

Beyond Reception Politics of Gibran's *The Earth Gods*: A Symptomatic Reading of Two Arabic Translations

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Abstract

Part of a larger study on the viability and relevance of symptomatic reading practice to the much broader scope of reception theory and translation criticism, this article investigates a range of discontinuities in two Arabic translations of Gibran's *The Earth Gods*, one by the Archimandrite Anthony Bashir and the other by Egypt's Minister of Culture Tharwat Okasha. Putting to work the methodological assumptions of Venuti's symptomatic reading, instances of religious correctness and (in)determinacy are examined within the framework of reception theory, specifically Fish's theory of interpretive communities, to explore how texts work upon individuals to create a community and how a community works upon a text to generate meaning. The analysis ends with a discussion of the temporality of the translators' interventions and the historicity of reception, with a particular focus on the paratextual reviews of the critical establishment as a situational interpretive community. The symptomatic reading offers pointers as to how the translators experimented with the metaphysical system of Gibran.

Keywords

Arabic translation, Gibran Khalil, indeterminacy, literary translation, symptomatic reading, reception

1. Introduction

The question of reception in general, and critical reception in particular, is inextricably linked to the practice of reading enacted in translation criticism, which veers heavily toward the long-established criterion of “transparent representation” (Venuti 2008, 276). This article examines a set of cumulatively meaningful shifts in two Arabic translations of Gibran’s *The Earth Gods*, a poem which first appeared three weeks before his repose in 1931 at a time when the Arab world was witnessing what came to be known as the *Nahda*. This cultural renaissance, spanning from the nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, saw the rise of reputed writers such as the Lebanese-American poet Gibran Khalil Gibran (1883–1931), the vanguard of *Mahjar* (Arabic: diaspora) literature. Among the translation figures of the twentieth century were the Lebanese-American Archimandrite Anthony Bashir (1898–1966) and Egypt’s Minister of Culture Tharwat Okasha (1921–2012). Both translated a multitude of Gibran’s English writings into Arabic, including *The Earth Gods*.

This case study seeks to untangle the complexities of the reception process through operationalizing Venuti’s “symptomatic reading” (2008) as a methodology—a term originally introduced by the French Marxist Althusser (1970). Hence, the first step will be to offer the core methodological assumptions and hypotheses of symptomatic reading, followed by a discussion of a growing body of scholarship on the viability of critical reading modes. Then, the article critically appropriates the conceptual apparatus of reception theory, particularly Stanley Fish’s theory of interpretive communities, in analyzing the manifestations and implications of the translators’ interventions for the reception process. Finally, the study ties the interventions and discontinuities into the web of the dominant canons of writing in the wider historical context in which the translations were produced, consumed and evaluated. The points of discontinuity connote discrepancies, silences, gaps, ambiguities, and shifts that prevent “the evocation of a coherent speaking voice” (Venuti 1995, 303). Put another way, discontinuous texts “are no longer seen as unified but as heterogeneous” (Fluck 2014, 63). The translations, entitled *Alihat Al-ardh* (*The Earth Gods*) by Bashir and *Arbab Al-ardh* (the earth lords) by Okasha, were produced in the United States and Egypt respectively in various epochs, those of the 1930s and 1960s. Indeed, a range of discontinuities find expression in two symptomatic characteristics:

religious correctness and (in)determinacy. The study will, thus, lay bare the workings of these elements through conflating reception theory and symptomatic reading within an analysis framework.

2. Symptomatic Reading Mechanisms

The concept of symptomatic reading has gained traction in Translation Studies since the 1990s with the work of Venuti (1995). This reading practice trawls through the sites of heterogeneity, renders the reader active, and uncovers points of discontinuity within the translation and vis-à-vis the foreign text. For Venuti, symptomatic reading juxtaposes the incongruities of the source and target language and culture, and develops awareness of the role and interventions of the translator, rather than assuming semantic unity or transparent communication (2008, 21). He conceives of symptomatic reading as a potent tool for historicizing translation by means of revealing the canons of accuracy under which a translation is produced and judged. These canons, argues Venuti, are culturally specific and historically variable. By no means does this reading assess the faithfulness or freedom of a translation, but rather it “locate[s] discontinuities at the level of diction, syntax, or discourse that reveal the translation to be a violent rewriting of the foreign text, a strategic intervention into the target-language culture, at once dependent on and abusive of domestic values” (1995, 25). Although symptomatic reading does not offer a definitive conceptual framework, it does add to the literature and puts forward fresh methods to think relationally of the micro-macro properties of heterogeneous translation. In any case, what is important is what unites these properties, namely the proposition that linguistic discontinuity is to explain macro-historical phenomena.

