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PARADIGM SHIFTS FOR LITERARY TRANSLATION[1]

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My career as a translator of Arabic literature has coincided with five paradigm shifts in Arabic and Islamic studies.[2] The first was from Orientalism to a social science approach for Middle Eastern studies. The second was the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature to Naguib Mahfouz in 1988. The third was the internet. The fourth has been conflict in the Middle East and the flight of people – including authors and scholars - from their homelands. The fifth is the popularity (or resurgence) of the "Global" novel (see Washington 2017).

Younger scholars may discuss Orientalism in the abstract, and there is a vast literature on it, but I write and speak from personal experience. I began my career in the late 1960s with an Orientalist training in the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute, which was established in 1919, but regularly crossed the street to converse with other students in the lounge of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, which was founded in 1965. In the Oriental Institute there was also a distinction back then between students deemed "ancients" and the others termed "moderns."[3]

This first paradigm shift was exemplified by the establishment of an "Islamic Civ" course at the University of Chicago in 1956 by Marshall Hodgson (Boyer 2015), the founding of Centers for Middle Eastern Studies at multiple American universities, and the offering of NDEA Title VI critical language fellowships starting in 1958. These last two initiatives became part of the federal government's Great Society programs in 1965. I served as a graduate assistant for a year for the University of Chicago's Islamic Civ course, which was based on the epic, three-volume work by Marshall Hodgson: *The Venture of Islam*. In that seminal work, Hodgson introduced the concept of "The Great Western Transmutation," which occurred:

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[1] An earlier version of this essay appeared in: Dorroll, Courtney M. (ed.). 2019. *Teaching Islamic Studies in the Age of Isis, Islamophobia, and the Internet*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. See also, https://newlinesmag.com/podcast/a-life-in-translation-with-william-hutchins/

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[2] My first publication of a translation from Arabic literature appeared in *Playboy Magazine* in 1975. It was an excerpt from al-Jahiz (d. 868/869 CE), "Boasting Match over Maids and Youths."

[3] Eventually, in 2024, "The Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations" was "renamed the Department of Middle Eastern Studies." See, The Division of the Humanities at the University of Chicago, *Tableau*, Fall 2024, p. 10.

> when specialized technical development transformed the presuppositions of human production, and the French Revolution . . . established . . . unprecedented norms in human social relations. (Hodgson 1974: 176)

Hodgson thus safely navigated between the rival theories of Western Exceptionalism and that of mean-spirited Western Exploitation.

I began studying Arabic at the Gerard Institute in Sidon, Lebanon, where I taught Secondary English in the Boys School for the school year 1964-1965. The Gerard Institute prided itself on attracting students from all of Lebanon's communities including Sidon's two Palestinian refugee camps as well as some students from Saudi Arabia. I am certain that I learned more from my students than they did from me. They had a lot to say about their lives and hopes and told me whenever they were planning a school walkout. One of my fellow instructors that year disappeared for political reasons, possibly to prison. I started learning French when I was eight and assumed that Arabic is a language like French, but of course it is much more complicated than that.

I eventually enrolled at the University of Chicago, where I earned an M.A. in Philosophy. After a couple of terms that I paid for, my Ph.D. program was funded by several NDEA Title VI fellowships for Arabic, and I could not have afforded graduate school otherwise – even at the bargain-basement prices of the 1960s. I earned my Ph.D. from the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago in the Arabic and Islam section. While I was a student there, the department hired a philologist to teach Arabic and then a graduate of a modern linguistics program, also to teach Arabic. That shift from Orientalism and philology to Islamic Civ and linguistics occurred in less than a decade.

The philologist, however, was himself part of a transitional generation and introduced me to al-Jahiz from the ninth century CE and Tawfiq al-Hakim from the twentieth century. Those authors became two of my literary heroes.[4] When this scholar gave a talk on contemporary Arabic literature, I remember that he stressed the importance of recent Iraqi novels without mentioning a single author by name. That omission struck me as odd.

The website of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Chicago states:

> The educational aims of the Center are to assist students in acquiring: 1) firm grounding in an academic discipline or a professional field; and 2) specialist knowledge of the languages and civilizations of the Middle East. (Center for Middle Eastern Studies n.d.)

