When the East Meets the West: Literary Interference and Cultural Transfer

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Abstract:
Our contribution focuses on literary interference and cultural transfer the processes and contributions of dialogue in the field of literature between the Arab-Muslim world and Europe and, more recently, from the Middle Ages, between the Arab World and the West. We show how these cultural universes have mutually fertilized over the centuries. We start by defining the theoretical framework in which the main questions raised by these exchanges are registered and what they teach us about the links between the cultures that produced the works concerned, and continue with the importance of literary borrowings seen as cultural exchange currencies. As an outstanding example we have chosen *Kalila wa-Dimna* and the *Arabian Nights* to demonstrate the circulation of classical literary sources in the Arabic language, and bring arguments in favor of the benefic encounter of Western literatures with the Arab world.

Keywords: Arab, cultural exchange, Divine Comedy, literary interferences, Kalîla wa-Dimna, One Thousand and One Nights, translation

1. Introduction: On Cultural Exchange

Like literature, literary criticism is part of history. This is why it is necessary to stand out here from the grid which has traditionally served, since the 19th century and sometimes even today, to account for the circulation of works in terms of the linear influence of a work A, born in a C1 culture, on a work B, later born in a C2 culture. Taking the two works as a closed space, this representation of cultural exchanges considers that there has been an "influence" of work A on work B, when it considers that B has drawn part of its material (generic characteristics, themes, characters, general architecture, stylistic characteristics ...), or even its essence, in A. The time difference between the two works can be considerable or, on the contrary, very small, even almost nonexistent. From this perspective, A appears as the cause or origin of B and their links are generally understood in qualitative and evaluative terms, with aesthetic or cultural value judgments, explicit or implicit, in which the oldest work is usually considered the most original and the other as a

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more or less successful form of imitation. The fact that, for centuries, imitation has expressed admiration and benefited from a positive literary value is concealed, or otherwise devalued. And, if it happens, rarely, that we consider that the imitator surpasses his model, this approach is based on the presupposition of a literary deficit, punctual or structural, of culture C2, unfit to produce by itself renowned works. Few studies based on these premises escape the regrettable hierarchical classification of works and, therefore, of cultures.

Cultural exchanges, particularly in the literary field, are much more complex and would have everything to gain by being approached in terms of networks, as we are trying to do now. Looking at literature as a dynamic structure and not as an aggregate of inert and closed corpora, we quickly observe that the works result from multi-literary exchanges and that their authors are imbued with a considerable amount of data (from their own present culture or past, other cultures and various works) from which they voluntarily or fortuitously draw part of the elements which enter into the composition of their works. Even if one isolates, punctually, for research needs, a line connecting two works, it is generated by multiple variables and is part of a tangle of criteria without which it loses its meaning and its justification, as can be seen in the following example.

2. Borrowings as cultural exchange currencies

Jean de la Fontaine (1621-1695) and his famous *Fables* illustrate the dynamics of such a network remarkably and show that it is in no way incompatible with literary innovation and creation. *The Fables* of La Fontaine have links with *Kalîla wa-Dimna* (كليلة ودمنة), one of the founding works of Abbasid literary prose. We should mention that the Abbasid dynasty, founded by Abu al-'Abbâs al-Saffâh, reigned over most of the Arab-Muslim world from 750 to 1258. Its capital was Baghdad, whose role and cultural influence were essential between the 8th and 10th centuries. La Fontaine himself testifies in the "Advertisement" to the *Second Compilation of Fables* (1678):

> Here is a second collection of fables that I present to the public. I thought it appropriate to give most of them a slightly different air and turn than that which I gave to the first, both because of the difference in the subjects, and to fill my variety with more variety. work ... Only I would say, out of gratitude, that *I owe most of it to Pilpay, an Indian sage. His book has been translated into all languages. The locals believe it to be very old, and original to Aesop, if not Aesop himself under the name of the wise Locman*. A few others have provided me with quite happy subjects. (La Fontaine, 1874: 204; my translation, emphasis added)

