



## La Part de l'étranger. La traduction de la poésie dans la culture arabe. Essai critique, by Kadhim Jihad Hassan

Shawkat M. Toorawa

To cite this article: Shawkat M. Toorawa (2012) La Part de l'étranger. La traduction de la poésie dans la culture arabe. Essai critique, by Kadhim Jihad Hassan, Middle Eastern Literatures, 15:2, 200-208, DOI: [10.1080/1475262X.2012.695689](https://doi.org/10.1080/1475262X.2012.695689)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1475262X.2012.695689>



Published online: 10 Aug 2012.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 35



View related articles [↗](#)

## Book Review

---

### La Part de l'étranger. La traduction de la poésie dans la culture arabe. Essai critique

KADHIM JIHAD HASSAN

Paris: Sindbad; Arles: Actes Sud, 2007, 352 + iv pp., €26.00, ISBN 978-2-742-76744-1

To call Kadhim Jihad Hassan versatile is to understate matters.<sup>1</sup> He is 'maître de conférence' at the Institut National de Langues et Civilisations Orientales in Paris, where he teaches Arabic language, Arabic literature, and translation theory. He is a published poet, with three collections to his name. As a literary critic and historian, he ranges widely across Arabic literature in his articles, essays and books, having broached *inter alia* Imru' al-Qays, al-Ma'arrī, al-Tawhīdī, Maḥmūd Darwīsh,<sup>2</sup> and a comprehensive overview of the Arabic novel.<sup>3</sup> And he has translated Badr Shākīr al-Sayyāb, his own poetry, and prose accounts of saints' miracles into French.<sup>4</sup> But it is his roster of translations into Arabic that are most striking: the first free verse translation of Dante's *Commedia*,<sup>5</sup> works by Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Jean Genet, Juan Goytisolo, Philippe Jaccottet,<sup>6</sup> Rainer Marie Rilke, and all of Arthur Rimbaud. Given all this translatorly activity, it comes as no surprise, therefore, that Hassan has strong views about the art, craft, and nature of translation, all of which form the subject of *La part de l'étranger*.

Hassan states in his preface that he is attempting a new kind of investigation ('un nouveau type de questionnement', p. 15), one that goes beyond the usual focus on incorrectly translated words and meanings ('les fautes lexicales et les contresens commis', p. 11). Early on, in a prefatory section entitled 'Liminaire', Hassan discloses the way of translating of which he is an advocate:

---

<sup>1</sup>As Hassan is little cited in Anglophone scholarship, I take the liberty of providing selected bibliographical information in the course of this review. Note that he also publishes as Kāzīm Jihād.

<sup>2</sup>Kāzīm Jihād, *Le labyrinthe et le géomètre: essais sur la littérature arabe classique et moderne suivis de Sept figures proches* (Croissy-Beaubourg: Editions Aden, 2008) includes the following essays, closely related to material in the present volume: 'Rimbaud est encore à venir'; 'De l'allégresse de toute révolte (Traduire *Un captif amoureux* de Jean Genet)'; 'Pour Derrida (en le traduisant)'; 'Deux lectures de Juan Goytisolo'; 'Avez-vous dit: *absence d'oeuvre?* (à propos de Georges Henein)'; 'Le vide pacifié (Jacques Lacarrière, lecteur de Yûnus Emrî)'; and 'Mahmoud Darwish ou le miracle de l'amitié'.

<sup>3</sup>Kadhim Jihad, *Le roman arabe (1834–2004): bilan critique* (Arles: Sindbad, 2006).

<sup>4</sup>Kadhim Jihad, ed., *Le Livre des prodiges, anthologie des karâmât des saints de l'islam*, traduction suivie d'une étude (Arles: Actes-Sud, 2002).

<sup>5</sup>Kāzīm Jihād, *Al-Kūmūdiyā al-ilāhiyya* (Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-'Arabiyya lil-Dirāsa wal-Nashr/UNESCO, 2002), which regrettably goes unmentioned in the 'Select Bibliography' (337–52).