[4] "Established in 1965, the CMES has been supported by the Divisions of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Chicago and by grants from the U.S. Department of Education and the Mellon Foundation for more than forty years." Available at https://cmes.uchicago.edu/page/about-us "The University of Texas at Austin has a long history of academic focus on the Middle East. The Center for Middle Eastern Studies, established in 1960, offers some 300 Middle East language and area studies courses each year. The Center provides a supportive environment for faculty researching and teaching on the Middle East throughout the University, which are carried out by 150 scholars with faculty appointments in 22 departments. The Center offers an interdisciplinary program in Middle Eastern Studies at both the undergraduate and graduate levels." Available at http://www.utexas.edu/cola/mes/center/cmes.php

The first aim clearly supports an Islamic Civ approach, while the second seems compatible with both Orientalism and Islamic Civ.

One assumption of the Orientalist tradition was that only classics should be translated and then only after a Western scholar had produced a definitive edition of the work. I wrote my dissertation on the theory of knowledge of Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, and at my defense one examiner did ask which text by Razi I planned to edit. As part of my graduate program, though, I spent a year in the Center for Arabic Studies at the American University in Cairo, where I studied with excellent Egyptian professors. My dissertation advisor was the South Asian Muslim scholar Fazlur Rahman and his predecessor at the University of Chicago was the Iraqi philosopher Muhsin Mahdi (Mahdi 2011). Both men, now deceased, had their feet firmly planted in the twentieth century and its intellectual controversies.

Professor Rahman arrived at the University of Chicago when I needed a dissertation advisor and topic. I met him in the garden of the residential hall where he was staying and asked if Fakhr al-Din al-Razi would be a suitable author for me to research for my dissertation, since the snippet I had read by him had struck me as a sophisticated, challenging philosophical text. Professor Rahman replied that a doctrine closely associated with Razi was that "knowledge is a relation" and recommended Razi's epistemology as my dissertation topic.

Once I succeeded in tracing Razi's hallmark doctrine back through earlier Islamic and Hellenistic philosophers to Aristotle's "Categories," Professor Rahman seemed disappointed and suggested, to my chagrin, that I shelve my dissertation and write a new one. I argued that, even if my findings were negative, they were of interest in a more than trivial way, since they demonstrated how a major, medieval Muslim theologian's key doctrine harked back to both Aristotle's *Categories* and the Qur'an. This, I thought, revealed Razi's sophisticated interaction with Greek philosophy even as he reasoned about a key doctrine for Abrahamic religions: God's knowledge of particulars: whether God does or does not know, for example, when Zayd is (or is not) in his house (or sins). What I have realized, fifty years later, is that, while Razi's theory can be traced back to Aristotle's categories, it also echoes sections of al-Ghazali's *Tahafut al-Falasifa* (*The Incoherence of the Philosophers*), which, as its name implies, lambasted philosophers. One maxim that applies here is that nothing is as complicated as what seems, at first glance to be simple.

In addition to editing medieval Arabic texts, some Euro-centric neo-Orientalists thought that the adventures of Europeans in the Middle East or Africa merited scholarly attention. This was exemplified by an African history course I audited at the London School of Economics in 1965; it was devoted to the European penetration of Africa. Two years earlier, though, at Yale University, I had taken Harry R. Rudin's African Civ course. At that time, I did not realize how groundbreaking his course was, that I would teach Arabic at the University of Ghana for three years in the 1970s while the pioneering British scholar John Hunwick taught African history there, or that I would eventually teach an "African Thought" course at Appalachian State University in North Carolina for several decades.

One small but important shift away from Orientalism in my translation practice has been use of an author's own spelling of her name in English - instead of the "correct" (library catalogue/Orientalist) transliteration.

At one time, American library cataloguers defaced title pages of translated Arabic novels by changing the spelling of the author's name if it did not match the Western, "scholarly" spelling. Back then, this seemed a sufficient reason for me (especially after several years of Orientalist training) to change an author's spelling of his name. I regret doing that. Today Arab authors commonly move between cultures and alphabets, but Tewfik El Hakim did that decades ago.

It is not uncommon for cross-disciplinary Islamic Civ courses to assign translations of contemporary novels or short stories. To meet this need, the Center for Middle Eastern Studies of the University of Texas at Austin started a Modern Middle East Literatures in Translation series, and Donald Herdeck launched Three Continents Press. The Texas Center referred me to Herdeck when it temporarily closed its translation series. At approximately the same time, Professor M. M. Badawi began lecturing on contemporary Arabic literature in the United Kingdom,[5] Denys Johnson-Davies began publishing excellent English translations of works of contemporary Arabic literature, like *Modern Arabic Short Stories* in 1967, and in 1966, Khayats, in Beirut, published Trevor Le Gassick's translation of *Midaq Alley, Cairo* by Naguib Mahfouz.

