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Jacqueline Jondot

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Jeffrey Einboden, *Nineteenth-Century U.S. Literature in Middle Eastern Languages*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2013, 232 pages, ISBN 978-0-7846-4564-0, 115 \$/70 £

- 1 *Nineteenth-Century U.S. Literature in Middle Eastern Languages* by Jeffrey Einboden, proposes to study the translations of some authors of the American Renaissance (Longfellow, Irving, Hawthorne, Melville and Whitman) into Hebrew, Arabic and Persian, between 1900 and 1976, and to explore the literary, historical, political, and linguistic implications of these translations by prominent Middle Eastern writers. The choice of the corpus is justified by the fact that these American writers have played an important role in the nationalist definition of American literature and are therefore of great interest to Middle Eastern writers who are themselves seeking to define their own national literature in a changing Orient. Jeffrey Einboden argues that these translations into Middle Eastern languages afford scholars tools to read the canonical authors of the American Renaissance in a different light. First of all, they allow the relocation of the national canon within a global frame instead of reading it as a self-contained unit. Translation in this case is even more than usual a vehicle of encounter between different languages and cultures, offering “transnational, cross-linguistic and inter-religious readings of the American Renaissance” (3). One could contend that in a postcolonial context, some of these translators would use elements of the dominant discourse found in the nineteenth-century American authors to enhance their own self-empowerment by “appropriating and revisiting” (5) their authority, but Jeffrey Einboden insists more on the fact that these translations “convey ideas and identities

back into home languages” (3) thus “widening out” (3) both the American textual source and the original oriental source. “Shifts in meaning which such processes engender” (4) impact both the American canon and the texts in Middle Eastern languages that have inspired them and the texts that may stem from them. Jeffrey Einboden speaks of literary genealogy across cultures, languages and time; to him, translation is a “pivotal space” (4) in the process. While he admits that translation “betrays” the text, he also argues that translating does not act as “a veil but as a lens” (2), enriching some American texts which he deems overlooked in their country of origin. The book is divided into three parts. Part 1 deals with inter-religious dialogue through the displacement of religious figures from Hebrew or Arabic into English and back into their language/culture of origin. Part 2 is devoted to two canonical texts – *The Scarlet Letter* and *Moby-Dick* – while part 3 focuses on several distinct translations of the same author, Whitman.

- 2 The first chapter (“Judaic *Maccabæus*: Longfellow and Joseph Massel”) is devoted to the translation of Longfellow’s *Judas Maccabæus*, by Joseph Massel, in 1900. In order to understand the choice of Massel to translate a drama considered by most critics as a failure, one must take into account the background of both the translator and of the sources of the drama. Joseph Massel was a Russian Jew, a staunch and active supporter of Zionism, who had to settle in Manchester in 1888 after being refused access to Palestine by the Turkish authorities. In Britain, he opened a printing press from which he could support the revival of the Hebrew language and literature. Through his work, he meant to promote Hebrew, the language of the Bible, as a language fit for a secular present. He envisioned translation as a cultural combat (26). Before *Judas Maccabæus*, he had translated other poems from the English in his *Songs from the Ends of the Earth*, which included poems by Longfellow among his own and poems by English poets, all concerned with “Jewish life and History” (24). In his introduction, he warns that “some of the translations will be found to deviate considerably from the original” (25). His translation of Milton’s *Samson Agonistes* (1890) had been justified by its focus on the problem of Jewish sovereignty over the Holy Land. Massel’s choices of translation always seem to be at the crossroads of political activism and literary or linguistic revival (30). Longfellow’s *Judas Maccabæus* (1872) offers interesting ground for Massel’s political and poetical enterprise. The American author had become interested in Judaic and Jewish themes through his contact with the historic Jewish communities in America and some of his texts such as “Psalm of Life. What the Heart of the Young Man Said to the Psalmist” (1838) were attempts at establishing a dialogue between ancient Judaism and modern America, between the Old and New Worlds, the Middle East, Europe and America. Longfellow’s *Judas Maccabæus* is precisely situated at such a crossroads. In his diary he speaks of it as “the collision of Judaism and Hellenism” (19). He first discovered *Judas Maccabæus* through Handel’s oratorio, which uses the biblical story to celebrate the end of the Jacobite Rebellion. Longfellow wrote his drama just after the American Civil War. No wonder then that the theme should catch the eye of Massel, an active participant in the first three Zionist congresses between 1897 and 1899. The struggle between Jew and Gentile is central to Massel’s Zionism, even if Longfellow is considered to have a “backward-looking approach” (23) by other advocates of the Jewish cause such as Emma Lazarus and to be “blind to the urgency of contemporary Jewish issues” (23). However, what is even more interesting is probably the fact that the biblical text has only survived in Greek; the original Hebrew has been entirely lost. Massel’s translation is therefore “an attempt to establish, for the first