<sup>6</sup>The Swiss poet Jaccottet, probably (undeservedly) the least well-known writer in this list, won the 2003 *Prix Goncourt de la Poésie* for his own work, and is also an acclaimed translator of Goethe, Góngora, Hölderlin, Leopardi, Mandelstam, Mann, Musil, Rilke and Ungaretti.

A minority position, and one still subject to questions and doubts, it [= the new way of translating] asserts itself and is undertaken. Practised underground or discreetly since time immemorial, it has only recently been elaborated theoretically. It does not see translation as an always possible undertaking, but as a shifting impossibility, something interdicted that we must negotiate. It finds its roots in the practice and reflections of the German Romantics and regards as an emblematic figure, Hölderlin, a major poet and translator of Latin and Greek poets into German. (p. 16)

It is no accident that Hassan entitles his work *La part de l'étranger*—this is an evocation of the French historian, translator and translation theorist, Antoine Berman (d. 1991), and of Heidegger, whose ‘Tell me what you think of translation, and I shall tell you who you are’ (about Hölderlin) Hassan quotes in French (p. 19).<sup>7</sup>

\* \* \*

The study is divided into three parts. Part One, ‘Traduction et totalité (Pour une conception multidisciplinaire de la traduction)’ (pp. 13–117, 303–14) is, as the title suggests, an attempt to conceptualise a multidisciplinary theory of translation. Hassan begins by surveying views of some of the most astute 20th-century western theorists of translation (of poetry in particular), notable among whom are Benjamin, Derrida, Goethe, Heidegger, Hölderlin, and Ricoeur. Hassan moves effortlessly between these and other theorists, including a number not often (enough) invoked in discussions of translation, such as Eric Cheyfitz and his 1991 *The Poetics of Imperialism: Translation and Colonization from the Tempest to Tarzan*,<sup>8</sup> and Tejaswini Niranjana’s *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism and the Colonial Context* (1992), among others.

Part Two, ‘La Traduction dans la culture arabe (Survol historique et théorique)’ (pp. 119–58, 314–19), is also an overview, this time of Arabic theory of translation. In this short section, Hassan first surveys translation in classical Arabic culture and its avoidance (*‘éviterement’*) of poetry, and then looks at such translations undertaken in the early modern and modern periods: we are thus taken on a brief journey from al-Jāhīz (d. 869) to the journal *Shi‘r* (1957–70). Hassan writes that the purpose of Parts One and Two is to prepare the reader for Part Three, by establishing a methodology (*‘protocole de travail’*, p. 10) based on a strict vision of translation as elaborated by selected philosophers, theorists of poetics and practitioners.

The five chapters that constitute Part Three, entitled ‘Comparative Approaches’ (pp. 159–302, 319–36), are the heart of this study, although, to be sure, the first 150 pages are a useful contribution to thinking about translation *into* Arabic, a direction in translation that scholarship has typically ignored in favor of translation *from* Arabic.<sup>9</sup> In Part Three,

<sup>7</sup>‘Sage mir, was du vom Übersetzen hältst, und Ich sage dir, wer Du bist’. M. Heidegger, *Holderlin’s Hymne ‘Der Ister’* (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klosterman, 1942), 76.

<sup>8</sup>Hassan references the 1991 edition rather than Cheyfitz’s expanded 1997 one: this may be because much of the research for *La part de l'étranger* was undertaken, as Hassan himself notes: ‘a little more than ten years ago’ (p. 9); cf. Kadhim Jihad Hassan, ‘La Traduction poétique chez les arabes’ (Doctoral diss., Sorbonne, 1995).

<sup>9</sup>But see, for example, Margaret Litvin, *Hamlet’s Arab Journey: Shakespeare’s Prince and Nasser’s Ghost* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), in which the question of the translation (in all its meanings) of ‘Hamlet’ is analysed.