The paradigm shift from Orientalism to Area Civ Studies did not, however, eliminate Western hubris. Scholars of my generation no longer aspired to edit yet another medieval text better than an Egyptian scholar; some still hoped to write the definitive history of, say, Yemen or the definitive biography of an Arab luminary. A friend of mine in graduate school considered anyone who attempted to write Middle East history based primarily on an ability to read original texts in Arabic or Farsi to be an Orientalist; in fact, that was virtually his definition of Orientalism. Even so, he aspired to write the definitive history of an Arab country.

I propose as a Golden Rule of Cross-cultural Studies this maxim: do not conduct research overseas that you would not pursue at home, and vice versa. Why study the argot of prostitutes in Sana'a, for example, if you would **not** do a comparable study in, say, London, **because** the latter project would be "**too dangerous**"? A foreigner may write the definitive biography of Naguib Mahfouz, but that, I think, would be an interesting exception rather than inevitable.

My appointment to the languages department of the University of Ghana was arguably an Orientalist posting, and I continued there with my attempt to translate some essays by the incredible medieval author al-Jahiz. I had begun that project after another graduate student at the University of Chicago told me at a party that I should not study Arabic, "because nothing was written in it." I did not finish my Jahiz project for decades, although *Playboy* published a selection from it in 1975. Instead, in Ghana, I read and translated plays by Tawfiq al-Hakim, the father of the Egyptian theater, with two of my top Ghanaian students. My idea was that the three of us would publish a collection of translations of his plays, but we were separated when I resigned from the University of Ghana and returned to the United States, after a military government temporarily closed our university.

[5] "He [Roger Allen] obtained his doctoral degree in modern Arabic literature from Oxford University in 1968, the first student to obtain a doctoral degree in that field at Oxford, under the supervision of Dr. M.M. Badawi." Available at http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/~rallen/

Donald Herdeck at Three Continents Press published the two volumes of my *Plays, Prefaces, and Postscripts of Tawfiq al-Hakim* in 1981 and 1984, respectively. My translation of essays by al-Jahiz was finally published in 1989, by, arguably, an Orientalist publisher. That work received two reviews. One was by a British scholar who trashed it and wrote that I should have waited for a senior scholar, like him, to edit those essays. The other was by an equally eminent American scholar, who praised my work.

To obtain a fellowship to conduct research in Egypt, I admittedly applied for and received a grant to write a biography of Tawfiq al-Hakim. That year, though, multiple issues, including the hubris of the project, proved too much for me, and instead I selected and translated all but one of the stories included in *Egyptian Tales and Short Stories of the 1970s and the 1980s*, which was published by the American University in Cairo Press in 1987. (The other story had been written in English by an Egyptian.) I, of course, asked for suggestions from authors and experts in Cairo when selecting stories for that book but also bought a copy of every single-author short story collection I could find on sale in Cairo bookstores that year. This resembled an open-casting call and may be one reason that I included eight women authors—more than was usual in those days. Another woman author whose work I wanted to include refused to grant me permission to use either of the two sample stories that I had translated. She served me tea but gave no reason for that refusal and obviously wished to have a story of hers included the book. My guess is that those two stories were examples of *iqtibas*, the adaptation of a foreign story.

After Lynne Rienner Publishing purchased Three Continents Press, I finally wrote *Tawfiq al-Hakim: A Reader's Guide*, with excellent guidance from editors of that firm. This book includes biographical and bibliographical sections but is mainly literary criticism combined with discussion of al-Hakim's use of religious and spiritual themes. It was published in 2003.

