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Shifting voices: A comparison of two novelists' translations of a third

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RÉSUMÉ

Cette étude compare les versions anglaise et française du récit autobiographique de Mohamed Choukri, qui fut écrit en arabe sous le titre *Al khubs al hafi*. Ces traductions se distinguent par le fait qu'elles furent publiées bien avant l'apparition de la version source, et par le fait que toutes les deux sont l'œuvre de romanciers renommés (Paul Bowles et Tahar Ben Jelloun) alors que Choukri lui-même était un inconnu. La comparaison révèle de nombreux contrastes. La version anglaise utilise un style lapidaire et souvent disloqué, un vocabulaire courant et beaucoup de répétitions, alors que la version française adopte une syntaxe plus élaborée et un vocabulaire plus spécialisé et plus varié. D'autres différences concernent le contenu : la version anglaise reste souvent plus implicite et pourtant fournit des détails plus choquants, et elle utilise l'exoticisme tandis que la version française emploie souvent la naturalisation. Il semble que ces différences proviennent de l'impact des styles personnels des deux romanciers, qui se révèlent même dans leurs traductions d'un troisième auteur.

ABSTRACT

This paper compares the English and French translations of Mohamed Choukri's autobiographical work originally written in Arabic under the title *Al khubs al hafi*. The translations are somewhat unusual in that both were published long before the source text became available, and in that they were done by two renowned novelists (Paul Bowles and Tahar Ben Jelloun) while Choukri himself was a completely unknown writer. The comparison reveals many contrasts. The English version favours a fragmentary, often disjointed style, with simple everyday vocabulary and frequent repetition, while the French version uses more sophisticated syntax and more specialised and varied lexis. There are also differences in content; the English version often remains more implicit than the French and yet provides more horrific details, and it frequently opts for foreignization where the French features the strategy of domestication. It is suggested that these contrasts reflect the ways in which the novelists' own voices have influenced the way in which they express the voice of Choukri.

MOTS-CLÉS/KEYWORDS

literary translation, style, adaptation, fidelity, foreignization/domestication

An autobiographical novel is by definition one in which we expect to encounter the author's own voice, with all it can reveal to us of the author's personality, outlook and experience. The translation of this kind of work, then, constitutes a particular challenge. Can readers of a translated autobiography assume that what they are reading is indeed the authentic voice of the author? Or does the shift of language also entail a shift of perspective, so that the translated version becomes more like a biography than an autobiography? With the aim of exploring these questions, this paper makes an examination and comparison of the opening pages of two translations of

the Moroccan writer Mohamed Choukri's first book, which bears the Arabic title *Al Khobz al Hafi* (literally, "dry bread"). While it could be read as a straight novel, there is no question that this book is in fact a narration of the first twenty years of its author's life; the prefaces of both the English and French versions present it as such, and the first person narrator is in fact called Mohamed Choukri even within the story.

The book is unusual for a number of reasons. Its author remained illiterate until adulthood; it was only at the age of twenty that he started attending school and learned to read and write. He went on to produce the original manuscript of the book, written in Standard Arabic, in 1972. However, the content of the work was considered so shocking, controversial, even pornographic that he could find no Arabic-language publisher willing to accept the manuscript. Instead, its first exposure to the public was via an English translation by Paul Bowles entitled *For Bread Alone*, which was published by Peter Owen in London in 1973. This was followed by a French version, the translation by Tahar Ben Jelloun, which was published by Maspero in Paris in 1980 under the title *Le Pain Nu*. In spite, or perhaps because of, the success of these versions, Choukri's image in the Arab world remained highly suspect; he was regarded as a highly controversial figure, classified among "les marginaux et les exclus de la littérature marocaine" (Mouzouni 1987: 150). It was not until 1982 that Choukri finally paid himself for the Arabic version to be printed and distributed by Imprimerie An Nahah Al Jadida in Casablanca, Morocco.

