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The Hidden Violence of Retranslation: Mahfouz's *Awlād Ḥāratinā* in English

Abstract

This article examines the (re)translation into English of Naguib Mahfouz's 1959 novel *Awlād Ḥāratinā* as a socially-situated activity. Drawing on Bourdieu's theory of practice, it analyses retranslation as an intrusive, symbolically-violent act in relation to a text which itself triggered unfavourable reactions when it was published in Arabic and when it subsequently appeared in English (re)translation. *Awlād Ḥāratinā* stands out as one of the few allegorical fiction works written in Arabic, which offers a unique case for the study of retranslation. Through an analysis of the paratextual materials of the two available translations of Mahfouz's novel (originally published in 1981 and 1996, respectively), this article identifies and critically examines the mechanisms of symbolic violence through which the translators, Philip Stewart and Peter Theroux, attempted to distinguish themselves and their works. The extent and intensity of the disputes between Stewart and Theroux also speak to this case study's significance. The findings suggest that a Bourdieusian perspective can expand and enrich the understanding and theorising of retranslation. They also illustrate that retranslation is not an act of mere linguistic or stylistic improvement on previous efforts but is often an act of symbolic violence and a site for struggle through which differences between translatorial agents are created and maintained, primarily via the generation and leveraging of capital.

Keywords: retranslation, symbolic violence, paratexts, Mahfouz, *'Awlād Ḥāratinā*, *Children of Gebalaawi*, *Children of the Alley*.

Introduction

The driving forces behind the commissioning or production of retranslations have been investigated in several scholarly studies and debates (*cf.* Mathijssen 2007:16–22; Koskinen and Paloposki 2010:296–297). Here, I define retranslation as a translation of a source text, which chronologically follows an existing version produced by a different translator in the same target language (*cf.* Susam-Sarajeva 2003:2; Tahir Gürçağlar 2009:233). In this article, I set out to develop a new understanding of retranslation, as a site for struggle between competing translatorial agents, based on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice. In the process, I critically examine, as a socially-situated activity, the two English translations (by Philip Stewart and Peter Theroux, originally published in 1981 and 1996, respectively) of Naguib Mahfouz's 1959 novel *أولاد حارتنا* [*Awlād Ḥāratinā*] (*Children of Our Alley*). I demonstrate that this case study represents a significant example of a social practice fraught with underlying symbolic, non-physical violence. I do so by analysing the relevant paratexts; that is, any verbal or non-verbal elements that present, complement, augment or supplement a text internally or externally (*cf.* Genette 1997). I trace the symbolic struggle for distinction between translators,

focusing on their conflict-ridden interactions and practices and how those dynamics construct or unveil symbolic violence.

Written against the backdrop of prodigious socio-cultural changes in the Arab world and translated amidst intense political and ideological upheaval in the Anglophone world, *Awlād Ḥāratinā* stands out as one of the few allegorical Arabic fiction works. It is also one of the few works of Arabic fiction that have been retranslated into English. As a result, *Awlād Ḥāratinā* offers a unique case for the study of retranslation and unmasking, as well as challenging, the invisible dimension of symbolic violence that this may involve. As I will demonstrate, the novel's publication in Arabic and in English (re)translation encompasses textual, symbolic and actual physical violence, as well as the threat thereof. There is violence implicit in the source text's narrative, violence deriving from the socio-historical context in which the source text and the two translations appeared, and (symbolic) violence relating to the two translations and the conflicts between their translators. While this article focuses on the latter type of violence, concentrating mainly on the rivalry between Stewart and Theroux, it occasionally considers other types of violence as well. This is done to illuminate the relevance of the symbolic violence of retranslation, as represented by the translators targeting each other—deploying their capital to classify the social world around them and attain distinction and legitimacy for themselves and their works. Stewart and Theroux's combative interactions, which often remain invisible, are documented in print in this instance, making this case study particularly significant.

In the following sections, I present an overview of retranslation, and, drawing on Bourdieu's sociology, I reconceptualise the phenomenon (in the context of *Awlād Ḥāratinā*) as the site of symbolic violence between translatorial agents for capital accumulation and preservation. I then outline the content and history of *Awlād Ḥāratinā*, as well as the controversial reactions triggered by its publication and its English translations. This will aid the understanding of how symbolic violence functions in the context of (re)translations. Finally, an evaluation of both translations' paratextual elements allows me to identify the mechanisms of symbolic violence in this case study and investigate the social struggles between the translators, their co-producers (e.g., reviewers, critics and publicists), and the logic underlying their practices.

Reconceptualising retranslation

Critical discussions of retranslation generally focus on why a text is retranslated when one or more translations of it already exist. Traditionally, these debates argue for a teleological 'history-as-progress' model, which assumes translations 'age' chronologically and perceives retranslations as items that emerge as time passes, succeeding previous translation(s) in a 'linear fashion' (Susam-Sarajeva 2003:2). In this view, retranslation is the act of producing a 'better' or 'updated' translation

that is 'more attentive to the letter of the source text, its linguistic and stylistic make-up, and its singularity' than earlier translations (Bensimon 1990:x). Thus, retranslations are believed to fill gaps or overcome inadequacies or deficiencies in the 'purblind', 'hesitant' or 'outdated' initial translation(s) (Berman 1990:5). This is generally known as 'text ageing'—a definition of retranslation that has at its core the view that source texts are ageless, but translations are not.