The second paradigm shift, in addition to the transformation of Orientalism into Islamic Civ, was, in my admittedly biased opinion, the announcement of Naguib Mahfouz as the Nobel Laureate for Literature in 1988. Donald Herdeck, various editors at the American University in Cairo Press, Professor Roger Allen, and others had struggled for years to interest major Western publishers in Arabic-language authors like Naguib Mahfouz. The award of the Nobel Prize for Literature to him inspired the purchase of fourteen of his titles by Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis for the American commercial publisher Doubleday and subsequently led to favorable reception for his works in English translation, notably for *The Cairo Trilogy*, which was published in individual volumes, one a year, starting with *Palace Walk* in 1990. Mrs. Onassis was, at that time, Doubleday's celebrity editor, having edited Michael Jackson's autobiography, for example. She did the line-by-line, pencil editing for all three volumes of my translation of *The Cairo Trilogy* in a perceptive, polite, and professional manner. She read along in the excellent French translations by Philipe Vigreux of the volumes of the Trilogy. Her edited pages can be examined today at the Lilly, Rare Books, Library of Indiana University, Bloomington (Indiana University Bloomington Libraries n.d.). The same is true for typescripts of an unpublished English translation of the Trilogy by three other individuals. I consider my apprenticeship with Mrs. Onassis to have been a turning point in my career as a translator; I learned a lot from her

penciled comments. Doubleday executives may have suspected that Mrs. Onassis would not complete this project and therefore assigned a junior editor to shadow us.

The Cairo Trilogy is itself **about paradigm shifts in Egyptian society** during the first decades of the twentieth century: from patriarchy mimicking colonial rule in *Palace Walk*, to undisciplined liberalism in *Palace of Desire*, and then, in the final volume, *Sugar Street*, to modernity and a neo-Kantian, game-theory approach to life: that individuals may choose to play different games in life but should obey the rules of whichever game they select. By the third volume, which was deliberately written in a zippier, more modern style than the first, the fortunes of the family rest squarely on the shoulders of the patriarch's gay grandson, who is respectfully portrayed.

The Nobel Prize for Mahfouz and the success of *The Cairo Trilogy* have, I claim, meant that major publishers no longer reject submissions **merely** on the once popular excuse that a novel has been translated **from Arabic**. Responses to such a submission used to be: "Who would be the audience for that?" or "What American readers are interested in Iraqi refugees in Denmark?" or "Why does this Iraqi novel end with an apocalypse?" Nowadays, though, access to major publishing houses is effectively blocked for most translators from Arabic by the common requirement to submit manuscripts through a literary agent. Moreover, even today, accountants at major publishing houses reportedly wince at translations from any foreign language, because they assume: "American don't read translations."

Income from the Doubleday deal allowed the American University in Cairo Press to offer the Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature (AUC Press n.d.) starting in 1996 to the best, untranslated Arabic-language novel of the year and to increase the quantity and quality of its publications of Arabic literature in translation. In November and December 2010, I was a member of a delegation from Appalachian State University to Egypt, where we met with the Chancellor of the University of Fayoum and signed an exchange agreement between our two institutions. I then took my two companions from Appalachian to the American University in Cairo campus for the ceremony during which Dr. Miral al-Tahawy was presented the Naguib Mahfouz Award on December 1, 2010. At that time, she taught Arabic at Appalachian State University, but previously she had taught at Fayoum University.

Although my translation of *The Cairo Trilogy* was well received, a now deceased head of the AUC Press told me years ago, while figuratively and physically patting me on the back at a party on a rooftop terrace in Cairo, that I would never translate Mahfouz again. (In retrospect, I assume that he was punishing me for asking for a share of the royalties.) The AUC Press, instead, offered me a chance to translate the memoirs of an Egyptian general, but I declined.

I had to wait several years for another opportunity to serve as a translator of Arabic literature. An editor at an American publishing house eventually offered me a contract to translate an Egyptian author's memoir, which she had commissioned, a work that was still being written. After the author came to New York and blew up her contract, and mine, the editor admitted that she had hired me, because I was "cheaper than the author's husband." I had also made less progress on that translation than I would have liked, because the **outgoing** chair of my academic department had warned the **incoming** chair not to allow me to "buy out" one of my four mandatory courses per semester to work on that translation – on the grounds that I was running a "cottage

industry" from the department. Robert Wechsler in his excellent book *Performing Without a Stage: The Art of Literary Translation* wrote memorably: "The translator is the monkey in the middle, with loyalties divided not only between languages and cultures, but also between author and publisher" (Wechsler 1998: 217).

