authorities were well aware of that central role). These writers and media all advocated the cause of poetry and poets as they sought to equate, in differing ways, the needs of the incipient societal experiments with a quest for poetic modernism. A listing of significant contributors to this movement in poetry would of necessity be extremely lengthy, but any such list could not avoid mention of Badr Shakir al-Sayyab and Abd al-wahhab al-Bayyati from Iraq, Nizar Qabbani from Syria, Salah Abd al-Sabur from Egypt, Mahmud Darwish from Palestine, and Khalil Hawi and Adunis from Lebanon. Accompanied by many others, these poets kept poetry at the forefront of social and political concerns for several decades, addressing themselves to the overwhelming events to which their homelands were exposed (of which there was no shortage) and to the infinite numbers of ways in which their national, communal and familial lives were subject to the inexorable processes of change.

This same set of circumstances should also have provided a tailor-made opportunity for the development of a tradition of drama, and in some cases it did. The most obvious case here is Egypt, where a combination of earlier historical developments (for example, the arrival in the latter half of the nineteenth century of many Syrian troupes to join their Egyptian counterparts) and a deliberately planned governmental tolerance of commentary and criticism did allow the emergence of what is often regarded in retrospect as a golden age of theatre. In other countries developments in drama were both later and more closely monitored, censorship of drama being not only a given throughout the region but also an extremely effective psychological weapon in the hands of the cultural apparatus as a means of keeping the theatre and its people “in line”. And here, of course, drama in the Arab world continues to suffer in particular. For while it is possible to produce books and materials unpublishable in the Arabic-speaking region in Paris and London, drama cannot exist or survive without its natural audience watching the actions on stage in their own indigenous environment.

Meanwhile, the two major fictional genres, the novel and the short story, had each gone through different processes of development. For while it was largely the novel —and especially the historical adventure novel adapted to the Middle Eastern environment and its history— that had first captured the imagination of the still limited readership for fiction, the short story —the more recent of the two to achieve maturity in the Western context— was the more malleable to this process of rapid domestication. Ironically, it may have been the ready availability of publication opportunities in newspapers that allowed the serialized novel to establish a readership alongside the shorter genre. In any case, it was the short story, “the glancing form that seems to be right for the nervousness and restlessness of modern life”, that was the first to achieve wide currency and to undertake its generic role within the different Arab societies. By contrast, the novel, having enjoyed an initial period of popularity within the relatively restricted realms of the historical romance (so well suited to the period of Arab nationalist aspirations), required a significantly longer period and, it must be said, a more concentrated effort before

it too was fully integrated into the cultural framework of Arab societies. Credit for that achievement belongs substantially to Najib Mahfuz, who, as has long been acknowledged, undertook a systematic investigation of the generic characteristics of the novel and then proceeded to implement them in two series of works composed in the 1940s, 1950s and into the 1960s. While many critics have traced the development of the Arabic novel back to the mid-nineteenth century and even earlier (myself included), it is possible to suggest that the development of a genuinely domesticated novel genre in Arabic is founded on the basis of the pre-1967 *œuvre* of Najib Mahfuz.

FIN DE SIECLE

"A disturbance of spirits" was Albert Hourani's apposite, indeed poetic, way of summarizing the impact of global political and economic trends on the Arab nations in the later decades of the twentieth century, and, equally important, of characterizing the various policies whereby Arab leaders dealt with each other and their own peoples. The optimistic bubble of pan-Arabism had been burst in the disaster of 1967; the advent of the oil era had introduced commercialism and entrepreneurship to every sector of society; once selected (and by whatever process), rulers seemed to remain in power, using the powerful weapons of modern media to create personality cults that would prolong their tenure of leadership. Democracy, where it existed, was kept on the tightest of reins, hemmed in by various laws aimed at protecting "the public interest", but for the vast majority of creative writers freedom of expression remained and remains an aspiration, a dream —unless, of course, one takes the radical step that many have indeed taken, namely to leave the region altogether. It is this scenario that has been the regular topic of the withering poetry of the Iraqi writer, Muzaffar al-Nawwab, who excoriates not merely individual figures but the Arab world's entire governmental apparatus and the attitudes that lie behind them in his *samizdat* odes.

In this scenario of commercialism and controlled media, it is poetry —the traditional public voice of the Arabs— that has been the most transformed, and to a certain extent marginalized and supplanted by the fictional genres. That is not to say, of course, that poets are not writing poetry, nor that the occasional poem strikes a popular or sensitive chord across the region: Nizar Qabbani achieved such an effect on several occasions, and the Israeli Knesset is currently having to confront some unpleasant truths about societal values as it debates the inclusion of a poem by Mahmud Darwish in school curricula. Poets continue to create poetry in every nation of the Arab world, but the outlets for their creativity are carefully monitored and publication possibilities are, in particular, based to an increasing extent on commercial (marketing) factors. Beyond all this lurks a larger issue, however, and one that is not confined to the region under discussion here: in an era when the younger generation is increasingly turning away from print media towards the visual, what is the audience for poetry and how does the poet reach that audience? That open question —one that can be posed with equal validity in Europe and the United States— applies, of course, as much to drama as it does to poetry. For many Arab countries (and particularly those in the Gulf region), a tradition of drama was only a few decades old when the "video revolution" arrived.

The commercialization, the “televisionalization” of theatre, is a phenomenon that most drama practitioners continue to lament, but here too the principal issue for the future remains the quest for creative ways of exploiting these new media rather than merely ruing their dominant role.

All of which return us to Gaber Asfour's “time of the novel”. It would appear to be the novel and short story that are best prepared to deal with and reflect this “disturbed” political and social landscape, and, in this era of globalism and commercialism, to adapt and indeed be adapted for the public's preferred media. After all, if the English-speaking world can do it with such obvious commercial success for the novels of Jane Austen and the Brontë family, let alone Shakespeare, then why not do likewise? Mahfuz's most famous novels have, of course, long since been converted into films (with varying degrees of faithfulness to the original), as have many of the short stories of the Egyptian genius of that genre, Yusuf Idris. More recently even Muhammad al-Muwaylihi's *Hadith `Isa ibn Hisham* (1907), originally published week-by-week in the family newspaper *Misbah al-Sharq*, has been serialized on television. The twin pulls of the more general and the more local that can be seen as impacting upon the creation and publication of Arabic fiction in recent times were mentioned above. Remaining at the level of genre, we might observe that the short story has been and is most adaptable to the demands of the local and the particular, and that in the course of its development in the various subregions of the Arab world it has proved its value throughout the twentieth century as a contributor to an emerging awareness of social and personal problems. For that very reason it remains a favoured mode of expression in the quest for social reforms (within the family, for example) and in the expression of individual angst. It goes without saying that women writers have been especially anxious to make use of the short story in order to examine and change the nature of their traditional role within the family structure and to explore the issues that emerge as they join and participate in the professional life of the public domain, albeit to degrees that vary widely from one region and nation to another.

Between the pull of these two forces the novel genre in Arabic has tended to follow similar patterns of development in the various regions of the Arab world, albeit along different time-scales. It is, of course, the fictional genre available for the treatment of the great topics of its era. The initial phases of novelistic development in each region were naturally concerned with the burning and immediate questions of resistance to colonial rule, quest for identity, and, after independence, identification of the ideals and directions of the emerging pan-Arab and local nationalism. The passage of time, however, the nature of political and social change and the events that have impinged upon the Arab world from both inside and outside are all factors that have led to a process whereby more general concerns (and novelistic topics) have gradually come to be supplanted by more particular ones, or perhaps the fictional portrayal of those larger concerns now tends to be based within more local contexts and priorities. Space does not allow time here to examine them all, but two prevalent types of creativity that seem to reflect these larger trends will be looked at briefly: the novelists' resort to both historical and autobiographical writing.

The large library of historiographical works that have chosen to question the Arab past and the very bases upon which local and national myths have been established has fostered in turn a movement in novel writing that utilizes the past and historical modes of writing as a way of not merely reassessing the values inherited from previous eras but also commenting on the social circumstances (often the less pleasant circumstances) of the present day. In this context the names of Bensalim Himmish and Ahmad al-Tawfiq from Morocco, al-Tahir Wattar from Algeria, Ibrahim al-Kuni from Libya, Jamal al-Ghitani and Ibrahim Abd al-Majid from Egypt, and Abderrahman Munif, of Saudi-Iraqi parentage and now resident in Syria, are just some of the more distinguished recent contributors to this trend. History and the discourse of historical writing in Arabic are not merely evocations of the past in such works: Jamal al-Ghitani, for example, is not merely reproducing the texts and times of the Egyptian historian Ibn Iyas (died 1524) in his renowned novel *Al-Zayni Barakat* (1971), but is rather, among other things, making very direct comments on the role of the secret police in contemporary society. In his recent novel, *Shajarat al-hinna' wa-al-qamar* (*Henna Tree and Moon*, 1998), Ahmad al-Tawfiq recounts the story of a local chieftain in the Middle Atlas region in pre-modern times, but the novel's narrative concerning patterns of tyranny and corruption in the exercise of power is by no means confined to accounts of the past.

As attempts are made to identify and explore the “particularities” of Arab societies and their regions, is it surprising that, alongside fictional recountings of episodes from history, there is also a renewed concentration on the autobiographical genre —surely the most “particular” of compositional exercises? Such trends have revealed an almost infinite number of variations along the spectrum between fiction, history, biography, and autobiography, a clear illustration of the ways in which, as Hayden White has convincingly shown (*Tropics of Discourse*, 1978), those genres are closely linked at the level of narration. It has long been acknowledged, of course, by critics (and often by novelists themselves) that initial efforts at novel writing are particularly prone to the autobiographical tendency. In Arabic, one thinks immediately of Haykal's *Zaynab*, al-Mazini's *Ibrahim al-Katib* (*Ibrahim the Author*) with its not very subtle hint in the title itself, Shakib al-Jabiri's *Naham* (*Greed*), Abdelkarim Ghallab's *Sab'at abwab* (*Seven Gates*), and Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's *Hunters on a Narrow Street* (originally written in English and later translated into Arabic). In more recent times, the Arab novelist's increasing awareness of the dimensions of the craft of fiction and consciousness of its creative potential (including the self-consciousness involved in metafiction —the inclusion of references to the act of writing itself as part of the narrative) have led to an increase in autobiographical writing, or rather to a host of works consciously and often confusingly labelled by their authors as “novelistic autobiographies”, “autobiographical texts” or “autobiographical novels”. Mohamed Choukri's *Al-Khubz al-hafi* (*For Bread Alone*) is almost certainly the most famous among these works (particularly after its banning by the American University of Cairo in 1998), but Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, Abderrahman Munif and Edwar al-Kharat are the more renowned among many authors who have contributed to this trend (and, needless to say, the autobiographical still makes its way into many other fictional works that are not so self-consciously labelled, including the novels of Rashid Abu Jadrah

[Boujedra], for example). Within this context, women novelists who choose to adopt the first-person narrative technique in their works of fiction have for some unexplained and, it would seem, unjustifiable reason been usually considered to be indulging in “confessional writing” rather than invoking a generally acknowledged mode of “fictional” writing. Thus while reserving for the authors in question all the privileges of fiction, attention should be drawn to the fact that among recently penned autobiographical works or memoirs by women writers are *Habbat al-Naftalin (Mothballs)* by Aliya Mamduh from Iraq, *Dunyazad* by May Telmissany and *Al-Khiba' (The Tent)* by Miral al-Tahawi, both from Egypt, and *Dhakirat al-jasad (The Body's Memory)*, Ahlam Mustaghanimi's wistful portrait of post-revolutionary Algeria.

CONCLUSION

Modern Arabic literature is of a diversity and richness that suits the enormous and important tract of the earth's surface whose values and aspirations it represents. For that very reason it is now increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to discuss it under a single rubric. Abd al-nasir's Arab world, “from the [Arab] Gulf to the [Atlantic] Ocean”, includes an area considerably larger than Europe, and the recent history of the Balkan region gives us plenty of food for thought regarding localism and the role of language(s). It is thus an acknowledgement of the perhaps inevitable course of historical development to note that the regional emphases of today's Arabic-speaking world are a natural, and perhaps desirable, outcome of the events of the twentieth century. This is not, of course, an either-or situation. There are and will continue to be contacts across the wider region; the demands of politics, culture, and religion will ensure that. But it is rather a question of emphasis, as each subregion tries, at this particular stage in its modern, post-independence development, to establish (and, in some cases, to rewrite) its own national myth. The creativity of every Arab *littérateur* will continue to emerge (assuming that it is allowed to do so) into its own local context, and the extent to which it can transcend that context into a more “international” one —whether Arab or beyond— will still depend on a number of factors, not least of which is translation and the ways in which translated texts are marketed. One may thus conclude by expressing the hope that, as a reflection of the trends mentioned briefly above, scholars and translators will intensify their focus on regional traditions and on particular genres and sub-genres, so that Arab writers may live to see their creative writings added to the tradition of world literature.