Venuti recommends this reading practice for foreignizing a domesticating translation by locating its discontinuities, inasmuch as that a translation's reliance on dominant values in the target language becomes most conspicuous where the translation deviates from them. He maintains that “this reading also uncovers the domesticating movement involved in any foreignizing translation by showing where its construction of the foreign depends on receiving cultural materials” (2008, 24). Yet, few are the studies that discuss the effectiveness of symptomatic reading in linguistically and historically contextualizing the translator's interventions. In her symptomatic study of contemporary Italian travel writing in English translation, Polezzi (2001) notes:

The stereoscopic and symptomatic analysis of translations of contemporary Italian texts into English, and, where appropriate, of their reception, can be used to escape the narrow perspective offered by the national literature model, and to explore the transformations which Italian travel writing undergoes when it is read and appreciated by a different culture and a different literary tradition. (135)

In essence, symptomatic reading seems to have explanatory potentiality to describe and interpret the dynamics of translation reception through grafting erroneous and heterogeneous sites onto the literary system. However, much uncertainty surrounds the methods whereby canons of accuracy in a historical setting could be identified. To transcend this arguable limitation, the article replaces the notion of accuracy canons with that of writing canons, which can be historicized in such a way as to offer glimpses of translation as a rewriting of the source text.

The modes of reading in general have become a hot commodity in a growing body of research. As an example, Kahf opines that it is the aesthetic reasons that demand the challenging of reader expectations in cross-cultural translation, and “this calls for texts that make reading less smooth” (2010, 43). Spivak elaborates a similar critique: “a disinterested reading attempts to render transparent the interests of the hegemonic readership” (1985, 258). In the same vein, Hall proposes diverse ways of reading a text: a hegemonic reading, a negotiated reading and a counter-hegemonic reading (1980, 127). Yet, there are valid reasons to keep the other alternative terms at arm’s length, eschewing a simplistic framing of symptomatic reading as merely an interested reading.

The term “symptomatic reading” simultaneously conjures both broader and narrower paradigms. The latter is that of interpretivism, which rejects the logic of “absolute facts and suggests that facts are based on perception,” whereas the former signals positivism that discards subjective perspectives and “deals with verifiable observations and measurable relations between those observations” (Vanson 2014). In an age that thrives on polarization, a symptomatic reading would be guided by an expanded understanding of the manifold roles translation plays in entrenching collective identities, aware as it is of the interpretive assumptions that inscribe translation with significances in diverse communities, and of the fact that people from different traditions share with each other as much as they do with members of their own communities. This article attempts to explore a new ground for a

symptomatic investigation of the translator's interventions and their implications for the reception process.

3. Reception Theory as Conceptual Framework

The literature on reception theory has been traditionally preoccupied with foregrounding the reader's position. For reader-response theorists, it is the reader, not the text, who holds interpretive powers. Of particular note is the concept of hermeneutics—the theory of interpretation—which Steiner defines as “the investigation of what it means to understand a piece of oral or written speech” (1975, 249). Yet, it should be noted here that hermeneutics assumes that the meaning is located somewhere within the text, whereas reception theory supposes that the meaning unfolds and takes shape through an interaction between the reader and text. The same line of argument was clinched by Wolfgang Iser, the prominent exponent of reception theory, who argues that “every literary text invites some form of participation on the reader” and that blanks and indeterminacy form a link between the text and reader (1993, 10).

The whole thrust of Iser's reader-oriented theory is that the writer provides clues as to what the reader should understand, and the latter “acts to fill in the gaps and blanks inevitably encountered in any serious literary text” (Shi 2013, 984). Blanks entail “connecting various segments of the texts” (ibid.), and indeterminacy refers to “a principle of uncertainty invoked to deny the existence of any final or determinate meaning that could bring to an end the play of meaning between the elements of a text” (Baldick 2008). One influential theory in reception studies is Fish's notion of interpretive communities being “made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions” (1980, 989). In other words, zones of indeterminacy, gaps and blanks are unpacked and concretized by the common experiences of interpretive communities.