time, a Hebrew source for this most Judaic of stories, building a new site for an unrecoverable text” (22). If the biblical text is “a translation without its source” (19), Massel will restore biblical Hebrew, basing his translation not on fidelity to the source (Longfellow’s text) but on rabbinic idiom and translation and in the end. Massel’s translation of Longfellow’s drama is an instance of “a textual bridge, conveying ideas and identities back into home languages” (3). Jeffrey Einboden, through his own translation of the Hebrew translation back into English emphasizes the shifts and deviations of Massel from the original text in order to serve his own purpose, that is to say “constructing a new literary home for a reviving people, erecting a linguistic ‘banner’ designed to lead towards ‘Zion’” (43).

- 3 The second chapter (“*Mahomet* or *Muhammad*? Irving and Alī Ḥusnī al-Kharbūṭlī”) continues the exploration of cultural and religious negotiations. 1492, the year of the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus, coincides with the climax of the Reconquista, linking both events in a way which struck Washington Irving while he was in Spain to write his *Life of Columbus*. He was particularly impressed by the cultural hybridity of Andalusia, between East and West, Islam and Christianity. While working on the “founder” of America, he started work on his *Life of Mahomet*, published in 1850, nearly twenty years after his *Conquest of Granada* (1829) and *Tales of the Alhambra* (1832). His chronicles of Muslim Spain and his biography of Mahomet have attracted the attention of Arab Muslim translators who have tried to “impart an idea of the grace and beauty of the American’s Andalusian canon to Middle Eastern audiences” (48). The prophet of Islam is a highly sensitive subject to Muslims, and Irving’s biography, while recognizing positive aspects and virtues to the prophet and his creed, is also very critical when, for instance, he portrays Mahomet as self-deceived. This means a problematic reception by Muslims. Irving did not pretend to propose an original work as his *Life of Mahomet* is based on European Orientalist sources. However, he offers his readers an innovative treatment of the subject, “a lively narrative, imaginative style, nuanced evaluation” (50). This originality in the treatment of known sources is what has drawn the attention of Middle Eastern translators since 1925 and the first translation into Persian. *The Life of Mahomet* appeared in Arabic for the first time in 1960; a second edition followed in 1966. It was published by a well-established Egyptian publishing house, Dār al-Ma‘ārif. The translator, Alī Ḥusnī al-Kharbūṭlī, is a most prominent Muslim scholar. So how could the translator make a text in more ways than one incompatible with orthodox Muslim teachings acceptable to Muslim readers and avoid censure? al-Kharbūṭlī “navigate[s] between fidelity to textual source and fidelity to religious tradition – between faithful Islamic translation and adherence to the Islamic faith” (50). In his preface to his translation, al-Kharbūṭlī states that a literal translation would be inadequate and that he had an obligation to amend shortcomings and correct all errors (51). He retains the positive aspects of the original work but his translation is a revisionary process which “reconciles” Irving’s Mahomet with Islamic tradition and makes of the American text a highly commendable, “neutral, equitable and just explanation” of “Islamic teachings” (49). al-Kharbūṭlī “domesticates” (53) Irving’s *Mahomet* by reinstating the correct Arabic words and names, distorted by imperfect transliteration. He substitutes the proper Qur’ānic text to the American’s faulty quotations derived from European rather than original sources since Irving did not master Arabic. al-Kharbūṭlī does not translate but reinstates the sacred text in his biography which is thus re-inscribed into the authentic language of Islam. Because al-Kharbūṭlī writes from within the Muslim tradition whereas Irving does from without,