The third paradigm shift has been open internet access for the general public from approximately 1995. When Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis edited the volumes of *The Cairo Trilogy*, sections of the manuscript, in approximately eighty-page packets, were sent back and forth between Boone, North Carolina, New York City, **and** Cairo by postal service and courier, because the American University in Cairo Press had brokered the deal. The internet has made it possible for a translator to correspond, even several times a day, with an Arab author or a publisher almost anywhere in the world, including Oman. It has also facilitated the research necessary for translation. Think Google. Think the Wikipedia and now artificial intelligence. The internet has brought new publication venues too – sites like *Words Without Borders* and *In Translation* [now closed for submissions] of *The Brooklyn Rail*.

Banipal Magazine of Modern Arab Literature, although a print journal, also had a major online presence and influence. Its regular publication would hardly have been possible without the internet. Samuel Shimon, Margaret Obank, and their publication *Banipal* were extremely important for me and introduced me to a stream of Arab authors whose work they asked me to translate. These included Mahmoud al-Rahbi from Oman.[6] They have, however, recently embraced a richly deserved retirement.

All these venues have helped me by publishing my translations of short stories or excerpts from novels by Arab authors and/or by introducing me to new authors. They are still important resources for instructors who wish to assign translated works of Middle Eastern literature to their students. My translation of Bahraini author Munira al-Fadhel's elegant novella *For the Voice, For the Fragile Echo*, for example, was serialized in *The Brooklyn Rail* and may be read online there.

Before the internet widened my horizons, I confined my translation efforts to my comfort zone, which is Egypt, where I have lived for four nonconsecutive years. Even so, to obtain an author's permission to translate a work, before access to the internet, I had to visit her in Cairo, only to have her refuse me permission, leave a note beneath a deceased author's son's apartment door, or send a friend as an emissary to Tawfiq al-Hakim. There is a direct correlation between access to the internet and my ability and willingness to translate non-Egyptian authors.

I now also hear occasionally from Arab graduate students who are interested in an author I have translated or in one of my translations, because they are pursuing translation studies. For example, for my 2012 revision of my translation of *Return of the Spirit* by Tawfiq al-Hakim, I benefited from access to portions of the M.A. thesis of Amira Salah El-Deen Askar of Zagazig University in Egypt after she contacted me online.

Translating Arabic has become easier with the publication of more dictionaries, especially those of various dialects of Arabic. I keep hoping to fall in love with an internet Arabic dictionary, but perhaps my own ignorance is to blame for my failure to

[6] Banipal (UK) Magazine of Modern Arab Literature. Contributors: Mahmoud al-Rahbi. "Six Short Stories," pp. 100-111, Banipal 68 (Summer 2020).

date in this regard. I do occasionally Google words in Arabic to see what information or image pops up.

I am tired, though, of hearing, in the locker room, from friends who brag about their connoisseurship of artisanal beer, artisanal cheese, and artisanal bread, that Google and artificial intelligence will translate my texts for me. My response is: "Literary translation is by definition **artisanal**, Guy**s**" (Oliver 2023).

Too many people fail to acknowledge the connotative – rather than denotative – aspects of literary translation (see Taneja 2018: 156). Most words in any language have more than one meaning. They are not capsules that contain meaning powder. The sentence and context in which a word appears are crucial for understanding its meaning and thus for making an informed choice of an English equivalent. In *Performing Without a Stage*, Robert Wechsler pointed out: 'translators work in the realm of alternatives, there are always other ways it could have been done" (Wechsler 1998: 146).

Moreover, if I wept in my university office while translating a chapter about the death of a minor character in *Palace of Desire*, I hope some readers will also shed a tear. If the conclusion of *Palace Walk* made me relive the assassination of President Kennedy in Dallas and slammed me back to 1963 and Timothy Dwight College at Yale University, I hope some readers will experience a similar jolt back in time.

Between 1968 and 1985, Arthur Wormhoudt published twelve translations from Arabic literature (DAL n.d.). My understanding is that his approach was to have students who were native speakers of Arabic translate into English works that he then polished. While I applaud his audacity and enterprise, I will quickly add that his approach has not worked for me, even though at least two native speakers of Arabic have volunteered to perform a similar service for me. One attempt I made with an Arab scholar convinced me to quit the experiment as quickly as I could politely. If I, myself, do not feel firsthand the emotion in an Arabic-language novel, how can I season my translations with it? When I was translating *The Cairo Trilogy*, one prominent Arabic-to-English translation-expert advocated such a two-person approach for the translation of Arabic literature, with a native speaker of Arabic teaming up with a native speaker of English. In my opinion, such initiatives ignore the importance of connotative and emotive factors in literary translation.