Fish's theory has received a surfeit of critical attention, with reader-response critics, such as Robert Scholes, contending that “the size and shape of the community change to suit Fish's needs” (1984, 173). Similarly, Davis dismisses this theory as a tricky rhetorical game which “uses the term in a variety of ways without ever defining it precisely” (1984, 682). Practically, Roberts argues that Fish “dangerously misapplies his theory, thereby embedding it in a power structure that creates a

discussion about power and ideology and not truth” (2006, 32). She alludes to Fish’s real-life example in which his class of religious poetry students interpreted a list of authors as if it were a religious poem. He drew a box around the list and informed the class “that what they saw on the blackboard was a religious poem of the kind they had been studying” (1980, 325). Although the students made sense of every part of the poem, Roberts views the entire experience as happening within the confines of a community (the class) “governed by an all-powerful teacher and by her ideology and beliefs” (2006, 34).

While there is an element of truth in all of these arguments, the theory of interpretive communities still holds because it decenters the author, reader, and text as the originating sources of meaning and effects a recentering of meaning around interpretive communities. As Fish states, “if the self is conceived of not as an independent entity but as a social construct whose operations are limited by the systems of intelligibility that inform it, then the meanings it confers on texts are not its own but have their source in the interpretive community of which it is a function” (1980, 335). This article benefits from Roberts’ forms of interpretive communities, a theory which she believes can play a pivotal role “in our understanding of interpretation, pluralism and truth” (2006, 36). One form is self-selecting interpretive community: “the theorists who choose to belong to a specific ideological group” (*ibid.*). She also cites Marxists and feminists as examples of self-selecting communities. For her, “it is the overarching themes, ideology, or practical skills that bind these communities together and are what is important when defining them” (*ibid.*).

The other type of community is the situational interpretive community, which brings together individuals who are “part of a specific situation that will influence how they think” (*ibid.*). Roberts refers to classrooms as an example of a situational interpretive community. The promotion of reader-response theories, especially Fish’s interpretive communities, could function as a viable way of explaining heterogeneity in translation as a meaningful symptom rather than an error. This view is supported by Venuti, who notes that inconsistency does not deserve to be viewed as erroneous; conversely, it reveals interpretive choices “determined by a wide range of social institutions and cultural movements” (2010, 78).

Overall, the literature presented thus far shows a rich area of study that promises to yield innovative analytical tools above and beyond binary positions, such as reader-text or author-text. The interpretive

communities theory applies a cognitive approach to exploring the reader's attitudes and the communities in which they are situated, since the norms of determining truth are "not embedded in the language [...] but in an institutional structure within which one hears utterances as already organized with reference to certain assumed purposes and goals" (1980, 306). That being the case, discontinuities can be mapped onto the communities and sub-communities that emerge out of the analysis.

4. Scope of Study and Methodology

The aim of the analysis is not so much to pass judgement on the quality of the translations as to valorize the discontinuities as symptoms of a complex network of interpretive communities. Inspired by Venuti's symptomatic reading, the study employs a bottom-up approach that takes as its point of departure a reading of a range of symptomatic discontinuities, with the aim of exploring the linguistic manifestations of the parameters which have shaped or, at least, conditioned the production and reception of both translations. The study, then, supports the linguistic analysis with a critical and historicizing discussion of the wider context of reception, including the critical reviews of Okasha's translation, to contextualize the shifts by setting them within the respective historical space in which they were produced and consumed. This method of analysis is limited by the lack of paratextual reviews of Bashir's translation. To partly overcome this limitation, the study integrates insights from a relevant study (Ali 2018a) of the readers' reviews of both translations on Goodreads, Amazon's giant social cataloging application. Although the notion of a critical establishment portrays a symptomized image of a homogenous identifiable critical regime in the target language, the study of the paratextual reviews could explain the interplay between this situational interpretive community and the reader's/translator's self-proclaimed interpretive communities in endorsing and sustaining the latter's interpretations.

