

## Translating Western Literary Theory among Arab Scholars : Between the Pursuit of Acculturation and Theoretical Preoccupation-Ahmed Bouhassan as an example-

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### Abstract:

Perhaps one of the most important cultural achievements in the field of modern literary studies—those that modern scholars have subjected to processes of review and evaluation—is the body of work in which translation was used as a medium for intercultural exchange. There is no doubt that the translation of literary and critical theory had both declared and undeclared aims. Consequently, these reviews emerged to assess whether these translation efforts succeeded in achieving what they sought in terms of renewal, keeping pace with developments, and advancement.

This study aims to review and evaluate the achievements made in translating the data and concepts of Western literary and critical

### 1. Introduction

One of the most significant cultural achievements in the field of modern literary studies—subjected by contemporary scholars to processes of review and evaluation—is the body of work in which translation has been employed as a medium for intercultural exchange. There is little doubt that the translation of literary and critical theory has pursued both declared and implicit aims. Hence, these reviews have sought to assess whether such translational efforts have indeed contributed to the renewal, contemporaneity, and development they aspired to achieve.

In fact, translation has, throughout the intellectual history of humanity, constituted

theory, from the perspective of the intellectual reception it gained among Arab scholars. It also examines their causes, references, and the mechanisms upon which they relied. Furthermore, it analyzes the outcomes of these inputs by surveying the opinions of Arab scholars about them from various perspectives regarding this intercultural practice. The study will focus on the dominance of the theoretical concern among Arab scholars, then present a translation model by the Moroccan researcher Ahmed Bouhassane, and finally conclude with a set of findings.

**Keywords:** Translation, Literary and critical theory, Acculturation, Theoretical preoccupation.

the most prominent form of communicative practice linking nations, by virtue of the opportunities it has provided for the circulation of knowledge, ideas, and methodologies. Translation exists “because people speak multiple languages—a condition we have lived with since the beginning of history, despite the seemingly natural appearance of this difference. (Allouche, 1987, p. 255)”. It is the intercultural medium that human beings have employed in all eras, and its use intensifies particularly during *interstitial periods* marked by contact between two different cultural systems, with the aim of civilizational interaction.

Among the most important modern interstitial periods in which the use of translation intensified was the encounter between Arabs and the West, with all its intellectual and civilizational resources. This encounter generated a state of fascination and attraction toward the Other, driven by the desire to probe the depths of its civilizational and literary development. Translation was arguably the first gateway through which contact with Western culture was established, beginning with what is known as the Renaissance period. It is well known to scholars of critical and theoretical studies that the volume of translated Western works in literary theory and criticism is substantial and has taken various forms, most notably articles—which constitute the largest share—as well as book translations. These translations have covered a wide range of literary and critical theoretical fields in their diversity. Many critics undertook the task of introducing and translating Western critical approaches, proceeding from the premise of the necessity of benefiting from the Other's critical culture.

This study aims to review and evaluate the achievements in translating Western literary and critical theory, from the perspective of the reception it has garnered among Arab scholars, while examining its causes, references, and the mechanisms it has relied upon. It then analyzes the outcomes of these inputs by surveying the views of Arab scholars across their diverse orientations and perspectives regarding this multifaceted intercultural practice. The study will focus on the dominance of the theoretical concern among Arab scholars, after which it will present a translational model by the Moroccan researcher Ahmed Bouhassan, and conclude with a set of findings and proposals within the framework of the topic under consideration.

### **First: Literary Theory and Issues of Literary Criticism: Boundaries and Intersections**

In this section, we aim to address literary theory and uncover its concept. Literary theory is the study of all that is literary, including its

genres and types, and the characteristics that distinguish each type from the others. It is as old as literature itself (Khalil, 2010, p. 13).

It stretches back to ancient times; starting with Plato, linguists, philosophers, and critics began classifying literature, and their pioneer in this was Plato himself, who classified the genre of poetry into three types (Khalil, 2010, p. 16).

The topic of literary genesis (Yahiaoui, 1991) considered by most literary theorists to be one of the most important subjects both in the past and in modern times.

One of the main objectives of literary theory is to explore most of the principles of literature and its general and specific characteristics, that is, everything that constitutes the world of literature. It reveals its formal and thematic structures, seeking to establish a systematic and comprehensive knowledge (Maskin, 2010, p. 17). Therefore, literary theory is a vast field of overarching concepts related to literature, understood as a phenomenon with multiple facets in terms of its meaning, origin, function, and its crucial role in establishing universal rules for literature. The primary aim of literary theory is to establish a scientific and organized knowledge specifically about literature and its genres.

