Dunn’s *Adventures of Ibn Battūta* is to highlight all the problems and pitfalls of the text, as well as its felicities, and persuade us at the end that this great traveller must indeed be taken at least as seriously as Marco Polo himself.

University of Exeter

IAN RICHARD NETTON


If the object of this anthology of previously untranslated poems by Mahmud Darwish, Samih al-Qasim and Adonis is “to provide English-speaking readers with a sense of the frontiers of Arab poetry today” (p. 8), then al-Udhari has succeeded, perhaps even admirably, in bringing to this readership a selection of some of the most urgent and impassioned verse by three of the Arab world’s most skillful and heeded poets. Al-Udhari has brought together in one volume fifteen poems by each poet which reflect each one’s individual use of the poetic tools at his disposal, his particular use of language, his use of symbols to illustrate the nature of the condition of the Palestinians and, particularly in Adonis’ case, of the entire Arab world. One cannot, however, take seriously the assertion on the back cover that because of the facing Arabic text “this anthology is a powerful learning tool for students of Arabic”. Indeed, a number of the translations suffer from random rearrangement with no attention to the form of the originals, from patently unacceptable renditions, and from misreadings and oversights that not only alter the original meanings, but violate them outright.

After a brief introduction, emphasizing the primacy of poetry in the Arab literary tradition and explaining the selections, expressing “the fate not only of Arabs or Palestinians, but also of humanity itself trapped in a contemporary tragedy” (p. 7), the major section of the book, “the Poems”, begins. Mahmud Darwish’s poems are preceded by a biographical note, far more interesting than the biographical notices to which we have become accustomed in previous anthologies for its detail and inclusion of observations by the poet himself about his art and his decision to write. The first thirteen Darwish poems are, the author tells us, collected for the first time in book form in Arabic. No copyright or bibliographical information, however, is provided for any of the poems in the entire collection. This makes it difficult for the Arabic reader to locate the sources from which the original versions come and their dates of composition. Whereas this may be an oversight on the part of the publishers, it is a very unfortunate one. The English reader is a little more fortunate: on what would have been the copyright page is the following acknowledgement “Some of these poems were first published in the following magazines: *Stand, MPT, South, TR, South East Arts Review* and *Index*”.

All of the Darwish poems are typically Darwish and contain the themes we have come to expect from him, but the language is not strained or trite. He has matured since his younger days and continues to produce poetry of a high caliber. The symbols of wheat, dreams, rocks, songs, clouds, and hope are still very much in evidence. As with all good poets, however, Darwish manages to forge these familiar symbols into a new language, immediate and effective. The

*Journal of Arabic Literature, XIX*
first poem, “The Earth is Closing On Us” (pp. 12-13), epitomizes the plight of the expatriated and disenfranchised Palestinian. His banishment is not only from that which he may call a homeland but from land itself:

The earth is closing on us, pushing us through the last passage, and we tear off our limbs to pass through.
The earth is squeezing us. I wish we were its wheat so we could die and live again.

The ejected Palestinian must seek solace in that which is living, that which is life, the grain of wheat:

...Give us a grain of wheat, our dream. (“We Fear for a Dream”, p. 17)

But the road to this solace is the dream, it is the melody.

Leave a night
for singing.

And despite the “darkness of the clouds” (p. 31) that hover over “a country that does not hang a special sun over us” (p. 33), “over an airport” (p. 47), an unidentified sort of every-airport, there is hope.

The guitar player is coming
Tomorrow night
When people go to collect soldier’s signatures
instead of a more lyrically and semantically faithful:

The Guitar player shall come
In the coming nights
When people go forth to gather the signatures of the soldiers.

And “Roaring” is a feeble “żāribhun mi’.lū’ta-qawwābī” (p. 44). We find other errors in the Arabic that appear on the facing pages, typographical errors. The “khdhīm...” line 9 of page 40, should read “khdhīm” in the masculine; the two “u-ulāmākum” on page 34 should read “u-ulāmākun”; and there should be no tekhza on “hā’isālānī”, line 2, page 32.

