

Literary Translations and the Dilemma of Translating Unique Genres

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ABSTRACT

This essay discusses some ancient and medieval examples from Arabic culture, dealing with the task of translating genres that did not exist in the target language. By examining these historical instances, this paper demonstrates that only by adapting innovative techniques can translators translate a genre that has no equivalent in the target language. It shows that the translators must try to enter what Jacques Derrida calls “the protocol of a text” to come closer to grasping the authors’ presuppositions. While it is the responsibility of the translator to choose a suitable method to deal with the challenge of translating a foreign genre, grasping the authors’ presuppositions, understanding the conventions of the target language, and inhabiting the different mansions of the source language are crucial factors in any successful translation. Although bringing the readers to the source language helps them come closer to understand the authors’ intentions, it can create more complex text for audience unfamiliar with that foreign genre. Finding a similar genre in the target language can be a temporal solution, though it might go against the intentions of the original author.

With firm and careful calligraphy, he [Averroes] added these lines to the manuscript: ‘Aristu (Aristotle) gives the names of tragedy to panegyrics and that of comedy to satires and anathemas. Admirable tragedies and comedies abound in the pages of the Koran and in the *mohalacas* of the sanctuary. (Borges, 1964, pp. 154-155)

The definitions of tragedy and comedy that Ibn Rushd (Averroes) introduces in his commentary on Aristotle’s *poetics* are among the most famous examples of wrong interpretations in the history of Arabic translation. The lack of drama in medieval Arabic literary traditions deprived Arabs from understanding many Greek literary concepts for long centuries. Because Arabs did not know drama during the Middle Ages, Arabic translators of Greek found it challenging to translate works that had no equivalent in their language.¹ Therefore, they only focused on the Greek scientific and philosophical texts, ignoring the works of such famous dramatists as Euripides, Sophocles, or Aeschylus. Similar to the dilemma of translating Greek literature into Arabic, the very limited attempts to translate the Arabic *maqāma*, *qaṣīda*, and *muwashshah* into non-Middle Eastern languages show the difficulties of translating genres that do not exist in the target language. Examining the history of translating some ancient and medieval texts from and into Arabic, I will argue that only by adapting innovative techniques can translators translate a genre that has no equivalent in the

target language. The translators must also try to enter what Jacques Derrida calls “the protocol of a text” as it helps them to come closer to grasping the authors’ presuppositions. While translating a new genre needs a creative way of translation, there is no specific approach for dealing with all texts or languages.

The question of equivalence comes to the fore when discussing the possibility of translating a genre that has no equal in the target language. The German philosopher, Martin Heidegger, defines equivalence as “a relationship existing between two (or more) entities, and the relationship is described as one of likeness/sameness/similarity equality in terms of any of a number of potential qualities” (Alhaj, 2016, p. 43). While there is no specific strategy that translators can use to reach a certain level of equivalence, many scholars of translation theory used linguistic as well as pragmatic approaches to discuss the concept. In his semiotic approach, Roman Jakobson (2000) describes three kinds of translation: intralingual; interlingual; and intersemiotic (p. 114). He believes that despite the cultural and linguistic differences between the source and target language, translation can be carried out from one language to another.

Mona Baker (1992), on the other hand, developed the theory of equivalence by putting together linguistic and communicative approaches. She maintains that “the ultimate aim of a translator ... is to achieve a measure of equivalence

at text level, rather than at word or phrase level” (p. 122). In order to achieve a high level of equivalence, the translator “will need to adjust features of source-text organization in line with preferred ways of organizing discourse in the target language” (p. 122). Baker (1992) also suggests that “if the meaning carried out by a particular item or expression is not essential enough to the development of the text to justify distracting the reader with lengthy explanations, translators can and often do simply omit translating the word or expression in question” (p. 40). While those scholars offer different approaches to the concept of equivalence, it is the responsibility of the translator to decide the most suitable method to produce a text with a high level of equivalence. This task of establishing equivalence between languages becomes more challenging if the literary conventions are very different and when the time gap between the original text and translation increases.