### **Second: Introduction to Western Criticism through the Medium of Translation**

Those who examine the process of critical intercultural exchange in the field of Arabic literary studies during the second half of the twentieth century will hardly overlook the role played by the medium of translation in this intercultural movement. Translated works at that time, as well as those translated in later periods, aimed primarily at introducing Western criticism to facilitate benefiting from it (Al-Bazei, 2004, p. 124). This endeavor responded to a tendency to move away from classical references and to enrich the critical discourse with new modern insights (Ailan, 2010, p. 17).

In fact, Arabic literary criticism witnessed a significant intercultural movement

since the 1960s, as universities provided specialists who closely explored Western cultural systems. The 1960s, specifically the year 1960 and the years that followed, were a turning point in the history of engagement with Western criticism, either directly or, more accurately, through the semi-direct access afforded by translations, or through books presenting critical theories and terminologies (Al-Bazei, 2004, pp. 123-124). Translation took various forms, including selected articles from books published in journals or complete translations of prominent works by notable authors such as Roland Barthes, Tzvetan Todorov, Lucien Goldmann, Gérard Genette, and many others. The

**Table 1: Represents examples of translational interest among Arab scholars in Western intellectual and theoretical works.**

Translated Text Title	Author	Translator and Year
Poetics	Todorov	Shukri Al-Mabkhout / Raja Ben Salama, 1978
Theory of Literature	Todorov	Ibrahim Al-Khatib, 1982
Writing Degree Zero	Roland Barthes	Naeem Al-Homsi, 1970
The Pleasure of the Text	Roland Barthes	Mondher Ayachi, 1992
Criticism and Truth, with the addition of Barthes' essay "The Death of the Author"	Roland Barthes	Mondher Ayachi, 1994
Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogic Principle	Todorov	Fakhri Saleh, 1992
Narrative Discourse Revisited	Gérard Genette	Mohamed Moatasim, 2000
Methodology and the Sociology of Literature	Lucien Goldmann	Mustafa Al-Masnawi, 1998

**Source: The translational blogs of Arab authors**

Before offering an analytical reading of the translational output, it is essential to step back historically to analyze the first translation attempt and draw from it several key insights. This attempt dates back to the critic Mohamed Mandour.

**Third: The Contributions of Arab Scholars to the Translation of Literary Theory: The First Attempt and Its Developments**

**1. Mohamed Mandour and the First Translational Attempt: (The Articles of Lanson and Mahié)**

It is almost unanimously agreed among scholars of literature, its criticism, and its history that the very first embryonic attempt at

publication of such works was facilitated by numerous magazines concerned with cultural and literary affairs, such as *Fusul* in Cairo, and *Mawaqif*, *Al-Fikr al-Arabi*, *Al-Fikr al-Arabi al-Mu'asir*, and *Al-Karmel* in Lebanon (Ailan, 2010, pp. 17-18).

As a result, the Arabic library was enriched, providing Arab intellectuals with a treasury of critical theories, ideas, and methodologies, which had a clear influence on contemporary Arabic criticism.

The following works can be presented as representative examples of Arab scholars' translational engagement with Western intellectual and theoretical production.

explicit translation in the field of literary theory was undertaken by Mohamed Mandour through his translation of Lanson's and Meillet's articles. After returning from France, Mandour worked on establishing the foundations of Lanson's historical-critical method, and in 1946 he authored his book *Methodical Criticism among the Arabs*, which included a translation of Lanson's study entitled *The Method of Research in Literature and Language*. Mandour reissued it in 1964, incorporating another translation of Meillet's article, *The Method of Research in Language* (Oughlessi, 2002, p. 21).

Mandour discovered Lanson "during his stay in France...through his students and

followers...perhaps reading some of his works and attending his lectures at the Sorbonne. It is therefore no coincidence that Mandour's first translation—upon returning to Egypt—was a study by Lanson" (Oughlessi, 2002, p. 52).

It is not surprising that Mandour undertook the translation of these two key articles in the field of literary history. He dedicated most of his projects in literary studies to reading Arabic literature in light of French methodological frameworks, motivated by the belief that "the French method in approaching literature is the most precise and effective" (Oughlessi, 2002, p. 4).

Hence, in the preface to his book *Methodical Criticism among the Arabs*, he asserts that "ancient Arabic books contain treasures that, if we return to them and approach them with our cultivated minds imbued with modern European culture, we can extract many truths that still stand today" (Mandour, 2007, p. 6). Through his book *Literature and Its Schools*, he conveys a clear message in the introduction: "Modern Arabic literature has been influenced by Western literatures more than by ancient Arabic literatures...this influence came either through translation or through reading Western literatures in their original languages" (Mandour, 2006).