In line with the focus of the article on religious correctness and indeterminacy, the main criteria for selecting textual samples derive from what Berman terms "significant zones" where the source text "condenses, represents, signifies or symbolizes itself" (1995, 70). The comparative analyses of religious correctness will converge on an excerpt drawn from page 33 where the first God meditates on love in panentheistic parlance. The excerpt accords to the profile of a significant zone because

it includes lexical items that recur multiple times throughout the excerpt and the entire text, with a series of secondary items selected as a basis for comparison. Another significant zone manifests itself in the differing translations of the book's title. The importance of the book cover stems from the fact that "cover imagery is interpreted on its own before the text is read" (Mossop 2017, 11). The examination of indeterminacy will be restricted to an extract from the opening lines of the poem in which the author extensively uses metaphorical language and deploys several rhetorical devices, thus rendering meaning indeterminate. Overall, the study synthesizes the most symptomatic discontinuities and relates them to mainstream translation strategies throughout the text, an approach intended to reveal the play of significant zones. As the analysis turns to the historical investigation of contextual elements, the discontinuities will be further mapped on the temporality of interventions and their overall implications for disrupting or maintaining the dominant literary and cultural canons, at the linguistic and intellectual scales.

5. The Symptomatic Discontinuities

(a) Religious Correctness

ST:	FIRST GOD:	Lo, there is the dancer, <i>carved out of</i> our ancient eagerness, And the <i>singer is crying mine own songs</i> unto the wind. And in that dancing and in that <i>singing</i> <i>A god is slain</i> within me. My <i>god-heart</i> within my human ribs Shouts to my <i>god-heart</i> in mid-air.
Bashir		الإله الأول: هنالك تقف الراقصة، التي نحتت من شوقنا القديم والمرنم يصبح بأناشيدي في أمواج الريح وفي ذلك الرقص وفي ذلك الإنشاد يموت إله قدير في أعماقي إن إله قلبي القاطن وراء ضلوع بشريتي ينادي إله قلبي المقيم في الهواء [Lit. carved out of ... And the hymner is shouting my songs ... singing ... an almighty God dies in my depths ... the god of my heart]
Okasha		الرب الأول: ها هي ذي الراقصة، وقد قدت من شوقنا العريق، وها هو ذا الشادي يترنم بأغاني أنا إلى الريح وفي هذا الرقص وذاك الغناء يذبح في سريرتي رب إن "قلبي - الرب" الحال بين ضلوعي لينادي "قلبي - الرب" الحال وسط الأثر [Lit. torn out of [...] And the chanter is hymning my songs [...] singing [...] a God is slaughtered in my inner self ... "my heart - god"]

From the superordinates “singer” and “songs,” Bashir derives the hyponyms “المرنم” (*muranyam*, hymner) and “أناشيدي” (*anasheed*, anthems); both import religious connotations in the sense that the former usually refers to religious singers, whereas the latter denotes religious songs or national anthems. The word *anasheed* recurs in Arabic biblical sources when referring, for example, to Solomon’s song of songs (Saint Takla). Similarly, the noun “singing” becomes “الإنشاد” (*al-inshad*, hymning) in the third stanza. The second and third lines move the reader from visualizing a singer and a dancer in an open area to envisaging the scene as hymns sung in worship. The various translations of the items “sing,” “songs” or “singer” throughout the text bear testimony to a pattern established, then interrupted or slowed down by dint of a conflict between the metropolitan’s self-selecting interpretive community and outside communities. He also alters “vintage” into “العصير” (*al’aseer*, juice) while translating “wine” as “الخمرة” (*alkhomrat*, wine) in another position. Such discontinuous sites would probably serve as discursive liaisons to those outside the community.

Likewise, Okasha embeds a plethora of quranic terms within his translation. Collocations such as “قُنت من” (torn from) bear witness to this orientation (Quran 12:25). In the first line, the translator invokes the quranically-charged word “قُنت” (tear) to render the phrasal verb “carved out,” which evokes a feeling of shared beliefs with the self-proclaimed interpretive community. By invoking the power of “canonical parallelism” (Jakobson 1966), the translator’s voice marks a shift from Gibran’s literary and biblical language to a marked use of quranic lexis, to probably engage in an ongoing conversation with his main interpretive community (Sufis) in their own terms, as specified in the preface (Gibran 2009, 9). As Kahf rightly observes, “every text creates its ideal reader by implying the body of knowledge and the expectations the reader is presumed to possess” (2010, 41). In the second line, Okasha converts the plural “songs” into the established equivalent “أغاني” (*aghani*, songs). The active participle “singer” is assigned the high-register literary hyponym “الشادي” (*alshadi*, chanter), and the verb “crying” becomes “يترنم” (hymn) to blend nicely into the singing scene. Those choices keep the interpretive community relatively intact.