Hassan provides the examples that underscore the need—dire, in his view—for a poetics and theory of translation. His specific choice of translators and translations, which he subjects to close comparative study, he deems ‘representative’ (p. 158), going on to explain that ‘[t]heir impact, but also the richness of the problems they exhibit, explains my choices’ (p. 158). It would have been desirable, therefore, to have an index of all poems treated in this study. (Indeed, it would be desirable for *indices* to become *de rigueur* in scholarly French publishing . . .)

\* \* \*

Hassan opens with Egyptian ‘philosopher and sometime poet’ ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Badawī’s translation of Lorca’s ‘*Llanto por Ignacio Sánchez Mejías*’, noting that:

In comparing Badawī’s translation with the original, we are confronted with a number of stopgap measures [*‘pis-aller’*], omissions and unconvincing contrivances, a reflection, to my mind, of the difficulty faced by a translator wishing at any price to insert the work of the Spanish poet into the mould of Arabic metrics. (p. 162)

There follows a sustained comparison of the Arabic with the Spanish, and also translations into French, regarded by Hassan as (more) successful. Hassan points out many mistranslations (he calls them ‘*entorses*’; infringements), such as: ignoring the plaintive *desolada* of *Y un musto como una asta desolada* in *Sāquhu wa-l-qarna bātāt waḥdahā* (p. 162); archaisms in the Arabic when rendering a Spanish that is fresh and simple; and deformations of words to fit Arabic meter. The bulk of the discussion is a criticism of Badawī for missing the meaning of *Comenzaron los sonos de bordón*, where *bordón* is not the drone of wasps conveyed by *Bada’a z-zunbūru fī ṭannin ratīb*, but rather the ‘*bourdon de la guitare*’, something adumbrated in some French translations (and explicit, I might add, in Stephen Spender and J.L. Gili’s ‘The bass-string struck up’<sup>10</sup>). Another translation, by Ṣubḥī Muḥyī al-Dīn into rhythmic prose, ‘allows the translator to proceed in a way that is surprisingly close to the Spanish poet’s canticle’ (p. 172) according to Hassan, but here too Hassan indicts Muḥyī al-Dīn for mis-taking *los sonos de bordón* for *aṣwātu n-nawāqīs* (‘the sounds of bells’). Hassan takes solace in Muḥyī al-Dīn’s *Fī l-khāmīṣati ba’da ḡ-ḡuhr* as superior to Badawī’s *Fī l-masā’ l-khāmīsa* [*sic*] as a rendering of the refrain that is repeated 30 times in the 52 lines that make up the first part of Lorca’s poem.

Hassan looks next at Muṣṭafā al-Ḥabīb’s translation of Paul Valéry’s ‘*Le Cimetière Marin*’, which appeared in the Fall 1959 issue of *Shi’r* preceded by a famous preface penned by the journal’s editors, as follows: ‘This daring attempt to translate into verse may well excite admiration for the translator’s virtuosity and eloquence. Nevertheless, a question must be asked: Has this choice enabled the translator in conveying the poem’s meanings and its poetic world?’ (p. 173). After cataloguing the poet’s numerous slips, in particular his habitual expansions—for example, *wa-fi n-naḥsi madā ṣarḥin raḥīb* for *Edifice dans l’âme*, which Hassan renders ‘*dans l’âme, l’étendue d’un vaste edifice*’ (p. 176)—he concludes:

<sup>10</sup>Federico García Lorca, ‘Lament for Ignacio Sánchez Mejías’, *The Selected Poems of Federico García Lorca*, ed. Francisco Lorca and Donald Allen (Newport, CT: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1955), 137–49.

It is clear that even a translator very sure of his abilities, having opted for a rhyming translation, finds himself having to alter the economies of the language of the translated text . . . But having resolved to enrich a fund he finds wanting and deficient, the translator, by this dangerous surplus (*'supplément'*) of qualifications and adjectives, instead impoverishes Valéry's poetic discourse. (pp. 177, 179)

As instructive and perceptive as Hassan's remarks are about the many translational problems he identifies, I cannot reprise or even summarise them in the space of a review; suffice to name the translators and select a few issues for special mention.