REMEMBERING FOR TOMORROW

AUTOBIOGRAPHY: A UNIVERSAL GENRE

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BACKGROUND

“Here lies dust; not I; I am who I was”. This is part of the epitaph penned by João de Deus on the tomb of the great Portuguese poet, Anthero de Quental, and the impression transmitted is that this verse encapsulates —unconsciously so, of that there can be no doubt— the quintessence of the autobiography, “I am who I was”. The autobiographer too starts out from an act of final assumption (not necessarily linked to the end of life, although certainly to the close of a biographical cycle) in order to delve into his origins and to discern, through the interpretation that he places upon these, the outlines of his own identity. Autobiography describes a parabola, the trajectory of an individual from his beginnings to a way station, the point from which the review of the course covered so far is begun. To what end?

At bottom, autobiography amounts to the desire to find the answer to a question, the eternal question posed by Man, “Who am I?” It is not Montaigne’s question, “What do I know?” Instead, it is a much more searching question, linked to the notion that Man has of himself in the modern age: the conviction that, aside from anything else he might be, he is a person endowed with a unique and unrepeatable individuality. What autobiography precisely entails is the desire to leave written

testimony to this conviction, a conviction that, at the same time, is a perception and experience underpinning the very foundations of the world and of life. Professor Karl Joachim Weintraub of the University of Chicago has written a magnificent, a simply superb essay (*The Value of the Individual: Self and Circumstance in Autobiography*, University of Chicago Press, 1978), in which he analyses the factors that have made a decisive contribution to shaping this notion of self as possessed by modern man and crystallized in Jean Jacques Rousseau's *The Confessions*, where the Geneva-born writer proudly affirms in the prologue to his book:

I have begun on a work that is without precedent, whose accomplishment will have no imitator. I propose to set before my fellow mortals a man in all the truth of nature; and this man shall be myself. I have studied mankind and know my heart; I am not made like any one I have been acquainted with, perhaps like no one in existence; if not better, I at least claim originality, and whether Nature has acted rightly or wrongly in destroying the mould in which she cast me, can only be decided after I have been read.

Over a period of six years, from early 1765 until the latter part of 1770, surrounded by documents and previous drafts and texts, Rousseau was to describe his life in detail, relating, and justifying, his conduct to the reader, conduct that, as is natural, was not always admirable, and indeed listing, at times pitifully so, the difficulties encountered in order to succeed in being himself, his greatest and perhaps only goal. The result is a voluminous and, at once, calculated confession, the cornerstone of modern autobiographical writing.

Down the years, readers have been profoundly impressed by Rousseau's personality and the power of his writing. However, the origins of the autobiographical genre are extremely old and are to be found in Saint Augustine's *Confessions*, a milestone along the road to individuality. St Augustine's confession is a Christian confession and, as such, is addressed to the comprehension of God and not that of Man, as is the case with Rousseau:

Still suffer me to speak before Thy mercy - me, "dust and ashes". Suffer me to speak, for, behold, it is Thy mercy I address, and not derisive man.

In the year 397, when he begged leave in this manner to address God and speak of himself, Augustine of Hippo was 43 years old and had a finely honed internal conception of what his life had been until then.

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY BOOM

Nowadays, interest in writings on self has become commonplace. Writers, critics and readers alike confess a yen for

auto/biographical literature —whether private diaries, memoirs, biographies or collected letters— and, indeed, for all those written manifestations that are characterized by a capacity for personal revelation and an ability to read and interpret a given setting. There are collections, specialized journals, literary prizes, television programmes... The truth is that fascination in learning about other people's lives involves a series of expectations and conventions that affects very different types of public, starting with a minority —intellectual— reading public that looks to autobiography for its ethical and aesthetic transcendence, well defined by Weintraub:¹ “And the fact is that we wish to know about the formation of autonomous human beings, about those who apply rules to themselves, about those who comply with such self-imposed rules with a sense of responsibility to themselves and to mankind, about those who are capable both of building up the store of common knowledge, as well as the taste of, the insight into their own personalities, and of wholly fulfilling their specific potential”.

The spectrum ranges from the reader interested in autobiography as an irreplaceable documentary record of a life, across to a very broad public that will dip into whatever autobiographical products are at hand (and these come in all forms and shapes), in obedience to what is admittedly a perfectly legitimate impulse, namely, the curiosity inevitably aroused by the affairs of others, and to the need to satisfy said impulse.

In general terms, autobiographical writing fluctuates between the two extremes towards which all human endeavour naturally tends: on the one hand, the gratuitous and, at the same time, committed side, evident in those autobiographers and writers of memoirs who, perhaps, with death hard on their heels, write about themselves in search of a kind of fourth dimension to their lifetime experience that might serve to mitigate its devastating effect (“the older one becomes, the greater the temptation to take stock and balance the books”, acknowledges Friedrich Dürrenmatt). On the other hand, can there be any doubt as to the financial profitability of *the biographical angle* used as an advertising ploy, as a showcase of the secret life, where this —for whatever reason— has become a token of value behind which there may nevertheless lie nothing but a terrifying void or a generous array of camouflage?

Accordingly, one could talk of a tilt or leaning towards autobiography, which experienced a fundamental boom in the twentieth century with the end of the First World War and progressive access to public affairs by the man in the street, who had until then been kept at a distance from the governance of Western societies. This was a qualitative, substantial shift that favoured the appearance of a new reading public with an inclination for a type of work, which from a historical, ideological or personal perspective might enable them to explain the reasons for the historical changes through which they had been ordained to live. As a form of writing about life and the immediate past, autobiography has done nothing ever since but develop its possibilities in the Western world, generating an ever-wider reading public.

¹ Translator's note: what follows is not the English original but a paraphrase of the Spanish translation.

SOME INCURSIONS INTO CRITICISM

It should come as no surprise that theoretical or critical activity, which always lags behind the practical accumulation of events (or texts), has emerged slowly over the century to a point where it has found a brilliant yet confused voice in recent years. Studies on autobiography basically begin with the German scholar, Georg Misch, who wrote an impressive history of autobiography in eight volumes which ranged from the funerary inscriptions in Egypt to Theodor Fontane, fundamentally focusing on the development of the forms of medieval autobiography. His unfinished project sought to bring together the complete body of autobiographical texts written throughout the ages in all countries, in order to demonstrate the progressive liberalization of the human being. An unattainable goal.

1956 heralded the appearance of a seminal study: *Conditions et limites de l'autobiographie* by Georges Gusdorf (see “La Autobiografía y sus problemas teóricos” in *Suplementos Anthropos*, 29). According to Gusdorf, autobiography that is worthy of the name is an initiatory experience motivated by a meta-historical purpose (as opposed to the essentially historical interest underlying memoirs), inasmuch as it assumes the standpoint of an ontology of personal life. Gusdorf links autobiography to Western culture.

The pioneer in critical, rather than theoretical-historical, studies on autobiography is Philippe Lejeune, currently holding the post of Professor of the *Collège de France* and, in my opinion, the single most innovative and stimulating author of all those who have come to devote themselves to the analysis of writings on self. The first of his books, *L'autobiographie en France* (1971), recently republished, includes a first version of the *pacte autobiographique*. In 1975 this was followed by *Le pacte autobiographique*, Lejeune's best-known work, in which he sets out to give a rigorous definition of the conditions under which autobiography functions and to systematize analysis of this type of text. The key concepts of this “pact” are: its referential quality, the so-called reading contract and the fiduciary nature of the genre. It is evident that there are no textual features to enable one to distinguish a real from an imaginary autobiography, namely Rousseau's *The Confessions* from Dickens' *David Copperfield*. The boundary line between a novel and an autobiography is always ill-defined, and to Lejeune the undeniable differences between the two genres or writing paradigms must, in the first place, be sought in the reading conditions, which are not at all the same in both cases. For instance, in the case of a novel, says Lejeune, the reader abandons himself to the twists and turns of the narrative, freely establishing similarities between the author, narrator and protagonist, whereas if the author-narrator-protagonist identity is asserted from the outset, as occurs with autobiographical accounts, the reader will try to spot the differences, the errors, the distortions in which the autobiographer has incurred and which will render it possible for said identity to be challenged. Lejeune maintains that herein lies the origin of the myth that the novel is “more genuine” than the autobiography, because anything that is believed to have been discovered painstakingly, by sifting through the text, will always seem truer and more profound than something that is offered openly from the very first page.

The writing conditions too are different. In the French critic's view, what prevents an autobiography from being confused with a novel are not concrete aspects of the text—which may well coincide—nor the fact that the autobiographer is sincere and truthful with respect to his account. Rather, it is the fact that the author asserts his resolve to write about himself (hence Lejeune's claim of author-narrator-protagonist identity) and to tell the truth, even when his intention may be no more than an illusion, impossible to put into effect, and the fact that the reader is at liberty to believe or disbelieve this, i.e., he may freely enter into this "pact" with the autobiographer or, alternatively, choose to regard this commitment as just another artifice and read the book as a novel.

Lejeune's most recent works (*Pour l'autobiographie* or *Les brouillons de soi*) reveal a notable shift in epistemological orientation: having turned extremely sceptical in view of the theoretical inflation surrounding autobiography—the subject of the most eccentric speculations imaginable—his purpose in recent years has been to draw up an inventory of everything relating to personal literature and true-life accounts.

Autobiography's epistemological dimension was propounded by James Olney (*Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, Princeton, 1980). He holds that the life or *bios*, located at the literal and figurative centre of any autobiography and constituting the genre's *raison d'être*, can be understood in a wider sense than the purely legitimate sense of the history of any one life, e.g., it can be understood as participation in an absolute existence that transcends any specific particularities. In other words, Olney feels that to be individual is a moral tendency, and in this sense, instead of being strictly circumscribed to a genre, should properly come within the ambit of aspiration.

It may be ambitious to regard the gnostic dimension of an autobiography, its ability to render a life intelligible, as the key to its appraisal. One has to admit that criticism of an autobiographical work is no easy task. What method is to be employed when it comes to assessing memoirs? Many are borderline texts or texts that are vehemently testimonial, where the writing lies at the very edge of the literary universe. Moreover, such texts do not generally allow anything more than a tentative approach (something that is not the case with the poet or novelist). On the other hand, they tend to make for very readable books that pose no difficulties of comprehension or style. Hence the instruments that literary analysis has at its command often prove inadequate to the task of interpreting these works in their true dimension. Nevertheless, the challenge remains to be met and indeed becomes that much greater each time any of us shows willing (for the *n*th time perhaps, but with all the tension demanded by major revelations) to listen to the magic words: I am...



REMEMBERING FOR TOMORROW

FROM SELF-MADE MAN TO MAN-MADE SELF: A STORY ABOUT CHANGING IDENTITIES

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To me, death at the head of an army would have been easier than the troubles of later life. For my life has been so prolonged that the revolving days have taken from me all the objects of pleasure (...) My energy has subsided and weakened, the joy of living has come to an end.

Thus complains the twelfth-century Syrian prince Usama ibn Munqidh about old age in his famous account of his life. Despite all the perils to which he had exposed himself, lion hunting and fighting crusaders, he had reached the unlikely age of ninety. Surely this was a miracle that had to be told for its lesson: the duration of the life of man is predetermined, so why be afraid of danger?

Usama's reminiscences stand out as one of the great books of classical Arabic literature thanks to its exciting events, personal tone and historical interest. "The author appears as a consummate story-teller who might qualify for a competitive

prize in a modern school of journalism” his English translator Philip Hitti remarked in 1929 and subtitled the work “Memoirs”. Yet the author himself did not know of this literary term. Instead Usama called his narrative “The Book of Learning by Example”, *Kitab al-i`tibar*, when he dictated it in Damascus a few years before his death in 1188.

In the Arabic language the term “memoirs” (*mudhakkirat*) was not to appear until the end of the nineteenth century, probably as a loan translation from French. Its entrance in the lexicon is connected to the advent of modernity in the Arab world. It marks the emergence of new concepts of identity and a new role for literature.

The major difference between the medieval self as represented in an autobiographical book such as the one by Usama and the modern subject expressed in contemporary life-stories, is its unproblematic God-given nature. To Usama society was static; he lived the same life that his father had and his sons would do after him. From birth to death the individual was inscribed in a stable social order with fixed roles. Belonging was absolute and unconditional.

In our age this stability has disappeared. Now individuals experience society around them as being in continuous change. Their place in it is no longer given or granted—it can be altered and chosen. Sons and daughters do not have to live as their parents did, indeed they cannot do it. Technological development, the disruption of traditional modes of life, the spread of education, the impact of foreign cultures and languages, urbanization, emigration and other changes have created increased social mobility. In all Arab countries people have found new opportunities to break loose from their original place in society, or have unwillingly been forced to abandon their roots. A new freedom/necessity to choose who one wants to be has presented itself, but accompanied by a feeling of insecurity and anxiety about one’s true belonging. A modern problem has arisen, the problem of identity.