Mohamed Mandour firmly asserts that the modernization process that permeated Arabic literature originated from foreign literatures, and that Western intellectual presence in contemporary Arab culture is inevitable, just like the classical literary element (Mandour, 2006, p. 4). According to Mandour, adopting Western theories is always coupled with enrichment, which allows for great cultural expectations "from the study of Western literary schools, which have become a main guiding force for our contemporary literature" (Mandour, 2006, p. 4).

Mandour further provides the same justification he presented in *Al-Mizan Al-Jadid*, namely, global diffusion and integration into universality, stating: "This guidance is harmless, and perhaps it is highly beneficial, as it will introduce our literature into the stream of world literature" (Mandour, 2006, p.

4). In reality, Mandour did not confine himself "to merely assimilating what the West produced in the fields of literature and thought, and its critical methods in those fields, but rather he advanced to the regions from which knowledge originates...thus, the Western centrality, which appeared as (humanistic), (universal), (holistic), or (comprehensive), became the driving force behind his efforts" (Mandour, 2006, p. 75). Moreover, he did not stop there; he advocated for these methodologies and emphasized progressing with them, under the availability of advanced modern Western standards, while considering older classical standards ineffective (Mandour, 2006, p. 75).

## **2. Arab Scholarly Efforts in Translating Literary Theory**

Despite the fascination with the field of **literary theory**, considering it a relatively recent scientific discipline, the quantity of translations in this domain remains relatively limited compared to what has been translated in the field of literary criticism.

1. Perhaps the most notable work translated in this field is *Theory of Literature* by René Wellek and Austin Warren. This book, first published in 1949, has been translated into many languages, including Arabic, in two editions: the first, in 1987, was translated by Mohiuddin Sobhi and revised by Houssam Al-Khatib (Wellek & Warren, 1987); the second was by Adel Salama, published in 1991.

2. *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* by Jonathan Culler, published in 1997, underwent two translations: the first by Mostafa Bayoumi Abdelsalam under the title *An Introduction to Literary Theory* in 2003; the second by Rasha Abdelkader under the title *Literary Theory* in 2004.

3. *Literary Theory: An Introduction* by Terry Eagleton, published in 1983, was translated three times: first by Ahmed Hassan under the title *Introduction to Literary Theory* in 1991; second by Thaer Deeb in 2006; and third by Jasem Al-Ali in 1992.

4. *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* by Raman Selden, 1985, was

translated twice: first by Said Al-Ghanmi in 1996, and second by Gaber Asfour in 1998.

5. *Modern Literary Theory: A Comparative Introduction* by Anne Jefferson and David Robey, first printed in English in 1982, was translated by Samir Massoud in 1992.

6. *Literary Theory* by David Carter, translated by Basel Al-Masalama, was published in 2010.

In addition to the six books mentioned above, Arab scholars have also compiled works consisting of translated articles centered on literary theory, collected into a single volume under the title *Literary Theory*. Among the most prominent are:

8. *Literary Theory in the Twentieth Century – Selected Articles*, translated by Mohamed Al-Omari, 2001.

9. *Literary Theory: Reading, Understanding, Interpretation*, translated by Ahmed Bouhsen, 2004.

A careful and comprehensive examination of the works mentioned above allows us to observe the following points:

a. The number of these translated works is relatively small, especially single-book translations, whereas the translation of articles on theory is even more limited.

b. Most of these translations lack any methodological preface, a feature evident to any reader of the canonical *Theory of Literature* by René Wellek and Austin Warren, translated by Mohiuddin Sobhi and revised by Hossam Al-Khatib. This edition lacks an introduction explaining the nature of

the work, its objectives, the translation process, or other methodological aspects. The same applies to other translations, such as Basel Al-Masalama’s translation of David Carter’s *Literary Theory* and Thaeer Deeb’s translation of Jonathan Culler’s *Literary Theory*. This has led many scholars to question the very act of translation and its intended purpose, especially as the absence of a proper framing or methodological introduction complicates reception and understanding of the work in a different context, as well as the translator’s familiarity with the general context (Al-Talib, 2017, p. 141).

c. These translations are usually delayed in time compared to the appearance of the original work, with a gap ranging from a maximum of 23 years to a minimum of six years (Al-Talib, 2017, p. 141). This delay undermines the potential for active engagement with the texts (Al-Daghumi, 1999, p. 302) and reflects “a flaw in the reception structure and the continuity in the target languages, negatively affecting the general reception of literary theory and its issues in these languages when compared to their originals” (Al-Talib, 2017, p. 141). Such temporal gaps often result in fragmented and partial reception of theories and complex critical projects, leading to a simplified and underdeveloped theoretical understanding, which diminishes the effectiveness of these translations. The following table clearly illustrates this reality.

