

## ANALYSING SIGNIFICANT TRANSLATED SOCIAL AND LITERARY ASPECTS IN RANDOLPH STOW'S MERRY-GO-ROUND IN THE SEA FOR AN IRAQI AUDIENCE

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### Abstract

This paper is based on a project of translating and analysing an Australian novel, Randolph Stow's *Merry-Go-Round in the Sea* (1965). The aim was to translate the novel into Arabic and to analyze key themes in order to determine the extent to which the vision of human aspirations in Stow's novel are translatable from a Western hegemonic discourse to an Iraqi discourse. The project interprets the discursive and semantic elements of the novel and how these elements translate for Arabic cultural consumption. The study highlights the opportunities and problem associated with the translation of popular literary works from English to Arabic, as far as these are issues in the creation of global narratives.

This paper is confined to a critical analysis of selected short paragraphs from the text. This exegesis draws on both communicative and semantic approaches, which are connected. Also, that the cultural qualities of the source language need to be communicated in such a way as to translate the semantic features of the text for readers from a totally different culture. The paper also discusses the attendant problems of addressing diction equivalence, linguistic, literary stylistic problems and cultural aspects in translating and interpreting a text from one culture to another which is different on many levels.

**Keywords:** Fiction, Global Narratives, Hegemonic, Periphery, Themes, Translation.

### 1. Introduction

Translation is a unique art which includes skill or talent, discipline and experience. This hard task is normally associated with problems, which vary in range, rank and intensity. Overcoming the complex challenges will build competence in translation. However, this definition, "the task of translation is ... to replace the language of the other by a native language" (Brisset, 2000, p. 346) does not match my objective in this study, because my job is not only to be accurate, but also to be free and flexible in translation. I choose words, phrases and expressions that suit the original texts taking care to avoid frigidity in my translation. In fact, translation is "reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style" (Nida, 1969, p. 495).

Consequently, "the relationship among languages shows itself in translations, to be far deeper and more definite than in the superficial and indefinable similarity of two literary texts" (Benjamin, 1997, p. 155). The translator's skill lies in interpreting texts, that is,

transferring the texts in the most appropriate way from one language to another and from one system of textual conventions to another. Accordingly, translation can play a crucial role in creating living communication among different nations. Thus, the project of translating an Australian novel into Arabic argues for the importance of a literary translation (rather than a literal one) to a close reading of a text so that it is accessible to a reader from another language group. The use of certain phrases and images in English does not necessarily have the same implications as in Arabic, or make sense. For example, “war is a different country”, when translated, does not have the same meaning in Arabic as it has in the original text: (إن الحرب بلد او وطن مختلف) .The project creates an Arabic version of the original English text and analyzes selected paragraphs of *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea* (1965).

This paper focuses on an identification of translation problems and analyses the social and literary aspects of the novel illustrated by some selected short passages. Beginning with the translation process, I will analyse the dominant features of the text through my own translated textual passages in the light of Tim Parks’ observation: “much can be learnt about a work of literature by considering the problems involved in its translation” (1998, p. 7). In other words, one can gain a deeper perception of both the language and meaning of a given text by means of translation.

## 2. Translation methods

One way of understanding and analyzing a literary text, such as a novel and translating it to a foreign language is by applying an appropriate theory or theories to the primary text. Two theories which are connected and applicable to this study are the communication theory and semantics. My technique of translating the text is a means to an end. The content of the source text is conveyed by the process of communication, which carries the semantic features of the text to readers from a totally different language. Every translation theory is, in one way or another, communicative, yet conveying semantic elements which imply different meanings, seems more appropriate to my study than other theories applied to translation. In *Approaches to Translation* (1981), Peter Newmark discusses various approaches to translation, notably communicative and semantic theories.

Newmark argues that “there is no one communicative nor one semantic method in translating a text, however, there are, in fact, widely overlapping bands of methods”(40); but in all cases, transfer of meaning is the major objective of a translator. This task falls within the scope of general cognitive translation and may serve as a ground for comparison between texts arising from distant and radically different languages structures like English and Arabic (41). In brief, semantic translation is more appropriate with serious literature, “but one should to bear in mind that all art is to a greater or lesser extent allegorical, figurative, metaphorical and a parable and therefore has a communicative purpose” (45). Hence, “there is no reason why a basically semantic translation should not also be strongly communicative” (45).

In my project, I used the following translation techniques:

1. I adopted the semantic-communicative method in my translation, working with meaning and the vehicle of meaning in order to bring the readers as close as possible to the original source.
2. I translated the semantic features of the source text to the target language as accurately as possible.
3. I analyzed linguistic and literary stylistic problems arising from translation.