The Samih Al-Qasim selection is, for the most part, a series of very short poems, all of which are savage indictments on the oppressing forces that have sought to silence and mute the Palestinian voice, whether external or internal.
I would have liked to tell you
The story of a nightingale that died.
I would have liked to tell you
The story...
Had they not slit my lips.
("Slit Lips", p. 53)

His images are fresh and arresting. The loss and lack of identity that Darwish attacked in his celebrated "Bats: some kind of apparatus" (p. 61), "the city square" (p. 62), "a strange colourless cloud" (p. 75), "jasmine" (pp. 75 and 81). Only at the last poem, "The Clock of the Wall" (pp. 84-85), can be levelled Badawi's accusation that, because of overproductivity, the poetry might sound "too facile and mechanical" (M.M. Badawi, A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry, Cambridge: CUP, 1975, 222).

Most of the translations do justice to the original but in at least two cases, "Travel Tickets" (pp. 58-59) and "The Story of a City" (pp. 64-75), the English is a travesty of the Arabic. "Tadakkirat as-safar" is reduced from an eleven-line poem in the Arabic to a seven-line one in English; the translator pays no attention to the passive mood, the absence of a second person addresser in the opening lines and the explicit stated addressee in the closing lines; and the form of the poem is completely ignored. There is neither justification nor excuse for changing

...I saw them go, but you, my love
I'll see you on the other side...

One day you'll kill me
You'll find in my pocket
Travel tickets

or for condensing

("Akhīr as-safar" by Nizar Qabbani, "Akhīr as-safar" by Nizar Qabbani, pp. 255-256."

Don't waste the tickets
In the opening to "Story of the City", "Akhīr as-safar" is reduced to "A blue city/Dream of tourists", and it does not get better. The English version is a grotesque violation of the Arabic.

Equally deplorable is the abbreviation of the names of the speakers in the dialogue of the following poem, "Conversation Between an Ear of Corn and a Jerusalem Rose Thorn" (pp. 66-69). After initially spelling out Ear of Corn for "as-Sunbulah" and Jerusalem Rose Thorn for "Shaḥkūlah as-safarī", the poet, or perhaps the publishers, saw fit to use EC and JRT. If it is excused on the grounds of saving space, it is not excusable at the end of the poem where

...you're leaving, you're on your way to where I'm coming from.

becomes

(Ashar, EC as JRT on the horizon)

Other infelicities include the unexplained deviations in English from the form of the Arabic, the abandonment of the opening "and" in every line of "Confession at Midday", for example, and a few misreadings and omissions. In "Bats" (pp. 60-61), "al-khiṭībatu al-dāl al-ṣafarī" is rendered "Bats on the window"; in "The Story of the Unknown Man" (pp. 72-75), "wās sāra yā mā sāra fi yaqchin mina l-asfar in sāra li-l-ṣafar" becomes "One day". There are, at least, no typographical errors in the al-Qastān section.

The third poet of the collection is 'Alī Ahmad Sa'id, or, as he is better known, Adonis. Almost half the book is devoted to him and deservedly so since he is perhaps the most "innovatory contemporary Arab poet" (p. 7) writing today, though some do take him to task for occasional lapses into obscurianism. He is the visionary, to coin from his own terminology, of a "new poetry". For Adonis, words must leap outside existing comprehensions, they must become "a womb with a new fertility" (al-riḥmūn li-l-ḥāshīn jābār). Adonis' innovative use of words is well represented by al-Uqdārī's selection. His enduring concern with writing and naming, for example, has not become clichéd and jaded.

"Tamkuh lā jāmil adlan" in "As-safar" is, for example, a change which is unnecessary.

The earth rises in my body
It demands my days so be its windows.

(..."Lam ināfīk", p. 100.)
And teaches my steps its name so they can be its letters
And birds.
("Song", p. 101)

and

kibb
yashbatu fi alabkā' qahwāb
("Mir'āţun li'l-qarnī 1-izhrīnā", p. 90)

A book
Written on the belly of a crow
("A Mirror for the Twentieth Century", p. 91)

And from section 29 of "The Desert" (pp. 135-165):
yashbatu 3'-keky ḍahbā
warqamū ʾl-ainā a'jābā ʾl-3'-kābri ʾl-3'-kābri lam yajī?"
("al-Sanā'a", p. 156)

The night descends (these are the papers he gave to the ink—
morning's ink that never came)
("The Desert", p. 157)

The nine lines of section 31 of the very same poem (pp. 160-161) all begin with "Kuchba ʾl-qājīdtā" incorrectly rendered "He wrote in a poem". Other familiar Adonis symbols abound: the wound, mirrors (including three poems with this word in the title), dreams, clouds, history, the sun, heads, the wind, weapons, the city and so on. The following lines are from page 114 and 115 of "The Wound" (pp. 110-117):

