AL-FUZAI: AN ARABIAN LITERARY FIGURE

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Translation, especially literary translation, helps nations and peoples understand each other, and this is the ultimate goal to this writer’s introduction in this widely circulated magazine.

Method: This research relies mainly on reading texts written by Al-Fuzai and searching for what was written about his literature in Arabic, as well as translating some of those texts from Arabic to English carried out by the author of this research.

Results: This paper is a literary translation that addresses the gap that exists between languages and can be addressed through translation. Reading this paper will make the English reader familiar with excerpts and translations for the writer in question.

Conclusion: That gap that exists between languages can be narrowed through communication through translation, as well as learning about the literature and sciences that others have that we need.

Keywords: Saudi, Al-Fuzai, short story, culture, writer.

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AL-FUZAI: UMA FIGURA LITERÁRIA ÁRABE

RESUMO

Objetivo: A tradução, especialmente a tradução literária, ajuda nações e povos a se entenderem, e esse é o objetivo final da introdução deste escritor nesta revista amplamente divulgada.

Método: Esta pesquisa baseia-se principalmente na leitura de textos escritos por Al-Fuzai e na busca do que foi escrito sobre sua literatura em árabe, bem como na tradução de alguns desses textos do árabe para o inglês realizada pelo autor desta pesquisa.

Resultados: Este artigo é uma tradução literária que aborda a lacuna que existe entre os idiomas e pode ser abordada através da tradução. A leitura deste artigo tornará o leitor de inglês familiarizado com trechos e traduções para o escritor em questão.

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Conclusão: Essa lacuna que existe entre as línguas pode ser diminuída através da comunicação através da tradução, assim como aprendendo sobre a literatura e ciências que outros têm, que nós precisamos.

Palavras-chave: Arábia Saudita, Al-Fuzai, conto, cultura, escritor.

1 INTRODUCTION

Khalil I. Al-Fuzai was born in 1940 in AlJasha, a small village in Al-Ahsa, the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. He grew up in this small village and went to its elementary school. Then, he continued his studies at Al-Mahaad Al-Elmy; a religious middle and high school, in Al-Ahsa until 1960.

Al-Fuzai later went to Dammam in 1961 in search of work. There he managed to improve his knowledge by reading independently. He worked in the field of Education, then in the media. After some time, he devoted himself to journalism.

In 1964, Al-Fuzai joined Al-Youm newspaper, where he held various positions: proofreader, editor and finally, in 1984, editor-in-chief. In 1991 he resigned to fully devote himself to his own business. He also went to the neighboring state of Qatar in 1973 and was involved in setting up Dar Al-Ahad for Journalism.

Now Al-Fuzai has a column to write in the Saudi Arabian Al-Youm Newspaper. He writes for different papers in diverse fields. He writes political, literary, and social articles. He participates in writing and presenting a few TV and radio programs.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Khalil I. Al-Fuzai is a short story writer from Saudi Arabia. He does his utmost to introduce Saudi culture to his readers and does his best to address many social, political and religious aspects that he found in his society. Deciding to work on introducing a literary Saudi Arabian text, I first explored whether there were other translations for Saudi Arabian literary texts. In spite of the fact that there are many Saudi Arabian writers, I found only a few literary translations such anthologies as Bagader’s *Assassination of Light: Modern Saudi Short Stories* and *Voices of Change: Short Stories by Saudi Arabian Women Writers* and Attieh’s *Short Fiction by Saudi Arabian Women Writers*. Of course, there are other translations, particularly of short stories translated and published in different magazines, yet the total number is limited. Though “literal translation from other languages … is not always justified” (Ziyamukhammedov & Mustafaeva, 2023, p.9), yet it is a way that can help in our communication.
I have chosen Khalil I. Al-Fuzai to introduce and translate as a writer for the author considers in his work cultural traditions and social norms that reflect an originality of his society with its simplicity, honesty, and poverty. This short article introduces Al-Fuzai to the English readers of this journal. Some excerpts are quoted to show how this writer works on many crucial topics in his short stories.