The task of the translator might look simpler than that of the author because the author is the one who offers new information, while the translator only repeats what the author has said or written. However, the translator's mission is more crucial and challenging than the

author's (Bahameed, 2008, p. 11), because translators must commit themselves to an accurate representation of the text.

Translators have always come across puzzling problems and difficulties while carrying out their job. Indeed, while some texts are easy to translate, others are so difficult that they may almost be described as untranslatable. The challenge to the translator is to enter the author's mind the moment he starts translating the text so that he can see what the author sees and feel what the author feels (Bahameed, 2008, p. 10).

English and Arabic do not belong to the same historical root; the former descends from the Indo-European language family, whereas the latter is of Semitic origin. There is almost nothing in common between these two languages. But this does not mean that the grammatical shift in translating from English into Arabic is unsolvable. In general, problems of translation related to grammar are seen as not particularly difficult to solve. For example, Liu Miqing states that "the first step to take in doing translation is to acquire the meaning of source language. Grammar serves as a very useful means to help the translators 'break down' the source language sentence for meaning" (1995, p. 301).

In the process of translating a novel such as *The Merry-go-round in the Sea*, considerable challenges arise from the differences between Arabic and English grammars, sentence structure, use of prepositions, standard and colloquial words and expressions and the slang used by certain characters in the novel, requiring literary research, as well as, linguistic knowledge. Vocabularies can cause problems, since it is not always easy to find suitable counterparts in Arabic. The translator has to be faithful to both texts in rendering the meaning, as well as, the tone of both languages. My objective has been to translate the novel without diminishing the stylistic distinctiveness of the original text when it is put into the target language, so that the original scenes, environments, circumstances, and atmosphere of the inner and outer world of the novel are vividly transferred to an Arabic readership.

There is space between the texts which needs to be bridged by making changes to how the original is expressed in the target language. Anton Popovic points out that "the changes that take place in a translation are determined by the differences between the two languages, the two authors, and the two literary situations involved. Taken together, these differences determine the major components of the translation's structure" (1970, p. 79). This can only be accomplished through recurrent revisions of the translated text, which take time and effort.

### **3. Translation Problems:**

Translation problems can be categorized into diction equivalence, linguistic and literary stylistic problems.

#### ***Diction equivalence***

One of the basic problems that I have faced in my translation of this text is the unusual vocabulary used throughout the novel. This may be a normal phenomenon in the process of any translation. In this case, some expressions are highly localized, restricted to the Australian environment and the culture of the period. Expressions like: "It's a triantiwontigong, It's a wig warm for a goose's bridle"; "jacaranda flowers"; "red tecoma"; "bunyips"; "dense thickets of dryandra"; "trellis of climbing roses"; "secateurs"; "a tall begonia grew in a pot by the waterbag"; "taffeta"; "giddup, giddup"; "sheoaks"; "scrooges"; "sissy"; "cassias"; "I got a double gee"; and "camellias", to mention but a few. Because there are no equivalent terms, words and expressions in Arabic, I adopted the strategy of transliterating or arabizing them, that is to

say, the same words are written in Arabic letters, which might cause difficulty in understanding them for the Arabic readers, but there was no suitable alternative.

### ***Linguistic problems:***

A special issue arises from translating an English text into Arabic: Arabic is much more grammatically and structurally complex than English. The Arabic sentence, for example, can be synthesized or structured in one word; that is to say, a whole sentence might be held in one structured word, like (كتبته), one word holding three grammatical elements, which contains verb, subject and object, while in English, these elements are written as separate words in a sequential way, which can be described as an analyzed sentence. The same Arabic word (sentence) is translated into English as: "I wrote it". The translator must know the linguistic characteristics of both languages.

Much difficulty lies in using pronouns. In Arabic, for example, five pronouns are possibly equal to the English pronoun 'you'. They are: (انتَ، أنتِ، أنتما، أنتم، أنثُنَّ), further, in English, there is either a singular or a plural pronoun, whereas in Arabic, there are three pronouns: singular, dual and plural. Besides, the Arabic sentence normally starts with a verb, which is often sequentially followed by other elements like subject and object, a different order from the typical English sentence. More, the subject is sometimes implied, to be guessed by the reader. This can rarely be found in English. In English, a sentence usually begins with subject followed by other parts of speech. All these differences and others create complications in the process of translation.