Hassan praises his compatriot Sa'dī Yūsuf for his translations, and choice, of Giuseppe Ungaretti, and is especially pleased that Yūsuf describes his poetics of translation in an afterword; but in the 10 pages that follow (pp. 179–89) he nevertheless catalogues what he regards as the translator's frequent missteps. He concludes with a discussion of the translation of *La notte più chiusa /lugubre tartaruga /annaspa* embellished (*'enjôlir[é]'*) as follows: *Akhfa l-layālī sawfa talmusu sirrahā /qamariyyatan /Asyānatan*. Hassan is right in recognising in Yūsuf's choices the influence of his (Yūsuf's) own poetics of writing (i.e., as opposed to a discrete poetics of translation). He writes:

Ever since Dante, and certainly since Baudelaire, the refusal of the essentially ugly or strange (the lugubrious tortoise erased here) is no longer fashionable in poetry. Crouching in his shell, the tortoise here speaks to the imprisonment of the night (p. 189).

The chapter closes with invocations of remarks by Yves Bonnefoy and Borges, great writers both, and accomplished translators too.

\* \* \*

Part Three's second chapter focuses on translations of Homer and is animated in part by three questions posed by Antoine Berman: 'Why undertake such an extensive and sophisticated task as to translate an author so ancient [*"lointain"*; lit. distant]?', 'What meaning can the translation of such a work, an epic, have for us? And how should it be accomplished, such that it can have some meaning for us today?' (p. 192). One answer is that such an enterprise constitutes a sort of *'mémoire rapatriante'*, an attempt to subject ancient epics to new perspectives and requirements. Hassan then scrutinises Sulaymān al-Bustānī's translation of the *Iliad*, comparing it with French translations of Homer, while conceding that his own lack of access to the original Greek (*'le non-accès au texte homérique dans sa langue'*) severely limits his readings (p. 207). He spends a lot of time on Bustānī's introductory essay, reflections he deems 'worthy of attention and represent[ing] a major step forward compared to the translation theory ("*traductologie*") of his time' (p. 195),<sup>11</sup> but nevertheless differs with him on some fundamental translatorly decisions. Let me here take just one such decision; namely, to eschew epithets. Hassan quotes Bustānī to the effect that he has suppressed certain repeated terms and epithets in order 'to be more economical and which we can avoid repeating every time', that

<sup>11</sup>The term '*traductologie*' was first used (independently) by Jean-Pierre Ladmiral and Brian Harris; the former is in Hassan's bibliography but not the latter.

these repetitions are ‘acceptable in their own language but not in ours’ (p. 199). This represents a great loss for Hassan, since the few times Bustānī does render the epithet-names he does so with great skill, thus *Akhīl ṭayyār al-khuṭā* (‘Achilles fly-foot’ for πόδας ὠκύς) and *Hiktūr hayyāj al-tārīka* (Hector moving-helmet for κορυθ-αίολος). Hassan criticises Bustānī for translating most proper names, turning the Orai (goddesses of the hours) into *Sā‘āt*, for instance: for him this deprives the text of the resonances of the Greek names and is *contra* Derrida’s contention that the proper name is untranslatable and ineffaceable (p. 200). Hassan also laments the fact that Bustānī sought inspiration in the ‘epic’ poetry of the Jāhiliyya rather than in the Arabic epics that do after all exist, such as *Sīrat ‘Antar* and *Sīrat Banī Hilāl* (p. 205).

