

TRANSLATING ARABIC LITERATURE: IDENTIFYING WITH STEREOTYPES

ترجمة الأدب العربي: التماهي مع الصور النمطية

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تثير الترجمة الأدبية الشك والريبة، مما يستدعي قراءتها بعناية نظرًا لأهميتها وتبعاتها. فالمرجم لا يتعامل مع كلمات ثابتة أو نصوص جامدة، بل مع كيان حي يعكس المجتمع الذي نشأ فيه، بكل عيوبه وفضائله. وينقل هذا الكيان إلى مجتمع يختلف عنه في اللغة والثقافة والمبادئ، مما يسهم في تشكيل صورة قد تكون مطابقة للواقع أو مشوهة. سواء بوعي أو بدون قصد، يؤثر المترجم على تصورات الجمهور حول المجتمع المصدر.

يسلط هذا المقال الضوء على العوامل الأيديولوجية والجمالية التي تؤثر على اختيار الأعمال الأدبية واستراتيجيات ترجمتها. كما يستكشف دور الترجمة في كشف الواقع وتقديم حقائق عن المجتمع المصدر وثقافته، أو في تحريفها وتعزيز المعتقدات الزائفة والصور النمطية في أذهان الجمهور الهدف.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

الترجمة الأدبية، الأيديولوجية، الصورة النمطية، الأنا، الآخر.

Abstract:

Literary translation evokes doubt and skepticism, requiring careful reading due to its significance and consequences. A translator does not deal with static words or lifeless texts but with a living entity reflecting the society in which it emerged, with its flaws and virtues. The translator conveys this to a society differing in language, culture, and principles, shaping an image that may be faithful to reality or distorted. Whether consciously or not, they influence perceptions of the original society.

This article highlights ideological and aesthetic factors affecting literary selection and translation strategies. It explores the role of translation in revealing reality and presenting truths about the source society and its culture or distorting them, reinforcing false beliefs and stereotypes in the target audience's minds.

Keywords:

Ideology; Literary translation; Other; Self; Stereotype.

1. INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that literary translation has played a significant role in introducing local culture and identity, fostering understanding and communication with the "other," and creating a space for cultural and civilizational interaction. It has also helped reveal similarities and differences between us and others, thereby shaping a mutual perception of both ourselves and them. However, this perception is not always accurate or truthful, as the "Self" often sees itself in the best possible light while perceiving the "Other" as incomplete or flawed. From this perspective, literary translation does not take place in an ideological vacuum or in absolute neutrality. Rather, it is subject to multiple influences—social, political, cultural, and economic—that shape both its production and reception. As Lawrence Venuti explains, translation is not merely about transferring words and sentences; it plays a crucial role in shaping an image of the "Other" and their culture at a particular historical moment. It also contributes to presenting a way of life that may seem foreign to the target audience. For this reason, some translators aim to align the translation with the target culture, striving to make the translated text smooth and transparent, free from linguistic and cultural discrepancies between the two languages and cultures. This is often achieved by replacing certain details to better suit the "taste" of the audience.

2. Framing the Arab Identity: How Orientalist Stereotypes Still Shape Perceptions

The historical relationship between the West and the Arab world is long and complex, particularly in the French context, which was significantly shaped by the Crusades. In French literature, the image of the Arab has often been associated with barbarism and sensuality. Western superiority during the 17th and 18th centuries further entrenched these negative stereotypes, which were reflected in translations of Arabic literature into Western languages. These translations often presented an inaccurate image, laden with mystery and primal instincts, as seen in *One Thousand and One Nights*, which contributed to the romanticized and idealized portrayal of the Arab world. The West tends to favor translations of Arabic literature that reinforce specific images of Arabs—associating them with violence and extremism, for instance—or that emphasize the depiction of the "oppressed" Arab woman. Mohamed Daoud (Daoud, 2006) in his article *Le Monde Arabe dans l'Imaginaire Occidental: Traduction et Interculturalité*, highlights how Orientalists played a crucial role in shaping the cultural image of Arabs through translation. He explains

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how this image has been repeatedly reinforced and preserved in various writings, whether translated from Arabic or originally written in a European language.