La Fontaine's interest in Aesop's *Fables* is also known. It is usually said that the latter "influenced" his first collection of Fables and that *Kallia wa-Dimna* "influenced" the next. This double linearity impoverishes La Fontaine's works. He knew many other fabulists (whose works are, incidentally, tangled), read the stories written by great travelers returning from the East, such as Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (1605-1689), or François Bernier (1620-1688). In addition, a former seminarian, La Fontaine knew well the face of the ancient Orient reflected in the Bible, evoked ancient Egypt, Andalusia or Morocco, and borrowed certain themes from poems or folk tales translated from the Persian. His "imitations" are all new creations, inventions in which he defends his ideas and distills his critics. His Fables are therefore the living and original result of a fruitful dialectic between various sources, placed at the service of his creativity.

Obviously, it is not always easy, or even possible, to highlight all the criteria that form such networks. The fact is that we are often forced to work from concrete material data and, in the literary field, for ancient times, concrete material data are written texts. However, these texts are the end product and the refraction of complex and partially inaccessible processes.

Following the meanders of the circulation of literary works through the traces that they print on other literary works therefore implies to restore, as much as possible, the cultural context in which they were developed; but also, to follow in the texts as such, all the manifestations of literary material. Here again, the task is not simple: How to define literary material? Are we talking about themes, patterns, ideas, topics, characters, genres, structures or all of these? When will it be estimated that interference has occurred? From what quantity of common elements will we seek between two works links of proximity or affiliation?

These are not empty theoretical questions. These are issues, all the more delicate to examine since the coincidence that sometimes arises between two works is not always, nor necessarily, the result of their correlation, even less – it will be understood – of a unequivocal action exerted by the oldest on the most recent. More than once, this coincidence reminds us that the ontological questions that we face in our humanity often produce the same questions and, in many cases, the same answers. The difficulty of determining what literary material consists of and from what point it is a question of interference between two works finds a telling illustration with the quarrel, to which we will return, opposing the researchers as to the links between *The Epistle of Forgiveness* (*Resalat al-Ghufran* رسالة الغفران) composed by Abou al-'Alâ 'al-Maʿarrî (أبو العلاء المعري, d. 1058) and Dante's *Divine Comedy*. A mention is necessary: Ma'arrî is an Arab poet and thinker, known for his

subversive ideas and accused of heresy. Original figure, he was vegan, lived reclusive and would have, according to some sources, converted to Brahmanism. In the *Epistle of Forgiveness*, the narrator visits the beyond and converses with many famous poets who have disappeared.

Tracing the course of certain works and seeing what impact they may have had on a culture that did not produce them, or on a particular author, is also to be interested in contact spaces and transmission procedures. Certain spaces, such as al-Andalus, are, in some cases excessively simplistic, designated as privileged spaces for intercultural contacts and listed as such. This focus, when it does not take into account the sometimes contradictory dynamics of cultures, leads to bias the role of the contact area studied, to obscure or minimize the function and role of other contact areas. However, the works circulate by several paths and the traces that they leave on their journey are not always those, reassuring, of the tangible text and clearly delimited by its materiality. A work like *Kalila wa-Dimna*, for example, enters Europe through several channels.

As for the transmission procedures, they are often limited to the activity of translation or the discovery of works in their original language. However, the transmission is not always first-hand and sometimes goes through third-party works, whether it is perceived as such or more underground. It also goes through orality channels forever lost for the past and only partially accessible for the present. Again, for the earliest period, al-Andalus played a decisive role. Yet, based on what we know, the famous translations by translators from Toledo or other translation centers in the 12th and 13th centuries were rather selective. Few of the great Arab literary works that have been translated into Spain. These texts, certainly known to the literate elite, who accessed them directly through the Arabic language, did not mobilize translators as a priority. The latter were mainly interested in the philosophical and scientific writings of the Greco-Arab heritage (in medicine, astronomy, astrology or mathematics) and in certain theological writings. If one is content to search in translations for the process of transmitting texts and if one limits oneself to a linear and unambiguous approach between two given works, one quickly ends up with errors of appreciation (some of which sometimes nourish closing speeches cultural). It therefore seems more fruitful and more relevant to speak, in the plural, of contact spaces and transmissions, rather than a contact space and transmission (in the singular).