When citing Bustānī’s view that Arabic is more supple and malleable than Greek, Hassan reveals an important (theoretical) position (incidentally, one I share):

It is neither my intention here to corroborate nor to refute such comparisons. What is more, I do not believe that a language can be deficient in flexibility [‘*souplesse*’]. Every language ultimately responds to the labours visited upon it by human actors. A language is neither flexible nor rigid, neither ponderous nor fast-moving: those are the characteristics of discourse. (p. 206)

Hassan concedes the synonymic richness of Arabic (a large number of words for horse, for instance), but concurs with al-Tha‘ālibī that ‘The abundance of words for “calamity” is itself a calamity’ (*Inna kathrata asmā‘i d-dawāhī la-mīna d-dawāhī*) (p. 206). Hassan’s ultimate approval of al-Bustānī’s *Iliad* rests on the fact that his lengthy introduction to his translation lays out his *modus operandi*, his philosophy of translation, and his poetics, although Hassan simultaneously decries his method as harmful both to epic and to poetry (p. 226). Hassan also has little patience for the ‘liberties (emphasis and impoverishment, addition and drastic cuts [“amputation”])’ (p. 217) taken by ‘Anbara Salām al-Khālīdī in her translations of the two Homeric epics and of the *Aeneid*, which he also analyses at some length.

\* \* \*

In Part Three’s third chapter, Hassan looks at three translations of Rimbaud’s *Une Saison en enfer*, a text he knows well as he has himself translated Rimbaud’s complete poetical works.<sup>12</sup> The three translators are Khalīl al-Khūrī, Ramsīs Yunān and Muḥsin Ben Ḥamīda. Hassan faults al-Khūrī in the first instance for titling his translation ‘*Rimbaud, sa vie, ses poésies*’ and then going on to omit 60 poems—the Arabic title, *Rimbū: ḥayātuhu wa-shi‘ruhu*, does not, however, imply that it will include every poem. For Hassan, the main difficulty with al-Khūrī’s translations is his failure to separate his tasks as poet and translator, respectively: ‘It is not difficult at all to see [his] romanticism or to realise how a single poetics (or politics) governs both poetry and translation of poetry’ (p. 229). As with earlier translations, Hassan is thorough in his review of lexical and syntactical choices, not(ic)ing countless errors. Among egregious ones, as with earlier translators he has discussed, is lack of fluency in the original language. We saw this with *bordón*; one example here is translating *Il veut marcher avec l’air du crime* as

<sup>12</sup>The *double entendre* of Hassan’s chapter title (‘*A Season in Hell* in Three Arabic Translations’) is, I think, inadvertent.

*Yurīdu an yasīra ma‘a hawā’i l-jarīmati*, where the *air* of the French, meaning ‘demeanour’, is mistaken for ‘air’, the element. Hassan shows Yunān and Ben Ḥamīda to be as guilty of errors as al-Khūrī, again duly catalogued (Ben Ḥamīda mistranslates *l’air du crime* as *rīḥ al-jarīma*). Hassan concludes this review of Arabic Rimbaud translations as follows: ‘When it is not distorting misunderstandings of the French that interfere with translators’ readings, it is their failure to grasp the poet’s use of his language, or indeed his very poetics, that mars their work’ (p. 246).

In the fourth chapter of Part Three, Hassan takes on the translators of Shakespeare, Hölderlin, Saint-John Perse and Yves Bonnefoy. He does so, once again, to ‘make the case for the absolute necessity for a critique of translation and an ethics of the translational act (“*l’activité traduisante*”)’ (p. 247). This chapter also is characterised by the comparison of translation with original, and the cataloguing of missteps. I confine myself to two examples. Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā renders ‘Your majesty, and we that have free souls . . .’ from *Hamlet* as *ḥalālātukum wa-naḥnu l-ladhīna natamatta‘u bi-anfusin ḥurratin*. Hassan is right to note that Jabrā mistakes the ‘free’ in ‘free souls’ to mean ‘freed’, rather than ‘unburdened’ (p. 252). In *Nadhḥun yaqtulu abī ḡhūlatan, wa-lidhā fa-‘innī /Anā (i)bnuhu l-waḥīdu, ursilu hādha n-nadhla ilā s-samā’*, Hassan faults Jabrā for using *li-dhā* to render ‘and for that I’ in the passage: ‘A villain kills my father, and for that/I his sole son do this same villain send to heaven’.<sup>13</sup> As this makes clear, Hassan can be ‘*trop exigeant*’ of other translators.