According to him much of what is written about Eastern civilization is the product of Orientalists, literary figures, travelers, and missionaries, among others. This image is shaped through an "exoticized" perspective, deeply influenced by the enchanting narratives of *One Thousand and One Nights*. This work was first translated into French in 1704 by Antoine Galland, before being translated into other European languages. The translation conveyed an idealized vision of the East, laden with mythical symbols that profoundly shaped the European imagination.

Many Western novels have portrayed the East as a place of despotism, violence, and superstition. This image has persisted in some literature, making the East appear inferior and more exotic compared to the West. The translations from Arabic into foreign languages over centuries have played a significant role in producing numerous stereotypes about Arabs and Muslims. Nada Tomiche (Tomiche, 1978) argues that these translations reflect an unpleasant and unfavorable image of the Arab world, portraying it as a realm of exotisme, sensuality, and naivety, much like the tales of *One Thousand and One Nights*. Even modern literary works selected for translation have not escaped this framing. They often depict an entirely backward society and a folkloric world that no longer represents contemporary Arab reality. This is done to cater to the expectations of a readership that seeks in literature an imagined world that contrasts with their lived reality.

At the First International Conference on Comparative Literature in the Arab World (1983, Annaba), Professor Jean Louis Maume highlighted that translated Arabic literature, along with Western literature depicting the Middle East and the Maghreb, often reinforces the image of the Arab as "vile," "filthy," "a thief," "silent," "mysterious," and "puzzling"—or even worse, "rude," "savage," and "inhuman." These attributes are not new but deeply rooted in the European imagination, merely reinforced and perpetuated through translation. This perception dates back to the Middle Ages, shaped by Orientalists, writers, travelers, and missionaries in their portrayal of the "Eastern Other," particularly the Arab Muslim. As Edward Said explains, when two cultures or civilizations interact, the tendency to recall and revive past images becomes one of the most common strategies for interpreting the present. The past, rather than being concluded, persists in different forms.

□ Appeals to the past are among the commonest of strategies in interpretations of the present. What animates such appeals is not only disagreement about what happened in the past and what the past was, but uncertainty about whether the past really is past, over and concluded, or whether it continues, albeit in different forms □ (Said, 1993 p. 1). As Shehata states:

The production of the 'Other'—any other—is shaped by imagined representations distorted by metaphysical references, divisions, and standards that have marked the entire history of Western metaphysical philosophy. Thus, the metaphysics of Orientalism portrays the Western self in its full glory, superiority, and dominance, while falsifying and demeaning the culture of the Eastern Other (particularly the Islamic Other), denigrating its culture, language, religion, and very existence, and placing it outside history and the shared universal space ((شحاتة، 2008، ص28-29).

Texts, whether original or translated, are never written in an ideological vacuum or complete neutrality. Instead, they are influenced by the prevailing cultural discourse, which imposes constraints on their production. In this sense, discourse serves as a contextual framework that defines the appropriate linguistic and cultural positioning of each text. The translator plays a crucial role in conveying this framework in a manner that aligns with the institutions the text serves. The fear of the Other can lead to linguistic strategies that reinforce hierarchy and dominance, creating stereotypes that perpetuate prevailing ideas about the Other.

This dynamic profoundly shapes the translation process, steering the adaptation of foreign texts toward alignment with Western ideological frameworks. The endurance of these representations is reinforced through strategic manipulation and the selective translation of specific works, ensuring that only particular narratives prevail. As a result, translated texts are frequently domesticated, molded to fit within the prevailing Arab cultural and intellectual paradigms rather than challenging them. Translation from Arabic remains deeply entangled in strategies that exoticize, manipulate, subvert, and appropriate, continuously shaping intellectual exchanges and the constructed representations of its speakers. Despite often being misunderstood and misinterpreted, the Other, Arabs in our case, is perceived as foreign and different yet strangely alluring. In this context, allure becomes synonymous with an exciting and mysterious world—the world of exoticism.