We must therefore proceed with caution, bearing in mind that it is hardly possible, despite all the precautions taken, to strip of one's own culture and to completely exclude any aesthetic preference. It is a posteriori that we can take stock of the critical approach of our

predecessors and that our successors will, no doubt, take stock of our own approaches. We must also dispel the notion of "progress" from the literary field where it has no place, as we might have believed a few decades ago. Thus, towards the middle of the 20th century, the realistic novel and the short story appeared as the finished product of European literature. Their absence from ancient Arab literary production has led some to see it as a mark of intellectual retardation. Likewise, the absence in this same literature of theatrical works, when the theater had marked Greek and Roman Antiquity and then endured in Europe, seemed incomprehensible.

3. The Arab world meets European literatures: *Kalila wa-Dimna*

Contrary to what the acceleration of knowledge linked to the development of new information and communication technologies might suggest, literary works have been circulating since literature existed. Some famous examples will illustrate this phenomenon remarkably and confirm its great complexity. Ancient Arabic literary production is a body of works composed in the Arabic language by authors of various ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. In this sense, this production is already a multicultural melting pot and an original experience in the circulation of ideas and works, as the example of *Kalîla wa-Dimna* shows.

The fables of *Kalila wa-Dimna*, to which La Fontaine said he was grateful, find their source in the Panchatantra (or the five treatises), a Sanskrit work, probably composed around the 3rd century BC by a Brahmin monk, in order to perfect the education of three princes of which he was the tutor. He would have fixed in writing older oral traditions, whose origins would go back to those, immemorial, of civilization, and would derive from a founding Indian epic. The work illustrates the main principles which must govern and regulate all aspects of the exercise of power, through fables, most often animal, gathered according to the principle known as "enshrining": inside a framework story, one or more stories are nested within each other.

The circumstances under which the first translation took place, from Sanskrit to Pahlavi, were the subject of a story later integrated into the collection. According to a probable account, but whose historicity remains very uncertain, the king of Persia Khusraw Anushirwân (531-79) would have sent his doctor Burzoe to India to fetch *Panchatantra* and translate it. Burzoe, who sought the herb of life, pledge of immortality, understood, with the help of a Hindu sage, that this herb was *Panchatantra* itself. He then made a creative translation of it, adding part of its composition and other similar Indian fables.

The Pahlavi translation, which has been lost for a very long time, will branch out into two new translations: one, in Syrian, almost concomitant and kept in a single manuscript, has been the subject of an edition. The other, in Arabic, sealed the fate of the book. We owe it to the Arabized and Islamized Persian author, ʿAbdallah Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (ابن المقفع, d. 756) who thus enabled this "ancient and vigorous multicultural hybrid" to pursue his destiny up to us and enter the universal literature. Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ died assassinated for reasons which divide the researchers. He is known for having adapted from Persian to Arabic, around the themes of power and the ethics of human relations, several famous works, including the fables mentioned here. A source from the ninth century, recently discovered, also attributes to him the first translation of the *The Arabian Nights* from Pahlavi into Arabic. He is said to have translated the fables for the Byzantine emperor Alexius Komnenus, by prefacing them with prolegomena of his composition.

A prominent figure, Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ belonged to the elitist circle of the first chancellery secretaries of the Abbasid Caliphate, in which literary prose was born. Author of briefs and treatises on ethics and conduct intended for princes or their entourage, he marked *Kalila wa-Dimna* with his seal, adapting it and inserting parts of its composition there. The avatars of time and the impact of oral transmission explain the innumerable variations between the preserved manuscripts. If the versions are sometimes very different, Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, whose style is described as "easy inimitable", has been considered, for more than a millennium, as the symbolic father of the work. And, although it is unthinkable to claim to reconstruct any "original" (if such a text ever existed), the Arabic version of *Kalîla wa-Dimna* is a fundamental hinge of the world's literary heritage.