The book was thus known in translation long before it appeared in its original language. This situation has produced something of a role reversal between the different versions of the book. Whereas in most cases the source language version of a text would unquestioningly be taken as the authoritative reference, and all translations seen as variants on this, for Choukri's work the situation is more complex. It is not easy to say, for instance, whether differences between the English and Arabic versions of the book result from the translator's manipulations of the original, or whether they may be attributed to modifications made to the original text by Choukri himself between the time when he first dictated the story to Bowles and that when the Arabic version was finally published. In a sense, then, we can say that the English version is a translation without an available authoritative source text. This seems all the more true when we learn, from Bowles' preface to the book, the circumstances in which the English text was produced: while Choukri's original manuscript was written in Standard Arabic, Bowles, not being a specialist in written Arabic, proceeded to translate, not directly from this, but from the oral version which Choukri dictated to him. He thus presumably had the opportunity to stop and question Choukri about his intended meaning and preferred translation at any point, and he remarks that they used French and Spanish to clarify details.

Since the majority of Moroccans would not have been able to read the English version of Choukri's book, it was not until the French version appeared that the work was accessible to Choukri's own fellow-countrymen, at any rate to the educated classes for whom French was a second language. Ironically, then, it was in translation that Choukri's work first reached Moroccan readers. Because of this, discussions of the work in Morocco sometimes seem to view the French version as the definitive one, and it is sometimes quoted as if it were an original text rather than a translation. For instance, it is surely significant that Mouzouni (1987) includes Choukri in his study

entitled *Le Roman Marocain de Langue Française,* which even features a photograph of him on the cover.

Even the status of Choukri's translators may be judged a little unusual. In fact, the reputations of both of them were such that they were both already well known among the audiences for whom they translated Choukri. Thus the American and British readers who encountered *For Bread Alone* (henceforth FBA) were likely to be familiar with Paul Bowles, whereas the name Mohamed Choukri meant nothing to them; and similarly, the French public reading *Le Pain Nu* (henceforth LPN) would have recognised Ben Jelloun's name but not Choukri's. Neither Bowles nor Ben Jelloun was primarily known as a translator, although Bowles had in fact done a number of translations from Spanish, French and Moroccan Arabic. Instead both were already highly esteemed and respected novelists in their own right, and indeed they probably remain more famous within their respective communities of readers than Choukri has ever been in France, the USA or the UK.

The two share some other common elements. Both are well known for their own novels set in Morocco and featuring Moroccan characters, though there is an interesting opposition between the paths they have followed. Thus Bowles, an American by birth, came to live in Morocco in the late 40s and remained resident there until his death in 1999, whereas Ben Jelloun, born in Fes, has moved in the opposite direction and now spends much of his time in France. However, neither Ben Jelloun, the Moroccan by birth, nor Bowles, who after 50 years of residence could perhaps be regarded as a Moroccan by adoption, targets a predominantly Moroccan audience for their own works. Writing in English and publishing his works in the US, Bowles clearly had an American audience in mind, while Ben Jelloun, despite the fact that his French texts are immediately accessible to educated Moroccans, seems to write primarily for readers in his adopted homeland, France. Moroccan critics have often reproached him for this stance (see, for instance, Boughali 1987, El Outmani 1997) Moreover, both novelists have been reproached for sustaining an Orientalist discourse in their works, using Morocco as a theme which might satisfy Western readers' taste for cheap exoticism; thus Boughali accuses Ben Jelloun of an "exoticisme provocateur" (1987: 129) and describes him as an "amuseur exotique" (1987: 123), while El Outmani, discussing Ben Jelloun, comments that there is no worse Orientalism than that emanating from the Orientals themselves (1997: 324). Both writers have also frequently been castigated by Moroccan intellectuals for presenting a negative view of Moroccan society (see, for instance, Edwards (2000) on Bowles and Boughhali (1987) on Ben Jelloun).

Interestingly, relations between Choukri, Bowles and Ben Jelloun have not always been amicable. In his last years, Choukri wrote an inflammatory account of Bowles' lifestyle and publicly reproached him for a lack of respect for Moroccans (Choukri 1997), to which Bowles responded in an interview that Choukri himself was sick. As for Bowles and Ben Jelloun, the latter actually made scathing remarks about Bowles' translations from the Arabic, accusing him of a lack of insight into Moroccan culture; he observed that Bowles failed to transcribe 'la réalité marocaine qui, malgré l'implantation de Bowles à Tanger, lui échappe totalement' (Ben Jelloun 1972: 21). Yet a few years later he himself opted to translate Choukri's text into French. The three novelists thus form an intriguing trio, their attitudes and intentions with regard to one another remaining ambivalent to say the least. What we can conclude fairly

confidently about the two translators, however, is that, given that they both took time out from their own creative work in order to undertake the translation of Choukri's book, they must have felt a degree of commitment towards this text, a firm belief in its value, a certain identification with it, and above all a sense that it would succeed in communicating with their respective target audiences.