I would have liked to see some discussion of M.M. Badawi’s translations of *Macbeth* and *King Lear*.<sup>14</sup> It may be, since these appeared in 2001 and 2003 respectively (i.e. after he had concluded the research for his doctoral thesis), that Hassan did not want to include new material in his study, but the decision is an unfortunate one as the first decade of the 21st century has been a productive one for translation into Arabic; what is more, Badawi is also a scholar of Shakespeare and therefore well placed to translate him. Indeed, his introduction to *Macbeth* includes a discussion of some of his translatorly choices from which one can infer a (latent) poetics of translation. On the subject of Shakespeare, I might mention here the work of Sameh Hanna, whose 2007 ‘Decommercialising Shakespeare: Mutran’s Translation of *Othello*’ would have appeared too late for consultation or inclusion, but not so his 2005 ‘Hamlet Lives Happily Ever After in Arabic: The Genesis of the Field of Drama Translation in Egypt’.<sup>15</sup>

\*\*\*

<sup>13</sup>Curiously, one the biggest differences between this chapter and the preceding ones is the large number of typographical errors in English and German. In the line quoted here, the first ‘villain’ is given as ‘vaillain’ and ‘send’ as ‘sens’. Also in this chapter, I noticed: ‘and can you no drift’ > ‘and can you by no drift’ (p. 249); ‘accrust’ > ‘accurst’ (p. 251); ‘Ave’ > ‘Have’ (p. 254); ‘whith’ > ‘with’ (p. 255); *Āqrabu* > *Aqrabu*; a comma missing after *Weiß* (p. 261); and *mawāhibahū* > *mawāhibahū* (p. 261). Typos elsewhere in the book include: Muṣṭafā > Muṣṭafā (p. 173); *kitabāti* > *kitābātī* (p. 230); and *Bartelby* > *Bartleby* (p. 336, n. 21).

<sup>14</sup>William Shakespeare, *Makbith*, trans. and intro. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Badawī (Cairo: al-Majlis al-A‘lā lil-Thaqāfa, 2001); and William Shakespeare, *Al-Malik Līr*, trans. and intro. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Badawī (Cairo: al-Majlis al-A‘lā lil-Thaqāfa, 2001).

<sup>15</sup>Sameh F. Hanna, ‘Decommercialising Shakespeare: Mutran’s Translation of *Othello*’, *The Arab Shakespeare: A Special Issue of Critical Survey* 19, no. 3 (2007): 27–54; and Sameh F. Hanna, ‘Hamlet Lives Happily Ever After in Arabic: The Genesis of the Field of Drama Translation in Egypt’, *Translator* 15, no. 1 (2005): 167–92.

With Hölderlin we return to ‘Abd al-Rahmān Badawī, whose ‘strict verse translations more often than not constitute a mutilation and, in the best of cases, an over-translation’ (p. 259). To take just one example, compare *Wunderbar ist die Gunst der Hoherhabnen und niemand / Weiß von wannen und was einem geschieht von ihr* with *Mā arwa‘a l-layla mā akhfā mawāhibahū*. For Hassan, Badawī prunes and carves up Hölderlin’s verses as he sees fit (‘*élague et découpe comme bon lui semble*’), divesting the poetry of nuance. This is especially egregious because, ‘More than any one else’s, Hölderlin’s poetry abides in its nuances and in the philosophical propositions wrapped up in pulsing networks of images. To forget this is to deprive a translation any access whatsoever to this’ (p. 263). When he turns to Fu’ād Rifqa’s translation of ‘Mein Vorsatz’, it is to illustrate that translator’s penchant for periphrasis. And yet, his example of *Ma-l-ladhī yarmū bi-galbī l-miskīn / Fī sakīnati l-marwā taluffuhā l-ghuyūmu l-qātima?* as a bad translation of *Was zwingt mein armes Herz in diese/Wolkenummachtete Totenstille?* because of the ‘addition’ of words, is too exacting—it is something like ‘What forces my poor heart into this nightcloud-wrapped deathly stillness?’. One might quarrel with the use of *taluffuhā l-ghuyūmu* for (the tricky) *Wolkenummachtete*, but *armes* does mean ‘poor’, and what is more it also carries the meaning of unfortunate, making *al-miskīn* a judicious choice. As this example and a few others show, Hassan is sometimes on less sure footing when evaluating translations from English and German than from French. This does not negate his criticisms of Rifqa (or others), or of the larger point he is making in this chapter and in the whole study—namely that successful translation of poetry must be accompanied by a poetics of translation, but it does make one wonder whether Hassan does not have more than simply a theoretician’s axe to grind.