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The self's perception of the Other has fundamentally shaped stereotypical characters, meaning that the translating culture, depending on its power, assigns specific characteristics to the translated persona. This process is primarily driven by more dominant nations for racialized purposes. For instance, there is little doubt that *One Thousand and One Nights*, *Ali Baba*, or *The Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam are among the most appealing works for Western audiences. They reinforce the images that Western readers expect and desire to see in the foreign Other—that of an Oriental world steeped in mystery, adventure, and exotic splendor. These texts immerse readers in fantastical realms filled with exaggerated and often fabricated representations of desert life, caliphs, harems, and untold riches. The danger of stereotypes lies in how they establish rigid boundaries around what is considered *natural* and *acceptable*. Over time, these characteristics become abstracted into dominant perceptions, shaping how target audiences interpret the Other—historically, economically, and socially. These stereotypical perceptions of the Other also affect publishers' decisions when selecting texts for translation, as they tend to favor works that conform to and reinforce these preconceived ideas. Edward Said, in his book *The Politics of Dispossession: The Struggle for Palestinian Self-Determination* (Said, 1994) observed the West's general lack of interest in translating Arabic literature. When Arabic literature is translated, it is often limited to works that reinforce or conform to the pre-existing Western image of the Arab world. The reception of Arabic literature in the West appears to be directly correlated with the reproduction of certain stereotypes and clichés. It is as if a curtain of indifference and bias systematically excludes any texts that fail to reiterate familiar clichés about Islam, violence, and sensuality, among others. This suggests the existence of a deliberate policy that sustains a reductive and homogeneous portrayal of Arabs and Islam. Most of what has been published in Western media, including journalistic commentaries and expert analyses in the American press, simply regurgitates crude stereotypes. This clearly and unmistakably stems from U.S. government policies, which have long depicted Arabs as either terrorists or foolish servants whose sole purpose is to be exploited for their wealth and cheap oil.

Similarly, the poet and translator Rifaat Sallam (رجب، 2018) noted, based on his travels to several European capitals, that the works of Egyptian writer Alifa Rifaat have received significant attention, having been widely translated and discussed. The reason behind this interest lies in Rifaat's portrayal of oppressed or marginalized women—narratives that ultimately reinforce the West's stereotypical view of the backward East. This observation highlights the selective nature of

translation, where literary works are often chosen based on how well they align with dominant cultural and ideological narratives rather than purely for their artistic merit. The emphasis on Alifa Rifaat's depiction of marginalized women suggests that Western interest in certain Arab authors may be driven less by an appreciation of their literary craft and more by how their narratives fit within preconceived notions of the "oppressed Eastern woman." Such selective translation practices can reinforce Orientalist stereotypes, framing the East as backward and in need of Western intervention or validation. Instead of fostering a nuanced and diverse understanding of Arab literature, this approach risks reducing it to a tool for confirming existing biases. This raises important questions about the politics of translation and the role of cultural gatekeepers in shaping how certain voices are amplified while others remain in the margins.

3. Literary Translation and Political Power: The Influence of Context on Selection

Translation is a fundamental tool for intercultural communication, enabling the exchange of ideas and knowledge among different societies. However, this transfer is not always neutral or objective; rather, it is often shaped by various influences, with political context being one of the most significant factors affecting the selection of translated works. Political circumstances interact with translation processes by influencing cultural transmission priorities—either by promoting the translation of works that align with specific political agendas or by limiting the dissemination of texts that may contradict political interests.