Like English, the Arabic language has its specific characteristics and cultural features. Words such as العم (uncle, brother of the father), and الخال (uncle, brother of the mother) or العمّة (aunt, sister of the father), and الخالة (aunt, sister of the mother) are cases in point. In English, there is only one word referring to the relative of each. I have met this problem by translating the word "uncle" or "aunt" to its equivalent in Arabic according to the context of the original text. The word "cousin" can be translated into eight different words with diverse meanings into Arabic: ابن العم وبنيت العم، ابن العمّة وبنيت العمّة، أبْن الخال وبنيت الخال وابن الخالة وبنيت الخالة. Translating this term into Arabic is a challenge.

### ***Literary stylistic problems***

Stylistics studies the way the elements of language are selected and arranged in the text. In defining this term, Geoffrey Leech et al. explain that:

*[Stylistics] studies the relation between the significance of a text and the linguistic characteristics in which they are manifest. This implies two criteria of relevance for the selection of stylistic features: a literary criterion and a linguistic criterion (1981, p. 69).*

Every writer has his/her own distinctive features of style. In one novel, one can find a variety of styles used at the same time; one may be high standard or literary, another common and colloquial and still another one that is used and comprehended by the majority of the writer's readership neither high nor colloquial. The style of a novelist may suggest the standard of education of the characters, their environment and experiences of different types (realistic, romantic or symbolic), and reflect the author's psyche, whether plain, simple or complex. In Stow's novel, the author has used more than one type of style, yet the predominant style is one commonly followed in realistic matters of life, which is familiar to an ordinary reader. There are also several styles or languages spoken by different characters according to their standard of education. In a conversation between Rob and his mother, the language used is that normally understood by the majority of people, with simple questions and answers. For example:

“That’s enough,” his mother said. “We must go now.” The merry-go-round slowed, and then she stopped it. He was sullen as she lifted him down.  
 “Mavis made it go fast,” he said. “She ran with it.”  
 “Mavis is a young girl,” said his mother.  
 “Why did Mavis go away?”  
 “To get married  
 “Why don’t we have another maid?”  
 “People don’t have maids now,” said his mother.  
 “Why don’t people have maids?”  
 “Because of the war, people don’t have maids in wartime.” (Stow, 1965, pp. 13-14).

A completely different type of conversation takes place when Rob talks with a drunken soldier, whom he accidentally meets in the street. The soldier uses colloquial words which are hard to understand and translate into Arabic:

“You’re not very old,” said the boy, “are you?”  
 “How old d’yer reckon I am?” said the soldier.  
 “You’re not grown-up,” said the boy.  
 “I’m eighteen,” said the soldier. “Eighteen, an’ never been pissed.” He belched and laughed. Then he turned back into the bar and shouted at the top of his voice:  
 “I’m eighteen, an’ never been pissed.”  
 Another soldier came and pushed him up against the windowsill and said: “Save it, willya?”  
 “I got a mate,” the first soldier said. “‘E’s a bush kid like me, an’ ‘e never let a drop past ‘is lips.”  
 He leaned out of the window, the other soldier leaning on his shoulder. “Washa name, kid?” he said.  
 “Rob,” said Rob.  
 “My name’s Reg,” said the drunk soldier, “an’ this ‘ere’s Tom, the deadliest murphy-peeler in the Forces.”  
 “How do you do?” said the boy.  
 “Whatchadoin’ ‘ere, kid?” Tom asked.  
 “Just waiting for my mother,” said the boy.  
 “Whyn’tchago an’ buy yerself an ice-cream or somthin’?”  
 “I haven’t got any money,” said the boy, embarrassed.  
 “‘E ‘asn’t got any money,” Reg said. “The poor kid ‘asn’t got any money.”  
 “Here, kid,” Tom said, “Catch.” (Stow, 1965, p. 71).

On a literary level, Stow uses figurative language or figures of speech such as simile, metaphor, and image. In this sentence: ‘the post began as a square pillar, formed rings, continued as a fluted column, suddenly bulged like a diseased tree with an excrescence of iron leaves, narrowed to a peak like the top of a pepperpot’ (Stow, 1965, p. 11), for example, the writer uses two similes. They are: ‘like a diseased tree with an excrescence of iron leaves,’ and ‘like the top of a pepperpot’, which I have translated as كأنها شجرة مصابة ذات نتوءات نامية تحمل أوراقاً حديدية أخذة في التضيق الى الأعلى كأنها قمة علبه الفلفل. These two comparisons might be familiar in English literature, yet they are unusual or unfamiliar in Arabic rhetoric. Another metaphor unfamiliar in Arabic is: ‘the tough leaves of the tree were making a faint clapping’ (Stow, 1965, p. 16), translated as

كانت الأوراق القاسية للشجرة تُحدث تصفيقاً خافتاً.

