

Adaptation or Manipulation ?

Notes on translating conjugal terms in Shakespeare

Mohamed S.A.Aly

Associate Professor, English Department

Aswan Faculty of Arts

Under the supervision of

M. M. Enani, of Cairo University

Abstract:

In so far as translation involves interpretation, no translation may be said to be free of the cultural factors governing interpretation. Making use of Foucauldian theory, namely that which states that to explain anything is to translate it into the dominant cultural episteme of the era – and, by extension, of a given culture – the researchers examine the translation of selected words in a number of Shakespearean translations into Arabic, done by different translators. The lexical item selected is “marriage” in Sonnet 116, where the authors argue

that, despite the fact that the phrase “the marriage of true minds” refers to a union of souls rather than a literal marriage, no translator who has undertaken to do the sonnet into Arabic has escaped the influence – however subliminal – of (زواج). The authors then go on to examine Claudio's marriage in *Measure for Measure*, looking at how the legality of the marriage contract, although unwritten, is emphasized in the Arabic translations by every translator so as to engage the sympathy of the Arabic reader and clear Claudio and Juliet of any charge of fornication or suspicion of falsehood.

Adaptation or Manipulation? Notes on translating conjugal terms in Shakespeare, Vol. 4, Issue No. 3, July 2015, p.p. 203- 220.

Keywords:

Adaptation – manipulation –
marriage – minds – handfasting
ceremony [fast my wife] - cultural
influence

المخلص

يذهب البحث إلى أن اختلاف عادات
الزواج وتقاليد بين إنجلترا ومصر يدفع
الترجمين إلى تعديل تصوير شيكسبير
لل قضية المطروحة في مسرحية دقة بدقة
لشيكسبير؛ بحيث يصبح كلوديو على حق
في أن يبنى "بزوجته" جوليت ما دام قد
عقد قرانه عليها في وجود شهود؛
فالإنجلياب والقبول والإشهار هما شرطا
صحة عقد القران عندنا، فالرضى والعلنية
هى الشروط التى نقبلها فى مصر لصحة
عقد القران، على الرغم من أن تقاليد
إنجلترا فى ذلك العصر كانت تقضى
بضرورة الإعلان فى الكنيسة عن هذا
العقد فى ثلاثة أيام أحد متوالية، ومن ثم

فإن الترجمة تثير التعاطف مع كلوديو رغم
الحكم عليه بالإعدام؛ لأنه بنى بأهله قبل
إعلان الكنيسة وقبل الاتفاق على المهر.

ويبدأ البحث بمناقشة كلمة (marriage)

الواردة فى إحدى السونيتات وكيف يصر
جميع المترجمين على ترجمتها بالزواج، أو
بالقران أو الاقتران، مع أن المعنى الذى يُجمع
عليه الشراح للسونيتة ١١٦ هو الصداقة
الحميمة أو الارتباط الوثيق خصوصاً؛ لأن
السونيتة موجهة إلى شاب يافع لا إلى فتاة،
ولكن المترجمين، حتى من يعرفون المعنى
يستشعرون حرجاً فى تفسير الكلمة على
النحو الصحيح حتى يرضوا القراء الذين
يعرفون الإنجليزية ولا يرون للكلمة معنى
آخر سوى القران أو الاقتران.

ويتساءل البحث عن مدى مشروعية

تطويع الكلمة فى سياق السونيتة قبل أن
ينتقل إلى مشروعية تعديل موقف كلوديو
فى المسرحية؛ فالمترجمون بذلك يصورون

العلاقة بين كلوديو وچوليت في صورة
زيجة شرقية وفق تقاليد الشريعة لا وفق
النظام الإنجليزي القديم. فهل التطويع
تلاعب؟ وهل يتنمى التغيير في المفهوم
المطروح للزواج إلى ما يسمى 'مدرسة
التلاعب' في الترجمة؟