Several translation scholars have attempted to transcend this reductive view by attributing the reasons for retranslation to translators, their co-producers and the social sphere(s) through which a retranslation is shaped, produced and consumed. For instance, Pym (1998:82–83) argues that to attribute an act of retranslation to linguistic or time-related causes is to understand the process as 'passive', involving few or no evident conflicts. To combat this, Pym (*ibid.*:83) introduces 'active retranslation', wherein the trigger for a new translation is closely related to the translator or his/her co-producers, thus creating an 'active rivalry' between the various published versions. Retranslations, Pym argues, strongly challenge previous translations' validity; therefore, 'the study of active retranslations would...seem better positioned to yield insights into the nature and workings of [re]translation [and] into its own special range of disturbances' (*ibid.*:83–84). Although Pym believes 'active rivalry' exists between (re)translations (*ibid.*:82), his conceptualisation of 'active retranslation' scarcely considers the factors informing the process or how it relates to the translator and other co-producers.¹

Venuti (2003) also emphasises the competitive and confrontational nature of retranslation, although, contrary to Pym, he elaborates on the intricate competition between (re)translations and their producers. Venuti rightly observes that retranslations may be triggered purely by an appreciation for a source text and produced without awareness of an earlier translation's existence. Nevertheless, he believes it is more useful to study retranslations that 'justify themselves by establishing their differences from one or more previous versions' (*ibid.*:25). Thus, Venuti's work is constructed on the assumption that 'competition' or 'challenge' is a trigger for retranslation. His idea of competition is informed by the supposition that retranslations establish or legitimise themselves by emphasising their differences from previous translations, which are 'judged as insufficient in some sense, perhaps erroneous, [or] lacking linguistic correctness' (*ibid.*:25–26). Venuti's arguments, *a fortiori*, imply that retranslation is, intrinsically, an act of struggle—vindicating the view that the new reading presented by a retranslation is connected to and shaped by the social setting in which it operates.

Understanding retranslation as an act of defiance based on competition and differences that positions translations and their producers in contest with one another resonates with Bourdieu's sociology.

¹ For more on this point, see Hanna (2016:131).

Examining retranslation from a Bourdieusian viewpoint is to perceive it as an act of symbolic violence—a struggle for material and symbolic stakes and social positions in which translatorial agents claim legitimacy and distinction for themselves and their cultural products at the expense of earlier translations. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992:142; original emphasis) argue that ‘*linguistic relations are always relations of symbolic power*’.² They add that every ‘linguistic exchange contains the *potentiality* of an act of power, and all the more so when it involves agents who occupy asymmetric positions in the distribution of the relevant capital’ (*ibid.*:145; original emphasis). For Bourdieu, in the hands of social agents, symbolic violence is an instrument of domination and legitimisation, which can manifest itself in various ways. It refers not to a particular form of violence, but to an aspect of most forms of power as routinely deployed in social life (Thompson 1991:23). In contrast to overt violence, symbolic violence is a subtle, non-physical, usually covert, oppressive power that is misrecognised as arbitrary and exercised by and on social agents (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:167). Since authority based on distinction, consecration or recognition is purely symbolic (Johnson 1993:7), Bourdieu’s concept of *capital*, in its different guises, is intrinsically linked to his understanding of ‘symbolic violence’. It refers to ‘the power to make things with words’; that is, the ability to constitute the given by stating it, which is a form of creation, and to act on the world by acting on its representation, which is a form of change (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:148). Symbolic violence is, therefore, inflicted *through and in discourse*, which is itself constructed, defined and informed by the struggles between agents over preserving, accumulating and leveraging capital, and over the imposition of legitimate classifications, their products and their practices (Bourdieu 1987:13).

In this struggle for recognition, legitimating differences through various means of symbolic violence is essential. The power of naming a translation as ‘official’, ‘deficient’, ‘obsolete’, ‘complete’ or ‘incomplete’ is one such means of claiming distinction, amassing capital and enacting symbolic violence. The result of this competition and struggle defines the status and value of earlier translations as either ‘in’ or ‘out’ of history (Hanna 2016:133). As I will demonstrate, the translations of *Awlād Ḥāratinā* enact this Bourdieusian understanding of symbolic violence in their accompanying paratextual discourses.

***Awlād Ḥāratinā* and its English translations: Setting the scene**

Mahfouz is the Arab world’s foremost modern fiction writer and, thus far, the only Arab writer to be awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature (Allen 1988:203). *Awlād Ḥāratinā* is Mahfouz’s most controversial work (Le Gassick 1995:47). Injustice and oppression are inscribed within *Awlād*

² Bourdieu tends to use ‘symbolic power’ (*‘le pouvoir symbolique’*) and ‘symbolic violence’ (*‘la violence symbolique’*) interchangeably (Dębska 2015:9).

Ḥāratinā's storyline, as represented in the power struggle among the protagonists. On the surface, the novel chronicles life as experienced by the denizens of a Cairene alley over several generations. It focuses on Gebelawi (the alley's founder) and other heroic figures (his offspring), who emerge throughout the alley's history. The storyline depicts the residents' lengthy battle to overcome the tyranny, injustice and corruption of the ruthless gangsters and embezzlers running the alley's affairs. Importantly, however, the novel is also a speculative treatise on humanity's history from Genesis to modern times. It portrays God (Gebelawi), Iblis (Idris), science ('Arafa) and many other figures from monotheistic religions, including Adam (Adham), Moses (Gebel), Jesus (Rifaa) and Muhammad (Qasim). Ultimately, *Awlād Ḥāratinā* raises questions about whether science has undermined or eclipsed religion and supplanted it as a source of guidance.

Awlād Ḥāratinā's publication in Arabic was not free of disputes. In 1959, when it first appeared serially in the Egyptian newspaper *Al-Ahram*, it prompted a violent reaction among Islamic scholars, who identified its characters with God and His prophets, although Mahfouz did not mention them by name. Considered blasphemous, *Awlād Ḥāratinā* was banned from publication in book form in Egypt and was published there only in 2006 by the Cairene publisher Dar El-Shorouk. However, following Mahfouz's 1988 Nobel Prize, several attempts were made to republish the novel serially in Egypt (Ewais 2006). When religious extremists, who accused Mahfouz of apostasy, attempted to assassinate him in 1994, several independent newspapers published (or attempted to publish) *Awlād Ḥāratinā* serially (Shoair 2018:188–190). Outside Egypt, *Awlād Ḥāratinā* was first published as a book in Arabic in 1967 by Beirut-based publisher Dar Al-Adab, accompanied by a far-reaching publicity campaign (*ibid.*:108), arguably to recoup the publisher's investment.³

The contexts in which the two English translations of *Awlād Ḥāratinā* were produced were also characterised by contention and altercations. Based on the serialised version published in *Al-Ahram* and titled *Children of Gebelawi*, the first translation was produced as a scholarly exercise in 1962 by Philip Stewart—a British writer and translator, now professor emeritus at Oxford (Stewart 2001:n.p.). Stewart's translation was published in 1981 under the joint imprint of Heinemann Educational Books in the UK and Three Continents Press (3CP) in the US. After Mahfouz was awarded the Nobel Prize, his publishing agent, the American University in Cairo Press (AUCP), to which he had sold all his global translation rights in December 1985, celebrated the achievement by producing a uniform, more accessible edition of most of his works in English (Johnson-Davies 2006:43). Soon afterwards, however, a link was drawn between Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* and Mahfouz's *Awlād*

³ Suhayl Idris, one of Dar Al-Adab's founders, reveals in his memoirs that Mahfouz was paid 'five thousand [Egyptian] pounds...as his author rights for the first edition of the novel'—the highest price ever paid for a novel in the Arab world at the time (Dar Al-Adab 2013).

