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Ameen Rihani's "Juhan" and the Problems of its Arabic and Russian Translations

Abstract: The present paper discusses "Juhan", a short novel by a famous Arab writer, Ameen Rihani with a particular focus on the problems of its Arabic and Russian translations. We shall focus on the final episode of the novel that is different in English, Arabic and Russian publications. Arab translator removed the last section of the novel that includes its main idea. In our opinion "Juhan" was translated into Russian from the incomplete Arabic version and therefore, the Russian translation is incomplete as well. In Russian scientific criticism, the existence of more than one Arabic translation caused certain confusion, spread of incorrect views about the end of the novel.

Keywords: Juhan, Arabic/Russian translations, Ameen Rihani

Introduction

Ameen Rihani, recognized coryphée of Syrian-American literary school was one of the main figures of the Arab movement Al-Nahda in the early 20th century and Mahjar literature. In 1888, while he was only 12, he was sent by his family to New York. Since his childhood, the writer has adapted to the American environment. He actively got familiarized with both European and American literature. He entered the Law School of Columbia University, but because of his poor health he gave up his studies and returned to Lebanon. The writer has maintained a close relationship with Arabic literature in America. Moreover, living overseas made his love to his native land even more powerful and refined. In 1901 Ameen Rihani became a US citizen. As a Writer, and a follower of American Walt Whitman and greatly influenced by Ralph Emerson, with brilliant knowledge of English language, Ameen Rihani started his literary journey with works written in English. His novel "The Book of Khalid" written in 1911, in English, was the first English-language novel of an Arab writer published in USA. After returning to his native land in 1904, Rihani was engaged in studying his native language, culture and literature. At that time he started active literary activities; he secluded himself in the Lebanese mountains for 6 years and wrote in the Arabic language.

It should be mentioned that the literature of Mahjar Transcultural School, though created outside the Arab region, comprised was an indivisible and a very significant part of Al-Nahda movement, as it was one of the powerful catalysts of Arab culture modernization, as well as initiator of a synthesis of western values and oriental culture in a positive context. Emigrant writers have indeed greatly contributed to the introduction of the East and the principles of Islam to the western world (America and Europe) in the early 20th century. The Mahjar School was able to do this with the help of its bilingual authors. Many representatives of this school were bilingual authors as a result of their education, first at missionary schools in Lebanon and further, after forced emigration to the West with a full adaptation to the foreign environment (Gardavadze 2015: 6). The Writers of Mahjar School were able to successfully write in both Arabic and English. The role of emigrant writers in the translation process is great as well. Their art was similarly perfect in both languages. Regarding the greatest success of the emigrant writers, whether this was in the sphere of translation or in the creation of original works – it would be reasonable to mention that translation, as term, is not limited to mechanical formulation of the sense from one language into another one, rather, translation implies the interpretation and transfer of the intellectual and literary values

from one language system into the other. In this context, the merits and achievements of emigrant writers in the history of modern Arab literature should be emphasized. Using the terminology of translation theory, there is a source language, i.e. the language from which the translation is made and there is a target language and the stage between these two languages, frequently referred to as the “inter-text” stage. Actually, the Mahjar School, with its bilingual nature, presents translation in its particularly vivid form. Moreover, the writers’ works are translated directly from the “original source”. Their bilingual competence have allowed them to successfully overcome the “inter-text” stage and interpret their cultural values and transfer of the intellectual and literary values from one language system into the other without any loss (Allen 2012: 12).

Thus, Ameen Rihani is seen as a writer with a “Hybrid identity”, attempting to create through reasonable synthesis of eastern-western values the third space – some kind of an alternative world. Almost one century ago, he preached the ideas of biculturalism and hybridity. As a great thinker and writer, he focused on the idea of a spiritual synthesis of the oriental and occidental worlds at the beginning of his creative activities. In the Arabic literature of the 20th century, the theme of meeting of these two worlds was and is of great significance even now, as it is clear from the works of Rihani. We can state that Rihani is the son of three cultures – American, European and Arab cultures. Moreover, he came to the Arab culture from European-American culture and undertook the mission – bring knowledge about the western world to the east and bring knowledge about oriental philosophy and poetry to the occidental world (Gardavadze 2007: 109). The writer’s (2010) statement: “Lebanon, Paris, New York, in the first lays my spirit, in the second my heart, and in the third my body now abides” (Rihani 2014: 52) demonstrates the worldview of a great writer and thinker. In Georgia, the name of Ameen Rihani is of particular significance as he was the first to launch the process of translation of Arab literature into Georgian language. In 1945 the founder of the Georgian orientalist school, the famous scientist and academician George Tsereteli in “Mnatobi” magazine called Ameen Rihani the “Arab dressed in the European tuxedo”. In our opinion, George Tsereteli has provided an appropriate description of Ameen Rihani as an author:

“Though Ameen has scattered the elements of his personality to different continents, he is still Arab... Ameen Rihani is created by both worlds – the eastern and western ones. He acquired the products of cultural-artistic activities of the both worlds and attempted to unify them in his very nature. On one hand, Abu al-‘Ala’ al-Ma’arri, Mutanabbi... and on the other – Voltaire, Goethe, Balzac, Carlyle, Keats, Whitman and others, these different figures of different worlds are converged in Ameen Rihani’s person in some way... I don’t know, whether one can say about Rihani’s poetry that this is Gustave Flaubert’s “east in the dress suit”, or whether this poetry is suitable to reject Rudyard Kipling’s words – “Oh, East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet” – though undoubtedly, it is the attempt of rejecting of this statement... The main motif of entire Arab and generally, oriental literature is unification of the oriental and occidental civilizations. Rihani dreams about this as well” (Tsereteli 1945: 75-77).

Method and scope of the research study

In this article we shall discuss Rihani’s short novel “Juhan”, where the writer develops the theme of linking two different religions and cultures, the East and the West through love. Before considering the translation problems, we shall analyze the novel itself, written in English by the author in 1917. The English novel “Juhan” was not published when it was written, but in the same year it was translated and published in Arabic by ‘Abd al-Masih Haddad with the title “Outside the Harem” (خارج الحريم). Arabic translation of the novel was published many times in the following years and the English original manuscript (typed on the typing machine, with the author’s handwritten corrections) was kept in the writer’s home museum (Juhan TS) and only in 2011 the printed version of the novel was published. The English publication of 2011 is regarded as the most complete text (Rihani 2011:13-91). We shall compare Arabic and Russian translations of “Juhan” with its English original version and focus on the final episode of the novel that is different in English, Arabic and Russian publications.

Presentation and discussion of results

“Juhan” is one of the first fictional works in the Arabic literature of the 20th century written about the East and West theme. Supposedly, the metaphor of love relations that have become some kind of ‘normal’ in the Arabic literature of the 20th century in the novels of “East-West” cycle originates from the mentioned work.

It is well known that Rihani was an active defender of women’s human rights and he openly wrote about the issues tabooed in the Eastern society in early 20th century. Unlike contemporary writers, in the novel “Juhan”, Rihani created the character of daring, young revolutionary Turkish woman desiring to bring modernized western values to her people. Juhan is some kind of symbol of an awakened East. The main character has many common features with the author as well.

The story reflects the events of World War I in 1915 in Turkey and the main characters are German von Wallenstein, the military advisor in Istanbul equipped with unlimited authorities and Juhan, a young Turkish aristocrat woman. Thus, “Juhan” describes new events and conflicts. Dolinina associates them with the appearance of some realistic elements in Rihani’s art; in her opinion:

“striving to be persuasive caused that the main character of Arabic novel is a Turkish woman and not Arabic as Turkish Moslem women were more Europeanized and they had more freedom. No one of even well-educated Arab Moslem women could find herself at Juhan’s place” (Dolinina 1981:18).

Juhan is the main character, a Turkish Muslim woman, with a modern vision of life. She is the daughter of an influential political figure – Ridha Pasha. Juhan is divorced, as her former husband, Prince Saif Ad-Din has broken the oath given to her wife that he would not marry another woman. Juhan fights for freedom; she is against some eastern traditions and desires to introduce progressive western views in her society. Though her father is against his daughter’s freedom, Juhan is still able to live an active life. Two people fight to win her love: Shukri Bey, her cousin and fiancé chosen by her father and the German officer. Ridha Pasha has a great influence on Juhan. The writer underlines the Pasha’s ambivalent attitude to the western civilization. Though he likes the progressive West, he follows the Eastern traditions and customs, just like Juhan when attempting to combine oriental and occidental values. A woman’s hope is her future child, a girl – she would follow her way and fight for the liberty of Eastern women, or a boy – he will grow up and become a hero, a leader, a savior of the nation. Juhan thinks that such dreams cannot come true within her nation; therefore she wishes that the child’s father was the German general though she rejects the idea of marriage. The General cannot accept a woman’s refusal and does everything to get Juhan under his influence. With the promise of freeing her father from the prison, the general pushes the woman to obey him. Juhan becomes the general’s victim. Shukri Bey, Juhan’s father and her brother, all three die because of the general. As a result, the woman decides to seek revenge and lured the general into her home, where she kills him with the dagger of her forefathers. Further, she lives far from Istanbul, with another name and continues her fight, cooperates with the progressive newspapers and raises a boy with blond hair, Mustafa, with the ideals of liberty and humanism. The entire hope for the bright future of her people is in this child.