The couplet “my god-heart within my human ribs: shouts to my god-heart in mid-air” implies a clash of beliefs. Bashir turns “god-heart” into “the god of my heart,” an interpretation which eschews the exaltation of a heart to the rank of a god and shows an inclination on the part of the

translator to mitigate critical panentheistic points with potential alienating effects. The gaps and blanks have, therefore, been filled by the translator. The interpretation reduces Gibran's emphasis, as Sherfan notes, on extrapolating the inward experience of God's presence and on actualizing that presence in the nuances of our conduct (2011). To this clash of beliefs, Okasha responds with a scare quote-based technique "قلبي - الرب" (my heart-god). In doing so, he disassociates himself from the writer's words. Okasha resorts to scare quotes in many other places to signal clashes of beliefs and to align himself with his self-selecting interpretive community. The scare quote-based distancing technique generates a pattern in Okasha's translation.

Most crucially, while Bashir substitutes "love" with the religiously-laden equivalent "المحبة" (agape) throughout, Okasha invokes the established equivalent "الحب" and justifies this interpretation in his preface by quoting a few lines to demonstrate that the word "love" refers to human love between men and women. Thus, romance is downplayed by force of the expectations of the Archimandrite's interpretive community as well as his own subjectivity as a priest. In broad strokes, such an inclination to religious correctness can perhaps be interpreted as a sign of a willingness to construct an image of Gibran as a true believer; something evidenced by Bashir's preface to his translation of *The Prophet*, where he defends his decision to translate Gibran and states that he is not a disbeliever (Gibran 1926). This concern is further compounded by his misgivings about potential harsh criticism from religious institutions in the Arab world. In the most egregious cases, a few years prior to the release of *The Earth Gods*, Gibran's *Spirits Rebellious* was "publically burned in the Beirut marketplace by Maronite church and Ottoman State officials who judged it fiercely dangerous to the peace of the country" (Waldo 2016).

Another telling example of this religious correctness comes across in the differing translations of the book's title in each version. While Okasha renders *The Earth Gods* as "أرباب الأرض" (*arbab alard*, the earth lords), Bashir opts for the established equivalent "آلهة الأرض" (*alihat alard*, the Earth Gods). In fact, the translation of the title has contributed to creating different modes of reception. Prominent Muslim writers, such as Yusuf Idris, praised Okasha's rendition, pointing out that we as humans do not feel comfortable when we read about *alihat* (Gods), especially when we realize that he (Gibran) is just a human (Okasha 2009, 47). Given that that is so, it seems that the choice of the word *arbab* (lords) has responded to the

interpretive frame of Muslim communities. By the same token, Boushaba believes that the word “الرب” (*alarb*, lord) is the apt rendition of the word “God,” and argues that it “refers to god in general and therefore renders better the concept of the universality of God” (1988, 71). Although it seems that Okasha’s rendering of the title has created a favorable milieu for a new reception among Muslims, the title disrupts the interpretive frame of other readers, specifically those familiar with Gibran’s Arabic publications in which he uses the word *alihat* rather than *arbab*.

Such interventions can be construed as rendering the writer religiously correct, while at the same time pre-empting potential criticism by the religious authorities. In other words, there exists “a balance between the environment of reception and the translator’s individual role” in creating favorable representations of *The Earth Gods* (Kahf 2010, 29). Indeed, this biblical discourse has typified the writer’s lexicon and spirit; something attested to by Gibran’s reply to Mikhael Naimy after he sought his opinion about Bashir’s competence as a translator: “However his translation might be, my spirit will be in it” (Qubaisi 2015). Besides the discontinuous attempts to imbue *The Earth Gods* with biblical- or quranic-like significance, both translators tapped into the indeterminate textual elements to affirm or dismiss a particular reading.

(b) (In)determinacy: Blocking a Symptomatic Reading

By its very nature, indeterminacy allows for linguistic and cultural variation to come into play. Crucial, here, is the role of symptomatic reading in inciting the reader to become active and delve into the gaps and traces that the writer leaves behind. Both translations rate high on the (in)determinacy scale. Here is a key line:

ST:	SECOND GOD:	It is the <i>scent of burnt flesh, sweet and bountiful</i> .
Bashir	هذه رائحة الأجسام المحترقة، وهي لذيذة وسخية	الإله الثاني:
[Lit. This is the scent of burnt bodies, and they are delicious and generous.]		
Okasha	إنها رائحة شواء اللحم اللذيذ الشهوي	الرب الثاني:
[Lit. It is the scent of delicious meat being grilled.]		

