



AWEJ Vol.3 No.1 March 2012

pp.190-200

Faithful Translation of Poetry: Abdul Wahid Lulua
Translating The Waste Land

Rima Eid Asi

English Department

Al-Zaytoonah Private University of Jordan

Abstract:

This study aims to show that a good translation of poetry provides the reader with a similar effect to that gained by reading the original text. It draws upon the importance of faithful translation as presented by Horst Frenze, in “The Art of Translation”. This paper attempts to introduce a case in point: Abdul Wahid Lulua’s translation of *The Waste Land* and its effect on the Arab reader. Although *The Waste Land* challenges any translator, Lulua’s gift enabled him to use his imaginative powers freely and produced a work of art which could stand on its own as an original work. His version thus created a standard work, which has captured the Arabic mind satisfyingly and thoroughly. It is this mastery of translation which gives the Arabic text its genuineness, making it look as if it were originally written in Arabic, despite confinement to the foreign original. Such a translation contributes to the development of literary works through professed cases of intellectuality, without distorting the original texts.

KeyWords: Faithful Translation, poetry, genuineness, Abdul Wahid Lulua, *The Waste Land*.

Introduction:

The rendering of poetry into another language has always been a debatable matter, since a large number of critics have emphasized the difficulty of translating extraordinary poems. Across the ages critics have raised grave doubts over the feasibility of translation of poetry. It has been claimed that it is not possible for anyone to combine in another language the thoughts, the emotions, the style, the form, and the effect of a poem. Eliot's poem has influenced different Arab readers, who are not fluent in English, indirectly through Lulua's excellent translation.

The Iraqi critic is a specialist in English literature and literary criticism and has translated more than 40 books, including three plays of Shakespeare and *The Waste Land*. Lulua's is one of the most distinguished Arab translators who presented his translation of *The Waste Land* in 1980 to the Arab reader. Before that date, Eliot's poem was translated in full for four times by other Arab translators: the first by the two Arab poets Adonis and Yousef al-Khal under the title of *الأرض الخراب* [*The Ruined Land*] (1958); the second by Dr. Fa'iq Matta, included in his book entitled *اليوت* [*Eliot*] (1966); the third by Lewis 'Awadh under the title of *الأرض الخراب* [*The Ruined Land*] (1968); the fourth by Youssef al-Youssef under the title of *الأرض اليباب* [*The Waste Land*] (1975).

Lulua has presented the fifth full translation of *The Waste Land* with a critical view to the poem and the poet in his book entitled [*T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land: The Poet and the Poem*] *ت. اس اليوت الأرض اليباب: الشاعر والقصيدة*. It seems that fidelity is the principle on which this translation was based; Lulua preserved Eliot's verse form and substance in many ways; he also perceived the metrical and rhyming schemes of the original.

Definition of Translation:

Ravis Varma, in ‘Literary Translation and Cultural Integration’, defines literary translation as follows:

Literary translation is a text in a target language that represents other pre-existing text in some other language. It is an interpretation by enactment and like its original strives to be a verbal object whose value is inseparable from the particular words used. It attempts to give the reader the same image and the same delight which the reading of the work in original language would afford any reader who is familiar with the foreign language while it yet always remains foreign to him. (1990, p.1)

Robert Escarpit, in his essay “Creative Treason as a Key to Literature”, defines translation as “being the passage from one linguistic environment to another, it is liable to the most spectacular kind of errors, factual errors” (1967, p.16). Nevertheless, the study of influence between literary works through translation is a major area of investigation in the field of comparative literature. E. Gertzler, in his book Contemporary Translation, realizes that the translator is required to painstakingly reveal “competence as literary critic, historical scholar, linguistic technician, and creative artist.”(1993, p.7) Mona Baker, in her book In Other Words: A Course book on Translation, recognizes “that a reader’s cultural and intellectual background determine[s] how much sense s/he gets out of a text.”(1996, p.14)

Who is the Faithful Translator?