“Juhan” represents not only feminist ideas; it also shows the conflict between two different oriental and occidental worlds. Following by two main characters symbolizing East and West by the way of love to one another ends fatally as these ways never meet. The characters have absolutely different goals in these relationships – the Eastern woman fights for the longed freedom, she dreams to give birth to a child, who would combine oriental and occidental values while the Western man seeks unlimited power. His “Asian dream” is to see the empire under the German protectorate.

At the end of the work the author shows the failure of the idea of marriage between east and west. Though both characters have made attempts to show willingness to compromise (Juhan’s eastern traditions and the western ones), the idea of their marriage has failed. Juhan is against marriage though the hope is in her future. Juhan’s son, Mustafa will be the very “prophet” able to combine eastern and western values. This is the main idea of the novel.

We would like to specially focus on the end of the fictional work. The English original version is different from the Arabic and Russian translations. In the first and second Arabic editions (1917 and

1922) “Juhan” ends with the scene of the general’s murder scene and Juhan’s suicide. Translator (‘Abd al-Masih Haddad) has completely changed the final and withdrew the section about Mustafa that is a very significant and indivisible part of the novel, containing the main idea of the work, in our opinion. Rihani’s “Juhan” was translated into Russian from the Arabic version though the Russian translation is based not on the most recent edition but on the incomplete one of 1922 and hence, the Russian translation is incomplete as well. The Russian translation was included into the collection published in 1981: *Arabic Romantic Prose of 19th – 20th Centuries*. Translator Derdirova specified that the translation was made from Cairo edition of 1922. Thus, before publication of the Russian version there were other published editions: New York edition of 1917, Cairo edition of 1922, Beirut editions of 1933 and 1945.

The existence of several versions in Arabic language has caused certain confusion in Russian criticism. In this respect, we cannot share Dolinina’s opinion, as though Ameen Rihani has changed the final of the story in the third edition and added Mustafa’s episode (Dolinina 1981:18).

Aida Imangulieva shares this opinion about Mustafa’s episode:

“When “Juhan” was re-published in 1933, Rihani changed the final. Juhan has not died; she lived far from Istanbul, raising a son born from her German lover” (Imangulieva 2009: 112).

We regard that Dolinina’s and Imangulieva’s opinion about the final part of the novel is wrong, as the original English manuscript contained this episode from the outset. Actually, Ameen Rihani has not made any changes either in the Arabic or in English texts. Dolinina and Imangulieva refer to the third edition of 1933, which, unfortunately, was not found, but if in any Arabic edition before 1948 there really is the full version, this means that the publisher, together with the Arabic text, had also the English original manuscript, for comparison with the Arabic text and its completion.

Currently, the electronic version of the Arabic translation of Ameen Rihani’s novel, in a form of PDF file is available on the Internet, though it should be mentioned that this is not a complete and correct version but rather the an incomplete one, supposedly, the edition of 1922. We suppose that the novel was posted and spread on the Internet by the Hindawi organization: www.hindawi.org and the text was taken from there by the other sites as well and even printed. In 2016, in Damascus, the Union of Arab Writers has published “Juhan” within the “pocket-book” series though, in this case as well, this was an incomplete version. Supposedly, in this case the publisher has relied upon the electronic version, without proper checking and comparison with the original version.

Conclusion

Thus, the Arab translator of Rihani’s “Juhan” has fully changed the end of the novel and removed the last section that includes its main idea. In our opinion “Juhan” was translated into Russian from the incomplete Arabic version of 1922 and not from the most recent edition and therefore, the Russian translation is incomplete as well. In Russian scientific criticism, the existence of more than one Arabic translation caused certain confusion, spread of incorrect views about the end of the novel, as though Rihani has changed the end, and added the last episode in the third edition of the novel. While actually, the mentioned section existed from the beginning in the first manuscript as can be seen from its text.

Thus, Arab readers, in many cases, get familiar with the incomplete text and the publishers should consider this issue more carefully and publish the full translation of “Juhan” that corresponds to the English original version. In case of translation of this work into other languages, translators should primarily rely upon the original version. Thus, incomplete Arabic and Russian translations of “Juhan” by Ameen Rihani are a clear example of how translation can be so different from the original work. The translator’s mission should be to maintain accuracy of the text and transfer the literary values from one language system to the other with minimal loss.

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