meanings that were absent from the American biography resurface for the Arab readership. The most significant alterations take place when al-Kharbūṭlī expunges the references to Christianity that Irving uses to establish a hierarchy between the two religions and even more so the Hebraic influence that Irving underlines. In the process, al-Kharbūṭlī inverts Irving's pejorative appreciations of the prophet and his creed. Alī Ḥusnī al-Kharbūṭlī violates translation principles, transgresses the limits between rendition and creation and doing so repatriates the American Mahomet to the Middle East and returns him to his original identity as Muḥammad. Thanks to this revision of his original, far less praising text, Washington Irving has become a source for academic work in the Middle East and "is implicitly recognized as an authority on Islam, a pioneer" (70) despite his claim of lack of originality. Alī Ḥusnī al-Kharbūṭlī himself has produced more works in which the frontiers between quoter and quoted are blurred. In his own academic production, he continues his filtering of Washington Irving who, at this cost, is domesticated into Muslim orthodoxy.

- 4 This first part, "Scriptural Circulations", discusses two examples of cultural negotiations in which religious texts and traditions are rendered to their original language after a detour in American literature. Because the American authors distort the original Hebrew or Arabic sacred sources through their own lack of knowledge of these languages, they introduce unwilling discrepancies. Yet, the Hebrew and Arabic translations do not only supply appropriate corrections but use the discrepancies to introduce more discrepancies/deviations from the American text to either serve ideological or political purposes or to defuse possible conflicts. The second part, "Orienting the American Romance", deals with the problematic translation of canonical American novels into another language, script, and culture, emphasizing the complex negotiation between linguistic, culture and religion, all the more so when some of the characters are common to both Bible and Qu'rān but are perceived differently in Christianity and Islam. How the American Puritan culture can be made accessible to a Muslim reader is one of the many challenges facing the Middle Eastern translators.
- 5 The third chapter, "Inscribing the Persian *Letter*: Hawthorne and Sīmīn Dāneshhvar" illustrates the difficult negotiation between a source text and the demand of a target audience with not only a different culture and religion but also a different alphabet system. The translation of Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* by the best-selling Iranian female novelist Sīmīn Dāneshhvar poses a number of problems due both to the ambiguous character of the American novel and to the gap between the source and target languages and cultures. The problem begins with the title, the letter inscribed in the very title of the novel. The "A", the central trope of the novel, has no equivalent as such in the Perso-Arabic alphabet; "alif" has no connection with the words implied by the English "A". Therefore, Dāneshhvar, like other translators of the novel into Arabic, leaves out the signifier for the benefit of its signifier and *The Scarlet Letter* becomes *Dāgh-e Nang*, i.e. *The Mark of Shame*. Figurative function is privileged over graphic form. She will resort to such phrases throughout the novel, "replacing this unfamiliar graphic with a 'sign' more accessible to her audience" (81). She does reproduce the letter "A" once, creating disruption in the Persian text and introducing a foreign exotic element. To help her readers understand what the letter connotes for an American reader, she introduces explanations and/or footnotes. However, a simple word association, directly accessible to an American reader, will need a roundabout commentary. Such processes "highlight the intractable difficulty posed by the novel's orthographically entrenched symbolism" (84). However, the rendition problem