All of these definitions would take us a step further towards the meaning behind what is meant by faithful translation. George Szirtes, in his article “A Faithful Translation” asserts that we think we know what we mean by the expression “faithful translation”.

It means not putting in too much that isn't there; trying to maintain a respectable degree of similarity of tone and form; and hoping that the impression made on the reader in the receiving language resembles, as closely as possible (as closely as you can judge) the impression made on the reader in the original language. (2009, p.1)

Horst Frenze, in “The Art of Translation” has a remarkable point of view regarding the translation of poetry; he believes that considerable “agreement exists that poetry should be translated into poetic form, but there is less agreement on the question whether or not the same verse form, rhyme scheme, etc., should be used in translation” (1973, p.109). He believes that almost “all authorities maintain that faithfulness should be adhered to in the process of translating, but they do not always mean the same thing by faithfulness (1973, p.111). After presenting a number of perspectives, Frenz asks, “if there is any justification for calling translating an art?” (1973, p.119). In his attempt to answer this question, he says:

It is clear that a translator must bring sympathy and understanding to the work he is to translate. He must be the original author's most intimate, most exact, in short, his best reader. But he must do more than read. He must attempt to see what the author saw, to hear what he heard, to dig into his own life in order to experience anew what

the author experienced... The translator as well as the writer must be sensitive to the mythological, historical, and social traditions reflected in a language and must use words to convey not only sounds but also rhythm, gesture, expression, melody, color, and association (1973, p.119-120).

However, his answer to the question about calling translating an art stems from his confidence in the importance of the translator's role:

However, it should be pointed out that translating is neither a creative art nor an imitative art, but stands somewhere between the two.... The translator must be creative, a "maker"; at the same time, he must submit to the reality of the writer whom he is translating. Thus translating is a matter of continuous subconscious association with the original, a matter of meditation (1973, p.120).

Finally, Frenz expresses his hope that writers will follow the dictum of Andre Gide who has expressed his point of view that every creative writer is supposed to serve his country by translating at least one foreign work that suits his talent and temperament to enrich his own literature. "Only then will the position of the translator become more respected, will the quality of translations improve, and will we be less hesitant to speak of translating as an art" (1973, p.121).

Lulua's Faithful Translation of *The Waste Land*:

Mariam M. al-Serkal, in her article "Lost in Translation? Never if You Keep These Points in Mind", mentions Lulua's belief that it is essential for the translator of poetry to love it, and that "the translator needs to understand the culture and history of the source when translating poems (2009, p 23). She Quotes Lulua's saying: "If the

translator is unaware of the cultural meaning behind a word then this can lead to the poem's distortion and the whole essence of the poem can get lost" (ibid). He identifies three general principles when translating literature: "The translator should be well grounded in his own language as well as the foreign language, he should have an excellent command of a language's history and how it developed over time" as well as "knowing the culture of the language" (ibid). Explaining why he translated *The Waste Land*, he says:

"I translated *The Waste Land* into Arabic for the fifth time because there were defects in the translation. The translated expressions meant different things than what was originally intended in the original text, which is why it is important for translators to understand the history and culture of a language" (ibid).

It seems that Lulua believes in utter faithfulness to the sense, rhythm, meter and rhyme, as far as it is possible, in transferring from English to Arabic. Here is an exemplary passage taken from the opening lines where Eliot echoes quotations from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*:

April is the cruelest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.
Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers.
Summer surprised us, coming over the Starnbergersee
With a shower of rain; we stopped in the colonnade.

And went on in sunlight, into the Hofgarten.

And drank coffee, and talked for an hour (Eliot, 1964. p.1-11).