In this context, political and ideological dominance plays a pivotal role in shaping the selection of texts for translation, often resulting in skewed or biased portrayals of other cultures. Translations may serve to reinforce preexisting narratives or propagate ideas that sustain political and cultural hegemony, demonstrating the profound influence of political contexts on the cross-border transmission of literature and intellectual thought. The selection of books from the Arab world for translation is largely driven by socio-political considerations rather than an authentic interest in the region's literary and artistic contributions. Consequently, these works are often treated less as expressions of literary creativity and more as sociopolitical artifacts, reducing them to sources of cultural and political documentation rather than recognizing them for their inherent artistic and intellectual value. This is the observation made by Nourah Alkharashi (Alkharashi, 2016) in her study of the novel *The Yacoubian Building*. She noted that the nature of the themes addressed in the novel played a fundamental and central role in the success of its

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translation in the West. For instance, *The Yacoubian Building* deals with controversial issues such as political discontent, homophobia, gender discrimination, Islamic fundamentalism, and terrorism—topics that are particularly appealing to Western readers, especially since the novel was published after the events of September 11, when Western interest in Middle Eastern politics and culture was on the rise. She adds that the success of *The Yacoubian Building* is not, in itself, evidence of openness to contemporary Arabic literature in the English literary market. Rather, it demonstrates that the political and cultural context in which the work was published, along with the translators' and publishers' alignment with the expectations and preferences of contemporary readers at a specific time and place, leads to a positive critical and commercial reception of Arabic literature in the English market.

The success of *The Yacoubian Building* is not in itself evidence of openness to contemporary Arabic literature in the English literary market. It is, however, evidence that the political and cultural context of a work's release, coupled with a good understanding by translators and publishers of the contemporary reader's expectations at a given time and place, can result in the critically and commercially favourable reception of Arabic literature in the English market (Alkharashi, 2016 p. 57).

Peter Clark, (Faiq, 2004 p.4) drawing from his experience in translating modern Arabic literature into English, recounts the following:

"I wanted to translate a volume of contemporary Syrian literature and believed that Abd al-Salam al-Ujayli's work was exceptionally good and deserved to be translated into English. Al-Ujayli, a doctor in his seventies, had written poetry, criticism, novels, and short stories—his short stories in particular were truly remarkable. Many of them were set in the Euphrates Valley and depicted people dealing with politics and an authoritarian state. So, I proposed a volume of his short stories to an English publisher. He responded: 'There are three things wrong with this idea. He is male, old, and writes short stories. Can't you find a young female novelist instead? ; Peter Clark's account highlights the challenges of translating modern Arabic literature into English, particularly the influence of market preferences on publishing decisions. His experience with Abd al-Salam al-Ujayli's work underscores how factors unrelated to literary merit—such as the author's gender, age, and choice of genre—can shape the accessibility of Arabic literature in English translation.

The publisher’s response, emphasizing a preference for a young female novelist over an older male short story writer, reflects broader industry trends that prioritize marketability. It also raises concerns about how literary value is assessed and whose stories get told in translation. Clark’s anecdote suggests that high-quality Arabic literature may be overlooked due to external expectations rather than artistic or cultural significance.

4. Shaping the Other: How Dominant Cultures Filter and Frame Translated Texts

It is now widely acknowledged that any literary production is a commodity like any other, subject to market demands, supply and demand laws, consumer (reader) preferences, and expectations. This commercial world imposes its strict and unforgiving logic on all cultural products and the stakeholders involved (writers, translators, publishers, publishing houses, etc.). Thus, the primary factor in selecting an original text for translation is its potential for financial profitability, regardless of its literary, aesthetic, or humanistic value. While the translator plays a crucial role in choosing the translation strategy from the available options and is undeniably a key figure in the translation process, they remain, like others, bound by the socio-cultural norms of the target language. Additionally, he/she must meet the expectations of multiple stakeholders, the most influential of whom, in our view, is the commissioner of the translation (which could be an individual, an institution, or a publishing house). This commissioner is the one who pays the translator and sets the conditions for the work. In the case of translating Arabic literature into Western languages, the primary criterion remains the guarantee of commercial success. Publishing houses, as commercial enterprises, operate according to market rules, prioritizing works that promise financial returns over those that may hold greater literary and cultural richness. Translated texts undergo strict selection processes, where only works that align with the prevailing standards and values of the target culture—often a dominant one—are chosen. Many scholars in translation studies, particularly in postcolonial translation theory, highlight this issue. The repeated selection of the same types of texts, with similar themes and structures, significantly influences the shaping and representation of cultural identities. It reinforces stereotypes and entrenches existing narratives. The transfer, translation, and interpretation of texts are rarely neutral; instead, they often serve political, ideological, and power-driven agendas.