continues with the names which Hawthorne gives to his characters according to aspects of their personalities and which depend on word play. Dāneshhvar transliterates most of the names, unable to find equivalent rendering the suggested cultural references that they carry. She only translates Pearl as Marāvīd, as it is explicitly referential. However, her translation does not convey the biblical connotations. The epithets to which Hawthorne also resorts for characterization are an additional problem for Dāneshhvar, especially when they have a dual meaning, such as “leech” which is both physician and blood-sucker. The exact equivalent is not found in Persian but Dāneshhvar substitutes another signifier with *double entendre*, physician/owl. These substitutions create a new web of connotations and relationships between the characters. *The Scarlet Letter* was written in a Puritan New England setting and uses religious vocabulary and style which introduces a new problem for the translator who “insinuates markedly Muslim phraseology into Hawthorne’s narrative, with no basis in US source” (89-90), with the risk of altering the meaning of the novel. There are certain ironical effects when the Puritan minister speaks in terms reminiscent of Islam. “The climactic moments of this Puritan novel are dramatised through reference to the Qur’ān’s own climax and conclusion.” (93). The translator is faced with a multiplicity of layers of problems which she resolves in different ways, always bearing in mind her Persian Muslim audience. *The Scarlet Letter* attracted Sīmīn Dāneshhvar’s attention when she was studying creative writing at Stanford in the early 1950s, under Wallace Stegner, who was not only a novelist but also a fellow Hawthornean. Her novel *Sūvashūn* (1969) was the first published by a woman in Iran and became a best-seller with at least 20 reprints. *The Scarlet Letter*, though not a source of inspiration, has left a deep imprint on *Sūvashūn* with its wounded yet resilient, female protagonist. The popularity of *Dāgh-e Nang*, the Persian “reincarnation” (97) of *The Scarlet Letter* has become a byword for feminist activism in Iran, illustrating the influence of a translation when adapted to its readership, even at the cost of some betrayal.

- 6 In the fourth chapter, “Navigating the Arabic *Whale*: Melville and Iḥsān ‘Abbās”, Jeffrey Einboden discusses the Palestinian scholar’s translation of *Moby-Dick*, a choice probably dictated by the translator’s own forced experience of exile and nomadism more than by Herman Melville’s fascination with the Muslim Orient dating from his travels in Greece and the Middle East in 1856-1857. Iḥsān ‘Abbās’s 1965 translation of *Moby-Dick* is considered a landmark in Arabic translation as it served to demonstrate “that modern Arabic was fully capable of meeting even the most difficult of translation challenges and of expressing the most complex concepts and ideas of other cultures.” (101). *Moby-Dick* has been translated into Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Urdu, these translations ranging from versions aimed at educated readers to adaptations for young readers. ‘Abbās is not only a translator but a scholar in Arabic and Islamic studies as well as an essayist on American literature. His essay “Islamic Influence on the Narrative *Moby-Dick*” surveys and explores the possible sources of Melville’s Islamic vocabulary. The translator of the American novel is faced with several issues, one of which is the paucity of nautical or whaling expressions in Arabic which forces him to coin new words derived from existing terms. However, he faces a greater challenge when dealing with Melville’s integration of Arab words: merely changing script or returning the Anglicized Arabic words to their original lexical form, therefore losing the exotic, oriental nuance of the original text. Iḥsān ‘Abbās often resorts to quotation marks to signal the word and in this way, to preserve its foreignness. This linguistic problem becomes more complex when it comes to religious terms or names. Melville borrowed

from various scriptural sources and traditions, including Islam of which he had a knowledge relying on Orientalists. In some cases, ‘Abbās chooses to replace Melville’s word by a neutral one; for instance, “Ramadan” will become “fast” so as not to target any precise religious tradition. In other cases, ‘Abbās will intensify the religious nuances and go as far as “occasionally interpolat[ing] diction reminiscent of Islamic precedents, thereby tilting the religious axis of Melville’s original” (107), making the Methodist minister sound like a *mufti*. The Biblicisms of Melville are often replaced by Islamic language. The discourse undergoes some degree of religious conversion (109) in order to “domesticate” the American text grounded in a Judaeo-Christian tradition. Because of its Abrahamic origins, Islam shares a number of figures and narratives with the Bible but instead of facilitating the translator’s work, it renders the negotiating process more complex. Ishmael’s place is crucially different in both traditions: the disfavoured exile of the Bible is seen as the beloved son of Abraham, a forbearing prophet of Islam, a positive figure. Therefore, in an “attempt to demarcate the original religious and cultural context of Melville’s novel”, Iḥsān ‘Abbās often chooses not to use the Qur’ānic name when an alternative exists: Jonas becomes “Yūnān” instead of the Qur’ānic “Yūnus”. However, the Semitic roots of some of the names, when they are returned into their “original” form, yield enriched meaning or ambivalence not obvious for English readers. Iḥsān ‘Abbās “balances between fidelity to its American source and the demands of reshaping this source for readers of Arabic” (117) and in the process “uncover[s] sources and semantic possibilities hidden beneath the narrative blanket of Melville’s English” (118); he also makes apparent the “transnational origins” (119) of the novel.