Andrew Benjamin, in his challenging book *Translation and the Nature of Philosophy* (1989), included an English translation of this quotation from the German philosopher Walter Benjamin: "Translation is a model." Without addressing the work of that important German philosopher or the context of this quote in1 Andrew Benjamin's book, I wish to appropriate this thought in its simplest reading and agree that **translations are models**, that they are alternative versions of a source text. If they were not, they would be useless. Philosopher Max Black endorsed the use of metaphors and models and pointed out that models are only useful when they **differ** from what they are modeling. (If you need a map, you do not want someone to hand you a paving stone from that street or have a forklift present you with an entire block of it.) In his essay "Models and Archetypes," Max Black pointed out that models assume metaphors (Black 1962: 219). Models work only when they are *not* precise replicas of the modeled entity: "only by being unfaithful in *some* respect can a model represent its original" (ibid., 220). He approvingly quoted E.H. Hutten:

> We are forced to employ models when . . . we cannot give a direct and complete description in the language we normally use. Ordinarily, when words fail us, we have recourse to analogy and metaphor. (ibid., 236)

In other words, English translations by definition differ from the original text of, say, an Arabic novel. My understanding of translations as models of the original work may also explain why I care so strongly about the selection of cover art for my publications. I now typically begin translating a book by selecting cover art for it, even though I know that one of the first things a publisher will do is to change the cover. Of course, the fact that I majored in art history at Yale may help to explain my fascination with cover art.

The fourth paradigm shift, by my calculations, has come with political and military disasters of many varieties and the subsequent dispersal of refugees, including authors, to other areas of the world. Some of those erupted when governments in the Middle East crashed into the Arab Spring. Clyde Edgerton, who is known as a "North Carolina author" and who has fittingly been inducted into the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame, has complained of the difficulty he has had dealing with New York editors, who do not, for example, know that a "doublewide" is, in North Carolina, a pair of house-trailers welded together, to form a prefab home. How does a translator explain literature reflecting the Arab Spring to an American editor?

Many Arab authors, especially Arab women authors, I contend, have struggled for decades to find a publisher if they do not have ready access to Cairo, Beirut, or some similar publishing hub, and to the "right" literary elites. Starting, as mentioned above, with *Egyptian Tales and Short Stories of the 1970s and 1980s*, I have translated and do still translate quite a few Arab women authors, but my attempts to find publishers for **their** works, beyond literary journals and websites, have proved challenging.

Now that many Arab authors are either in external or internal exile, in prison, and/or under some type of threat, translators should offer them the flimsy lifeline or megaphone represented by an English translation of their works. One author's repeated attempts to attend university or to publish in Iraq, for example, reportedly led to repeated incarcerations for him. At least four of the authors I have translated have been imprisoned. At least two have sought refuge on occasion **in** Syria. Another is now in exile **from** Syria. Some Arab authors also reportedly have a larger audience in their country of origin after finding an international audience for their works through translation—or by writing in English or German, for example.

The liberating influence of the area-studies, Islamic Civ approach for translation from Arabic has limitations here, because a novel by an author who has lived for decades in exile in Europe may be regarded as "inauthentic," especially if her novel is set in Europe or was written in a European language. Some **Arab authors** also, mistakenly I believe, assume that an American audience will want a novel with American themes or one that is dedicated, for example, to Chelsea Manning (formerly Bradley Manning).

In short: **The selection of works to be translated into English remains chaotic, and there are lapses of communication between interested parties on both sides of the Arabic/English language divide and the publisher/translator chasm.**

A fifth and final *paradigm shift* is evident in a new interest in Arabic literature, whether written in English or in translation (or renewed – think of Kahlil Gibran (Gibran Khalil Gibran) and the success of *The Prophet*, published in 1923). This shift also parallels the success of literature written in English by Middle Eastern authors.