Introduction

In so far as translation involves interpretation, and considering that interpretation is culturally governed, no translation may be said to be free of the cultural factors governing interpretation. At the lexical level, this can be seen most clearly in the way a translator interprets a given lexical item in his native language or in a foreign one being learnt, in terms of his or her own culture – a fact axiomatic enough to be almost aphoristic. What is not equally obvious is the way we understand culture. A loose definition of culture as Eliot's 'way of life' may be

attractive as a compact working concept, but what this concept involves is not often examined, not deeply enough or comprehensively enough. A better and more useful definition may involve the ways in which individuals absorb (and reflect) the prevalent mores, tastes, and thought of their own society. These are believed to govern what Foucault calls the episteme(s) of that particular society, that is the extent of knowledge (and whatever follows from that knowledge) available to that society. Basil Willey had tried to use the same concept, *avant la latter*, in explaining what explanation or interpretation means. Willey had argued that to explain anything was to translate it into the dominant episteme of a given society at a given time: when the prevalent episteme is religious, people accept a's explanation the translation of

any statement into a religious interpretation; if the dominant episteme is scientific, people would want an explanation that looked scientific enough to them; if the episteme is philosophical, philosophical explanations would be accepted, and so on.

The acquisition of a foreign language (English in this case), and reading literature written in that language, are therefore governed by the epistemes current enough to control the culture of the society in which the reader (an Arab in this case) is brought up. In early youth, even in childhood, a student learns that a word like marriage should mean the usual bond between man and woman. Other abstract meanings of the word are later learnt, if the learner specializes in languages or has a literary career, but the original Arabic word learnt

in childhood is never far from his or her mind. The other meanings of marriage and divorce are seen as part of a foreign language (and another culture) which vie for supremacy with what the learner believes is *the* original sense of the words. Even when the context clearly shows that 'marriage' means 'bonding' or 'close association', the translator finds that the putative 'original' meaning forces its way to his or her pen. The case of sonnet 116 is a good example of the way this happens, although the context emphatically calls for 'bonding' or 'close association'. Here is the full text of the sonnet:

Let me not to the marriage of
true minds

Admit impediments; love is
not love

Which alters when it alteration
finds,

Or bends with the remover to
remove.

O no, it is no ever-fixed mark,
That looks on tempests and is
never shaken;

It is the star to every
wandering barque,

Whose worth's unknown,
although his height be taken.

Love's not Time's fool, though
rosy lips and cheeks

Within his bending sickle's
compass come.

Love alters not with his brief
hours and weeks,

But bears it out even to the
edge of doom.

If this be error and upon me
proved,

I never writ, nor no man ever
loved.

This is regarded as one of

Shakespeare's best, as it seems
neutral' enough to be applied to
any 'kind' of love; but it is in fact
addressed to what commentators
call the 'youth', a young member
of the aristocracy who was in all
probability the poet's benefactor.
Some editors do not accept the
general terms of the sonnet, that is,
it deals with love in the abstract in
so far as the poet does not mention
the addressee. There is a
temptation, no doubt, to free the
sonnet from any specific reference
to the 'youth' and from regarding it
as a continuation of the previous
declaration of the poet's 'love' for
him. Burrow (Oxford edn p. 612)
says it can refer to the poet's love,
or the love of the youth for
someone else (a view not shared by
any other commentator). Even if
regarded as an independent
meditation on the real nature of
love (whatever that may be) the

immediate context of the word 'marriage' suggests that it is the other meaning of the word that the poet has in mind. The key is, of course, the word 'mind'. According to the O.E.D., the word can mean a good deal more than its common and current use: it most probably relies on its derivative sense (in Latin *mens*, *mentis*) meaning 'soul'; a meaning we still have in expressions like 'mental illness' and 'mental instability'. Evans construes 'marriage of true minds' as 'a spiritual union [which is] constant and faithful' (Cambridge edn, p. 342). We may therefore regard it as closer to 'souls' than to 'brains' or 'intellects'. The adjective further confirms the obvious sense, namely the ideal of sincerity, constancy and honesty. The most recent editions of *Shakespeare's Sonnets* confirm this interpretation. Katherine Duncan-

Jones (Arden edn, 2010) says that the poet does not acknowledge "objections to the fulfillment of the union of thus (truly loving) minds or intentions" (p. 342).