Similarly: ‘... the southerly...half swallowed in the palm thicket, a figtree shot out from its rough leaves sudden volleys of green eyes that were tearing at the ripe fruit’ (Stow, 1965), translated as:

كانت كثافة النخيل تبتلع نصف الريح الجنوبية وكانت شجرة التين تدفع من خلال أوراقها القاسية ثمارها الناضجة التي كانت فجأة  
تثير كثيراً من عيون لحساد الباكبة عليها!

This is unusual figure of speech, which may not make sense in Arabic and is difficult to comprehend and translate, though it is a colourful and complex metaphorical image in English.

### Analysis of selected short passages and paragraphs

Some social, as well as, literary aspects in the novel can be seen in the following selection of short passages from the text, which are followed with my translation and analysis. They can be seen in: the writer's position regarding the war; war's result in the aftermath and Australia as a virgin land or a childish country. Because Randolph Stow is also a poet, his poetic sense and imagination colour the prose in his novels with many poetic images.

#### *The writer's position regarding the war*

*War is a different country, Rick had written. It doesn't matter which side you were on, or if you won or lost, if you fought a war you became a citizen of another, extra nation, not on the map. It has its own language and its own literature, its own art (caricatures and battlescapes) and its own music (brass bands, nostalgia, bawdy). When you have belonged to that country you do not really go back to the known nations. You never lose your citizenship. In that country everything dies and nothing breeds, but somehow it never ceases to exist, because while it is flourishing its language and its songs become part of the experience of children, growing into heroic nostalgia, so that once every twenty years or so that nation is refounded, and begins enthusiastically to die. (1965, p. 173).*

إن الحرب بلد مختلف. إذ لا يهم مع أي طرف كنت، أو إذا كسبت الحرب أو خسرتها، إذا قاتلت في حرب أصبحت مواطناً لدولة أخرى، أمة بعيدة عن حياتك، غير واقعة على الخريطة. أمة لها لغتها الخاصة بها ولها أدبها الخاص بها، ولها فنونها الخاصة بها (صور كاريكاتيرية ومناظر من أرض المعارك) والموسيقى الخاصة بها (حيث فرق آلات النفخ النحاسية، والشعور بالحنين، والفجور). عندما تكون منتظماً إلى تلك البلاد فأنت لا تعود فعلاً إلى تلك الشعوب المعروفة. لا تفقد احساسك بالمواطنة الخاصة بك أبداً. في تلك البلاد كل شيء يموت ولأشياء يولد، ولكن تلك البلاد لا تتوقف إلى حد ما عن الوجود، وذلك ففي الوقت الذي تقوم بإنعاش لغتها وأغانيها تصبح جزءاً من تجربة الأطفال، التي ترقى إلى حنين بطولي، وعليه تحدث هذه الحالة مرة كل عشرين سنة أو ما يقارب ذلك حيث أن الشعب يعاد تكوينه، ثم يبدأ متحمساً للموت.

This paragraph, though it was written by a post-traumatized young man, Rick, who recently suffered extreme privation in a concentration camp at the hands of his country's enemy, holds deep layers of meaning, since it reflects not only the protagonist's attitude towards war, but also the novelist's. On a literal level, the key sentence 'war is a different country' does not make sense when translated into 'إن الحرب بلد مختلف'. Here the 'vehicle' or the diction 'بلد مختلف' does not convey the actual or proper meaning of war. But on a metaphorical level, in a free translation, 'war' can be described as 'a different country' which means that once man engages in war, he lives a completely unfamiliar life in a world or realm with unusual atmosphere and conditions. So, it is a world or realm by itself rather than a literal country. Further, describing one's attitude toward war as 'it doesn't matter which side you were on, or if you won or lost, if you fought a war you became a citizen of another, extra nation, not on the map' implies the meaninglessness or triviality of war, simply because a man loses his own identity and distorts his being, so that it does not matter which of the fighting parties one belongs to. War is an image of total loss and confusion. The paragraph also suggests that there is no use winning or losing a war, since a man turns out to be a citizen of another nation, which is not geographically situated on the global map; the implication is that he can never return fully to his home country. This is an absolute loss.