Kalila wa-Dimna must have known more than two hundred versions or adaptations, including many translations, free or faithful, in more than fifty different languages. Around 1080, the work was translated from Arabic into Greek by Simeon Seth. The Greek text was in turn translated into Latin, German and several Slavic languages. Shortly after, at the beginning of the 12th century, Rabbi Joel made a first translation from Arabic into Hebrew, which was translated into Latin by John of Capua around 1270. It was from this last Latin translation that most of the subsequent translations, except the most recent. At the same time, the Arabic manuscript used by Rabbi Joel was also translated into Old Spanish.

As for Jean de La Fontaine, he learned about our fables from the French translation of Gilbert Gaulmin (1585-1665), alias David Sahid of Ispahan and borrowed from them, for example, "The Cat, the Weasel and the Little Rabbit", "The Two Pigeons" or "The Tortoisee and the

Two Ducks", which will illustrate our point: In *Kalila wa Dimna*, drought pushes the two ducks and the turtle to move away from their place of residence; at La Fontaine, it's the taste for travel. But the spirit of the two texts is the same, as evidenced by this extract showing, by fable, the mortal risks that one incurs to want to speak too indiscriminately.

Another author who took advantage of *Kalila wa-Dimna* is the noble Castilian Don Juan Manuel (1282-1348) in *The Book of Count Lucanor*. The question is not without causing controversy between researchers. Some limit the impact on *Count Lucanor* of *Kalila wa-Dimna*, or other sources in Arabic, solely to the effects of a diffuse and imprecise cultural atmosphere. Without explicitly denying the contribution of Arab-Muslim culture to emerging Castilian literature, they strongly suggest its almost non-existence. Others claim, on the contrary, that Don Juan Manuel knew several sources in Arabic, which he would have read in the text, because everything leads to believe that he knew the Arabic language. What *The Book of Count Lucanor* certainly bears witness to is that Don Juan Manuel had at least knowledge of *Kalila wa-Dimna*. Thus, "example XIX" ("What happened to crows with owls") and "example XII" ("What happened to lion and bull") find their antecedents in the fables reported by Ibn al-Muqaffa.

4. The circulation of classical literary sources in the Arabic language

The divisions between critics of the sources of *The Book of Count Lucanor* are not always academic. They sometimes arise from an essentialist approach seeking a unique and exclusive origin for the works and, often, from the desire to obscure or minimize the contribution of the Arab-Muslim world to Western literature. Purely ideological intentions, especially in the context which is ours today, with the "clash of cultures" which some seem to call for, are set against the oldest historical realities. Three new examples will allow us to see how difficult it can sometimes be to disentangle academic discourse and ideological discourse.

First, there is the possible interference between *The Divine Comedy* and certain sources in the Arabic language, more specifically the beautiful hagiographic legends of Isrâ 'and Mi'râj or the *Book of Forgiveness* by Ma'arrî. A brief chronological reminder is essential. In 1919, the Spanish Islamologist Miguel Asin Palacios (1871-1944) published *La escatologia muslima en la "Divina Comedia"*, a work in which he tried to prove that the conception of the afterlife in Dante's work was influenced by literary myths, even Muslim theology, opening the way to a controversy that remains alive. According to Palacios,

> Six hundred years at least before Dante Alighieri conceived his marvellous poem, there existed in Islam a religious legend narrating the journey of Mahomet to the abodes of the after-life… A comparison with the Divine Comedy of all these versions combined bewrays many points of resemblance, and even of absolute coincidence, in the general architecture and ethical structure of hell and paradise; in the description of the tortures and rewards; in the general lines of the dramatic action; in the episodes and incidents of the journey; in the allegorical signification; in the roles assigned to the protagonist and to the minor personages; and, finally, in intrinsic literary value. (Palacios, 2008: 145)

The discovery, in 1944, after the death of Asin Palacios, of *Il Libro della Scala*, a translation of an Arabic text relating the Mi'râj, seemed to confirm his words, all the more so as certain Latin versions of this text seemed to have circulated in Europe during Dante's lifetime. The defenders of this thesis also relied on the mention in the Divine comedy of great Islamic figures, namely the philosophers Avicenna and Averroes and the Sultan Saladin, but especially the prophet Muhammad and his cousin and son-in-law Ali. For their opponents, the mention of these characters does not necessarily mean that Dante knew Islam, even less than he had identified it in its specificities.

