

An Introduction to and a Translation into English of Khalil I. Al-Fuzai's¹ "Thursday Fair"²

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ABSTRACT

This narrative is the title story of the whole collection. Thursday Fair is a weekly marketplace where people go to buy, sell, and exchange commodities in the city on Thursday. The author draws a realistic picture of any weekly marketplace in Saudi Arabia; villagers, farmers, and those who live in the suburbs go to such places to sell their goods and buy their necessities. For example, he describes in vivid detail canopies that protect people from the heat of the sun and crowds cramming into the stores. More exciting is the description of Olyan, the main character in this story, "moving from place to place..." in a race for time. Such a weekly marketplace is held in various regions of Saudi Arabia, moving from place to place on different days. Usually each day the marketplace moves a distance of ten to fifteen miles, so sellers with trucks and the ability can move to the next location. The commercial shops in each city benefit from these events. However, in the character of Olyan, the author draws a picture of a youth who goes to the city for his mother and neighbors. Of course, not everyone is able to go to the city to buy the items they need, particularly old people and women. And as this story indicates, being nice enough to volunteer for such an errand can bring one grief; one is expected not to forget, miss, or lose a thing. Indeed, one may be blamed. Unfortunately, people like Olyan are illiterate, so if someone writes him a list, he must find a reader at the marketplace. Even now, with education more available to new generations, some old people still bring pieces of paper with them and ask sellers to read for them. Besides, the author in this story presents the city and the marketplace from the villagers' point of view: the market is a place of "contradictions... bad and good aromas... harmful and beautiful scenery... harsh and soft bodies... sounds of insult and curse..." while "salesmen of the city are deceitful, so be careful O Olyan." The author brings to light here an educational issue: in the seventies and eighties of the twentieth century, rural people used not to send their children to school at the age of six for many reasons. First, schools were a far walk for children, and there was no school transportation. Even today, students in rural villages and suburbs have to find their own means of transportation. Second, villagers often lack the money to pay for such transportation. Third, students from the villages are usually naïve and subject to bullying in the city. Furthermore, the story addresses the religious punishment of cutting off a thief's hand. Such a punishment is carried out in public to warn others against stealing. Ironically, Olyan "finds nothing" in his pocket at the end of the story, himself becoming a victim of the crime. Apparently, the scene did not deter thieves because, perhaps, some people are sick or have no means of income or are not prepared to learn from the warning. In brief, this story depicts the simple life of people at the marketplace and circumstances that may transpire there while exploring a wide—perhaps too wide—array of social issues at the same time. Finally, translation is a medium for communication between cultures, nations, and people. The masses underestimate its significance in our world. It is through translation that people can create an atmosphere of understanding and respect. In that general sense, this contribution may fit. Also, this translation may attract the attention of translators to introduce their cultures to readers of different culture.⁴

TRANSLATION

The shouts of the sellers start rising... each calls out to passers-by trying to sell his goods, and the lumps of human beings move in a continuous chaos; it is hard to separate these groups from each other... women... and men... and carts pulled by donkeys... and cattle and camels... and human animals and inhuman ones... all are busy selling or

buying what they have on hand, while some boys carry baskets full of fruits, kitchenware, old and new clothes, and a lot of things apt to be bought or sold, even if they are old, someone will buy them in this *souq*⁵ held every Thursday. And it is attended by a lot of people living in the suburbs and nearby villages, and travelling Bedouins who come to sell firewood and other things that might be found in the