“Who am I? What do I want? What do I like? What do I hate? Why do I refuse to live like everybody else?”, the boy-hero in *Ayyam al-tufula* (*Days of my Childhood*) (3 vols. 1955, 1961, 1962) silently asks himself, lying awake in his bed worrying over the future. His questions could be the questions of millions. In this particular case the voice of the adult author-narrator, the Egyptian novelist Ibrahim Abd al-Halim (1920-1986), answers in between the lines that fighting for socialism—understood as democracy, equality and justice—will solve the identity problem for his young self. Indeed, after the Second World War leftist ideology long provided a common identity for many Arab writers and intellectuals. The 1950s and 1960s were still an age of optimism, and the autobiographical hero was still represented as an example to emulate, even if the knight’s armour had changed to the outfit of the freedom fighter and revolutionary.

SELF AND HISTORY

Modern Arab writers mostly discover a different lesson in their lives than Usama did: nothing is in fact predetermined. Both self and society seem to be shaped by human actions and will, not always for the better. Neither life nor history develops as expected when one is young and optimistic. Since the 1970s disappointment has become a common note. When God is no longer in control, the timeless pain of ageing is aggravated by a sense of own responsibility, both for personal and political failures.

We disobeyed the orders of our fathers and pretended not to hear our imploring mothers. Without being fully aware of it we aimed at the overthrow of paternal power, the breaking of family shackles and deliverance from domestic values. We wished to exchange the individual life in the stagnant family environment that we grew up in for a life in the midst of society, wide and rich. So we followed the road of party work and we paid the price for our “meddling in politics” dearly (...) Now we, the members of that generation, are in our forties and fifties. Our lives lie behind us and our future has become our past. What did we achieve with our struggle?

This combined lamentation over lost youth and frustrated ambitions is taken from the Palestinian historian Hisham Sharabi's autobiography *Al-yamru wa-l-ramad* (*Embers and Ashes*, 1978), which is in many respects typical.

Firstly, it is typical because of its critical approach to society. It questions the established order and values individual revolt and protest, in contrast to the classical norm of acquiescence and consent. Self-criticism is also part of this attitude; the author confesses personal mistakes and exposes some of the less flattering sides of his personality. His unheroic self is situated on the middle of the scale between the edifying moral example and the subversive anti-hero, which together are the three main types in the modern gallery of autobiographical characters.

Furthermore, the author sees his self as a function of history. When Sharabi writes about his childhood in Palestine—he was born in Jaffa in 1927—his youth in the United States as a student, and his adventures in Lebanon as a political activist, he wants to show how socio-political factors formed him and influenced his life, but also how he himself was an agent in shaping the course of events. This too is a typical contemporary position, to acknowledge the secular powers of heritage and environment over divine fate and at the same time profess the ability of the individual to change the order of things on earth and make one's own destiny.

SELF AND PLACE

Another typical aspect of *Embers and Ashes* is that part of the narrator's identity problem has to do with exile. He cannot return to his homeland Palestine because it has become Israel. He wants to settle in Lebanon, but the civil war prevents this. Working as a university professor in the United States he feels cut off from his origins. Similar dilemmas meet in Arabic memoirs and autobiographies over and over again. Foreign dominance, political and economical, and local poverty have made a great number of Arabs seek education and job opportunities abroad. Wars and repression have added countless refugees to their numbers. And they all nurture a dream of one-day returning "home".

But where is home? Does it really exist except as a dream? Perhaps it is a bit like youth? It is when it has disappeared and gone that you realize its full value. And the more distant it seems, the more mythical it becomes. Therefore the dream of youth and the dream of home often merge in modern Arabic autobiographical literature, producing beautiful imaginary landscapes inhabited by fantastic figures and full of marvellous events. The geographic setting may be a cosmopolitan city such as Alexandria in the flights of fantasy of Edwar al-Kharat (*City of Saffron*, 1989) or a remote rural district such as northern Syria in the poetic outbursts of Salim Barakat (*The Iron Grasshopper*, 1980), but the magical world that writers such as these create is not to be found on any topographical map.

To make the place (home) an extension of the self (youth) is also a strategy encountered in more straightforward historical narratives, because how could you describe the self except in relation to its environment? Thus the story of the city, of the village, of the quarter, or the house even, also functions as a story of the man or woman who wrote it. This equation is particularly obvious in books about childhood. Perceived as a seminal time in life, childhood is a favourite subject for the modern Arab writer, whereas the classical writer hardly touched upon the subject. But the descriptions are not necessarily nostalgic. Even if the grass was always greener in childhood, the dark places were darker too, and injustice was deeper. Therefore the tales that are told are sometimes brutal and cruel, about children who were deprived of both bread and love and survived against all odds. The most famous book of this kind is *For Bread Alone* (1980) by the Moroccan writer Mohamed Choukri. His harsh memories of starvation and slums are not unique, however, even if they are extreme in their nakedness and more shocking than most. The same story of "poor boy suffers but eventually makes good" repeats itself in the testimonies of other "survivors" from both East and West in the Arab world. To read them is chilling and reassuring at the same time; after all there is a happy end. We are spared the more depressing failure stories. Those children who perished never had the opportunity to write down their experiences. Their suffering can only be guessed. But to a certain extent the texts by the "survivors" help us to do that too.

FROM SELF-MADE TO MAN-MADE

When the Arab world entered the twentieth century it also entered modernity. To the first generation of autobiographers the quest for identity was a quest for a rational, coherent and unified self. The modern subject was configured as the sovereign individual. The paradigm was the self-made man (later the self-made woman). The implicit theoretical foundation was Darwin, empiricism and positivism. The typical life-story followed the romantic plot: adventure –victory– reward. This structure governs, for example, the modern classic *par excellence* of Arabic autobiography, *An Egyptian Childhood* (3 vols. 1929, 1939, 1967) by Taha Husayn. In this story it is blindness rather than poverty that is both the handicap that the boy-hero has to overcome and his adventure. His journey takes him from the Koran school in the village to Cairo where he battles the conservative sheikhs of the Azhar university. Finally he receives due recognition for his superior intelligence and is admitted into the higher circles of society. I suspect that the great success of *An Egyptian Childhood*, and the appeal of many later books of its kind that continue to be written, have to do with their use of this archetypal plot, the successful quest. It is a quest for identity, for name and fame, that expresses the readers' secret wishes to rise above their origins and win recognition in society. It corresponds to the story of David's victory over Goliath, and the readers' sympathy of course is with the underdog.

Later generations devised a more sociological concept of the self. The independence of the individual was relative and his trajectory affected by socio-political events largely beyond his control. Personal identity was formed in the interaction between self and society, negotiated between an inner core, "the real me", and the outside world. This sociological concept was supported by psychology; Marx and Freud formed an alliance. The family was conceived of as a society in miniature and upbringing as another form of social coercion. The idea of a virgin self, of an original, unspoilt, but unified "I" still prevailed. The mission of the writer was to demonstrate how this original self had been destroyed by the authoritarian society/the patriarchal family, or, perhaps, saved from it through the efforts and brave struggle of the individual. Hisham Sharabi's aforementioned autobiography gives a good example of this type of self-understanding.

Today, at the advent of the twenty-first century, Arab society has entered a new phase, a "post-modern" phase, that has brought with it different experiences and narratives. In literary texts such as those by Raouf Musaad Basta (*The Ostrich Egg*, 1994) or Rashid al-Daif (*Dear Mr Kawabata*, 1995) we meet autobiographical subjects that are composed not of a single but of several identities; the self is not one but many, sometimes contradictory. Identity is no longer experienced as simple and stable over time, from childhood to old age, but as complex and shifting. The new self is a fragmented self in continuous transformation, unpredictably and irrationally moving between a multitude of choices. It is a man-made configuration of nebulous character. To express this split identity al-Daif introduces his own double as an independent character in *Dear Mr Kawabata*, and Radwa Ahshour uses the same device in her recent autobiographical work *The*

Phantoms (1999). The shattering of the unified subject has been accompanied by increasingly blurred boundaries between fact and fiction in literature as “reality” has become equally problematic as “self”. But the need to tell a story about oneself still remains, for cognitive reasons if nothing else —the human mind makes sense of the world through story-telling. And as long as it does, autobiographical writing has a future. What the narratives of tomorrow will look like we do not know. Certainly they will not function as a simple mirror, because words never do. Both writers and readers know that the “I” of the beheld is ultimately in the eye of the beholder.

EMPOWERING ART

It has been suggested that autobiography is an art often practised by marginalized groups to express their protest against their subordinate position in society. Writing autobiography is an act of empowerment; visualizing your self is also to expose the suppression and define a way out. This interpretation also applies to modern Arabic literature, where the writers have tended to describe their life, their childhood in particular, as a liberation struggle. The quest for identity is also a quest for freedom. To the obstacles of blindness and poverty we may in this connection add the “fault” in patriarchal society of being a woman. There is a fairly long tradition, beginning in the 1930s, of women’s memoirs in Egypt where feminist organizations and a feminist press developed early. But today the same tradition exists in most national literatures. Women’s liberation has been the red thread throughout these texts, which show how growing up as a girl was different. However, it is a liberation that is argued for both in Islamic and secular terms, with Koranic verses as well as Marxist slogans, something that demonstrates that women’s identities are as negotiable as men’s.

And is this not exactly what autobiography is, a negotiation? The autobiographer negotiates a meaning with life. His or her identity is not given in advance; it is created in the act of writing the self. Therefore young or middle-aged writers practise the empowering art just as intensely as old. Everybody has a past to interpret, a present to face, and a future to build —in people’s memories if nowhere else.

THE *MEMOIRES* ODYSSEY

Odile Chenal

European Cultural Foundation

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PRIORITY TO BE GIVEN TO THE MEDITERRANEAN

In the early 1990s, when all energy was focused on Eastern Europe and a continent opened anew, it seemed a daring step indeed to turn the spotlight on the Mediterranean region, especially by an institution such as the European Cultural Foundation, perched as it is on the bleak shores of the North Sea. Nevertheless, the decision was taken, even before Euro-Arab dialogue was to become fashionable, thereby enabling a series of initiatives to be implemented, among them being the *Mémoires de la Méditerranée* project. At that juncture, the Arab world, often reduced to its most risibly exotic aspects, was, without expressly so desiring, just entering the era of the “clash of civilizations”. Paradoxically, at a time when the Internet was beginning to spread its web and conquer the world, the taunts exchanged between the two sides of the Mediterranean —“egocentric Europe” versus “country of fanatics”— afforded insight into the rift that became ever wider as the withdrawal into identity became ever greater.

In this context a goal was imposed, namely, the urgency of recalling that the history of this region was, above all, a narrative shared by men and women whose interlocking destinies provided the best rebuttal to those who raised themselves as the champions of unyielding otherness. Accordingly, the *Mémoires de la Méditerranée* collection would therefore take true-

life stories, testimonies, intimate confessions as its guiding *leitmotiv*, in order to give voices from the opposite shore a chance to be heard. To implement such a programme all that was needed was a flexible formula, adapted to the nature of the project and involving individuals, rather than a structure with an uncertain future. In a number of European countries, translators and editors were already joining forces, with uneven success, in an attempt to ensure that the Arab component of Mediterranean heritage might become better known. Why not then propose to them that they take part in the adventure?

A EUROPEAN NETWORK FOR THE TRANSLATION OF ARABIC LITERATURE

As it happened, this proposal met with an extremely favourable reception from the very first meeting, which took place in November 1994 within the framework of the new “Toledo School of Translators”. The first seven —soon to be enlarged to nine— members of the recently created network thus embarked upon an odyssey, without remotely imagining the sheer scope and number of events that this would entail. Collectively, after multiple conversations in which national specifics had to be taken into account without losing sight of the common goal, a set of guidelines —plus its entourage of exceptions— was drawn up. Texts would be jointly selected by the correspondents, who would then propose these to the editors in their respective languages; if a minimum of three then undertook to publish any given text, the European Cultural Foundation would provide financial support in the form of a copyright advance and co-funding of translation costs. To ensure a certain degree of harmonization among the different translations, and bolster the cohesion of the nascent network, the Toledo School of Translators offered the ideal framework for the organization of workshops, which would, as often as possible, bring together the authors and their respective European interpreters. Lastly, thanks to simultaneous publication in various European countries, it would prove easier to organize the promotion of such translations, and so arouse greater interest than could be normally expected for this type of literature.

Nearly every season, the editorial programme was to experience a momentous birth, marked by the publication of a single title by the majority of correspondents: Abderrahman Munif and Amman; Rashid al-Daif and the Lebanon; Latifa Zayiat, Edwar al-Kharrat or May Telmissany in the case of Egypt. Parallel to this, at the dictate of certain specific affinities, other more secret territories were also explored (the Sudan of Raouf MUSAAD Basta, the Morocco of Abdelkarim Ghallab, the Palestine of Muhammad al-Qaysi, and so forth), whilst other titles were made known to a new reading public, e.g., the Iraqi, Aliya Mamduh; the Palestinians, Mahmud Darwish and Jabra Ibrahim Jabra; the Syrian, Salim Barakat, etc. In all, by the time the cycle — inaugurated in 1995 with the publication of a text by the Lebanese historian, Khaled Ziyadeh—draws to an end in the year 2001 after a period of seven years, some 50 translations will have seen the light of day.