**Table 2:** Illustrates the time gap between the publication date of the Western author and the year of the Arabic translation.

Book Title	Year of Original	Author	Translator	Year of Translation	Time Gap (Years)
<i>Theory of Literature</i>	1942	René Wellek & Austin Warren	Mohiuddin Sobhi	1972	30
			Adel Salama	1991	49
<i>Contemporary Literary Theory</i>	1985	Raman Selden	Said Al-Ghanmi	1996	11
<i>Introduction to Literary Theory</i>	1997	Jonathan Culler	Mostafa Bayoumi Abdelsalam	2003	6

			Rasha Abdelkader	2004	7
<i>Literary Theory: An Introduction</i>	1983	Terry Eagleton	Ahmed Hassan	1991	8
			Jasem Al-Ali	1992	9
			Thaer Deeb	2006	23

**Source:** Translational blogs of Western and Arab authors

d. Beyond the issue of temporal gaps, there is also the problem of selective bias that characterizes these works. Most of them “are translations of selected articles, through which it is impossible alone to engage in dialogue or adequately represent the efforts of the original authors, or to grasp the theoretical and philosophical backgrounds from which they originate” (Al-Daghumi, 1999, p. 304). This selectivity also manifested in translating some works while leaving others untouched, which may include the foundational texts of modern and postmodern Western theories and schools. Moreover, this selective approach was evident in the focus on textbooks or general works, as translators usually prioritize “books that remain at the level of general introductions and overviews” (Al-Daghumi, 1999, p. 302).

e. It is also common to observe that the translations are closely linked to the academic concerns of the translators, based on the fact that they are teachers or specialists in literary theory in their Arab universities. “Hence, the prominent presence of educational/academic concerns in these translations and the motives behind them is not surprising” (Al-Talib, 2017, p. 141). In fact, this feature should not be viewed as a cognitive limitation; rather, what reviewers of translation projects hoped for was that these efforts would move beyond personal initiatives and enter the sphere of broader cultural projects that serve the development of critical and intellectual discourse. Such projects address the needs of the Arab reader, who fears the potential isolation of his literary experience within a narrowly defined cultural framework.

#### **Fourth: An Analytical Reading of the Arab Achievement in Translating Literary Theory**

##### **1. The Intercultural Orientation and the Translation Mechanism, and the Concern with Theorization among Arab Scholars**

##### **1.1 Intercultural Exchange and Translation**

We cannot consider the practice of Arab scholars in translation except within the varied contexts from which their projects and works emerged. Perhaps the closest context to their situation is the intercultural context, encompassing the multiple meanings and implications of the term interculturality: discovery, communication, understanding, dialogue, acquaintance, testing the new, and other dimensions. Assuming that the primary concern of most translators was the theorization of general literary studies—and literary and critical theory in particular—the Arab translator sought to provide critics and researchers in the field of Arabic studies with Western models “to bridge gaps in theoretical works that converge with the synthesis of ideas by intermediaries whose mediation became a theoretical authority...thanks to the selective and reductive success of their works due to their pedagogical approach” (Allouche, 1987, p. 103). This is evident, for instance, in the preface of Bouhsen’s book and also in what Gaber Asfour asserted in the introduction to his translation of Raman Selden’s *Theory of Literature*, where he stated: “We translate theoretical texts rather than having some of us claim to present these theories in books attributed to ourselves, which are nothing but distorted summaries of one, two, or three known books to a reader of foreign languages” (Selden, 1991, p. 5).

Thus, it is essentially an educational desire: for the reader/student to draw from the original source rather than read the summarized and often distorted intermediaries. Hence, the dedication of the theory to the students of Cairo University was an invitation to openness and an effort to distance them from backwardness, as he said: “To my students, in the hope that they will open up to the horizons of contemporary

theories and rid themselves of the rust of old theories that will lead them only to further backwardness” (Selden, 1991, p. 11). The question arises: what explains this fascination and attraction toward Western theory? It is intellectual admiration for the borrowed Western model. This is why the translator of Horkheimer’s *Traditional Theory* proclaimed with certainty about a text known only to him: “Arab translation professionals have not yet dared to translate the works of this school, despite their critical importance and theoretical richness. The text we present today (Reception Theory) can be considered the foundational text of the school or its intellectual groundwork” (Horkheimer, 1990).