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Contemporary cultural theory, therefore, deals with the relationship between the conditions of knowledge production in one given culture, and the way knowledge from a different cultural setting is relocated and reinterpreted according to the conditions in which knowledge is produced. They are deeply inscribed within the politics, the strategies of power, and the mythology of stereotyping and representation of other cultures (Carbonell, 1996 p. 80).

The dominant discourse within a given culture imposes its constraints on all actors in the creative field at the macro level (the broader context). This results in both the "self" and the "other" being positioned within inherited representational frameworks stored in collective experience. Consequently, every "self" develops a sense of fear toward the "other." In this regard, Faiq argues that when the "self" fears the "other," the expected lexical strategies (linguistic choices) are those that reinforce hierarchy, subordination, and dominance. This often leads to the creation of stereotypes, which are typically accompanied by pre-existing representations in the collective imagination, reinforcing the underlying ideologies. Representing the "other" through translation thus becomes a powerful exclusionary strategy, perceived by the "self" as natural, even ethical. Unsurprisingly, this exclusion is often accompanied by the selective inclusion of certain "acceptable" members of the "other," provided they conform to and align themselves with the dominant discourse and representational system regarding the "Other."

The presentation of others through translation is a powerful strategy of exclusion used by a self as normal and moral (Said, 1995). Not surprising, this exclusion is also accompanied by an inclusion process of some accepted members from the other as long as the acceptees adopt and adapt to the underlying master discourse and its associated representational system and ideology of the accepting self, acceptors. (Faiq, 2008 p. 30). From a translational perspective, institutionalized patterns of speech or writing that reflect attitudes toward this socio-cultural activity impose another set of constraints on translators, particularly when their stances regarding the dominant discourse diverge or fail to align with the prevailing norms of the target culture or the specific criteria governing the selection of texts for translation, the strategies for their transfer, the representation of the "Other," and the consumption and reception of foreign works.

Moreover, the aim of such translation is to render the "culturally different Other" as the "Self," making it recognizable and familiar. However, the risk inherent in domesticating foreign texts lies in the fact that it is often carried out through deliberate projects that serve imperialistic, appropriative, and annexational translation practices. These practices subordinate foreign cultures to local, cultural, economic, and political agendas, thereby reinforcing hegemonic structures and undermining the authenticity and diversity of the source culture.

This is what (Altoma,2005) concluded, attributing the positive trend in translating the works of Arab women writers such as Sahar Khalifeh (1985), Emily Nasrallah (1987), Alifa Rifaat (1983), Nawal El Saadawi (1983, 1985, 1987, 1988), and Hanan al-Shaykh (1986) to the general direction of the feminist movement in the Western world. This movement focused on the issue of feminism in the Third World and women's perspectives on the most significant political and social issues in their countries. This suggests that one of the primary motivations for selecting the works of certain Arab women writers for translation is the political-ideological impetus to understand the status of women in Arab-Islamic societies, particularly texts that reinforce the image of Arab women ingrained in the European reader's imagination—that of a submissive, resigned, and powerless woman.