It was very quickly realized, too, that this unprecedented programme was providing traditional European book-publishing circuits with much more than an original collection of works. Indeed, a veritable network was born out of the meetings and translation workshops, capable of enhancing the potential of each of its members to maintain an unflagging vigil, not

only regarding Arabic literary production, but also regarding all initiatives, often plagued by great dispersion, targeted at disseminating this culture throughout Europe. Insofar as the *Mémoires* were concerned, translators and also university professors assumed the role of both intermediaries and cultural entrepreneurs, making themselves known to institutions able to provide help in launching new collections at certain publishing houses, training new translators, fostering meetings with readers, locating and contacting book-dealers, drafting press dossiers, organizing round tables, publishing feature articles in journals and magazines, and the like.

THE LESSONS OF EXPERIENCE

Naturally, this long voyage through the memoirs of the Southern Mediterranean had to traverse perilous passages and even came to grief on a reef or two. In the context of a programme encompassing nine European languages, each culture maintains its own particular history *vis-à-vis* the Arab world and is thus victim to its own blinkers and, at times, to its own enthusiasms... Inevitably, one cannot but feel a certain degree of bitterness on seeing so many hopes, so much energy, being drowned in the sea of indifference of a publishing scene which leaves little margin for originality, or worse still, which neglects quality texts to rush headlong towards a kind of literature that is more insidiously exotic. Moreover, we should have doubtless liked to have had some of our Arab partners come aboard to reinforce the initiative sponsored by the Foundation.

Yet it is essential that the journey come to an end, that Ulysses return to Ithaca to narrate his adventures... What lessons can be learnt from this odyssey through the Mediterranean memoirs? Aside from pride in the task done (these 50 volumes that mark a milestone in the history of European translation of Arabic), there is too—for all those that encouraged this project—the sense of having lived through an experience of a unique kind, particularly in the case of the translators, so often prisoners of solitude and isolation. Learning, over seven years, to adjust to the constraints imposed by collective work, in the interests of the greatest possible efficiency, has given rise to bonds of solidarity that will not be easily weakened.

Naturally, the unearthing of these texts, the meetings with authors and the contact with literary circles in Amman or Tunis has afforded a unique chance to all to enrich their knowledge of the Arab world, to penetrate that much further into its culture, into what is perhaps its most vital aspect. Yet, in the most unforeseeable manner, these years of exchanges, at times very lively ones, in which those participating made an effort to have their individual voices heard, have also afforded these same participants the chance to discover, there within the Arab mirror, their own reflections, their own images.

Curiously, a programme that was aimed at furthering knowledge of Southern Mediterranean culture, has, in its way, also contributed to creating a Europe of young Arabic studies, the Europe of a new generation that the Toledo School now has the task of training.



REMEMBERING FOR TOMORROW

THE TRANSLATION OF CONTEMPORARY ARABIC LITERATURE IN EUROPE

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Contemporary Arabic literature is fairly unknown among European readers. Only in the last decade have certain authors, especially Najib Mahfuz, become familiar to a wider audience. This limited diffusion contrasts with the success and widespread acceptance that other world literatures, such as that from Latin America, have enjoyed in Europe. Nevertheless, although Arabic literature has not yet received the recognition that it deserves, it should be mentioned that in recent decades considerable headway has been made, with many countries opening a window on a greater understanding and diffusion of these works.

In any case, a consideration of Arabic literature in Europe taken as a whole is no easy task. Translation flows evolved differently in different countries, depending on their particular Orientalist and Arabist traditions and historical experience. For example, there can be no doubt that factors such as eight centuries of Muslim presence on the Iberian peninsula have conditioned academic interests and translation activities in Spain, where Arabism has been characterized by its primary focus on the “domestic Orient” that was al-Andalus.

Orientalism in the rest of Europe, be it French, British or Italian, has been more linked to the colonial experiences of these countries in the Arab world. This experience does not necessarily imply a domestic interest in the translation of the literature of colonies or former colonies. Nevertheless, Arab authors who have chosen English or French as their language for literary expression have achieved greater recognition and diffusion. Khalil Jubran Khalil, known for his work in English, and Tahar Ben Jelloun, who chose French as his language for literary expression, are representative of this phenomenon. However, the very existence of literature in other languages, such as the vigorous Maghrebi literature in French, could paradoxically have had a negative effect on the flows of translation of Arabic literature into French.

In spite of these historical and linguistic differences, certain common traits can be found in the way that contemporary Arabic literature has been transformed into European languages. The first phase of modern Arab literary translation was in the mid-twentieth century, driven by official entities such as the *Istituto per l'Oriente* in Italy or the *Instituto Hispano Árabe de Cultura* and the *Instituto Egipcio de Estudios Islámicos* in Spain. These early translations were closely linked to university activities and had a pronounced academic bent. Undoubtedly due to its crucial pioneering role in contemporary Arab culture and its dynamic literary environment, Egypt was well represented in the first round of Arab works translated into French, Spanish or Italian through authors such as Tawfiq al-Hakim, Taha Husayn and Mahmud Taymur.

In spite of national circumstances that have influenced translation from Arabic into European languages, there are nonetheless certain events that have affected the reception of contemporary Arabic literature in virtually all European countries. The first of these was the Six Day War in 1967, giving rise to a militant movement in favour of the Palestinian cause, which transcended university circles. Novelists such as Ghassan Kanafani and Emil Habibi and poets like Mahmud Darwish became the literary voice of Palestinian consciousness and were translated into major European languages. This solidarity with the Palestinians could be considered as a true milestone for the diffusion of Arabic literature in Europe. This situation coincided with the appearance of new publishing initiatives such as Éditions Sindbad, an adventure in publishing incomparable with any other European country, which presented French readers in the 1970s with major contemporary and classical works of Arabic and Islamic authors.

Undoubtedly the most influential factor in the history of translation of Arabic literature into European languages was the awarding of the Nobel Prize to an Arab author for the first time in 1988. While the repercussions of this prize to Najib Mahfuz have not been uniform and vary from country to country, it has given rise overall to an important increase in the translation of Arabic literature not focused exclusively on works by Mahfuz. In Spain not only have virtually all of his narrative works been translated, but for the first time an Arab author has been treated as a modern classic and included in a collection of universal classics published by Cátedra.

During the 1980s the production of translations of contemporary Arabic literature began to move from institutional and university publishers to commercial houses, which had better distribution channels and larger print-runs, but were often still too dependent on subsidized translations. This transition was frequently backed by public entities such as the *Instituto de Cooperación con el Mundo Árabe* or *l'Institut du Monde Arabe*, which expanded their activities to include the granting of subsidies and economic assistance to private publishers to ensure the translation of literature of this type.

This progressive change towards the private sector has been accompanied by a diversification of the publishers producing Arabic literature and by the appearance of specialized collections put out by non-specialized publishing houses. Such a move is generally characterized by a shift away from the critical apparatus inherited from the philological methodology applied in earlier translations of modern Arabic literature. Evidence of this can be seen in German with the creation in the mid-1980s of the *Arabische Literatur* collection by the Swiss publishing house Lenos, in Spanish in 1990 with *al-Qibla* (Ediciones Libertarias), in French in 1992 with the *Mondes arabes* collection (Actes Sud) and in Italian in 1993 with the *Narratori Arabi contemporanei* collection (Jouvence). In addition to these publishers, there are others (Sindbad in France, CantArabia in Spain and Alhambra in Sweden) specializing in Arabic and Islamic culture that have also put out titles of Arabic literature. As a result of this loss of prominence of the public and university sector in the translation of Arabic literature, the philological approach applied in the past has been replaced by an approach that underlines the interest of the work as a literary event rather than as an anthropological, social or political document.

The wider audience available to contemporary Arabic literature has also led to a geographical diversification of the authors translated. Together with Egyptian and Palestinian writers, translation of works by Moroccan, Iraqi and Lebanese authors has become more frequent. The anthologies of poetry and prose by Arab writers that characterized translation activity in various countries has given way to translations of complete texts. There is also a change in the genres chosen for translation, mainly reflecting the trends in Arabic literature. Poetry has handed over to the novel its position as the most widely translated and most representative literary form in the second half of the twentieth century.

A comparison of authors and titles translated into various European languages shows a high degree of uniformity, indicating that translation into one language facilitates translation into others. This is a common trend in the translation of “minority” languages. As a result of the lack of “readers” outside of academic environments who can inform publishers as to interesting new authors and the importance of works reflected in Arabic cultural and literary media, in Europe only works by authors such as the Moroccan Abdallah Laroui that were published originally in French are known, while the bulk of his historiographic and literary works from recent decades published in Arabic remains unknown and has not been translated.

It is no exaggeration to affirm that the late twentieth century was witness to unprecedented advances in the translation and diffusion of Arabic literature, driven as we saw to a great degree by the Nobel Prize received by the Egyptian writer Mahfuz in 1988. Mention should also be made of the Goncourt Award to authors in French such as Tahar Ben Jelloun (Moroccan) and Amin Maalouf (Lebanese), which also contributed in a certain way to bringing creative works by Arab authors into the mainstream of European markets.

Another factor that should be discussed in a reflection on the evolution of translation flows from Arabic to European languages is the presence in Europe of groups of Arab immigrants of diverse origin. The influx of several million Arab immigrants does not necessarily lead to an increased interest in Arabic culture and literature. Paradoxically, there is even a risk that, in countries where immigrant groups are sufficiently large to constitute a “sub-market”, the interest in and translation of Arabic literature could become ghettoized.

Finally, it can be said that the selection of titles and authors is still largely based on an abstract demand for exoticism, reinforcing preconceived stereotypes of the Arabic and Islamic world that unfortunately still prevail in the general public opinion in Europe.

CITIES... BETWEEN REALITY AND DREAMS

Abderrahman Munif

I

When I started writing *Sirat madina (Story of a City: A Childhood in Amman)*, I was keeping a promise that I had made myself to write about the city in which I was born and where I spent my childhood and early youth. As for why I had made such a promise, the truth is that when I returned after more than 15 years of absence, I found a different city. For this reason I wanted to remember, accompanied by the people of that time, the city that once was, the one that I knew, the old one, in order to compare it with that of today, so that contrasting the two images we could discover the effects of time, what the passing of the days brings, and how people and places change as life goes on.

Secondly, while I wrote and evoked each circumstance, I wrote thinking of myself and my group of friends, with the goal of remembering with them a not insignificant amount of events and faces that we knew together and that for us had a meaning. Perhaps only for us, since it is probable that for anyone else they are no more than mere names and events of no importance, which many would not think twice about or remember later.

By this I mean that I wrote for myself, to know about the person that I had been. And if at any time I got tired or bored with it, I would set the text aside and set to writing letters to friends. However, when difficult times closed in and darkness approached, I would get scared. Then, like a child who doesn't want to be left alone and is afraid of the shadows, I would start to sing, waiting until the others arrived. As soon as they arrived and began to see and hear, the little boy realized that what he did moved other people, and that his voice not only delighted himself, but it also delighted those who heard it. And so the game went on until reaching an end... In this way *Sirat madina* started and in this way it finished.

However, when the European Cultural Foundation selected *Sirat madina* to be translated into various languages and asked for my approval, I felt that this adventure would not have a happy ending. After all, what interest could it hold for readers who had not known the Amman of yesterday, encountered its residents, heard of the minor events that happened there..., what could they find of interest in the landscapes and scenes that once existed and were now buried forever? And besides, what relationship could exist between the city of then and the city of today?

II

Questions like these were left hanging unanswered until I was invited to travel to Spain to meet with the translators and discuss the definitive versions in the seven languages into which *Sirat madina* was being translated. But what was my surprise, my amazement, to discover that among that gathering of translators, each had his or her own "Amman", that each "Amman" had a history both similar to and different from the others, that through a specific city it was possible to evoke places and times that held meaning for many people, and that there were many who saw in that city the features that distinguish their own cities.

People frequently take some time to discover the vast number of shared elements that join them to others and are astonished at the way these were hidden, or that they had not perceived their existence and their influence until now, after so long.

But that is not all. When a person stops to contemplate a city that is not his and observes the lives of those who live in it, he suddenly sees before him his own city under a new diaphanous light, as if he were remembering a dream he had once that later faded from memory. The images and scenes that were hidden in memory reappear then like fireworks, soaring into the sky and exploding. Where were they hiding? And if they were as remote as they seemed, how could they emerge so suddenly?

New cities, at the same time as they provide us with something, allow us to discover our own cities, the cities in which we were born and live, which make up our memories and have given us something of their personality, which have trained our eyes and ears to the shapes, colours and melodies which today form part of our very being. In this way the city, it matters little which, becomes at the same time a recognition and a rediscovery. We know it and we don't, we have seen it and we haven't, it is new and old simultaneously. And the city, look at it as you may, always presents us with something new to add to our memory. And so cities end up having a different and renewed image and become something more than merely a place.