This opening is a reversal of Chaucer's image where spring is a season of life renewed joyfully after the "death" of winter. In Christianity April is the month of resurrection. In Eliot's poem, April is described as the cruelest month because it brings life to death. This first segment introduces one of the poem's major themes, that is, the growing pains involved in any revival. It is the first allusion to the idea that people are dead in life. Derek Traversi, in his book *T.S. Eliot: The Longer Poems*, depicts how April which is normally the month of rebirth, has become "the month which produces in men momentary flowerings of intuitive life in a soil which has no nourishing qualities" (1976, p. 24).

The above quoted verses establish the picture of the world that Eliot wants to present. The images employed here fill out the initial impression that the world in this poem is characterized as cruel and bleak. Such paradoxical and strange images create a sense of disorder. John Peck, in his book *How to Study a Poet*, reveals how the conjunction here of rain and summer suggests "that a traditional order has been lost, and even the seasons are all awry" (1988, p.99). The snow that "kept us warm" suggests the same effect too. In an ironic and paradoxical situation, winter has kept the Wastelanders warm by covering them with a blanket of forgetful snow, while summer came and surprised them by bringing with it a "shower of rain".

An ideal translation of this passage would attempt to solve specific questions of phrasing, and look for some Arabic equivalent of the intricate variety of rhythm and allusions. It would also seek to reflect the echo of language and metaphoric structure. Fortunately, Lulua has strikingly achieved a high quality of translation:

نيسان أفسى الشهور، يخرج
الليلك من الأرض الموات، يمزج
الذكرى بالرغبة، يحرك

خامل الجذور بغيث الربيع.
 الشتاء دفأنا، يغطي
 الأرض بتلج نساء، يغذي
 حياة ضئيلة بدرنات يابسة.
 الصيف فاجأنا، ينزل على بحيرة (ستارنبركر)
 بزخة مطر توقفنا بذات العمد،
 ثم واصفنا لنا المسير إذ طاعت الشمس،
 وشرينا قهوة، ثم تحدثنا لساعة (Lulua, 1980, p. 11 -1).

The two texts have got the same number of lines and they can be regarded as fully corresponding. The English 11 lines are met with 11 Arabic lines. The Arabic version is less in number of words and different in rhyme. However, the linguistic and technical features of the Arabic translation are indeed made to come as close to those of the original as can be imagined. Arabic equivalents associated with alien cultural images are used, which make the original image appear clearer, with the same effect, and supply the Arabic language with fresh images. Such recombination of the original lines does not make them look musical, which is a primary feature of verse; nor does it seem to serve the structure of the Arabic lines; it rather breaks the grammar of Arabic language. Contrary to Arabic norms of structuring a sentence, some sentences begin with the subject nouns "الصيف" و "الشتاء" (as literally as the original does).

The translator preserves most of the technical features of the original (concerning rhythm or tempo, sequence of ideas, tone, and point of view) in a completely different linguistic and cultural matrix. He ideally produces a kind of translation that carries the general cultural and linguistic parameters of the source text. Lulua's translation matches with Lawrence Venuti's preference for the technique of Foreignization over Domestication as described in his book *The Translator's Invisibility* (1995). Jeremy Munday, in his book *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Applications*, believes that if Foreignization is applied to a translation, the target text readers will feel

that the translator is “visible” and they will tell “they are reading a translation” (2001, p. 147). This solution would highlight the importance of translators according to Venuti.

Conclusion:

Lulua loves poetry; therefore, he excels in poetic translation. He captures the essence and the rhythm of *The Waste Land* by understanding the true meaning of Eliot’s words. He is not a poet himself, but appreciates and enjoys poetry. He is a faithful translator who is capable of revealing to the Arab reader the various elements of a wonderful poem like

The Waste Land.

About the author

Dr. Rima Eid Asi Moqattash is a Jordanian creative writer, literary critic (Secretary-General of the Jordanian Critics Organization), literary translator, and Assistant Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the English Department, Al-Zaytounah Private University of Jordan. She has composed three books (two in Arabic and one in English), in addition to several articles in both languages.

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