For one thing, "Publication in English," including in English translation, is becoming comparable to "Written in English" for some awards. (This goes a step beyond the eligibility requirement for the Nobel Prize for Literature that "enough" works by an author should be available in some Western language or languages – either originally or by translation.) The Tuareg author Ibrahim al-Koni, who publishes in Modern Standard Arabic, was, for example, shortlisted for the Man Booker International Prize in 2015 on the basis of English translations of some of his many works. English translations are being judged, by some, not merely as translations (for translation awards) but as an alternative transcription – like a cello composition transcribed for the bassoon – for the U.S. National Book Award, for example, – and at times even by an author. The Iranian writer Amir Hassan Cheheltan, for example, has written:

> The new collection of stories is the first of my books to appear in Persian since 2005. In the intervening nine years, four new novels of mine have been translated and published in German, English, and Norwegian without first having had a chance to appear in Persian, their original language. (Cheheltan 2015: 38-40)

I, even though I am a translator, although not from Farsi, felt sad when I read this comment. I doubt that my own two novels will ever be published, and it might be better for everyone concerned, including me, if they were published in Arabic translation rather than English. When I met once with a group of writers in Bahrain, they informed me gleefully that: "translators are failed authors."

The trend of some Arab or Iranian authors who choose to write and publish in a European language, whether because they are bilingual, trilingual, or more comfortable in English than their "native tongue" is arguably related to the phenomenon of the **global novel** written in English by Arab, Iranian, South Asian, or East Asian authors, for example (Deb 2017). The success of some Arab authors who write global novels in English, though, has, I contend, done little to promote awareness of all the Arab authors who write primarily in Arabic.

One American editorial committee for a Middle East publication series was reported to have become "more and more anxious about book sales" by 2016[7]. Is it appropriate to wonder whether competition for a reader's attention from global novels written by Arab authors in English, French, or German has played a part in that alleged decline in sales?

An anonymous and perceptive professional (**third**) reader for one of my translations wrote:

> If there is an audience looking for "news" from "there," this novel requires too much work in between the fast-moving sections. . . . The novel also would be a difficult teach . . . and the whole text would make a long read for students.

[7] Email, March 22, 2016.

This reader said the quiet part out loud by remarking that the novel "would be a difficult teach." Would the translation of an Italian or Spanish novel be evaluated for its potential use in a European Civ course? I think not. The reader appealed, I think, to the Islamic Civ paradigm, which acted here as a hindrance. I wonder as well whether the reader was comparing that submission to a Global novel when remarking:

> Although it creates an interesting composite portrait, and is a compelling innovation in Arabic literature, it would be difficult to open this book up to English-language audiences—not in its referents, but its form. [8]

For years before and after 9/11, I deplored the contrast between the frequent, front-page coverage of turmoil in the Middle East and the minimal coverage of the region on arts and lifestyle pages. A novelist from Georgia suggested astutely some years ago to me and Clyde Edgerton that, if there were more coverage of the Middle East on the culture pages, there might be less Middle Eastern violence to report on the news pages. In 2015, though, *The New York Times*, for example, ran a big spread, in color, about eating dates and another on yummy foods for Ramadan *iftar*s and four months later published a signed, laudatory obituary for the courageous and distinguished Egyptian author Gamal El Ghitani (Moskin 2015). By February 2024 and thereafter, however, there has been far too much excruciating Middle Eastern violence to report.

I conclude my discussion of changing paradigms for Arabic translation with a reminder for translators and authors alike that there is an American Literary Translators Association, which has an informative website,[9] holds translation conferences, hosts programs for emerging translators, presents a variety of awards for translations, lists literary translators, and provides a database of publishers.

I have supported myself for years by teaching philosophy and religious studies courses and have usually worked on more than one translation at a time. When people ask me how long it took me to translate a certain novel, I usually do not know. I was, however, allowed one year to complete my translation for each of the three volumes of *The Cairo Trilogy*. The other time span I remember is spending four months in my university's loft in New York while I served as its loft-master, checking in and out groups of students visiting from Appalachian State. Much of the time, though, I sat by a window with a view of the Hudson River while translating *Return of the Spirit* by Tawfiq al-Hakim. In short, I may be looking for a publisher at any one time for as many as eight completed translations of Arabic novels. [My university has since then leased a different space for its "loft."]

Appendix: Paradigm Shifts for Teaching

The first, third, and fourth paradigm shifts discussed above have also affected Western instruction about Islam and Islamic culture. Oddly enough, after teaching for years in the Religious Studies section of the joint Philosophy-Religion Department at

[8] An editor's email containing the anonymous reader's report, May 20, 2016.
[9] The website is available at https://www.literarytranslators.org/

Appalachian State University, I feel that I have stumbled upon a comparable shift in religious studies. In a hyphenated department like ours, there are predictable tensions between philosophers and theologians and, also, in religious studies, **between** modernists **and** scholars of ancient texts and historic religions.