In Toledo, while reviewing the translations, and later walking leisurely along the narrow streets, I had the impression that all of the translators knew Amman in some way. And I confirmed this as we discussed minor details relating to the climate, and the names and forms of certain birds and animals. All of the translators enjoyed telling about images and scenes from their cities which were similar to Amman, and they all felt that the compared image was at all times clear and appropriate. As a result, the Amman squatting at the edge of the desert became a city that had meaning for everyone and that is taken as one's own.

The translation workshop in Toledo was beautiful, useful, and for me represented more than a bridge towards those so-called ideal cities, the cities that one loves and for which one feels nostalgia, cities whose gates one has pursued —perhaps for a long time— to discover what makes them fascinating and enigmatic, to comprehend the secrets that make them so.

For this reason, the discussion about *Sirat madina* in Toledo was an introduction to a city that was like Amman and opened the possibility of a broader, better understanding of the places and people, at the same time as it contributed to starting a long journey towards discovering and understanding the world. Because every relationship with others always starts with a mutual understanding, and that is what makes *Mémoires de la Méditerranée* —with its interest for autobiographical works linked to their cities— the seed for a long journey.

III

For the *Mémoires de la Méditerranée* experience to be complete, for the journey to discovery to reach its end, that is the conscientious examination of the city with its permanent transformations, and for us to become familiar with the changes that had occurred over a half century, as we wandered in spring 1998 around the ruins of Petra and its landscape etched itself in our memory, I proposed to those translators who had given themselves over for months to the minute translation of the Amman of the 1940s and to the delegation of coordinators of the programme who were in Amman at the invitation

of its town officials, I proposed, as I said, that we write about the Amman that our eyes now saw. In this way we would obtain an image of the way that cities change, of how age leaves its mark and how its features fill with wrinkles.

If an experiment like this one, or any other, became a reality, the city would continue its journey through time and generations, emerging with different visions. If we did this, we would obtain a new and different text, and the way that cities are transformed and reborn time and time again would be revealed to us.

THE STONES OF BUBILLO IN TOLEDO: **A UNIQUE EXPERIENCE**

Edwar al-Kharrat

When I first set foot in the *Escuela de Traductores de Toledo* in May 1999, I felt a mixture of fear and deep respect towards an illustrious and far-off past, as I was not unaware that the present school is built on the ruins of a palace which, in the glorious and ancient times of al-Andalus, had belonged to an Arab prince or governor. It was in these circumstances that my friend Gonzalo Fernández led me to the remains of a wall full of history, the only vestige of the grand palace. As the electric light flooded the wall and was reflected in a small glass screen, it was as if its evident and invisible presence had illuminated it all since the beginning of time; as if it had formed a part of the foundations of a culture whose past it condensed and on which had been constructed a modern building in which life and beauty swayed, at both architectural/technological and poetic/metaphoric levels. At the same time, I was also not unfamiliar with the achievements of the historic school of translators, in which the civilizations and cultures of the Middle Ages were fused in a fruitful and productive manner.

Several years ago the European Cultural Foundation created an ambitious project entitled *Mémoires de la Méditerranée* to promote the translation into various European languages of autobiographical novels or stories written around the Mediterranean. Among the works chosen was my novel *Hiyarat Bubillo* (*The Stones of Bubillo*), and so the Foundation and the *Escuela de Traductores* invited me to participate at a meeting in Toledo that would be attended by four of this work's translators. The translators were Hartmut Fähndrich, into German, Paul Starkey, into English, Marta Serra, into Catalan, and Jolanta Koskowska, into Polish. The French translation had already been published and the Italian translator, Leonardo Capezzzone, who had translated splendidly —so I have been assured— my works *Turabu-ha za`faran* (*City of Saffron*) and *Banat iskandariyya* (*Girls of Alexandria*), apologized for his absence.

During two or three days of intense discussion and constant questions, these four translators, sitting around me in a beautiful, peaceful, sunny room in the *Escuela de Traductores de Toledo*, submerged me in a flood of consultations and clarifications relating to linguistic, semantic and structural aspects of the novel. To my surprise, I observed that this novel, which I had understood to be “relatively simple”, was actually a complex work with dimensions the scope of which I did not perceive during its writing, immersed as I was in the feverish state of artistic creation and dragged along by an interior voice. The questions asked by the four translators brought a new light which logically radiated from the text, but which had remained hidden, secret, raised on the structure of the novel so that I hardly noticed it while writing. It was, without the slightest difference, like the ruins of the ancient al-Andalus palace wall, and a new light was now being projected on it.

My friend Hartmut Fähndrich, who had visited the actual stage of the novel in Tarrana, the village of my maternal grandmother, showed us the slides that he had taken of the hill Abobelo, or the ruins of Bubillo. I then saw how time had passed (nearly half a century) for the ancient monuments of Tarrana and how modernity and new constructions had penetrated the village. However, its spirit continued firmly rooted, once again like the palace wall.

After all, are they not one and the same: the stones of Bubillo and the remains of the temple of Apollo, which historians have situated in this very place?

Is this novel not —in a way— a song to Dionysus, god of drunkenness, sensuality and delirium, raised among the remains of Apollo, god of reason, light and musical harmony?

My experience with the four translators in Toledo opened my eyes to this sense that flowed hidden through the novel, and of which I was not fully aware when writing it as I was involved in the story of the daily lives of the inhabitants of the village

in the late 1930s and early 1940s, to the same degree that I was involved in the impressions and memories of the old man writing during the tenth decade of the same century (1991).

This was the scope of the fruitful workshop in Toledo, with discussions on translation techniques, analyses of the character and events in the novel, discerning how much reality, fantasy and surrealism were disseminated in the narration of the occurrences and memories of a town in the Egyptian Delta, in a time that goes beyond its own real time and aspires to come into contact with the times of the gods Apollo and Dionysus, and with the times of Horus, god of reason, putting things in their place, and those of Min, god of lust, sensuality and excess.

This is what I, the author of the novel, learned in the *Escuela de Traductores de Toledo*.



REMEMBERING FOR TOMORROW

LURING THEM OUT OF THEIR DENS: WORKSHOPS OF TRANSLATORS AND THEIR AUTHORS IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE *MÉMOIRES DE LA MÉDITERRANÉE* PROJECT

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Preliminary Remark:

In writing this report about the experience of eight workshops for translators and authors held in Toledo between 1995 and 1999 I decided to withstand the temptation to mention the individuals by their names. Whoever knows any of them, either authors or translators, will easily recognize them from the characterization they receive, and the features referred to. And whoever does not know them will simply take them as what they also are, specimens of two particular species —authors and translators.

THE TRANSLATORS' LOT

Translating is a lonesome activity. This is nothing new to anybody who has ever spent days or weeks or months poring over a book in a foreign language —in our case Arabic— with a dreadfully slowly rising pile of paper, pages of the text,

gradually taking shape in the target language. The struggle with words, phrases, structures and sense is one that is usually waged in the translator's den, if only because the meagre remuneration to be expected after the completion of the toil does not permit involving a colleague.

Thus any project intended to improve the translator's lot will have to lure him or her (women happen to be much more numerous in this trade) out of this den. This ought to enrich the translators' lives, it will speed up their work and may improve the result, particularly if luring them away from their desks serves the specific purpose of confronting them with two sets of people: the author with whose works they are grappling; and colleagues who go through the same or a similar ordeal, with whom they can share not only their experience and knowledge but also, on a more human level, the suffering, the anguish, the feeling of insufficiency.

It is on this rather concrete level that a translator can best be helped with work in progress. Theorizing on translation as such may be an interesting activity, which can widen the translators' horizons and make them aware of what they are doing ideally. Yet no matter what kind and number of theories are presented, discussed, accepted or refuted in the end, the actual, the concrete categories of problems are few. How should one designate clothes, foodstuffs, architectural features, etc., not found in the target language? What should one do if the Arab author uses ten different words to describe what we simply know as "desert"? Which tenses should one employ in the target language, bearing in mind that its use of present and past differs widely from that of Arabic?

TRANSLATORS AT WORKSHOPS

In order to give translators a helping hand in coping with these kinds of questions, but also to establish a network of individuals translating from Arabic into different European languages, the European Cultural Foundation incorporated meetings between authors and their translators as part of the project of the *Mémoires de la Méditerranée*. During the debates that led to the establishment of the project, confronting the creator of a work with its "re-creators" in other languages was considered sufficiently important and worthwhile for it to be planned for every work accepted for translation into several languages (which was itself a basic condition for support anyway). Thus eight workshops were organized with the meritorious help of the always hospitable *Escuela de Traductores* in Toledo, which materialized in 1995 like a beautiful historical myth.

And hardly any of the translators concerned and invited ever missed his or her workshop. They flocked in, were lodged in hotels that to the "regulars" have become very familiar, were sumptuously fed in local restaurants (even though at hours somewhat unusual for participants from northern Europe), and had to spend two complete working days ploughing once

more through the text that they had taken upon themselves to render into Catalan, Dutch, English, French, German, Italian, Polish, Spanish or Swedish. They came, more or less well or poorly prepared or equipped to ask questions and to exchange knowledge or points of view. Some were trying their hands for the first time at the translation of a literary text, while others were already old hands at the trade, looking back on piles of novels and collections of short stories rendered into their languages. Some were well-established university lecturers or even veritable professors, others were doing more menial academic work or even waiting at the gates of academic institutions to be granted access, hoping that the translation of a literary work would enhance their chances. Belonging to such diverse groups, they were also able to allow their colleagues invaluable insights into the field of Arabic studies in different European countries, an insight that was apt to disperse any illusions one may have fostered in this respect.

The meetings, then, were first and foremost European. They were reunions of individuals, each with a different native language. So there also arose the question of which language(s) the participants were to use to communicate among themselves.

In a meeting of this kind of translators from German, English, Spanish or Russian, a question like this would probably never arise. One would quite naturally use the language of the common original text, i.e. German, English, Spanish or Russian. As far as Arabic is concerned, and probably other non-European languages as well, the answer is not as obvious. In Arabists' circles one does not use Arabic (yet) as a language of communication; it is the object of an academic endeavour, Arabic having been taught at many universities as a tool for the execution of philological tasks —and definitely not to encourage the translation of literature! So the most widespread language of communication has remained the language of Shakespeare, followed by the language of Voltaire.

But then, there has been a perceptible development, a very promising one. For on the one hand, there are younger Arabists eager to translate who have acquired an often admirable affinity with the Arabic language and frequently also the Arab world, who would not hesitate to carry on regular conversations with their colleagues in Arabic, sometimes partly because their knowledge of Arabic exceeds that of either English or French, to say nothing of German and other minor languages! On the other hand, the presence of the author in most cases obliged all the participants to use Arabic during the working sessions.

WORKSHOP DEBATES

So there they were, these motley European groups, meeting in Toledo, a town where several hundred years earlier other translators had been at work. And those participants with a thorough training in older Islamic (and Spanish, for that matter)

civilization and a vision of history might every once in a while let themselves be carried away for brief moments, reflecting on the fact that their predecessors' activities in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries had eventually had an enormous impact on the intellectual development of Europe. And they might hope in their heart of hearts that their own efforts would in the end be granted at least a fraction of this kind of influence, drawing just a little positive attention among Europeans to the Arab world.

In the meantime, they were sitting there in an enlarged and remodelled stately town house in the old part of Toledo discussing their translation problems with the author with more or less rhetorical sophistication. Their questions mainly concerned vocabulary or problems of details, such as local customs, political events, rare tools or instruments, or plants or foodstuffs only known regionally. Sometimes street maps were unfolded or projected on to a wall to clarify the location of a building or follow the traces of the author as a young boy across his home town. At times historical developments or events were discussed, usually because the texts were autobiographical in one way or another, concerning more recent Arab history, but now and then also reaching back into early Islamic times and civilization.

Success basically depended on the questions asked by the participants, in other words their readiness to admit their own shortcomings, to let others, colleagues, know that their knowledge was imperfect, their familiarity with language and civilization incomplete. Of course, no one, when asked directly, would ever deny the existence of such lacunas. But then, admitting shortcomings in private and exposing oneself as imperfect in front of others are two different things, and close observation of the group's behaviour during the meetings showed some hesitation here and there, now and then. Such hesitation was probably less evident as long as questions dealt with individual words (terms simply not traceable in dictionaries) or ethnographical details. Discussions only developed rather reluctantly beyond this, even though they would be necessary in order to improve the quality of many a book, given the state of publishing in the Arab world, where the author will not usually find someone at the publisher who is responsible for the book and prepared to discuss the whole text with him and suggest modifications and improvements.

Debates did arise during the workshops about leaving out some words, usually names, some passages considered redundant or contradictions within the text. Even these short debates turned out at times to be painful and precarious: painful for the author who tends to consider every word part of himself (thus intervention in the text by someone whose task it is to render it into another language is sometimes difficult to swallow); and for exactly this reason they were precarious, for during this kind of debate the usual harmony between author and translators was occasionally somewhat strained, and compromises had to be found between what the author considered his flesh and blood and what the translators (the few who had the courage to propose modifications or cuts in the text) considered should be changed. It was only in

one case that the opposite occurred, the author reshuffling large parts of his book and - very much to the dismay and despair of the translators - distributing new paragraphs, phrases and other additions and asking for several sentences to be dropped.