A clear example of this is Nawal El Saadawi, who, according to the same study, remains without a doubt the most accepted, received, and celebrated writer in Western society, not due to the intrinsic literary value of her works but because of her radical and candid approach to depicting the conditions of women in Egypt and Arab societies. While her writings were banned and censored in Egypt and other parts of the Arab world, her works, both fictional and non-fictional, gained widespread popularity in the West and reached a much broader audience than Arabic literature had until 1988. In contrast, her compatriot Latifa al-Zayyat (1923–1996), a prominent novelist and intellectual, was largely ignored or overlooked until the mid-1990s. Reem Bassiouny, novelist and professor at the American University in Cairo, asserts that most novels translated from Arabic into European languages deliberately break taboos related to sex, religion, and politics, aligning with a prevailing negative stereotype about Arabs. She states that she artistically addressed this issue in her novel *Tour Guide*, and when she attempted to translate her novel, she failed because it did not conform to the conditions imposed by publishers and translators, which require reinforcing the stereotypical and negative image of Arabs. "There are deeply rooted ideas and images about us as Arabs, with terms like terrorism, political

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tensions, and backwardness [...] European publishers seek out these negative attributes to market them," she explains (رجب، 2018)

Dalal Abboushi also pointed out the recurrence of certain images in the translation of Arabic novels in Britain. The novels that are translated are often imagined and written to reaffirm widely accepted ideas about two dominant themes: the Arab woman and the Islamic revival, or what is commonly referred to as Islamic fundamentalism. □ Novels which are translated are often imagined to reconfirm accepted notions about two dominant subjects: Arab women and Islamic resurgence or what is called Islamic fundamentalism □ (Abboushi-Dalal, 1998).

The translation of Arabic novels into Western languages is often influenced by implicit preferences that align with dominant narratives and expectations in the target culture. Translated novels frequently serve to reaffirm preconceived notions about Arab societies, particularly regarding two major themes: the role and status of Arab women and the phenomenon of Islamic resurgence, often framed as "Islamic fundamentalism." These themes reflect Western cultural and political interests, shaping the selection, promotion, and reception of translated Arabic literature.

The focus on these topics suggests that Western audiences are drawn to portrayals that either confirm or challenge existing stereotypes, rather than offering a broader and more diverse representation of Arab life. This selective approach to translation reflects the dynamics of cultural gatekeeping, where publishers, translators, and funding bodies play a significant role in determining which voices reach international readerships. The implicit preferences underlying these selections create a form of cultural translation that reinforces dominant discourses about the Arab world rather than offering an authentic or multifaceted perspective.

Moreover, the emphasis on specific themes—particularly narratives of oppression, resistance, and religious extremism—often aligns with broader geopolitical discourses that shape Western perceptions of the Arab world. This selective process not only influences the visibility of certain Arabic works but also affects the way Arab cultures are understood globally. By privileging certain narratives over others, translation becomes a site of ideological negotiation, where cultural representations are filtered through Western frameworks of understanding. This raises important questions about the politics of translation and the responsibilities of translators and publishers in shaping cross-cultural dialogue. Should translation be driven by market demand and dominant political interests, or should it seek to foster a more nuanced and diverse exchange of perspectives? Addressing these concerns requires a critical examination of how translation

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functions as a mediating force between cultures and the ways in which it can either reinforce or challenge existing power structures in global literary circulation.

Abboushi-Dallal (Abboushi-Dalal, 1998) observed, in relation to the translation of Arabic poetry into English, a tendency to reproduce similar images of the original culture that conform to the poetic standards of the target language. She argues that this approach is misleading and does not truly represent Arabic literature and Arab culture. Instead, she advocates for highlighting the cultural differences, unique experiences of contemporary Arab poets, their dialects, visions, and emotional and spiritual identities. She asserts that catering to the tastes of the target culture's readers in terms of content or form leads to either a misrepresentation or a distorted representation of Arabic poetry. Therefore, the selection criteria should be based on the specificity of the source culture and the experiences and identities of its creators. □ to bring out the cultural differences and the varied interests of contemporary Arab poets: their particular kinds of experience, their special emphases, their visions, and their emotional and spiritual identities □ (Jayyusi, 2005 pp. xxi-xxii).

For these reasons, it is essential to adopt a translation approach that prioritizes the preservation of cultural differences and highlights the unique experiences of contemporary Arab poets. This means retaining key elements such as dialects, regional idioms, and poetic forms that reflect the emotional, spiritual, and intellectual landscapes of Arabic poetry. Rather than reshaping Arabic poetry to align with the preferences of an English-speaking audience, translations should provide readers with an unfiltered insight into the artistic and cultural realities of the Arab world.