It can therefore be said that the Arab tendency toward theorization chose a challenging but appealing path: promoting numerous new theories within the Western cultural framework, where the translator found himself compelled to use translation as a medium to benefit the Arab reader. Az El-Din Ismail explains his own practice: “Here is the book we deemed worthy of translation into Arabic, given its historical and scientific theoretical significance, to make this thought and theory available to the Arab reader. Some consider it the best presentation of reception theory available to date...this endeavor will serve as a new gateway to literary theory, illuminating aspects that until now have suffered neglect and disregard” (Holub, 1994, pp. 28-29).

He further clarified his primary ambition: “There is no doubt that Arab critical thought, both ancient and modern, encompasses visions and ideas that can be organized around the activity of literary or artistic reception, and can be developed to ultimately form a theoretical framework that serves as a development or addition to general theory. This alone justifies undertaking the translation of this book” (Holub, 1994, p. 29). The translator places significant hopes on supporting Arab critical theory as a development of general theory, transforming “literary critical translation, in these pioneering models, into a magic wand expected to change the prevailing critical

situation, and indeed as a tool for modernization and accountability, addressing latent needs in the consciousness of professors, critics, and translators who engaged in a sweeping translational and critical quasi-modernism alongside a group of critics and translators” (Al-Talib, 2017, p. 137).

Az El-Din Ismail justifies his practice as part of global scholarly practice: “The era of simplifying critical thought and the accompanying reduction is over. Even Americans translate from the French, Germans, and Russians, while Italians and Spaniards translate from everyone” (Yelvaivankos, 1992). Given that all world literatures are translated, what prevents the Arab translator, according to Az El-Din Ismail, from engaging in the same practice as theorists in other countries?

University theses have always tended to simplify curricula and extract from them constructed theories. “Since the return of Taha, Mandour, and Ghanimi, impressed by the French positivist approach, which remained the model...” (Allouche, 1987, p. 107). Regarding the concern with keeping up, Hamid Abu Hamid notes:

Western theoretical sciences moved toward methodological specifications that require the creation of a modern Western culture to keep pace. They concluded that the best way to deal with the dominant culture is to transfer it from its original sources into Arabic, rather than distort it in compilations that patch together fragments from here and there. (Yelvaivankos, 1992, p. 10)

It seems that this translational approach to Western culture has become an inevitable path, unavoidable and necessary. Al-Bazei states:

That Western culture was, and still is, our problematic destiny—one that some sought to reject by taking refuge in heritage, while others tried to reconcile with it under the guise of the same heritage at times, and under the guise of another heritage at other times, namely human heritage and concepts such as universality, globalization, and the unity of knowledge. (Al-Bazei, 1997, p. 178)

## 1.2 Arab Theorists and the Arab Cultural Reality: Connection and Disjunction

Perhaps one of the most important features recorded by evaluative discourse regarding the theorization carried out by Arab thinkers, aided by the discourse of translation, is the problematic of connection and disjunction with the cultural reality of their societies and their cultural systems. The theorist often thinks in terms of an expected or idealized situation, as opposed to the actual prevailing reality. Thus, they approach it as a cognitive problem through theoretical, conceptual, and methodological levels. (Al-Daghumi, 1999, pp. 81-82)

The reality of practices shows that this discourse does not meet the conditions of Arab cultural theorization; it is nothing more than subjective preoccupations of the Arab critic or scholar, resulting from their exposure to Western methodologies and theories. The essential issue is not “the abundance or scarcity of discourses, nor the motivations behind their production”—although this is an important point that cannot be ignored when analyzing these discourses within a specific sociological context, or when examining the vision of their authors regarding the reality of their culture. Rather, what ultimately matters is the **existence or absence of the conditions for theorization**, and the extent to which these conditions are appropriate for addressing the questions of literature and criticism. (Al-Daghumi, 1999, p. 82)

Therefore, given that the necessary cultural conditions are not available, the usual stance toward incoming critical thought tends to be one of confrontation: it is either completely rejected, or embraced through affiliation, and sometimes reconciled with. In most cases, justification becomes necessary, whether for acceptance or rejection. (Al-Daghumi, 1999, p. 82)

Perhaps the first manifestation of this confrontation appeared in the form of theoretical comparison, then transformed into a process of selective borrowing and reconciliation, to the extent that the “other”

came to occupy the position of a model. Thus, *the aim became to benefit from it*, which facilitated the rapid entry of literary and critical schools within a short period. Consequently, these schools became intertwined with one another, and criticism itself became mixed with other forms of literary and intellectual study. (Al-Daghumi, 1999, p. 82)