Aside from these incidents, however, the meetings were very harmonious and fruitful and the authors were extremely helpful, and this was certainly not only due to the fact that they were very glad and proud of the privilege to have their work translated into several languages at the same time, which has never happened before, and to have their translators flocking around them.

THE AUTHORS

They all came happily to Toledo.

Authors do not usually have to be lured out of their dens. Most of them like to travel to see the public who reads their literary production. In Toledo, they also seemed to enjoy meeting those individuals who had a secondary responsibility for their work, and especially meeting them in this particular town, situated on the edge of that region that still looms large in parts of the collective imagination in the Arab world —al-Andalus, Andalusia.

They were many and varied.

There was the professor of political sciences from Tripoli in Lebanon, quiet and friendly, catapulted by chance on to the international stage for the simple reason that one member of the *Mémoires* project discovered his small book about his home town in the 1950s and early 1960s, an impressive sketch of the development of modern Lebanon before the civil war.

There was the already famous novelist of mixed Saudi-Iraqi origin and sundry Arab passports, a pipe-smoking chronologist of contemporary psychological, social and political trends in the Arab world, a gentleman bravely resisting all too intensive cutting of his extensive report on Amman during the 1940s, i.e. in the shadow of the Second World War and its aftermath.

There were two (their workshops took place at the same time) authors who had already in their youth experienced the transition from their homelands to Europe and made this part of their respective autobiographies, one an Egyptian of Sudanese birth, a prose writer belonging to the “generation of the 1960s”, the other an Iraqi living in Paris, a poet with a strong attachment to Western surrealism, their different characters and diverse courses of life showing beautifully in their autobiographical texts that reach far beyond their childhood.

There was another Lebanese professor, of Arabic literature this time, very calm and with a deeply wounded relationship to his home country, which he describes in his (or his hero's) development during a span of time and with a shift of place from the 1940s in a northern Lebanese village to the end of the civil war in the capital, Beirut.

There was one embodiment of the recent history of Arabic literature, a cheerful and witty Egyptian, very eager (not always successfully) to help solve the linguistic problems he created by using a language so different from the one usually found in autobiographical writings, as his texts are “far beyond such bounds”.

There was a young Egyptian woman from a well-known family of film-makers leading the translators through a very different kind of (autobiographical) writing, a text without references to political or social life, a text exclusively about a woman's personal catastrophe, the loss of a child.

And finally (with the workshop being organized in Rabat), there was one of the great figures of Moroccan independence who, partly following the model of the best-known Arabic autobiographies, described his life and activities between the 1920s to the 1940s in Morocco.

They all deserve our gratitude, as they have taught us, the translators, and indirectly the European reading public, a lot — about their own activities and work, about Arabic language and literature, about the Arab world, and about the difficulties in making it understood in another language and another cultural environment.

Mémoires de la Méditerranée
Translation Workshops:
The Translators

IDENTIFICATION¹

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OUR IGNORANCE OF TRANSLATIONS

In general, we know very little about the translations that we read. It is a situation that is to be deplored. And not only from a scientific or an academic point of view. Aside from the interest that attaches to research into the theory or history of translation, there are reasons of another kind for deploring such ignorance.

In the first place, there are purely practical reasons connected with the exercise of the profession of translation. Very rarely do we translators get to know details of our colleagues' work, even though we may be able to form a fairly good idea by using our intuition.

In addition to this, however, there are far-wider-reaching reasons, reasons that affect us all. Ignorance as profound as that usually found surrounding translation, means that we keep ourselves within a kind of accepted minority (or marginalization) *vis-à-vis* an activity that plays a fundamental role in the constitution of our culture.

¹ Prior to setting these ideas down in print, I communicated them to Manuel C. Feria García and Miguel Vega Martín. Their comments were, as always, enlightening.

This ignorance of the conditions in which translations are undertaken is not common to other activities of a similar nature, be these scientific, artistic, industrial or handicraft-related. In advanced Western societies, individuals almost always enjoy access to a medium-to-high level of knowledge concerning the production of items or works of different types.

Every single one of us knows a lot, or is capable of getting to know a lot, about the conditions in which scientific research has been conducted in the sphere of history, for instance. Indeed, historians (like so many other specialists across a whole range of disciplines) are under an obligation to furnish a series of facts regarding the way in which they have conducted their work. And many more such examples could be cited. The reason for this general ignorance about translation seems clear. Whenever the issue of translators' footnotes is discussed, the main argument levied against their presence is usually that they interrupt the reading, that they come between the reader and the text. In other words, translators' footnotes would seem to be a breach of the pact of invisibility, the pact whereby the reader (or listener) of any given translation acts as though he were unaware that he was reading a translation and not the original, so that, by this means, he is that much better placed to be carried away and so achieve the illusion that the fiction is real or, alternatively, enjoy the best conditions for concentrating on the non-fictional discourse before him.

Yet this does not fully explain the enigma of why the process of translation is nearly always kept concealed in the deepest of shadows. Take motion pictures for example, those falling within the genre of fiction. Here too we find the pact of illusion. The audience trusts that nothing will interfere with the process whereby they manage to "believe" that the images they are seeing are true. Hence the reason for actors not normally looking at the camera.

And yet cinematographic illusion nevertheless does not bar viewers from gathering a great deal of data on the process of making a movie, whether through the so-called credits that come up at the end of the film, or through a series of detailed secondary sources (articles in magazines, specialized books, etc.). Very little of this happens with translation, outside the narrow confines of academic research or specialized discussion among professionals.

Translation is an activity of primordial importance in our civilization. We live surrounded by translations. Our knowledge, our fantasies, our ideologies, our religions are all fed by translated texts (and at times depend directly on them). Accordingly, to wish to know more about translations should be an understandable demand on the part of any individual in a democratic society or any consumer in a market economy. In the latter case, this is so because translations, as with any other product that is bought and sold, are open to fraud; and in the former case, because translation is closely linked to the perceptions of reality that are offered to us and from which we have to choose.

MY EXPERIENCE IN *MÉMOIRES DE LA MÉDITERRANÉE*

The above line of argument summarizes the reasons why it seems to me that it is high time: firstly, that experiences such as that of the *Mémoires de la Méditerranée* were made public, inasmuch as several translators met with each of the authors whose work they were translating; and, secondly, that a translator —I myself— without any work of special significance, dared to explain his ideas and work philosophy.

I therefore propose to give an account of my experience as one of the translators who took part in the *Mémoires de la Méditerranée* project, in my case through the Toledo School of Translators, an institution where I had the opportunity of attending two such encounters. The first of these, in June 1997, was with the Egyptian Raouf Musaad Basta, author of *The Ostrich Egg*, and the second, in July 1998, was with the Lebanese writer Rashid al-Daif, author of *Dear Mr Kawabata*.

However, I feel that it might be very useful for the purpose in hand if account were also taken of my translation of the autobiography *Fi al-Tufulah (On Childhood)* by the Moroccan Abdelmajid Benjelloun, which was included in the *Mémoires de la Méditerranée* series only in Spanish. Given that the author died in 1981 and that, due to it being a singular case insofar as Spanish was concerned, no meetings were held with other translators, a comparison between the technique used in this translation and that used for my versions of two other books may therefore prove fruitful.

The *On Childhood* experience was very different from the other two, not only because I never met with any other translators, but also because I was unable to make contact with the author. Yet this is in no way meant to imply that my meetings with the translators of *The Ostrich Egg* and *Dear Mr Kawabata* were devoid of utility or effect. Naturally, I learnt a lot from my colleagues and there were many clarifications made, decisions taken and questions raised by them that enhanced specific aspects of my translations. What I mean to say is that in the aspect which I regard as most important, namely, in my overall interpretation of each of the texts, I endeavoured to act individually.

THE PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING A WORK PHILOSOPHY

When translating, I try to apply the non-negotiable principle of fidelity. Fidelity to a (tacit) commitment, which I undertake *vis-à-vis* my community (Spanish readers) and which could be expressed as follows: “I, in my capacity as translator, give an assurance that this text is as close as possible to the original Arabic text”. This essentially implies neither seeking to make explicit anything that is insinuated, nor eliminating or adding anything by reason of ethical or aesthetic considerations, nor softening anything that might prove shocking, and, above all, respecting ambiguity.

This last point obliges the translator (if he accepts the principle of fidelity) to reduce his intervention in respect of the original to the maximum, never to block the original's potential for interpretation, and to give as little guidance or direction as possible as to any conclusions that the reader might draw from the text.

To my mind, this ideal neutrality of the translator —as somebody who strives not to provide readers with a text that is already interpreted (“predigested”)— has a limit in the case of literary, and more so still in the case of autobiographical texts. In such cases it would appear essential, for technical reasons (of readability), to search for an emotional tone that can be maintained throughout the narration.

But let us not go too fast here. This last assertion entails prior adoption of a stance requiring clarification. Compare the profession of translator (of autobiographical texts at least) to that of a stage actor. Personally, in all the above-mentioned cases I have opted for a stance that was as far removed as possible from the acting technique defended by B. Brecht, the so-called *Verfremdungseffekt* or “distancing effect”. That is to say, far from seeking to make the reader more aware and so assume a critical stance with regard to what he is reading, I have sought to achieve the opposite: I have always chosen to identify myself emotionally with the author and to transmit this emotion to the reader, so that he too comes to identify himself in a similar manner.

In order to make the author's emotional stance my own, I have in all cases used a technique and, without realizing it, have taken a specific idea for granted. The technique relies on a combination of intuition and interpretation of certain clues, and the idea is that any discourse, system of thought, book, or individual's experience of life can be reduced to a simple concept, and at times even to a single word.

In no case have I allowed (as far as possible) my tastes or opinions as to the original to influence my translation. My intention, while engaged in translating, has always been to adopt the perspective of each of the narrators of the autobiographies, put myself in their place, and strive to see the world through their eyes, even where their way of thinking or feeling felt alien to mine.

These are the principles that explain my approach as a translator of autobiographies. Let us now see how these principles have worked in practice.

THE THREE CASES

1. Identification with Raouf Musaad Basta

The Ostrich Egg enthused me from the very outset, due to its rebellious spirit, its hedonism, its insolent sincerity, its anarchy and its lack of respect for almost everything. I found it easy to identify with many of these traits (they are not too divorced from some of my own attitudes to life). I was subsequently able to talk to Raouf over a period of days and at some key moments, for example, when seated in the early hours of the morning on the stairs of St Andrew's Church (*San Andrés*) in Toledo, with another friend, a bottle of whisky and a glass filched from somewhere or other.

Later, during the meeting with the author and the translators, I was then able to concentrate on understanding certain passages that I found somewhat obscure, and to reaffirm my resolve to be completely faithful to the Arabic text. The way in which I managed to identify successfully with the author's approach to life ultimately owed more to the personal relationship, which seemed to come as confirmation of my previous suppositions. It was this that led to my definitive decision as to the emotional tone and general impression that I wished to convey.

In my opinion, *The Ostrich Egg* expresses a vitalistic yet disenchanting rebelliousness at the fleetingness of life and pleasure. This and Raouf's love of chaos were what I sought to reflect in my version. I was not quite able to accomplish this, however. Raouf's iconoclasm and his lack of respect for the Establishment did not sit well with the purist rules (linguistically speaking) of the Spanish publishing house where the book was published, and I still think that Raouf would never have written such faultless Spanish.

2. Identification with Rashid al-Daif

With Rashid, too, there arose a current of affection. When I met him, I already had a complete draft of *Dear Mr Kawabata*, but had not yet found the emotional tone for the Spanish version. The days spent in Toledo provided me with sufficient leads to take a decision, a decision that then took form, once back in Malaga, in the following revision of the draft. Rather than the book itself, it was the relationship with Rashid that supplied me with the key (or that is what I believe anyway). The life experience related in *Dear Mr Kawabata* expresses—in my opinion—bitter indignation at the defeats and failures that one suffers over the course of a lifetime. Indeed, the meeting with the author and the remaining translators provided me with a key in the form of a word: *qahr*, in the sense of “humiliation”.

The chat and contact with Rashid made me see, moreover, that he is a person who takes things, including words, very seriously, and I therefore endeavoured to instil this element in the choice of each and every term in my translation. His interest in my personal problems, his disheartened and hurt attitude towards Christianity and his respect for suicides were

the other foundations upon which I constructed my identification. And once again —as had been the case with Raouf— identifying was not something that I found especially difficult to do.

3. Identification with Abdelmajid Benjelloun

Everything connected with *On Childhood* was utterly different. This was not solely because I have never seen Abdelmajid Benjelloun or because I never held a meeting with his translators. There were two further reasons. On the one hand, I feel that the book is written from a number of emotional stances, and on the other, I find it very difficult to feel empathy for many of the attitudes to life expressed therein. Nonetheless, I do not think that I was any less faithful to this particular author than to Raouf or Rashid. My job is to create (based on what the book itself said and on intuition) a new sensitivity (for myself) from which I can then see the world as Abdelmajid saw it in the book. Needless to say I am less sure of having been totally successful. I shall always lack the confirmation that a meeting with the author might perhaps have afforded.