The dilemma of translating an unknown genre is old and complex in many places like the Arabic speaking world. It often compelled translators to innovate new strategies that aimed to prepare their readers to receive unfamiliar forms. For instance, after the establishment of Bayt al-Ḥikmah (The House of Wisdom), one of the largest academic centers in the medieval world, the problem of translating foreign genres into Arabic came to the fore. That is, the process of translating many texts from Greek, Indian, Syriac, and Persian languages did not go smoothly but raised questions about the validity of old translation techniques. The challenge of translating philosophical and scientific words that did not have equivalents in Arabic obliged the tenth- and eleventh-century Arabic translators to find new ways of transmitting those foreign ancient texts. In the early years of establishing Bayt al-Ḥikmah, the translators used word for word translation methods by replacing the foreign word with an Arabic one, an ancient method that was insufficient to provide accurate translations for huge numbers of manuscripts from various languages and disciplines.

The lack of clarity and accuracy in the traditional literal translation motivated that generation of Arabic translators in Baghdad to use new techniques that were uncommon at that time. Consider for example, the renowned translator, Ḥunayn ibn ʿIshāq (809-873), who “broke with the older practice of word-by-word rendition, and [whose] translations are remarkable today for their clarity and precision” (Reynolds, et al, 2001, p. 107). Ḥunayn, known in Latin as “Joannitius”, and his successors “created a new scientific vocabulary for Arabic and made possible the successful appropriation and naturalization of Greek thought into the intellectual life of the Islamic world” (p. 107). Along with his proficiency in multiple languages, being a notable physician and philosopher helped Ḥunayn grasp the presuppositions in the philosophical and medical texts he translated, especially those of Aristotle and Galen.

While there was no evidence that Ḥunayn and his fellow translators at Bayt al-Ḥikmah tried to translate such foreign genres as the Greek drama or epic poetry, the task of translating philosophical or scientific Greek terms that had no equivalent in Arabic seems to be the biggest challenge at

that time. Ḥunayn and his translation team innovated new approaches that were uncommon in the Arabic translation traditions. In one method, the translator used to read the entire sentence, understand its meaning, and rewrite it in Arabic, ignoring the word order of the original language (Salama-Carr, 1990). When the translators encountered Greek or Syriac words that had no equal in Arabic, they would first borrow the exact words from the source language. After that, they would Arabize them phonetically based on the system of roots in Arabic phonology, creating new neologisms (1990). For example, the Greek word, *Nóμος*, was translated as *nāmūs* (law) *κατηγορία* was translated as *Katigoriz* (Category); and “*φιλοσοφία*” was translated as, *falsafa* (philosophy) (1990). Although the next generation of medieval Arabic translators replaced most of the borrowed words with new Arabic terms, the foreign words introduced by the translators did not hinder the comprehension of the translated texts.

After the Abbasid caliph, al-Maʿmūn, appointed him as the chief of the translation *diwān* in Bayt al-Ḥikmah, Ḥunayn developed new translation techniques that helped translators deal with hard challenges in translating ancient texts. The lavish financial support of the caliph along with the cultural prosperity in Baghdad paved the way for Ḥunayn and his staff to make significant changes in the Arabic traditions of translation. For instance, in order to remove the ambiguity from some Greek texts, Ḥunayn “went to extraordinary lengths to critically compare manuscript copies, ensuring accuracy and consistency in his translations. He even travelled into the Byzantine Empire in search of Greek manuscripts not available in the Islamic world” (Hallum, 2014). Since Arabic speakers were not familiar with the meanings of most Greek medical terms, the translators of Bayt al-Ḥikmah translated foreign terminology in literal simple terms rather than transliterating them (Hallum, 2014). By making this decision, the translators helped Arabic speakers understand these terms easily, compared to the speakers of some European languages, whose languages are still replete with many Greek words that may perplex non-specialists.

