

NABIL ALAWI

Translating Dickinson's "There came a Day at Summer's full" into Arabic

لقد جاء يوم في عر الصيف
كله من اجلي
وقد ظننت ان مثل هذه الأيام للقديسين
حيث يكون الارتقاء

الشمس كالعادة غابت وراء الحدود
والزهور كعاداتها تطايرت
والاعتدال الذي يجدد الأشياء
مر حون ان يشهد ان للروح وجود

ولم يعيا الوعد بالحديث
اذ ان الحاجة لدلالة الكلمات كانت
كحاجة الرب لملائسته
عند العشاء الأخير

كل كان للأخر كنيسة مغلقة
سهم لنا ان نتحاور هذه المرة
فدعنا لا نكون مزعجين
في حضرة العشاء الرباني

ومرت الساعات حيث ان الساعات تمر
وتعانقنا بايد شرهة
حيث وجهين علم سفينتين ينظران الم الخلف
متوجهين الم اراض متعاكسة

وعندما نرف الوقت كله
دون صوت خارجي
كل منا صلب الآخر في وجهته
دون ان يعطه وعد بالخلص

ويكفينا الوعد باننا سنصعد
وننفض القبر علم طوله
الم الزواج الجديد
مصادق عليه بالحب المصلوب

Nabil Alawi

Lakad Ja'a yaumun fi Iz assif kuluhu min ajlee Waqad thanantu anna mithlu hathihi al ayyam Lil qideeseen Haithu ya kunu al irtika'.	There came a Day at Summer's full, Entirely for me – I thought that such were for the Saints, Where Resurrections – be –
Ash shamsu qad ghabat wara' al hudud Waz zuhuru ka a'datiha tatayarat Wal i'tidal allathi yujadidu al ashya'a Marra duna an yashhada anna liruhin wujood	The Sun, as common, went abroad, The flowers, accustomed, blew, As if no soul the solstice passed That maketh all things new –
Walam y'aba' alwqtu bilhadith Ith anna al hajata lidalalat al kalimat kanat Ka hajat al rub limalabisihi Inda al asha' al a kheer.	The time was scarce profaned, by speech – The symbol of a word Was needless, as at Sacrament, The Wardrobe – of our Lord –
kullun kan lil akhar kanisatan mughlaqatan Sumeha lana an natahawar hathihi al marra Fa d'ana la nakunu muz'ijeen Fi hadarat al asha' arrabbani	Each was to each The Sealed Church, Permitted to commune this – time – Lest we too awkward show At Supper of the Lamb.
Wa marrat ass sa'at haithu anna ass sa'at tamurru Wa ta'ankna bi ayden shariha Haithu wajhein ala safinntayn yanthurani ila al khalf Mutawajehayni ila aradin muta'akisa	The Hours slid fast – as Hours will, Clutched tight, by greedy hands – So faces on two Decks, look back, Bound to opposing lands –
Wa indama nazafa al waktu kulahu Duna sawten kharji Kulun minna salab al akhar fi wijhatehi Dun an ya'tiyahu wa'dun bil khalas	And so when all the time had leaked, Without external sound Each bound the Other's Crucifix – We gave no other Bond –
Wa yakfina al wa'ad ba'annana sa nas'adu Wa nanfudu al qabra ala tulih Ila az zawaj al akheer Musadaqun Ôalihi bilhub al maslub.	Sufficient troth, that we shall rise – Deposed – at length, the Grave – To that new Marriage, Justified – through Calvaries of Love –

An Early Interest in Dickinson's Poems

Arabic interest in Emily Dickinson's poetry began immediately after the publication of the first collection of her poems, *Poems by Emily Dickinson*, in 1890 under the editorship of Mrs. Mabel Loomis Todd and Colonel Higginson. In 1891, the July 16th issue of *Nation* wrote about "an Arabic translation of Dickinson's poems made in Syria" and that it had "passed through several issues." The same news was repeated in the *Critic* and in the *Christian Union* two days later and two weeks later in *Kansas City Star*.

The news about an Arabic interest and a consequent translation of the poems of Emily Dickinson surprised the editor of the *Kansas City Star*; he wrote: "Emily Dickinson's poems, which are not well-known even in this, her native country, are said to have passed through several editions in the

Arabic." Today, however, the news ceases to surprise. The nineteenth century witnessed an active movement of translating literary and religious texts from English into Arabic. The Bible took a major part of their concern; following the Bible were religious sermons, hymns, or prayers. Several religious texts from the nineteenth century that were translated from English into Arabic survived. The most well-known is "Sablib al Masih" (Christ's cross), a collection of twenty hymns which was translated by an anonymous translator. Arab philologists such as Nasif al Yaziji (1800-1971) and Butrus al Bustani (1819-83) were employees at the American mission in Beirut in the 1840's, and their jobs facilitated contact with American culture. These figures were contemporaries of Emily Dickinson. Al Bustani went to Abeih Seminary, which was similar to Dickinson's Mount Holyoke Seminary. However, both Al-Bustani and Al-Yaziji died before the publication of Emily Dickinson's poems and after they laid the foundation for an interest in theological literature coming from the United States among Christian Arabs.