However, the backgrounds of the two writers lead us to raise the question of the extent to which their own writing experience has influenced their translations. Might it not be the case that in transmitting Choukri's text to their respective target audiences, Bowles and Ben Jelloun were also creating texts of their own? Even the professional who is first and foremost a translator, and whose prime mission is the transmission of the voice of the original author with minimal distortion or intervention, may on occasion be judged to have twisted or transformed, supplemented or depeleted a source text, with results which may or may not be judged favorably. In the case of Bowles and Ben Jelloun, who were above all novelists in their own right, already acclaimed and with an audience waiting for their next production, then, it would not be entirely surprising to find their translations influenced by their own techniques of novel writing, so that their own authorial voices find expression in the translation of Choukri's text.

Given the context in which Choukri's book was translated, then, a comparison between the French and English versions of Choukri's book seems worth undertaking. The present study will restrict its attention to the opening passages of the two versions. The story begins when Mohamed, as a young boy, moves with his parents and younger brother from the Rif mountains to live in Tangier. Their move is part of the large-scale exodus from rural areas in the 30s and 40s by people seeking to escape drought and starvation. Mohamed's father is a drunkard who has spent time in prison and is quite incapable of supporting his family; instead his mother has to sell vegetables to earn a little money, and Mohamed learns at a very young age that he must do whatever is necessary to survive. He gathers scraps from the bins and from café tables, does various menial jobs, steals and even prostitutes himself. He soon begins to drink and smoke kif, discovers prostitutes, sells contraband goods and gets locked up in a police station. At the end of the book he finally resolves that the only way to improve his lot is to obtain some education and therefore he enrols in school even though he is by now twenty years old. As well as telling Mohamed's own story and expressing his perceptions of the harsh world he was born into, the book also provides a graphic description of a whole community struggling with abject poverty and lack of opportunity.

The novel opens as the family is walking wearily towards Tangier along with many other families. Along the road the young Mohamed sees animals that have starved to death, and as the weakest of the migrants also die, they are buried at the roadside before their relatives continue on their way. Hopes of a better life soon fade, as the family is installed in a single room, Mohamed goes out scavenging for food in the dustbins, and his small brother Abdelqader lies at home sick. His father can find no work, but regularly beats his mother, and one day in a fit of rage strangles Abdelqader. The murder is hushed up, but Mohamed is left harbouring feelings of terror and hatred towards his father.

In both texts these events are recounted in a simple, dispassionate way, the horrific details set out in a matter-of-fact style. In reading both one is struck by the frequent use of simple, often very short, sentences., but there are differences in the degree

to which this type of sentence structure is present in the two versions. For instance, what is expressed by Bowles in two or three simple sentences is often conveyed by Ben Jelloun through a single complex or coordinate sentence.

1) One afternoon I could not stop crying. I was hungry. (FBA. p. 9)
2) Un soir j'eus tellement faim que je ne savais plus comment arrêter mes larmes. (LPN, p. 11)
3) No. He'll kill me. He killed Abdelqader. (FBA, p. 12)
4) Non! Il va me tuer comme il vient de tuer mon frère. (LPN, p. 14)
5) I begin to pull off the feathers. I hear her voice. (FBL, p. 11)
6) Je me mis à la plumer quand j'entendis la voix de ma mere. (LPN, p. 12)

Moreover, in each of the English extracts above, one is struck by the lack of linking words which might signal the relations between the events narrated. In contrast, the French versions explicitly indicate these relations, with signals of result (*tellement… que*), manner (*comme*) and temporal sequence (*quand*). In fact, over and over again, we find the English narrative to be made up of disjointed statements, with each detail, fact or feeling presented separately, in its own independent sentence, whereas the French version flows more smoothly as one point is clearly linked to the next. A similar contrast is found in the opening lines of the novel:

7) Surrounded by the other boys of the neighborhood, I stand crying. My uncle is dead. Some of them are crying, too. (FBA, p. 9)
8) Nous étions plusieurs enfants à pleurer la mort de mon oncle. (LPN, p. 11)

The French version here explicitly states that the tears shed by Mohamed and the other children are for the dead uncle, whereas in English one is not obliged to make this intepretation; Mohamed's crying is separated from mention of the death, as it is from that of the crying of the other children, so that it is possible to interpret the whole in ways which are excluded in the French version. Mohamed may be crying for himself, and the other children's tears need not necessarily be solidary ones, as is implied in the French.