What we have here, therefore, is the 'spiritual union' of two persons who are 'faithful' and 'well-intentioned', as it were. No Arabic translation would, however, forget the supposed 'original' sense of marriage, namely the Arabic (زواج) and its cognates. The earliest translation, Badr Tewfiq's, uses (التزواج). The subsequent, by Ismat Wali, uses (أن تتزواج) and the latest (or most recent) by M. Enani, uses another word still used for 'the original' sense of marriage, namely (تقترن). In Arabic we refer to marriage as (القران), to the wife as (قرينة), but we rarely say (اقرن) or (اقرنت برجل) or (بامرأة) as the verb (اقرن) is reserved to 'associate

oneself with'. The famous Arabic line of verse says:

عَنِ الْمَرْءِ لَا تَسْأَلْ وَسَلَّ عَنْ قَرِينِهِ
فَكُلُّ قَرِينٍ بِالْمُقَارِنِ يَقْتَدِي

Do not enquire after a given person,

But find out more about his companion,

For a person's companion is his paragon.

The Arabic (قَرَن) (*qarana*) is a verb meaning to 'put together' or to 'associate', hence the noun (قَرِين) which means a close associate or permanent companion. The word is also used to translate *doppelganger*, or 'double', even wraith. The word used by Enani is therefore an attempt to get away from the almost sacrosanct association of marriage and (زواج) with its undesirable connotations when addressed to the young man (especially in Arabic),

but, for all his good intentions, the word used by the translator does carry a lurking implication of the Arabic (زواج).

Let us have the three Arabic versions of the opening line of that sonnet before moving on to more substantial questions of cultural adaptation. Here is the earliest version, by Badr Tawfiq:

لا تتركني في التزواج بين أفكارنا
الصادقة

أدع سبيلاً إلى العوائق

(سونيتات شيكسبير، ط ٢، ٢٠٠٩، ص ٢٤٨)

Ismat Wali has:

لا شيء يمنع قلوباً صادقة أن تتزوج

(سونيتات شيكسبير، ط ٢، ٢٠٠٥، ص ١٣٢)

Enani's verse version has

لا أقبل زعم القائل بوجود العقبات

إن رغبت أن تقترن نفوس مخلصه
النيات

Apart from the horribly

mangled sense in the earliest version, the translator has produced an almost unintelligible sentence: a back translation should give us the following monster:

[Do not leave me in the
marriage of our truthful ideas
Find a way to impediments ! (?)]

Wali can cut corners, and his brevity is commendable, but his focus – ensures that what we have is a marriage proposal. The translator may have been misled by the references commentators make to use of the word ‘impediments’ in the marriage ceremony. According to the Book of Common Prayer, the marriage service includes the following statement by the priest:

“if any man do allege and
declare any impediment why
they may not be coupled

together in matrimony – then
the Solemnization must be
deferred until such time as the
truth be tried”

(B.C.P., p. 291).

Most commentators agree, however, that the use of this word does not make the Shakespearean sentence imply a coupling of bodies as the BCP’s words indicate: for the marriage intended is one of ‘true minds’. ‘Impediments’ can be a red herring, and the translator should not be thus deluded.

This glimpse at the word ‘marriage’ in fact opens up a larger and more complex debate. What does ‘marriage’ mean to a Moslim reading a Shakespearean play ? What does the word mean to an English-speaking person *today*, rather than in Elizabethan England ? To the question of culture is now added a ‘time’

dimension: An Arab Muslim (or Christian) can be unmarried in the morning, then, following a marriage service, at home, at a mosque or a church, he can be married in the evening. The preliminaries of courtship, financial arrangements, and betrothal are considered just that – preliminaries. They may lead to a marriage contract or be annulled if something untoward occurs. Such ‘preliminaries’, though they are spread over months (or years) can be forgotten (the bitterness they leave behind notwithstanding). Not so in Shakespeare’s day, when courtship is followed by a hand-fasting ceremony which for all intents and purposes is regarded as a valid contract. In other words, betrothal was tantamount to marriage, minus the Church banns, and financial agreement.