Examples of this confrontation/interaction are numerous in our modern history, beginning with Taha Hussein, Al-Aqqad, Mikhail Naimy, and many others. It is difficult to describe their thought as belonging to a clear, specific methodological or theoretical framework, due to the reconciliatory tendency that characterizes their criticism—between old and modern, Arab and Western references. They truly reflected on literature and criticism, yet they were unable to stabilize their thinking or continue along a single evolving methodological path. (Al-Daghumi, 1999, p. 82)

This logic continued later with many critics and remains dominant to this day, even among those who chose to follow an existing method or theory without contributing to the creation of what they use and promote. The only explanation for this acculturative situation is that the path became open to everyone, *to the point that anyone who reads criticism produced by others claims to theorize or create something significant*, whereas the difficult path necessarily passes through literature itself—through textual criticism and through entering the culture that produces those texts. (Al-Daghumi, 1999, p. 83)

This approach later appeared under many labels, such as: establishing a new theory, founding a specifically Arab methodology, theorizing for the sake of understanding, theorizing for the sake of reconciliation, and other justifications that seem endless.

## 1.3 The Intercultural Tendency: By What Logic and Toward What Purpose?

Based on the issues outlined above, we conclude that theoretical discourse is haunted by “contradictions rooted in the fragmentation

of the self and its attachment to constraints that prevent the production of a discourse that truly speaks about its own time and place—that is, about its culture and identity. This is because it is a discourse that has not positioned itself within philosophy and science, where universals are formed... Rather, it is positioned within other discourses, where fashion, slogans, and ideologies operate—where seduction prevails. In this sense, it has become captive to the reasoning of other discourses and has forgotten how references, theories, and methodologies are constructed. These forms of reasoning enable nothing but reproduction, influence, dependency, and the practice of analogy and comparison” (Al-Daghumi, 1999, pp. 296-297).

The Arab theorist usually tends, in his intercultural engagements, toward selectivity and syncretism, and then exerts maximum effort to justify this by using the most persuasive means. Due to the available knowledge, the theorist of Arab criticism has come to view matters “through the models of Western criticism—criticism embodied in doctrines, theories, and methodologies unfamiliar in ancient or modern Arab culture. Yet, at the same time, they claim to be universal doctrines, valid for all world literatures and literary languages, especially when they adopted the slogans of ‘science’ and ‘method’ and found support in the human sciences that explain them” (Al-Daghumi, 1999, p. 297).

At the beginning of the intercultural journey, universities and scientific missions in the early twentieth century played a major role. This was part of a comparison that attempted to demonstrate what was “negative in comparison to what was considered exemplary” (Al-Daghumi, 1999, p. 298), confirming the presence of intercultural exchange, which never ceased and was further reinforced “with the emergence of the writings of scholars such as Ruhi Al-Khalidi and Qustaki Al-Himsi. From that point onward, we began to find a confirmed image of Western criticism through references to Western critics’ statements, translation of their

fundamental positions, and definitions of their methodologies, in an attempt to establish a relationship with this criticism in order to benefit Arabic literature and criticism” (Al-Daghumi, 1999, p. 83).

Subsequently, the process shifted from intercultural exchange toward the adoption of Western—particularly French—models (Al-Daghumi, 1999, p. 298). In other words, theoretical discourse found itself facing a powerful model that encouraged imitation and carried the attribute of universality that it promoted. At the same time, the Arab theorist began questioning “his own specificity, manifested in his sense of difference, which created a troubled consciousness seeking an appropriate solution: sometimes by transferring a model through adoption and translation, sometimes by rejecting it or exercising caution toward any tendency that claims it, and sometimes by conducting processes of reconciliation and synthesis based on acts of selection and adaptation”. (Al-Daghumi, 1999, p. 299)

From this emerged various discursive forms expressed through slogans: discourses of rooting (authenticity), dialogue, modernization, definition, rejection, and calls for adherence to the self. These critical and theoretical discourses were carried by elites engaged in criticism due to their positions within universities, media, or journalism. “Their position provided them with a platform to operate in the name of research and the introduction of new ideas, without necessarily grounding their work in the reality of the cultural society as it is, or relying on data produced by that reality” (Al-Daghumi, 1999, p. 299). These elites often found themselves caught between “two different cultural models—one perceived as deficient and another idealized model they promoted in order to transcend reality toward what ought to be”. (Al-Daghumi, 1999, p. 300)

Moreover, the necessary conditions were not in place before the emergence of slogans of modernization, modernity, and renewal. This resulted in the spread of a critical discourse characterized by critical language, terminology, and conceptual frameworks, yet

lacking spirit—the spirit being the presence of a philosophy of criticism within society. The critical knowledge consumed by criticism “did not rely on a knowledge movement capable of producing sciences that support critical knowledge. The reference framework upon which criticism and theoretical discourse rely does not exist within society; rather, it exists in foreign foundational works and sources—particularly Western ones—produced by figures such as Taine, Descartes, Hazlitt, Eliot, Lukács, Goldmann, Barthes, and Derrida” (Al-Daghumi, 1999, p. 300).