When he comes to Adonis’s translations of Perse and Bonnefoy, Hassan’s criticisms are unrestrained. This impugment is perhaps to be expected from the author of a work on Adonis’s plagiarisms (uncited in the bibliography, which is curious since many of the criticisms in the volume under review are to be found in that work too<sup>16</sup>). Here is Hassan’s damning verdict of Adonis—provided even before he gets into the meat of his analysis:

... since the appearance of his versions of Perse’s poetry, careful readings of the translations proper have put into serious doubt Adonis’s knowledge of the most elementary rules of the French language. More so than Jabrā and Rifqa, he puts the reader in an awkward situation: the beautiful form of the Arabic effectively conceals the misunderstandings that the monolingual reader is unable to rectify. (p. 271)

To be fair, some translations do betray inattention on the part of Adonis to the French, although it is unclear to this reviewer whether this is the result of inadequate knowledge or merely Adonis’s approach to translation, which, to Hassan’s credit, he cites. Adonis writes:

<sup>16</sup>By contrast, Hassan does mention that his chapter on Homer has appeared elsewhere (p. 226, n. 86). The work on Adonis is Kāzīm Jihād *Adūnīs muntaḥilan: dirāsa fī al-istihwādh al-adabī wa-irtijāliyyat al-tarjama* [Adonis Plagiarist: A study of literary usurpation and improvised translation] (Casablanca: Afriqiyya al-Sharq, 1991; rev. and enlarged Cairo: Maktabat Madbuli, 1993).

When I translate a poem, I try to write according to the genius of the Arabic language, and with the craft of poetry in mind. This is why I violate the formal grammatical rules not only of the language I am translating, but also those of the language into which I am translating. I have said repeatedly that I prefer to make formal mistakes rather than poetic ones. The important thing with a translation is that the text be beautiful in the target language. When the target language submits to the logic of the original language, both poetry and language lose out. (p. 280)

But Hassan rejects this: ‘That the translation should mirror the genius of the target language,’ he avers, ‘is a principle based on an outdated and outmoded conception of translation’ (p. 281). Like Hassan, Adonis is a Paris-based poet, translator and critic: one cannot but wonder if this has anything to do with the pointed critique.

\* \* \*

The conclusion to this study of the nature of translation of Arabic poetry is preceded by an ‘Addendum’ entitled ‘Toward a Poetics of Prose Translation’. Hassan has considerable experience with the translation of prose, if principally of philosophical, non-fiction texts. As we have come to expect, he damns with faint praise: ‘In spite of our fears and doubts, we should not underestimate translations of middling elegance (“*d’élégance moyenne*”), which are in truth quite numerous and not to be ignored, nor the great successes, howsoever scarce they may be’ (p. 285). Hassan concentrates here in particular on poor lexical choices, drawing on his own efforts—for example, he suggests that *ziyāda* (‘increase’) is a superior translation of Derrida’s *supplément* to other translators’ *mukammil* (‘complement’). He uses this short disquisition on prose to argue that the need for a theory (or poetics) of translation is just as essential for it as it is for poetry.