It is culture here that plays the

major role. The word ‘culture’ can, in this definition, include what Barthes calls *doxa*, by which he means the set of unexamined cultural beliefs which “structure our understanding of everyday happenings” (cf. Peter Brooks, 2008, p. 16). This specific sense should not, I must emphasize, exclude our usual concept of culture established by T.S. Eliot, as referred to above, as it in fact, enlarges it. The readiest example of Barthes’ *doxa* is, according to Enani, belief in the ‘evil eye’ in Egypt (and many parts of the Arab homeland) (cf. “On Translating Shakespeare”, in *Salah Jaheen* [forthcoming]). He further regards as part of our *doxa*, feelings of acceptance and rejection of certain physical features in men and women, of certain kinds of animals and colours. However, it is only *doxa* as part of culture,

strictly defined, that determines a translator's reaction to a dramatic situation such as that we find in *Measure for Measure*.

The initial situation in this play involves a man who has been condemned to death because he made love to his fiancée before the conclusion of the lengthy marriage formalities culminating in the banns of the church, that is, the public announcement by Church officials on three successive Sundays that they were formally married.

In an enlightening essay, Victoria Hayne explains that English custom in Shakespeare's day enjoined upon a couple a series of steps, some of which they took privately, some publicly, some steps they took as a couple, others as members of their families. ("Performing Social

Practice: The Example of *Measure for Measure*", *Shakespeare Quarterly* 44 (1993) 1-29). Hayne explains that marriage began in courtship, usually brief at the time, and the extent of family involvement in this early stage depended on the class to which the couple belonged: the higher the class, the greater the family involvement. Then would come a private exchange of a promise to marry – called *Sponsalia per verba de futuro*. This is the second step. The third is a more or less public betrothal in a ceremony called "hand-fasting" – technically called *Sponsalia per verba de praesenti* in which the couple joined hands and exchanged 'vows'. If the second step may be referred to in Arabic as (تبادل الوعود) the third may be called (تبادل العهد وحلف اليمين). According to Barbara A. Mowat,

Many couples appear to have regarded themselves as, at this point, actually married and free to begin their sexual relationship. But in the eyes of the Church the couple were not yet married and would not be until banns were read on three successive Sundays in their parish church, the marriage then solemnized in a church wedding, the couple formally bedded after their wedding feast, and, finally, they consummated their marriage.

***Measure for Measure* The Folger edn., 2009, p. 222**

An Arab reader, listening to a summary of the initial situation as given by Claudio, the man condemned to death for jumping his guns, will most probably sympathize with him, even before looking closely enough into the

nature of his offense. The Arab reader's reaction would be governed more by *doxa* than by the argument presented by the church. As Christy Desmet says (*Measure for Measure: 'A Modern Perspective'*, in the Folger edn., 2009, pp. 245-257) "Claudio and Juliet have engaged in a *sponsalia per verba de praesenti*, or public "hand-fast" marriage, a declaration that they are husband and wife made before witnesses and symbolized by the pair's clasped hands (p. 249). An Arab translator may therefore acquit Claudio of any wrong-doing for consummating his marriage before church banns; or he may judge him to be guilty because, "although Claudio confirms that Juliet is "fast" his wife, the secrecy surrounding the ceremony complicates the legality of their marriage" (Desmet, 249). Let us therefore have the problematic passage in full before looking into

how the Arab translators accepted
or rejected Claudio's case; Claudio
tells Lucio:

Thus stands it with me: upon a
true contract

I got possession of Julietta's
bed

You know the lady; she is fast
my wife,

Save that we do the
denunciation lack

Of outward order. This we
came not to

Only for propagation of a
dower

Remaining in the coffer of her
friends,

From whom we thought it
meet to hide our love

Till time had made them for us.
But it chances

The stealth of our most mutual
entertainment

With character too gross is writ
on Juliet.

I.ii. 134-144

To begin with, This is what Claudio himself says in defence of his act, that is, his own interpretation of his association with Julietta. Then we have to remember that he is addressing an English audience, that is to say, the action in the play and its legal background, though assumed to be in Vienna, will be interpreted by an English audience in the late 16th century (or early 17th century). Shakespeare is in this case relying on the reaction of his English audience's consciousness of the rules of marriage and the difference between what was called *Sponsalia per verba de praesenti*, that is a marriage contract made verbally, in the presence of witnesses, which was

“still valid in England, though the church required a religious ceremony” (Lever, p. 16) and *Sponsalia per verba de futuro*, which was legally binding provided an agreement on the dowry is reached. Claudio’s assertion that his ‘contract’ was *de praesenti* means that he was legally married when he consummated his marriage. But as the translated text will be addressed to an Arab audience, or an Arab reader, the translator is forced to make up his or her mind whether to believe Claudio, accepting the legality of the ‘verbal contract’, that is, a contract made by word of mouth, or to regard Claudio as having jumped his guns, and so was guilty of ‘fornication’, a vice condemned by Arabs of all creeds.