IN CONCLUSION

1. The first meeting between an author and his translator usually tends to be difficult. The author is hard put to avoid a certain degree of mistrust towards this stranger (very often a foreigner) who is going to touch something as intrinsically his own as a book, and even more so when personal memoirs are involved. As a translator, the only thing that I can say is that I can understand the authors. What has been said in the preceding pages shows that a translation is based on many decisions, possibly arbitrary and almost always lacking any demonstrable basis. And intuition can prove fallible, can it not?

2. As a reader, and since I am familiar with the way in which translations are done (mine and those of others), I miss the presence of a note in each book in which the translator would be able to explain the procedures he followed, whether or not he sought to be scrupulously faithful, whether he opted for an interpretative approach or retained the same level of ambiguity as the original, whether or not he searched for some specific emotional tone and whence this was drawn (does he know the author personally, did he try to identify with him?), and whether he was able to consult anybody (the author, other translators, speakers of the language in question) on knotty points in the original.

Until this happens, while the books we read fail to furnish more information on the details of the translation process, I, for one, am going to continue regarding translations with a certain degree of wariness, with a modicum of mistrust. I have always asked myself why it is, thanks to the information supplied on the packaging, that we know so much more about the biscuits and crackers that we eat than about the translations we read. Although for this, for our ignorance about translations, my colleagues —the translators— cannot be held to blame.

3. Meetings such as those held between the authors and translators of the works in the *Mémoires de la Méditerranée* collection serve to ensure the technical improvement of translations for obvious reasons: possibility of consulting the author on passages; exchange of opinions between translators on problems, etc. However, for translators who employ the technique of identification, it can be of absolutely vital importance. In a context such as that of literary translation, which gives rise to so many problematic points, few procedures can be more profitable than direct contact between the author and his translator.



REMEMBERING FOR TOMORROW

INTERVIEW WITH ALIYA MAMDUH¹

You are well known to both Arab and Western audiences thanks to your trilogy Habbat an-naftalin, al-Wala` (The Passion) and al-Gulama (The Lass), especially for the first novel, which has recently been translated into English under the title Mothballs. All three works demonstrate a marked desire to use memories as your principal tool, much in line with other major Arab writers. Do you feel that one can speak, as many critics do, of a definite autobiographical tendency among Arab authors, at least in earlier works?

I am not especially interested in the interpretations that people may make of books, either autobiographical or any other kind. What matters is the book and even more the creative literature. All writers, past and present, have started from a fact, a secret or an image arising from their existence and which they have waited a long time to reveal in order to re-establish an interrupted relationship between the writer and his ghosts and earliest visions. For example, in my real life I never got to know my mother, who died when I was only three years old. However, the chapter dedicated to the mother of the protagonist of *Mothballs* is written from the heart of a ten-year-old girl who loses her mother suddenly. So what do you do with the living and the dead surrounding you if you have to articulate the story once again from behind various

¹Interview held in Madrid with Iñaqi Gutiérrez de Terán.

masks in order to fit with what you want to tell? This is something that affects writers all over the world and is not the exclusive domain of Arab writers. We are, in a way, looking at a sort of “fictional autobiography”, as in *Childhood* by Nathalie Sarraute, *Women* and *Portrait du joueur* by Phillipe Sollers, *Recurring Mirror* by Alain Robbe-Grillet, *The Lover* by Marguerite Duras and dozens of other works written by Arabs and non-Arabs. Many of them took a step back and in doing so achieved a higher level of connection with their readers. We have to say “I” with simplicity, a simplicity that becomes selective if we really have something to tell. The first person is at the same time a strategy and a tactic. For me “I” is not equal to confession, but rather a form of approaching one’s own identity and that of others.

It seems that, apart from the “I”, in your novels there is an omnipresent “you”: Iraq, the birthplace, the land. Have all these years on the move from country to country given you a certain notion of “memory in exile”?

A few months ago in an interview for the press I said that every ten years I try to integrate myself in a country, but that I am never able to. From Baghdad to Beirut, from Rabat to England, and for now, until God decides otherwise, Paris. Beirut, to the same degree as Paris and earlier than Baghdad, made me repeat what a famous French traveller once said: “I like to feel foreign in all places: French in Austria, Austrian in France and both in Russia. It is the best way to be satisfied with one’s self anyplace”. When you leave your native land you end up recreating it over and over again. In all my works I always try to maintain my country in my heart like an ember that burns you from the inside if you keep it in and marks your face if you let it out. To create is to arrange and reinvent the cities and countries that we have left behind, and it’s a good thing to have confrontations between ourselves and our native land, without hostility or usurpation: a confrontation like that which I myself fought when I tried to clean and renew my first relationship with Baghdad and Iraq through my writing. On the page I move as if I were in my own personal domain. I am a sensitive writer, I trust my feelings. I listen, I taste and I smell how the city recreates its movements, how I free myself from its ties of holiness and its despotic authority. The city is not only stone and building, a network of communications and a history. The city is also us, the people who live in and with it. Some cities can push us to insanity, murder, suicide, emigration, exile or eternal passion. Why do we think of our countries as infallible beings when mankind is, above all, fallible?

Memory serves to reinvent ourselves and others. But don’t you think that memory often ends up betraying those who grasp at it? Don’t you feel that memory can become a ruse to falsify or conceal the past?

Memory betrays. It is like the lover who swears faithfulness to whoever she is with. And who may go back to the same lover but with different masks. But memory also represents one of the main attractions for an artist. I don’t think that any

writer can or has ever been able to remember everything that has gone through his memory. We easily forget both the good and the bad. Memory is a river that flows and receives mud, weeds and water from other streams which, in turn, cut through the territories of others. I have hidden things that I would have liked to remember if it were not for political, ethical and religious obstacles. At the same time, in *Mothballs* certain of the aspects shown do not coincide with reality, such as when I talk about the protagonist's stepmother. Memory reflects the truths that we want it to reflect. I don't mean lies, but skilful evasion. I would rather evade than lie.

A discernible element of your literary style is the use, evident in Mothballs, of three personal pronouns (I, you and she) to structure the narrative process on the basis of the protagonist's perceptions. Are we dealing with a new stylistic resource or is it more a desire to classify childhood images, fictitious or real, and define the process of transformation that certain memories undergo with the passing of time?

First of all, while the use of these three pronouns gives rise to a kind of confusion and unease in the reader, at the same time it gives the novelist a wide margin for action to cross over to the other side of the mirror. The first person is the fruit that ripened during the planning of the work and has subsequently been set to paper. The third person discovers, sometimes, complex relationships between the writer and the other person, the identity that you don't want to repeat. The second person represents what I call an "additional solution". We have to find solutions at all times so that the characters can continue asking questions. Of course, individual memory changes, is transformed, gets rid of certain parts and rescues others that we thought were extinguished, lost or dead. I can remember the veil of a woman in a quickly passing carriage more vividly than certain personality traits of the same woman. And it is from this veil that the fiction appears, to assist memory in forming truly complex and surprising realities.

You say that you carry Iraq in your heart "like an ember that burns you from the inside". How does an Iraqi writer of the diaspora handle her country's daily tragedy? What role does the fiction you referred to before play here?

I am Iraqi through and through, and each day that my country is exposed to extermination and danger I know what I can do. I take on my homeland and my culture not from a chauvinistic angle, but by expanding my presence within them and converting them into the main character of every novel I write; scrutinizing, contemplating, analysing and bearing witness to the abuses, ideological lies and obscenities of international politics for which my country and my people have paid such a high price. By writing about Iraq I first of all protect myself, but I also safeguard the artistic and cultural value system of one of the most illustrious and ancient nations in the world. Ultimately, by writing I oppose the attempts of the *other* to deprive me and alienate me as a writer and as an Iraqi citizen.

Truly, the pain of Iraq is always present, through the people, land and even linguistic turns of phrase, in the works of Aliya Mamduh and of so many other Iraqi writers who have left their country for one reason or another. Bitterness and anguish are reflected in the works of each. But while your countrymen, like Fadil al-Azzawi in his famous novel The Last Angels, express this bitterness directly, with a preponderance of action and a peculiar magic realism covered with irony and sarcasm, you prefer a more intimate style of expression, centred on descriptions and feelings of the characters.

A Swiss journalist writing about *Mothballs* said the following: “In the end, the only thing the novel leaves behind is an immense bitterness”. When Fadil al-Azzawi composed his novel he had before him, as do all writers, many formulas and forms to choose from. He ended up choosing irony, sarcasm and humour as valid tools to defend his country and culture. In my opinion, sarcasm occasionally acts as a mask for a tragic character, and is at the same time a form of attack and defence. Iraqi bitterness, in all Iraqi authors, is immediately perceived through the language used, the actions of the characters and many other things. This is an ethical attitude that is diametrically opposed to submission. In essence, this bitterness represents, in generally all true literary texts, the path to liberty.

MY AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL EXPERIENCE

Abdelkarim Ghallab

I have approached autobiographical writing on four occasions in which, without regard for chronological order or dealing with all my personal experiences, I have covered four periods of my life. I still have left a major period of my journalistic, political and cultural activity which I consider to be incomplete, which continues to be fruitful, and which links my most recent experiences in this area with the early times I fortunately lived. I do not know whether what beats so strongly in my heart, in my mind and in my self will one day see light as a manuscript.

My first attempt at autobiography was *Sab`at abwab (The Seven Doors)*. In this novel I set out, straight from the heart, a series of personal experiences arising from the nationalist movement and the business of life, politics and journalism, whose light brightened time, space and usurped freedom. In this work various types of characters come and go, exercising their freedom in an unknown and untouchable world, enclosed by pressures and pitfalls, charged with activity and vitality, in which dignity dies, crime nests, the name of the law lives condemned, and censure and punishment are opposed. This was a rite of initiation that few people experienced as I did, with one's heart sheltered in tolerance, cradled in a faith for the future, wrapped in a mystic vision of abnegation and at all times prepared for sacrifice in the interest of freedom.

My second attempt revived memories of my early days in *Sifr al-takwin* (*The Book of Formation or Genesis*). Life was in its dawn and accompanying an innocent newborn who did not celebrate family life, as his family knew more about girls than boys. He was the first boy in the second generation of a small family closed in on itself, in an old neighbourhood of an old city. A boy who ventured into a childhood surrounded by obstacles that impeded the newly sprung flowers from growing and blooming in the open air. He ventured to enter a society where any unfamiliar gesture was “a sin” that adults, and much less children, could not commit. He ventured to learn from the alphabet and the words to the concepts of the Koran and the principles of the oneness of God, passing through the verses of the major pre-Islamic poets (the *Muallaqat*) and of the moderns. He had to accept the challenge of crossing the “threshold of sin” when he read *Calila e Dimna* or *A Thousand and One Nights*, since in the eyes of the Koranic school *fqih* the child had fallen into the deepest of sins by taking up his time with legends and fables that diverted him from the domain of the rules of ritual ablution and prayer. Later he would risk revolutionary reading such as *al-Urwat al-uzqa* (*The Firmest Bond*) and *Why the Muslims Fell Behind and All the Others Progressed*. This is how the boy abandoned adolescence and entered into the stage of formation. Guided by his nationalist teachers, he would plan his future in the field of culture, thought and politics. He would rid himself of the atmosphere of vital and intellectual oppression and march towards one of such relative openness that a city enclosed in its traditions could offer; a city which, nevertheless, lived liberating experiences, burning eras and erasing all traces of time to leave proof of its existence and live a life of openness without discomforts or want.

The Book of Formation not only delved into the formation of the individual, but also the formation of the city in a time of creation and dedication shared by its youths and adolescents, interchanging their experiences in the fight to rid themselves of the past. The city pushed me to venture into all ambits until I became myself. I started reading every book that fell into my hands, even when its content was superior to my capacity for comprehension. I started writing, even knowing that whatever I wrote would be covered in oblivion, abandoned in a drawer, or enveloped in the flames of an unholy fire. I penetrated all areas and was the young man who left the *Book of Formation* for... the unknown.

The third incursion represented a leap into old age that I considered unjust. Accordingly, I wrote *al-Shaykhukha al-zalima* (*An Unjust Old Age*). I don't know whether many old people have had the opportunity to speak of their experiences in this stage of life, but I know that as my age advanced, I felt that I was fighting on ground where few had ventured. Frequently, it was old age that won. And frequently she stripped her guides of their resources and their strength, while keeping her own to bring them to their knees or send them running in retreat. But again, something inside me said that I should throw myself into the adventure, as neither submission nor retreat was familiar to me. “Old age” was a personal experience that did not depend on me, and yet I exposed my pen to the chance to court her, distract her and spar with her. I looked back to her first warnings. Since my earliest childhood, she had insisted on demonstrating her presence,

had insisted on living with the boy in moments of physical, mental and emotional weakness, and had turned him into an old man at the age of twenty. I sought revenge by writing about those episodes, trying to be a young man at the age of eighty.