Moreover, it is crucial to challenge selection biases in the translation process. Too often, works are chosen based on their perceived accessibility or their alignment with Western perspectives rather than their literary significance within the Arab world. This selective approach not only reinforces pre-existing stereotypes but also limits the diversity of voices that reach global audiences.

Ultimately, a translation strategy should respect the integrity of the original texts while preserving the specificity of the source culture. Arabic poetry, for instance, should be presented as a literary tradition with its own aesthetic and philosophical frameworks, rather than being modified to fit external expectations. By doing so, translations can foster meaningful intercultural dialogue rather than serving as instruments of cultural assimilation or distortion.

Faiq, (2004), cites Dalal Jayyusi's reference to John Updike's remark, in which he expresses regret that Mr. Munif does not appear to be "Western-oriented" or *Occidentalisé* enough to produce a novel that closely resembles what is conventionally called a novel. This perspective stems from a prevailing, one-sided ideological framework based on universality, uniformity, and the homogeneity of human nature.

This ideology marginalizes and excludes the distinctive and unique characteristics of Arab societies and their rhetorical traditions. It assumes that the "Other" must conform to its standards in order to be accepted as part of global culture and the literary world. Such repeated choices lead to the production of "stereotypes" and a "misunderstanding" of the source culture, as they obscure the "realities" of that culture and portray the lives of the "Other" only insofar as they are perceived to be transparent. Consequently, literary works are often treated merely as scientific documents—historical, social, anthropological, or ethnological:

□ It is unfortunate [...] that Mr Munif [...] appears to be [...] insufficiently Westernized to produce a narrative that feels much like what we call a novel.' Such an attitude stems from the one-sided, still current stereotypical ideology based on universalism, unitarism, and the homogeneity of human nature. □ (Faiq, 2004 p. 5).

In this context, Shahid argues that the French, for instance, approach the original Arabic text with a sense of superiority that allows them to refine and "tighten" it. They believe that the Arab writer lacks full control over their text, subjecting it to their own rigid Cartesian judgments. They assume that if the text were left as the author originally wrote it, it would lose its elegance and appeal, ultimately failing to attract demanding readers. As a result, they undertake a process of rewriting—removing certain details, rearranging passages—so that the text appears more "coherent." It is as if the Arab writer is still perceived as an infant, not yet fully developed, and as if writing must conform to a purely European model as the ultimate standard. Thus, an Arab novel is either a replica of European writing or it is not considered a novel at all (Shahid, 2007).

Even some Arab and Muslim writers in the Western world have not escaped adopting strategies that reinforce the dominant stereotypes prevalent in Western discourse—particularly those who have managed to attract the attention of academics, critics, and readers and have won prestigious awards. Their writings often align with the entrenched representations and stereotypes of Arab and Islamic cultures and societies, conforming to the ideologies, morals, and values of the target culture. One striking example is Tahar Ben jelloun, one of the most renowned Arab

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writers in the French language. His novel *La Nuit sacrée*, which won the Goncourt Prize in 1987, sold millions of copies and was translated into multiple languages, perfectly aligns with the dominant discourse in the Western world.

His work, along with his other writings, is characterized by an obsession with sexuality, as it depicts a world of delirium and illusion, presenting various stories of irrationality and mental illness—concepts reminiscent of Orientalist portrayals of Arabs and Islam. By doing so, he creates a text that is easily accepted within the dominant discourse and culture of French society, reinforcing the stereotypes associated with Arabs and Islam.

Instead of exploring the relationships between two worlds that differ in terms of race, religion, society, and language, *La Nuit sacrée* presents itself as a Western text written by a "non-Western" or "Oriental" author—an aspect that, according to Jacquemond, is particularly gratifying for the French. He argues that all "documents" confirming the otherness of the Arab world—depicting it as backward and authoritarian—are enthusiastically received, especially when these affirmations come from the Other himself. Meanwhile, such texts reinforce the self-image of French culture as modern and democratic. (Faiq, 2004).