The study of Ḥunayn’s translation methods is important as it shows how a successful translation should take sociological and sociolinguistic factors into considerations. The lack of the Arabic vocabulary in some scientific and philosophical fields and the societal lack of knowledge about foreign traditions obliged Ḥunayn to follow flexible translation methodologies that would suit his readers’ needs at that time. Ghada Osman (2014) maintains that Ḥunayn considered the sociolinguistic and sociological status of the Arabic speaking world by: “varying the target and even the source language of the translators, expanding the Arabic lexicon, turning to an *ad sensum* approach, developing the annotated translation, catering to the audience, and factoring in the translator’s experience” (p. 47). In his introduction to the English translation of *Questions on Medicine for Scholars*, Paul Ghalioungui (1980) states that when encountering a strange term, “[Ḥunayn] poured into an Arabic mold a terminology he had to coin, to convey previously unknown concepts” (p.

V). He adds that “some terms, such as *cephalic* or *basilica*, which could be used without knowing their literal meanings, ‘he merely dressed in an Arabic garb’” (p. V). Some concepts such as “humours and temperament, that could not be fully comprehended without understanding their significance, he used Arabic words, while succeeding in giving them acceptions independent of their vernacular usage” (p. V). Ḥunayn’s translation strategy demonstrates that translation is an endless process that evolves with the changes of place and time. He, in fact, retranslated many works such as the exposition of Themistius into Arabic, which he first translated thirty years before his second translation.

Unlike the success that Arabic translators showed in their translations of philosophical and scientific words that did not exist in their language, the translation of literary terms that belonged to unknown genres proved to be an unresolvable problem at that time. When Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus (870-939) translated Aristotle’s *Poetics*, his use of borrowed words from the Greek drama, an unknown genre for medieval Arab readers, confused some Arabic philosophers who were interested in the works of Aristotle. Such Arabic philosophers as al-Fārābī (Alpharabius) (872-951), Ibn-Sīnā (Avicenna) (980-1037), Ibn Rushd (Averroes) (1126-1198), who extensively commented on Aristotle’s *Poetics*, misunderstood the sections that talk about drama as they relied on the translations of ibn Yūnus or that of Yaḥyá ibn ‘Adī (893-974). The two translations included many mistakes as both translators, ibn Yūnus and ibn ‘Adī, probably did not know drama or never saw a theater. Criticizing the inaccurate Arabic translation of some parts of *Poetics*, Abū Hayyān al-Tawhīdī (923-1023) writes in *al-Imtā’ wa al-Mu’ānasa* (1988) that ibn Yūnus was definitely “stupefied with drink” when he translated Aristotle’s work (p.107). Even al-Kindī (801-873), who commented on Aristotle’s work a few decades before ibn Yūnus and ibn ‘Adī translations of the book, provided ambiguous explanations on *Poetics* as his translator probably could not grasp the presuppositions of Aristotle.

Similar to the misunderstanding that the tenth and eleventh century translators and philosophers showed in their comments on the literary sections of Aristotle’s work, the later Andalusian philosophers could not grasp the meanings of some terms in *Poetics* as well. The unsuccessful attempts of the twelfth century philosopher, Ibn Rushd, to understand Aristotle’s work show the complexity of the task. In “La Busca de Averroes”, the Argentinian writer, Jorge Luis Borges (1964), uses fiction to explain Ibn Rushd’s research to find the meanings of tragedy and comedy despite his lack of knowledge about the genre of drama:

The night before, two doubtful words had halted him at the beginning of *Poetics*. The words were *tragedy* and *comedy*. He had encountered them years before in the third book of the *Rhetoric*; no one in the whole world of Islam could conjecture what they meant. In vain he had compared the versions of the Nestorian Ḥunayn ibn ‘Ishāq and of Abū Bishr Mattā. These two arcane words pullulated throughout the text of the *Poetics*; it was impossible to elude them. (p. 149)

The absence of theater in the Islamic world at Ibn Rushd’s time prevented the Andalusian philosopher from understanding the drama terms that Aristotle used in his work. The few Arabic and Syriac translations of Aristotle’s *Poetics* could not offer clear interpretations of what the drama was. Therefore, he came up with wrong definitions of the terms “tragedy” and “comedy.”