- 7 In the third part of his essay, “I too am untranslatable”: *Middle Eastern Leaves*”, Jeffrey Einboden deals with translations of Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* into Hebrew and Arabic. “Viewed together, the Israeli and Iraqi *Leaves* appear a dissonant pair, their translated texts opposing in context, divergent in nation, religion, culture, politics” (158). In spite of the lexical mirror between ‘Ēsev and *Ushb*, both words coming from the same root, Simon Halkin and Saadi Youssef differ in their approach to the American text, one using it in a distinct political context, recalling Joseph Massel’s activism, the other recruiting Whitman’s innovative style to enhance his own poetic research. In these last two essays, Jeffrey Einboden examines closely both renditions, highlighting the interactions between languages and cultures.
- 8 Chapter 5, “The *New Bible* in Hebrew: Whitman and Simon Halkin” examines in detail the Hebrew translation of the American “New Bible” – in Whitman’s own terms. Since the nineteenth century, *Leaves of Grass* has attracted a great number of Jewish writers, intellectuals and translators, probably owing to its debt to Hebrew poetry, the Bible in particular. Its psalmic form of verse together with its ethos made the critic Shin Shalom write: “To translate him [=Whitman] into Hebrew is like translating a writer back into his own language” (127). Simon Halkin’s translation work should therefore seem unproblematic but it is not so. By 1952, the date of the first publication of *‘Alē ‘Ēsev*, a rendition of a great part of the 1881-1882 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Halkin was already an influential critic and creative writer as well as a literary mediator between America and Israel between which he had repeatedly migrated. This translation met with immediate success, was awarded a prize and is still considered as the definitive edition of *Leaves of Grass*. A second edition was published in 1984, including more material from the 1891-1892 version. In the introduction, Halkin explains the problem posed by Whitman’s poetry and describes the foundations of the text and the role of America in

Whitman's works (127). According to Uri Zvi, "Whitman is moulded from the same substance as a Hebraic prophet" (130), and indeed his style has the allegorical and elliptical quality of Hebrew. The form of *Leaves of Grass* rather than the content is "richly Hebraic" (138). That is what has inspired biblical readings of Whitman. Halkin not only reproduces his style but he also improves on the American and "construct[s] a "new" *Leaves of Grass* for modern Israeli readers, even while echoing an antiquity that is "biblical", producing a Hebrew Whitman that bridges disparities – national, religious, historical – through ironically conveying this American author back into his own" (128). In fact, Halkin amplifies Whitman's Biblicisms and employs vocabulary "that coincides with terminology from the Bible" (133) and more particularly moves Whitman's text away from metaphysical ideals towards specific settings. Halkin "biblically revises Whitman's poetry [...] and replaces English generics with Hebrew specific." (134). Halkin grounds his Hebraic developments in Whitman's style structured through repetition, antithesis, synthesis... echoing the Bible. These improvements would have special resonance for Jewish readers. Some tropes which are read as exotic by Whitman's readers, are entirely familiar to those of Halkin who amends a certain number of expressions: "Syrian ground" becomes "Holy Land" or Messiah, "the Nazarene" and "Jehovah", the name which must not be uttered is rendered as "God Almighty"... This translation appeared a few years after the creation of the state of Israel and like Joseph Massel's translation of Longfellow's *Judas Maccabæus*, the political environment is not indifferent. Simon Halkin accommodates Whitman's American Civil War in the context of Israel's war of independence, using the echoes of biblical antiquity to herald the modern Israeli state (141) and recruiting Whitman's poetic nationalism to echo the shaping Israeli nationality. Halkin's translations of Whitman were published in Hebrew/Zionist magazines in the United States, in 1946 and 1960, targeting a Hebrew readership "inhabiting New World space while speaking the idiom of ancestral homelands" (141) but also showing the impact and influence of this work which is echoed in Halkin's own creative writing.