On this subject, the position of the medievalist Théodore Silverstein in his essay "Dante and the Legend of the Miʿrāj: The Problem of Islamic Influence on the Christian Literature of the Otherworld" (1952), remains the most convincing, because the most balanced and the most sensitive to the notion of network: according to Silverstein, Dante used, of course, the myths living and the marvelous tales which circulated in its culture; at the same time, he was certainly marked by more than one source whose presence in his work eludes the reader's eye. Identifying the possible Arab sources of his inspiration can only be done on two conditions: first, study them as elements of all the various sources that inspired him and see how he uses them, how we manage to to bring them to light and to differentiate them, in short to approach them starting from the very art of the poet and his style (as the narratology and the theories of the text would do today). Then, put these questions (on the impact that Muslim eschatological stories or works whose theme is similar to that of the *Divine Comedy* could have had on Dante) within the general framework of the inter- and intracultural circulation of myths and stories about the afterlife and the last ends: for Silverstein, no answer to these questions can be definitive until we try, in a global way, to follow the paths of all the stories of same nature, beyond the particular case of this or that other work. Rather than seeking by all means to affirm, or to deny, that Dante had knowledge of such works in Arabic, it would be more fruitful to first see how these works circulated and contributed to forge representations of the afterlife in the cultural

universe of Dante. Perhaps it must also be admitted that certain questions on metaphysics arouse in the imagination of humans, in their diversity, similar responses (without being identical) across languages and cultures.

The question of Dante's Arab sources did not only oppose supporters and opponents of Asin Palacios' theses. The portrayal of Islam and Muslims in the *Divine Comedy* has been interpreted as a deliberate will on the part of Dante to denigrate Islam. The positions of Edward Said, seeing in the Florentine master an early Orientalism, despising the Muslim world and its founding figures, are all too excessive and, above all, anachronistic. If he mentions them here, it is because they in turn bear witness to the complexity of the task and the difficulty in extracting questions about literature from an ideological environment which, at times, completely biases them. The "culture shock" is neither unequivocal nor unilateral. In view of all of this, it seems possible to say that an overwhelmed history of the circulation between Islam and Christianity, scholarly or popular accounts dealing with the beyond and the last ends, still remains to be written.

Another story that deserves to be rewritten is that of the relationships between the art of troubadours, Arab-Andalusian music and the love poets known as *'udhrite*. According to a hypothesis, envisaged since the 16th century, and more solidly argued since, without making unanimity, the poetry of the troubadours would be an inventive extension of the loving lyricism characterizing the *ghazal 'udhrî*, an Arab poetic genre. Having passed from the Hedjaz and Iraq, where it was born in the 8th century, to the Arab-Muslim courts of Spain, this lyricism would have been transformed and reshaped, while permeating the work of the troubadours. Large similarities between the themes, the motifs, the rhymes and certain structures of the poems allow this proposition. The formal structure of the poems, composed to be sung, recalls the *muwashsha*h, a typically Andalusian strophic poem, in which loves are often light-hearted. Interference would therefore be complex. The hypothesis is also supported by the passage of certain Arab musical instruments, such as the lute, from Spain to Europe, where it will differ from the previous one in a later stage. However, these similarities should not conceal significant differences, especially in musical theories and practices, at least as they are known to us today.

All the examples discussed so far have made al-Andalus appear as a privileged contact area. The information, which is nothing new, confirms the need to abandon the linear concept of literary influences in favor of more subtle exchanges, sometimes indirect or unconscious. In this sense, it is regrettable that, apart from Andalusian poetry, the examination of these exchanges is based on a priori of univocity and that

the impact of the world of Christianity on literary productions in Arabic during the period Medieval, even minimal, has not yet attracted the attention of researchers.