Ḥāratinā. This link was made by Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman, a blind fundamentalist cleric with alleged ties to the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, who issued a *fatwa* against Mahfouz in 1989, just two months after Khomeini issued his *fatwa* against Rushdie, arguing that, had Mahfouz been punished for writing *Awlād Ḥāratinā*, Rushdie would not have dared to write his blasphemies (Jacquemond 2008:59; Shoair 2018:175–176). This prompted Stewart to refuse to sell his translation rights to AUCP, fearing potential consequences for himself, Mahfouz, their families and Islamic–Western relationships (Stewart 2001:n.p.). Consequently, AUCP commissioned a new translation, and American writer and translator Peter Theroux agreed to retranslate the novel. His version, titled *Children of the Alley*, was released in 1996 by Doubleday—to whom the AUCP sold the English translation rights to several of Mahfouz’s works following his Nobel Prize win. This retranslation’s existence was, therefore, engendered by socio-cultural and geo-political forces, which also created the appropriate conditions for the rise of a rivalry, and hence symbolic violence, between the translators.

Between Mahfouz being awarded the Nobel Prize in 1988 and the publication of Theroux’s retranslation (in both hardcover and paperback) in 1996, four further editions of Stewart’s translation were published. These include reprints of the 1981 version in 1988 and 1989, a revised edition in 1990 and a revised, augmented edition in 1995. Following the publication of Theroux’s translation, which is based solely on the book version of the Arabic text published by Dar Al-Adab (Theroux 2012:400), and upon discovering some disparities between *Al-Ahram*’s serialised version and Dar Al-Adab’s volume publication, Stewart embarked on producing a revised edition of his translation, focusing primarily on making it superior to Theroux’s (Stewart 2001:n.p.). Stewart’s updated and augmented version was published in 1997 as *Children of Gebelaawi* by 3CP—which had been renamed Passeggiata Press.

As the above illustrates, different types of violence are inscribed in *Awlād Ḥāratinā*’s publication in Arabic, its narrative and its storyline. Symbolic violence also occurred between the translators, who competed over attaining legitimacy and distinction for themselves and their products at one another’s expense. The remainder of this article focuses on the latter type of violence.

Symbolic violence at play: Paratexts as a means for claiming distinction

Symbolic struggles between agents and competition between different translations often find expression in the ‘paratextual’ zones accompanying a text (Genette 1997:1). Such conflicts and rivalries are manifested in the paratexts of *Awlād Ḥāratinā*’s (re)translation and in Stewart’s and Theroux’s ripostes. Genette categorises paratexts into two key types: peritext and epitext (*ibid.*:5). The former refers to all verbal and non-verbal paratextual elements accompanying a text’s core, including covers, title pages, prefaces, notes and introductions (*ibid.*:16–17). The latter refers to all paratextual elements published externally to a text, including commentaries, reviews and interviews

(*ibid.*:10, 38). Paratextual elements are among a publisher's most effective marketing and communication tools because they present and sell a text to a target audience and ensure its positive reception in the target culture. Paratexts are also the only space where translators and other co-producers can truly make themselves visible.

With this in mind, the paratextual discourses of both translations of *Awlād Ḥāratinā* are examined below, exploring the mechanisms of symbolic violence and power play that underlay Stewart's and Theroux's interactions. These discourses are represented by peritexts and epitexts, authored by both Stewart and Theroux, concerning their respective translations or in response to each other. The peritexts include the introductions to the various editions of Stewart's translation, especially those written after he knew AUCP commissioned the new translation to Theroux. As Theroux's translation lacks an introduction, the 'Translator's Acknowledgement', the 'About the Translator' and dust jacket are examined as peritexts. The epitexts include: (1) Stewart's 2000 Amazon review of Theroux's translation; (2) an article written by Theroux in 2001/2002 in the *Massachusetts Review*; (3) Stewart's 2001 retort, published on his website after the editor of the *Massachusetts Review* refused to publish it;⁴ (4) an article written by Stewart in 1997 but only published on his website in 2010; and (5) another article written by Theroux in 2012, a revised version of his 2001/2002 article, which appeared in *The Middle East*. This latter article is arguably a rejoinder to Stewart's, given the changes made to Theroux's original article, which will be outlined below. The seemingly chronological order of these writings makes them read as exchanges between the translators.

To test the validity of my arguments, I asked the translators themselves for more information.⁵ In examining the paratexts, it became apparent that Stewart is the most aggrieved, and, therefore, his statements are more abundant, direct and explicit than Theroux's, which were generally 'strictly tactful'—as Theroux himself stated to me in a personal correspondence. However, a close reading of the materials Theroux wrote about his own translation reveals that he read Stewart's articles and was engaged in the exchange with him, too. Theroux recounted to me in one of our exchanges that: 'Mrs. Onassis [Mahfouz's editor at Doubleday], her chief assistant Martha Levin, and I were expecting [Stewart] to attack my work. *We were right*' (emphasis added). The remark '*We were right*' demonstrates that Theroux must have read what Stewart had written and made publicly accessible. There is also evidence to suggest that Theroux read Stewart's Amazon review of his translation. A

⁴ In a personal correspondence, I asked Stewart the reason why the *Massachusetts Review* refused to publish his retort. He responded: 'No idea! Editors are not obliged to publish retorts'.