Altering the indeterminate “burnt flesh, sweet and bountiful” to “شواء اللحم اللذيذ الشهوي” “delicious meat being grilled,” Okasha mutes the multiple underlying rhetorical devices: personification, oxymoron and

synesthesia embedded in the original text, filling the gaps and blanks on behalf of the reader. The employment of personification is evident in assigning an animate quality “generous” to an inanimate entity “flesh.” Additionally, combining the epithets “sweet and bountiful” with “burnt flesh” brings about oxymoron. The foreign text transmits synesthesia through depicting a blend of sensory elements that the second god is experiencing. That is, the adjective “generous,” which appeals to the sense of sight, modifies the proposition “burnt flesh,” which has to do with the sense of smelling.

Bashir maintains the original personification, oxymoron and synesthesia, and thus preserves the alterity of the foreign text through adopting a literalist approach. Literalism in this context stresses the significance of “iconic emotive syntax to the overall reading experience and how it can color interpretation” (Burke 2001, 37). More crucially, this example reveals the destructive force of fluency in quashing the eccentric features of the Gibranian literature, which breaks with the priorities of classical rhetoric and its focus on aesthetics. Transparency, hence, places the reader in an inactive position, although tropes have a descriptive force which makes “interpretive communities gravitate toward it as an essential interpretive frame” (Gourgey and Smith 1996, 239).

One point to make here is that explication blocks a symptomatic reading of the polysemantic sites, since this procedure fills the gaps and spaces to render the translation optimally relevant. Gutt views the principle of optimal relevance as putting to work the least amount of processing power to infer two strands of meaning: explicatures (the analytical implications of an utterance), and implicatures (the context-based implications) (1991, 40). The contextual implications rest in the gap between the mental state of the author and his or her diction on the paper. The gap is to be filled by the “reader’s inferential recognition of the communicator’s intentions, guided by contextual clues” (Mackenzie 2002, 16). As a consequence, transparency tosses away the aesthetics of the foreign text or, at best, reduces the play of the signifier.

As a secondary example, Bashir interprets the indeterminate “virgin infinite” as “عذراء اللانهاية” (the virgin of the infinity), thereby relatively explicating the implicit (Gibran 1932, 20), whereas Okasha reproduces the indeterminacy by opting for “اللانهاية العذراء” (the v-irgin infinity). The gaps and blanks have, therefore, been filled by the Archimandrite. Such multiple indeterminate composites allowed him to paint a more religiously loaded picture of *The Earth Gods*.

The conceptual common denominator in the two discontinuities discussed is the dilution of God's immanence and transcendence underpinning the Gibranism philosophy (Sherfan 2011) as a consequence of interrupting the psychology anchored in the verse. The examples indicate that a symptomatic reading can be effectively exercised through an in-depth analysis of discontinuities, with an eye on investigating their relationship to dominant discursive strategies. Nonetheless, the meaningfulness of discontinuities can be more efficiently understood within the larger historical context of production and reception. Were such discontinuities culture-sensitive or text-bound? How did critics evaluate the translations? Did the discontinuities resist or subscribe to the then dominant canons of writing and literary production? These questions will be taken up in the following section.

6. Critical Reception and Literary Influence

Although a multitude of literary critics evaluated Okasha's translation in reference to the standards of style and transparent semantic unity, a symptomatic reading of the same reveals multiple sites of hybridity that expose the translation. Cases in point are the amalgam of qur'anic, biblical and literary discourse, and English-like syntax, among others. As the poet Saleh Gawdat states, "Nothing detracts from the faithfulness of the translation, except those interventions intended to improve the style; it is an improvement upon, rather than a departure from, the original" (Gibran 2009, 46). Likewise, the historian Ahmed Hamroush described the translation as written in an elegant style; for him, it reads like an original copy (ibid., 47). In the words of the poet Al-Awadi Al-wakil, *Arbab Alard* "facilitated the relocation of the expatriate (Gibran) to his people and relatives" (ibid.). The differing reviews of the critical establishment suggest varied reading practices that mostly judged the translation on the question of transparent semantic unity.

The reviews exemplify a situational interpretive community, inasmuch as the reviewers constitute a part of a specific situation that would influence how they think and evaluate. This situation brings together a group of individuals who share similar experiences and who would interpret the text in a similar, positive manner. Indeed, these authoritative reviews "function as consecrating frames of Okasha's translation," and "would likely affect the reader's perception and evaluation of the entire translation" (Ali 2018b, 97). The practice of such situational interpretive

communities speaks for a monolithic critical regime that appreciates literary aesthetics and marginalizes the symptomatic heterogeneity of translation and the values of pluralism lying at the core of the source text as well as the translations. All in all, the reviews reveal how texts become burdened not only with immanent textual and paratextual meaning—the translator’s preface and critical reviews—but also with the historicity of evaluation and reception.