The more dislocated, less explicit style of the English version is also seen in parts where Bowles uses incomplete sentence fragments in contrast to Ben Jelloun's tidy and complete sentences:

9) Your brother is with Allah. With the angels. (FBA, p. 13)
10) Ton frère est reparti chez Dieu. A présent il est avec les anges. (LPN, p. 13)
11) Mother in the city, Abdelqader propped against the cushions. (FBA, p. 10)
12) Mes parents n'étaient pas à la maison. Seul mon frère était étendu. (LPN, p. 12)

Even where the English version does use sentences composed of more than one clause, these often involve merely coordination, whereas their French counterparts display a greater variety of structures, exploiting various types of subordination as well as coordination.

13) I run outdoors and hear him stopping my mother's screams with kicks in the face. I hid and waited for the end of the battle. (FBA, p. 11)
14) Effrayé, je sors de la pièce pendant qu'il essaie de faire taire ma mere en la battant et en l'étouffant. Je me suis caché. (LPN, p. 13)

The examples cited so far may also illustrate another difference between the two versions: the fact that the French specifically states what is only implicit in the English

version. For instance, in (5) the mother is not explicitly identified but referred to only by the pronoun *her,* whereas in (6) she is clearly specified by *ma mère*; in (9), Mohamed is told simply that his brother is with God, whereas the French states that he has gone back to God, and adds the specification of present time (*à présent*) for more emphasis. Another example where the French is more explicit than the English is seen in the contrast between (13) and (14), where the narrator seems to be summing up his experience of the difference between the two sexes:

15) Les hommes battent les femmes. Les femmes pleurent et crient. (LPN, p. 14)
16) Men hit. Women scream and weep. (FBL, p. 14)

The stark generalization encapsulated in the two syllable sentence *Men hit*, whose concision is achieved by using the verb *hit* intransitively, seems more shocking than the French sentence with its unexceptional syntax. The English version also offers a closer parallelism between the two statements, which in turn reinforces the opposition between them. Thus in English the two statements seem to present what the child narrator sees as the inherent properties of men and women. In the French, where this parallelism is less pronounced, and where *les femmes* is used first as object and then as subject, the second statement seems more likely to be read as indicating a consequence of the action of the men, rather than an inherent characteristic of women.

As can be observed in extracts like (13) and (14), both narratives switch back and forth between the past and present tenses, without there being any apparent motive for the shifts. In both cases this kind of alternation imparts a spontaneous, unedited tone to the texts, and is reminiscent of the alternation which is common, in both English and French, in oral narratives such as jokes and anecdotes. However, here again there are differences, as may be seen by comparing the accounts of Mohamed's attempt to kill in the ritual fashion a hen which is in fact already dead. Here the English version has frequent shifts back and forth, whereas the French is set consistently in the past, and indeed in the *passé simple*, the tense reserved for formal and literary style.

17) I turn towards the east, as my mother always does when she is about to pray. I said: Bismillah. Allahou akbar. And I kill it as I have seen grown-ups do it. I drew the knife back and forth across its throat until its head fell off. I was waiting to see the blood come out. I massage the bird a little. Maybe it will come out now. A few drops of blackish blood appeared in its open gullet. (FBA, p. 10-11)
18) Je pris un couteau et me mis dans la direction de la priere. J'égorgeai la bête. Pas de sang. A peine une goutte. (LPN, p. 12)

It will also be noted here that the English text contains many details not included in the French; the significance of this contrast will be discussed below.

There are also obvious contrasts in the level of vocabulary chosen by the two translators. In many places, Bowles seems to opt for the most banal everyday expressions, whereas Ben Jelloun uses more elaborate or specialised phrasings. Thus the French version has the specialised verb *plumer* whereas the English expresses this meaning by using more basic vocabulary: *pull off the feathers* (see examples (5) and (6) above).