⁵ All my personal correspondence with Philip Stewart and Peter Theroux, regarding their respective translations and each other's translations, took place between December 2019 and January 2020.

search reveals that Theroux does read such reviews, as evidenced by a response he wrote to a review of his translation of Saudi novelist Abdelrahman Munif's *Cities of Salt* on Amazon.⁶

My analysis of the aforementioned paratextual elements is carried out by examining three marks of distinction that could differentiate each of the two translators/translations. These are Stewart's and Theroux's individual claims that each had: (1) more efficient access to and a more thorough understanding of the source culture and language; (2) direct access to the source author; and (3) an overall superior translation as a cultural product.

Claiming better access to the source language and culture: Competing assertions of authority

In his 1997 'Translator's Introduction', Stewart sought to accumulate cultural capital for himself by detailing his extensive knowledge of the Arabic language and culture, including the novel's publishing history in Arabic, the controversy it provoked, and Mahfouz's style and language use. Stewart also responded to the main criticisms the novel had received, supporting his assertions with several direct quotes attributed to Mahfouz in reported speech (*cf.* Stewart 1997). This conferred authority upon his translation and differentiated it from Theroux's, which lacks an introduction. Comparing Stewart's 1995 and 1997 introductions reveals that, in the latter, he added statements exerting symbolic violence against Theroux after having seen Theroux's translation (published in 1996). Stewart critiqued Theroux's poor understanding of the Arabic language and of Mahfouz's text, while demonstrating his own superior knowledge and implying his more efficient access to Arabic sources—pushing, in a symbolically-violent way, Theroux's translation out of, and firmly inserting his translation into, history. In the revised 1997 edition, Stewart added:

The key term futuwwa is translated as 'strongman'. Its original meaning is 'young-manliness', from the word fata, 'young man'. In the middle ages it became the name of something between a guild and an order of chivalry, but by modern times this had degenerated and most strongmen had become the protection-racketeers met with in Mahfouz's work. It is important, however, not to use a word such as 'gangster', which necessarily implies someone bad, because ambiguity is needed, especially when the term is applied to Gebelaawi and Qaasim. (1997:xix)

Although Stewart did not name his adversary, reading this alongside his 2010 article reveals that he was, in fact, critiquing Theroux, who translated 'futuwwa' as 'gangster'. Stewart also implied that he not only had a better linguistic understanding of Arabic and of Mahfouz's text, but also had a better awareness of the cultural meaning, origin and use of the terms Mahfouz employed. This, again, indicates to readers that Stewart's translation was better than Theroux's and closer to Mahfouz's intended meaning. Making his critique more explicit, Stewart (2010:n.p.) stated:

Theroux chooses 'gangster' as his stock rendering, which means he can use it for the heroes only as an insult. On the very first page Gebelaawi is referred to three times as a

⁶ <https://www.amazon.com/gp/customer-reviews/R2PZFWXWA1AIYS/>

futuwwa, which Theroux translates respectively by the adjectives ‘tough’ and ‘noble’ and by the noun ‘leader’, emasculating the book from the beginning.

This assertion of authority distinguishes Stewart’s translation from Theroux’s by calling the latter inarticulate. It also confers legitimacy to Stewart’s work, adding to his cultural capital and consecrating his, as well as his work’s, position in the Arabic literary translation field. Stewart’s critique of Theroux did not stop here. In his memoirs,⁷ Stewart became even more direct, criticising Theroux’s poor understanding of Arabic and of Mahfouz’s novel—effectively attributing symbolic value and authority to himself and his work. Stewart (2020:171) states: ‘[Theroux’s] Arabic was even poorer than mine had been in 1962, and I howled with laughter over some of his mistakes, for example confusing *asīl* “afternoon” and ‘*asil*, “honey” in chapter 43’ (emphasis added).

Although all editions of Theroux’s retranslation lack an introduction, on the hardcover and paperback editions one can read that: ‘[Theroux] is the translator of several major Arabic novels’. Emphasising Theroux’s knowledge of Arabic and his previous translation record highlights his cultural and symbolic capital and legitimises his retranslation of Mahfouz’s novel. This statement also discredits Stewart—who translated only one novel—and delegitimises his work. Notably, in the biography given in Theroux’s translations preceding *Awlād Ḥāratinā*, he is described as the ‘author of several books’—not as a prolific translator of ‘major’ Arabic novels, as he is described in the *Awlād Ḥāratinā* translation (see, for instance, Theroux’s biography in Abdel-Hakim Qasim’s *Rites of Assent*, the translation published immediately before *Awlād Ḥāratinā*).

Theroux’s two articles about his translation (2001/2002 and 2012) also make the claim that he had better access to *Awlād Ḥāratinā*’s source language and culture, thus reinforcing his bid for legitimacy and distinction. He begins both articles by describing the novel’s publication history in Arabic and discussing how ‘this *all-important novel* made its way into English’ (Theroux 2012:400; emphasis added). These articles (two of the retranslation’s epitexts) demonstrate Theroux’s superior knowledge (compared to Stewart) of Mahfouz’s work and the socio-cultural environment surrounding its publication. They also claim some of the symbolic capital attached to this ‘all-important novel’ and its author to accumulate economic or other forms of capital for Theroux. Moreover, they serve as responses to Stewart’s (2000) criticism of Theroux, which states: ‘Theroux’[s] version lacks an introduction, and I consider this a grave lacuna. The history of the book is deeply interesting in itself and needs to be told’. Theroux’s articles can therefore be said to contribute directly to the translators’ exchange of symbolic violence. Additionally, Theroux (2001/2002:668) highlights his constant contact with and superior knowledge of the Arab world:

⁷ I am grateful to Philip Stewart for sharing a pre-publication copy of his memoirs with me.

I acquired a copy of *Awlad Haratina* while on a journalistic assignment in Cairo in 1990, navigating the community of Egyptian, Levantine, and Gulf refugees from a newly expansionist Iraq, and was quick to agree to translate it when the American University in Cairo Press offered the job.

These implicit assertions of authority portray Theroux as a competent translator with personal and professional knowledge of the Arabic language and the Arab world's various communities and sub-cultures. These symbolically-violent pronouncements suggest to readers that Theroux's translation is better and conceivably more accurate than Stewart's, endowing the former with greater authority.