5. *The One Thousand and One Night*

The most emblematic work of the fertility of the circulation of literatures between the East and the West is certainly *The One Thousand and One Nights* (أَلْف لَيْلَة وَلَيْلَة, *Alf Laylah wa-Laylah*) Like *Kalila wa-Dimna*, the *Nights* are at the start a mirror of princes composed in Sanskrit, whose destiny is sealed by three founding translations / adaptations, first in pahlavi, then in Arabic, then in French. Like *Kalila wa-Dimna*, the stories conveyed by the Nights are inserted into a framework story, that of the tragic, then happy, fortune of Shahrazad, the storyteller who saves her life by entertaining and edifying King Shahryar, her shady husband. Innocent as to the things of love, she carries an age-old knowledge drawn from her readings since,

> Shahrazad had read the books, the annals, and the legends of old kings, together with the histories of past peoples. Also she was credited with possessing a thousand books of stories telling of the peoples, the kings, and the poets of bygone ages and of past time. She was sweetly eloquent of speech and to listen to her was music. (*The Nights*, 1986: 6)

Combining knowledge, courage and seduction, she implements in narration, with the help of her young sister, a strategy:

> When I am with the King I will send to fetch you; then when you have come and when you see the King finish his act with me, you must say: 'Tell me, my sister, some of your stories of marvel that the night may pass pleasantly.' Then will I tell you tales which, if Allāh wills, shall be the deliverance of the daughters of the Mussulmāns.'(*Ibidem*: 9)

For a long time, the time of entry of the *Nights* into the Arabic language was presumed to be in the ninth century. But information contained in a recently discovered manuscript has made it possible to formulate the remarkable hypothesis that the first translator of the tales in Arabic would have been only Ibn al-Muqaffa. Unlike *Kalila wa-Dimna*, the *Nights* did not find their place in the learned and literate elite of Abbasid Iraq. For centuries, stories will circulate mainly orally, increasing over the narrations, with regional particularities. Functioning as an elastic matrix, the framework story will integrate the variants and make room for new tales. There are thus as many versions of the work as there are manuscripts, the latter constituting above all a memory aid for the oral narration of this work without an author.

The translation of the *Nights* into French by Antoine Galland (1646-1715), antiquarian of the Sun King, will condition their destiny, in the West but also in the Arab world. It is certainly a major event in the history of universal literature. Supporting numerous translations into other European languages, it retrospectively changed the way Arab societies view these tales, which were initially despised. The ambivalent relation of the Arab world to the *Nights* has not however disappeared, but it is notable, for example, that it is the most consulted and commented work on the plethoric virtual library al-warraq.net, far ahead of the monuments of religious literature or beautiful letters.

The assimilation of a part of the oriental dream by the cultures which welcomed the translations of the *Arabian Nights* is remarkable. You only have to look at the titles and themes of many films, cartoons, comics, operas or musical compositions to realize this. Languages also bear witness to this. The "sesame", "Ali Baba's cave" and other "Aladin lamps" creep into the words of people every day who are not necessarily aware of this testimony of interculturalism.

6. Western Literatures Meet the Arab World

The (sometimes ambivalent) taste for otherness and curiosity about what is different is rooted in a double movement from East to West and from West to East. Texts travel; the men too, of which we must say a few words before continuing. The travelers, many of whom recorded their testimonies in writing, set out on their journeys to trade, as mission or embassy officers or as pilgrims. A few, too, are carried by the taste for adventure. One of the most remarkable consequences of these contacts is the lingua franca, defined by Jocelyne Dakhlia – who devoted an important work to it – as "a Franque language that is understood throughout the Mediterranean" (Dakhlia, 2016: 92).