3 METHODOLOGY

Venuti (1998) argues that translation has a “cultural political practice” in constructing national identities. In addition, “translation can teach us about the wider problem of acculturation, the relation among different cultures that is becoming increasingly important for the survival of our planet” (Lefevere, 1992, p. 12) This work will contribute to the relationship between the Arabic and Western cultures; it is through translation that people can create an atmosphere of understanding and respect. Anyhow, “the content analysis approach was used to analyze the [original text of] the translation” (An, et al., 2023, p.1). While translating, I tried to keep as close as possible to the source text where “a reader gets a glimpse of a cultural other” (Venuti 1995: 309). Choosing “foreignization” to be my method of translating excerpts of this article, I kept long sentences, some foreign words, and the flavor of the foreignness. The main problem “often faced by interpreters is determining whether a word or phrase in one Language has an equivalent in another language” (An, et al., 2023, p.3). Probably the most difficult part I faced is long sentences and tense shifts in the source text. With regard to the long sentences, I tried to keep them—a reader may find phrases, ellipses, long fragments, and paragraphs. In the Arabic text, the author sometimes shifts from one tense into another. I tried to keep tense shifts as part of “foreignization” as well. This short introduction for this writer will be based on the translations I have previously done and the articles I obtained in Arabic.

4 DISCUSSION

So far, Al-Fuzai has written seven collections of stories. They mirror the huge view of his experience. In addition to his innovative ability, he has his own topics and his distinctive style of writing. His topics is probably summarized as follows: the pre-oil society and its lifestyles, the family’s topics, problematic marriage and its consequences, low profits and financial difficulties, each day lifestyles and social traditions, the struggle
among the old and the new, the present and the past, traditions and civilization, and dream and reality. In the subsequent paragraphs, you will read a few translated passages from Al-Fuzai’s writings to make clear how he handles a few of those topics in his writings.

In “Alienation,” a short story, Al-Fuzai depicts the village and how life is there:

Beautiful dreams that shape the coming moments . . . awaiting the comers to the wonderful village . . . welcome that this village longs for . . . great feelings that struggle inside me . . . memoirs that come to my mind . . . all that disappear . . . it turns into blood on the hands stretched to the absentee who returns . . .

Those evenings at the public center of the small village . . . stories of the past in our minds where we started and used to retell their details . . . we used to read and memorize some incantations intended to protect everyone while coming back to our homes after talking with friends in the moonlit nights . . . we used a hand-light on an alternative basis . . . we were young . . . loved the moon’s light . . . we traveled to different imaginary worlds that we had never visited before . . . venture in this universe our own way . . . Yet, in the end, we learned that we did actually talk in the evenings at our village's public center and realized that about half of the night was left . . .

Did time erase the memoirs of those beautiful nights . . ?

Al-Fuzai introduces real and simple pictures of the countryside where he himself was born and was brought up. Again in “Alienation” the main figure believes,

My love of the village does not change . . . it is my life . . . how does a human being give up his life . . . how to prove that I love the place . . . I wish I could kiss its earth . . . and dust my head with its granules . . .
Children gather . . . look with astonishment at me as if they were having a creature coming from a different world . . . I want to talk with some of them . . . all leave running away like frightened animals . . . if I did not leave the place, one of them might have been my child . . . then it might be possible to talk with anyone . . . it could be if I did not leave . .

Al-Fuzai is a critic of the society, too. He introduces it as if it were in front of the reader with a sincere portrait. When it comes to specific topics like marriage, poverty, education, child abuse, etc., he does not hesitate to assure that incorrect and bad habits should be corrected and changed in the society. The story “Many Hands” presents child abuse and its consequences as in the following quotation;

He killed his dad?
Isn’t this action some sort of foolishness?
At that particular moment, he realizes what he has done; he has imagined that way to be the only exit that would rid him of his dad’s cruelty and mistreatment . . . and this way would make him able to inherit his dad’s wealth after all . . . he felt comfortable with the idea of killing the father, generally.

Now he is not aware of what is taking place around him . . . the last word he remembers was “NO” when the cop asked him, “Do you have anything else to tell us about?”
In his stories, Al-Fuzai records a social history, too. He writes about the history which he himself is a part of. In “Revenge,” he literarily immortalizes the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait of 1990:

The sky of the city of Kuwait becomes dark after being overcast with gray clouds . . . its roads wear grief . . . empty of anything except some destroyed cars or those with no tires on both sides. Here and there . . . some soldiers gather around military centers with some cars and equipment; on the tops of buildings heavy artillery are installed . . . the front of houses on the main streets are used by the invaders . . . citizens keep to their homes, staying inside for they are not allowed to leave their homes . . . the whole district is full of soldiers looking for the resistance groups . . .