The confusion that Aristotle’s theatrical terms caused to Arabic philosophers and translators, who never saw a theatrical performance, is similar to the bewilderment that Abulcasim’s narrative created to the characters in Borges’ story. The narrator says:

Abulcasim continued: ‘One afternoon, the Moslem merchants of Sin Kalan took me to a house of painted wood where many people lived. It is impossible to describe the house, which was rather a single room, with rows of cabinets or balconies on top of each other. In these cavities there were people who were eating and drinking, and also on the floor, and also on terrace. The persons on this terrace were playing the drum and the lute, save for some fifteen or twenty (with crimson-colored masks) who were praying, singing and conversing. They suffered prison, but no one could see the jail; they traveled on horseback, but no one could see the horse; they fought, but the swords were of reed; they died and then stood up again’. (p. 152)

When the men in Borges’ story asked if the people in the strange house were madmen, Abulcasim explained that they were presenting a story (1964). Perplexed by the answer, they compared this exotic performance, which was acted by many characters, with the familiar performance of classical Arabic poetry, which is only performed by one speaker. Despite Ibn Rushd’s wide knowledge in Arabic literary and philosophical traditions, he could not grasp Aristotle’s concepts. The failing attempts of Abulcasim to explain the theater to Ibn Rushd is parallel to the failure of translators to transmit a form that does not exist in the target language.

Presenting the form is very important when translating a foreign literary genre. Unlike the translated texts from disciplines such as the sciences, which usually focus on the meaning of the original material without a great emphasis on the form, the loss of the original form in literature often affects negatively its reception in the target language. In his book, *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, the renowned medieval literary critic, al-Jāhīz (776-868) argues (as cited in Jackson, 2000) that poetry in translation loses much of its value:

Poetry cannot be translated and does not render itself to transmission. And whenever it is converted into another language its concinnity (*naẓm*) is broken, its meter is rendered defunct, its beauty evaporates, and that something that inspires wonder and admiration simply absents itself. This is unlike the case with expository prose, though it is likewise true that what was originally written as such is superior to and more genuine in its constitution than prose that has been written by converting metrically balanced poetry. (p. 101-102)

Since classical Arabic poetry is rhymed and every verse ends with the same rhyme throughout the poem, al-Jāhīz

found it impossible to translate a poem to a foreign language like the Greek, whose poetry does not require an end rhyme. While poetry seems to be untranslatable according to al-Jāhīz (as cited in Jackson, 2000), he states in *Kitāb al-Hayawān* that “it has been confirmed that books are superior to the monuments and poetry in their ability to preserve the grand achievements of civilizations” (p. 102). The general attitude among medieval Arab scholars that literature, particularly poetry, is beyond translation compelled translators to focus mostly on the translation of sciences rather than literature. Indeed, the Arabs translated Plato, Aristotle, Galen, but they excluded such great poets and playwrights as Homer, Sophocles, or Euripides, though their works were within their reach.