Claiming direct access to the source author: The struggle over distinction

The struggles between the translators of *Awlād Ḥāratinā* are also made visible by their competition to claim direct access to the source author. In their symbolic struggle for distinction, neither translator spared any effort emphasising their association with Mahfouz in their peritexts and epitexts, seeking to use their connections with the author to accrue symbolic and material profit.

Considering the peritexts, Stewart ended his 1995 introduction with the following statement: 'I am grateful to the author for his friendship and advice' (1995:xii). By professing his status as an associate and friend of Mahfouz, Stewart legitimises and strengthens his position, and that of his translation, in the literary field. 'Friendship' and 'advice' are important words here because they imply an exchange and a relationship between equals or, at least, like-minded individuals. These words affirm that Mahfouz helped with the translation (something made very explicit on the back cover of Stewart's work), thus endowing legitimacy and authority to the translation and translator. The 1997 edition does not explicitly mention Mahfouz's friendship or advice, but it does feature a subtle reference to them: 'I have retained the continental punctuation of dialogue favoured by Mahfouz' (Stewart 1997:xxi). This signals Stewart's awareness of Mahfouz's intentions, distinguishing him and his translation while discrediting Theroux's, which employs a different punctuation style. This covert, yet symbolically-violent, dialogue between Stewart and Theroux reflects how, in retranslation, one translator can be both visible and invisible in another's translation.

In his 'Translator's Acknowledgements', Theroux thanked 'Naguib Mahfouz and Sasson Somekh, whose generous guidance never failed' (1996:n.p.). This invocation of the symbolic and cultural capital attached to Mahfouz's name underlines Theroux's attempt to foreground Mahfouz's direct involvement in his translation—bestowing authority and legitimacy upon himself and using symbolic violence to 'push' Stewart's translation 'out of history'. His reference to Somekh, a Baghdad-born Israeli scholar and prominent translator of Arabic literature into Hebrew, is an attempt to draw upon Somekh's capital too, thus reinforcing the claim to have produced a better translation: one made with the assistance of an extremely well-educated and knowledgeable native Arabic speaker and literature

specialist. This is also evident in one of Theroux's articles, in which he describes Somekh as 'Baghdad-born' and 'Oxford-educated', stating that having 'Sasson Somekh give you advice on textual analysis is like having Albert Einstein help you balance your checkbook' (2001/2002:669). These assertions confer authenticity and legitimacy on Theroux and his translation, strengthening the position of both in the literary field.

Stewart's and Theroux's bids to claim legitimacy in their symbolically-violent struggles, to emphasise Mahfouz's participation in their respective translations and to ultimately demonstrate that they each have a better understanding of the novel's content, are also found in further epitextual examples. For instance, in his 2010 article, Stewart states:

My translation was made in Cairo in 1962, two and a half years after the novel first came out as a serial in the newspaper Al-Ahram [*sic*]. The author, *whose memory was still fresh, gave me every assistance.* (emphasis added)

This statement has two effects. First, it accrues legitimacy for Stewart's translation by stressing its pioneer status and emphasising that it closely conveys Mahfouz's intended meaning. It highlights that the translation was made with Mahfouz's assistance, produced in the same cultural milieu (Cairo) and created within close chronological and geographical proximity to its original Arabic production. Second, it questions the legitimacy of Mahfouz's help with Theroux's translation (flagged in the latter's text) by casting doubt on Mahfouz's memory, since he was 85 when Theroux's translation was published. This is confirmed by one of my personal exchanges with Stewart, in which he states: 'My experience of Mahfouz in his last 15 years suggested to me that he was probably senile and that he certainly was not an accurate guide to his own thoughts in the 1950s and 60s'.

This symbolically-violent battle to attain distinction continued in another article published on Stewart's website:

I was sent to represent Britain at the Cairo ceremony in honour of Mahfouz. He greeted me with great affection, told me he believed *I was his best translator and said 'You are my son'.* (Stewart 2001:n.p.; emphasis added)

By invoking Mahfouz's assertion that he perceived Stewart as his 'best translator' and 'son', Stewart endeavoured to secure authorial consecration for himself and his translation. In his Amazon review of Theroux's translation, Stewart (2000) went so far as to rate it one out of five stars. Stewart then reiterated Mahfouz's help with his own translation and, in a direct act of symbolic violence, discredited Theroux's translation by arguing that it includes 'various gross errors of translation', thus also suggesting that it was made without Mahfouz's assistance or, at least, does not reflect his original intentions (see Image 1). Notably, Stewart has recently edited his review, upgrading his rating from one to three stars and toning down his language extensively (see Image 2). Curious to know why

Stewart edited his review, I explicitly asked him about this in a personal correspondence. He responded: 'I've no idea who edited the Amazon review or why. I had even forgotten I ever wrote it'. Whether this is true or not, it remains the case that Stewart's purpose for posting the review was to undermine Theroux translation and affect its sales by actively discouraging readers from buying it, while drawing attention to his own translation and enticing readers to buy it instead, stressing its original status and that it was made with Mahfouz's help. This is implicitly confirmed in another personal correspondence, where Stewart states: '154 people found my review useful, so it served its purpose'.