âshā kāna li fi iswāti ʾtohānī aw ʾ-umānī
manfi ʾum, laq kāna li ṣafmā
laq ʾumān li ṣafiyyā
mazārib li laq ʾumān li ʾmadīnā
laq iswāti laq ʾuṣūlā iswāt ʾ-ḥabū
tarqū ʾtqamī ʾl-ṣābī ʾl-ṣābī ʾtqamī
qayb qayb ʾl-ṣābī ʾl-ṣābī ʾtqamī
laq ʾumān li laq ʾumān
laq ʾumān li laq ʾumān

If I had been in a country of mirrors and dreams,
If I had a ship,
If I had the remains of a city,
Or a city
In a country of children and weeping
I'd have made out of all this for the wound
A song like a sparrow
Piercing trees, stones and heaven,
And soft as water,
Overpowering and amazing like a conquest.
("To cables", p. 315)

The image of the city, which has long pre-occupied Adonis and which is the subject of other long poems such as "Qūw min ajnāk New York" and "Magad-dimb is-Tārīkh Mu'akk af-Tawbūfīj"; is the subject of the 209-line poem "The Desert". This is a previously unpublished poem, the subject of which is Adonis' native Beirut, subtitled "The Diary of Beirut Under Siege, 1902". It is admirably translated by al-Uthair except in the case of the first of the thirty-four sections into which the poem is divided:

fi ʾrabīnak
yasāhūnak labā bi hāra
wa-ṣalīhīn kāna awa-ṣafmū aw ʾakūlū
wa-aw ʾmān ʾal-tārīkh yuṣūl
yataharrak fi ṣuḥūfat
al-Qāhrawī ʾl-jumānā
My era tells me bluntly:
You do not belong.
I answer bluntly:
I do not belong.
I try to understand you.
Now I am a shadow
Last in the forest
Of a skull.

(The stiches are my own, showing the mistranslations.)

Of the remaining translations only "The Pearl (Dream-Mirror)" (pp. 128-133) "The Golden Age" (pp. 98-99) and "The Palm" (pp. 106-109) are well translated. The rest suffer from misreadings, unjustified re-arrangements and omissions. In "A Mirror for the Executioner" (pp. 88-99), "aw ʾunūdū 3jdībū li hāra ʾmān ʾaqnīyū aw ʾtenmānū aw ʾtqamī" is pathetically and unlyrically reduced to "Your velvet skin/Will be my carpet." In "Song" (pp. 100-103), the elucidating "Bless it with the Koran's praise of the Madonna" is counteracted by the opaque "Fine and green like Khadir's colt", meaningless to the English reader. A few lines later we are presented with "As distant as our souls/As distant as a journey into the space of the soul" for "kaymānū bi ʾl-rāʾib/kaymānū ʾl-ʾamīnū aw ʾtqamī bi fi ʾjianī ʾl-ʾamīnū". In "The Wound", "fi ašābīnak" is read "in your eyelashes" and the closing lines

wa-ṣalīhīn ʾl-ṣābī ʾl-ṣābī ʾtqamī
wa-ṣalīhīn ʾl-ṣābī ʾl-ṣābī ʾtqamī
marwa ʾdāʿūd ʾl-ṣābī
marwa fa-lam yuṭrakh lahu kānū
yaghrīt, wa-3lam yuṭrakh lahu 3ārīn
transform into

The wound is beyond the fate
Your eyes cast
On the lost civilizations
It's left no sails
Nor islands.

The hitherto faithful "The New Noah" (pp. 120-125) is ruined by the careless translation of "nasīlū l-bi ʾl-nālū awa-ṣafmū aw ʾal-ṣafmū as "And Noah asked
me: ‘Save the living’", "Ayyuhā l-ammu l-lati taskharu/min ḥubbī wa maqti’, the opening lines of “The Seven Days” (pp. 126-127), become the lacklustre “Mother, do not mock/My love, my hate.” Despite the occasional stray diacritical mark, the only serious typographical error is “ḥagala” for “ḥamala” in line one of “Psalm”. All in all, the Adonis selections suffer from the most problems. The reasons for this are not clear: the errors do not seem to be the product of ignorance, perhaps they are the price of haste.

Al-Udhari has provided us with some top-flight poetry by three of the veritable masters. If his translations leave a little to be desired, so be it: his anthology can only serve to spur other scholars to translate and retranslate these and other works. After all, as Bonnefoy has said, we translate to better understand a text.

University of Pennsylvania

Shawkat M. Toorawa