### **Fifth: Ahmed Bouhassen as a Practitioner of Translation: Mechanisms and Backgrounds**

#### **1- Cultural, Intellectual, and Educational Motivations**

Bouhassen framed his work within his interest in emerging issues related to literary theory, particularly with regard to the conceptions “that have affected literary practice during the last decades of the twentieth century” (Bouhassen, 2004, p. 5). He believes that critical and literary practice has developed significantly at the global level, giving rise to new and meaningful conceptions in contemporary literary practice, especially since their origins lie with well-known thinkers (Bouhassen, 2004, p. 5). This reflects a sense of keeping pace with new developments and a desire to benefit from the new conceptual frameworks developed by others, which may contribute to enriching literary studies in general, and critical and theoretical studies in particular.

Bouhassen also maintains that it is the duty of the Arab intellectual who is close to, and knowledgeable about, the Western cultural system—by virtue of linguistic competence—to transmit as many new ideas as possible, particularly since they constitute “part of our concern with what is taking place in the field of our intellectual and scientific activity” (Bouhassen, 2004, p. 5). This reveals the epistemic passion that motivates translators to further expand their engagement with texts.

Moreover, the fundamental aim is “to enrich our literary and intellectual studies

through what advanced human thought produces and offers” (Bouhassen, 2004, p. 5). If this thought possesses a universal human character, far removed from regionalism and geographical boundaries, then what prevents us from benefiting from it? It is the same idea and the same justifications that proponents of cultural exchange have long used in relation to the Other, since the time of Qustaki al-Himsi, Ruhi al-Khalidi, Taha Hussein, Muhammad Mandur, and many others.

Bouhassen further expresses, quite clearly, the academic objectives behind this translation movement, considering them among its most important driving forces. Indeed, it is “an essential part of fulfilling our educational role at the university, by enabling students and providing them, as far as possible and through personal efforts, with newly produced knowledge in fields related to our literary and intellectual interests” (Bouhassen, 2004, p. 5).

Bouhassen summarizes the overall concerns that motivated him for this work in his statement: “It is at the core of our attempt to engage with our contemporary scientific world, and an effort to introduce our language and thought into this human achievement, which can only contribute to the development of our scientific tools, theoretical conceptions, and practical procedures”. (Bouhassen, 2004, pp. 5-6)

#### **2. On the Mechanisms and Method**

Considering that understanding something stems from conceiving it, Bouhassen revealed his conception of translation. He believes “that translation possesses a precise and profound human communicative dimension; when we discern some of this in the works we translate, it is among the human acts that reveal Otherness (Altérité/Otherness) within us, and our creative difference, which recognizes the value of the self and the value of the other, constituting our human existence” (Bouhassen, 2004, p. 6).

This embodies a sense of alterity and distinction from the other, and therefore difference—but a creative difference that enshrines the principle of valuing both the self

and the other as part of the same human entity. When we observe this humanistic feature in Bouhassan, it feels as if we are revisiting the same characteristic we noticed earlier in Mandur's work, particularly in light of a strong belief in the communicative dimension among all human beings.

Bouhassan then discusses the works of others, emphasizing that no one can deny the importance of what the translator's research has contributed in his book, or their role in advancing human literary research. According to Bouhassan, Arabic literature is but an inseparable part of this whole, especially since "it was able, to some extent, to benefit from that and assimilate those achievements, even acquiring a discursive dimension in contemporary Arab culture" (Bouhassen, 2004, p. 6).

Finally, Bouhassan reaches the central point: that the credit, both past and present, goes to the translators—"usually individuals—who recognize the scientific, intellectual, and human value of the act of translation, and indeed the role of translation in presenting knowledge, arts, and peoples".

(Bouhassen, 2004, p. 6).

### **3. Introducing the Translated Texts**

After Bouhassan framed his practice within a framework of unavoidable human intercultural engagement, based on the considerations he outlined—namely, the human dimension, the nature of the new conceptual insights held by the Other, the necessity of interacting with the Other to benefit from their knowledge, and the students' need to enrich their understanding with new Western theories, among other justifications—he then proceeded to introduce us to the nature of the translated works and to clarify their scientific value.