These narrative models have revived the Orientalist imaginary, opening up a vast space for the Western imagination to reclaim its own "lost paradise"—a vision that once haunted its daydreams, only to be revealed as an illusion and a mirage. This is a reconstruction of the Orientalist imaginary, a creation of an exoticized image of the East intended to captivate the Western reader, crafting an ambiguous identity that remains inseparable from the Other and is always defined in relation to it.

This alignment does not stop at a submissive worldview that accepts the West's superiority and centrality, internalizing its narratives about the East. Rather, the East itself becomes a Western necessity—a source of pleasure and entertainment that breaks the monotony of Western life. Writing for the sake of translation—that is, the desire of writers to see their works translated into one of the dominant cultural languages, such as English or French—drives them to extensively study these literary traditions. This includes a deep engagement with Orientalist and Eurocentric stereotypes, which they often integrate into their writings. As a result, producers of modern literature have found themselves, even implicitly, compelled to conform to French ideological and aesthetic values, adjusting their work to meet the expectations of the Western audience. Jacquemond in *Translation and Cultural Hegemony: The Case of French-Arabic Translation* (Jacquemond, 1992) provides

an example of this phenomenon through the selection of *Al-Ayyam* by Taha Hussein and *Diary of a Country Prosecutor* by Tawfiq al-Hakim—two of the earliest Egyptian works translated into French.

This choice, according to Jacquemond, was based on two key factors: first, that both authors belonged to the bourgeois class, and second, that they embraced Western cultural values. As a result, they were perceived as being closer to the West than to Egyptian society in terms of lifestyle and moral values. Their works highlight the deep divide between their modern ideals and the so-called "backwardness" of traditional Egyptian society. While their original intent may have been to critique the social conditions of Egypt, Western readers instead saw in their works a detailed depiction of the flaws of Egyptian society—reinforcing the Otherness of Arabs while validating Western self-representations. This satisfied the dominant French ego, especially since such depictions came from the Other himself.

Translators and publishers rarely engage with Arabic literature—whether originally written in Arabic or another language—without considering Western audience expectations. These expectations are shaped by deeply embedded clichés and representational frameworks that dictate how Arabic and Islamic cultures are portrayed in translation and original texts alike.

5. CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the deeply ingrained stereotypes in the European imagination—shaped by Orientalists, writers, travelers, and missionaries through both direct writings and translations—have played a significant role in constructing an exaggeratedly romanticized image of the East. Works such as *One Thousand and One Nights*, featuring characters like *Scheherazade*, *Ali Baba*, and *Sinbad the Sailor*, have reinforced an unrealistic and distorted perception of the Arab world. Additionally, the translation of the Quran into Western languages has contributed to the misrepresentation of Arabs and Muslims by questioning their legal foundations and casting doubt on their sources of legislation. This has transformed translation from a tool for cultural exchange into a mechanism for cultural invasion and intellectual dominance. It has become evident that translated texts undergo a meticulous selection process, where only works that align with the values and expectations of the target culture are chosen. These criteria play a significant role in shaping cultural identities and representations. The selection of texts for translation is often driven by prevailing stereotypes in the target society. Moreover, this phenomenon is not exclusive to Western publishers and translators; even some Arab

and Muslim writers in the West—who have gained recognition from academics, critics, and readers and have received prestigious awards—have conformed to these entrenched stereotypes. Their works align with the dominant ideologies and values of the target culture, reinforcing existing narratives about Arab and Islamic societies.

Publishers and translators rarely engage with Arabic literature—regardless of the language in which it is written—without considering Western audience expectations. The Western readership is often drawn to entrenched clichés and familiar representations that confirm preconceived notions. Additionally, the political and cultural context in which a work is published, along with the ways translators and publishers adapt to contemporary readership expectations, significantly influence the critical and commercial reception of Arabic literature.

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