Now for the translator to ensure an audience reaction similar to

what is supposed to be the audience reaction of the source text, that is, to secure a force of illocution guaranteed to produce the desired perlocutionary effect, he or she must manipulate the given text, as locution, even though slightly – that is, to adjust the terms of Claudio’s statement in *Arabic*. And herein lies the difficulty, for in Arabic we have a variety of words to describe the ‘sacred bond’ of matrimony. Let us consider the most important: in the Qur’an we have the following formula (مِيثَاقٌ غَلِيظٌ) that is a solemn oath, legally binding in the eyes of God and, consequently, in the eyes of people. If a man makes this solemn oath, he will be bound by this ‘compact’ (= contract) in society (and before God, of course). Another Arabic word that shares most of this meaning is (عَهْدٌ) (= the modern عقد). Before the introduction of modern courts

of law, the word (عهد) carried all the meanings of the modern (عقد). Another word comes to mind in connection with the other form referred to above, that is *Sponsalia per verba de futuro*, that is (عهد) whose meaning is carried by the term 'betrothal'. In both Christianity and Islam, a marriage ceremony is required to ensure the public nature of the marriage (even of betrothal) and for the judicial procedures to be made to ensure the rights and duties of both parties (such as registration with the authorities concerned).

All the Arabic translations of the above quoted speech, agree on the translation of 'true contract' as: (عقد صحيح) (Farouq Abdul-Wahhab Mustafa, 1968), (عقد حقيقي) (Zakhir Ghibrial, 1971), (بصحيح العقد) (Ibrahim Zaki Khurshid, 1993-1st edn., much earlier), and finally (بصحيح العقد)

(Enani, 2013). The Arabic word implies a written document, which is not suggested by the source text and, considering the historical conditions regarding the conclusion of a marriage contract, referred to above, could not have been made. However the foregrounding of the term in the speech in English implies that Claudio wants to impress on his listener, Lucio, that his marriage contract was real (true) not false (untrue). This manipulation of the term, that is turning the (عهد) [which could also have the modern meaning of 'pledge' or 'covenant'] into (عقد) establishes that Claudio is not guilty of fornication. However, he quickly qualifies the 'contract' by referring to the bond with his wife as 'fast', which, on the surface of it may mean 'firm', but in fact it refers to the hand-fasting ceremony in the traditional *Sponsalia* (O.E.D.

a 46). This required “a mutual recognition as husband and wife in the presence of witnesses” (Lever, 16). In Islamic law this should be enough for the conclusion of a marriage contract, and the translators who have accepted the surface meaning of ‘fast’ in fact accept Claudio’s claim of innocence, of being unjustly sentenced to death. It is the *doxa* here that would account for the translators’ sympathy with Claudio, as capital punishment is not the usual punishment for a man who has a valid marriage ‘contract’, albeit wanting the confirmation of Church officials. Manipulation here appears to have dictated the use of (عقد) first, then the translation of ‘fast’ as, respectively (لقد) (أفعلاً), and, with a clever qualification (فهي) (1993). In Enani’s case, he tried to further qualify the

strong (عقد) by translating the phrase rather freely as:

وبعهد زواج موثوق به .. وأمام شهود

But culture is not conducive only to manipulation: it can temper any expression bordering on taboo, through euphemism, a common enough practice in Arabic. “I got possession of Juliet’s bed” may not in itself offend a prudish Arabic reader, and the translators vary in doing it as it is in Arabic (وصلت إلى) (استبحت لنفسى فراش) (فراش چولیت), (شاركت چولیت فراشها) and (چولیت), respectively. Enani thought, however, that the claim of ‘true [marriage] contract’ required the idiomatic Arabic word for the legitimate conjugal intercourse, namely (بینی) [The Arabic idiom is (بنی بأهله) that is, he made love to his wife]. Enani maintained the sense of mutuality required in any real marriage by rendering the last sentence as:

لَكِنَّ الْقَدَرَ رَأَى أَنْ يَكْتُبَ آثَارَ نَعِيمٍ
شَارَكْنَاهُ مَعًا
سِرًّا بِحُرُوفٍ لَا تَخْفَى فَوْقَ فَتَاتِي
جُولِيَتْ

(my emphasis)

The earlier translators have:

ولكن تصادف أن علاقتنا المتبادلة
المختلصة

تركت بصماتها الغليظة على چولیت

(1965)

غير أنه حدث أن ذلك الحب المختلس
الذي يكنه .. إلى أقصى حد كل منا
للآخر .. سطر بأحرف فاضحة .. جد
فاضحة .. على چولیت

(1971)

ونعمنا خلصة بأعظم متعة لنا، ولكن
المقادير شاءت أن تظهر آثارها على
چولیت واضحة جلية

(1993)

While the first two avoid the
connubial bliss of sex, and the
third refers to it explicitly, the last

ignores the 'mutuality' indicated
by Claudio, as though to confirm
that it is a consensual relationship,
as consensuality is essential to the
recognition of any adult sexual
relationship (even among
homosexuals, in Britain at least,
today).

Elsewhere, Enani borrows the
concepts of the implied author from
Booth and 'second degree' writing
from Gennet to describe the work of
the translator. In so far as the
translator is the writer of the target
text, he or she must be regarded as a
'second degree' author; and, as the
translator adjusts, adapts or
manipulates the target text, he or she
must be thought of in terms of
another implied author. How much
of an author, 'second degree' or
implied, a translator can be will
naturally depend on the extent to
which he or she makes himself or

herself *present* in the target text. This is again illustrated from Arabic texts such as translations of Claudio's speech. No translator will feel he or she is doing violence to the source text even in taking too much liberty with it through 'adjustment' or 'manipulation'; but look at the last image in the above-quoted lines by Claudio. Claudio says that our mutual enjoyment, in secret, is written (*writ*) with obvious letters (characters) on Juliet's body". One would have thought that a translation in prose would present this image with adequate accuracy, but only one of the three prose translators managed to convey the image, though he interpreted "gross" (which means 'big' and therefore 'obvious') as "scandalous", adding an unnecessary "very scandalous" (فاحشة .. جد فاحشة ..). The other two changed the image, the first

giving it as (تركت بصماتها الغليظة) the other saying (تظهر آثارها واضحة جلية). The last is the abstract meaning of a poetic image that should have been presented intact.

Conclusion

These 'notes', I hope, have thrown some light on 'normal' that is, usual, cultural adaptation as distinguished from manipulation: the changes introduced in translating Claudio's lines are, of course, a case of cultural adaptation, but the extent of this adaptation makes it a case of manipulation.

Works Cited

- I am grateful to Professor Enani of Cairo University for lending me some of the books on translations and a number of editions of *Measure for Measure*. I am especially indebted to his Arabic

translation of *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, especially to its introduction (forthcoming).

○ Mowat, B. and Paul Weretime, *Measure for Measure*, The Folger Shakespeare, 2009.

المراجع والمصادر العربية

○ Burrow, Colin, ed., *The Complete Sonnets and Poems*, Oxford Shakespeare, 2002-2008.

○ مسرحية «دقة بدقة» ترجمات: فاروق

عبد الوهاب (١٩٧٠) وزاخر غبريال

(١٩٧١) وإبراهيم زكي خورشيد

(١٩٩٣) ومحمد عناني (٢٠١٣).

○ Desmet, Christy, "Measure for Measure: A Modern Perspective", The Folger edn., pp. 245-257.

○ السونية ١١٦، ترجمات بدر توفيق

(٢٠٠٩)، عصمت والي (٢٠٠٥)،

محمد عناني (٢٠١٦).

○ Duncan-Jones, Katherine, ed., *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, Arden, 2010.

* * * *

○ Evans, G. Blakemore, ed. *The Sonnets*, New Cambridge, 1996.

○ Hayne, Victoria. "Performing Social Practice: The Example of *Measure for Measure*", *Shakespeare Quarterly* (1993), 1-29.

○ Lever, ed., *Measure for Measure*, Arden, 1982.