Moreover, 'if you fought a war, you became a citizen of another, extra nation, not on the map', there is a lot of ambiguity in this phrase 'extra nation, not on the map'. It is not easy

to understand what is meant by this paradoxical phrase. A new, peculiar entity outside geographical and political reality is created, an extra nation. The extra nation also suggests the distortion of people's characters, particularly those of soldiers, by war. War is always associated with death and barrenness as everything dies and nothing breeds. Despite the highly unusual description of the war by Randolph Stow as a Western writer, the speaker is describing the essential nature of war and why it should not be accepted globally or universally. A question raises itself here: why do some people make war and involve nations in it? Nations may be willingly or unwillingly drawn into war.

One of the catastrophic consequences of war is that people may be uprooted from their original residence, yet they never lose their citizenship of this 'extra nation', as this quotation dictates: 'when you have belonged to that country you do not really go back to the known nations. You never lose your citizenship'. Once more, there is a paradoxical implication between becoming a citizen of another, extra nation, not on the map and 'if you fought a war you became a citizen of another, extra nation, not on the map' on one hand and 'you never lose your citizenship' on the other. At the end of this quotation, there is a link between heroism and children's innocent attitudes towards it: 'its songs become part of the experience of children, growing into heroic nostalgia.' Finally, the speaker stresses the universal or a global fact that war is a recurrent event which occurs time and again 'once every twenty years or so' throughout history. It is a cyclic or frequent event all over the world and is applicable to other nations waging wars, like the Iraqi peoples.

### ***War's result in the aftermath***

In this first year after the end of the war, all the kids were full of war stories and Rob grew prouder and prouder of Rick's scarred ankles. But some of the stories were shocking. "There was this Jap," one kid said, "that was washing his clothes in a creek, and this bloke with Uncle Dick run up with his bayonet and shoved it right up his—." (1965, p. 204).

في هذه السنة الأولى التي أعقبت الحرب، كانت أذهان الأطفال ممتلئة بقصص الحرب، فضلاً عن أن روب أزداد فخراً أكثر فأكثر بالنندب التي كانت في كاحلي ريك. إلا أن بعض القصص كانت مثيرة للصدمة. "كان هناك هذا الياباني،" قال أحد الأطفال، "يغسل ملابسه في جدول صغير، وكان مع العم ديك هذا الشاب الذي جرى إليه ويبيديه حربة ودسها بشكل مستقيم في الياباني—"

This short paragraph depicts a universal image of the immediate post-war situation, when people and children in particular are fully engaged with stories of war. In reality, 'all kids were full of war stories' is not literal, but rather figurative, an exaggerated (hyperbolic) expression. Boys like Rob feel a sense of pride about the signs of injuries, such as those on his cousin, Rick's ankles from being tortured in captivity during the war. For Rob, these scars are a sign of bravery. Then, an incident of heroism is described: the stabbing of a Japanese soldier, who was washing his clothes in a small river, yet this incident sheds light on an implied obscenity and repayment of cruelty in kind. Two vivid depictions of pride and heroism are presented in these few lines. This can be a global image, seen almost everywhere in the world, including the Iraqi people upon confronting the occupant army.

### ***Australia as a virgin land or childish country***

Rick described Australia: "It was a good country to be a child in. It's a childish country." (1965, p. 250).

وصف ريك أستراليا كالأتي: كانت بلداً جيداً لأن يكون المرء فيه طفلاً. إن أستراليا بلداً ذو طابع طفولي.

Once more, the author uses a metaphorical image, in which he describes Australia as 'a childish country' which starts afresh soon after the War. This image suggests the beginning of a new life and its innocence. Australians have led a childish life before the war, but this has

been changed by the war. Rick himself is changed by the war, and will never be the same again. His relationship with Rob is changed, and Rob mourns this great loss that he has been dreaming of all through at the time when Rick was away in the war. So passive change begins to overwhelm Australian people as a result of the war and starts involving in the modernised war with its innovative features. Once, Australians were innocent and uncultivated, living their own pure, uncontaminated life.

To sum it up, the Australian society, described in this novel, has been passing in a slow and circular state. It starts as a primitive-like agrarian society lived in an almost stagnant life for ages. Immediately after the war, it reached a turning point in the process of living. Then, it gradually begins to change toward openness forwards. This is typically represented in the miner career of Rick who left his country, heading for Britain after he felt that he was dying in an atmosphere of boredom. So, a series of successive alterations are taking place over the past seventy years and onward till Australia has become a modern Western country, joining the globalized world, though it is situated at the distant edge of Asia.

However, what has happened in Australia can never be applicable to a troubled country like Iraq, whose people are agonizing a terrible sequence of appalling, devastating wars. There is, in fact, no way nowadays of directing the Iraqi people forward toward stability and development, let alone living and joining the modern globalized world.



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