Emily Dickinson's familiarity with the Middle East, particularly the Arab World, seems to have been strengthened through her friendship with Mrs. Abby Bliss, whose husband was one of the founders of the University of Beirut in about 1863. After the death of her father in 1833, Abby moved to live with an uncle in Amherst, and there she became a close friend with Emily, forming "The Five" group with Abby Wood (Bliss), Abiah Root, Harriet Merrill, Sarah Tracy, and Emily as members. Their friendship lasted for a long time, for even in 1873 when Abby Bliss visited Amherst, she met Emily Dickinson face-to-face. Arabic influence on the poetry of Emily Dickinson, however, is insignificant. There are certain isolated references and allusions to some Arabic figures and events but they cannot be considered as a substantial theme that can be incorporated in a unified body. If there is such theme, at least it has not yet been recognized. There is for example a reference to nineteenth-century Egyptian leader Mohammad Ali in one of her poems and another reference to Caliph Omer in one of her letters, but it is very likely that such references were either prompted by the political milieu of the time or by her readings in her father's library. Mohammad Ali and his revolution in Egypt were headline topics in the media of the time.

There is no doubt that Emily Dickinson was well-read and that her readings included a comprehensive list, by virtue of her father's encouragement and library, that helped her to develop a personality that transcended the regional and the local towards the human and the international. Thus, when one reads Emily Dickinson's poems, one finds a human idiom that speaks of human passion and compassion. "There Came a Day at Summer's Full" is

one of those poems that "breathe," to use Dickinson's term, with human passion.

The poem was composed in 1861, and it was among the first poems that Dickinson sent along with her famous letter to Higginson on the 25th of April, 1862. Higginson, most probably misunderstandingly, gave it the title "Renunciation." A misleading title, for the poem tells more of commitment than of renunciation. The poem has seven stanzas: in the first group two are of a narrative style, the following four describe a secret meeting surrounded by profound silence. The final stanza is about a metaphysical union.

While translating Dickinson's "There Came a Day at Summer's Full," an Arabic translator runs up against many obstacles. I have divided them into three categories to facilitate the task of dealing with them. These categories are as follows: cultural and religious obstacles, linguistic obstacles, and obstacles related to the sophistication of the poet's talent.

Cultural and Religious Obstacles

The cultural and religious obstacles include in particular the religious terminology. As is known, Arabic language is oriented towards the Koran, and any religious theme derives its psychological and emotional significance from the Islamic tradition. Biblical words do have equivalencies in Arabic, but they do not represent the psychological and emotional meanings that are associated with them in a Christian (or Western) context. Words such as "Resurrection," "Sacrament," "commune," "the lamb," "our Lord," "Crucifix," and "Calvaries" are both problematic and difficult for an Arabic translator. For example the symbolic connotation of "the lamb" may not bring any reference to Christ or even to God. In Arabic it will only mean a young sheep. It may, however, connote adjectives that are associated with the lamb, but it does not represent any religious meaning unless you search for a word that would be equivalent to Christ. The word "lord" is also problematic for the same reason. The best word which one could use is equivalent to "Sir." If one uses the word *Allah*, that may be offensive to certain religious readers.

Linguistic and Formalistic Obstacles

The linguistic obstacles concern the inflections of the Arabic language and its semantics. Sometimes the translator has to decide whether to use the masculine or feminine form of the word. The sun, for example, is a masculine

symbol in Emily Dickinson's diction. If we accept an autobiographical reading of the poem, then the choice of gender would set a problem. In Arabic the sun is always feminine, and it is not possible to refer to it with the masculine pronoun "he," as the case is in some of Emily Dickinson poems. Furthermore, the use of the word "abroad" to refer to the sun connotes departure.

Sometimes the frequent run-on lines in the poem make it difficult for the translator to decide where to end a line and where to start another. Should the translator violate the system of lines in the poem and give the closest meaning possible, or maintain the same system and violate the meaning? The first line of the first stanza, for example, ends with the phrase "by speech – " followed by a hyphen. The phrase lend itself to the second line rather than to the first line. The sentence, paraphrased, would be: "by speech the symbol of a word was needless." As a result three lines are scrambled, and the translator is left with a difficult choice as to what to include in each of the translated lines. Generally, I tried to give equal line-by-line translation unless the order of words and grammar does not permit. For example the simile in stanza 3, "The symbol of a word / Was needless, as at Sacrament / The wardrobe – of our Lord," when translated, maintains the following order of words: "The symbol of a word was needless as the wardrobe was for our Lord at Sacrament." The words are arranged to make the number of lines in each stanza correspond to that in the English version.

The Poet's Talent

The third category of obstacles concerns the sophistication of the poet's talent. The clusters of images and the multi-leveled meanings that underlie each line in particular and the poem in general give the translator liberty in choosing the word which represents his or her critical biases. For example, a translator who is obsessed with the confessional and the autobiographical readings of Dickinson's poems would use terms (with all their mundane and physical connotations) that would foster the "marriage" of Emily Dickinson; others who have different biases can use them through a subtle choice of words. It is important to maintain the silent atmosphere that prevails in the poem. This is achieved through several images and symbols: the setting sun, the passing solstice, the profaned time, the sealed church, the sliding hours, and the departing faces on two decks. The atmosphere created by such terms is that of soundless love thrust upon a long period of time which is seen as relatively short by the poet. The key word that the translator would have to

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find an equivalent for is "leaked"; it connotes the relative shortness of time as seen by the poet coupled with serenity, since a leak has no sound. The translated Arabic version of the poem maintains the same reverence and docility that the English version has. I have tried to maintain the internal music and flow of words as much as possible.