. . .
In one of the villas . . . six soldiers are questioning and beating Ahmed’s mother . . who is resisting despite the pain . . despite her enemies’ cruelty, stubborn . . it appears they wanted to humiliate her; when three cops with an order from their officer take the maid to an isolated room . . she comes back crying . . they have torn her clothes . . fear is drawn on her face . . disgrace tears her feelings . . with her torn dress she tries to cover her chest . . it does not take her long to black out, and when Ahmed’s mother tries to succor her . . a soldier kicks her . . . she stands before him challenging . . he pushes her with his weapon until she bumps against the wall . . . with a rough voice he says, “Tell us who your son’s friends are.”

Al-Fuzai’s stories explore the social and historical ideas of rural people as well as the psychological aspects of his characters. Indeed, he has been able to create characters whose physical features, psychological traits and social backgrounds are reflective of the rural environment they are from. In a short story entitled "From the Front," the main character tells a story in a simple and uncomplicated style:

I met her when we were studying communication at the University . . . our story of love grew and became the concern of our colleagues’ conversation . . . even our families did not leave us alone . . we intended to get married in after our graduation.
Once, I told her, “One day we will leave this college and each should travel to his country . . . how can we live without being together?”
She asked, “And how should we live without being together? . . . you live in my heart, oh my eye.”
“And you are living within me too, oh my heart.”
“The day of our wedding will be the day of my birthday.”
After graduation . . . each went back to his country . . . each become a journalist . . . but . . . yet she was killed while reporting from the front . . .

. . .
On the first of March . . . colleagues of the same career started arriving from all over the world, in order to report what was taking place on the front, victories of the allied armies, and because we arrived a few hours earlier, we attracted others’ attention, and that granted us some memories not to forget. Among the waves of comfort and happiness . . . her face seemed calm, assured . . . as if she wanted to join us in this unique moment.
Al-Fuzai’s style is simple, literary, and carefully chosen. He combines both ‘standard’ language and the dialect of Al-Ahsa in an understandable literary style. In one of his short stories, we read

The sun is about to disappear, and the café owner turns on the light . . . people can hear Muazen [a man who calls to prayer] calling to prayer from a nearby mosque . . .

His bothering friend replies, “Well I have two reasons: no. 1 is that I know her family, and no. 2 is that I am searching for comfort and rest—how great it is when you return to your home and find everything in the right way . . . food is prepared . . . clothes are in the appropriate manner . . . your house is tidy.

“Did I say, ‘there are more than two reasons?’” No. In fact, they are three . . . let me add my love for a familial preference. A family . . . a wife and few children . . . all that is good, don’t you agree?

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“Did I say, ‘three . . .?’” No. No. Indeed, you can say four reasons . . . the fourth one is that I am old enough to marry, and if I don’t marry at this age, it will be difficult for me to be accepted by any girl later . . . you know age is running fast; it is a natural course and I think it is the right moment of looking for a wife.

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“Did I talk about four reasons to marry now?” No. I think I have to add one . . . well, five might be the right number of reasons . . . and well, a friend of mine has married one of her friends . . . indeed, he has encouraged me to marry since a while.”

His astonished and stubborn disputer is not persuaded with all these reasons . . . he appears doubtful . . . hence he admits, saying, “Did I mention, ‘five reasons?’” Indeed, it is one reason; she is a school principal and owns three huge buildings.”

And they go to the mosque to say their Maghrip [sunset] prayer.

In fact, Al-Fuzai has worked as a journalist who knows how to address his readers. He pictures the village and its local people with vivid details that make his audience feel they are in front of a really professional painting. In his story “Reaching the End,” he depicts a real picture:

He begins walking inside that quiet night and what bothers is its frightfully complete silence . . . nothing moves, with the exception of the interruption of dogs’ barking and frogs’ croaking coming from those huge marshes that stretch endlessly around the village . . . as usual, alleys are full of dirt, smelly, and stagnant water.

. . . suddenly he stops, trying to understand a voice he has heard. After that he tightens his igal [a black cord tightened around the head]. Then, he proceeds walking and plays with the two ends of his worn ghotra [a headdress]; such a movement makes it possible for him to scratch his neck that is connected energetically above his small body. He deludes the self of being brave and what he needs is just to prove such a claim.