Analyzing a corpus of 112 reviews of *The Earth Gods’* translations by Bashir and Okasha, Ali notes that the readers evaluated the translations in relation to a wide range of standards, including acculturation, originality, style, defamiliarization, ambiguity, and biblical discourse, among others (2018a, 58–68). He concludes that “the available data indicates a correlation between the in-text critics’ reviews and reception, insofar as the former has exerted a great assuring force over doubtful readers” (ibid., 68). This attests to the existence of multiple self-selecting interpretive communities whose experiences reinforce the interpretations they create, and that the illusion of a fluency-oriented monolithic readership blinds critics to the hybridity of translation and target interpretive communities. Thus, there seems to be some evidence to argue that the understandings of readers and reviewers are informed by interpretive principles and shared notions of what counts as translation and what is worthy of being noticed, which makes a case for why “meanings, in the form of culturally derived interpretive categories, make readers” (Fish 1980, 336). Another practical implication is that a reception-based symptomatic reading challenges our perception of the foreignizing-domesticating dichotomy.

The domesticating practice at work in *Arbab Alard* arguably aimed to assimilate Gibran’s text to the dominance of classical literature in Egypt throughout history in order to facilitate the institutionalization of Gibran’s *The Earth Gods* in the wider literary market. Such contentions are borne out by the fact that “the overwhelming majority of Arab scholars and Orientalists tend to define Arabic literature as encompassing only the literary works written in standard Arabic, a language which has maintained by and large the syntax of the language of the Quran if not its vocabulary” (Abdel-Malek 1990, 7). The elevated status of classical Arabic (*fusha*) as “the language of revelation” is highlighted in both the Quran and prophetic hadith (traditions) (Suleiman 2003, 43). Further evidence can be traced in Hanna’s observation that the authority of *fusha* in modern Egypt derives from “its association with the Quran” (2016, 168). Commenting upon Said’s study (1964) on the call for using colloquial Arabic and its impact in Egypt, Hanna observes that

the book was published “when President Jamal Abdul Nasser was in power, which explains the underlying Pan-Arabist ideology, with its promotion of *fusha* as the politically unifying language of all Arabs” (2016, 173). Suleiman goes so far as to describe Said’s project as “not devoid of ideology” and as “driven by a commitment to the standard-language ideology” (2004, 63).

On the ground, colloquial poetry was immensely popular with the grassroots in the 1950s and 1960s. The vernacular pillar Fouad Haddad and other reputed poets such as Salah Jahin and Sayid Higab were leading “the revival of colloquial Arabic language poetry” (Attalah 2009). Moreover, the infusion of the target text with religious lexicon, although specific to the target language, can be observed as anachronistic, in that religious-like diction was more specific to earlier periods than the Nasserite era, which witnessed the rise of dialect popular literature and modernist poetry trends. Furthermore, the detention of a substantial number of literary figures forced the majority of poets and novelists in the 1960s, such as Salah Abdul-Sabour and Naguib Mahfouz, to structure their literature around romance (Mijalli 1995, 341). In Venuti’s terms, the translation “put to work cultural materials and agendas that are domestic, but also, in this case, anachronistic” (2008, 28). Perhaps, indicative of the heterogeneity of *Arbab Alard*, are the words of the well-known playwright Yousef Idris: “As is true with *The Prophet* and *The Garden of the Prophet*, Okasha created an extraordinarily delicate Arabic, that is peculiar to *The Earth Gods*, to formulate Gibran’s language and emotions” (Gibran 2009, 46).

The entire process of production, starting from the very selection of this mystically loaded poem to packing it in a tight chain of paratexts, was conditioned by subjective factors such as the translator’s interests, and, more broadly, a rising Sufi movement in Egypt that invoked a need for a new translation of *The Earth Gods*. To illustrate, the translation production was determined by Okasha’s view of Gibran as a Sufi, as made explicit in Okasha’s interview with the Egyptian newspaper *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, in which he stated that Gibran “absorbed the thoughts of Sufi Muslims such as Al-Ghazali, Ibn Arabi and Al-Hallaj” (Abdul-Kareem 2017). That being the case, the sense of a shared literary and Sufi identity with Gibran motivated a new instantiation of this poem in a bid to construct a perception of Gibran as a Sufi who had as much in common with Muslims as with Christians. This personal motive and identity claim contributed to retranslating *The Earth Gods* in a sublimated manner.