This autobiography was an act of rebellion against old age and, even today, I still believe that the human capability of rebellion makes this fight possible. Frequently, life behaves despotically towards a person and imposes a certain way of thinking or acting. I, however, always wanted to impose on life the thoughts or behaviour I had chosen for myself, convinced that defeat begins on the day that a man —especially an intellectual— submits himself to the whims of life, as if he were not life itself.

An Unjust Old Age is, as a I see it, a once-in-a-lifetime experience, as I will not be old twice. I said farewell to old age and carried on with my life. I separated her from my existence by my own will and against hers. For that I am in debt to my will and to my faith in the human being, master of his own destiny and of his life. A true human being does not allow anything or anyone to take over his life, unless he is unworthy of both life and the human condition.

The fourth effort at autobiography covered the second phase of my life, during which I emigrated to Egypt to expand my studies. This was a stage of profound transformation from a social, educational and intellectual stance. The abrupt leap from Fez to Cairo was like a thundering whirlwind that devastated my past and laid before me a new model which was not totally unfamiliar thanks to my readings of Egyptian writers and thinkers, and given my interest in the history of that country, past and present. Nevertheless, when destiny threw me into the ocean that is Cairo, I was not prepared to swim in that turbulent sea, as I had just left the serene, modest and self-absorbed Fez. Two opposing worlds united by the call to prayer from the hundreds of minarets of Fez and the thousands of minarets of Cairo, or by the invocation of God any time one felt incapable of facing a new challenge. This is nothing more than a trust in God that the Egyptians express with the phrase “Leave it to God”, and the Moroccans with “Trust in God... hand your troubles to Him”...

In Cairo I found another world: the world of the university with all of its literary and official personalities, the world of politics with all its statisticians and politicians, and the world of the press with all of its shared and opposing opinions. Contradictions that provoke mental commotion, and yet produce pleasure and raise you above the routine of naive acceptance to the sublime freedom of choosing to accept or reject.

Cairo's world was a deafening world. And today I am thankful to have released the boisterous man living behind the other shy introverted one. Had I not lived in Cairo —with all of the difficulties brought on by the Second World War— I would

have been a different man and would have needed a winged fantasy to draw it... I would never have written *al-Qahira tabuhu an asrariha* (*Cairo Reveals its Secrets*), my fourth foray into autobiography.

Cairo revealed the secrets that it had hidden from history. Perhaps the 1952 revolution buried the secrets that Cairo had lived out loud in the preceding era. All revolutions are interpreted as a turnaround that erases the preceding period. But justice is not done to Cairo if its children deny that period of cultural, social and political splendour. That its children would chronicle the characteristics from that era is not in detriment of the revolution. However, there was not a trace of those characteristics. One could say that Cairo's inhabitants were ashamed to mention them. And that is the greatest of injustices and the greatest negligence...

In my autobiography on Cairo I was freed from the "shame" imposed by the revolutionary mentality of Egyptian intellectuals that leads them to turn their backs on the glorious pre-revolutionary period. What I did was allow Cairo to reveal its secrets to a pen that had not fallen under the control of revolutionary censure.

When I write my memories, what I am least attracted by are events. The story of the life of a person interests no one. I am much more drawn to what hides behind, and so in my four autobiographies you will not find many aspects of my life, aspects that you might be able to discover from those who knew them. At times when I read the memoirs of scientists or writers, I find them insipid. The author could have written another name on the cover of the book in place of his own and nothing at all would have changed... The philosophy of life offered me numerous opportunities to pick up the thread of an event, whether or not it had taken place in my presence, and convert it into life's mystery, negatively or positively. There is also that which joins me to another and which joins that person to me. On occasion I have found myself writing the biography of another person, in which the reader identifies more with this other than the other identifies with me. This other is not necessarily a person; it could be a street, a place, a house, a jail, an idea that floats on the horizon of knowledge, or a philosophical or mystical vision. And it could be a person like myself or different, or someone insignificant who leaves no mark on life, but who, in spite of this, has a place in memory and revives when memory analyses an attitude, tells an anecdote or remembers an event.

It is possible that my endeavours are a mixture of novel and autobiography. Be that as it may, I consider that each work has a special taste, as I use different technical elements for novels and autobiographies. Each has its own distinct technical space.

I live autobiography as if reliving life, with all of its aesthetic values, its boldness and details. I do not live them by merely remembering, but rather by being moved and moving. Perhaps this has to do with the fact that I live my first life long and wide and deep. Nothing and no one says something in my presence and is accepted. Everything provokes a reaction in me that simultaneously roots itself in my mind, my heart, my conscious and my feelings. This is why you can see that I live life a number of times. I don't repeat it, but rather I live it adopting a positive or negative attitude, requesting accountability, criticizing or analysing... I do not disdain even the trivial aspects of life. It is true that the waters of the river never flow backwards. However, rivers carrying much water never cease to flow, as if evoking their existence.

The greatness of the art of autobiography is the evocation that imbues the second life with value and a sense, sharing with features of the first and yet different. For this reason I have the impression that had I not written these works, I would not have lived even once. And that would have been a waste for a man of letters who can live life twice and let his friends be witnesses to it the second time, after destiny impeded them from sharing it with him the first.

There may be an aura of narcissism in all this. It is possible that others—even friends— have no interest in living parts of your life with you. But a writer's happiness is never exempt from a certain "well-understood narcissism". Something in this narcissism convinces me that I have given all that I could give and have used all the "technical" resources—if literature indeed needs "technical resources"— to write when I wrote of autobiography. Did I succeed?

I leave the answer to my readers, especially to the critics. I am happy when the response is positive, but my happiness is not diminished when it is not. Not because I am proud of what I have written or because I write for myself, but because I consider that in both the negative and the positive there is a lesson to add to the lessons that I have received.



REMEMBERING FOR TOMORROW

THE WAY FORWARD

Rüdiger Stephan
European Cultural Foundation

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Around a decade ago, the European Cultural Foundation decided to "reinvent the Mediterranean".¹ The ECF is the only northern foundation to have made this geocultural region a priority for action. For is not the Mediterranean the cradle of Europe, the source of its spiritual and cultural memory?

In 1995, in Barcelona, the foundations for a Euro-Mediterranean political, economic and cultural partnership were laid by the governments of the European Union and 12 coastal countries of the southern shore. Experts are in agreement that the construction of this partnership is not yet very advanced, particularly in the cultural domain.

This situation does not exactly reflect the evolution in civil society. There are 814 bodies from 43 countries —research centres, associations, foundations, networks— that work, at least partially, in the Mediterranean field: of these, 588 are based in 24 Mediterranean rim countries and 226 are based in 19 non-Mediterranean European countries. Perhaps yet more astonishing is that among 133 listed cultural organizations, 72 (more than 50%) are based in Northern Europe.² This simple statistic demonstrates the need for deeper analysis in order to create the conditions for strengthening North-South links between civil society organizations and cultural ones in particular.

¹ This phrase is borrowed from the book *La Méditerranée réinventée* by Paul Balta, published in 1992.

² See the *Répertoire méditerranéen* published in 1999 by the Fondation René Seydoux with the support of the European Cultural Foundation.

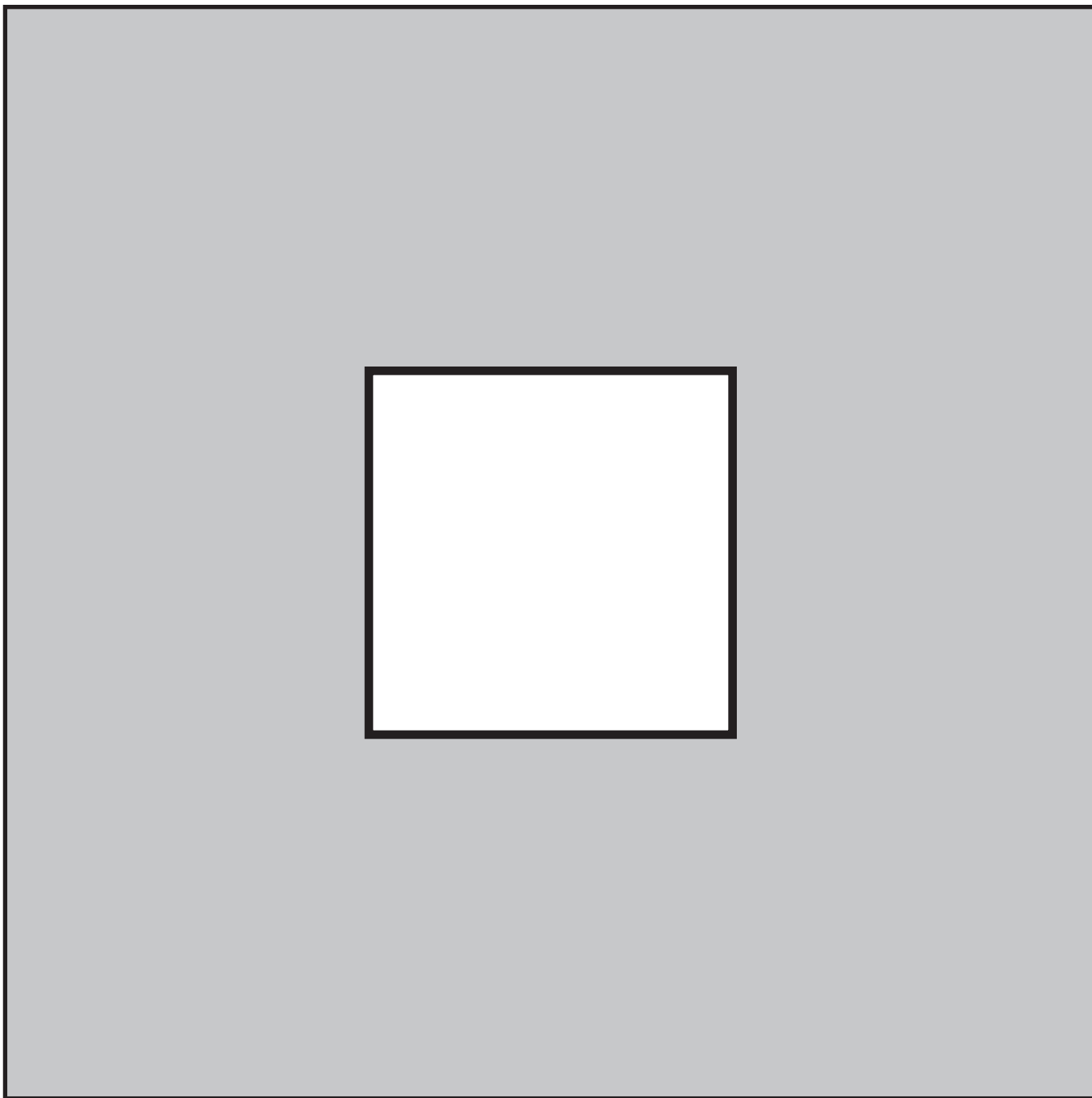
The start of a new century has been, for the European Cultural Foundation, the beginning of a reflection on the future orientation of its activities. We could say today that intercultural dialogue, both within Europe and beyond its borders, will remain, as in the past, a strong priority, one of the privileged regions being the Mediterranean. From 1998 until now, the Foundation has financially supported 36 Mediterranean projects. The Foundation being an operative foundation, it has developed three of its own major programmes, all of which were aimed at intercultural dialogue: *Diagnosis*, intellectual dialogue between the Arab world and Europe; the *Escuela de Traductores de Toledo*, a centre for transmitting European and Arabic cultures; and *Mémoires de la Méditerranée*, the subject of this book. These programmes, like our grants policy, will be reviewed in the light of two new future perspectives.

The first is that of an enlarged Europe which, in the medium or long term, will include South-Eastern Europe and Turkey and, perhaps, further into the future, some countries from the South or East of the Mediterranean. While political and economic cooperation with the Arab world goes on, the movement for cultural integration continues in the North. This process, which concerns European society in its entirety, is accompanied by major challenges for which cultural cooperation must find answers.

The second perspective for the future is based upon a strong recognition of the importance of culture for the development of society. The secular, current conflict in the Balkans has proven, as clearly as possible, the role of culture in the affairs of "war and peace". Culture and security, culture and religion, culture and sustainable development are the current topics on the agenda. It is in this new context that intercultural dialogue will take place around us as well as across European borders.

The Foundation has already taken a step forward, from the "translation of cultures" to the "translators of culture". The first of these cultural workshops was organized in Toledo, in cooperation with its closest partners, the *Escuela de Traductores* and *Transeuropéennes*, for advanced students, young intellectuals, artists and writers from the Mediterranean, on the themes of diversity and cultural transfer in a European context.

The *Mémoires de la Méditerranée* will give way to the "Médiateurs de la Méditerranée".



REMEMBERING FOR TOMORROW

Dear Mr Kawabata

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