It was especially from the 16th century that European travelers, the most famous of whom was probably Pierre Belon du Mans (1517-1564), a friend of Ronsard, went to the Arab-Muslim world and to the Ottoman Empire. Before them, Andalusian or oriental travelers also went to discover other countries, either on the pilgrimage route or because of their duties. Note the special case of travelers leaving the Muslim West for the East, discovering a world that is both similar to theirs and totally different, such as the Grenadian "high official" Ibn Jubayr (ابن جبير, 1145-1217) or the Tangier Muhammad Ibn Battuta (محمد ابن بطوطة, 1304-1368), founding a literary genre, the *rihla* or "travelogue", whose tradition has been carried on to the present day. We perceive, among all of these authors, the effort to open up to cultural difference, even when it is not always understood in its own logic. Without renouncing their identity, without completely abandoning the feeling that their way of life

is a kind of "norm" preferable to others, they strive not to denigrate what they discover, even if it disconcerting. These two extracts bear witness to this. In the first, Jean Thévenot (1633-1667) tries to explain how and why the Turks are not the "savages" that his compatriots think. In the second, Ibn Jubayr seeks to reconcile the real admiration aroused in him by William I of Sicily, raised in the East and living like an Arab, with his feeling that the lands he rules have been usurped from Muslims and must be returned to them.

Halfway between the medieval *rihla* and contemporary travel accounts, the Egyptian Campaign sparked the vocations of travelers in both directions. It is at this date that researchers generally locate the beginning of the Nahda or rebirth of the Arabic letters, after a long period often unfairly devalued, under the Mamelukes then the Ottomans. The iconic traveler of this period was the Egyptian imam Rifaʿa Tahtawi (رفاعة رافع الطهطاوي, 1801-1874). Sent on a mission to France by Muhammad ʻAlî (d. 1849), he records his experience and his remarks in the work translated under the title of *L'Or de Paris*. His astonishment when he discovered Parisian theaters and the difficulty he experienced in speaking about it illustrate well the absence of this art of classical Arabic letters. According to Saïd Ismaïl ʻAli,

> the main contribution of this unique book was perhaps that it was the first in the history of modern Arab literature to call on the Muslims … to accept a new world of political and social ideas. In his 1834 book the author for the first time gave a detailed and convincing statement of these ideas, which took firm root in a soil which had been ready for them since the French expedition and even earlier, and which was to provide a forcing bed for other ideas and activities that would multiply and spread within the limits that the conditions allowed. (Saïd, 1994: np)

Another form of travel, migratory movements were very early an active cause of cultural contacts and interactions, generating literary works. The Syro-Lebanese of America is an example. Thus, *The Prophet* of Gibran Khalil Gibran (1883-1931), which has become a lasting bestseller, illustrates by its destiny the fruitfulness and the complexity of the exchanges of which we speak.

Written in English by its author of Lebanese origin living in New York, translated into Arabic thereafter, it draws its romantic breath from Western readings of Gibran, when part of its rhythms and sound is obviously shaped by Arabic texts of which he was aware. Generations of adolescents around the world, in their diversity, recognize themselves in these few lines addressed to parents:

> Your children are not your children.
> They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.
> They come through you but not from you,

And though they are with you yet they belong not to you. (Gibran, 1951: 21)

Conclusion

The circulation of works between the West and the Arab World, after the Egyptian Campaign and especially from the 19th century, is better known to us than that which prevailed in the medieval world. She seems more familiar to us, being closer to us. Researchers agree that modern Arabic literature has been the product of two converging interactions, that of the ihyâ 'or revival of classical heritage by authors turned to tradition, and that of the iqtibâs or adaptation of foreign literature for others. Obviously, the voluntary approach of the authors in one or the other case cannot abolish all the imprints which mark them.

Ideological issues are even more significant and vivid here. The movement of free adaptations, creative translations or faithful translations of works, especially in French or English, is considered by some to be an undue intrusion from the West, colonial or neo-colonial. For others, it is, on the contrary, the only chance that Arab authors had of producing works, which they were not capable of on their own. As you can imagine, neither of these two readings speaks of literature.

Cultural and literary interference have also been favored by the development of missionary schools, created by congregations of French, English, Italian, Russian or German, the first two being the most represented. This is not the place to return to the very contrasting views of these institutions, whose functions were often complex and paradoxical. Let us say, to take just one example, that the contribution of authors from the Arab world to French-speaking literature attests at least that all of these exchanges were not unilateral or in vain.

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