desert, after a long trip in the dry land and Thursday souq is classic despite its extreme anarchism. Commercial shops are on one side and the date shop on the other, and also the vegetable sellers sit on the ground, and the meat sellers use large wooden planks to protect the meat from the blowing sand, and sellers of home utensils, and others... each takes a specific side, and every one of these sellers disappears under a canopy of canvas and fronds called Amariah. And every group is used to having a small souq within the big souq... all are equally overcrowded... starting at Thursday Gate and ending at Al-Hamediah Building, which was occupied by the sole elementary school in the city. Later, it is used as the police centre near the date and oil souq, and sometimes when the souq becomes overcrowded and the give-and-take activity increases... the scattering crowds creep to fill a large area starting from Al-Soweig Street, which has on both sides small stores of various tools, and ending at the firewood souq, near Al-Jern Gate. And in the area between Thursday Gate in the north and the beginning of Al-Souq Street... small roads and zigzag lanes branch out... they too are full of moving human masses, including Al-Hadadeen Street and another called Al-Khabaaz Street at whose start is the hospital opposite to Al-Coot Gate... A ditch, where the depth seems to gradually disappear, prevents people from reaching it. And at the beginning of Al-Souq Street, Al-Souq branches out toward the west until Um-Al-Khubeiisi... where the crowds lessen due to its large area, and in its far parts, donkeys of city-comers are fastened, and their camels are shackled... and in distant parts loads of plaster are placed and packed up... in pieces on top of each other in the pyramidal form, in preparation for burning them before being used in painting and plating houses. Olyan is moving from place to place... so as to buy a lot of things his mother and some of his neighbours in the village have asked him to buy, after selling what he has of watermelon that he brought to the city on his donkey... And his mother did not forget, while surrounding him with her gaze before he set off with his procession... to say compassionately, smiling, "Don't be late, O Olyan... and don't forget the neighbour's stuff and the myrrh and the saffron, and the cardamom and the alum and..." And she continues reminding him of the long list of things he has heard more than once... until she says, "Allah protect you... goodbye."

His mother is good-hearted... like other good-hearted mothers in the village... if he doesn't forget anything she entrusts him to buy, then he will not rile her temper... his memory is weak... this is his trouble that he can't get rid of, and so far he has only bought a bag for his little cousin who will start school this year as the first individual in the family who has a chance to learn, and although he is not yet ten years old, the family's happiness is beyond description, and the mother's and father's happiness is greater... the promising future will open its doors for their son, and also for them after their son gets an education.

And what else other than the bag? A pencil, and a notebook for his cousin as well... and a small clay jar for his friend Jassim's mother who intends to perform *Hajj*⁶ to Makkah this year... and a new light for his old neighbour Yousef.

he has finished selling and started purchasing, which is harder and more difficult.

A wheel of a cart pulled by a donkey hits... a poverty-stricken man... who shouts, "Don't you see me?... may blindness strike your eyes!"

The owner of the cart comes back to him after leaving his donkey... and gives him an obscene speech that may not be mentioned here... they reciprocate insults... and each grabs the other, and Olyan sees one of the policemen intervene and take the two quarrelling opponents to Al Hamediah... and everyone standing nearby watching becomes sad... but this action is appreciated by others.

The creeping crowds take him to places that he does not want to reach, so he has to struggle a lot before he can reach one of those people from whom he used to buy his things, and others' things, when he came to the city.

And suddenly he finds himself in front of a scene he is not accustomed to... policemen are making a circular ring, and onlookers are competing to see the horrible scene... and at first he can't believe what he sees; then he becomes sure of the scene... and opens his mouth... a hand has been cut off... its possessor writhes as if he is thrown into a fire, trying to get away... and a pool of sanguineous blood seeps beside him... and all meanings of panic have gathered in this pool and in Olyan's self... fear surrounds him from all directions and he tries to leave this scene after his ears catch a conversation... he doesn't know who has said it, "This is his punishment."

"He stole... so his hand was cut off."

"And how did he admit his crime?"

"The right is not lost, O Ahmed... and the criminal should be punished."

His two baskets in which he brought watermelon are still hanging on his shoulder, one inside the other, and he has the school bag and the pencil and the notebook and the small jar and the new light. Regarding his donkey, he has tied it in Um Al-Khubeiisi with the other donkeys. If he returns to the village he will tell them what he has seen, and he will not forget to embellish the incident with whatever his imagination will allow him to add as intimidation... it does not matter if he tells them that he has seen the scene from the beginning, and that no hair on his body twitched... after all, the scene is normal. yet he knows if he had witnessed the event from its beginning, he would have fainted... and he feels shame knowing that he will lie; a bad habit, but this incident will become a good topic of gossip for a long period in the village...

And he feels nausea when he remembers the horrible scene while leaving it.

Olyan leaves the place with great difficulty... because everyone wants to look at the horrible scene... even those who look from the balconies of Al-Hamediah... they have not left their spots yet.

And the seller of the old clothes shouts at his apprentice, "Give me the blue wool *thobe*."

"Okay, O my uncle..."

And the seller of the old clothes turns toward the customers standing in front of him. After he has finished his conversation with another customer, he says, "This *thobe*

is very expensive... you are wise... to buy winter clothes in summer... and summer clothes in winter... and I will sell it to you cheaper than I sell it to other people... you are a customer who deserves everything good... hey boy, give me the blue wool *thobe* quickly."