Besides Al-Fuzai’s style and themes, his stories present a new historic stage—a stage of how life changes. In his writings, he compares between city and village,
civilization and tradition, present and past. He implies the modern changes of life in his short stories; one has to adopt and consider the new changes, but to what extent? Al-Fuzai is aware of modernism, yet he neither eliminates nor contradicts the culture and traditions that represent the focus of the identity of his society. Hence, his heroes tend to be young ordinary and wise people who try to understand and deal with what is new. They also try to protect and defend their culture. In most cases, readers notice how those heroes try their utmost to get to a point of stability and some sort of balance between the opposites. “The Crazy Street” is a short story where Al-Fuzai describes the conflict between the old and the new:

Nobody, not even Allah, is aware of who gave this street its name in the first place ….

Virtue ends her life on this street, although it is only temporary. It doesn't last longer than a couple of hours in the late afternoon and a short while in the early evening. However, it worries individuals whose circumstances force them to cross this street, lest they be accused of corruption and join the crowd of people willing to undermine what they see to be traditional values.

Doheiman sits on one of the benches strewn in front of the small café, watching almost shocked as busty girls enter and exit, their boobs protruding till they are about to rip the tightly fitting clothing that covers them. He finds it strange to observe this never-ending human throng, as well as this unexpected temptation in the street, and he is reminded of the desert women, whose skin colors have turned brown and whose complexions have been scorched by the sun.

In a period when the entire world has become a little village, and contact with different cultures becomes inevitable, Al-Fuzai's characters struggle for cultural balance since they cannot ignore their values of which they should be proud. However, they are unable to isolate themselves, though. Accordingly, his characters are open to change to the extent that it allows them to live fulfilling their lives’ requirements, but not to the point where their desire is so deep or severe that they risk their customs and values. The same story continues:

“They are stunning,” Doheiman asks, "Do you admire them?"
The man says, "They are gorgeous." He is too preoccupied with admiring the two women he sees in the street.

“Who are you referring to?” asks Doheiman.

“I'm referring to the two women you are gazing at.”

When he turns to face the man who tries to continue his commentary—which is not at all polite—he notices that the color of his face has changed, and an unforgettable mood of rage has overtaken him. So he says, "What is the matter?" after casting an inquisitive glance at the two women. They then move closer.

He makes no comment.

Then, while the man continues to remain still, Doheiman's remarks are interrupted by the man's shrill “What did you say?” yelled the man at his face.
Doheiman asks, "What makes you angry?" after being startled to hear him shout. How are you able to utter such offensive things? Which offensive remarks? Is there anything more offensive than what you say? Do you not comprehend that these two women are my wife and sister? He continues, expressing his tremendous rage.  

Al-Fuzai portrays in his tales the everyday struggles of rural impoverished people who yearn for a better existence—one that is characterized by hope, love, and respect. His protagonists are either unassuming villagers who love the city life but despise its duplicity and complexity, or destitute individuals who are psychologically disillusioned and wish for success. In "In the Café," the protagonist's battle for a better life is depicted in the following quotation:

There, where the sea lies with no choice, leaving the city kneeling under its feet in a desperate giving-up, he follows the short waiter with his looks until he disappears in the small room to bring the tea, but he allows for his imagination to go beyond the walls of the small room and explore the farthest north of that area ... the sea holds land secrets in its big womb... and hides tyrannical cruelty behind its doubtful calm ... the sea has put an end for his father... After learning that his father has passed away, he is left with no alternative but to step into his father's shoes and join the navy. He learned the trade by going on trips with his father when the weather was favorable.  

In a very brief article, Dohal (2021) writes about Al-Fuzai what might be a good conclusion:

Al-Fuzai has written several collections of short stories. In his writings, he attempts to present clear and realistic depictions of Saudi Arabian society. He wrote Palm Tree and the Watch (1977) and Love and Women (1978). In late seventies, he wrote Thursday Fair (1979). In addition, he wrote collections like Some Suspicion (1993), and Torture That Doesn't Go Away (1998). We shouldn’t forget his A Moment of Collapse (2000).  


5 CONCLUSION

Generally speaking, as a Saudi Arabian author, Al-Fuzai writes about his society and tries to address the social difficulties it faces. However, there are other Saudi writers who have tried to address issues found in the society. Indeed, Al-Fuzai stands out because he is a journalist who understands how to address his audience appropriately. He also concentrates a lot of his efforts on rural communities. More than this, he uses short stories
so that his social topics are usually addressed directly and appropriately. This article is a trial to introduce this Saudi writer.
REFERENCES


2- Ibid.


9- Ibid.