Customer Review

118 of 134 people found the following review helpful:

★★★★☆ **A tale of two translations**, February 29, 2000

By **Pipistrel**

This review is from: **Children of the Alley: A Novel (Paperback)**

No one should buy this translation without first checking out the original version made in 1962 with the help of the author and in print since 1981. An updated version of this was published in 1997 as Children of Gebelaawi. The reason why there are two published versions is that after the threats to Mahfuz's life made in 1989 in the wake of the Rushdie affair, because of this novel, the translator (and author of this review), P J Stewart refused to sell his copyright to Doubleday for a world-wide relaunch, considering it more prudent to continue quietly publishing with the original American publisher, now renamed Passeggiata Press. The unsuccessful attempt on Mahfuz made in October 1994 confirmed the wisdom of this decision. The American University of Cairo Press, which owns the world rights, then commissioned Peter Theroux to make a new translation. However, Passeggiata continued to have the US paperback rights, which had been granted to it in 1981 (and in apparent violation of which Doubleday has published its paperback in the USA). As the translator of Children of Gebelaawi, I cannot decently comment on the quality of Theroux' version. Some people may like his use of English, which does not appeal to me. I have found various gross errors of translation of the Arabic, but no doubt a careful study of my version would find similar mistakes; neither of us is a native Arabic speaker. However, it does worry me that in some places he has made a mistake that was in my 1981 edition and which I have since corrected; at least one of these is such an improbable 'howler' that I cannot believe he did not use my translation. Theroux' version lacks an introduction, and I consider this a grave lacuna. The history of the book is deeply interesting in itself and needs to be told. The novel also needs some explaining: why did Mahfuz, the deep psychological observer, write a book so apparently lacking in subtlety; and what is the secret message of the book? All this is tackled in the extensive introduction to Children of Gebelaawi. One more point: Theroux, like all other translators, uses the Arabic text published, without the author's participation, in Beirut in 1967. It is full of typos, but also - mysteriously - it includes words and whole sentences missing from the original Egyptian serialization, suggesting that the publisher had access to the missing manuscript. Children of Gebelaawi is the only version in any language to be based on both the source texts.


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Was this review helpful to you?

Review Details

Item



[Children of the Alley: A Novel](#)

★★★★☆ (21 customer reviews)

5 star: (11)

4 star: (6)


3 star: (1)

2 star: (1)

1 star: (2)

~~\$16.00~~ **\$9.90**

Reviewer



Pipistrel

Location: Oxford United Kingdom

New Reviewer Rank: 775,557

Classic Reviewer Rank: 40,873

[See all 11 reviews](#)

Image 1: Stewart's Amazon review of Theroux's translation (captured April 2011)

Customer Review

 Pipistrel

★★★★☆ **A tale of two translations**

February 29, 2000

Format: Paperback

No one should buy this translation without first checking out the original version made in 1962 with the help of the author and in print since 1981. An updated version of this was published in 1997 as Children of Gebelaawi.

154 people found this helpful

Product Details



[Children of the Alley: A Novel](#)
by Mahfouz, Naguib

★★★★☆ 4.6 out of 5

36 customer ratings



\$13.40 + Free shipping with Amazon Prime

Image 2: Stewart's edited review on Amazon (captured January 2020)

However, Theroux also used epitexts to assert his direct access to Mahfouz and hence his better, more thorough understanding of *Awlād Ḥāratinā*. In his two articles about his translation, Theroux (2001/2002:669, 2012:400) states:

Mahfouz never expressed to me any explicit opinion on whether he thought a new translation to be necessary or not, *but he was always open to queries about the language of the book, and enjoyed hearing passages from the new translation read aloud.* (emphasis added)

Theroux clearly questions the legitimacy of Stewart's translation by invoking the 'language of the book', which can be construed as a way to call into question Stewart's understanding of Mahfouz's intended meaning and to delegitimise the translation altogether. The verb 'enjoyed' (combined with the emphasised 'new' translation) further substantiates this argument, suggesting that Mahfouz considered Theroux's translation more accurate than Stewart's—or, at least, a more culturally-enjoyable experience. The claim is even further corroborated by Theroux's statement that Mahfouz was 'beaming' while Theroux was 'bellowing the first page of the [translation's] preface' for him (2001/2002:669). Further evidence of these dynamics emerges from the answer I received from Theroux when I asked him about what he believed distinguishes his translation from Stewart's:

Since you are fluent in Arabic and English, and are an expert on this book, I am sure that you can reach your own conclusions of the comparative quality of my work and Stewart's. *My main aims were to use American English and always err on the side of being literal. Most of the bad qualities of previous Mahfouz translations involved translators who liked to omit or paraphrase to make the text sound more to their liking in English. When I had questions, I turned to Mr. Mahfouz himself.* (emphasis added)

This statement not only reaffirms Mahfouz's active involvement in and approval of Theroux's translation, but also clearly questions the language of Stewart's translation—who stated, in his 1997 edition, that he had taken 'slight liberties' in producing his translation, replacing 'some of the foods and drinks...with the nearest equivalent familiar outside the Arab world' and translating nicknames 'with a great deal of freedom' to make the text more accessible to the target audience. Indirectly, Theroux is also questioning Mahfouz's involvement with Stewart's translation. Thus, both translators engaged in a symbolically-violent battle for ascendancy via a range of paratextual means, including prefaces, articles and even Amazon reviews.

Claiming to have produced a better translation: The struggle for translation ratification

In their paratextual struggles, Stewart and Theroux each claimed to have produced a better translation. They did so by stating that they had based their translations on the full version of Mahfouz's novel, emphasising their dedication to producing a faithful rendition of the source text and Mahfouz's intentions, and flagging the deficiencies of each other's translations. While both claimed

to have reflected at length on their source, in reality, they were also reflecting on and engaging with each other's translations.

In the introductions to all editions of Stewart's translation, his investment in symbolic capital is evident through his emphasis on his translation's positive (or superlative) qualities. In the 1997 introduction, Stewart outlines how he undertook the painstaking task of comparing both *Al-Ahram* and Dar Al-Adab texts to construct a 'correct' and 'complete' version of *Awlād Ḥāratinā*, pointing out multiple discrepancies and arguing for the unassailable quality of his *Children of Gebelaawi*, which he pronounced as 'the only version in any language to take full account of both the original sources'. This assertion of authority distinguishes Stewart not only from Theroux, but also from any contemporaneous translators of Mahfouz's text (*cf.* Stewart 2000). In his 1995 and 1997 editions, Stewart writes: 'The translation here offered is aimed at the general reader with no prior knowledge of the Arab world; no words have been used that cannot be found in a good English dictionary' (Stewart 1995:x, 1997:xviii). Such pronouncements portray Stewart as a faithful, conscientious and talented translator, thus ascribing his translation a prominent position in the field. In the Bourdieusian sense (*cf.* Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:99), these examples may be interpreted as 'position-takings', unconsciously oriented by symbolic violence: a strategy to amass cultural capital that may later be transformed into symbolic and/or economic capital.

