

Translating Al-Fuzai's 'The Passage of Time'

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ABSTRACT

In 'The Passage of Time,'¹ a teacher considers resigning in order to return to his hometown, but he receives notice that he can move to the place he has requested. Homesickness is treated as though it were a formidable foe in this short story. Even if it is a "barren, parched desert," like the situation in the story, identity is usually linked to the location to which it belongs. However, it is possible that one will have to relocate for few reasons. Displacement can have emotional and psychological implications, which can hinder one's ability to work. The teacher in the story is not in a teaching mode; he is drawn "toward the place..." from which "a considerable distance...² separates him." All he has left are "his ideas and memories" that bind him to his home. The memo he receives at the end of this story represents a new hope for him to reclaim what he has lost in his village education. In brief, the story emphasizes the necessity of having a job and the difficulty of finding a good job in one's own neighborhood.

1. Introduction

Translation is a powerful tool that allows nations to become acquainted with and close to one another. The readers will learn about some typical challenges that can be found anywhere on the planet and have a chance to know Khalil I. Al-Fuzai (1940-), the author of 'The Passage of Time.' Al-Fuzai is as a "Saudi Arabian short story writer" who has done his best to incorporate his culture into his literary works, addressing various social, political, and religious themes he found in his community (Dohal 2013). This individual, like some other characters in Fuzai's stories (Dohal, 2018 & 2019), fights to overcome his financial issues in this story (see Dohal 2018 & 2019). Again, hardship begins once he finds work in that remote village. As a result, disillusionment and homesickness result in even more irritating and unsatisfactory outcomes.

After reading 'The Passage of Time,' readers of this journal will be able to look for other similar items to read in order to better understand the Arabian culture (Dohal 2019).

2. Translation: 'The Passage of Time'

Large swaths of desert separate this *hijra*³ from any metropolitan structures... a sea of dunes that stretches uncontrollably over vast distances ...he is cut off from the rest of the world by the desert... from time ... and drags him in the direction of that place. His days are wasted with its vivid memories... he heads for the desolate, arid desert to bury his memories in its sands... Even his time is no longer his own, and he no longer cares to have it... everything is unimportant... nothing necessitates attention. Since his arrival in this *hijra*, he has been controlled by this sentiment, to the point where he feels hatred and animosity toward those who have caused his relocation to the *hijra*... When he amuses himself by thinking of his relocation to this faraway location as a fee he must pay, he wishes to terminate his exile at the same time and return to his hometown, where he left his family and fondest memories... there in the distance... there in the unknown... live the sweetest people: His daughter, his wife, his mother, and his father ...all members of his family. He only gets to see them once a year when he visits them during his summer vacation. Apart from that, he is unable to see them while in exile... he lives in order to trade his tears, sighs, misery, and worries for money, which he sends to them when he is paid and after taking some... Some of the money is transferred to his family, while the rest gets lost among the caravans of camels passing through the desert mazes. He attempted to persuade himself to bring his family

here... but he rejected the idea, believing that living here is no different than living in Hell. And since he considers this place Hell, there has been no way for him to bring his family to such a place in the past years, forcing the city dweller to adapt to the bleak circumstances in which he lives, until adaptation becomes a part of his life and despicable acceptance of everything is one of its colors... years passed, and the city dweller became a part of the *hijra* he had migrated to. As a result, it becomes his hell, from which he is unable to escape. Those who live around him are vulgar. Therefore he becomes uncouth... in terms of the positive aspects of their lives, primitiveness is going to obliterate their features... even principles that people hold dear and with which he first disagreed because they were in conflict with his beliefs... he is now influenced by them or is about to be influenced by them.

He has no choice except to stand in front of his students, holding a reading book, and let each student read in his book whenever his turn comes as he becomes a little distracted.

"O teacher!" one of the students exclaims, "look at how this student shifted his seat to read ahead of me."

He dismisses the student's complaint in order to focus on his own thoughts... on his never-ending anxieties. But the kids' cacophony gradually increases to the point that he believes these sounds are coming from Hell... his nerves can no longer endure it... he yells forcefully and fiercely, "Shut up!"

Even this silence becomes uncomfortable; as if the birds are over their heads... it is similar to the calm of the dead... They've all been rendered dumb...except for one pupil who looks at him as if he were ready to say something, the severe features of his face suppress any desire his student would have to scream.

He notices the student's eyes following him and adds, "Finish up your reading....."

A child blows his nose and cleans it with his soiled handkerchief, while another big child yawns near the window.

Why isn't he quitting his job?

Why isn't he stepping down?