A noticeable contrast can be seen between the descriptions of Abdelqader's reaction when his brother brings home the dead hen:

19) He sees the hen and his eyes open wide. He smiles, his thin face flushes, he moves, coughs. (FBA, p. 10)
20) Quand il vit la poule, une lueur traversa son regard. Il eut un sourire. Une lueur de vie traversa son visage amaigri. Il haletait tout en toussant. (LPN, p. 12)

Bowles's description here is presented in a series of parallel main clauses, each using a verb in the simple present; *sees, open, smiles, flushes, moves, coughs*. The picture is built up through a series of plain statements about the reactions of the child. Ben Jelloun's structures are more varied, including subordinate clauses (*quand il vit la poule, tout en toussant*), and his description of the child's face makes use of the abstract nouns *lueur* (twice), *regard* and *sourire*. The single word *coughs* in the English corresponds to the syntactically and semantically more elaborate *Il haletait tout en toussant* in French.

More striking still, perhaps, is the contrast between the versions of Mohamed's own words as he tells his mother about the hen:

21) I found it. It was sick. But I killed it before it died. (FBA, p. 11)
22) Je l'ai trouvée. Elle était un peu fatiguée, alors je l'ai égorgée avant qu'elle ne rende l'âme. (LPN, p. 13)

Here again we have more specific vocabulary in the French (*égorger* as opposed to the vaguer *kill*, *un peu fatigué* as opposed to *sick*), but most notable is the contrast between the last clauses: the English uses the basic verb *die,* the French the rather flowery euphemism *rendre l'âme*.

Similarly, Ben Jelloun places the somewhat technical term *détritus* in the mouth of the small boy who accompanies Mohamed in his search of the dustbins, presumably to avoid repetition of the more everyday term *poubelles*, which is used in the previous sentence. Bowles, on the other hand, has no scruples about repeating the everyday word *garbage*:

23) Tu sais, les poubelles de la ville nouvelle sont plus intéressantes que celles de notre quartier. Les détritus des chrétiens sont plus riches que ceux des musulmans… (LPN, p. 12)
24) The garbage in the middle of town is a lot better than it is here, he said. Nazarene garbage is the best. (FBA, p. 10)

Indeed, while Ben Jelloun seeks to vary both syntactic structure and vocabulary, Bowles not only tolerates repetition but exploits it as an emphatic device. Thus, in the following extract, the word *bread* is repeated to suggest the child's direct and inarticulate plea, while the repetition of *Shut up* emphasises the aggressiveness of the father's response:

25) When my father came in I was sobbing, and repeating the word bread over and over. Bread. Bread. Bread. Bread. Then he began to slap and kick me, crying: Shut up! Shut up! Shut up! If you're hungry, eat your mother's heart. (FBA, p. 9)
Neither of these triple repetitions is present in the French:
26) Mon père, furieux, me donna des coups de pied en hurlant;
- Arrête, fils de pute, tu mangeras, tu mangeras avant même ta mère. (LPN, p. 11)

A striking example of the way in which Bowles exploits repetition and Ben Jelloun apparently seeks to avoid it is provided by the following passages:

27) I wanted to cry out: He killed him! Yes. He killed him. I saw him kill him. He did it. He killed him! I saw him. He twisted his neck around, and the blood ran out of his mouth. I saw it. I saw him kill him! He killed him! (FBA, p. 12-13)
28) J'ai failli dire: «Mon père n'aimait pas mon frère. D'ailleurs, c'est lui qui l'a tué. Oui, je dis bien tué. Assassiné. Je l'ai vu. J'ai assisté au meurtre. C'est lui qui l'a tué. Je l'ai vu. Il lui a tordu le cou. Le sang a giclé de sa bouche. Je l'ai vu de mes propres yeux. C'est mon père son assassin.» (LPN, p. 14-15)

In both of these passages, there are essentially two assertions: that the father killed Abdelqader, and that Mohamed witnessed this event. In English, these facts are asserted repeatedly using the same two verbs, *kill,* which is used six times, and *see,* which recurs four times. The sentence *He killed him* is repeated four times, and another four sentences begin with *I saw*. In contrast, for the first assertion the French version resorts to the verb *assassiner* as well as *tuer,* and also uses the nouns *meurtre* and *assassin*, thus varying the structure as well as the vocabulary, while for the second it includes the verb *assister* as well as *voir.* Also contributing to the difference in effects here is the fact that the French is more explicit, using *mon père* and *mon frère* where the English has only *he* and *him*. In addition, the French uses the specific expressions *tordre le cou* and *gicler,* whereas in the English we find, not the specific term *strangle*, but the more general *twist his neck around,* and the blood is simply said to *run out.*