The significant similarities between the Arabic language and other Middle Eastern languages made the process of literary translation less difficult. Unlike the limited success that the translators of classical Arabic genres such as the *maqāma* and the *muwashshah* into Latin and Spanish, the translation to Hebrew and Persian was more successful. In the Hebrew case, the linguistic similarities between the two languages helped the Jewish translator, Yehūda al-Ḥarīzī to translate al-Ḥarīrī’s *maqāmāt* into Hebrew in 1218, which he titled *maḥberōt ītī’el* (*the maqāmāt of Ithiel*). The fact that the majority of the Jewish population in al-Andalus spoke Arabic and had absorbed Arab culture facilitated the process of translating works from genres that had no equal in Hebrew such as the Arabic *maqāma*. Only two years later, the translator himself, Yehūda al-Ḥarīzī, composed his first *maqāma*. The same phenomenon can be viewed in the Farsi translation of the Arabic *maqāma*, which later became a genre in Persian literature. For the same reasons, the translation of the Arabic *muwashshah* into Hebrew also proved to be successful and the genre was later adapted in the Hebrew poetry.

The differences between genres in terms of generic conventions, structures, and expectations across languages and cultures make the translation process more complicated. These differences can also exist within “the same genre across languages and cultures as they are shaped by distinct course communities” (Biel, 2027, p.154). Anna Trosborg (2002) maintains that “for the translator it is important to be aware of the fact that although the same genres may exist in different cultures, they may in fact be—and often are—structured or composed in different ways (p. 14). Sonia Colina (as cited in Malmkjar, 2017) argues that if the translator of the genre fails to adapt the text into the target language “the text’s rhetorical purposes will not be achieved, and ultimately, processing of the text as a coherent, cohesive whole may be difficult” (p. 378). The book adds that “if the genre does not exist in the target culture, the translator may opt for introducing a new genre or make adaptations to existing, similar genre” (p. 378). Despite its relative success, this approach may increase the risk of distorting the rhetorical purpose of the author and departing the readers from the goals of the original text.

In contrast with the success of the translation of Arabic genres into the Hebrew and Persian, the European languages resisted the translation of those literary productions. While

many socio-political and geographical factors hindered the translation of many celebrated Arabic works in the medieval period, the literary and linguistic barriers seem to be the most difficult obstacles. Examining the success of many medieval Arabic works and their influences on the European literature shows that the biggest challenge is situated within the genre itself. Classical Arabic prose works such as Ibn Ṭufayl’s *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān*, Abū al-‘Alā al-Ma‘arri’s *Risālat al-Ghufrān*, (*The Epistle of Forgiveness*), *‘Alf Laylah wa-Laylah* (*One Thousand and One Nights*), to name a few, show that the acceptability of these works in other cultures depends on the familiarity of the genre. The successful Latin translation of al-Ma‘arri’s work probably influenced the famous Italian poet, Dante Alighieri; the accessible Latin translation of Ibn Ṭufayl’s philosophical novel made it the best-seller work in Western Europe for more than two centuries, exerting a potential inspiration for other works such as *Robinson Crusoe* and *Tarzan*; and so was *One Thousand and One Nights*, which became one of the most famous works in translation in the history of world literature. In contrast to this success, lesser-known genres such as the *maqāma*, *muwashshah*, and the *qaṣīda* poetry, which are highly popular in the Arab culture, resisted translation into Latin as their forms had no equals in European languages.

The excessive use of embellished language in classical Arabic literary works such as al-Ḥarīrī’s *maqāmāt* requires new approaches of translation that pays more attention to the form. In *Thou Shalt Not Speak My Language*, Abdelfattah Kilito (2008) states that medieval Arabic literature cannot be translated in conventional methods as it relies on complex structures, expressions, and styles that do not exist in other languages. He thinks that the Arabic *maqāma* is the most difficult genre to transmit into foreign languages: “Perhaps one of the best examples of this is al-Ḥarīrī’s *maqāmāt*, a book in which every sentence seems to say, ‘No one can possibly translate me!’ It is as if al-Ḥarīrī did his utmost to protect his book from the tyranny of another tongue” (p. 18). Kilito maintains that the form, which is superior to the content in the *maqāma* genre, is untranslatable: “Who would dare translate a text that remains the same when read from beginning to end and vice versa, or an epistle that reads one way from the beginning and another way from the end? And who would dare venture to translate another in which dotted and undotted words alternate?” (p. 18). Kilito adds that in al-Ḥarīrī’s *maqāmāt*, the author created a form that cannot be transmitted into other languages: “Al-Hariri aimed at demonstrating his linguistic dexterity, and has been compared to an acrobat, but he certainly aimed at exhausting the hidden reserves of the Arabic language and realizing its full potential. As a result, his *maqāmāt* cannot be imagined in any language but Arabic and are impossible to translate” (p. 18). Since al-Ḥarīrī’s *maqāmāt* lose much of their magical appeal in translation, unconventional translation strategies should be applied to convey the form as well.