The translated articles sought "to unsettle traditional concepts and perceptions of literature, as well as to present new theoretical conceptions of literature and its role in contemporary society" (Bouhassen, 2004, p. 6). From Bouhassan's discussion, one can perceive the duality between the old and the new, the fixed and the changing, the modern and the classical perspectives, and the

necessary interaction, transformation, and assimilation between them.

Subsequently, Bouhassan provided a concise presentation of the content of each translated article and the intended benefit. His precise delineation of their themes "indicates an internalization and comprehension reinforced, on the one hand, by the fluency of the translation language, and, on the other hand, by the critical translation supported with footnotes, commentary, and explanatory notes, in addition to the establishment of a list containing the essential terms" (Al-Talib, 2017, p. 152).

### **Sixth: Research Findings and Conclusions**

In conclusion, this study presents the main findings we have reached:

- It became clear that the act of translation has asserted itself as a fundamental tool of intercultural exchange, in addition to the psychological and pedagogical justifications it carries. It emerged as a natural civilizational behavior, resulting from the interaction of Arab scholars with the West, and from their discovery of ideas that could enrich their own cultural system, which is in dire need of a touch of scientific dialogue, knowledge exchange, and methodological exploration. This explains the combination of translation with theoretical and critical concerns, especially during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s.
- It is evident that the output of translated works in the field of literary theory is quantitatively limited, due to several reasons, including the complexity of the field and the difficulty of mastering it, not to mention its novelty even for Western scholars themselves.
- The translated books in theory, like those in literary criticism, were often marked by the subjective inclinations of translators, which subjected the practice to a state of random selectivity. Among the main motivations observed among translators were educational/university motives and global knowledge motives. The cognitive motive was dominated by a concern for keeping up with scientific developments, justified by multiple reasons, including serving the Arabic language in its textual, intellectual, and cultural

dimensions, the necessity to transcend the old, and the exercise of intellectual freedom in reading others and transmitting their perspectives on literature and criticism. Translation, therefore, functions within the contexts that led to the formulation of new perspectives, aiming to compare critical reality with the inherited literary heritage. This practice started in the early 20th century and developed various conceptions "whether in its foundations, in its concepts, or in its view of literature and the critical process" (Ailan, 2010).

- The translation methodology reflects subjective perceptions regarding the function of translation and its application in Arab culture, keeping it distant from the real issues of literary theory and criticism.

- The value of translation is highlighted in its contribution to creating a new critical stance, which draws on theories and concepts and utilizes procedural tools to aid in text interpretation, beyond the conventional, social, and historical models familiar to traditional Arab criticism.

- Translation was not systematic, organized, or consistent, nor was it derived from an established academic reality. It did not respond to a coherent Arab cultural vision but was subject to selectivity and personal taste. Only major works were translated, leaving gaps in the overall projects of related topics, and often translations occurred over widely spaced periods, "which negatively affected the ability to grasp the comprehensive theoretical and philosophical conception of methodology" (Ailan, 2010, p. 40).

- The study revealed the Arab translator's neglect of critical terminology, and the methodology adopted contributed to deepening terminological issues in contemporary Arab critical discourse. Translation of critical works, theories, and methodologies often lacked precision in conceptual understanding, depth of reception, and application. This is mainly due to neglecting the importance of terminology and awareness of the need to agree on its philosophical, theoretical, and procedural essence (Ailan, 2010, p. 41).

- Another factor in translation practices was the spread of methodological sectarianism, where translators often translated works that aligned with their own critical approach. This tendency peaked in the 1990s, a phenomenon less observed in Western criticism. This led to a sense that Arab translation discourse reflected assimilation with Western thought.

- Regarding scientific recommendations, it became clear that collaborative efforts are necessary to produce bibliographies and lists summarizing translation achievements across Arab countries. The output in translating literary theory and criticism and its methodologies should be systematically monitored, as it remains a subject awaiting attention from both official and unofficial scholarly bodies. It is also necessary to deepen understanding through comprehensive studies that "trace the transfer of literary and critical ideas through the gateway of translation in particular" (Al-Talib, 2017, p. 137).

- Finally, the ambition of Arab scholars to establish an indigenous critical theory remains a valid project, supported by civilizational and critical data. Systematic and conscious literary translation can significantly help eliminate ambiguity, confusion, and intellectual disorder in the field of literary studies, particularly if the translation process considers minimizing the time gap between the original work's appearance and its translation.

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