Some of the differences noted so far may in fact be related to general stylistic contrasts between French and English discourse patterns: to differences in what Delisle (1980: 227), with a nod of apology to linguistic theoreticians, refers to as the 'génie de la langue.' So, for instance, it has repeatedly been observed that English tends to use coordination where French would use subordination (see, for instance, Delisle 1980: 198, Duron 1963: 104) and that French texts tend to be more explicitly structured through the use of connectives than English ones (Hervey and Higgins 1992: 49). The tendency for French discourse to favour the use of nouns where other languages, English in particular, would use verbs, adjectives or adverbs has also been noted by more than one commentator (see, for instance Vinay and Darbelnet (1958: 102) and Hervey and Higgins, who provide many examples (1992: 203-215). Vinay and Darbelnet also make the point that French vocabulary tends to display a higher level of abstraction than does English lexis, citing Taine's remark 'traduire en français une phrase anglaise, c'est copier au crayon gris une figure en couleur.' (1958: 59). Moreover, the tendency to avoid lexical and syntactic repetition in the French text may be related, not to a characteristic specific to Ben Jelloun, but to a very general tendency for such repetitions to be judged negatively in French discourse. The fact that French writers resist repetitions of this type, and indeed that apprentice writers in French schools are taught actively to avoid them, has been noted by a number of scholars, including Bonnard (1953), Ben-Ari (1998) and Delisle (2000); French has been explicitly contrasted with English, which is judged to make greater use of repetition (Grellet 1985, Ballard 1989), and Quillard (1997) shows that translators moving from English to French have a strong tendency to remove lexical repetition.

However, not all the contrasts can simply be subsumed under such general patterns. There also seems to be a fundamental difference of tone between the two versions. In so many places, the choices made by Bowles seem to combine to create what is very much a child-like tone. Over and over again we find that Bowles' narrative sounds much closer to the way a child might describe the events. The brevity of

the sentences, the lack of complex structures, the very basic vocabulary and the use of repetition all contribute to this stylistic effect. Ben Jelloun's text, in contrast, with its more elaborate and varied structures and more specific and sophisticated vocabulary, seems quite remote from the way a child narrator might have recounted these events. For instance, whereas the English in (21) genuinely sounds like the words of a young child, the French in (22) definitely does not; we cannot imagine the young uncultured Mohamed of the novel using this type of style. Similary, Bowles' use of very basic vocabulary such as *twist his neck around, pull off the feathers* and *garbage* suggests the limited vocabulary of a child better than do terms like *plumer, tordre le cou* and *détritus*. The excessive repetition and anaphora of (27) suggest a child's emotive incoherence in a way that the more carefully varied and explicit (28) does not; and the same can be said for the constant shifting of tenses in extracts like (17), in contrast to the consistency of (18).

The child-centred viewpoint of Bowles' text also emerges from some specific remarks which have no equivalents in the French version. In describing how he attempted to kill the already dead hen according to Muslim rites, Mohamed twice makes to point that he was trying to copy adults' ways:

29) I turn towards the east, as my mother always does when she is about to pray. I said: Bismillah. Allahou akbar. And I kill it as I have seen grown-ups do it. (FBA, p. 10-11)

No such references are present in the French version, where the child seems to be an autonomous agent needing no guidance:

30) Je pris un couteau et me mis dans la direction de la prière. J'égorgeai la bete. (LPN, p. 12)

Other contrasts include the choice of metaphors used in the two translations. Both feature a metaphor in the description of the stars as seen by Mohamed when he has run outside to hide following the strangling of Abdelqader. But their effects are very different:

31) I looked up at the sky. Allah has turned on the lights. Clouds sail across the face of the big lamp. (FBA, p. 12)
32) Je regarde le ciel. Les étoiles viennent d'être témoins d'un crime. (LPN, p. 13-14)

The English offers a simple concrete image of the stars as lamps and the moon as a bigger one, with the religious reference to God as in control of all this. The French instead personifies the stars and introduces the legal notion of witnesses. Again, one might judge the first image to be more likely than the second to occur to a young child.