Some of my now former "modern" colleagues in Religious Studies have, also, insisted that a modern Religious Studies Department needs a sociologist of religion, an anthropologist of religion, a psychologist of religion, etc. to explain [away?] **religion**, considered as a single, complex entity. Such scholars, despite their wide assortment of specialties, might all come from the same divinity school and do not need to have enrolled in a course in a department bearing the name of their specialization. Their students can be sent back to the mother (secular) divinity school to become a sociologist (etc.) of religion. The key thing is that they **know religion**. I wonder whether the rejection of Orientalism in religious studies and the embrace of a more civilizational approach carries with it some of the hubris of an American student of the history of the Islamic world who aspires to write a definitive history of Oman, for example, especially when such a modern religious-studies scholar is exploring a religion they did not grow up with.

To the three paradigm shifts mentioned above regarding translation, I would add two additional, paradoxical paradigm shifts I have experienced while teaching. First, the American invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq brought to my classroom soldiers training for deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan and veterans of those wars. Their genuine interest in the subject matter – whether prompted by a desire to stay alive or puzzlement about: "Why are they shooting at us?" – counterintuitively helped to calm Islamophobia in the classroom. With them have come, even to the mountains of North Carolina, Muslim students and professors, who contribute to social harmony by their very presence and their need for a place to pray, for example. (Boone, North Carolina, now has its own mosque.)

Wikipedia and YouTube – so the internet again – also changed the way I taught a "content" class. Instead of arriving in the classroom with a power-point or list of notes to write on the blackboard, at times I pulled up a series of Wikipedia articles on the people and ideas I planned to discuss, so that together we could debate the accuracy of those articles. Then I could spice up our debates with music and interviews from YouTube, etc. This approach, I hope, allowed me to interact more spontaneously with students in the classroom. It obviously should never become a crutch.

The death of the printed textbook should be considered here but arrived after I retired from teaching. One (former) acting dean of Arts & Sciences at Appalachian, though, once told members of my department he thought that many of the out-of-class essays submitted to him for a course he taught were **plagiarized**. I was shocked that he did not seem concerned.

I prioritized in-class essays (written on paper) based on reading assignments and class discussions. These essays could be rewritten out of class for extra credit or a better grade. This approach seems even more important now with students' ready access to artificial intelligence. My former colleagues who prided themselves on assigning long research essays due at the end of the semester (and then complained about grading stacks of them) may now be reconsidering their options.

As a teacher, though, I was also a consumer of translated literature, using either printed texts I assigned or works archived online by language and country, for example at www.wordswithoutborders.org. Whether as a translator or a teacher, I have looked for works of Arabic, Turkish, and Farsi literature I hope will engage a reader/student emotionally rather than simply works that bring "news from over there." I have often paired a novel with a film to heighten the emotional impact and balance Islamophobia's appeal. Admittedly, the use of fiction as a reality check seems as paradoxical as benefiting from the presence of soldiers and veterans in a classroom to assuage free-floating prejudice against Islam, but translated literature brings to the classroom an everyday-life approach that focuses "on what is going on in ordinary people's lives rather than on abstract theories of social action" (Bowen, Early & Schulthies 2014).

Marwa al-Sabouni in her elegant and engrossing book *The Battle for Home* writes that Western scholars who study Islamic architecture have "overlooked discussion of the *architectural experience*" (al-Sabouni 2016). In that same chapter she provides the example of a tree:

> You can enhance your experience and take it to a deeper level if you wish: you can focus on its bark, on the insects that march on it . . . On each level of experience there is a new world of 'design' to be discovered and enjoyed. It is exactly that effect at which the old Islamic architecture aimed. (al-Sabouni 2016: 168)

She suggests turning architectural instruction: "in a new direction, so as to study the small things, the real things, the things that people relate to in their daily lives" (al-Sabouni 2016: 176).

I hope that my work as a translator of Arabic literature and teacher of Islamic Culture has moved in the direction that Marwa al-Sabouni recommends. A novel or short story written for a Middle Eastern readership and translated from a Middle Eastern language into English (or French, or German, etc.) can provide readers, including students, the vicarious experience of things Middle Eastern people encounter in daily life, even if the characters live in Denmark.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

Ethical Standards

The authors affirm this research did not involve human subjects.