When somebody considers leaving his job, he usually has many questions. For example, what will he do after that? How will he support himself and his family, given that he is the breadwinner? Is he going to walk away from his responsibilities to them?

To himself, he responds:

There are other job opportunities...it is not required to work in the field of education. He can work in one of the government buildings or in one of the national establishments; if he cannot find a job similar to the one he has now, he has no objection to becoming a construction worker or a workshop tradesman. And he imagines himself in khaki slacks and an oil-streaked shirt... "Yes, sir," he tells his employers whenever one of them directs him to carry out a mission.

And the issue will be resolved...

And then a voice speaks up, reading:

"Mohammed sits down to write his lesson and r..."

He attempts to ignore the voice, and lives with his memories and thoughts.

He glances out the one and only window in the class, which is more like a stench-filled prison cell, at space.

He underestimated the difficulty of the situation. He will find work, whatever it is, as long as it is close to his family. Why not attempt writing a resignation document right now... let it be a test, he won't lose anything.

He takes a seat in his chair and begins writing...

"Pardon me! O, teacher... Right Honorable the Principal needs you... he has just arrived." The manservant mumbles these words and then walks away... damn you... don't you quit pestering me, you uncouth manservant, even in times of crisis, and this principal... what does he want? He always travels... and always returns; can't he wait until the lesson is over? Is he so eager to see me right away that he has dispatched his manservant to inform me before the lesson concludes; this is folly... the ultimate folly?

He leaves his students after warning them that he would beat them if he hears their foolish noises. He's certain he'll hear their voices the moment he steps outside the classroom.

He walks inside the principal's office with his mind free of all thoughts at the time.

And when he sees the memo from the principal, he doesn't believe it... he reads it once and then again to be sure he isn't dreaming. He feels compelled to laugh, dance, kiss all of his colleagues and students... and suddenly he realizes that he loves them all... even the manservant with whom he used to have frequent disagreements.

And when they all shake hands, saying farewell, and he leaves the *hijra* forever... he hugs them with new profuse feelings, full of love, faith, and loyalty... this is what he feels towards them from the time he has the memo issued by his country's education officials. The document mentions his move to his village's school, as well as a raise in his salary in acknowledgment of his hard work and honesty. A miracle has occurred, one that no one could have predicted.

3. Conclusion

Readers will have the opportunity to read for this Saudi writer, as stated before in the introduction. Some readers may get interested in other related stories. The ultimate goal is to give a good background for those interested people in the Arabic literature. In 'The Passage of Time,' readers will become aware "how literature all over the world shares a lot of interests and ideas" (Dohal 2018). Furthermore, "readers will experience a theme all cultures share; i.e. a struggle for survival" (Dohal 2019) as in the above story, an individual must retain a financial source in order to live a regular life.

'The Passage of Time,' on the other hand, is written by Al-Fuzai, a Saudi Arabian writer who has attempted to write about his society and its annoyances. What distinguishes Al-Fuzai is that "he is a journalist who knows how to address his audience" (Dohal 2021). As a result, his language is journalistic, as evidenced by the translated story; that is, basic and direct. By the way, Al-Fuzai has authored few story collections (Dohal 2013).

Translations are necessary, especially in our time, in order to foster an atmosphere of learning about and understanding other cultures and people; translations will be quite helpful in this regard, and individuals who do not have access to certain cultures will be able to read about them.

When it comes to limitations of similar works, literary translators gain no benefits for their translations. Hence, they refrain from bringing forward such a trial. When these translators are encouraged and supported at all levels, one will expect more works and returns.

Anyhow, this translation is an effort in a way of communicating with the 'Other.' Other contributions are required for the sake of providing knowledge and understanding among cultures and peoples. By the way, a number of Al-Fuzai's stories have been translated and published in different global journals.

Translator's Notes:

1. This narrative was adapted from the Arabic source:
Al-Fuzai, Khalil I. (1979). *Thursday Fair*. (سوق الخميس). Taif: Taif Literary Club, pp. 23-28.
2. . . . Occasionally, a few dots can be spotted in the source text.
3. *hijra*: a small isolated village.

About the Author

Gassim H. Dohal is from Saudi Arabia. He is an English literature Ph. D. holder. He has published papers and articles in a variety of academic periodicals. His work has been published in journals such as *The IUP Journal of English Studies*, *Agathos* journal, *International Journal of Comparative Literature and Translation Studies* (IJCLTS), *Int'l Journal of Linguistics, Literature, and Culture* (IJLLC), and others. E-mail: dr_waitme@hotmail.com

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