The discontinuities highlighted signal some of the conditions that guided Bashir’s foreignizing translation. One important consideration

is the intellectual current that dominated the literary scene in the production milieu, in this case New York. The fact that Bashir was living in New York at the time of translating *The Earth Gods* is most mimed in his relatively faithful handling of the verse form that can be attributed to being contemporary to the Pen League, of which Gibran was a member. The league advocated writing standards grounded on simplicity rather than archaism and stylishness (Suhaila 2013, 2). Indicative of Bashir's foreignizing practice is the very heterogeneity of his translation as manifested in knotty syntax, multiple borrowings from diverse biblical resources, and neologisms, such as rendering "my nostrils" as "مشامتني" (an Arabic neologism for a nostril). He departs from classical Arabic by adhering to the English diction and achieving closer textual equivalence to reproduce the concatenation of Gibran's English style. Yet, a symptomatic reading reveals a domesticating practice to transform metaphors to harmonize with the expectations of his readers. He converts "the lotus land" into "عرائس النيل" (the brides of the Nile), and "savage ocean" into the more specific synecdoche "الأوقيانوس البربري" (savage Oceanus), the titan god of River Okeanos. Another indication can be identified in backgrounding simile structures that were fronted in the source text, which suggests a tendency to conform to the rhetorical preferences of Arabic.

7. Conclusion

The translations serve as key spaces for members of different communities to challenge and enforce a set of assumptions by adapting the foreign text to their specific life experiences. The translators populated the text with what they knew to be true of Gibran, assigning it biblical or Islamic significances that mirror institutional structures and social constructs, of which they are extending agents. One inescapable conclusion of this article is that symptomatic reading gives perspective to the unfamiliar and that the discontinuities speak to a well-meaning reluctance to engage in the sort of metaphysical dialogue that would discomfort the translators and their readers. The translations are full of respect for religion; the pressures of the interpretive communities make it worthy of such veneration. The conflation of symptomatic reading and Fish's conception of interpretive community expands the interpretive frame to include the defamiliarizing, and unites readers/translators into interpretive collectives with overarching interpretational principles. At the same time,

the findings suggest that readers/translators are communal individuals whose interpretive strategies underlie a relative independence of their life experiences. It is thus evident that “when one interpretation wins out over another, it is not because the first has been shown to be in accordance with the facts but because it is from the perspective of its assumptions that the facts are now being specified” (Fish 1980, 340).

The textual and historical analysis vindicates that Venuti's symptomatic reading offers analytically rich tools for mapping and historicizing discontinuous sites as a set of interconnected entities, each required to fulfill some function of the whole. There remains, however, a need for a conceptual apparatus through which the eccentric violence of transparency and its implications for reception can be more overtly disentangled, a limitation that suggests the possibility of a more productive connection with reception theory. Symptomatic reading also—and this is the core of the study—makes a case for why tracing discontinuities would insinuate what a translation cannot express or repress in view of reception pressures. More crucially, the symptomatic analysis indicates the extent to which translation can be violent not only in reframing silences, gaps and contradictions but also in disrupting literary canons and cultural formations. This can be observed in the transplantation of the *Mahjar* literature peculiarities into the wider literary field in the Arab world.

Bashir enlists the target text in the revival of biblical lexicon through infusing the poem with an amalgam of biblical terms from anachronistic resources. In this sense, the translation sought to compete for cultural dominance in the target language. Still less can the effects of discontinuities compare with the mainstream foreignizing or domesticating practices at play in the translations. By way of conclusion, the attitudes of the critical establishment and readers towards evaluating the translations in question show a need to valorize symptomatic reading in appreciating silences and polysemous discourses rather than reducing evaluation to the standards of fluency and correctness. In particular, translation education courses could play a pivotal role in teaching the principles of symptomatic reading for students to value and do justice to the sites of silence and gaps in the source text. While a reception-based symptomatic reading has the potential to resist the regime of fluent translation and cultural marginalization, the dynamics of this reading could be further expanded by appealing to cognitive stylistic approaches to mind-style.

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Further Readings

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