By contrast, Theroux claims distinction for his translation by tactfully criticising Stewart and his work. After acknowledging his awareness of an existing translation when he agreed to undertake the retranslation, Theroux (2001/2002:668) poses the following rhetorical question:

Why did Doubleday not use it? AUC Press officials implied that they and [Doubleday]...preferred not to republish that translation, which was the work of Philip Stewart. The truth may have been that AUC *wanted to commission a new edition that—*unlike Stewart's perfectly adequate work—*would produce income for them.* The new translation of the book would be commissioned by AUC Press, but—like Stewart's pioneering work—would not be available in Egypt. (emphasis added)

This statement discredits Stewart's translation by attempting to delegitimise its popularity among readers and its usefulness to publishers. Furthermore, in an act of symbolic violence, it implies that Theroux's translation was intended either to overcome the textual deficiencies of and the deviations from Mahfouz's original text in Stewart's work or to produce a new, more accessible translation for the target culture and audience. Notably, this statement also reads like a response to Stewart's (2000) explanation of why there are two translations of Mahfouz's novel. Stewart (*ibid.*) declared he refused to sell his translation rights to AUCP and Doubleday. Conversely, Theroux undermined this explanation, claiming that AUCP and Doubleday refused to buy Stewart's translation rights, indicating a problem with Stewart's work. This is evident in a response I received from Theroux when I asked him

to elaborate on what he meant by the above quotation. He stated: 'Putting AUCP aside for the moment, Doubleday [particularly referring to Jacqueline Onassis] didn't like [Stewart's] translation of *Awlad Haratina* [...and] decided against using [it]'.

Although Theroux's description of Stewart's translation as 'perfectly adequate' and 'pioneering' could be considered truthful, evidence suggests that these statements were made to either prevent further tensions or damn the earlier translation with faint praise. This is apparent in Theroux's 2012 article, in which the above excerpt was altered as follows:

I acquired a copy of *Awlad Haratina* in Cairo in 1990 and was quick to agree to translate it when the American University in Cairo (AUC) Press offered me the job. A *mostly complete translation* of the Egyptian text *already existed* at that point; it was titled *Children of Gebelaawi*. The work by an *Englishman*, Philip Stewart, *had not yet been published*. The new translation of the book would be commissioned by AUC Press, but like Stewart's work, would not be available in Egypt. (2012:400; emphasis added)

This quotation contradicts Theroux's earlier assertion. Despite describing Stewart's translation as a 'perfectly adequate' and 'pioneering' work in 2001/2002, Theroux, in another act of symbolic violence, labelled it a 'mostly complete translation' in 2012. This is a clear example of him questioning the legitimacy and discrediting the authority of Stewart's translation to claim distinction for his own. Theroux also alleged that Stewart's translation 'had not yet been published' when he undertook his translation in 1990. This claim is an attempt to delegitimise Stewart's translation and throw it 'out of history', rendering Theroux's own translation the pioneer and inserting it firmly 'into history'.⁸ By (intentionally or unintentionally) using the title of Stewart's revised augmented editions of 1990, 1995 and 1997 (i.e., *Children of Gebelaawi*, rather than *Children of Gebelawi*), the latter of which Stewart (2010:n.p.) claims to be 'the only complete version in any language', Theroux engages in another act of symbolic violence by attempting to discredit Stewart's work altogether. Theroux's use of the qualifier 'Englishman' to describe (or delegitimise) Stewart, despite the latter's academic capital, further substantiates this claim.⁹

⁸ Interestingly, since Stewart's translation, in all its editions, was only published in paperback, and since Stewart continuously asserted the original status of his translation, in a seemingly stark act of appropriation, the copyright page of Theroux's paperback edition bears a striking difference to his hardcover edition in that the copyright year for the translation is changed from 1996 (hardcover) to 1959 (paperback). This is the same year that Mahfouz's novel was published, insinuating to readers, calculatedly or inadvertently, that Theroux's edition was produced earlier than Stewart's, pushing Stewart's 'out of history'.

⁹ It is conjectured that Theroux's use of this term to describe Stewart speaks to another layer of symbolic violence, exemplified in the inherent cultural-political relationships between the UK and the US—the respective countries of Stewart and Theroux—with some Arabic-speaking nations (cf. Zamir 2015:142–144). Paratextual elements are used here as a means of channelling the conflicts of both translators' nations over this geo-political region within the context of their personal conflict.

Stewart also mocked Theroux's translation and, in turn, attempted to write it 'out of history'. In response to the preceding quotations, Stewart (2001:n.p.) wrote:

Peter Theroux has described my work as 'perfectly adequate'. I have to say frankly that I consider his barely adequate. I will not complain about his mistranslations of the Arabic, since I am no doubt guilty of some too (neither of us is a native speaker). It does bother me though that he has reproduced a number of the more improbable ones in my first edition.

Elsewhere, Stewart (2010:n.p.) asserts:

There are places where Theroux reproduces [linguistic] mistakes that I made in my 1981 edition, amounting cumulatively to strong evidence of plagiarism. (*cf.* Stewart 2000)

(Re)Translators' linguistic choices can be used, as Hanna (2016:151) argues, to: 'partly determine whether or not the new translation is capable of pushing the previous translation "into the past" and hence achieving distinction in the field'. By flagging textual deficiencies in Theroux's translation and accusing him of plagiarism, Stewart pugnaciously underscores the ostensibly superior qualities of his own work, pushing Theroux's translation 'into the past' despite its being the most recent version chronologically. Stewart (2000) also criticised Dar Al-Adab's version of Mahfouz's novel, on which Theroux based his translation, claiming that it is 'full of typos' and was published 'without [Mahfouz's] participation'. Similarly, in his letter to Donald Herdeck of 3CP (Harry Ransom Center, 3CP Archives, Box 13, Philip Stewart, 20 February 1996), Stewart asserts that his translation (compared to Theroux's) 'is based on a *better* Arabic text...and is therefore closer to the author's original intentions' (emphasis added). These statements distinguish Stewart's work and imply that Theroux's translation is incomplete, deficient, and lacks authority and value. Such pronouncements are, in Bourdieusian terms, acts of symbolic violence, whereby Stewart attempted to influence the distribution of symbolic capital to assert the primacy of his position in relation to that of his competitor (i.e., Theroux).