Recognizing the history of the text and its presuppositions helps the translators in this task. In *Historia De La Literatura Árabe-española*, Ángel González Palencia suggests that Arabic *maqāma*, which resisted translation into European

languages, has presumably contributed to the emergence of a picaresque novel in Spanish literature. Transforming the Arabic *maqāma* into a similar genre in the target language can be a solution for the dilemma of translating genre that is not available in the target language. Kilito himself translated the *maqāma* as a picaresque novel: “I translated the *maqāmāt*, not in the sense of transferring them from one language to another, but presented them as though they were picaresque novels, I transferred them into a different genre, a different literature. I undertook a *cultural translation*, so to speak” (p.10). In addition to the high level of flexibility that Kilito’s methodology requires, it also needs a suitable cultural reference in the target language such as the picaresque genre in Spanish literature.

Although there is a general agreement that translating the Arabic *maqāma* into European languages is very complex, translators can use different approaches to make the original text accessible to the target audience. For instance, translating Badi’ al-Zamān al-Hamadāni’s *maqāmāt* shows the possibility of using various methods. In the translation of a classic *maqāma* such as al-Hamadāni’s “the *Maqāma* of Mosul” into English, bringing the original text into the target language and relying on various translation techniques that facilitate this process is necessary. However, the first step for this approach must be based on a sophisticated understanding of the author’s presuppositions as well as comprehending the literary genres in the target language. To successfully apply this approach, a broader social and historical context about the work, the genre, and time of composition should be introduced. For instance, the translator needs to find a suitable approach to educate the readers about the uniqueness of this literary genre, which usually consists of short fictional prose stories and is characterized by an excessive use of rhymed prose and occasional intervals of poetry. Finding a way to explain that the narrator in “the *Maqāma* of Mosul,” like most narrators of *maqāmat*, narrates the adventures of an eloquent trickster, who deceives naïve people and steals their belongings, might help the translator clarify some of the hidden messages in the work itself and the genre as a whole.

Understanding the authors’ goals and assumptions helps the translator capture the message that the original text intends to convey. In “Translating into English”, Gayatri Spivak (2005) states that: “the translator should make an attempt to grasp the writer’s presuppositions” (p. 93). Because Spivak thinks that translation is an intimate act of reading, it is not enough for the translator just to string together “the most accurate synonyms by the most proximate syntax” (p. 94). For that reason, the translator should try to enter what Derrida calls “the protocols of a text- not the general laws of the language, but the laws specific to this text” (p. 94). Since it is probably impossible to completely enter the protocol of a text written more than thousand years ago, exploring other works by the author or reading his biography may help the translator to come closer to grasp the author’s presuppositions. For instance, knowing that al-Hamadāni was a grammarian and he included nonpopular words to urge people use the dictionary may help the translators of his *maqāmāt*

understand his intentional choices and emphasize them in the translation.