- 9 The next chapter, "American Song of Iraqi Exile: Whitman and Saadi Youssef", Jeffrey Einboden tries to answer the concluding question of Saadi Youssef's introduction to *Awraq al-'Ushb*, his 1976 translation of *Leaves of Grass*: "What is the significance of Whitman to the Arab reader, and to Arabic poetry?" Youssef's is the first translation of importance in the Arab world, published in Baghdad although there had been other renditions of Whitman's poem in Arabic. In fact, Whitman plays a prominent role in Arabic poetic reform, helping Arab poets to move away from the weight of traditional rules and conventions. Several poets at the turn of the twentieth century have experimented with free verse inspired from Whitman. Youssef, an important figure of contemporary Iraqi poetry and permanent exile, follows in their tracks while "transplant[ing] a poetic icon of American democracy within the soil of the ancient Iraqi capital" (157). *Awraq al-'Ushb* like *Leaves of Grass* is shaped in the context of national conflicts – American Civil War and the Civil War in Lebanon and the Kurdish rebellion in Northern Iraq. However, the innovative poetry of Whitman is the main concern of Youssef as is expressed in the choice of the term "*Awraq*" which means both the leaves of a plant and textual leaves, "balancing foliage and folio" (159). Thus Saadi Youssef not only offers but a selection from the 1881-1882 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, he also reorganizes the order of the chosen poems, producing "a fresh plot" (160): "Song of Myself" moves from the beginning to the end. This revision echoes the complex process of composition and correction of the original. By placing "Shut not Your Doors"

at the opening of his selection, Youssef shifts Whitman's plea to the debate on Arabic poetry and aesthetics, pleading for literary openness in the Arab world and acceptance of his own avant-garde style. Saadi Youssef uses Whitman in the interest of the artistic debate in the Arab world and also in defence of his personal writing. Youssef is found "domesticating the American in Arabic verse, even surpassing the originality of his original source" and "sound[ing] more Whitmanian than Whitman himself" (163). Without reverting to Qur'ānic diction like the translators discussed above, Youssef is still influenced by some of its tropes (such as direct second-person address) as well as some others common in classical Arabic poetry (such as paronomasia and euphonies) which, in some cases, lead him to homogenise and amplify the English original, generating new meanings. Some ambiguities disappear through the determination of pronoun gender or the dual form. The domestication of the American text through these stylistic choices offers new resonance specific to Youssef's target readership. For example, when he translates "stranger" (from "To a Stranger") by "gharīb" which means both alien and émigré, he builds a "bridge between Civil War America and inter-war Iraq" (165). Jeffrey Einboden argues that Youssef's translation does not provide a full straightforward answer to his initial question but his innovative method "transcends the margins dividing translation and composition" (171). In the second part of this chapter, Einboden discusses Youssef's *New York Qaṣīdas* (2007) at length and how the latter embeds *Leaves of Grass* in his own poetry, juxtaposing juxtaposes English sources and Arabic translations (174), again altering the order so that American sources follow Arabic translations of Whitman therefore revising the chronological order of influence (174). If Whitman is the model for Saadi Youssef's own poetic revolution (171), the latter addresses him directly across time, space and languages.

- 10 Through his own re-translation of the Arabic/Persian/Hebrew translations of some canonical American texts back into English, Jeffrey Einboden is able to highlight the interaction between languages and cultures and the negotiations of the different translators to produce a new text acceptable to their national readership as if originally written in their languages but above all, ideologically acceptable. Part of the difficulty of this transaction springs from the fact that American literature is grounded in the Bible, therefore posing a problem for Jewish or Muslims readers. Einboden uses the term rendition rather than translation to underline the complex process. Einboden's essay is rich with the cultural background of the works translated and the context of the translations, emphasizing the political nature of the choice of translating a particular work at a particular time, work which itself has been written at a particular place and particular time. The intersection of both times and purposes enlightens the ideology behind the translations. Moreover, most of the translators under study are also creative writers, and Einboden's essay highlights the continuing influence of a certain writer upon his translator's creation, showing new intersections, new cross-influences.

AUTHORS

JACQUELINE JONDOT

Université de Toulouse 2 – Le Mirail