Other differences between the content of the two texts relate to the degree of horror which they convey. In a number of places, Bowles' text includes horrific details not included by Ben Jelloun. The descriptions of the dead animals they see on the roadside as they are making their way towards Tangier are a case in point:

33) All along the road there were dead donkeys and cows and horses. The dogs and crows were pulling them apart. The entrails were soaked in blood and pus, and worms crawled out of them. (FBA, p. 10)
34) Sur le bord de la route, il y avait des charognes, des oiseaux noirs et des chiens. Ventres ouverts, déchirés. La pourriture. (LPN, p. 11)

Here again, one might contrast the French version with its general term *charognes* and its abstract noun *pourriture* with the English version's precise details of the types of animals (*donkeys, cows*, *horses*) and the nature of the decomposition (*blood, pus, worms*) – just the sort of detail a child might indeed relish commenting on.

The boy with whom Mohamed searches the bins is also presented in a much less shocking way in French; here the only information given is about his inadequate clothing, whereas the English also goes into sickening detail about the unhealthy state of his skin:

35) Là, j'ai rencontré un gamin, nu-pieds, à peine vêtu. (LPN, p. 12)
36) I found another boy there before me. He was barefoot and his clothes were in shreds. His scalp was covered in ringworm, his arms and legs scarred with sores. (FBA, p. 10)

From examples like these, we can see that, where the description is concerned with signs of poverty and sickness, it is Bowles who uses the more specific detail while Ben Jelloun is less explicit. The same can be said of the descriptions of Mohamed trying to get blood out of the hen's neck, presented as (17) and (18) above. It is noticeable that only Bowles's version includes reference to the child's action of sawing the neck, the head falling off, the action of massaging the hen, and finally a precise description of the appearance of the blood. The attention to gory detail in the English version is once again consistent with a child's view of the world. There are also other minor differences where the English provides a stronger message: in French the blood is simply said to come out of the child's mouth, while in English it is said to *pour out*, and while the French makes reference simply to a bloodstain, the English refers to a *mass* of blood.

37) Blood pours out of the mouth. (FBA, p. 11)
38) Du sang sort de la bouche. (LPN, p. 13)
39) There is a mass of coagulated blood beside his mouth. (FBA, p. 12)
40) Une tache de sang coagulé s'était accrochée à la lèvre inférieure. (LPN, p. 14)

A further difference is that, in several places, Mohamed's view of his parents seems more severe in the English than in the French version. Thus both versions state that the father insulted everyone, including God, but only the French portrait is softened by the remark that he then repented of these misdeeds:

41) He abuses everyone with his words, sometimes even Allah. (FBA, p. 11)
42) Il injuriait le monde entier, maudissait Dieu et ensuite se repentait. (LPN, p. 13)

The comparison of his father's power over his environment to that of God is also weaker in the French version:

43) Not a movement, not a word, save at his command, just as nothing can happen unless it is decreed by Allah. (FBA, p. 11)
44) Pas un geste, pas une parole. Tout à son ordre et à son image, un peu comme Dieu, ou du moins c'est ce que j'entendais. (LPN, p. 13)

Likewise, when at the funeral a man asks Mohamed whether he loved his brother, there is an interesting contrast between the two versions of his reply:

45) Did you love your brother very much? the old man asked me.
Yes, I said. And my mother loved him more. She loved him more than she did me. (FBA, p. 12)

46) – Tu aimais bien ton frère?
– Oui, beaucoup. Ma mère l'aimait beaucoup. Elle l'adorait. (LPN, p. 14)

The English version adds to Mohamed's suffering the sense that he came second in his mother's affections.

A final difference between the two versions concerns the degree to which they domesticate the Moroccan culture-specific references within the text. Bowles is happy to retain an Arabic flavour here and there, notably in the religious references. God is consistently designated by the name *Allah*, as we have already seen in examples (9), (29), (41 and (43); and in the ritual of hen-killing, the appropriate formula *Bismillah. Allahou akbar* is reproduced in this form, with no gloss or explanation (see example (29)). Ben Jelloun, in contrast, adopts the norms of his French-speaking audience here, using the word *Dieu* and not invoking the formula at all (see examples (10), (42) and (44). These contrasting strategies, not surprisingly, correspond to those used by the two novelists in their own works. Thus Bowles, in his novel *The Sheltering Sky*, frequently incorporates into his text words and phrases in Arabic, French and Spanish, without feeling the need to provide any gloss or explanation:

47) "*Stenna, stenna. Chouia, chouia*," said the man. (Bowles 1949: 242)
48) "*Smitsek? Kuli*!" they would say to her, holding small bits of food in front of her face. (Bowles 1949: 243)

Ben Jelloun, on the other hand, seems to take special pains to provide French translations even for what are quite culture-specific Moroccan references. For instance, even the title of his novel *La Nuit Sacrée* (1987) is in fact a French label for the very special night, around the 27th day of the month of Ramadan, which is called in Arabic *laylat al-qadr*; the significance of this title is quite obscure to French readers, and indeed even to Moroccans until they read the text and realise what is being referred to.

Bowles also makes use of the term *Nazarene* (see example (24)), which might indeed be somewhat puzzling for an Anglophone audience, for whom it will probably evoke only a reference to Nazareth. It is, however, immediately recognizable to those familiar with Morocco as a representation of the Moroccan Arabic term *nsrani*, used as a general term to designate Europeans living in Morocco. Apparently he does not feel it necessary to clarify every local reference for his readers. Ben Jelloun, on the other hand, uses the term *chrétiens* here (see example (23)), and evidently still feels this is not transparent enough for his readers, since he includes a footnote explaining that "On appelait à l'époque tout Européen 'chrétien' dans le sens d'étranger."

A last striking example of the degree to which Ben Jelloun, in contrast to Bowles, seeks to orient his text towards his French readers is provided by the metalinguistic comment he includes on the placename *Ain Ketiout*, a neighbourhood of Tangier.

49) Quand la faim me prenait aux tripes, je sortais dans les rues de notre quartier qui s'appelait joliment ‹la source du petit chat (Ain Qettiouett). (LPN, p. 12)

This time the comment is not even separated off in a footnote, but inserted directly into the narrative, so that we have the impression that it is the child narrator who is remarking on the prettiness of the name. While an outsider might indeed find this name quaint, it seems unlikely that a child like Mohamed in the story, who is concerned only with finding whatever is edible to satisfy his hunger pains, would have paused to reflect on the name's literal meaning. He would probably have been as

oblivious to any aesthetic appeal of its literal content as the present-day inhabitants of this neighbourhood seem to be. Predictably, then, Bowles includes the name but without comment:

50) One day when the hunger had grown too strong, I went out to Ain Ketiout to look in the garbage dump for bones and ends of dry bread. (FBA, p. 10)

This last pair of examples could be said to epitomize the different approaches of the two translators. Bowles sets down an unadorned, matter-of-fact narrative which evokes a child's view and voice through its banal vocabulary, simple, repetitive syntax, concrete images and sometimes lurid details. Ben Jelloun offers a much more elaborate, polished discourse, guiding his readers through the story with comments and explanations; rather than sensing the voice of a child, we detect a more sophisticated narrator who is obviously concerned about the impact of his text on outsider readers. This seems slightly ironical when we reflect that, while Bowles' text really was aimed at outsiders, the Anglophone readers of the UK and North America, Ben Jelloun's version was the one which made the book accessible to Moroccan readers. In fact, however, far from presenting the text to his fellow countrymen, we get the distinct impression that Ben Jelloun is firmly targeting a European francophone audience.

In the absence of an available Arabic text of Choukri's book, it was of course these two translations which largely contributed to making his name as a writer, and critical evaluations were based on one or the other of them. The book was admired for the authenticity of its voice, the way its frank descriptions of a tortured childhood horrified yet rang true. However, in the discussion above I have tried to show the extent to which the two texts differ in both style and content. The degree of contrast evident in this analysis of only a few pages of the book should be enough to demonstrate the extent to which the individual choices made by a translator, page after page, though they may appear trivial when taken one by one, can have an accumulative effect which determines the overall impact of a text. While some of the stylistic differences noted above might simply be traceable to the different norms of English and French discourse, these are accompanied by differences of content which seem to produce a more fundamental opposition between the two versions. One might almost question whether readers of the French text can truly be said to have experienced the same book as readers of the English one. Thus, while Bowles and Ben Jelloun are each assumed to have provided a faithful transmission of the voice of Choukri, they may also each have overlaid their own voice on top of the source one. When a translator is also an accomplished author in his own right, as in these two cases, then the result may ultimately be that one voice takes on the accent of another.

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