In translating a highly rhetorical genre like the *maqāma*, the translator should acquire a high proficiency in the source language as well as enough sense of it. The linguistic skills of the translators provide them with useful tools to reintroduce the original text and allow it to speak to another audience in a different tongue. Spivak argues that in translating non-European texts into English, knowing only how to speak the source language does not qualify the translator to grasp the author’s presuppositions. The translator must “inhabit, even if in loan, the many mansions, and many levels of the host language” (p. 95). She adds that speaking the language only gives “entry into the outer room, right before the front gate” (p. 95). Since the *maqāma* authors always use metaphorical language replete with cultural references, understanding the historical connotations of the text is crucial. For instance, when the narrator of al-Hamadāni’s *maqāma* says: ““In this mass there is a palm tree for us and in this flock a lamb”” (Hamadāni, 1915, p. 85), it is important to use a thick translation that gives a cultural context rather than relying on a literal approach. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1992) argues that only by possessing the art of understanding “through the most diligent treatment of language, through exact knowledge of the whole historical life of a nation, and through the most rigorous individual interpretations of individual works and their authors”, the translator can convey “the same understanding of the masterworks of art and scholarship (p. 39). Spivak says: “unless the paleonymy of the language is felt in some rough historical or etymological way, the translator is unequal to her task” (p. 100).

Translating a foreign genre such as the Arabic *Maqāma* may require a clear decision whether to push the reader toward the original text or vice versa. Schleiermacher (1992) explains that the translator has two options:

Either the translator leaves the writer alone as much as possible and moves the reader toward the writer, or he leaves the reader alone as much as possible and moves the writer toward the reader. Both paths are so completely different from one another that one of them must definitely be adhered to as strictly as possible, since a highly unreliable result would emerge from mixing them, and it is likely that author and reader would not come together at all. (p. 42)

In his translation of *Maqāmāt Badi’ al-Zamān al-Hamadāni* into French, Abdelfattah Kilito focused on bringing the author to the reader as he found it easier for European readers to receive the text as Western genre. Therefore, he translated it in a way similar to that of the picaresque novel. W.J. Prendergast translated the same book into English in 1915 as a collection of short stories. While these two translations introduce relatively accessible readings, they have been criticized as they depart significantly from the goals of the author who intentionally wrote the work in an innovated form that made it distinct from any other genres. On the other hand, previous translations tried not to bring the Western readers to that medieval text as it relies heavily on rhetorical devices that would make the readers deal

with complex language full of puns, jokes, and proverbs that may lose much of their power in translation. It is worth to mention that Michael Cooperson has recently come up with a non-conventional methodology in translating the Arabic *maqāmā*. He translated al-Harīrī's "maqāmāt" by using a variety of literary styles used in English literature across different periods, bringing the original text closer to the English readers.

As I ultimately propose, only by relying on what Kwame Appiah calls "thick translation", the translator of the *Maqāma* can offer a text that captures the presuppositions of its author and entertains its foreign readers. The historical examples discussed in this paper show the complexity of translating foreign genres that do not exist in the target language. Although many scholars discussed the concept of equivalence in translation studies, the approaches they suggest do not provide fixed strategies to deal with the issue of translating texts from different genres. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the translator to choose a suitable method to deal with this challenge. Grasping the authors' presuppositions, understanding the conventions of the target language, and inhabiting the different mansions of the source language are crucial factors in any successful translation.

While bringing the readers to the source language helps them come closer to understand the authors intentions, it can create more complex text for audience unfamiliar with a foreign genre. Finding a similar genre in the target language can be a temporal solution, though it might go against the intentions of the original author. The questions that arise are: had the English poet, Edward FitzGerald, not taken the liberties he had in translating Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám, would Western poets such as Algernon Charles Swinburne and Robert Frost imitate this Persian genre? Had Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq and Mattā ibn Yūnus translated *Prometheus Bound* or *Oedipus the King*, would Ibn Rushd be able to provide correct definitions of tragedy and comedy? The answers will remain debatable until translation theorists agree on a specific definition of the term "equivalence."

END NOTE

1. Muḥammad ibn Dāniyāl (1249-1311) is believed to be one of the few writers of shadow plays in medieval Arabic literature, a foreign genre that was unknown in Arabic at that time.

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