And when the boy brings the *thobe*... the customer turns it around, then pays for it after a haggle that does not last long. "Salesmen of the city are deceitful, so be careful O Olyan." His mother says things like that to him whenever he thinks of going to the city.

The profit of this day is big; he did not expect that, although he hoped for it while making his way from the village, repeating a new rural song; having memorized some of its words, but with a new tune after he failed to remember its original tune. He is able to buy more things that his family needs, and he will return with a decent amount of money; that is not bad... he will add it to his savings so as to buy the piece of land adjacent to his farm, for its owner, who is old, wants to sell it. and he, more than anybody else, has the right to buy it, and with it his land will become bigger and the produce will increase, and he will be able to save during fertile years for the barren years. And hence, he will not pass through the crises which all others who live in the village will go through... in the years of drought... the locusts reap the produce instead of the people, and blight destroys plants, and the elements of nature gather to diminish their produce; farmers may lose everything, and then destruction and ruin and ravage will come to the houses of the village. Accordingly, smiles disappear from faces, and happiness plunges into deep dimensions of pain and torture... no one can do anything except to bear patiently and steadfastly the disaster, like those who have gone through such disasters before them... all suffer except a few people who have wealth to last through the time of need. he will be among this group after buying that piece of land and increasing his produce.

All his senses pick up contradictions... bad and good aromas... harmful and beautiful scenery... harsh and soft bodies. sounds of insult and curses, and hope and entreaty... what a crowd! His two baskets may fall off his shoulder in spite of his gripping them with both hands.

And he busies his mind... he tries to remember... what has he to buy now? He has to go to another place, and he can come back to buy what he needs on his way to get his donkey.

Now he has to work, and he remembers his mother's voice and her kind smile saying, "Don't be late, O Olyan."

The sun has begun sending fire arrows of its blazing heat while the heads have been protected with stationary or mobile umbrellas or baskets, which contain different types of things packed up haphazardly, and gatherings of people cram in Al-Geisariah and the other shady places, and foreheads break into sweat. Layers of dust find a chance to stick to the bodies and the wet clothes. And the boys come alive selling unclean water to these gatherings, which start little by little fleeing the sun's heat as much as they can, and a baker insults some boys because they did not fill the jar with water,

and one of them looks at him with one eye, and another pees after turning his face toward the wall, and the bodies start to avoid clinging with each other after much sweat has leaked from them. And the flies revolt and start adamantly stinging cheeks, and gather on the dates and uncovered sweets. Olyan wipes the oozing sweat off his face with the back of his hand which he puts back so as to help the other hand carry the two baskets and what they contain.

Oh Olyan, you are wet with perspiration... you have to finish your mission soon and return... the road to the village is not short, and before darkness... you should be there so that your mother will not worry about you... you don't want to cause her worry, so why do you take so long buying what you want?

And Olyan goes to a shop and buys things from the shop owner... and when he intends to pay for those things, he inserts his hand into his pocket to take out the money... he finds nothing... he does not believe it, and searches all his pockets but in vain.

And in one moment, his dreams evaporate, and a wave of disappointment overwhelms him, and at the same time he cannot forget all those who patiently wait for him in the village.

CONCLUSION

Translation is an influential medium for communication between cultures, nations, and people. Accordingly, readers of this journal will have a chance to read for this Saudi short story writer. Indeed, people of different cultures need translations in order to develop an atmosphere of respect and understanding, particularly when translators know the culture they are translating from and are able to introduce and present the culture in question appropriately. In "Thursday Fair," readers will experience and learn about some Bedouin social habits and life.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

1. KHALIL I. AL-FUZAI (1940) is a literary writer from Saudi Arabia. In his writings, he introduced his culture, addressing many social, cultural, and religious issues he saw in his society.
2. This story was translated from the following Arabic source: Al-Fuzai, Khalil I. *Thursday Fair*. (سوق الخميس). Taif: Taif Literary Club, 1979: 75-81.
3. Every now and then there are few dots found in the source text. I tried to be as close as possible to the original text through keeping names, some familiar words written in italics, and those dots.
4. An introduction a reader may need to connect the text to its context.
5. *souq*: a local, open marketplace.
6. *Haj*: pilgrimage to *Makkah*; a religious place in Saudi Arabia.
7. *Thobe*: a gown worn by men.