Theroux was quick to defend his translation's legitimacy and distinction and to refute claims that it might be incomplete. Specifically, Theroux asserted: 'The Beirut edition—fifth edition, 1986—[...] had the virtue of being, to use the standard redundancy, complete and unexpurgated' (2012:400). Elsewhere, he claimed that 'the translation took a year to do, a blissful year *in the hands of a master*' (Theroux 2001/2002:670; emphasis added). This statement appears to be an attempt by Theroux to consecrate, yet also distance himself from, the source text he relied on while producing his translation, as evidenced by his use of the words 'in the hands of', which simultaneously imply the author's agency and somehow eliminate that of the translator. This is further evidenced by Theroux's response to a question I sent him asking why he used Dar Al-Adab's version and whether there was any significance to this. Theroux responded: 'I used the Dar al-Adab edition because that is [what] AUCP provided me with and directed me to translate from. Then-AUCP director Arnold Tovell

personally handed me the book in Cairo'. This statement distances Theroux even further from responsibility, while emphasising the legitimacy of the Dar Al-Adab version on which he relied—a version that is authorised and approved by Mahfouz's worldwide translation agent and, therefore, by proxy, Mahfouz himself. In another act of symbolic violence, Theroux (2001/2002:667–668, 2012:400) attacked Stewart's translation again, insinuating that the serialised Egyptian text on which Stewart based his work had been expurgated:

The serialized Egyptian text—published after Mahfouz was stabbed—had struck out some scriptural parallels that were probably too direct for some readers. For example, the Egyptian text cut out a brief passage—describing the first meeting of Umaima [Eve] and Adham [Adam]—where Umaima's shadow appears to emerge from the ribcage of the shadow of Adham'.

This reads as an attempt to attack the basis of Stewart's translation and affirm the primacy of Theroux's. It indicates that Stewart's work is based on an incomplete form of Mahfouz's novel and is, therefore, incomplete itself. It further distinguishes Theroux's translation—legitimising its existence and choice of source text (i.e., Dar Al-Adab's version)—and endows authority to it, undermining Stewart's translation by questioning its authenticity and dismissing it as deficient. This was an effort to carve out a place for Theroux's translation by displacing Stewart's.

While my focus has been firmly on the translators of Mahfouz *Awlād Ḥāratinā*, the observations I have made so far highlight the intersection between them and a number of other agents in the field. Here, it is important to note the additional roles played by each translation's co-producers and how they deployed their own marks of distinction in symbolically-violent assertions to legitimise and consecrate particular translations and translators in their rivalries with earlier, later or synchronous (re)translations. For instance, Roger Allen, a prominent scholar of Arabic literature, asserts 'the interesting historical fact that the only version of *Awlad haratina* that contains the complete text of the original serialised novel is the latest edition of Philip Stewart's English translation' (2010:479). Allen (2019:121) adds elsewhere that Theroux's translation is 'based entirely on the less than satisfactory Beirut book version', thus implying that Theroux's translation is incomplete. Such comments distinguish and legitimise Stewart's translation at the expense of Theroux's. Similarly, co-producers of Theroux's translation used the epitext to push Stewart's work 'out of history'. For example, writer and journalist Patrick Rengger (1996:C19) states: '*Children of the Alley* was originally published in 1959 in Arabic and has now been brought into English by Peter Theroux'. By suggesting that Theroux's translation was the first to be published in English, Rengger claims distinction and legitimacy for it and delegitimises Stewart's translation by, effectively, denying its existence. Similarly, Raymond Stock (2018), Mahfouz's biographer, hails Theroux's translation as 'today's standard

translation'. Stock thus legitimises Theroux's translation by pushing it firmly 'into history' and indirectly writes Stewart's translation 'out of history' by implicitly deeming it outdated.

Conclusion

Retranslations are products of socio-historical events and interactions, fashioned by tensions between social agents. Commissioned and produced by one set of social agents (e.g., translators, publishers), they are promoted or demoted, consecrated or deconsecrated, by another set of social agents (e.g., reviewers, booksellers) for the consumption of still other social agents (e.g., readers, researchers) within a social space of positions and power relations. As such, retranslations ought not be studied in isolation from the translatorial agents who commission, produce and circulate them; the struggles between these agents; or the social conditionings that govern the commissioning, production and consumption of the agents' cultural products.

This article investigated the two English translations of Mahfouz's *Awlād Ḥāratinā* as a social activity, riddled with contention and rivalry between translators by examining the paratexts involved. Bourdieu claims that the existence of any work of art within a cultural production field is conditioned by a symbolic power relation. At issue is the continuous struggle for capital, which turns on having a monopoly on imposing categories for legitimate perception and appreciation. The struggle for capital gives meaning to distinctions between the dominant and the dominated, the elite and the masses, the veterans and the challengers. This article also revisited the traditional view of retranslation as the act of producing a better or updated translation, with retranslations evolving in a linear fashion. Drawing on Bourdieu's sociology, an alternative interpretation of retranslation, as an act of symbolic violence and a tool of domination for attaining and maintaining social distinction and legitimacy, was proposed. An analysis of the paratexts of the two English translations of *Awlād Ḥāratinā* demonstrated that the translator and retranslator exercised symbolic violence to insert themselves and their translations 'into history', 'into the eternal present of consecrated culture' (Bourdieu 1996:156), and to 'push' their rival's work 'out of history'. The analysis revealed how (re)translations can be employed as tools of domination, consecrating specific translators and their translations while deconsecrating others, legitimising particular source texts while delegitimising others, and raising the statuses of certain translation co-producers while discrediting others.

Overall, this article's findings suggest that a Bourdieusian perspective can expand and enrich our understanding and theorising of retranslation. They also illustrate that retranslation should not be perceived as a mere act of linguistic or stylistic improvement but as a site for struggle and competition where differences between translatorial agents are created and maintained. What gets (re)translated,

what does not, and why is always, at least partly, the result of power being exercised, a claim of legitimacy and distinction, or a reflection of authority.

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