The Conclusion proper (pp. 295–302) is short and consists principally of two lists. Hassan concedes that it ‘it may be difficult to say what makes a translation successful’ but in his first list offers 12 (numbered) translation strategies to avoid, which I shall not repeat here because they can be inferred from what I have abstracted above. The second list recapitulates five larger desiderata also inferable from the study—briefly stated, these are: an explicit poetics of translation; an implicit poetics of translation; serious research on the author to be translated; careful selection of works to be translated; and collective initiatives (*pace* the editors of *Shi‘r*). Hassan also indicts Arab publishers for their unwillingness to publish poetry (a criticism that can, alas, just as easily be leveled at North American publishers . . .). Modern translation into Arabic is in its infancy so we should not be surprised that it is undertheorised or underdeveloped, but there is great promise, as the special 2005 issue of *The Translator*<sup>17</sup> and the establishment of the Abu Dhabi-based translation outfit Kalima,<sup>18</sup> to name but two initiatives, one in the realm of theory and theorising, the other in the realm of practice, both attest.

As an aspiring translator myself (from Arabic, not into Arabic), I have learned something about missteps from Hassan, and have been reminded of the need for, and for articulating, a poetics of translation. But I am more than a little surprised at the vitriol

<sup>17</sup>[www.stjerome.co.uk/tsa/issue/29/](http://www.stjerome.co.uk/tsa/issue/29/) (Accessed 19 June 2012).

<sup>18</sup>[www.kalima.ae/en/](http://www.kalima.ae/en/) (Accessed 19 June 2012).

Hassan reserves for other—I should say, fellow—translators. There can be no doubt whatsoever that every translator Hassan indicts for a failure to make explicit a poetics of translation, or for a less than impeccable command of the language from which they are translating, has taken on the task of translation with respect for the literary text and with good will and good intentions. No one starts out as a *traditore*.

I am surprised also by Hassan's outrage. There have been differing views of translation since the very beginning of that enterprise.<sup>19</sup> As Mark Polizzotti has recently put it:

The ticklish issue of where to pledge one's fidelity tends to split translators into two camps: on the one side, those who feel that the author's meaning and form, her syntactical and idiomatic peculiarities, must be respected, even if it means doing violence to the target language's conventions; and on the other those who argue that the translation must produce an effect on its audience similar to that produced by the original, which sometimes requires deviating from it in order to preserve its spirit or 'flavor'.<sup>20</sup>

Hassan falls more or less in the first camp, Adonis more or less in the second. By Hassan's account, he is also—in the benevolent shadow of the German Romantics—the (lone?) champion of the 'correct' way of translating whereas all other translators into Arabic approach their task without taking stock of the theoretical, philosophical and ethical considerations that undergird the process. But there is a very wide spectrum indeed of positions one can take as a translator and not all are perforce mistaken. It would seem that, in the end, the differences Hassan identifies between his way and the highway are personal—which is as it should be—rather than truly theoretical. As Gregory Rabassa, the celebrated translator of Gabriel García Márquez, Julio Cortázar and Mario Vargas Llosa, observes in his memoir: 'I leave strategy to the theorists as I confine myself to tactics'.<sup>21</sup>

Shawkat M. Toorawa © 2012  
Cornell University, USA  
Email: smtoorawa@cornell.edu

<sup>19</sup>See Mark Polizzotti, 'Traduced with Abandon: Translation and Its Malcontents', *Parnassus: poetry in review* 32, nos 1&2 (2010): 1–40, for a perceptive discussion of the choices translators make and for an assessment of a dozen recent works on translation; notably Daniel Weissbort and Astradur Eysteinnsson, eds, *Translation—Theory and Practice: A Historical Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>20</sup>Polizzotti, 'Traduced with Abandon', 4.

<sup>21</sup>Gregory Rabassa, *If This Be Treason: Translation and Its Dyscontents: A Memoir* (New York: New Directions, 2006), 67.